Dear Students,

It is a real pleasure to welcome you back to St Andrews after what I hope was an enjoyable and refreshing mid-semester break. The town is a remarkably different place over the vacation, a reminder of the extent to which our students are the life and soul of this university.

I am sorry that the long-running national dispute over staff pensions has not been resolved over the break and I have to inform you that the Union has announced a further week of strike action in St Andrews.

There is however a new proposal on the table: this safeguards all staff pensions until the valuation of the USS pension fund has been reviewed by an expert panel jointly agreed between UUK and the UCU.

This proposal was first suggested to national negotiators by St Andrews and other universities early in March. We believe it offers the best hope of bringing our universities and their staffs together to determine the fairest and most transparent route to the strongest possible pension scheme.

UCU are to put the new proposal to a national ballot of members where a positive vote would bring an end to the dispute and a prompt return to the normal scheduling of teaching.

UCU have not yet said when they will hold the ballot, but sadly it looks probable that further strike action will commence before the ballot has concluded. We had asked our UCU colleagues not to disrupt students’ studies any further, but St Andrews is amongst thirteen universities where the UCU has served notice of a further week of strike action, commencing on 16 April. UCU has confirmed that these dates were chosen by the local branch members, as part of a nationally co-ordinated campaign.

We remain committed to ensuring that your grades this semester are fair, and that you obtain the credits you have earned towards your Degree programmes. The Faculty Deans and Heads of School set out in their email of 9 March some of the steps we may consider to ensure that you receive rigorous and fair assessments that reflect the pattern of studies that has been possible in each of your modules. I can also confirm that our Graduation schedules will be unaffected by the industrial action.

We are in regular contact with your elected representatives in the Students’ Association and would encourage you to let them know any views you may have.

Sally Mapstone
Principal and Vice-Chancellor