

**STAFF FORUM DISCUSSION SESSION SUMMARY**

**Topic: Redundancy: how far are you willing to go to save jobs?**

**Date/ Time: Tuesday 14th July 2020 at 1pm & Thursday 16th July 2020 at 1pm**

The Staff Forum representatives welcomed attendees to the discussion session and explained that the Staff Forum were hosting discussion sessions during the current consultation period to give colleagues the opportunity to give their views, ask questions and have a discussion about how the options being considered as part of the response to the Covid-19 situation. Colleagues were also invited to send through any other questions, comments or suggestions to staff-forum@reading.ac.uk. It was also noted that staff could access the summaries from the discussion sessions via the Staff Forum website.

Staff Forum representatives introduced the topic for discussion and explained the purpose of this discussion topic was to understand thoughts and opinions on redundancy and the various collective options available for staff to consider. The Staff Forum representatives initiated the discussion by asking colleagues in the session if they would prefer salary saving measures or redundancies. There seemed to be a general consensus that colleagues in the discussion sessions would prefer any form of salary sacrifice to redundancy given the present job market. It was acknowledged that finding a job elsewhere is very difficult. A couple of attendees suggested that they would prefer redundancy as it would only affect few members of staff compared to other options which would affect all staff (potentially for a long period of time).

Colleagues in the discussion sessions expressed concern that they could be made redundant even after agreeing to collective action like pay cut or pay freeze. Although, many colleagues in the discussion sessions seemed to agree that being at risk of redundancy in a year’s time would be better than being at risk now.

The discussion sessions covered the following themes:

**Voluntary Redundancy:** Some colleagues in the discussion sessions felt that VR should be given consideration as staff may voluntarily leave which may result in reduced forced redundancy numbers. Staff who had their Voluntary redundancy application refused during the earlier VR scheme and others who may be willing to leave should be given the opportunity. The Staff Forum representatives mentioned VR is currently not seen as viable option (due to the unpredictable amount of potential savings involved) but the VR is being considered and discussed during consultation meetings.

**Staff Morale:** Many staff in the discussion sessions were concerned about employee morale and increase in stress levels due to pay cut or increase in workloads.

* Colleagues in the discussion sessions enquired about the support/help available from the University. The Staff Forum representatives shared details on wellbeing initiatives and provided link to the [wellbeing webpage](https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/WorkingatReading/well/well-home.aspx).
* The Staff Forum representatives also reiterated that if the student recruitment numbers are better than predicted that the University and VC are committed to scale down plans on salary saving measures.

**Flexible Working Arrangements:**  Colleagues in the discussion sessions suggested that staff wanting to go part-time could consider flexible working request as an option, though the Flexible working arrangement is to be discussed and agreement sought with reporting manager. The Staff Forum representatives noted that they would put this suggestion forward during the consultation meetings but also mentioned that a flexible working arrangement would not eliminate the other collective options being applied. Another colleague in the discussion session asked whether any considerations would be given to work from home more regularly to ease the cost of commuting.

**Rewards, Personal Titles and Promotion:** Colleagues in the discussion session raised concern about the expenditure of Rewards, Personal Titles and Promotion. Staff Forum Representatives acknowledged the concern and explained that the University would not save much money by removing these rewards/promotions. The University believes that there are benefits to keeping these schemes i.e. maintaining employee morale.

* Colleagues in the discussion sessions mentioned about rewards/celebrating success funds. It was suggested that celebrating success need not be monetary. Other methods of celebrating success should be sought for example a small token reward or non-monetary acknowledgement like an extra day annual leave.

A query was raised whether there should be one collective agreement for all. Colleagues in the discussion sessions asked if different schools and functions could have different agreements. A concern was raised on how the university intends to find a consensus on non-redundancy methods. For example, it may be easier to rota academic teaching on 4-day work week, but very difficult to do the same for non-academic and support staff due to business requirements.

Staff Forum representatives acknowledged the concern and the difficulties in implementing a 4-day work week. The Staff Forum representatives confirmed that discussions regarding practicalities of the options (how they could affect different departments/ staff on different grades/ part time vs full time employees) were on-going in the consultation meetings and needed to be explored in more depth. The Staff Forum representatives mentioned that in order to advocate fairness and reasonable action, the university would try options that are fair across the board.

**What colleagues in the discussion sessions have asked for:**

* Would there be help from HR in terms of CV writing or extra training for staff at risk of redundancy?
* Confirmation and reassurances about the timeline i.e. the point at which the pay cut or pay freeze would be implemented so that staff can plan their own finances.
* Answers to a staff questions on an FAQ document. The Staff Forum representatives noted that the FAQs from staff who had engaged with the Staff Forum would be submitted to the Consultation Group.
* SFM initiated the discussion with the question how far the staff would be willing to go to save jobs? A question was posed whether staff prefer options like pay freeze, pay cut or redundancy.
	+ Consensus was that any form of salary sacrifice is preferred to redundancy given the present job market with many businesses already making staff redundant. It was acknowledged that finding a job elsewhere is very difficult.
	+ It was noted by staff that previous redundancies and restructuring affected the support staff and non-academic staff disproportionately compared to academic staff.
* Question was raised that following PAS review which affected many support staff, it was mentioned that the academic contracts would be reviewed. Would VC consider use this opportunity to review the academic contracts?
	+ SF mentioned that this could be considered in Phase 2 but is not pertinent to the present consultations
	+ It was noted that the redundancies should be fair and should not adversely affect support staff.
	+ It was recognised that any decision on the collective action should not be rushed as there is no clarity now regarding student numbers and hence on subsequent workload.
* Question on whether voluntary redundancy is being considered as an option?
	+ It was noted that Voluntary redundancy should be given consideration as staff may voluntarily leave which may result in reduced forced redundancy numbers. Staff who had their Voluntary redundancy application refused during the earlier VR scheme and others who may be willing to leave should be given the opportunity.
	+ SF mentioned voluntary redundancy is currently not seen as viable option due to minimal savings involved but the question is being considered during consultations.
* Staff raised an opinion that redundancy may not be bad quoting example from her husband’s company (different industry) where many staff were made redundant but now face shortage of staff/skill and are finding it difficult to recruit.
* Question raised on whether redundancy payment will be protected if pay cut is agreed – redundancy payment for staff at lower grade is guaranteed at their current salary entitlement instead of reduced salary?
	+ SFM confirmed that this query has been raised in consultation meeting.
* If pay cut and pay freeze are considered, could staff take up another job to make up for the shortfall in pay?
	+ SFM mentioned that this is being discussed in the consultation meeting.
* Staff nearing retirement, would they be encouraged to retire?
	+ SFM responded that this was discussed before but not necessarily seem to make enough savings.
* Question was asked whether there is an expectation to serve full notice period when the staff has taken a pay cut or going through redundancy.
	+ SF will raise this question in the consultation meeting.

* Many staff were concerned about employee morale and increase in stress levels due to pay cut and increase in workloads and enquired about the support /help available from the university.
	+ SFM shared details on Well Being initiatives and provided link to the Well Being Web page
	+ SFM also reiterated that if the student numbers are better, University and VC are committed to scale down plans on redundancy and pay cut.
* SFM asked whether staff would be interested in a survey for Staff Forum to understand the opinions/options that staff are willing to put forth to the consultation meeting.
	+ Consensus is that staff would prefer a survey with various scenarios explained.
* Question was asked whether 4-day work week is still being considered as it was mentioned in recent VC talks that it is difficult to administer due to staff working on different shift/work pattern and keeping to teaching and research commitments.
	+ SFM responded that 4-day work week is an option being considered although the practicalities are yet to be worked.
* Would there be help from HR in terms of CV writing or extra training for staff being made redundant?
	+ SFM would raise this question to John Brady, Director of HR in the consultation meeting.
* Clarification was sought on negotiation rights of the Staff forum vis a vis UCU in the consultation meetings and whether UCU are in stronger position.
	+ SFM explained the difference between UCU and the Staff Forum. UCU is a union and therefore has legal rights to negotiate which unfortunately the Staff Forum does not have as it a voluntary forum. However, assurance was given that staff views through the Staff forum would still be heard as equally as UCU member views.
	+ SFM reiterated that University and VC are committed to listen to staff views and Staff Forum is actively engaged in the consultation meetings.
	+ It was acknowledged that although Staff forum represents staff from Grade 1-5, staff from Grade 6+ have participated in the Staff forum discussions.
* Question was raised whether pension will be protected at previous higher salary as otherwise the percentage reduction in contribution will affect older generation once they retire. Also, if there are job cuts in future, would the severance/pensions base on the new reduced pay?
	+ SFM mentioned that pension contribution would reduce in line with pay cut and acknowledged the concern that any chosen option would have an impact on pensions.
	+ SF will raise the query regarding protection of pension in the consultation meeting.
* Question was raised whether university’s underlying financial issues - Poor management decisions in the past, adding to the Covid-19 pandemic have pushed the university into this dire financial situation?
	+ SFM mentioned that universities with significant percentage of international students are in similar financial difficulties.
	+ Staff mentioned that there is inherent risk when having many international students and university should have factored in those associated risks. It was mentioned that Governance, UPP should be reviewed or considered.
	+ Consensus was that there should be learnings from past events but this is not the time for blame game and university should consider all options in the fairest possible way to arrive at an appropriate collective action.
* Staff wanted reassurances about the timeline, the point at which the pay cut or pay freeze would be reversed so that staff can plan their own finances.
* Staff acknowledged that FAQs on pensions, notice period during redundancy and how final pay will be calculated for redundancy would be useful.