

Dear Students, Staff, Emeriti and Alumni of the University,

Open Letter Coordinated by Sussex UCU

I am writing in response to the four actions you raise in your letter, delivered to me as Vice-Chancellor on 29 March 2022.

There is much in this letter that we all agree on, and the University Executive Group would like to work with the Sussex community to make significant and rapid progress.

The two areas where I think we all share a common interest and commitment are pay gaps and casualisation.

On the issue of pay gaps, the University Strategic Plan, *Sussex 2025*, and the Inclusive Sussex strategy outline the targets and work packages that we are in the process of implementing. Our work to date has already [seen some improvements](#), but there is much more to do. Our mean [gender pay gap for 2022](#) is 17.9%, a reduction of 0.5 % percentage points compared to last year. Our median gender pay gap has also reduced, from 12.7% to 12.0%. Many of these gaps arise from structural and societal issues beyond our control. For example, the gender pay gap is significantly influenced by that fact that a high proportion of the staff on lower scale points are female. We are committed to reform, but some of our actions will take some time to work through the system.

We have also been working to reduce significantly the level of casualisation in our staff base, by working towards eradicating the use of zero-hour contracts, reducing the number of staff engaged through casual contracts and scaling back the number of fixed term contracts.

We have made good progress on zero hours contracts. Due to the seasonal nature of the academic year, there will always be a need for some casual staff. By using [Reed Talent Solutions to provide a managed service](#) which will take responsibility for temporary/casual staff engagements, we will be able to see data about the use and patterns of these types of engagements in order to target improvement in the future. Alongside this, we are also monitoring and reducing fixed term contracts. We are also trying to ensure managers are using the right contract in the right instance. We recognise there is more work to do in these areas, however.

Negotiations on pay have now commenced for the 2022 round between national employer (UCEA) and staff (Five Trade Unions) representatives. We very much hope that these negotiations will result in a fair settlement for all concerned, and one which recognises the hard work and commitment of the vast majority of our staff.

The first two actions in your letter both relate to the USS 2020 pension valuation. The valuation has now concluded and was implemented on 1 April 2022. The next opportunity to influence the USS contribution and benefits rates is in the context of the next valuation which must be held no later than March 2023. Council has asked me as Vice-Chancellor to work with staff, UCU representatives and UUK to improve the USS Pension Scheme. This should include strongly encouraging future work on governance reform, lower-cost contribution options and benefit improvements in the form of investment conditional indexing. The USS trustee should also be asked to investigate optimal timing for the next valuation, and to ensure that the valuation has the appropriate risk profile and contributions and benefits outcomes.

The impact on Higher Education of long-term Government policy and multiple rounds of industrial action is sad and I wish there were easy answers. We are clear that by working together at Sussex and putting the local needs of our students and staff first we can at least ameliorate the worst

excesses. The University Executive Group is always willing to engage constructively in discussions about our future and to avoid further disruption wherever possible.

Regards,

David Maguire (Prof)

Interim Vice-Chancellor on behalf of UEG