



University of Wolverhampton UCU Newsletter September 2009

A message from Sally Hunt to Wolverhampton UCU Members

UCU General Secretary, Sally Hunt, has said: 'Government rhetoric suggests that education will not be a victim of the recession and it will play a key role in our recovery. Sadly, individual universities' actions, coupled with pruning of the education budget, means what is actually happening is that we are making it much harder for people to get a high quality education when they need it most. We will be fighting the redundancies at Wolverhampton, as we will be at other further and higher education institutions across the country, because we know education can, and must be allowed to, play a full role in helping the UK recover.'

Summary of Feedback on the Redundancy Threat by Loraine Westcott, chair of UCU Negotiating Committee to the City Branch Meeting 15th September

The redundancy threat was announced on Friday 31st July, atrocious timing by executive in view of summer leave. This was the first opportunity there had been to consult with members. A similar meeting had taken place at Walsall the week before.

The VC had talked of 'challenging times' at her open meeting in May. A selective job freeze was announced at the same time. No mention was made that jobs were at risk. In June, UCU challenged the appointment of a new Director of Corporate Services at executive level. This was an ideal opportunity to 'lead by example' and reduce the size of executive. The argument fell on deaf ears but the Negotiating Committee were warned that in any future redundancy situation the financial terms offered would be considerably less favourable than previously. In early July we were told that executive wanted to meet with the unions and consult on redundancies.

The question that has been asked is why the negotiating committee did not forewarn members at that stage. UCU believed that any premature announcement would adversely affect clearing and the beginning of the academic year. Executive clearly had no such concerns. On July 31 st, at the first meeting, the negotiators were told that Governors had just been informed and that the intention was to e-mail all staff before the end of the day.

To date there have been three meetings. Your negotiators have requested information on:

- Alternatives to redundancy and rational for rejection (received after the meeting on the 16th September 09).
- Equality impact assessment - supplied
- Full financial disclosure – 2009/9 accounts not available until after the audit in mid-November.

- Details of the HEFCE claw back/fine – not yet finalised.

It was considered necessary to submit a Freedom of Information request to HEFCE to try and determine exactly what the financial situation was. In addition the committee have consulted fully with UCU regional/head office to ensure that all appropriate actions have been imitated. A media campaign was launched which resulted in some very positive coverage. MP's were contacted and committee members have started to meet with the Wolverhampton MP'S. We will also be asking you to write to your MP's.

UCU and You

UCU is a professional trade union representing the collective and individual interests of its members. It is determined to oppose university policy on redundancies and support members who are victims of unfair policies. We will take action within the university procedures and, if need be, outside of it to resist job losses. If you have a colleague who is a non-member please pass on this newsletter and advise them to join. This is not the time to be alone and unrepresented. You, as a member, have the support of your union. Non members must trust in the university executive.

Extracts from Minutes of Special Branch Meeting held on Tuesday 15 September 2009 at City Campus

Present: Jim Hoyle (Acting Chair) and 97 members

The Chair pointed out that this was a special meeting with a single item of business – the announcement by the University Executive that they wanted 250 jobs to go through voluntary and, if necessary, compulsory redundancy.

Following Loraine Westcott's statement Pat McCarthy reported on the Walsall branch meeting. Members there had called for

- a public audit of the University accounts
- a delay in the deadlines for VR and CR
- a campaign for the withdrawal of goodwill by members

In response to questions, LW and PM confirmed that

- The University had £45 million in reserves, but more than half of that sum was already committed.
- The University Executive was proposing to spend £5 million on redundancy payments in order to save £8.5 million in a single year
- The University Executive had already spent considerable sums on a VR scheme in WBS and in SoH when UCU could see no objective justification for this.
- The total bill for senior staff salaries, benefits and performance-related pay was £11.3 million (12% of the total salary bill). 'Senior staff' includes University Executive, Heads of Schools and Service Departments and some professors.

A general debate followed in which the following points were made

- The University Executive had been guilty of the worst sort of HR practice in announcing redundancies on a Friday afternoon when many staff were on leave or about to go on leave.
- UCU was firmly opposed to redundancies of any sort and the scale of the

- proposed redundancies would make the university unviable.
- UCU officers were advising members to apply for VR only if it suited their individual circumstances and not to believe that they would be saving the job of a colleague if they took VR. In some cases, one member's VR would mean the threat of overload for remaining colleagues.
- We need much more clarity on what HEFCE are entitled to reclaim as a result of the university over-reporting student completions. Can they really take money from UoW indefinitely?

The following motion was moved, seconded and agreed unanimously.

"This branch demands that the Vice Chancellor takes public responsibility for the over-reporting of student completions to HEFCE".

The question of increasing workload demands imposed by the decision to move to a 20 credit curriculum framework was raised and members were advised to contact their School UCU rep immediately if they were asked to work outside their conditions of service on anything to do with the 20 credit framework.

- Members present also gave their support to the resolution passed at the Walsall branch - 'UCU should organise a campaign for staff to withdraw their "goodwill"'.

What can we do?

UCU is asking all its members to join in a vigorous campaign of opposition to the Vice Chancellor's plans. In the first instance members are being asked to lobby as widely as possible to expose our situation and the policies that have brought us here. Letters should be sent to MPs; opinion makers in the region should be contacted; and no opportunity should be lost to expose our situation. We are also requesting the support of the students and we should not feel afraid to discuss with them the possible consequences of the redundancy plans and the claim that they will not affect the 'student experience'. As lecturers we are both professionals and trade unionists. The two roles re-enforce one another as the university executive tries to push through changes in provision on the basis of whim and fancy. Inside and outside we have a dual responsibility to stand up for the university and its best interests.

UCU Website

UCU at the University of Wolverhampton has its own website at
<http://www2.wlv.ac.uk/natfhe/>

The national UCU website is www.ucu.org.uk

UCU at Wolverhampton is working closely with UNISON whose members jobs are also threatened. <http://www.unison.org.uk>

From Wolverhampton to London Met and Back

UCU local negotiator Pat McCarthy has spoken of the threat of 250 redundancies at Wolverhampton as the 'London Met' of the provinces. For the last year UCU at London Met has been conducting a major campaign to save a university crippled by poor management, claw backs etc. Like Wolverhampton London Met takes in some of the least privileged students in the country – it has more Afro Caribbean students than the whole of the Russell Group put together. The on going battle at London Met and the successes UCU has had in publicising their plight and forcing major concessions and changes at the top of that university can be an inspiration for us. For details see the London Met UCU website

<http://www.lmuucu.devisland.net/>

Did you know?

The university is committed to regional regeneration but the Vice Chancellor is looking for redundancies at a time when the West Midlands and the Black Country has one of the highest regional unemployment rates in the country.

University staff are still being encouraged to offer services to other organisations to help them avoid redundancy.

The university claims to be a 'learning organisation' and at the heart of 'knowledge transfer' but its own plans do not involve any serious retraining of its own staff.

CAN'T AFFORD IT?

The UK still only spends around the average level of GDP on education amongst the OECD countries.

The UK has one of the highest HE drop out rates in the OECD.

The so -called public sector financial crisis is a consequence of the bail outs and the reduced tax take not excessive public spending.

The Wolverhampton 'crisis' involves at best a few million due to bad management and accounting as opposed to billions elsewhere. What's wrong with a write off?

The words of Caroline Gipps we can all support

In 1992, discussing the work of A.H.Halsey in her presidential address to the British Educational Research Association, Professor Caroline Gipps said

'Halsey's view is that one reason the response to academics to this hostile climate has been so mild is because of their tolerance of hostile ideology and their patience to pursue reasoned argument. Perhaps it is time academics gave up these traits'

http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/08/Gipps,_1992.pdf