

The decision taken by the University to open the Voluntary Severance scheme is a direct attempt to undermine the ongoing joint consultation process. We are therefore advising UCU members not to engage formally with the Voluntary Severance scheme at this point in time and have set out our reasons for this below in the form of Q&A, split in two parts relating to Voluntary Severance and the “At Risk” pools, which we hope you will find helpful. Until UCU receives satisfactory responses to the various issues identified, we ask you to hold off applying for Voluntary Severance.

Voluntary Severance (VS)

Q 1: Why is UCU advising that I should not apply for or take part in individual discussion about VS at this point in time?

A1:

1. The University’s assessment of how many people need to be made redundant keeps changing in unacceptable ways. In particular, the number has risen from that indicated in the original business plan in one area, the Directorate of Finance
2. In at least one area, FBMH, the University has not committed to accepting retirement applications as examples of voluntary leavers, which would reduce the overall number of people who it is claims need to be made redundant.
3. In four business areas, SALC and the three PSS areas in FSE, the University has not yet consulted with the trade unions on the exact numbers of staff deemed at risk.
4. In FBMH, the University is seeking to redistribute the teaching workload up to the equivalent to the workload of 22.5 full time equivalent staff amongst existing staff.
5. FBMH is also seeking to create 10 new teaching jobs, on lower pay and fixed term contracts, to replace and take up some of the work of permanent staff being made redundant. This means they are not truly redundant; it is a cost cutting exercise designed to replace experienced staff on permanent contracts with less well paid staff on precarious contracts.
6. Similarly, across all the academic areas, the University is seeking to create 100 new early-career academic jobs on lower pay in place of the academic staff being made redundant. We are not convinced by the University’s assurances that none of these will be direct replacements taking up the teaching and research of those who depart.
7. In the four PSS areas, the University is breaching their commitment under the University’s [Introducing Change to Organisational Structures](#) policy by showing less favourable treatment to non-academic staff by failing to allow them at least 8 weeks to make any VS application decision.

8. In FBMH, SALC, AMBS, FSE/PSS, the University has not yet explained what steps they have taken to meet their primary duty of seeking to 'avoid' redundancies as opposed to 'mitigating' them through VS (which does nothing to avoid or reduce the number of redundancies).
9. In all the affected business areas, the University has not yet consulted with the campus trade unions on the selection criteria and thereby enabled those at risk to assess the likelihood of being at selected for redundancy when compared to other colleagues.
10. In all the affected business areas, the University has not yet explained how they intend to take action to remedy issues identified in their own Equality Impact Assessments.

Q2: When is a good time to apply for VS?

A2: Please hold off applying for VS until UCU are able to resolve some of the concerns above. Once UCU advise that consultations on the above matters have been exhausted, by all means apply if you genuinely wish to leave - as opposed to leaving the University under duress.

Q3: Will my delaying any application unfairly prejudice my application?

A3: No as this would be classified as unfair. Also, the University has told us that, even if staff apply earlier, no decision regarding who will be granted Voluntary Severance will be made until after the scheme is closed, which means there is nothing to gain or lose from applying now.

Q4: What if I'm not in the at risk pool but would like to volunteer to leave?

A4: If you are not at risk but would be genuinely interested in volunteering, please apply for VS. This will provide potential opportunities for the employer to allow you to leave instead of someone who wishes to remain. This is an established redundancy avoidance strategy known as "bumping" and can assist your colleagues. Contact HR in the first instance and copy UCU in so we can assist where necessary.

Q5: Is it ok for my employer to approach me individually or in a group and ask me to consider applying for VS?

A5: No, this would be potentially classified as being unfairly targeted to accept VS under duress. If this happens please contact UCU immediately.

Q6: If I have a query specific to my individual situation should I contact HR in the first instance?

A6: Yes. If, for example, you are pregnant you may wish to ask HR to explain how any maternity pay will be affected. Please copy UCU into any correspondence to enable us to assist you further if needed.

'At Risk' status

Q7: If I'm classified as 'at risk' by my employer do I have a right to be placed on the Redeployment Register?

A7: Yes the University has promised in its [Security of Employment Policy](#) to place all staff identified as 'at risk' on the Redeployment Register, and told UCU that it will do so on Friday 23rd June. The benefit of being placed on the Register is that the University has to give you PRIORITY access to NEW vacancies. See the links [here](#) for further details. If you are aware of any vacancies arising in your area during this redundancy process, you may wish to activate your right to receive PRIORITY access to the NEW vacancies.

Q8: How do I respond if the University says a particular new vacancy does not match my skill set and will not therefore be frozen for me while I consider applying for it?

A8: The University has made a commitment to you in the [Introducing Change to Organisational Structures policy, Section 4.8, Filling Vacancies](#) to conduct a relevant assessment on the new job being less than 51% of a match. You may wish to ask the HR to show you a copy of the 'assessment' they have conducted and explain and justify it to you. Please copy UCU into any correspondence so we may assist where necessary.

Q9: Do I have a right to challenge the fact that I have been placed in an 'at risk' pool?

A9: The University has made a commitment to you in its [Security of Employment Policy, Section 4.6, Review of Pooling Decisions](#) to allow you to seek a review. If you feel your pool size is unfairly drawn – for example, because of one of the issues we have raised in Q1 above – then you may wish to consider activating this right. Please copy UCU into any correspondence so we may assist where necessary.