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## **RSE Young Academy of Scotland Statement On dispute between UCU and UUK regarding reforms to the Universities Superannuation Scheme**

The Young Academy of Scotland welcomes the UUK's openness to further talks beginning on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> March in response to new a new set of proposals from UCU.

As representatives of a wider body of early- to mid-career staff that includes many academics, who will be disproportionately affected by the proposed reforms to the USS, we are concerned that the solution currently favoured by UUK is one that will most negatively affect the lowest paid University staff, in particular those in fixed-term positions and those with part-time contracts (mainly women). Because pension cuts disproportionately affect individuals who are already disadvantaged in many academic fields, particularly STEM, the proposed changes have the strong potential to contribute to gender and cultural inequality in academic institutions.

We are also acutely aware that reductions in pension security will make it harder for non-British academics to settle comfortably in the UK, something that will damage the sector as a whole. Cuts to pension security will surely contribute to an already in-progress peri- and post-Brexit "brain drain", especially because UK academic salaries are low in comparison to many other countries competing for academic talent.

In our view the UUK proposals will have harmful consequences, and there is no evidence presented that the measures are necessary. On the contrary, the notional deficit rests upon contestable assumptions, and the viability of the scheme may be sustained through adjustments to Defined Benefit employer benefits. A fresh, transparent and independent valuation is required to ensure that proposed reforms are not based on discretionary and unreasonably pessimistic assumptions.

The Universities Minister, the leaders of the Green Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrats, and numerous MPs and MSPs have called for negotiations to recommence. The leaders of 17 universities have publicly stated that they support negotiations to end the dispute, and several of them have openly questioned the need for the proposed cuts. We call for a resumption of negotiations – without preconditions – with a view to achieving a settlement that is just and fair to all. We further call upon our public representatives to consider the wider societal issues of the proposed changes, as they continue to support resumed negotiations between UCU and USS.

ENDS

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**Notes for Editors**

*Established by the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2011, the Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) is part of a network of Global Young Academies (GYA) and provides a platform for innovative entrepreneurs, professionals and academics to develop a coherent and influential voice, and to address the most challenging issues facing society in Scotland and beyond.*

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