

20/05/20 NATIONAL DISPUTE COMMITTEE STATEMENT TO USS branches

This document briefly sets out the position of the National Dispute Committee in respect of the ongoing USS dispute and offers recommendations to branch delegates. The aim is to aid discussions at the branch delegates' meetings and to inform national debate within our union.

Employers - who had previously ignored sound arguments - have finally moved closer to the union's position by agreeing changes to the way in which the Scheme should be valued. These key areas of movement – that are less visible because they sit below the surface of the dispute - include

1) removing de-risking in the current form. Any future de-risking can only be introduced if it is properly evidenced and justified in respect of form, content and timing

2) abandoning test 1

3) committing to greater transparency and to using confidentiality appropriately and only where justified.

Implementing these changes will help to keep contributions affordable and sustainable in the longer term, while maintaining current benefits. These wins have been achieved through industrial strength.

However, employers are still unwilling to move on the shorter-term increases to member contribution rates.

The NDC finds the current increases to be unjustified and part of a trajectory to reduce benefits and increase costs on false premises. Halting any unwarranted increases now is vital to ensure that the Scheme doesn't start haemorrhaging members or employers on spurious grounds.

While there are wider issues to consider in respect of USS, we note employers are manipulating the concerns raised as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, to refuse to either challenge USS on short-term contributions increases, or to pay the excess contributions themselves. We are concerned that settling the dispute now, will induce employers to also argue for reduced benefits going forward using similar false pretences. NDC also believe the 4Fights and USS disputes must continue to be closely linked. Given the institutional changes and the importance of pressing for movement on areas such Health and Safety throughout the Covid crisis, settling now on the USS dispute, will send the wrong message to our employers. Employers have the financial strength to support the Scheme and the demands of the 4Fights Dispute. It is a matter of where they choose to put their resources. Overworked and underpaid members must be treated and paid fairly. Our jobs must be secure and we must know we will have a good DB pension when we come to retire. Our pensions should be sustainable and affordable.

The NDC also notes that we have had other less-visible victories as a result of industrial action. The courage to fight the two disputes (USS and 4Fights), has helped strengthen our union and to provide more than a tokenistic acknowledgement of key issues that the Higher Education sector faces, including casualisation. We have transformed our union. Our membership has grown phenomenally and we are a stronger union. Increasing numbers of members are interested in and scrutinising what employers, USS and the union do. There are networks of activists who have come together to expose serious improprieties on the part of USS, at our employers and at their representative bodies. This includes unmasking the ways in which USS's 'doom and gloom' and creative approaches to presenting figures have misrepresented the health of the Scheme and how employers have allowed USS to do this. Members can now see what is really happening.

We therefore make the following recommendations to branches.

Recommendations from NDC to branch delegate meeting

1. We advise not to settle the pension dispute at this time.
2. We recommend that a Special Congress be organised to allow space for a democratic discussion of all proposals for 4fights and pensions, prior to any decision to rebalot or take industrial action once the crisis has passed.