

**Caroline No Mates?**

Wolverhampton is now in the position of being one of the two universities – the other is London Met - to have issued the formal notice for major compulsory redundancy demanded by legislation.

Who wants to be our VC's friend? Publically it seems no-one. So what do other VCs say? Here is Malcolm McVicar, the VC of Central Lancashire talking about the need for more funding and someone's 'suicidal tendencies'

*"It would be beyond reason for an incoming government to significantly reduce public expenditure on higher education in the middle of a recession. It would be like a general demobilising regiments of battle-hardened troops in the face of an enemy. There is, of course, a danger that a few politically inept vice-chancellors will offer up their troops in voluntary sacrifice in advance of any battle. However, on the assumption that these suicidal tendencies can be controlled by the rest of the sector, let us address the elephant in the room."* Guardian 20/10/09 (our emphasis)

Then down the road at Birmingham University we have David Eastwood also pointing a finger at those who are complicit in cutting *'In reality, we all know that the costs of restructuring are considerable, and the cash reserves of many institutions are modest. Achieving such a restructuring would deplete those reserves, and may require further borrowing. Meanwhile, legislation makes restructuring the public sector and publicly funded institutions ever more costly. Given the staff-intensive nature of our business, if an institution turning over £200m were to take out 15% of its cost base, it would be lucky to achieve sustainable reductions for less than £25m in restructuring costs.*

*So, facile talk of modelling massive reductions is quite different from achieving them. But, even if they were achievable, are they advisable? Of course not. The sector has argued, rightly, that teaching remains underfunded. Investment in HE as a proportion of GDP in the UK hovers between 1.3% and 1.4% below the OECD average, and cripplingly below that of the US (at 2.9%). Moreover, our competitors are increasing their relative investment in HE as we slip back.'* (Guardian 29/10/09

**Key Dates for your Diary for rest of 2009**

Thursday 5 November City Campus branch meeting MA202 and Walsall Branch Meeting 1-2pm

Tuesday 10 November Intersite Negotiating Committee

Wednesday 25 November University Executive reports on VR applications and whether it is intended to move forward to CR

Thursday 26 November Branch Meetings at City and Walsall to consider UCU Reposes

Thursday 3 December First UCU Day of Action and related activities to implement branch resolutions

## UCU National President meets with the Vice Chancellor 14 October

Alastair Hunter, President of UCU, and Martin Machon, UCU regional officer (accompanied by local reps) met with the Vice Chancellor, Sir Geoff Hampton and Roger Williams and asked searching questions regarding the financial state of the University, the need for a compulsory redundancy programme (matched only by London Met) and the lack of proper consideration of alternative strategies. The answers that were received were far from convincing. Specifically, Martin Machon asked firstly if there was an intention to hold an independent financial review into the management of the University. The Vice Chancellor saw no need for this. Secondly, Martin asked if the Vice Chancellor intended to tender her resignation. The Vice Chancellor responded that she would not be doing so as 'it would leave a vacuum at the top of the organisation'.

### October Branch meetings at City and Walsall

A well-attended Branch meeting on the Main site on 14 October heard reports from the UCU regional official, Martin Machon, and the national UCU President, Alistair Hunter, about their meetings with the VC, Geoff Hampton and Roger Williams along with University of Wolverhampton negotiators.

One member asked how long had the University Executive known that there was a problem? Another spoke of the coercion that people were feeling to take VR. A third raised the issue of the status of anyone whose VR application was rejected. Another asked why so little progress had been made in negotiations with UCU, to which the regional official replied that he was surprised at the University Executive's lack of any constructive response. This just shone more light on their inability to look for a positive solution.

After discussion from the floor two motions were put. These motions were also put and passed at a Walsall Branch Meeting.

#### **Motion 1 Governors' Enquiry**

*This meeting expresses its dismay at the failure of the Vice Chancellor to give a clear account of the nature of the University's financial situation or to offer a convincing explanation of its causes.*

*In view of the seriousness of the current situation and the question of the adequacy of the oversight of the University it calls upon the UCU officers to write to the chair of the University's Governors to ask for an immediate enquiry into the stewardship of the University and to take evidence from all interested parties and to report publicly by 30 November 2009.*

This motion was passed unanimously with no abstentions.

#### **Motion 2 VC's position**

*This meeting notes with dismay the deterioration in the situation of the University whilst in the charge of the current VC, Professor Caroline Gipps.*

*It further regrets the way the VC is using large scale redundancy as a solution to problems not of the staff's making, without due consideration being given to other cost saving initiatives.*

*It expresses its lack of confidence that the current repositioning exercise is a credible basis to position the University for the future. It therefore calls upon the UCU officers to begin the process of organising a ballot of all UCU members calling for the resignation of Professor Gipps as Vice Chancellor.*

This motion was passed with 2 abstentions and no votes against.

## **Twenty Credits and All that at City Branch Meeting**

'Learning works' at the University of Wolverhampton (but not apparently elsewhere?). It may be as well that the launch of the University's flagship scheme has been done quietly given the widespread cynicism and scepticism with which this idea is being met. But the pressure is on to push the 20 credit changes even if they may not work. A number of staff spoke at the city branch meeting expressing their frustration with this policy

'Too fast for serious academic/ pedagogical planning' was how one member put it from the floor. Another member spoke of the damage these rushed changes will do to the University's reputation. 'The Learning Works framework is flawed or invalid due to pressure of time'.

An informal hand vote was held on the suggestion that the move to 20 credits be delayed by 12 months.

**3 abstentions, 0 votes against.**

## **3 December 'It's Not Their University Day'**

On this day UCU members will be invited to a series of on site and off site events to have the say that so many think they have been denied on where the University Executive is taking the University.

Never been asked? Never been listened to? Fed up with top down fads? Sick of being treated unprofessionally?

These are the Vice Chancellor's exact words on 'Learning Works'

*'Over the last six months we have reviewed all our courses ... During this process we have listened to students, employers and professional bodies.'*

If you are part of the group she forgot to mention – the one that was never asked - then join UCU's campaign to create a University that we can be proud to say that we work at.

## **Stop Press**

As we go to press the new University website (a flattering echo of our near neighbours BCU who also intriguingly have their own RoLEx version of 'learning works') has, glitches and all, come on line. We understand that prospectuses are being pulled, UCAS listings changed, and many applicants being written to and told that the courses that they thought they were applying for in September 2010 no longer exist or have been changed.

If you haven't a clue about what is going on, this is probably because you are not the type of entrepreneurial, digitally aware global citizen teacher that the Executive thinks the University needs. Fortunately we can help you to learn the right words by accessing the University video where you will hear from the student union officers, amongst others, what you will be doing next year and why, by implication, the teaching you are doing this year does not work:

<http://www.wlv.ac.uk/default.aspx?page=21498>

## UCU denied meeting with University Governors

On the 23 September UCU wrote to the governors asking for a meeting. The result was a long letter from Tony Lee on behalf of the Governors which is to be circulated separately. While allowing for future contact the letter makes it clear that redundancy issues are remitted by the Governors to the VC.

But we are happy to set this aside. It is perhaps the last paragraph that disturbs us most

*'Firm leadership is essential in the current economic climate and the Vice Chancellor has the support of the governing body, who are all determined to see the University overcome the present financial pressures, and to move the University forward in its mission'.*

The Wolverhampton UCU website is at

<http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/natfhe/>

So now we know the same team that got us into the mess is going to get us out of it by exercising 'strong leadership'.

The questions we have to ask are simple

The letter claims that the terms of the restructuring were agreed by the governors. Our information is that they were not fully briefed and we note that the letter from Tony Lee refers several times to the 'voluntary redundancy scheme' and NOT the threat of compulsory redundancy.

1. Where were the governors when the finances were apparently getting out of control?
2. Do the governors know how demoralised staff are?
3. Have they bothered to ask about whether the staff share the VC's view of the University mission – does the Executive even have one?
4. Has it occurred to them that in the last 18 months we have seen institution after institution go under because boards charged with oversight backing management teams that had lost control of the situation?

Be that as it may, it is also disappointing to find UCU being attacked for damaging the reputation of the University

*'The University welcomes the opportunity for constructive dialogue with UCU and other interested parties in an endeavour to minimise the potentially negative impact that a redundancy programme will have. It is disappointing that UCU, through you and your negotiating committee have not fully grasped the vital opportunity for consultative exploration of solutions, but have instead resorted to a negative campaign which can only damage the University'*

According to the letter on behalf of the Governors *'the Vice-Chancellor has fully acknowledged her responsibilities as the University's Chief Executive'*. Yet she also continues to deny that a mistake was made because

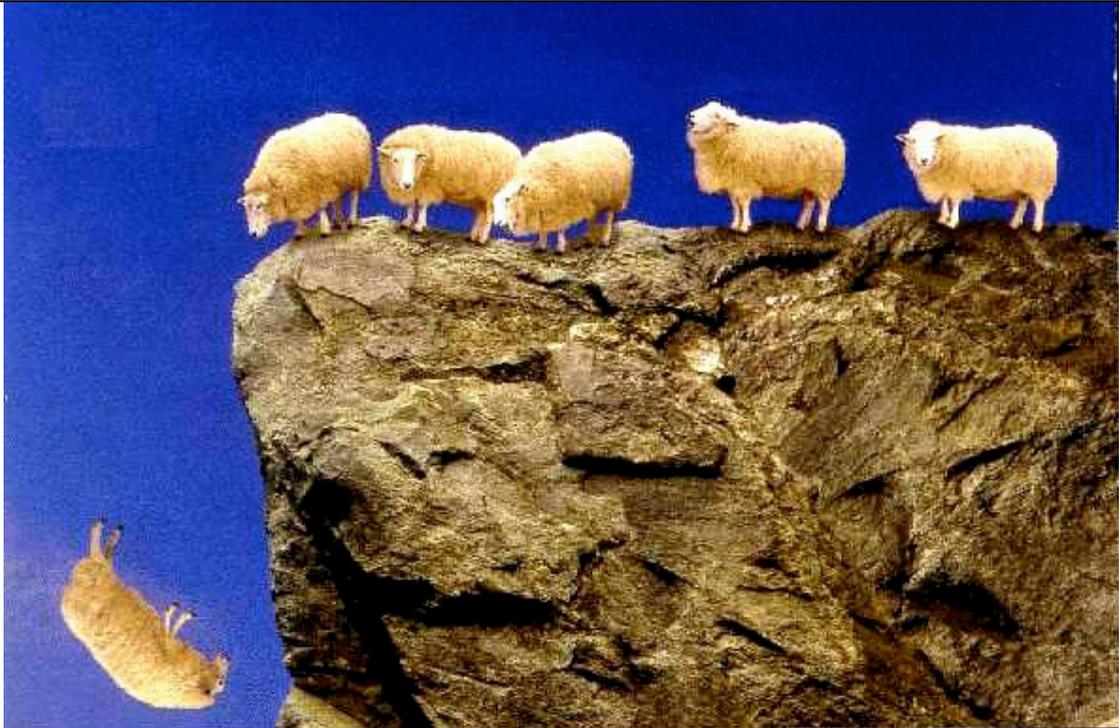
- (a) it was complicated
- (b) others messed up too.

Convincing as an excuse?

<b>Right of Reply to Jane Nelson denied</b>	<b>Letters to Your MPs</b>
<p>The sudden appearance of an announcement on Wolf from Jane Nelson with the suggestions that students had no need to worry since the University was guarding their best interests provoked some annoyance amongst UCU members. Accordingly the Negotiating Committee wrote to the VC on 9 October questioning this use of Wolf to persuade students the Executive's policy of reducing the staff by 10% would not damage the University and asking for a right of reply so that students might have full knowledge of the issues involved.</p> <p>Below we print the VC's response of the 22 October</p> <p><i>Thank you for your email of 9 October regarding the use of WOLF to inform students about the University's repositioning exercise.</i></p> <p><i>WOLF is one of the means available to the University to communicate with students, along with e:Vision and email, about any matter that the University thinks is important to them. It is principally but not solely a learning resource. For example, we have recently put on information about the Student Loans Company delays and practical information, not learning related, to help students with disabilities.</i></p> <p><i>I do not accept your interpretation of the message posted by Jane Nelson. This was a corporate message, and factual, not an attempt to "make political points". I do not think it would be an appropriate use of WOLF to allow UCU, or others, to publish statements on it. I am concerned that any such communication might raise anxiety in the minds of our students.</i></p> <p><i>Yours sincerely</i></p> <p><i>Caroline Gipps</i></p>	<p>Many UCU members have written to their MPs. Can we continue you urge to do so using the model letter? This is an important source of pressure and it has also caused the University Executive some headaches as they are asked to explain themselves. Colleagues should write to their own MPs. So far we do not know of a single MP – Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat who has refused to take up the issue and ask what is going on. UCU has also been able to arrange meetings with a number of MPs and is seeing David Lammy to brief him on how things look from our perspective.</p> <p><b>Wolverhampton in the THES</b></p> <p>Many of you will already have seen the discussion of the Wolverhampton situation in the THES. If not can we urge you to check it out.</p> <p><b><u>'Completion data error 'was just a misunderstanding' THES October 8 2009</u></b></p> <p>Assiduous research has also culled this gem from the archives. Apparently in 2006 the VC thought she and Wolverhampton were on top of the numbers situation:</p> <p><b><u>THES 28 July 2006 Caroline Gipps</u></b></p> <p><i>Universities such as Wolverhampton work very hard to improve retention, and our drop-out rate for first years is now down to 10 per cent for young full-time students, which is below our benchmark. It is also below the benchmark for young full-time students from low participation neighbourhoods (at 12.5 per cent, benchmark 13 per cent) - a critically important point given the high percentage of students from low socio-economic groups that we take.</i></p> <p><i>So, by looking at different statistics from the same source it is possible (and more accurate) to tell a rather different, and much more positive, story.</i></p>

## Caption Competition

UCU colleagues are invited to add their own words:



### Have they Done it Again?

In the last few years less and less authoritative information seems to be available about how the University is functioning despite all the talk of transparency. Not least of these areas is that of admissions where the favoured method of communication from the top down appears to be by word of mouth and rumours. This leaves open the question of how much over-recruitment has taken place this year and whether the University will be hit with additional fines. It also raises the issue of how over-recruited students are being treated. It would be nice to have a clear published statement of the situation and how the University proposes to cope with any over recruitment.

## Bringing the University into Disrepute?

Lord Paul, the University of Wolverhampton's rarely seen Chancellor, is currently being investigated by police over an alleged expenses fraud involving him claiming 'that a flat occupied by one of his employees was his main home, allowing him to claim £38,000 in expenses'. During the investigation he has temporarily stood down as deputy speaker of the House of Lords.

Fortunately any disrepute that might fall Wolverhampton's way will also be shared with the 'prestigious' [not our words – that of the relevant press comment] University of Westminster where he is also Chancellor.

Lord Paul is also registered as a 'non domicile' for tax purposes.

## No comment

	<p>He says</p> <p>Lord Paul 'confirmed to <i>The Times</i> that he had never slept in the residence that he nominated as his main home.</p> <p>"It's true I never slept there. But it was available. I submitted the claim and I gave the flat as my address, because I have it as a place to stay.</p> <p>"The question is, what are the rules? I know that I have followed the rules and the House of Lords will look into the claims." <i>The Times</i> 12 October 2009</p>
	<p>She says</p> <p>'A Wolverhampton spokesman ... insist[ed] that the University's data were accurate. "The University correctly recorded and reported the number of students enrolled and the modules they took," he said. "The problem was a misinterpretation of Hefce's arcane definition of 'completion' for funding purposes."</p> <p>Professor Gipps said a policy of allowing full-time students registered on an eight-module-per-year course to progress if they had completed six modules had fallen foul of Hefce's definition of completion.</p> <p>"It wasn't until Hefce began the audit in June last year that we began to understand their definition," she said. "Every new University with a modular course structure has had, or is having, a similar problem." THES October 8 2009</p>

## **THES Reporter on Wolverhampton Commended for London Met Reporting**

Melanie Newman, the THES reporter whose preliminary reporting on Wolverhampton we noted earlier, has been highly commended in the 2009 Paul Foot Journalism awards for her investigation into the HEFCE scandal at London Met. Newman's August 6 *THES* summary of the situation at London Met quotes extensively from an HEFCE commissioned external audit, including:

'London Metropolitan University was "operating blindly", with key decisions being made by managers and governors in the absence of solid facts, according to an independent auditor's report into incorrect student-data returns at the institution.

BDO was asked to audit the University's data returns for 2006-07 and to assess the extent to which the findings of two Hefce audits for 2003-04 and 2004-05 had been acted upon. .... The BDO auditors ... found that the University's processes for compiling, reviewing and authorising data returns were ineffective.

They said that Brian Roper, who was vice-chancellor then, and his senior management team had not passed key information such as Hefce letters to the governors, who had in turn failed to carry out their assurance responsibilities effectively.

The BDO auditors also criticised Hefce for not being "more explicit" on the issue in the documentation issued to London Met following the 2005 audit. ... By 2006, the University was running "financially blind with no reasonable mechanism to understand its base funding level", BDO concluded.

It said that as recently as November 2008, London Met was still submitting to the Higher Education Statistics Agency data in which the auditors had "no confidence".

The BDO auditors found that management had also been taking critical decisions on funding that should have been discussed at board level.

"Nowhere in the board papers have we seen representation from the designated officer (the vice-chancellor) providing sufficient information to the board to enable it to take reasonable decisions to ensure that the University planned its affairs so as to remain solvent," the BDO report says.

And while members of senior management were aware of potential problems with the data, they did not bring them to governors' attention other than through the vice-chancellor, it adds.

The BDO report also says that there were "significant gaps" in internal auditors' reports that resulted in a "total reliance on management".

It criticises the governors' oversight of management, saying: "Both the audit committee and the finance and human resources committee should have pursued their responsibilities more effectively ... the overall governance at the University in relation to data issues was not effective." The auditors were unable to find in any of the board or committee papers any discussion "around the risks of the University's practice with regard to non-completions compared with Hefce rules in the area".

**What would a similar audit uncover here?**

