

# HEALTH AND LIFE SCIENCES REDUNDANCIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Senior management at the University of Liverpool intend to make **47 academic staff members in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences redundant by the end of May 2021 as part of a restructure titled ‘Project SHAPE’.**

The 47 academic staff members have been selected using the following selection criteria:

1. A calculation of average research income as a comparison with the Russell Group average.
2. The use of a citation measure known as the Field Weighted Citation Impact (FWCI) score which is based on Elsevier’s SciVal database.

Those two metrics are being used to dispose of our colleagues – many of whom are amongst the most respected in their field. We have very serious concerns about the incompleteness of the data in those measures and the gross distortions they produce, and are producing a detailed analysis of how the algorithms and analytic tools produce uncontrollable distortions. However, the main problem with those metrics is that they fail to account for the broad range of tasks academics undertake as part of their contracted role. Indeed, those quantitative metrics could never capture the true impact of our research. Neither could they ever capture the mentoring work, the peer review and examination work, teaching and other collegiate work upon which the entire academic system relies.

None of the staff selected for redundancy were made aware of the metrics, or how those metrics were applied. Neither were they given the opportunity to ensure the data applying to them was accurate. This is the first time those metrics have been used to assess the capability of staff at the University of Liverpool. The University of Liverpool is therefore in breach of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA). Influential figures in the research community have already spoken out against these dangerous proposals - the authors of the Leiden Manifesto and the Hong Kong Principles have written to Liverpool’s Vice Chancellor, Professor Dame Janet Beer, describing the actions as “seriously contravening the principles of ethical and responsible use of research metrics.”

There are existing policies at the University covering performance and redundancy. Those policies have been ignored. Indeed, the University has informed the UCU that only one of the 47 is being actively managed under the capability procedure for performance. The UCU has also informed the University that it has a prima facie case for unfair selection and unfair dismissal.

We have never seen metrics used to 'rank and yank' the workforce in a UK university in this way before and we are worried that this is being treated as a test case. This practice is deliberately aimed at rendering permanent contracts worthless. If staff can simply be disposed of en masse, for reasons they have never previously been made aware of, then this opens the floodgates to a universal casualisation of the sector.

To add insult to injury, the 47 under threat of redundancy have been told regularly by the Executive Pro Vice Chancellor in charge of forcing these proposals through, Professor Louise Kenny, that the redundancies are being made "to serve the people of Liverpool." The University has never claimed that this is an economic necessity. It is in a better financial position than anticipated at the beginning of the pandemic. Rather, Professor Kenny claims that those redundancies are necessary to create the "headroom" to refocus the priorities of the Health and Life Sciences faculty. The Senior Leadership Team argue that the Faculty does not serve the health needs of the community well enough and blame the staff for this. The UCU has consistently argued that the Senior Leadership Team's obsession with league tables (and associated metrics) leads them to make all kind of catastrophic mistakes and has undermined the research culture in the Faculty. This obsession with metrics allows the Senior Leadership Team to obscure the steeply rising teaching and administrative workload faced by staff and the difficulty of producing research under these burdens.

The Senior Leadership Team have cloaked their brutal and unnecessary actions in the language of "responsible metrics" and "civic responsibility." It is time they were called out for this hypocrisy.

We want to put a serious discussion of responsible metrics back on the agenda in the longer term. Our short-term priority is to protect the livelihoods of those staff. Many of them have families, and many have been working as clinicians at the front line of essential health services during the pandemic. They are now being treated in the most inhumane and reckless way. The UCU branch is determined to take sustained industrial action to defend our friends and colleagues.

And we know we can count on the support of the academic community and the solidarity and collective power of the trade union movement to back us.