Dear Alistair

I write at a time of great challenge for our University and our sector. We are facing disputes relating to core elements of our national HE structures over which we, as individual institutions, have limited ability to directly influence. To further complicate matters, not all of those whom your organisation represents are experiencing the same immediate pressures of industrial action and disruption to students’ education.

As you will know, we have been working closely with our UCU colleagues in Sheffield for some time to push for the outcomes of the first Joint Expert Panel (JEP1) report to be adopted. The failure to adopt those recommendations, which were widely supported by employers, means we continue to be in dispute over the scheme. It is a source of great frustration that we are once again back into industrial action over a substantive issue we have worked so hard to seek a solution to.

I welcome the commitments issued in your media statement on 21 November 2019 and am pleased to hear that UUK remains committed to working with UCU and other stakeholders to effect change in the way the governance of USS operates and to find a methodology for future valuations which all can subscribe to.

The second Joint Expert Panel report (JEP2) is key to establishing a future approach to the operation of USS that satisfies the needs of UCU, representing members, the collective employers and the USS Trustee. It is reassuring that your first commitment is to positively receive the recommendations contained within it and to jointly agree with UCU a set of proposals for the USS Trustee. It seems to me that with the 2018 valuation now concluded, the JEP2 report is the only realistic prospect of finding a solution to the current dispute.

Here in Sheffield we are, once again, experiencing industrial action over USS, and 59 other universities also face this disruption to their students’ education. I therefore urge you to do all you can to ensure the JEP2 report is published quickly, ideally in the coming days, so that all parties can consider its content before we find ourselves in preparations for the 2020 valuation.
I also ask that you and your colleagues at UUK continue to meet with UCU representatives, pending the release of the report, to do all you can to see if there is a negotiated resolution to the impasse we seem to find ourselves in right now.

Yours sincerely

Professor Koen Lamberts
President & Vice-Chancellor