

10 June 2009

Professor Keith Burnett  
Vice Chancellor  
The University of Sheffield

## **Action to Reduce Staffing and Other Costs**

Dear Professor Burnett,

I am writing on behalf of the SUCU Committee in reply to your e-mail message sent to all staff (09 June 2009) in which you lay out the need for the university to reduce its staffing costs by £15 million per year by 2011.

Your explanation of the background to the current situation includes the statement *“pay and pensions costs across the sector have risen rapidly and are set to rise further – meaning that it will take more of our budget to employ the same number of staff”*.

It is totally unfair to once again present pay rises over the last three years as a cause of the current financial situation. These pay rises were agreed in 2006 with the employers nationally and therefore should have been included in any forecasts and budgets. Indeed the senior managers of this University locally urged UCU members to accept the settlement in 2006. These salary increases cannot be blamed for the current discrepancy in forecasted budgets.

You state that there will be an anticipated shortfall of £25 million, of which an estimated £15 million will need to come from staffing costs. You also state *“In my last update I gave you my commitment to doing all we can to continue to provide an excellent student experience, preserve our research environment, and to protect jobs. I repeat that commitment.”*

However, you do not explain sufficiently why the bulk of the savings need to come from staffing cuts, especially if you are committed to protecting jobs. What other cost saving measures are the university instigating or planning, and what value has been placed on these individual measures? More importantly, why is it that *“all possibilities are being explored”* whilst the measures aimed at cutting staff are being taken with immediate effect, especially if there is a commitment *“to protect jobs”*?

You say that you *“do not believe we have a lot of excess capacity”* but given that every lost job potentially results in several lives being seriously effected, we would ask that any excess capacity be thoroughly explored before implementing plans that require staff to carry the bulk of the required savings. We are particularly concerned that imposing an immediate over-time ban will probably mean that lower paid staff will

suffer disproportionately and we urge you to reconsider this decision.

We would also remind you that a reduction in staff of the magnitude suggested in your message will inevitably have a serious impact on any remaining staff. Workloads are already excessively heavy as a result of the undeniable increase in 'productivity' in HE over the last decade or so – it is impossible to envisage how the university will be able to “*continue to provide an excellent student experience, preserve our research environment*” following the losses you are planning, without serious stress-related health and safety issues for remaining members of staff.

Whilst we understand that the university faces an unprecedented set of circumstances at this time, and we welcome your commitment to consultation with the trade unions when reviewing the local situation, we also hope you can support national negotiations designed to save jobs and lobby UCEA accordingly to agree a process that will look at every possibility before embarking on a strategy to deplete (probably for ever) the main asset of every university – its staff!

Regards

Steve Collier  
On behalf of SUCU Committee