

The impact of the Academic Futures consultation on Cardiff University staff

In March 2025 Cardiff UCU ran a rapid survey of members asking about the impacts of the Academic Futures restructure in Cardiff University. We received 197 responses from staff, of whom 78% are at risk of redundancy. This includes 1104 free-text comments. The responses consistently present a comprehensive breakdown of trust and morale, and a total health and safety crisis including risks of staff suicide.

This survey demonstrates that the Academic Futures process is an unfolding and comprehensive disaster for university workload, day to day operations, staff health, and academic community. Cardiff University as an employer has not conducted a staff survey on the impacts of the Academic Futures restructure. They must act urgently to address the structural and health crises that their mismanagement has unleashed.

The Academic Futures process

'We live in fear. It's like they're doing everything badly on purpose to grind down the staff.'

93% of respondents say that the university **has not communicated adequately and sensitively** about the AF proposals, the consultation process, their employment status, or the statutory redundancy process.

82% of respondents **do not feel safe giving their personal feedback** on the Academic Futures proposals to the University.

97% of respondents **do not feel that their feedback will be listened to** (both individually and via collective counter-proposals) and incorporated into the Academic Futures proposals.

The **vast majority of staff** describe the process and communication from **the university and HR as uncaring** (insensitive, inhumane, impersonal, disconnected, tone-deaf, disrespectful, lack of empathy and compassion) and **incompetent** (unprofessional, rushed, disorganised, erratic, shambolic, inadequate, inaccurate, inaccessible, contradictory, unclear, unreliable, meaningless, confusing, ambiguous, opaque, obscure, vague, delayed, factual errors, misrepresentation, lack of evidence, unjustified, incoherent, unclear, evasive, technocratic, opaque, contradictory, inaccessible, incomplete).

'I have been left feeling infuriated and distressed by the appalling way that this is being handled.'

‘Everything has been last minute and unclear with absolutely no respect or sensitivity.’
‘The proposals themselves lack justification and detailed explanation of how data and decisions were arrived at.’

‘We live in fear of "dignity at work" prosecution, so we avoid using university email to discuss the cuts.’

‘Everything has already been decided and their main task is now to d*ck around staff.’

University leadership and management

‘Trust in senior management is at rock bottom from every colleague I have spoken to.’

92% of respondents feel that **they and their colleagues have not been treated respectfully and with dignity by the Pro-Vice Chancellor** of their College during the consultation process.

97% of respondents state that **their trust in the UEB has been broken** since the announcement of Academic Futures.

The approach and communication from UEB (VC and PVCs) is repeatedly described as **top down and adversarial** (patronising, condescending, arrogant, dismissive, insulting, callous, confrontational, obtuse, antagonistic, insulting, avoidant, evasive, unhelpful, flippant, ill-informed, obfuscating, insincere, deceitful, cynical, disdainful, unprepared, incompetent, manipulative).

‘I do not, honestly, believe that trust can be rebuilt in this senior management team (UEB). The process has felt deceptive, deliberately opaque, and lacking basic respect and dignity for colleagues.’

‘This feels like a deliberate and cynical strategy to panic colleagues into taking VR.’

‘I felt treated with condescension and patronised by someone who had no concrete evidence to present and when asked for detail provided no answer.’

‘Horrendous phrases – "natural wastage" "remains of schools".’

‘A senior management team that really does not care and will plough on with their plans regardless of whether they are justified or not.’

‘The disproportionate attack on the arts and humanities in the Academic Futures proposals have clearly shown me that University management do not respect what I do or see any value in it.’

89% of respondents think they were **not consulted meaningfully during the Big Conversation**, which is described as a pretense of consultation, manipulative, farcical, laughable, dystopian, a waste of time, a PR exercise, so disconnected from the Academic Futures proposal that it left staff feeling disappointed, ignored and betrayed.

‘I honestly cannot believe that myself and colleagues wasted our precious work time contributing to the ‘big conversation’ only for it to be almost immediately deployed as a veneer for deep cuts.’

‘Telling us we have contributed to the new vision without demonstrating how - e.g. when did Uni staff suggest it was a good idea to wipe out Humanities provision?’

The professional impacts on staff

‘I have never felt more disenfranchised and demotivated.’

93% of respondents **do not feel valued** as an employee of Cardiff University.

97% say that the Academic Futures proposals and consultation have **negatively affected their morale and productivity.**

96% say that the process has **negatively affected their team’s morale and productivity.**

Staff describe the professional impacts as catastrophic, divisive, toxic, inducing fear and distrust, leaving staff feeling disposable, betrayed, exhausted, unbearably tired, always on edge, unable to focus or prepare anything, disengaged, demotivated, impacting teaching quality and research time, collaborations, working towards grant deadlines or progressing publications.

‘I can’t wait to leave’; ‘our best staff are leaving.’

‘It will take a generation to undo the damage that has been done by this process.’

‘The team is in survival mode [and] this negates innovations and/or projects that were about ‘thriving’.’ ‘It is like walking around in a ghost town’.

‘Many colleagues are traumatised and exhibiting high levels of stress and distress. As a line manager, I have had to provide support to a wide of colleagues who are exhibiting anxiety and fear on a day to day basis.’

‘We’re already on our knees due to the severances.’ ‘We have already given more in unrecognised, unpaid overtime - there is no more goodwill left.’

The personal impacts on staff

'The impact of the process is there when I wake up and when I try to sleep, it is constant and impacting my health.'

88% said the process has **negatively affected their health and wellbeing**.

88% said that the University **has not offered adequate wellbeing and mental health support** during this process.

Staff report widespread and severe manifestations of stress, anxiety and depression, including crying every day, not sleeping or eating properly, nausea, panic attacks, weight loss, stomach problems, lack of clear thinking and concentration, exhaustion, tachycardia, increased blood pressure, struggling with caring duties, drinking, taking medication, taking sick leave and feeling suicidal. These are exacerbated by disabilities and pregnancy, and exacerbate existing health conditions. Staff also report worrying about finances, inability to get mortgages and the stress impacting the mental health of family members and children.

Wellbeing and mental health provision is described as inadequate, at capacity, with months-long waiting list. It is clearly unable to cope with the scale of the mental health crisis created.

'Staff are crying daily while email after email comes through asking for "free" help or to contribute to another pointless consultation.'

'I considered having an abortion as a result of the panic.'

'I have felt suicidal more than once over the last few weeks.'

'As a result of academic futures, I am now receiving additional medical treatment – both physical related to blood pressure and in relation to mental health. I find many days a struggle.'

'The resources supplied to us for mental health support services are woeful.'

'I am also offended by the tokenistic signposting to an employee assistance programme, as if this is a sufficient response to the hurt and damage you are causing to people's lives.'

'Impersonal websites where you can't even book an appointment are a waste of time.'

'Then to be informed that the waiting list was large and they had no appointments until March was absolutely atrocious. It was a farce and much like the rest of Cardiff UEB's messages, held no substance.'