Dear Colleagues

I am writing to you about the current industrial dispute over the future of the USS pension scheme.

You may now be aware that an interim proposal for reform of the scheme, agreed last night by Universities UK and the leadership of the University and College Union, has today been rejected by UCU following meetings of its branch representatives.

The proposal would have retained an important element of defined benefit. It would also have meant that contributions from universities and staff would increase to 19.3 per cent for employers and 8.7 per cent for employees for three years from April 2019. Current contributions are 18 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

The St Andrews Branch of UCU was among those to reject the proposal, and our colleague Tom Jones was in London to communicate the views of St Andrews UCU members to union leaders.

While the proposal was only an interim measure, it would have been broadly acceptable to the University as a step towards a sustainable long-term solution involving further joint working by UCU and UUK, had it carried the support of both sides of the dispute.

Most importantly, it would have lifted the threat of strike action which is causing considerable stress to our students, staff and their families. We recognise that for many of our staff taking industrial action, the withdrawal of labour is a profoundly difficult experience.

Like other universities, we have been asked to give our view of the proposal to Universities UK by tomorrow afternoon.

We shall be responding that we do not believe it would be a constructive move to endorse a proposal which has already been rejected nationally and locally by UCU.

These are now very serious and challenging times for universities, their students and staff and it is my hope that we can work quickly and in a spirit of cooperation to bring an end to a dispute which threatens real and long-lasting damage.

As it is clear that the current valuation does not command the confidence of a significant number of USS members at St Andrews and across the UK, we will strongly repeat our call of last week for an independent assessment of the valuation and the scale of the USS deficit.

We are prepared to work with other universities, trade union colleagues and national representatives to make a case to the USS Trustee and the Pension Regulator to reconsider the requirement for a determination by June. If successful, this would allow a full and considered examination of the true scale of the USS deficit, in order that we can begin to build a genuinely sustainable solution.

Sally Mapstone
Principal and Vice-Chancellor