

23 January 2025

Our Ref: AOS/rlc

Professor Trevor McMillan  
Vice-Chancellor  
Keele University  
Keele  
Newcastle ST5 5BG

**Sent by email only**

Dear Vice Chancellor

I am writing to you in connection with the University's proposed restructure and redundancy process in HumSS and to request an extension of the consultation period (which is due to close tomorrow) to enable the following issues to be properly addressed.

A key justification cited for the restructure, is the financial situation of the University. As union representatives UCU cannot fully represent and support our members through the currently proposed Voluntary or Compulsory Redundancies without all the relevant and accurate information which we currently do not have.

The branch initially requested copies of specific financial information from the University in November. No response was received until 16 December, a full week after the consultation period started. Consequently, this has considerably reduced the time the union has had to fully consider the information provided.

Furthermore, it transpires that both information requests and discussion of the financial situation have been taken outside of the collective consultation meetings, via the Financial Sustainability Plan (FSP) group, which includes all Keele trade unions and is not specific to the consultation process for the proposed compulsory redundancies. This FSP group meets much less regularly than the weekly collective consultation meetings and the constituent members are significantly different.

To date therefore, the consultation meetings have not included anyone from the University side who has full knowledge of the financial aspects of the business case for the restructure/redundancies. This has made proper consultation on the proposals unreasonably slow and has not allowed us the time and information required for full consideration of possible alternative proposals. The first, and only, meeting we have had with the Chief Financial Officer took place in the first week of January, almost a full calendar month after the consultation started.

Furthermore, the next meeting of the FSP group will take place on 29 January, when the agenda includes discussions on Estate costs, their impact on the financial situation and potential proposals around that. We strongly believe this is the real underlying issue responsible for the current situation at Keele; however, this key meeting, along with the information that will be shared with us at that point, will fall outside the consultation period.

Under these circumstances we do not consider the University to be currently in compliance with its statutory duty to consult meaningfully with UCU as one of the recognised unions.

We have shared with the University our initial alternative interpretations of the financial situation as we see them, based on what published information we have been able to gather. As alluded to above, our analysis suggests that the fundamental issues do not lie within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, with Staff Costs or with Student Fee Income. That being so, we believe that the proposed approach of cutting staff through compulsory redundancies will not in fact solve the problem, and may potentially have a significant negative effect on the University.

Accordingly, we have requested both further information and meetings of our finance expert group with the University's financial team to jointly review the issues and propose real, sustainable and meaningful solutions agreed by both sides. Disappointingly, this has not been taken up by the University which has instead, relied on a set of pre-determined assumptions, which we have not had any opportunity to interrogate for the reasons stated above.

It is not only the financial aspects of the proposals about which we have concerns. For example, we have asked questions and made suggestions about:

- the EDI impact assessment,
- the process and criteria for determining the selection pools,
- the proposed criteria to be applied for redundancy selection.

Part of the rationale around certain parts of the Faculty (and of the affected Schools) being removed from the selection pools, is related to maintaining sufficient staff numbers to deliver the programmes. However, when we queried what these SSRs are, we were told that SSRs are 'not an appropriate measure' due to outdated HESA data (on average 3 years old); however, when discussing student numbers, HESA data is used. We have requested delays in decision-making on the proposals until this cycle's applications are known, to allow some more up-to-date data to be gathered and considered; this has been denied but with no real justification offered.

In fact, we have not been given any indication or assurance at all, as to whether any of our queries and suggestions will be discussed with us. We have been informed only that they will be 'considered after the consultation process is over'. Meaningful consultation requires proper dialogue; it is, however, difficult to have confidence in the meaningfulness of consultation if we do not know whether fully-considered alternatives, independently proposed by staff, will or will not be taken on board by the University from the meetings we've had.

Furthermore, the University has not provided a Health & Safety (H&S) impact assessment which we believe to be necessary in terms of establishing:

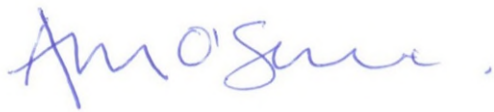
- the effects of the proposals on the staff and students that will remain at Keele. For example, the potential increase in workloads for remaining staff has not been fully considered, or if it has, it has not been shared with us. Linked to these considerations, we have been asking the University for the last several months, without success, for the Workload Working Group to be reinstated, which would allow these issues to be fully considered. This was an item at the last JNC but the action to schedule a meeting remains unfulfilled. We have therefore had to table this as an item for JNC on 30 January but again, this falls outside the current consultation period.

- the impact on students, not only in terms of H&S, but also Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and the student experience. No information has been provided on this. It is not clear whether the University has considered these points at all in these proposals. Nor do we know if the University has considered the ability of remaining staff to continue support for the student experience if these proposals were to be adopted.

In light of all of the above we request that the current consultation process be extended to allow sufficient time for our concerns, and those of our members, to be fully addressed in a meaningful process with a view to reaching agreement on a more positive and sustainable way forward.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely



**Anne O'Sullivan**  
**UCU Regional Official West Midlands**

cc Mark Ormerod, Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
- Mike Farrar, Chair of Council  
- UCU Committee