

Education Worker News

Four Page Education workers supplement produced by the Organise! Education Workers Branch

Queens University Belfast plans hundreds of compulsory redundancies



News emerged in June of plans by Queens University in Belfast to make 150 members of academic staff redundant. This comes a year after the university attempted to pursue compulsory redundancies for the first time in its history, and now plans are afoot to axe at least 150 academic jobs at the university.

The university is blaming a funding shortfall and the 'poor performance' of some staff. However, local press contacted the Department of Employment and Learning who said funding for this financial year had actually

been increased, and were unaware of the plans:

"To date, Queen's University Belfast has not informed, or consulted, us on changes in the number of staff, or the provision of degree subjects, for the coming year"

Many of those expected to be targeted with compulsory redundancies are those who concentrate on teaching rather than research. Queens is currently in the Russell Group, a group of the top 20 research-intensive universities in the UK that is often

called the 'Ivy League' of the UK. Russell Group members account for the majority of government funding for universities, despite making up less than one-fifth of UK universities.

German department to go

The BBC reported that the first department to go under the new redundancy plans is the German department, with all of its courses to be dropped, and staff to lose their jobs. Paul Hudson, a spokesperson for the University and Colleges Union (UCU) said the planned cuts will be detrimental to education offered at Queens: *"Because all the people who concentrate on teaching are in the group who are being invited to leave, it gives the message that teaching is unimportant."*

UCU had warned staff to be vigilant in the past year and their projections look to have been correct given these newly-revealed plans. Jimmy Donaghey, of the UCU at Queens has stated that the projected number of academic job cuts is "up to 333".

In addition to German, the

Nanotechnology research centre in Electrical Engineering is set to close, along with the Belfast E-Science centre in Computer Science. A projected 10 academic jobs will be cut in the School of Maths and Physics, 4 in Politics and 6 in Geography, with many more spread across the University.

When asked whether he was puzzled by the fact that that QUB management was blaming a funding shortfall as a reason for job cuts, when, in fact, DEL government funding has increased this year, he said: *"Yes, that is puzzling. But even more puzzling is the fact that, in the 2007-08 accounts, Queen's surplus rose to £12.6m. The projected surplus for this year is £15m and reserves rose from £75m to £78m, so it is clearly not an issue over finance."*

He also stated that the University was using the current financial crisis as a "smokescreen" to allow them "to get rid of people who don't fit into their vision" of the future.

Workers are viewing the plans as another example of the recession being used to implement attacks on jobs, wages, and working conditions that they suspect bosses have wanted to implement all-along. In the last decade Queens has already 'streamlined' and closed many departments that aren't money-spinners: geology and classics both closed years back history of science is closing this year, and many others have amalgamated. Now that the German department is to go, many staff are asking 'who will be next?'

Organise! Education Workers Branch

This Education Workers News supplement of the Leveller is produced by the Organise! Education Workers Branch. Set up in August last year the Education Workers Branch is made up of Organise! members who work in education - from admin and support to research, teaching, lecturing and community education.

While the branch is specifically for education workers who are members of

Organise! we want to promote militancy and solidarity across the education industry. We are seeking to build a network of militant education workers that can begin to take effective action in defence of workers and students across the industry and in defence of education itself. If you are interested in getting involved in such a network, one that aims at active involvement in the day to day struggles of education workers while promoting solidarity with others in struggle then get in touch.

We believe that in order to successfully counter the attacks being carried out against workers that we need to organise industrially - such an industrial strategy is not simply for education workers though, such a strategy can and must be applied to every industry.