

Voluntary Severance and Increased Flexible Working:

The University introduced a new Voluntary Severance Scheme and related increased Flexible Working proposals on 30 April. The formal UMUCU Executive position was communicated to senior management following an initial 'consultation' (or rather more an information) meeting that took place on 24 March 2010, as follows:

"...we remain deeply concerned at the need/rationale for any VS scheme (especially one that is so rushed and lacking in strategic focus) and would seek assurances that, notwithstanding the truncated (and we would argue fundamentally deficient) nature of the 'consultation' process, all issues remain open for negotiation and possible change/amendment. We will need clear evidence that ALL other avenues have been/are being explored including, for example, a moratorium on hiring pending agreement..."

"In particular, the proposed VS scheme would appear to be far too limited and insufficiently generous to attract any but a tiny minority of our members' and/or to achieve the University's stated aims. For many of our members, even the 'higher rate' of 12 months' pay after 3 years service is really only a net 9 months plus pay in lieu of notice - this 'higher rate' must start at the least at the level of the last scheme (ie 18 months' pay). As things stand, and in all conscience, we would have no choice but to advise any of our members who sought our advice not to take what is currently on offer in the prevailing economic and labour market circumstances.

"Beyond the deficiencies in the VS scheme itself, we are predominantly concerned about the impact on those who would remain in post. We will be seeking clear WRITTEN undertakings that there will be NO workload increases/work intensification for such staff as a result of departures - ie the latter must amount to genuine and provable redundancies and that this will ultimately be the KEY determinant of decisions under any VS scheme..."

"On the voluntary flexible working proposals, we are at a complete loss as to what would be in it for our members. Again, unless it clearly reflected an individual member's wishes, we could not advise any member to give up pay permanently (for this is what is in reality being proposed). These proposals must be modified to permit as the default setting temporary changes to working time/patterns with binding contractual rights to return to previous hours/patterns..."

"As I'm sure you will understand, we will have many further and more detailed points to make at the next consultation meeting on 15/16 April..."

This position was restated forcefully in three subsequent consultation meetings with management. Although it became clear during these meetings that the University was not going to be persuaded to drop its plans, some significant progress was made as a result of representations and arguments from all the campus unions. In particular, the University:

- (i) added a further band for staff with 10 years or more service of 14 months' pay - we continue to regard this as inadequate for the reasons already set out but it at least demonstrated that management engaged with the unions in good faith;
- (ii) accepted and incorporated verbatim the following clause demanded by the UCU in order to underline the need to fully protect staff who remain if and when others apply for and are accepted for VS under the scheme:

'In all cases, a critical consideration will be how work will be undertaken in the future and whether the skills, expertise and role of an applicant can be covered adequately by continuing members of staff without increases in the workload of such staff.'

In the light of the foregoing, we would urge members to:

- (i) contact the UMUCU Executive as soon as possible if they feel under any pressure (direct or indirect) to consider applying for Voluntary Severance; and
- (ii) contact the UMUCU Executive as soon as possible if they suffer or fear any work intensification/increase in workload as a result of colleagues being accepted for Voluntary Severance.

UMUCU Executive Committee.