

Submission 9, dated 24 March 2022

I am writing to ask you to call Scottish University Principals to a Committee Inquiry at the Education, Children and Young People Committee. Scotland's Universities are seeing a crisis in working conditions. Pay has lost 20% against inflation since 2009. There are stark pay inequalities in the sector with a 15.5% gender pay gap, a 17% ethnicity pay gap and a 9% disability pay gap. Workloads have risen dramatically. The use of precarious hourly-paid and fixed-term contracts is extremely common. Pre-1992 Universities have also seen a cut to defined benefit pension entitlement of around 30%. All of these issues particularly affect younger people coming into the sector, who are also more likely to be significantly burdened by debt from their studies. They amount to a serious threat to the diversity of the workforce in Scottish higher education. They also limit the attractiveness of Scottish universities to their highly internationalised pool of applicants. They are a threat to the quality of the education and research that Scottish universities can provide as staff are insecurely employed, overworked, underpaid, unfairly paid, and have less secure retirement prospects.

UCU, the union representing academic and academic-related staff in the sector, has taken strike action on these issues over several years, with sustained strike action every year since 2018. More days of strike action have been taken in the education sector than in any other sector of the British economy, and that is largely down to these industrial disputes. At the same time, universities have seen increased student numbers, increased income from fees, and have invested heavily in their estate. Scotland's universities clearly could afford a reasonable and fair level of pay and pension provision. But University Principals and Senior Management Teams are, seemingly, refusing to listen to their staff or negotiate with their recognised trades unions. University Principals and Senior Management Teams are not, in my view, adhering to the Fair Work principle of effective voice in their approach to these workplace issues. I ask you to call Principals and Senior Management Teams to Committee to inquire into their management of pay, conditions and pensions arrangements in Scottish Universities and to ask them how they have sought to understand and respond to employee, including trade union, representative views to resolve longstanding industrial disputes that are disrupting teaching and research.

(University Professor)