

Statement by the Combined Unions at GCU regarding the announcement of a Mutual Severance Scheme

The Combined Union Committee at GCU are disappointed to see the opening of another Mutual Severance Scheme at the university. We believe this to be ill-considered given the current staffing levels at university.

At a time when national league tables tell us that we occupy the 4th worst position amongst **all** UK universities in terms of overall student: staff ratios, any scheme which leads to a further loss of staff in the institution can only exacerbate this unacceptable situation. There also needs to be an acknowledgement that high workloads affect all staff, and not only academics.

Successful workforce planning must be dependent upon detailed strategic planning for the short, medium and long-term, rather than a hasty response to short-term headwinds.

We believe that this requires a detailed portfolio review, carried out in consultation with staff and unions at GCU.

The current proposals appear to defer any changes to portfolio until after the Mutual Severance Scheme has been completed, which we believe lacks any strategic rationale except in the very short term.

Under the proposal, any staff accepted in the Mutual Severance Scheme must leave the university by July 2024, yet the refreshed 2030 strategy is not yet completed, and so the implications of the new strategy are not yet clear.

We believe this approach is the veritable cart before the horse strategy – making changes, losing staff, and by implication increasing

the workload for remaining staff before the future shape of the university is decided.

We regret that the proposal of the joint campus unions that the Principal should hold a meeting for **all** staff, chaired by the Chair of Court and with representatives of the unions on the platform, together with the Principal, has not been taken up by the University Executive Group or by Court

The approach to the Mutual Severance Scheme, proposed by the University Executive Group and endorsed by Court would appear to be driven by short term financial pressures, rather than the stated desire of the University Executive Group to rebalance resources.

The crippling losses at GCU New York which the University has correctly decided to withdraw from – in the region of £25m and previously sanctioned by Court, form part of the background to current financial worries, and ought to be acknowledged as a significant contributing factor to the current financial position of the university.

The Mutual Severance Scheme has been launched **before** the university knows exactly what the impact will be of the proposed cuts to sector funding by the Scottish Funding Council.

Decisions are therefore being taken without a full knowledge of the financial context facing us, and indeed without a targeted figure of financial or staff savings being stated.

It is also at a time when Court has acknowledged that we are better placed financially than many other universities and that we are presently in a strong place financially.

The points above were made to Court by staff and trade union governors during the discussion of the Mutual Severance Scheme proposal and we regret that they were not accepted.

Such MSS schemes are not new to staff and Unions at GCU. Indeed, the last one took place in 2017 and 2018. This approach did not resolve the University's financial position in the short or medium term.

Staff who are unsuccessful in their applications may become disillusioned in the institution. Reducing the headcount in general will also put more stress and workload on existing staff. Absence levels due to stress at the University and the lived experience of union members suggest workload is the most pressing issue. MSS can only make this situation worse.

We need long term strategic workforce planning not a reactive proposal to short-term financial pressure.

An MSS scheme **may** have some role to play in the future shape of GCU – yet this current scheme seems hasty and ill considered.

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