

Email from Sally Hunt to UCU members, 6th April 2018

Dear

Thank you very much for voting in the USS e-ballot consultation. Please see below a reminder message I have just sent to those who have yet to vote. It may be of interest to you as it responds to questions I have been asked. Thanks again for your participation.

Sally Hunt
UCU general secretary

Dear colleague

I want to remind you to make sure your voice is heard in the USS consultation.

Below are six questions I have been asked about the USS consultation. If your question is not answered, let me know and I will try to answer it in a future message.

1. How long do I have to vote?

Voting closes at 2pm on 13 April. UCU is your union and this is your decision so please don't forget to vote.

2. I support the principle of 'no detriment' (the employers pay in full for any changes in benefits or contributions) why do you believe it will be so difficult to achieve?

The reason is that nobody yet knows what the joint expert panel's (JEP) report will say so persuading the employers to give a commitment to completely underwrite it all will be very hard. Even those vice-chancellors (VCs) who have supported UCU's position on USS will not currently give this commitment. Others point out that no detriment would be contrary to the current agreement on cost sharing which means any agreed increases in costs are split 65/35% between the employers and members.

In this context my main concern about 'no detriment' is a practical one - in chasing something that even prolonged industrial action is unlikely to achieve we may risk the other important gains we have been able to make.

3. I do not support 'no detriment' but I do have other worries about the proposal such as the timetable for the JEP and whether its work will finish in time to influence the valuation?

The JEP will not be constituted unless and until UCU members vote to accept the UUK proposal. If we vote to accept, making the JEP work for you will be our next key job. We need to choose the right people for our side of the panel, work hard to win the argument, ensure the panel reports in a timely fashion and report back regularly to members.

As to the interaction between the JEP and the current valuation, the employers' proposal is that the panel will make an assessment of the valuation and that if changes need to be made in order to provide a guaranteed, defined benefit pension comparable with current arrangements then proposals will be made to the JNC and then the USS Board. This provides an effective platform for our next set of negotiations.

For more details [see paragraph 5 of the proposals and the further email from UUK's Alastair Jarvis here](#) and also an earlier [clear statement from UUK that the JEP will deal with the current valuation here](#).

There are no guarantees, we will have to make our case but the panel provides an equal platform for the next negotiation between UCU and UUK - a transformed position from that with which we started this dispute. Don't forget that the employers started this round by proposing a fully defined contribution scheme which would have cost the average member around £200,000 in retirement. Now they accept the need for a guaranteed, defined benefit pension and for a joint approach to the valuation. That's a big step forward.

4. If we vote yes, will the Pensions Regulator (tPR) and USS really allow UCU and UUK time to develop a joint approach?

The tPR has said that they see the panel as an opportunity to bring all stakeholders together and avoid recurring disagreements and that they are receptive to any new evidence brought by stakeholders.

As for USS, if UCU members vote to accept the proposal, then the union and UUK will need to make a joint approach to the USS board. Given the positive attitude of the tPR and the fact that the USS board has a majority of UCU and UUK trustees, I would expect the board to note the proposal. However it is prudent to keep our strike action mandate live until we know for sure. If the vote is no the honest truth is that I don't know what the regulator or USS board would do! Regardless we would press the case you ask of us.

5. If we vote no to reject, what strike action should we take next?

This ballot is your opportunity to assess what next and the union will do what you ask. We already have fourteen days of strikes planned for the assessment season plus further days in many branches in April and these will be triggered. The law requires the union to ballot members again for any action after June and if members vote to reject we will do this with the aim of intensifying the action above and beyond those days. In tandem with that we will seek to re-open negotiations with the UUK board.

6. I just don't trust them. I want greater clarity. Is it possible?

Many of the queries I have had are rooted in a mistrust of the employers. I completely understand this but holding out for further word changes and further clarifications will not resolve this issue. Trust has to be re-built through actions.

The union must use its new found strength to hold the employers to account. In my judgement the proposal on the table is a substantial step forward and we should take the opportunity that our strike action has earned.

Please let me have any other questions you have.

Sally Hunt
UCU general secretary