

15 July 2024

Sir Jon Coles
Group Chief Executive
United Learning
3rd Floor
91-95 Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 0AX

Dear Mr Coles,

As General Secretaries of ASCL, NAHT, NASUWT and the NEU, serving the overwhelming majority of members of the teaching workforce in United Learning academies, we are writing to express our shock and dismay at the way the Trust recently decided to announce its plans for a 'new' pension offer for teachers from 2025.

As you are well aware, all teachers working in United Learning academies are automatically enrolled into the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). This is an important part of the professional terms and conditions package that is provided for all teachers working in state-funded schools, so the proposal to seek to encourage, or even seek to facilitate, teachers to voluntarily opt out of the TPS and enrol in a defined contribution (DC) pension scheme is of serious concern to each of us.

The recognised trade unions are not able to comment on the detail of your proposals as these have yet to be provided and you have instead decided to conduct discussions on this reckless plan to undermine the pensions of the thousands of staff you employ in the national press.

This is unacceptable and has damaged the already poor record of industrial relations that United Learning has with the trade unions.

The suggestion that your proposal tackles the issue of low pay in the sector is also rejected. The proposal to allow staff to opt out of a high-quality defined benefit pension scheme into a less generous defined contribution scheme will clearly not improve the overall pay of your staff. Nor will it provide younger workers with the foundation for a decent pension in retirement if they will be required to opt out of the scheme in order to receive a decent salary. It is a prime example of robbing Peter to pay Paul and cannot in any way be compared to the benefits that teachers receive from the TPS.

ULT would be better advised to lobby for both better pensions and better pay. Your plan does nothing to alleviate the pressures of low pay in the sector it simply defers the low pay teachers now receive into their retirement and stores up problems for the future.

As a national figure in education and in your role as an employing manager we would suggest that you have a greater responsibility than most to take a careful and measured approach to such issues and not to open a discussion on what are complex financial matters which have a huge impact on the lifetime earnings of your employees in the national media.

Your plans to encourage teachers to opt out of the TPS also serves to undermine the scheme itself; in that the more members who leave that scheme to join an inferior defined contribution pension the less sustainable the TPS becomes for everyone. The Teachers Pension Scheme plays an important role in the wider economic planning of the nation and should not be so cynically attacked in the national press.

Our members are already reporting to us that they are deeply concerned and anxious about your plans and, as such, our unions collectively request the Trust withdraw its proposal over the TPS and fully engage with us in negotiations.

Yours sincerely,



Daniel Kebede
NEU General Secretary



Paul Whiteman
General Secretary, NAHT



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary, NASUWT



Pepe Di'lasio
ASCL General Secretary