

## Important information for UCU Members at Warwick University

Your union on campus

August 2014

### Union fights academic staff cuts

**Warwick UCU has set up an action group to fight a proposed significant reduction in academic staff posts in Warwick Medical School and the School of Life Sciences.**

At an Emergency Branch meeting held on 10 July, members agreed that the group should be set up with Kevin Purdy as convenor. There was a strong feeling at the meeting that a university with a large financial surplus should not penalise colleagues for senior management failings that included making expensive and unfunded senior appointments for REF purposes.

The meeting also condemned the timing of the announcement of the job losses in the summer vacation as an obvious ploy to ensure minimal opportunity for consultation. The University has since claimed that this is 'simply untrue', pointing to a meeting with staff about the *possibility* of a need to reduce staffing on June 18, ten days before the end of term. Leaving aside the fact that this last-minute meeting does not respond to the union's fundamental point, it is in itself 'simply untrue': the relevant proposal was not brought before the University Council for approval until 9 July, nearly two weeks *after* the end of term.

The report submitted by management at that meeting makes disturbing reading. As yet, no criteria have been put forward for determining which heads will roll in the proposed 'reduction in academic staff headcount'. However, the signs are not promising. Anyone reading the report could not fail to notice that the target seems to be colleagues who are failing to generate an average of at least £100k per annum in research awards, though the University will doubtless be happy enough to enjoy the benefits of any income derived from the QR grants of such colleagues as a result of the REF.

Just as worrying is the decision to establish a small number of additional teaching fellowships in SLS 'to ensure continuity of the

positive developments that have been achieved in student experience in the School'. The assumption, in a university where teaching is research-led, that academic colleagues would be incapable of ensuring such continuity does not bear close scrutiny. It is hard not to read this as a blatant attempt to cull academic staff solely on the basis of dubious metrics and with scant regard for their potential contribution to properly managed Schools.

The branch has responded robustly to this, passing five key resolutions at its emergency meeting. It resolved:

1. That management hold meetings with staff to explain the financial plans in detail and allow for alternative proposals to be considered.
2. That there is a freeze on external recruitment and a commitment that all posts will be ring-fenced to those at risk.
3. To continue to work with the other recognized campus unions and the Student Union to raise the above issues in negotiations with senior management.
4. To draw public attention to the loss of student experience and the impact on the quality of teaching that could result.
5. To seek to ballot members of Warwick UCU for industrial action.

#### Join us

In a university that is prepared to make employees redundant while planning to recruit new staff and that will pursue even senior academic colleagues for 'insubordination', can you afford not to be a member of your union? The UCU has members, full- and part-time, from all areas of the university, including academics, researchers, administrators and librarians. Joining couldn't be simpler: just go to [joinonline.ucu.org.uk](http://joinonline.ucu.org.uk) and follow a few short steps. It could make a big difference to your future.

## What price academic freedom?

The emergency meeting held on 10 July also considered the blog posted by David Browne, a senior member of the firm of Birmingham solicitors, Martineau, employed by the University and currently involved in the case against Thomas Docherty. The relevant passage deserves to be quoted in full (words in italics were added after an outcry on Twitter):

'...Universities and colleges may, equally, encounter high performing employees who, although academically brilliant, have the potential to damage their employer's brand. This could be through outspoken opinion (*where these fall outside the lawful exercise of academic freedom or freedom of speech more widely*) or general insubordination, *e.g. a failure to comply with the reasonable requests of an employer, or other behaviour such as bullying or harassment of colleagues*. Irrespective of how potentially valuable these employees may be to their institutions, the reality is that, in consistently accepting unacceptable behavior, institutions may be setting dangerous precedents to other employees that such conduct will be accommodated. From a risk perspective, it is also much harder to justify a dismissal, or other sanction, if similar conduct has gone unpunished before. ...'

The meeting unanimously agreed that 'This blog is evidence that the legal firm Martineau is openly casting doubt on the ability of academics to defend their rights to academic freedom as set out in both the Education Act 1988 and the Statutes and Ordinances of the University.' it called on the Vice-Chancellor to re-iterate his commitment to the principle of academic freedom and to *explicitly dissociate the university from the position expressed in the blog*. He replied promptly affirming his own and the university's commitment to the principle of academic freedom...

## Where have I heard that before?

In 1967 the University Council commissioned a firm of industrial consultants, John Tyzack & Partners, to carry out an investigation into the administrative structure of Warwick. Their report, delivered the following year, included the following prescient observations:

'We have been told that democracy has a special place in University life and that there is constant political pressure from the rank and file of the academic staff claiming the right not only to be consulted more but to "have a hand in decision making." The result in practice is already an amorphous and time-wasting system which has led to needlessly protracted argument, dilatoriness in the taking of decisions, uncertainty regarding the effective centres of power and action, and at times to conflicts of policy and incompatibility of decisions.' [Para 73]

'Sooner or later the University of Warwick will have to come to terms with the age-old conflict between democratic principles and effective government.' [Para 74]

Plus ça change.

For a riveting account of events at Warwick in the late sixties, don't miss E.P. Thompson's *Warwick University Limited: Industry, Management and the Universities* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1970/2014). The above details are taken from the report reproduced in that.

### You don't need to face it alone

If you're facing problems associated with your employment at Warwick and are a UCU member, you can rely on our help. We have a team of personal caseworkers, all volunteers, who are trained to provide support, advice and representation on a range of issues from contract renewal to potential disciplinary action or harassment. If you are being disciplined, or taking a grievance against another member of staff, you have a legal right to be accompanied by a union representative.

If you find yourself in this situation and would like to speak, in confidence, to one of our caseworkers, email our administrator, Claire Duffy at [administrator@warwickucu.org.uk](mailto:administrator@warwickucu.org.uk)

## Pensions: What's in store?

The fight for a fair pension goes on. Readers of Sally Hunt's email last month will know that there's a busy autumn ahead and that the omens are not encouraging. There is every sign that the latest valuation of the USS pension scheme, already contested by the union because of its unwarranted emphasis on short-term trends, will show a significant worsening of the deficit.

The result is likely to be a further attempt by management to erode the benefits to which members are entitled and this time it could hit those on a final salary schemes. The expected changes, if implemented, are likely to mean a significantly lower pension and lump sum.

Formal proposals will in all likelihood be tabled to the UCU during early autumn, so you can look forward to the benefit of expert analysis soon after that. This will give you a clear picture of the difference proposed changes will make to your pension, benefits and contribution rate.

On 29 July the union sent a letter to all institutions, including Warwick, expressing its concerns and urging dialogue, and there will be a special meeting of its pre-92 branches in September to consider the proposals and recommend a response to them. In the meantime you can access details of the current situation via a very useful [branch briefing here](#)

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/pdf/UCUHE225.pdf>

## Motes and planks...

In his blog referred to earlier, the solicitor David Browne warned universities of the dangers they face from employees who 'have the potential to damage their employer's brand'.

We wonder how much damage the case against Thomas Docherty, with its references to 'negative body language' and 'ironic' comments has already done to the Warwick brand. Readers of Laurie Taylor's Poppletonian column in the Times Higher will be left in no doubt: '...we can only marvel that Warwick has drawn back from the summary execution that such dangerously subversive behaviour would undoubtedly prompt in less progressive institutions of higher education. So, well done, Warwick. Your liberalism is a shining beacon for the whole university sector.'

As if that wasn't enough, a THE piece on 1 August suggests that the case has now gone viral: 'The University of Warwick has been ridiculed on social media for its suspension of the prominent critic of higher education policy, Thomas Docherty'.

(<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/thomas-docherty-case-students-and-alumni-drum-up-online-support/2014890.article>)

Perhaps Mr Browne could give us his thoughts on whether coming across as prize chumps to the rest of the academic community is a matter that needs to be addressed.

### Do you have a story to tell?

We aim to send out this newsletter once a month, around the middle of the month, and want all members to feel that they have a stake in it. If you think you have a story to tell, some interesting news, an idea for an item or perhaps a suggestion for something that would be worth following up, please get in touch with us at [administrator@warwickucu.org.uk](mailto:administrator@warwickucu.org.uk)

Please ensure that you mark your email NEWSLETTER.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Join your union online at: [www.ucu.org.uk/join](http://www.ucu.org.uk/join)

## To whose benefit?

Work on the new traffic system is now well under way and we've all had to find different routes to work. When it's finished, judging by the artist's impressions in the design and access statement drawn up by Churchman, the landscape architects involved, it should look very handsome. But can the extent of the investment be justified at a time when, in its own words, 'The University is operating in a position of increasing financial constraint'?

The work will benefit not only the university but also a range of other businesses in the area, and their contribution to the Local Pinch Point application submitted the Department of Transport makes interesting reading. The scheme extends beyond the area where changes are currently being made and includes roundabouts on the A45 and Mitchell Avenue, though Warwick's contribution does not technically extend to these.

The list of beneficiaries is a long one: The University of Warwick, Coventry City Council, Westwood Business Park, Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, Warwickshire County Council, Centro, De Courcy Travel, National Express West Midlands Coventry & Stagecoach, and local residents.

Letters in support of the project reflect their enthusiasm for it:

'This scheme will go some way to help alleviate the 61% of businesses that say they have been affected due to traffic congestion.' (Federation of Small Businesses)

'Barclays welcomes 'any improvements that makes travelling to the site easier for staff, improves our attractiveness through location.' (Barclays Bank)

'In particular we are keen to promote the business opportunities that are associated with having a varied and extensive business base in close proximity of one of the country's top performing universities.' (Coventry and Warwick Chamber of Commerce)

In fact, the number of employees affected by the changes is calculated to be around 11,300 with the university making up roughly half of these. In total, this represents about 12% of the city's employment, so the area is clearly important to the local council, whose representative is the Senior Responsible Owner of the project.

We can only applaud the university's commitment to the local community as reflected in this project, but what puzzles us is why its contribution of nearly £3.5m should represent 67% of the total scheme costs. Coughing up two-thirds of the cost of a scheme that will be of such demonstrable benefit to the local council and businesses is nothing if not generous, but it does raise serious questions about the university's priorities. At a time when academic resources are squeezed and there are plans to make academics in two Schools redundant, should the university be contributing so generously to the success of local businesses?

A more fundamental question is whether the money should have been spent at all on what seems to many to be little more than a cosmetic operation not unconnected with Warwick's pursuit of recognition as a world class university. That particular agenda should surely not be allowed to distort priorities to the extent that appearance trumps substance – and £3.5m would represent a significant investment in academic terms.

**Don't miss the next Branch Meeting:  
Wednesday 10 September, 12:00-13:30  
PS1.28 Physical Sciences Building**