

## Leeds – an alternative vision. A statement on behalf of academic and related staff by University of Leeds UCU

If you agree with us, sign our statement at: <http://leedsucu.wordpress.com/alternative-vision/>

### The future of OUR University

Leeds is a great university with students who are eager to learn, and staff who are committed to providing excellence in teaching, research and support.

The current strategic direction adopted by Michael Arthur, our vice chancellor, threatens to destroy our university and to turn it into something very different. If unchecked, the proposals to cut up to 700 jobs will undermine academic standards, our relationship with our students, and our regional, national and global reputation. In short, the fabric of our institution is under threat. We believe the VC's current strategy, agreed with minimal consultation with staff and students, is wrong in five key ways:

#### 1. Leeds and league tables

The VC wants Leeds to move higher up the global league tables. Yet the strategy of cutting staff is likely to achieve the exact opposite. Research

shows that cutting 10 per cent of jobs will leave Leeds with the worst student:staff ratios in the Russell Group. Those institutions already at the top of the table have fewer students per staff member than Leeds, not more as the VC proposes. This approach threatens everyone's future while failing to deliver the objective.

Indeed, while everyone wants Leeds to do even better, research performance cannot be improved in a climate of staff fear, and staff will not be attracted to work at Leeds if the institution becomes associated with department cuts, large class sizes and inadequate numbers of support staffing.

The development of original research takes place in a variety of settings, both funded and unfunded. The university's job, in our view, is to nurture and promote creative research, not stifle and curtail as these proposals surely will.

#### 2. Leeds and its staff

The VC's current strategy has big aspirations but fails to recognise that it is the staff themselves that are Leeds's greatest asset. We reject:

- suggestions that academic staff should move to bigger and bigger teaching loads, or teaching-only roles in order to allow the proposed cuts to take place
- reductions in the number of academic-related and support staff, which contradict the aim of freeing up the time of academics.

#### 3. Leeds and 'the global university'

Academic reputation is central to global standing.



The university's 'brand' has already been massively damaged by the vice chancellor's proposals to cut 10 per cent of staff. Press criticism of poor leadership, secrecy and lack of consultation with staff and student representatives are not the ideal advert for our institution. Pictures of hundreds of staff and students protesting to keep courses open will not encourage a view of the university as a serious institution.

We believe that prospective students want to see a university at ease with itself, which invests in and develops its staff and which listens to its students.

#### **4. Leeds and the 'student experience'**

The university spends a great deal of money on marketing Leeds as a great place to be. We agree, but for most students the learning must be at the centre of the Leeds experience, not at its periphery. Cuts of up to 700 jobs will have a massive impact on our students. Overworked staff will have less and less time to help their students. The average debt upon leaving university has been estimated at £23,000 – why would students come somewhere that is cutting staff as Leeds proposes when other universities already provide smaller class sizes and greater access to senior and support staff? Why should students pay fees of over £30million this year if the university then makes cuts of £35million from its budget. How does that marry with the promise that student fees mean a better student experience?

#### **5. Leeds and OUR community**

The staff and students who live in Leeds are proud of the contribution OUR university makes to the regional economy and to the vibrancy and diversity of the city itself. The campaign against

the 10 per cent cuts has shown that the local community also cares about its universities. We believe this institution should act as a regional and national exemplar for the principle of widening participation so talent and potential, not affordability, become the central drivers of access to education. To achieve this we need more staff, not fewer.

The University is one of the largest employers in Leeds, and removing £35 million from the local economy will also have a devastating impact – increasing unemployment, depressing local earnings and creating further social divisions.

#### **Our vision**

Leeds UCU is campaigning for an alternative future for our university. The proposed cuts will destroy what we have built. Our vision is of university that staff and students can be proud of, where teaching and research excellence flourish, where all are listened to and valued, and which is rooted in its local and regional community. We call upon the VC to halt his plans and agree to work together with staff and students on a new vision which will have the support of all those who care about our institution.

### **Show YOUR support**

**Please comment and sign up to the Leeds alternative vision statement here:**

**<http://leedsucu.wordpress.com/alternative-vision/>**

**For a further, more detailed critique by Leeds UCU of the current political vision for the higher education sector go to: [www.leeds.ac.uk/ucu](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/ucu)**

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