

Submission 8, dated 24 March 2022

I write to express my serious concerns about the management of the University of Edinburgh, my employer.

As you may be aware, despite a substantial financial surplus at the University of Edinburgh, pensions will be cut massively, and there are other concerns, such as insecure contracts for many. Many colleagues have tried to persuade management in our university to take a stance on this, but without any success whatever. Whilst we would much rather be at work, many of us have been on strike for almost a month this academic year already, as our concerns are not being listened to.

Our senior management's failure to listen to academic staff does not only affect the current dispute over pensions, pay gaps etc. One issue that is of particular concern is the University's recent introduction of a "Sustainable" Travel Policy.

This would be wonderful news, if the policy was indeed mainly concerned with sustainability – which colleagues and I, of course, strongly support. Yet I believe that this policy uses sustainability as a cover for unethical measures that have no benefits for the environment. All travel now needs to be booked via a single travel management company that has been provided with what I view as a monopoly. 130 colleagues, a high proportion of the academic staff in two Schools, wrote an open letter in 2018 opposing a strikingly similar policy (then without the claim that this had anything to do with sustainability) to the University's Director of Finance. The policy was then withdrawn, but has now been introduced nonetheless. Prior "consultation" was I believe a smokescreen, and there was no mention of this monopoly. Many colleagues and I wrote to the Principal, expressing our concerns about

- the misleading nature of the "consultation",
- the wasteful use of precious research funds at the expense of charitable and public funding bodies,
- that the policy will favour hotel chains over sustainable and affordable local guesthouses,
- that the massively increased costs (e.g. for hotels as opposed to local guesthouses) will in many instances make it impossible to offer students fieldwork opportunities abroad,
- the workload implications of the bureaucratic booking and authorisation process, notably for those administering large grants, and
- concerns by staff, no longer being able to choose accommodation they consider safe.

Our Principal's response has, in my view, been evasive to say the least, and attempts to engage in a meaningful discussion with the Director of Social Responsibility and Sustainability and the new Director of Finance have been similarly

unproductive. We have been presented with a fait accompli and attempts to justify the unjustifiable, but none of our concerns have been taken on board.

Regardless of strong opposition by academic staff, the policy has now been introduced, and I understand is even more wasteful of funds and staff time than we had feared.

In my view, our management's complete disregard for the views of academic staff undermines work morale. Using sustainability as a cover for unethical procedures may bring the University into disrepute and will undermine genuine efforts to take effective measures against the climate crisis. If our university was serious about sustainability, it would support us in travelling by train or ferry where feasible (e.g. to the near Continent), rather than preventing us from opting for accommodation with a low carbon footprint. Enriching a monopoly and drowning us in bureaucracy will not save the planet. Our University should liaise with staff to produce a genuine sustainable travel policy.

I would thus urge you to ensure that the Education, Children and Young People Committee launches an inquiry into our university's claims that providing staff with decent pensions is unaffordable at a time when they boast that there is a big financial surplus.

There should also be an inquiry into what I believe is the wasteful use of charitable and public funds to enrich a monopoly, following a "consultation" that, in my view, has been economical with the truth. Massive cuts to pensions, unmanageable workloads, interference with our desire to use funds responsibly and the breakdown of meaningful dialogue between university management and academic staff makes the University of Edinburgh a less attractive workplace. This will also have negative ramifications for the Scottish economy.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you will use your influence to ensure that our management acts responsibly.

Addendum, dated 8/9/22

Postscript: Due to tireless efforts by many colleagues to raise concerns about the negative repercussions of the Travel Policy, management in the meantime finally conceded that accommodation for research fieldwork no longer needs to be booked via the Travel Management monopoly – in my view they never had the competence to do so in the first instance. They may well cite this as evidence that they have listened to staff concerns, but sadly most of this wasteful policy remains in force. Reminding our management that it has a duty to use public and charitable funds responsibly and to ensure that there are tolerable work conditions and a meaningful dialogue with academic staff is in my view no less urgent today than when I wrote this letter half a year ago. Thank you for your efforts on this.