

14 March 2024

Sent by email to:
Regional Union Representatives
University of Surrey Employee Representatives

Dear Union members,

Thank you for your letter of 11 March. I appreciate the concerns that colleagues have about the financial challenges that we and most other higher education institutions are facing. I will set out what we are planning to do to address these challenges and respond to the questions in your letter.

But first, I want to reassure all staff at the University that the range of measures we need to take are guided by the principles of minimising the impact on our people and ensuring least harm to our core mission. That is the reason why we are taking a focused and nuanced approach across the University, taking into account local factors.

At the all-staff meetings in October last year and on 6 March I have been transparent about the challenges facing the University. These are driven by economy-wide challenges of high inflation, cost of living increases, and high energy costs, as well as sector-wide issues of devaluing domestic tuition fees and declining numbers of international students due to external factors. We are a stronger and better University than we were five years ago, reflected in our rankings, the quality of the student experience and REF scores, thanks to the hard work of our staff and students. However today's challenges are unprecedented and substantial.

I have set out the range of measures we are taking to respond to these challenges, which includes diversifying our income, making improvements to how we recruit international students and considering asset sales that won't undermine our long-term future opportunities.

Now let me respond to each of your points in turn:

1. That you provide a categorical assurance that no member of staff for whom recognised trade unions have bargaining rights for will be subjected to compulsory redundancy this calendar year.

We want to avoid the need for any compulsory redundancies. The purpose of the voluntary severance (VS) process is to offer an opportunity for employees to apply to leave the University on a voluntary basis. For those who choose to go, we are providing a generous financial package to support them. Through VS we are looking to minimise any formal change management processes. Until we know the outcome of the VS offer, we are not able to give a commitment that no further action will be needed.

2. That a VS scheme must fully incentivise applicants in order to reduce the risk of compulsory redundancies. As this is our paramount goal, we ask that you keep the VS application process open until at least the end of this academic year. This would allow those considering this option the time to make financial decisions which could involve checking pension data, considering reducing hours on a permanent or temporary basis, unpaid sabbatical etc. A 10-day period is not long enough for such life changing decisions nor to get the feedback required on the various options.

With the cooling off period included, the window for colleagues to commit to a decision is 27 calendar days. The shorter deadline enables swift decision-making, which is beneficial for many people. It is not feasible, practical or appropriate for us to keep the VS window open beyond the current deadline given that we must have certainty over both our future financial position and human resource commitments necessary to ensure effective delivery of our core mission.

3. That you provide assurances that where “different ways of working” are planned, and where this may significantly change someone’s role, (especially where people may be outsourced or directed to sign new contracts that they may feel are on less attractive terms), then VS will be re-opened for those individuals, on the same terms as currently offered.

We agree that if significant changes were to be proposed to the extent that terms and conditions of employment were to be changed, then we would consult staff. Where that may be the case, the University cannot guarantee the same terms as those currently offered. The terms of that change programme would be established as part of any process of collective consultation with our recognised trade unions.

4. That the period, after which an employee can be made compulsorily redundant without an unsuccessful application for EVS being honoured, should be at least a year.

This is currently a hypothetical situation because we are seeking to avoid compulsory redundancies. However, if we were required to move to a formal consultation process under our management of change policy, which would necessitate putting colleagues at risk of redundancy, those who leave then would do so on the terms of the arrangements in place at that time.

5. That UoS respond in detail to the UCU request for full financial transparency (formal request made to the Interim Chief Financial Officer Finance: Tuesday 5th March 2024).

The information requested is in the process of being compiled and will be provided to you shortly. In addition the CFO will join one of the additional meetings that are being set up with union colleagues to talk through the reports and answer any additional questions. Please note that we also publish our annual statement of accounts on our website. You can find those for [2022/23 online](#).

We look forward to discussing the issues further with you so that, together, we can achieve our financial sustainability goals and support our staff, our greatest asset.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'GQ Lu', written in a cursive style.

**Professor GQ Max Lu AO DL FEng FAA FTSE
President and Vice-Chancellor**