

Script for 3-union presentation to council, 17 June

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, on behalf of all three unions, and as members of staff. After 4 months of chaos, we came to present what nearly all of our 8000 colleagues think: the business case, as it stands, is unacceptable.

It pursues Student Staff Ratios significantly out of line with Russell group averages. It offers no evidence from market data, no financial modelling, no academic portfolio for the SGH, and no strategy for managing critical impacts on workload, research capacity or wellbeing.

More fundamentally, staff do not agree with the vision for this future university, nor with the benchmark metrics or approaches used to translate this vision into the proposal. Cutting academic payroll is a quick fix to balancing the books, but one that threatens short- and long-term sustainability. Slower, more sustainable solutions, such as reducing estates, should be a priority.

To be clear – we need reform. We want the long-term success of this university. We are not just protecting our jobs or subject areas; we are defending our right to substantively engage with the academic and professional planning of our disciplines and our university. There is considerable expertise in frontline staff. We know how things work on the ground, we know how quickly things can be broken, and we know it will be left to us to mend things when they break. We ask to be taken seriously.

The Academic Future exercise

The 4-month consultation on the Academic Future proposal is still incomplete and has resulted in a premature “final” business case (which originally contained multiple errors and inconsistencies). This presents multiple risks.

Since the end of January, the unions have been granted 12 hours of university-level formal consultation: these never felt long enough, and no minutes were ever provided. We have submitted hundreds of members’ questions, over a quarter of which never received answers. Staff were promised answers in individual HR consultation meetings, but never received answers. Major stakeholders in and beyond Cardiff wrote to UEB, but never received answers. Many of the alternative proposals never received feedback. Others received feedback only orally and briefly, with no notetakers allowed. Townhalls were held and questions taken, but answers were overwhelmingly perceived as unhelpful and avoidant. There has been little transparency around decision-making processes and no room for questioning the premises underlying the proposal. No criteria have been proposed to make individuals redundant in units which are in scope. The final business

case moves staff in and out of scope indefinitely, raising serious concerns about constructive dismissal. Reference is made throughout the document to ‘the new Professional Services Excellence Model’, as if it were completed. But this model is yet to be determined and hasn’t been consulted upon. All this is both legally and structurally of great concern. Legal advice is being sought, and the university is under scrutiny from the Health and Safety Executive about the ongoing adverse impact on staff safety.

There has been some evolution of the original business case. But instead of demonstrating that the consultation has been meaningful, the detail of the changes in fact reveals three things: Firstly, that the data on staffing and the legal ramifications of cuts were not fully considered during initial planning. Secondly, that staff have made bargains for huge workloads and the risks of unknown work conditions in Kazakhstan. And thirdly, that large numbers of expert staff have left, which means that very high Student-Staff Ratios have suddenly been met. The schools still in scope are the ones that have been asked for the biggest staffing cuts, and have not been able to strike a deal, despite enormous efforts developing fully-costed and viable counter-proposals.

Staff are already reporting unsustainable workloads and administrative disarray. Now 650 staff are still at risk. Staff whose jobs are at risk don't apply for research funding or effectively engage in long-term activities that contribute to our reputation. Overworked and stressed staff are also not in a position to work towards long-term goals. Universities are built on reputation and run on staff goodwill. We fear that by damaging one and destroying the other, the academic futures proposal threatens the short and long-term sustainability of the institution.

What to do?

We ask Council to follow Senate’s very clear recommendation on what is essentially an academic matter. Not doing so would be unprecedented and further undermine staff’s confidence in our governance process. We recommend that Council:

- Pauses implementation of Academic Futures to allow for full consultation and risk assessment, in particular around the new SGH and other mergers.
- Requests a more measured reform timeline that protects academic quality, student satisfaction, research capacity and income generation, and staff wellbeing.
- Revises the short-term EBIDA targets to align with sector norms, ensuring financial viability without sacrificing institutional integrity.
- And finally, urges UEB to prioritise rebuilding trust with staff through transparent and meaningful engagement.