

Baroness Smith of Malvern
Department for Education
Via e-mail

14 January 2025

Dear Jacqui,

I hope you are well and had a good break over Christmas.

I am writing to highlight UCU's deep concern about Coventry University's recent proposal to implement a major restructure which will see at least 300 academic staff at risk of redundancy with more than 100 likely to lose their jobs. For those who remain, the university proposes to employ them through a subsidiary company on inferior terms and conditions without access to the sector standard pension scheme.

So far, academics in the School of Engineering, the School of Economics, Finance and Accounting, the School of Arts and Creative Industries and the School of Social Studies and Humanities have been notified of these proposals. Approximately 340 staff are affected, with over 120 redundancies so far proposed and staff will have to compete for the smaller number of jobs offered in the subsidiary. As I'm sure you can imagine, this proposal, announced in the run up to Christmas, has shocked and distressed the academic community at the university. No voluntary redundancy package is being offered and it is feared this is just the start of a major compulsory redundancy programme, alongside the mass transfer of academic teaching staff at Coventry University into the subsidiary company.

Compared to the university proper, the subsidiary company, PeoplesFuture Limited, (PFL) as an employer will mean:

- Longer working hours
- An increased teaching load
- Fewer days of annual leave
- A less favourable company sick pay scheme
- An inferior pension scheme, which involves the removal of academic staff from the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS).

Under the post-92 agreement, all academic staff in post-92 universities have guaranteed access to the TPS. This agreement was designed to protect staff welfare, support recruitment, and maintain employment standards across the sector. It is alarming to see Coventry University circumventing these principles. This extreme attack on our members at Coventry risks starting a race to the bottom on employment practices in a sector where precarious contracts and gig-economy conditions are already rife.

This action sets a dangerous precedent that could have long-term consequences for education and social mobility. If other universities follow Coventry's lead, it will have serious implications for the Treasury in terms of a reduction in Teacher Pension Scheme contributions.

It would be hugely appreciated if you were willing to make a behind-the-scenes intervention in this dispute, conveying to the vice-chancellor that this behaviour does not accord with the spirit of the government's reform priorities for higher education. In particular, Coventry's senior management could usefully be reminded of the Secretary of State's insistence that "efficiencies do not mean making staff do more with less or indeed fewer staff".

I would welcome further discussions on this important issue and can supply further information if you require.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Grady'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary