

SUBJECT LIBRARIANS DOWNGRADED

Cuts leave academics at Warwick with less support as fewer library staff do more work for lower pay

Not directly an issue of redundancies, but closely related in its cynical exploitation of a weak jobs market, is the action – to our knowledge unprecedented at Warwick – taken by senior Library managers against expert staff providing the most traditional core service to academics and students.

Subject Librarian posts have always been graded at the equivalent of Framework Grade 7, a level that was confirmed both under the Hay evaluation scheme that preceded assimilation to the single spine and by the subsequent Hay-approved assimilation procedure. The role has always incorporated support for research, teaching and learning services, within an appropriately flat professional structure.

In June 2009, however, the 6 F/T and 4 P/T Subject Librarians, many with long histories of service to the University, were summarily informed (no prior consultation) that their continued employment was subject to their having to apply for jobs within a new job structure. The proposed structure contained two separate 'teams' – *Teaching and Learning*, comprising a T&L Support Manager, seven FTE T&L Support Librarians and a T&L Support Officer, and *Research*, comprising a Research Support Manager, ONE (!) Research Support Librarian and a Research Support Officer. The two Manager posts had been Hay assessed as Framework Grade 7, but the Support Librarian posts were at Framework Grade 6. The Subject Librarians were invited to apply for these posts, which were in closed pools.

The managerial incompetence encapsulated in this action includes:

- its cynical timing over the Summer break when the main users of these services were absent;
- a lack of prior consultation either with the Subject Librarians or the users of their services;
- an evident lack of concern for continued service quality
- the procedure itself, including a threat (in fact illegal) that failure to apply for any of the jobs offered would constitute a waiving of redundancy rights.

The Subject Librarians did manage in *post hoc* negotiation to correct to some extent the practical lunacy of the proposed absolute divide between teaching and learning support services and research support services. Their success, however, re-established the previous full range of Subject Librarian duties across the new structure, even more clearly highlighting the real aim of the exercise – short-term savings regardless of the effect on academic services.

The outcome... Although three Subject Librarians applied for the post of Research Support Manager, the panel declined to appoint and the post has now been advertised externally. No Subject Librarians applied for the post of Research Support Librarian but it was later opened up to other members of Library staff. Again, no appointment was made and the post remains unfilled.

The post of Academic Support Manager (Teaching & Learning) was filled from the applicants within the closed pool (i.e. Subject Librarians). The remaining Subject Librarians had to go through the process of applying for, and being interviewed for, what were effectively their own jobs at a lower grade, apart from one person who applied for the Enhanced Leaving Scheme.

In fact, Academic Support Librarians now have responsibility for more subjects than previously. This is partly the result of the restructuring, but also because three 2-year support staff secondments to posts of Assistant Subject Librarian ended shortly before the restructuring was announced. As the posts no longer exist, those subject areas have had to be redistributed among the Academic Support Librarians. The Business Librarian left in January 2009 and the post was filled on a temporary basis until the end of July but the role is now shared, with no apparent likelihood of a new appointment, by 2.5 of the Academic Support Librarians, who already have additional subject responsibilities. Tasks formerly carried out by subject teams now have to be done by one individual, but with less clerical support than in the past.

Subject Librarians are working in a new structure that has severely damaged trust and working relationships. They are coping with enforced changes to their working practices that hamper their ability to maintain the quality of services, which they as professional staff formerly determined. Morale in this area has quite naturally plummeted. The subsequent falling off of Library performance has been noted around the University, and concern is being expressed by a growing number of academics in various fora.

The much-vaunted Hay grading scheme has also been further brought into question by the evident flexibility evinced by its operation at Warwick. As far as we are aware, none of the responsibilities of the former Subject Librarians have been lost in this restructure, but the majority of the posts have – very conveniently for management – been downgraded.

Sadly, unethical managers assisted by poorly operated processes can still get away with such things in the current financial situation and against the background of weak workers' rights – the legacy in the United Kingdom of successive governments. Strong protests of any kind are encouraged, but the only way to provide consistent opposition to this kind of iniquity is to join a union and strengthen the officially recognised opposition.

www.warwickucu.org.uk

Equality and Selection

Legally, employers are required to undertake equality impact assessments related to selections for redundancy so as to minimise unfairness and ensure there is no disproportional effect on people from ethnic groups, disabled people or between men and women. Currently at Warwick the University's performance in terms of legally-required equality assessments has been poor, though this will probably improve as the effects of not following procedure become more difficult.

On ethical grounds, we would argue that unfairness also relates to managers opting for a quiet life or settling scores by taking advantage of redundancies to clear out those they see as troublemakers. Caseworkers involved in redundancy cases, however, have long noted a correlation between selections for redundancy and past willingness on the part of individuals to stand up to unfairness or perceived errors in managerial behaviour.

We would like to think that equality in terms of employer-defined criteria for

redundancy selection will improve alongside legal compliance, but long experience of redundancy processes suggests otherwise. See articles in this newsletter about recent experiences of staff in the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies, Centre for Applied Linguistics, and the Library.

If you are worried that you might be subject to vindictive targeting or an unfair redundancy process, join the union now. WarwickUCU is legally restricted to representing only members whose membership predates the onset of any problem or process.

JOIN YOUR UNION TO PROTECT JOBS

Warwick closes RAE topping department 120+ jobs to go

Most members of staff will have seen Insite messages about the University's new plans for a School of Life Sciences. Many may not yet have looked at the document in detail. Very few may realise that these plans, which involve the closure of two departments (the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) and Biological Sciences), could also mean the loss of up to 150 jobs.

The University has proposed that the new Life Sciences School will have between 55 and 60 academics. Since there are currently over 90 members of academic staff in Biological Sciences and HRI combined, this will inevitably require between 30 and 35 academic redundancies. The 200 or so support staff currently employed across these two departments face even greater uncertainty since Interim Head of Life Sciences, Stuart Palmer, has stated that decisions about support staff will be made only after the selection of academics has been completed. It appears very likely, however, that upwards of 100 support staff will be made redundant (or will be forced to accept the Enhanced Leaving Scheme).

In the 2008 RAE, Warwick HRI was ranked top in the category Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science. Sixty percent of the research was assessed as 3* or 4*. Under the University's current plans,

GENERAL MEETING

UCU position on Life Sciences

Wednesday 2nd December, 12.30pm
Ramphal R1.13

this world-leading department is going to disappear as a free-standing group and may well face a progressive run down. The University may dispute this and try to suggest that the new School of Life Sciences will be a protective umbrella. The risk, however, lies in the very different profiles of the two departments, both student profiles (see later) and the research areas covered. While there is some overlap between Biological Sciences and HRI, the trend in Biological Sciences is strongly towards the biomedical area and this is unlikely to change. More natural partners for Biological Sciences will lie in parts of the Medical School, who have so far resisted any involvement – possibly because they aren't inclined to be part of what they see as an ill-considered fix designed to make short-term savings.

Warwick took over HRI (formerly Horticulture Research International) in 2004. At the time it had sites at Kirton and Wellesbourne. The Kirton site was closed earlier this year. Now Warwick has proposed the closure of the 191 acre Wellesbourne site. And, as soon as it is able, will sell off the land, which it bought from DEFRA for £1 on the condition that it take over the research programme of HRI. Whilst some of the facilities, including the greenhouses, will be retained and moved, these will be vastly reduced. And only a minority of the 226 HRI staff will still have jobs when the reorganisation is complete. This will seriously undermine Warwick's ability to sustain the research excellence that HRI has achieved and will hamper any plans for even greater development.

The Biological Sciences department is one of the largest at Warwick in terms of student numbers (currently 650 undergraduates, over 70 MSc students, and 150 research postgraduates) and has a good track record of attracting large research grants. Yet the resources available have been steadily shrinking. The department had 56 full time equivalent academic members in RAE2008. It now has just 42 academics and yet student numbers have not decreased but have dramatically increased. This will undoubtedly affect both teaching and research quality as staff become progressively more overloaded.

The proposed transition to Life Sciences does not include proposals for reducing either

undergraduate or graduate recruitment. Yet some current teaching staff in Biological Sciences will undoubtedly lose their jobs because the selection procedures for Life Sciences will include staff from both departments. The University has not yet provided any assurances or advice on how core teaching in the biomedical areas (which HRI staff are unequipped to cover) will be managed. Staff are worried that this could be the precedent for a two-track department, with teaching staff and research staff, something completely out of line with the University's avowed commitment to 'research led teaching'.

The University has also been remarkably ham-fisted in planning for the School of Life Sciences. To start with it has undermined the capacity of academics in both HRI and Biology to apply for funding by informing DEFRA and other funding bodies of the proposed changes, without waiting for them to be agreed. Research councils and other funding bodies are unlikely to consider funding staff who may be at threat of redundancy. This is hardly going to help create a sound financial footing for the new School during transition or for some time after its establishment.

The University has also not yet appointed a Head of School for Life Sciences. That means that decisions about appointments will be handled by Stuart Palmer, Interim Chair of Life Sciences. He is a distinguished Physicist, which seems an unlikely CV for a complex process requiring great expertise and understanding of a quite different area.

Continued overleaf

Stand up For Research

UCU Launches National Campaign Against REF 'Impact' Agenda

The latest proposal by the higher education funding councils is for 25% of the new Research Excellence Framework (REF) to be assessed according to 'economic and social impact'. As academics, researchers and higher education professionals we believe that it is counterproductive to make funding for the best research conditional on its perceived economic and social benefits.

The REF proposals are founded on a lack of understanding of how knowledge advances. It is often difficult to predict which research will create the greatest practical impact. History shows us that in many instances it is curiosity-driven research that has led to major scientific and cultural advances. If implemented, these proposals risk undermining support for basic research across all disciplines and may well lead to an academic brain drain to countries such as the United States that continue to value fundamental research.

Universities must continue to be spaces in which the spirit of adventure thrives and where researchers enjoy academic freedom to push back the boundaries of knowledge in their disciplines.

We, therefore, call on the UK funding councils to withdraw the current REF proposals and to work with academics and researchers on creating a funding regime which supports and fosters basic research in our universities and colleges rather than discourages it.

Add your name to the UCU petition: www.ucu.org.uk/standupforresearch



JOIN YOUR UNION TO PROTECT JOBS



Warwick Anti-Casualisation Campaign (WACC) Launched FOR FIXED TERM AND HOURLY-PAID STAFF

Information Gathering:

Irrespective of whether you are currently a UCU member, if you are on a fixed-term or hourly-paid contract (including postgraduates), please fill in our survey at www.warwickucu.org.uk/wacc and encourage your colleagues to do the same. We need to know more about the conditions and priorities of fixed-term and hourly-paid staff so that we can better campaign for you.

Organising:

WarwickUCU is organising meetings across campus in the second half of November for fixed term and hourly-paid staff. Come along, get involved WACC, help set the campaign agenda. Dates and times at the WACC website: www.warwickucu.org.uk/wacc.

Is big brother watching you?

Members should think carefully before making enquiries about their USS entitlement from the Pensions Office. Recently a member was unexpectedly turned down for study leave, and when he went to ask the Deputy VC the reason, he was informed that he believed he was planning to retire immediately afterwards and the fact he had been making pension enquiries was given as evidence. It looks like matters that should be confidential are routinely monitored at Warwick

WARWICKUCU GENERAL MEETING CONDEMNS PROF. HELEN SPENCER-OATEY

On 14th October a WarwickUCU General Meeting passed a motion to condemn Professor Helen Spencer-Oatey. The rationale for this condemnation was the following:

Two colleagues in the Centre for Applied Linguistics, of 11 and 15 years service, have been made compulsorily redundant. This is a result of a restructuring by Professor Helen Spencer-Oatey, the Centre Director. During the course of the restructuring, Professor Spencer-Oatey has acted unethically by:

- not consulting staff at risk of redundancy whilst the restructuring proposals were in a formative stage;
- employing new staff during the formative period without informing the staff at risk that they should be applying for these new posts, or indeed that they were at risk at all;
- putting forward misleading statements to Senior Management and Centre staff regarding the staff at risk;
- not following statutory redeployment procedure for staff at risk.

Professor Spencer-Oatey is not unique. Therefore, WarwickUCU is campaigning to publicise the practices of other managers who are evidenced to have acted capriciously. If you know of cases that you want highlighted on the website, let us know.

You are entitled to support from the local UCU branch from the day you join UCU. After 90 days you are also entitled to legal support. You are not entitled to support where a problem began prior to your joining – so don't wait, join today! More information at:

www.warwickucu.org.uk

BIG PAYOUT TO CTCCS THREE?

Warwick University's slapdash attitude to following proper redundancy procedure highlighted

The ex-VC of Southampton University, Sir Bill Wakeham, has been brought in to sort out Warwick University's slipshod management of the closure of the Centre for Translation and Comparative Cultural Studies (CTCCS) after the Academic Redundancy Committee rejected the University's case for making three academic staff redundant and criticised the procedure followed.

The CTCCS was closed last year, despite its popularity with international students. Four staff were redeployed. The four remaining were offered the Enhanced Leavers Scheme (ELS). Subsequent events have revealed that the University was banking on all four accepting this option. But three held out. They wanted to keep working. And they were willing to go to an employment tribunal if they had to.

These three were threatened with redundancy. But management were caught on the hoof when it turned out they had not followed procedures for academic redundancies. The university case was also judged completely inadequate: the document that 'explained' the need for redundancies was discovered to be a single page of A4 paper, and one

that contained no financial information whatsoever. Not exactly convincing.

In the face of this incompetence even the University's Redundancy Committee couldn't easily look away, and to their credit they did not. They found no case for redundancy. In early October Council determined that the CTCCS three could not be made redundant. But, the CTCCS had been closed and all their academic duties had been taken away. The University management was in a bind. And that's why they called in an outsider, Sir Bill Wakeham.

Sir Bill has met with the three and their UCU representatives and it seems like there are only two options for the University: either start the process again, and keep paying the three salaries for doing nothing. Or give up, recognise they've screwed up, and offer a sizeable cash settlement, which seems the most likely. It won't make up for losing their jobs. But it could at least partially compensate. And it might encourage the University to be more circumspect about redundancies in the future.

Moving the Probation Goalposts

The university has approached WarwickUCU about revising the guidelines for probation. We are willing to negotiate on this but want to consult members first. We are particularly concerned that, in addition to revising the published HR guidelines, every department appears free to develop separate and different detailed criteria.

The framework agreement tied the end of probation to promotion to Associate Professor. In discussions leading to this agreement the University repeatedly said that the criteria for completing probation would remain largely unchanged, notwithstanding a small increase in the standard expected to reflect a one year increase in the probationary period, from four years to five.

It has recently come to our notice however that an increasing number of academics are failing to complete probation successfully. In several cases this has occurred despite glowing annual reviews in every year preceding an end of probation application. This arbitrary situation is not acceptable.

The University has now set up a Probation Review Group (PRG). The PRG has proposed the following:

- 1) Probation Review Group be retained.
- 2) The practice of referring completing cases to external referees should be normalised where there are performance concerns.
- 3) Consideration be given to the provision of a full teaching load in the 4th and 5th year of probation. Currently it is only in the 5th year of probation that this is required.
- 4) Heads of Department be asked to publish their internal criteria for completion of probation on which their recommendations are based. These would be remitted to the Academic Staff Committee to ensure that they are consistent with the spirit of the University's probation criteria.

WarwickUCU has been asked to give a response to these suggestions and we need your help to do this. We are however worried about several issues. Firstly, teaching in year four (proposal 3) effectively increases probationers' workloads. Secondly, whilst welcoming any moves towards more explicit criteria (proposal 4), we fear that departmental criteria will be much tougher in application than the general HR guidelines. One draft we have seen from a Department demands that research is not just 'satisfactory' but 'internationally excellent'. This leads us to worry that the University may rely on departments to raise the bar for passing probation.

We have taken advice from regional office and have been told not to agree to revised criteria that are substantially different across different departments as this could create a risk of discrimination. Departments are not the employer and an employer has to act consistently in order to avoid discriminating.

We need to hear members' views.

What have your experiences of probation been?

What do you think about these criteria?

Let us know at administrator@warwickucu.org.uk

"When Warwick management first proposed a five year probationary period it was already adrift, by a year, from the national agreement of three years. AUT/UCU entered into extensive negotiations on the issue of academic staff probation and an agreement was only reached in 2006 based on a number of firm assurances by management, one of the key ones being that there would be no change to the probationary criteria. This was the proposal that our members were balloted on but it now appears that management are seeking to unpick the agreement piece by piece by allowing department heads to set local criteria of varying severity and forcing probationers to take on full teaching loads a whole year ahead of that agreed. This is not acceptable and Warwick should honour their agreements with staff and the recognized trade unions – it was, after all, their idea in the first place."

Dr. Rebecca Stewart, UCU Regional Support Official

Redundancies in Biological Sciences and HRI continued from front page.

The University has shown a similar lack of joined-up thinking in setting out research areas for Life Sciences. The ones currently chosen simply reproduce current research themes of the major funding bodies, but do not allow the flexibility to reflect the changes which continually emerge in the research priorities of funding bodies. For example, the chosen research themes do not even match the Government's recent *Blue Print for Life Sciences*. There also seems to be little recognition of the currently strongest areas for research funding for either HRI or Biological sciences. At present, major funding for Life Sciences research comes from biomedical and biochemical areas rather than plant and environmental areas. Yet the latter are two of the major formal research themes for the proposed School.

Lastly, in terms of process and fairness, despite the duty on public bodies to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment whenever a re-organisation is proposed, Warwick management appears to be dragging their feet over this. An Equality Impact Assessment for the creation of Life Sciences needs to be carried out immediately and made available to all Trades Unions and all staff affected by the proposed changes. This assessment must include analysis of the impact of sub-disciplines on the process and the retention of staff across all staff categories, not just the academics.

UCU opposes any compulsory redundancies and believes that a decision by the University to merge the Biological Sciences and Warwick HRI will lead to substantial redundancies across all unions and all grades. We call on all members of Senate to reject the current ill thought out proposal, which carries huge risk to important areas of academic research and seems largely motivated – as almost everything at present – by short-term financial considerations. University academic enterprise should be managed on the basis of good academic strategy and financial experts should serve rather than drive academic considerations.

Warwick University has a strong record as a 'good employer', a reputation that has been severely damaged by University management in the past few years. UCU calls on all members to not participate in redundancy committees or assist in drawing up selection criteria for redundancy. This includes agreeing criteria for the establishment of sub-themes and the populating of those themes with the names of academic staff. WarwickUCU will also withdraw from any joint consultation meeting at which selection criteria are discussed.

We will be using guidance from our Regional and National offices on how to actively oppose

the scale of redundancies proposed here, and will employ all measures available to the Trades Union up to and including Industrial Dispute being declared.

Download and read WarwickUCU's fuller draft response to the University's plans at www.warwickucu.org.uk

Warwick University claims that there have been no redundancies as a response to the credit crunch. In fact about 120 jobs have already been 'lost'.

So far the Enhanced Leaving Scheme (ELS) has led to 72 non-academic job losses. Approximately 25 more are still to be decided by line managers. Approximately 45 academic staff have negotiated early retirement/severance packages. Most leave in June 2010. These posts cannot be refilled, meaning more work for those still employed.

It is now increasingly apparent that the University wants to shed more jobs. This means that the ELS will probably be offered again next year. More widespread redundancies are also now likely.