



**University of
Wolverhampton
UCU Emergency
Newsletter
November 2009**

**UNI EXEC RETREATS - NO COMPULSORY
REDUNDANCIES**

Weeks of criticism from UCU and UNISON and the anger and distrust shown at open staff meetings have led to the University Executive withdrawing its threat of CR. This is a victory for common sense and a victory for those who have resisted the threats hanging over us since the end of July.

The decision provides a breathing space for the University Executive to try to rebuild the trust it has lost over recent years. How great that loss is can be seen in the fact that 170 have decided to walk on an inferior VR scheme. The Executive claims that this 'sacrifice' will revive the university's fortunes. They should know that they will be held to account for this. The sacrifice is not theirs. The problem and its supposed solution is.

The size of the alleged deficit and its cause still awaits proper investigation. VR itself costs. It strips out talent and experience. It increases normal staff turnover as people opt for a more trustworthy employer. Savings are easily lost by senior managers who lack the humility to reflect on their own failures and look to their own positions.

As UCU and UNISON members we will take heart from the way that we have come together, but we now need to sustain this. The bitter experience of the last months will endure. It will be reinforced on a daily basis as we cope with colleagues leaving, chaotic and unrealistic planning and the lack of a clear vision for the future. Those at the forefront of this mess should know that that in the eyes of every member of staff there is suspicion. *They are the ones now on notice.*

Time for Executive to pack their bags.

The City Campus UCU branch meeting on 5 November 2009 passed this motion:

'This branch strongly believes that any financial shortfall remaining in the University budget for 2009-10 after the Voluntary Redundancy exercise is completed should be met by as many members of the University Executive as necessary being invited to take Voluntary Redundancy (on the same terms as other staff) instead of the University Executive seeking to make other members of University staff compulsorily redundant.'

26 November Emergency Branch Meetings

The union will update you on its officers' discussions with the University Executive and discuss plans for further action. 'Learning Works' will also be on the agenda.

We urge you to attend and contribute your ideas.

Main site at 1 p.m., in MA030. Walsall site in WN001

Branch Motions for 26 November Emergency Meetings

Motion

'This branch welcomes the guarantee won by the UCU and UNISON negotiators that there will be no compulsory redundancy this academic year. In the event of any member being threatened with compulsory redundancy, the branch requests the Negotiating Committee to organise a ballot on strike action.

This branch also recognises the potential increased workload for members as a result of the voluntary redundancies, approved by Executive, and reminds members of the need to work in line with their agreed workload allocation, and requests the University Executive to issue a statement reminding all staff of this and instructing School and Departmental management to act accordingly.'

Learning Works

The City Campus UCU branch passed the following resolution at the branch meeting on Thursday 5 November 2009.

'This branch regrets that the Learning Works initiative has not been based on pedagogic evidence or on consultation with academic staff and calls on the University Executive to withdraw the vacuous list of graduate attributes and to take down the embarrassing video.

The branch also reminds members that they should not devote more time to the 20 credit curriculum changes than is allowed for in their workload allocation.

The branch notes that the paper on Learning Works was tabled at Academic Board and there was no time for teaching staff representatives to consult anyone. This makes a mockery of Academic Governance at the University of Wolverhampton.

We ask the officers to organise a UCU meeting at which Sally Glen can answer members' questions on Learning Works.'

Learning Works. So does Resistance!

Because UCU concerns and members' protests from a variety of schools brought management to the discussion table and resulted in some concessions, it has been agreed *as a gesture of goodwill* to withdraw the threat of a day of action on December 3rd.

At the branch meetings on 26th November there will be a report on discussions with the Executive over Learning Works.

Who is taking VR?

Brief details of numbers; questions about implications; age profile etc.

At the meeting on Wednesday morning (during which the VC's letter was sent out) a limited amount of detail was given. UCU and UNISON asked for more information and some of this may have crossed while this newsletter was being prepared but we have no control over its content. No details of how schools and service departments are affected were available. The information given was as follows

177 requests made 154 accepted 23 to go to appeal (2 Deans/associate deans and 2 academics)	Of 154 there are 99 APTC and Manual 42 academic 13 Senior staff, deans, associate deans etc
---	--

The £8 million savings alleged required have been reduced to £7 million as a result of management accepting union claims about money still in the kitty. Of this £7 million, £5.4m will be accounted for by VR, leaving £1.6 million to be found. But this assumes a pay settlement of 0.5% and that all who have indicated that they would accept VR will ultimately do so.

VR and Workload: What Happens Next?

If you are up to hours on your WLAM and you are asked to do more, then check with your UCU representatives and if they agree, use this model letter to refuse:

Dear X

Thank you for your written verbal/request that I take on additional duties to cover the gap created by the departure of colleagues under the university redundancy programme. You will know that when the WLAM was agreed for this academic year I was one of a number of people who were required to work at the contractual limit. I have therefore taken the advice of UCU representatives and they have advised me that it was inappropriate for university management to ask me to take on additional tasks that will clearly take me over the contractual limits. They have further advised me that in view of this I should decline your request. Given the advice I have received from the official representatives of the recognised trade union I have no choice but to ask you to seek an alternative solution and not to put further pressure on me to work beyond contract. I understand that the UCU representatives, and if necessary officers, are available to discuss the workload situation in the school and the need to ensure that no member of staff is asked to exceed their contractual obligations.

The VR should be properly planned so that workloads of existing staff are not unfairly increased at short notice. It is important that UCU members who may not be up to hours and may be asked to take on extra work do not feel coerced into working in areas where they lack expertise or at such short notice that it risks the credibility of what they do or their health and breaches the agreed terms and conditions. UCU will issue more formal advice as the situation develops, and reps will be available to give advice. In the meantime all members are urged to have readily available a copy of the terms of conditions of employment and to locate their original workload documents that should have been agreed at the end of the last academic year. Check here for the key general document

<http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/natfhe/revised%20contract%20agreed%20april05.doc>

Why have they ignored alternatives to redundancy?

The University Executive claims it has actively considered all alternatives to redundancy. Even the tea and coffee have been cut. Neither UCU nor UNISON agree. Both unions have separately drawn up overlapping demands that the university commit itself to implement a proper policy designed to avoid any further crisis. Few of us will have failed to notice the irony of an organisation committed to teaching life long learning and offering courses to outside interests to develop flexibility, resorting to redundancy itself when its management perceives that problems exist. The UCU list of demands is set out below:

1. That the university executive undertake a published review of how the current financial crisis arose with full transparency in respect of all aspects of income and costs that bear on the issue of financial stewardship since the university went into deficit.

2. That the university executive commit itself to proactively follow the ACAS guidelines with immediate effect in respect to avoiding future general or localised redundancy situations and that it have in place clear and agreed plans, procedures and opportunities by the start of semester 1 2010. In particular, we draw attention to the following elements of the ACAS guidelines to avoid redundancy:

- (i) Natural wastage.
- (ii) Restricting the recruitment of permanent staff.
- (iii) Reducing the use of temporary staff
- (iv) Retiring all employees at the normal or default retirement age.
- (v) Filling vacancies from amongst existing employees.
- (vi) Reduction or cessation of overtime working
- (vii) Reduction of hours by short time working.
- (viii) Training, retraining or redeploying employees for different work for which there is a requirement either in the same or a different location.

3. That university executive ceases to employ outside contractors or consultants for work that can be done by staff on its establishment.

4. That university executive agrees not to use the VR situation to allow promotions to vacant senior posts at the expense of resourcing frontline academic and administrative services.

5. That the university executive commit itself to rebalancing over the next period by diminishing the number of senior managerial posts at the executive level, service heads and schools. Further that in respect of academic staff it will establish a minimum level of teaching required of all staff below deans and an expectation that deans will also show a demonstrable contribution to research and teaching rather than just management.

6. That the university will seek to show demonstrable progress in reducing the burden of its self-generated internal audit culture which not only overloads staff but involves an unnecessary diversion of staff resources away from front line activities with attendant support.

7. That the university undertake a full review of the value of its blended learning initiatives.

8. That central services be obliged to publish their staffing, budgets and performance indicators each year in the same way that schools are required to.

Where are We Now?

Letter from Walsall member at 12.17, 25th November 2009:

‘Just wanted to thank you for your hard work dealing with this industrial relations situation. As an outsider my reading is that the strength of opposition has forced them to back off. It doesn’t get much better!!!. Please convey my best wishes to the whole Branch committee.’

The Negotiating Committee in turn thanks colleagues for their support but we appreciate that there is still a battle on. As Loraine Westcott, Chair of the Negotiating Committee, said after the meeting, ‘*I didn’t get the impression of much forward thinking being in place at Executive level*’. This is not true of your Union!

<p style="text-align: center;">Sick to death of what is being done to you?</p> <p>Sadly this is not a bad joke. Workplace stress, the threat of unemployment and unemployment are known to be significant factors in ill-health. No-one will need a UCU newsletter to tell them about the current scale of stress and sickness as people struggle with the Learning Works drive while worrying about whether they will have a job, a subject or department in a year's time. The University of Wolverhampton is still one of the few universities (the only one?) to have been reported to the Health and Safety Executive in 2001 by local GPs because of the low health of its staff. The circumstances then were very similar to today but less intense. Last year, before the double whammy of redundancy and Learning Works, Personnel had to report that the university was failing its key sickness performance indicator.</p> <p>With this in mind UCU has asked the University Executive for an urgent investigation into levels of stress and sickness.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Wittgenstein and the Management Leaf</p> <p>Wittgenstein and a union newsletter? Come on – this is a university: we should have professional pride even when management don't! Wittgenstein once illustrated the problem of why we do things by telling the story of the leaf who kept telling itself as the wind blew it around, 'now I'll go this way, now I'll go that.' We are all victims of a management culture that follows the logic of the leaf. We are told to charge in this direction and then in that under the illusion that 'they' are in control and know what they are doing. Sadly the evidence accumulated over the last two years is that they do not. The finances have been allowed to develop into a mess; Learning Works is producing chaos; over-recruitment is now leading to panic.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Solution</p> <p style="text-align: center;">After the uprising of the autumn 09 The Associate VC, Had hyperlinked leaflets distributed via the internet Stating that the staff Had forfeited the confidence of the executive And could win it back only By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier In that case for the executive To dissolve the staff And appoint another?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">With apologies to Bertolt Brecht</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Are we now going to be fined for having too many students?</p> <p>The poor control of the university's finances is now complemented by the university's inability to control admissions. UCU has deliberately avoided reporting some of the horror stories we have heard about students being left in limbo about starting here and the nightmare in the colleges offering foundations degrees. But at the open meetings it has gradually become clear that the University Executive is engaged in a fire-fighting exercise to make sure that we do not pay the price for their lack of controlled admissions last summer.</p>	

The Ballooning Deficit

	Income	Expend-iture	+/-
2005/6	129	122.7	+1.3
2006/7	144.6	144.5	-0.1
2007/8	148.5	154.0	-4.7
2008/9	148.7	160.5	-11.9
2009/10e	146.9	153.1	-6.2

These are the figures according to the university accounts, the last of which have still to be put on the website when we went to press.

Accounts are always a problem. Henry Ford is supposed to have asked his chief accountant what profit he was making only for the accountant to say 'tell me what profit you want to make and I will make the accounts show it'. The same can apply to deficits. So we have some serious questions that have yet to be answered.

1. If these are true and accurate, why was the VC reporting to the governors as late as May 2008 that 'The budget for the year was for a surplus of £320,000. The current forecast is for a surplus of broadly this amount'?

2. When can we have a full breakdown of all the university costs and not just staff pay awards? In particular:

1. What is the capital budget and why have these spending priorities been set in the past and for the future?
2. What has happened to the surplus on student bursaries?
3. How can we explain the past growth of staffing levels when income has not been growing?
4. Why has the executive's pay risen and some members of the executive been restructured into higher grades?

You may have more – in which case tell your UCU rep.

By our calculations the HEFCE deficit and the national pay deals account for only part of the increase in costs and therefore it is wrong to attribute the whole deficit to these. Where has the rest come from?

The Catalogue of Lame Excuses

As the executive has toured the campuses for hurriedly-arranged meetings to 'listen', we have been treated to some classic senior management excuses.

Think they might be culpable over HEFCE? Why not try the RBS-Fred Goodwin excuse? 'I am no worse than any other VC so don't touch my PRP and pension.'

Think they might have mismanaged the finances more generally?

Try the 'you can't blame us we all thought the good times would go on forever and here are some selected cases I have chosen to support this claim'.

Leaning Doesn't work for you?

Try the insurance company excuse: 'It's your fault for not listening and reading the small print', so read our documents properly next time suckers.

And don't forget the 'you agreed to this' excuse.

This saddles the Deans and associate Deans with responsibility. 'It's middle management, that's the problem so kick them not us.'

THE HEFCE Error

Many of you will know that despite the claim that everyone was doing it they were not. Peter Knight at what was then UCE publicly warned against the problem in 2006, and the HEFCE website has a number of warnings dating back to previous years where it explicitly draws attention to mistaken interpretations that should not be allowed to continue.

'the committee has ruled that the university is funded for a student if, and only if, the student completes every aspect of a year's work in that academic year. Any postponement of a final assessment, any resit, will almost certainly result in the student being regarded as a "non-completer" and not fundable, even if the academic decision is that the student can proceed to the next year of study.' See *Guardian 21 Feb 2006*