

EDUCATION SECTOR

Our Ref: MJR/vt

28th January 2011

Mr David Briggs
Human Resources Executive Director
Robert Gordon University
Human Resources Department
Central Services Building
Garthdee Campuss
Garthdee Road
Aberdeen AB10 7FY

Dear Mr Briggs

Your letter dated 11th January to my colleague John Kelly has been passed to me to respond. My apologies that the reply is not within your requested timescale.

I found the tone of your letter and the implication of compulsory redundancies should trade unions not engage in your specific proposals unhelpful and would request that if we are to make serious headway on any difficulties that the University has to face it would be best to work in a spirit of co-operation and partnership. Whilst I can understand superficially why you would want to introduce a John Lewis style gain sharing scheme I believe a higher education institution is not the same as a department store. Your workforce are not shop assistants but highly skilled and qualified professionals.

The John Lewis Partnership is a completely different entity than Robert Gordon University and the salary increase of the previous Vice Chancellor's pay is not the same as the pay structure for the John Lewis Partnership Chief Executive nor the ownership and profit distribution of the Company.

I fear you do not understand the role of a modern trade union if you believe my local representatives can be mandated to enter into negotiations by its Officials.

I have considered the specific proposals contained in your letter and although my union would recommend local representatives engage with you on serious alternatives to compulsory redundancies the union will not countenance support or discussions on a potential breach of the Framework Agreement signed on behalf of Robert Gordon University by UCEA and its subscribing institutions, nor on potential breaches to Equal Pay legislation by the removal of an agreed salary scale represented by the proposed freeze on incremental increases nor weakening of other contractual terms.

The proposal for staff to give up contractual holidays has been tried elsewhere in the sector and the difficulty was that in order to ensure staff who gave up benefits did not still suffer compulsory redundancies it required legally binding agreements from the University in question. They were not forthcoming, therefore support for a weakening of contractual benefits such as agreed holidays is not something the union would be interested in either.

My union would be willing to consider a voluntary redundancy scheme as one measure to avoid compulsory redundancies as well as discussions on other measures such as closing external recruitment, ending external contractors and bringing work back on site and other potential restructuring of work.

Clearly it would need participation from all trade unions to make effective discussions. If you have any confirmed dates that other unions will be attending then please let me know and I will seek to ensure Unite is represented providing of course that the agenda is not fixed around the potential unlawful proposals and ending the Framework Agreement arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Mike Robinson
National Officer
Education

Copy to: Fiona Farmer – Regional Secretary
John Kelly Regional Officer