

Dr JR Melrose and Colleagues
UCU Branch Secretary

Via e-mail: Jamie.Melrose@bristol.ac.uk

Professor Hugh Brady
Vice-Chancellor and President
University of Bristol
Vice-Chancellor's Office
Beacon House
Queen's Road
Bristol BS8 1QU, UK
T +44 (0)117 42 83183
www.bristol.ac.uk

Ref: HRB/jw/AOGJMUCU090620

9 June 2020

Dear Jamie and Colleagues

Thank you for your email dated 3 June 2020, setting out your requests and concerns in relation to how the University responds to the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic.

Our University is its people - putting our people at the heart of our decision making is a core principle that we have adopted, and which informs our decision-making. We will seek to safeguard jobs as far as we're able without putting the future of the institution and its staff and students at risk.

As part of our commitment to working with all our trade unions, we have been in regular discussion with all of you about the current challenges and how best to negotiate these.

Senior UCU colleagues have had access to detailed financial information relating to the likely scenarios that the University will face due to the pandemic, including the impact of lower student numbers. You are also aware of the decisions we have taken in relation to capital projects, and the substantial reduction in planned capital expenditure.

This situation is unprecedented and will inevitably lead to decisions being made that we would not have contemplated a few months ago. However, if we do not safeguard our finances, we could end up in a situation where mass redundancies are required. This would have disastrous consequences for decades to come and is something we are actively trying to avoid.

Casualisation

As you know, we have been working together to address casualisation in our workforce. The HE sector has a long history of employing part of its workforce in temporary roles to fulfil the requirements of fixed funding research and temporary teaching opportunities. This situation will endure until the funding regime changes.

However, we remain committed to reducing levels of casualisation wherever we can.

If we acquiesced to your demand to extend the employment of all fixed term contract staff until employment *might* be available, we would be putting the University in financial jeopardy, given the estimated cost of doing this of £27m to the end of the calendar year. There is no guarantee that the job market will have returned to pre-crisis levels by then. It is the responsibility of the University Executive team, along with the Board of Trustees as custodians of the University, to ensure that that we remain financially viable for generations to come.

Where we are able to support our fixed term contract staff as opportunities arise, we will, but we cannot support your principal demand to extend all contracts regardless of work available.

Recruitment pause and furlough

As part of our financial planning we have introduced a recruitment pause for some posts. However, posts that are wholly externally funded or are required to meet identified shortfalls in capacity and/or expertise, are still being advertised and these are open to anyone to apply. Professional Services jobs are advertised internally first.

We have also funded Covid-19 research posts for our research staff. Where research has been paused due to Covid-19 we have furloughed those research staff at 100% of salary, rather than the government grant rate of 80%, so that individuals don't suffer a financial detriment until they can resume their research. We have also supported our HPTs until the end of their contracts and intend to continue in our efforts to reduce casualisation for our teaching staff, by offering fixed term contracts where possible in the future.

Supporting staff and workloads

We are mindful of the pressure being faced by all staff as we deal with the reality of the pandemic and the requirement for the majority to suddenly transition to working from home. We have been supportive of the individual situations that staff find themselves in with home and work responsibilities and have been clear that we trust staff to do the best they can in the current situation.

We are not asking staff to take on additional workload, but we may be asking staff to work differently, if needed, to support our move to online education and secure the future of the University. We are very aware of our responsibilities as an employer, the Public Sector Equality Duty and will always take care to ensure we are treating our staff fairly and equitably.

We know these are challenging issues affecting our staff community. We look forward to working together in partnership with you to address the challenges together.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Brady and the University Management Team