



The Joint Union Committee
2 Hounsfield Road
Sheffield
S3 7RF

14 June 2021

Mr Ian Wright
Director of Human resources

Dear Ian,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us last Wednesday in our JUCC negotiating meeting. It is a disappointment that the tone of the meeting was not more constructive, but given the escalating series of significant change proposals initiated by senior management, it was perhaps inevitable. We remain concerned that the university is failing to live up to its side of the mutual obligations contained in our recognition agreement. We would draw your attention, as we did verbally in the meeting, to two key points of the agreement:

3.2 The University as employer and its recognised campus trade unions hereby jointly commit to an organisational system of employee relations that will be founded upon the key principles of; collaboration, team working, equal opportunities, transparency and mutual respect.

3.3 It is the University's responsibility to plan, organise and manage its activities to achieve its strategic objectives and corporate plans. In undertaking such activities the University will adhere to good practice, ensuring the timely sharing of information, consultation and negotiation as appropriate with the recognised campus trade unions.

These two points of the agreement suggest that in order for us to have the historically well managed and mutually beneficial system of largely constructive industrial relations we have enjoyed at Sheffield for some time, key principles must be adhered to. We remain deeply concerned that the university is no longer ensuring the timely sharing of information in order for the recognised campus trade unions to fulfil their obligations under the agreement, which runs counter to the spirit of collaboration, transparency, and mutual respect. Given this obstruction, we will need to consider what other mechanisms we may have at our disposal to obtain the necessary information being withheld or delayed by university management.



We hope that the tense tone of the meeting indicates to the university management something of the depth of anger of our members at the exclusion of staff and student views from meaningful consideration. We have repeatedly warned that the unsustainable pace and scale of the changes being proposed is materially undermining the health of not only the staff in scope, but also the trade union representatives, particularly during a year of already increased stress. We have also made clear the widespread concern in the university community that well-informed and expert views of staff - a crucial stakeholder - were being side-lined in a rush to implement changes with much potential risk to the university.

We were disappointed to hear you acknowledge that the university is currently not fulfilling certain of its obligations under its own Change Management Policies and Procedures. We were further surprised that you and your fellow HR colleagues were unaware of which, if any, of the recent restructures had followed the full process (including the post-restructure review), as we have raised these policies on several occasions in prior negotiations including in the aftermath of the APSE and Research Services restructures.

For the health and wellbeing of staff and students at this university, we want to ensure that these procedures are being followed, and so we highlight two important parts of the policy and procedure. First, the policy is framed as “establish[ing] the fair, robust, and transparent principles and processes to be followed so that the University’s interests are protected and staff are treated fairly...It is the intention that this will be used by University managers to help ensure change is managed positively, effectively and consistently.” We are not alone in raising concerns that the current processes are not being conducted in a transparent or consistent manner, which leads to concern about fairness.

Secondly, Section 6 of the Restructuring Procedure sets out a requirement for regular Post Restructuring Reviews:

6.1. When restructuring has concluded, there will be the opportunity for the University to explore with stakeholders, including staff and Trade Unions, whether any organisational or departmental process improvements could be considered. Such a review would focus on improvement, and measures to manage the change, rather than changing decisions made during restructuring. For example:

6.1.1. A review might focus on identifying what went well; ensuring any emergent concerns or problems are addressed; and recording any lessons learned. A review template is available.

6.1.2. A Post –Change Wellbeing Risk Assessment could be undertaken to review staff wellbeing and take action where required.

6.1.3. It is good practice for the outcomes of the post-restructuring review to be shared with Trade Union colleagues for discussion, via JUCC, and with staff, as appropriate.



At JUCC, we requested copies of the documentation for all such reviews of restructures conducted over the last several years. You have confirmed that these have not consistently taken place, and moreover, that there is no paperwork which can be reviewed by staff or student representatives.

By our count, there have been at least 17 such restructures in the last five years, and there are several more underway. We are extremely concerned that the university is failing to take the space to reflect on restructure processes in order to learn the lessons (both positive and negative) from completed restructure processes.

We hope that you would agree that given the extreme gap between current practice and the procedures, the university is not currently in a position to confirm to staff, students, or to important governance structures like Senate and Council, that its past processes have been properly assessed or that its current processes are fit for purpose.

Given this, we request again the immediate suspension of all change management processes until such time as a holistic review of the aforementioned 17+ processes can be completed with appropriate input from stakeholders, including the recognised trade unions.

We would welcome the return of industrial relations which are characterised by the university's stated commitments to collaboration, team working, equal opportunities, transparency and mutual respect. We hope that university management will consider the above request as a sign of a similar commitment, moving forward.

UNISON, Unite, UCU, GMB