

University staff to vote on strike action over job cuts

Nicola Woolcock Education Editor

Lecturers will be balloted for strike action over job cuts at universities and threats of further redundancies.

University and College Union (UCU) said the equivalent of 15,000 jobs had been lost in the last year, up from 5,000 in March. It will ballot members whether to take national industrial action in an attempt to prevent more redundancies and to secure a bigger pay rise.

The union wants the employer body, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA), to commit to a national agreement to stop redundancies at all universities and make a higher pay offer (university staff were offered a 1.4 per cent rise for 2025-26). The union expects more than 65,000 members across 138 institutions to vote on whether to launch a campaign of industrial action.

Jo Grady, general secretary of UCU, said: "These job losses are not minor and government must stop treating them as localised incidents ... Overpaid

vice-chancellors are carrying out brutal cuts and have caused an existential moment for the UK higher education sector; our members do not want to strike, but they have been left with no choice but to ballot to defend it."

Figures from the Office for Students published in May showed that 43 per cent of universities forecast a deficit for the 2024-25 academic year.

Lancaster University is seeking to cut 400 full-time jobs to save £30 million while University of Nottingham staff voted to strike in August over more than 250 proposed cuts to jobs.

Raj Jethwa, chief executive of UCEA, said: "It is much better for employers and unions to work together to highlight the value of higher education to the UK economy. But that can't and won't happen if UCU pursues industrial action causing disruption and suffering for students."

The Department for Education is expected to publish a white paper setting out plans for higher education reform this autumn.

