

UCU to Ballot for Industrial Action

There are more redundancies coming promises HR Manager

We are writing to update you concerning the latest campaign against redundancies affecting Newport branch and which has now reached a crucial stage. Members will be aware that Newport's Art and Foundation course has been closed and 4 of our colleagues are being made compulsorily redundant. Following extensive efforts by branch officers to seek a negotiated settlement, all avenues have now been exhausted and the branch has been moved to ballot for industrial action.

In addition to the loss of jobs, and of local provision of another highly respected course in Newport **staff were informed that USW policy is only to offer statutory redundancy pay, which is calculated at one week per year served (with a maximum of £465/week). When UCU officers complained at the paltry offer, we were informed in writing by the USW HR Department that future redundancies were sure to follow and thus the university was aiming to keep its costs low in this area:**

"We have a potential number of changes in the foreseeable future and need to have a consistent approach which applies to all affected staff irrespective of which trade union they may, or may not belong to and to offer VL/midpoint terms again would we consider set a precedent which is not affordable for the University"

At the following and well attended branch meeting members voted to undertake a campaign in defence of the course and also to seek a voluntary scheme with an enhanced redundancy offer- one which would compensate staff fairly for the loss of their jobs, and which recognised that the university had received extra assembly funds to finance reorganisation following merger, of which this was clearly part.

Only as a result of our decision to register a dispute and ballot for industrial action, did management agree to meet with UCU officers and then offered a voluntary scheme, which they insisted would be a once only concession. The branch committee suspended the ballot to allow talks to take place, discussed the offer (see below) and rejected it as insufficient to resolve the dispute.

Officers met once more with management's representatives in order to attempt to reach a negotiated settlement, however UCU have been subsequently informed that management are not willing to increase the value of the voluntary scheme.

It is USW policy to offer these statutory rates.

Lecturer 1 employed at the Uni for 28 years (8 of these as a VT working 2 days a week) is entitled to statutory redundancy of £14,000.

Lecturer 2 employed at the Uni for 6 years is entitled to £4,275

Lecturer 3 employed at the Uni 0.4 for 8 years is entitled to £2,500.

Technician/Instructor 2 employed at the Uni for 30 years is entitled to £10,619

Only following a dispute has management offered a 'one off' mid-point between a week's pay and real full pay. In practice this will mean the following:

Lecturer 1 offered £20,500.

Lecturer 2 offered £6,294.59.

Lecturer 3 offered £2,500.

Technician/Instructor offered £11,225.80.

We need to be very clear what is at stake here. USW, the largest university in Wales, and which is in good financial health, is only willing to offer redundancy payments which represent an average well below that offered by other local universities, but also cash strapped FE colleges. Further, as the merger continues, and site consolidation takes effect, USW's policy is to sack more staff. Staff who have remained at Newport post-merger and through a long period of uncertainty have been rewarded by the removal of local provision and now paltry compensation. At every stage your officers have attempted to resolve this situation by negotiation to secure settlements which better reflect the local average and which reward staff for both their service and compensate for the disruption to their careers. For this reason we have now been forced to escalate to industrial action and as a last resort will be balloting shortly on a policy of industrial action which may include both strike action and action short of a strike in the form of nonattendance at exam boards. Management have responded by threatening to write to every member of staff with the aim of intimidating them into submission.

UCU Wales Official, Margaret Phelan says:

“You need to stand up and fight if you want to be treated fairly. The fact that VC considered it appropriate to offer a statutory payment to staff losing their jobs as a consequence of a strategic decision and then to insult staff further by only offering them what the law requires as a basic minimum, demonstrates the lack of value placed on staff at USW.”

We need to secure a Yes vote in the ballot and bring management back to the negotiating table to secure a fair deal for Newport staff. Following a YES vote no industrial action will be taken until all members have had an opportunity to meet together and decide how we wish to proceed.