

Evidence gathered from UCU and UNISON members regarding experience of the redeployment

The following observations and accounts of experience of redeployment have been collated from messages sent by members of UCU and UNISON, some of whom have been on the Redeployment Register themselves and some of whom are line managers of staff who have been on it.

They provide evidence of both successes and failures in the implementation of the University's redeployment policy. When it works as it should, the Redeployment Register enables the University to retain valuable staff who would otherwise be lost, thereby reducing recruitment costs and enhancing its reputation as the kind of good employer top-level staff want to stay with and remain loyal to. However, there are also too many occasions where the Redeployment Register does not work as well as it should: of failures in helping redeployed staff find appropriate opportunities or gain the training that would enable them to fill positions, of HR consultations that are treated as mere tick-box exercises, and of line managers who believe staff on the Register are in some way tainted.

The evidence has been edited to ensure anonymity and organised into general comments about recent events, in particular the delivery of Section 188 at-risk letters to staff on the Redeployment Register and announcement of radical changes to the University's redeployment and redundancy policy, answers to a set of specific questions that were put to members, and additional anecdotes.

General comments

"The way in which this was announced on Staff Net as well as the proposal itself has made me very angry. A disgraceful way to announce such a fundamental change to our employment rights at the University. Are zero hours contracts next?"

"I have been a successful Head of Department and Faculty Dean. My political views are right of centre. During my term of office the University has seen good times and bad. Some of them very bad. Frankly I do not believe that the current financial situation is anything like as bad as it was in the really bad times back in the 1990s. The University management are well aware that the University relies to a considerable extent on the goodwill of its staff. I know of many people who go the extra mile because of their goodwill towards this University. I believe that this goodwill is founded on an implicit understanding that this is a University that cares about its staff. Successive vice-chancellors have confirmed a general understanding that this is a University that will do all it can to avoid compulsory redundancies. I believe that a significant move away from this understanding will materially damage the University in terms of the goodwill and the loyalty of its staff. Moreover, if it gets out that UoM has become a nasty employer this will make the University less attractive to current and future employees"

"I have known colleagues who have benefitted by being able to move within the University via the Redeployment Register. I have always considered its existence as one of the benefits of working here. So, yes, taken overall, I feel the proposals regarding the Redeployment Register and compulsory redundancy policy perhaps undermine the benefits to the university, and certainly undermine the benefits to individual staff provided by the redeployment register as it currently operates. Combined with the attack on pensions (and increasing workloads, etc), it sadly seems to underline a dwindling appreciation of its staff by the university."

"Can I suggest that you remind the President and Senior Management Team of the prescient views Alan Gilbert expressed in his 2004 Foundation Lecture, when he set out why collegiality is important and is central to our desire to be a world class university. It was why he was opposed to compulsory redundancies and argued, in university forum meetings with staff and elsewhere, that no one would come to work in Manchester if we got rid of such a policy..."

It may also be worth pointing out that our present financial problems arose because of a failed REF strategy pursued by the same management team that now seeks to absolve itself and is committed to doing the same thing again. What exactly does creating financial headroom actually mean? What investment decisions are they being prevented from implementing? Our grant income is going up, we are finding the resources to invest in the areas that we want through non-research council income (as the President likes to boast - some of the highest in the country)."

"... these concerns are secondary to the overall roughshod approach that the University is taking to negotiating key employment policies. It is very disappointing, and it is making me seriously reconsider my position at the University, despite me being in a job which is HIGHLY unlikely to be affected by this change in policy."

"If the 4 years pay protection/redeployment is to disappear this is a massive change to our contracts and employment status"

"I have every hope of continuing my career with the University but losing this 'right' would unfortunately make me have to look elsewhere rather than have the breathing space to try to continue on to the next stage of my career here. I know my department would not wish to see me go and it is the last thing I would want to do. This just raises huge uncertainties on the back of having my pension rights eroded, both issues are particularly important to a new academic that came into the area in my mid 30s."

"Sometimes it takes longer than 3 months to find something suitable. For example, sometimes people are on the redeployment register whilst on maternity leave due to restructuring etc. A few years ago people on it were given an external mentor to encourage them to explore what they liked and disliked and liked doing. It helped to find the right job rather than just the first one that came up and built confidence. I have worked with people who have been put on the redeployment register here (for example because they were being bullied in their last department) and they have turned out to be really nice and really good. At my previous university it was 'the kiss of death' to be on it and no-one wanted to employ anyone who had been on it because they were stigmatised for being a trouble maker. But here we have had so many restructures that it's more of a useful tool. Some people might prefer the option of redundancy, but for people who really want to stay in the University and don't mind working in a different department and learning something new, it is a good thing to have. I think 3 months is quite a short time to find the right match."

"It is in the concept of HR being a passive participant in the redeployment process that my comment about the policy not being policed should be viewed. The redeployee is powerless throughout the process, and has nothing to gain by bringing a recruiter to task – who wants to be interviewed/work for someone who has been forced to accept you. HR should mediate in the process, and all feedback should go to them for comment before being sent to the redeployee – that is, HR should tell the recruiter that based on their feedback they have to either interview someone, or offer them the job should that be the case. To repeat, the most powerless person in the whole process should not be the only person carrying the responsibility of being involved in the process."

"I think the Redeployment registry is a good thing but needs some additional measures to implement to make it work effectively. There must be a strong message from the highest echelons of the University management that our people deserve to be redeployed if they are truly the greatest assets of this institution."

Question 1: Does the Redeployment Register as it currently operates help sort out short-term employment problems, or allow them to fester?

Positive

"This is an invaluable and fair system of attempting to maintain essential and valuable staff and one way of avoiding people leaving the university before their contracts end."

"I think the redeployment register works well and I know of many examples where staff were ultimately incorporated into worthwhile and meaningful jobs within the University instead of being lost. There were only 1 or 2 examples where staff were allowed to fester and that was more to do with bad HR support rather than the fault of individuals. I believe that sometimes the redeployment register is used by HR as a means of not resolving performance management issues and then allows them to claim that people do nothing whilst on the register. HR could do a lot more to find alternatives for people on the register and there are many occasions, because of poor communication that we go out and advertise for posts when skills were already available in the University (sometimes requiring a minimal amount of retraining)."

"I think it helps, but only if the people on the redeployment register are pro-active and search for jobs themselves and take the situation into their own hands."

"My experience would suggest that it helps to overcome short term problems – allowing well trained staff to use their skills and experience effectively (whilst at the same time as looking for alternative permanent employment) and to contribute to "helping out" in areas that need staff. It also provides an opportunity for staff to move to another role (whilst looking for alternative permanent jobs) – where there has been a breakdown in working relationships- in my experience when this has happened it is usually the lower grade employee who is deemed to be at fault and either has to resign or go on the redeployment register."

Negative

"... although you may have meetings with an HR person no real help is given notifying you of upcoming vacancies. They take a copy of your CV but don't match you to any vacancies."

"I don't believe the Redeployment Register is being used to the advantage of the staff placed upon it but is being used as management tool allowing them to replace or bypass staff who are no longer (for whatever reason) seen as fit for purpose."

"... it is more of the latter, unless the person on the list finds a position himself/herself."

"HR do nothing to help in terms of finding people suitable jobs/ helping applications etc. More needs to be done in terms of educating interviewers/ people assessing applications of the redeployment policy..... HR staff need to be more proactive - speaking to interviewers if a redeployment application has been submitted, explaining the rules, following up if redeployment candidates weren't successful."

"There is also a problem of equality - in the past, during the merger, more ethnic minority staff were on the register (proportionately) than white staff so there are issues of equality."

Question 2: Does management provide adequate support to people on the Register to enable them to find an alternative role in the university, or do they treat it as a dumping ground and expect individuals to find a new position by themselves?

"Some management do expect individuals to find a new position by themselves and you have to be extremely pro-active in order to make the system work"

"Support is not adequate while fairly regular meetings with an HR representative may occur they do not help to find jobs and normal job application and interview procedures are followed. It's very much left to the individual and if working on a placement no time is allocated for job hunting etc"

"From my experience with a member of my team who was on redeployment – no. They were only concerned about whether HR processes were being followed – meetings kept, timely issue of letters and administration etc. which was of no real benefit to the redeployee. No encouragement was given to apply for potential positions and no retraining provided despite being asked for."

"... depends on who your line manager is and what support they are prepared to give you."

"I had encouragement from my ex-manager..... I had little help from anyone else & was pretty much left on my own."

"Definitely a dumping ground. I was never suggested a job by HR when I was on the redeployment list. If HR are to make these changes they need to do their jobs and help."

"... support is not adequate and management (HR) seem to be happy to leave people on the redeployment register and just dumped them into any role/project that may need some short term help."

Question 3: Do people on the Redeployment Register do valuable work for the university that would have had to be done by someone else, for example by undertaking short-term projects that make proper use of their skills and knowledge, or are they unproductive members of staff who might just as well be on gardening leave?

"The work done by most people on the RR is, I would argue, for the most part very valuable. Many people have been here a long time and have invaluable specialist knowledge that would otherwise be lost. I was able to work on an important project quickly for a short-period because of the RR which was helpful for the wider project the research team were working on. It would not have been economic in time or money for them to hire externally."

"Both the placements I have had have involved useful work that wouldn't otherwise be done but there wouldn't be a resource to create a post."

"In my opinion redeployees carry out exactly the same tasks as they did before, and that's what I was told when I enquired about it to a senior manager. In actual fact I think you should investigate the authenticity of claims for efficiency when a restructuring takes place. In many cases the people left end up with more work to do. This has affected me personally where I have had to take on work from other areas where staff have been redeployed or taken a severance package."

"They are very productive members of staff! No doubts about that! The example of my friend XXX, who was on her gardening leave in our XXX Facility. The manager gave her tough projects which had

been on the back burner for quite some time due to the lack of manpower. And she delivered them all successfully in times which are even shorter than if performed by any current member of the Facility!"

"Yes MOST people on the redeployment register do valuable work for the university (even if they are placed on lower grade roles)- especially where they have a set of skills or experience of systems and processes that would be difficult for agency staff to undertake effectively. However as with most large organisations there are exceptions and some redeployees, possibly because of the lack of support or because they have been moved between roles several times, do, in my experience, as little as possible - perhaps a system of encouragement, performance review and support from HR and managers would alleviate this tendency"

Question 4: Would implementation of the proposed changes, whereby anyone on the Redeployment Register for more than three months would be told to choose between voluntary severance and compulsory redundancy, change your perception of the redeployment register and make you more or less likely to agree to go on to it if there were any other option, however unpalatable?

"It makes things much more stressful, currently most of the posts advertised initially for redeployees are on short contracts ranging from 9 months to 2 years. Presumably at the end of this period you are back to square one only worse given you only have 3 months to find a post. This will mean people will be constantly looking for jobs which means they are likely to be more focussed on the next post than the one they are doing as the contract reaches the later stages of the time."

"Of course, the original purpose of redeployment was for something else. It showed that the University actually cared about the loyalty of long term staff and proposed every effort should be made to find them alternate work at the University."

"I think it would cause a high degree of stress for staff which doesn't chime with the university's "commitment" to staff well-being."

"... if there were clear safety nets in place to prevent an compulsory redundancy then perhaps, but solid guarantees would be needed."

"I would definitely try to avoid to be placed on the list in the case of those changes"

"The redeployment register will definitely be an unfavorable option."

"... it would make me less likely to agree to go on the redeployment register"

Question 5: Taken overall, would the proposals regarding the Redeployment Register and compulsory redundancy policy enhance or undermine the benefits to the university and individual staff provided by the redeployment register as it currently operates?

"I think it would serve to undermine it overall – staff on short-term and externally funded contracts already experience greater anxiety around the precariousness of their employment position which has implications for aspects of their lives outside of work (e.g. mortgages, supporting families). If the University claims to be a research-led University then they need to recognise and value those (predominantly women) that carry out the day to day research tasks, not just the multi-million pound budget holders. Also support staff play a vital role across all areas of the University and should be valued (again the majority of whom are women)."

"It could only enhance it if staff were given much more help moving between roles. It undermines the reputation of the University as an employer... it isn't unreasonable to expect more targeted support getting people into appropriate employment or offering an acceptable severance package especially for those who have worked for the University for long periods of time. The current redeployment scheme is difficult to judge because there is no clear information about the numbers of people on it, the length of time people on average stay on it before finding alternative employment, the ages and grades of people on the register given there is concern that this reorganization may be targeted at older more expensive people who have worked for the University for more than 10 years."

"It's definitely going to undermine staff and lower morale. Too often the University pays lip service to its claims to being a 'people first' organisation and supporter of local communities. This proposal has the potential to devastate people's lives, eventually all staff will be under threat and remember 'fear kills productivity'. It's a short-sighted approach to the problem and I would have thought that senior managers at Manchester University would have come up with a more creative solution."

"Undermine, although it was very badly managed when I was on it. if it was better organised it could contribute much more."

"It would greatly undermine the image of the university and would lower staff morale enormously! Personally, I would start looking for a job elsewhere instead..."

"The proposed changes would undermine the benefits of being staff at the University. Being 'permanent' won't mean anything. I've stayed at the University for 8 years but will be looking for jobs elsewhere if this goes ahead."

"... it would severely undermine the benefits to both the university and individual staff – what is proposed is a massive change to staff employment status/contracts, and I cannot see how making people redundant after 3 months would save money especially if the roles being filled by redeployment staff would then have to be advertised or agency staff taken on."

Additional anecdotes

"... it has helped reduce my anxiety nearing the end of contracts allowing me to concentrate on completing my job rather than running off in a blind panic to another institution. I worked on several short-term contracts (3 – 9 months) where my expertise was invaluable to my department and it contributed to my career development and loyalty to the University and more specifically my research clusters and department."

"HR are being unreasonable and arbitrary in moving the 37 of us currently on the redeployment register to a 3 month window to get redeployed or face redundancy. I am in this boat and believe my case gives a classic example of this unreasonableness and inflexibility. It was suggested to me that it would be good for me to go on the redeployment register in 2012 when Research Computing Services was being dissolved and before the IT Services reorganisation. When the IT Services reorganisation was happening from September 2014 through to early 2015 I was told not to be concerned because there would be negotiations to find me a more appropriate place in the University structure. I was assured that the work I was doing was valuable to the University. While on the redeployment register I have won research money as an investigator; I have been principal supervisor of 4 successful PhD projects and co-supervisor on a similar number, and am currently supervising 4 that have still to submit and am still getting new applications. I teach on distance learning courses that bring in income, and am currently heavily involved in brokering two very

important interdisciplinary collaborations across different Schools, both of which have the potential of bringing both money and prestige to the University. However after doing all this and providing details to my management as requested so they could find me a more appropriate position, I suddenly found in late April that I was one of the staff under Section 188. Under any reasonable definition I believe my work profile has been successful and beneficial to the University but I am still in the position of facing imminent redundancy, because of a lack of imagination in finding a place where this cross-disciplinary activity is secure."

"... once work started to dry up within XXX I managed to secure a secondment in XXXX, helping out during the beginning of the academic year. I also managed to get a couple of days a week working with XXX team.....The latter secondment was a lot more suited to my skill set, and within a month, I was lucky enough to be working in the faculty XXX team for the whole of my working week. This led to an offer of a six month temporary contract, which was renewed for another six months (both these temporary contracts were a grade lower than I was on at XXX but I was on protected pay). At the end of my first year with the team, I was offered a permanent contract at my original grade, and have worked with the team ever since. So the point I am making is that without the redeployment register being so flexible at the time, I might never have had the confidence to offer my services around other faculty teams. I seemingly made a valuable enough contribution to the team when on secondment, as they had the confidence in me to offer me a permanent contract – a role that they probably would have had to pay to advertise externally if I hadn't been available. And I am not the only one."

"Since going on the Redeployment Register I have been seconded to XXX. Over that period I have help the school secure over £XXM of grant income... I wrote the Impact case studies for XXX and XXX for the REF. ... Nancy particularly mentioned XXX in her statement about the REF. I have also recently worked on a bid that if successful will secure the School's overseas student numbers for XX years giving £Xm income pa at current overseas student fee levels which the HoS stated when I told him about the proposal to make me redundant would not have happened without my input."

"My experience was one of frustration and bewilderment. The key comment I would like to make is that the policy as it stands is worthless as it isn't "policed". Given that feedback has to be provided to an applicant either as to why they aren't being asked to interview, or have been unsuccessful at interview, the redeployee has nowhere to go with the information provided if they feel it is unjust, unwarranted, or actually counter to the intention and/or purpose of the redeployment register. Despite the fact the policy states that interviews should be informal, on two occasions I was confronted with surprise tests which I was made to take prior to the interview.... I was declined an interview because I hadn't met one of the essential criteria – this despite the fact the policy clearly states: "The key objective is to establish whether or not a ring-fenced employee meets or can be trained in a reasonable period to meet the essential criteria in the job's person specification. A candidate may not meet the full specification of the job but with training and within a reasonable period would be able to carry out the role.""

"My impression is that the idea of the Redeployment list is very good. It operated more efficiently back in 2009. When I was placed on the list I was assigned a junior member of HR whom I could contact regarding a particular vacancy. My HR contact would then forward my CV to the PI who advertised the position and provide me with his/her feedback. The same feedback was expected to be produced after an interview if I was short-listed for it. From the experience of my friend, XXX, I learned that this is not the case nowadays. HR expect you to sort yourself out so to speak. Their excuse is that "they are not well placed to match our skills with the vacancies because they are not experts in the field."

"I recently supported a member of staff who wished to return from maternity leave to reduced part-time hours (she was previously working full-time), which would not have been feasible in the role she was employed to. I found that HR gave me as her line manager good support throughout the process and successfully found a suitable position for my direct report in a role that suited her childcare needs within a reasonable time."

"I asked to be put on the redeployment register last year following submitting a grievance (which also was not handled well) but felt like I couldn't go back to my old role. I took my current temporary role, on the understanding that I am officially on a permanent contract and therefore 'safe'. This is also the impression I got from HR, who must have known that these changes were being considered. I feel very let down by the University and the secretive way they have handled this. I am now worried about my job security if these changes go through, even though I have always 'stuck to the rules' and am in this position because I reported a major case of bullying of a whole department."

"I recently applied for a role which had gone to Internal/External stage of recruitment and am a redeployee. I alerted the recruiter (by e-mail) to the fact that I had submitted an application as a redeployee and after two days of not receiving an acknowledgement of my e-mail, I contacted them again... I am really quite shocked that the recruiter has not responded to confirm or refute my understanding of the process or to arrange an informal e-mail which I thought would have been the required course of action... I am boiling mad about it tbh that as a Gr 4, I am explaining redeployment procedure to a Gr 5 or 6?? And the worst thing is she hasn't yet responded in writing to it???? HR have finally replied and said that they have forwarded my query to my HR Partner, XXX, but I believe that she is away from the office this week."

"I was redeployed in 2007 and the process was managed effectively by the HR officer at the time, who looked for suitable vacancies before they were advertised and put me in direct contact with the recruiting manager. This made me feel like a valuable member of staff and led to my successful redeployment. These days, the process is not managed pro-actively in this way, as we are told that HR staff are not qualified to decipher academic CVs. I am aware of one colleague who applied for at least 10 redeployment posts before (eventually) securing a new role. The reasons given by the managers who declined the applications ranged from mentioning that they had received a large number of applications from external candidates and had appointed one of those, to stating that the applicant was not trained in a specific laboratory technique that can be learnt in a couple of days. This highlights the problem with the University's policy of not ring-fencing research posts for redeployees at all before they are released to external and internal applicants. I have also heard that HR managers advise recruiting managers to make job descriptions/person specifications as specific as possible so that they will not be forced to take a redeployee. This sort of negative attitude reinforces people's prejudices and does nothing to help the redeployee. We need to go back to the days where encouragement and support was offered and the process managed much more proactively."