

Subject: Risks to the Efficient Management and Conduct of Cardiff University Arising from the Academic Futures (AF) Process and Associated Plans

Financial risk

UEB plans draw on reserves to rapidly facilitate restructuring. The university has a [strong balance sheet](#) even aside from endowment funds and the bond repayment fund, with more financial resources (adjusted for size) than the vast majority of the sector and the Russell Group. UEB is planning to use some of this reserve to restructure the university on a short, high-risk timeline with the continued risk of compulsory redundancies. We suggest the same reserves can be used to restructure in a measured and prudent fashion.

A more measured timeline would enable careful management of programme reforms, marketing, academic workload and efforts to increase research income generation for REF2029. This would pose significantly less risk to academic sustainability and reputation which are vital for the university's mission and financial health.

Foundational business risk

The Academic Futures plan advocates Student Staff Ratios that are well outside of current sector norms. This significant sudden change risks serious damage to academic programmes' attractiveness and to league table positions.

The plans contain no market analysis and no proposed academic portfolios to evidence that the markets sought and financial returns targeted are realistic and justified.

Staff report increasing workloads, chaotic administration as services are also restructured, and further breakdown of [already frayed trust](#), a fundamental risk to sustainable business.

Legal risk

The formal collective consultation remains incomplete. Staff and senate have not received:

- The evidence-based business cases, market analyses, and financial details to justify high Staff-Student Ratios across all Schools under Academic Futures;
- The evidence-based business cases, market analyses, and financial details to justify proposed School mergers;
- The justifications, risk assessments and due diligence for TNE;
- Any specifics of the academic portfolios or programmes for all merged Schools;
- The justification for the closure of some degrees (German, Religion, Ancient History) that have higher student numbers than some that are being maintained (Chinese);

- Any agreed minutes of collective consultation meetings with the trade unions, including any minutes at all of the university-level collective consultation meetings;
- Any minutes or decision-making notes from the Academic Futures Task and Finish Group to justify decisions made on revising proposals;
- There has been no written feedback on counter-proposals submitted;
- There have been no responses to many of the external stakeholder submissions to the consultation process, including regarding programmes set for closure.

Proposals to allow UEB to move staff back 'in scope' on an indefinite timeline (Academic Futures final business case p. 37) risk creating conditions for constructive dismissal and risking legal action. ACAS has also informed UEB that this is bad practice. UCU is seeking legal advice on potential breaches of the law in relation to meaningful consultation.

There is a risk that current plans may not align with the University's charitable objectives, potentially exposing the institution to regulatory scrutiny.

The University is already subject to Health and Safety Executive reporting based on [a staff survey demonstrating the extreme adverse impacts and health risks](#) of the Academic Futures process, with potential for further investigation.

Financial and reputational risk from TNE

Transnational education projects (TNE) are high-risk on the university's own risk matrix, including the proposal for 'flying faculty' from September 2025. It is unclear [who is funding](#) the TNE project in Kazakhstan and staff have seen [no risk assessments or due diligence](#). How has council satisfied itself that the proposed TNE with undisclosed financial partners does not pose a reputational risk to Cardiff University, and is not a threat to the assets and purposes of Cardiff University and its charitable objects?

Recommendations to council

It is premature to present these plans to Council for final approval. We recommend Council advise a pause to implementation to allow for a full consultation and risk assessment.

In line with its responsibilities to the efficient management and sustainability of the university, Council should recommend a more measured period of reform, reducing risks to academic sustainability, staff wellbeing, and student satisfaction. This would not necessarily incur higher costs than those required by a fast pace of chaotic change and expensive redundancy processes. Financial viability of more cautious and carefully-implemented reforms would be secured by a short-term revision of EBIDA targets that would bring them back in line with A1 creditor norms.

Council should recommend that UEB rebuild trust in its governance through transparent and meaningful engagement with its academic staff in the Academic Futures reform process.