



The University of Manchester  
H34 Sackville Street Building  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Manchester

Dear President and Vice-Chancellor,

**RE: The University profiting from staff going on strike**

I am writing on behalf of the UMUCU Executive Committee and branch members to welcome your response ([President's weekly update Feb 21](#)) to our [letter concerning external research funding and deduction of wages for tenured members of staff who are taking strike action](#). We note the issue has particular salience given the unprecedented length of industrial action and therefore the significant sums involved. We further note that in this context the University may not, as yet, have had the opportunity of developing appropriate policy within this area. This letter is therefore intended as an invitation to engage in dialogue to develop such a policy.

In that spirit, we request clarification on two points that you make in response to our letter.

Firstly, you claim that we are “incorrect” in our statement that **the University is profiting from funds obtained from external funding bodies intended to pay the salaries of tenured researchers and associated overheads (whose costs are ‘directly allocated’) through deducting wages due to the strike**. You go on to say:

“...the University has not and will not ‘profit’ from any pay deducted due to strike action. This will be used to benefit students.”

These are mutually contradictory statements, in the context of the issue we raise. If the University allocates funding obtained by researchers from external funding agencies to pay their wages to a fund for student benefit the University is making a financial gain (from withheld wages) and deciding on its allocation: i.e., to reiterate, **the University is profiting from funds obtained from funding bodies intended to pay salaries**.

It is laudable that the University wants to increase funding for student benefits. However, research funds obtained from external funding agencies, are—as your own statement makes clear—intended “to ensure that projects continue to involve the total amount of

research activity agreed with the funder, as stipulated in their award notification". They are not intended for the benefit of students. We would strongly suggest that the University has no more legitimacy in reallocating these funds for student benefit than would the Principal Investigator or budget holder of the research fund. **Your statement implies that the University is misappropriating external research funds for activities outside those stipulated in their award notifications.** This is a serious matter. In the absence of any satisfactory and timely explanation concerning the allocation of these funds, or a change of policy from that which you and Director of Human Resources Karen Heaton have now stated, we would need to pursue this issue with UKRI and other external funding bodies.

Secondly, we seek clarification on your statement (echoing Karen Heaton's) that:

"For those staff whose costs are 'directly allocated' the University is obliged, irrespective of the impact of any strike action, to ensure that projects continue to involve the total amount of research activity agreed with the funder."

What does this statement mean in respect of the issue we have raised in our previous letter? (i.e. of tenured research staff—whose costs are 'directly allocated'—who have had wages deducted for participating in the strike). How in these cases will "projects continue to involve the total amount of research activity agreed with the funder"? As you know, research funding provides 'buy out' from other duties. How then does the University intend researchers to make up lost time on funded projects once the strike is over? Is the University going to extend 'buy out' by those researchers that have been on strike and accommodate that into departmental work allocation models? The University has made no communication on this point. In the absence of this, the statement that "projects continue to involve the total amount of research activity agreed with the funder" is meaningless. Furthermore, as you know, one of the sources of dispute in the current industrial action is excessive workloads: goodwill on this matter would therefore suggest meaningful clarification of this statement.

Finally, we would like to remind you that our original letter suggested that an appropriate use of the funds retained from tenured research staff salaries provided by external funding agencies would be for this money to be ear-marked by the University for a fund to benefit fixed term research staff. Where practical this funding could be used to extend the contracts of fixed term researchers on the projects from which it has been withheld, by directly returning it to those projects. This would be in keeping with the spirit of ensuring, as you state, that "projects continue to involve the total amount of research activity agreed with the funder".<sup>1</sup> We also suggested that if contract extensions were not possible, funds could be used to benefit fixed term researchers in other ways, for example funding conference attendance and other career development activities. We further suggest that such a fund should be administered by a committee of both appropriate faculty and UCU representatives of fixed term researchers, and should be transparent concerning the

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<sup>1</sup> This would involve agreement with research funders of viring these funds between directly allocated and indirectly allocated costs. We suggest that funders would be more sympathetic to such shifting of costs within project budgets than the University unilaterally allocating those funds outside of project budgets, as is currently the position.

amount of retained funding involved and its allocation. As you know, one of the sources of dispute in the current industrial action is casualisation. The use of these funds for the benefit of research staff on fixed term contracts would be a strong indicator of goodwill on the part of the University of Manchester to creatively address this issue.

If the University declines the invitation to engage with UMUCU in a dialogue over the use of these retained funds we suggest the only appropriate course of action would be for the University to return these funds to the external funding agencies that provided them. We have every faith that striking tenured research staff would facilitate this process by identifying themselves to the University, and to their funders, after the conclusion of industrial action, such that we could expedite the return of these funds. As researchers benefiting from external research funding we feel strongly that these funds should be used for the benefit of research as funders intend.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Adam Ozanne  
UMUCU Branch Secretary

cc. Edward Astle, Chair of the Board of Governors  
Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer  
Karen Heaton, Director of HR