

Job cuts and course closures: History provision being axed and Politics department to be wound down

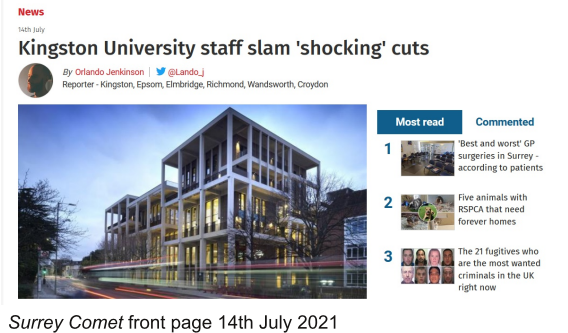
Outcomes of consultations regarding the future of History, Media & Communications, Film Studies and Politics staff were announced on 30th June. History provision will be permanently withdrawn. All three remaining Historians face compulsory redundancy. Staff teaching Media & Comms and Film Studies have been reduced by nearly 40%, as a result of colleagues opting to take voluntary severance or applying for other posts. Despite management claims to the contrary, workloads of those who remain have already been impacted as they scramble to work out how courses and modules can be delivered in the coming academic year.

The decision to suspend student recruitment to BA Politics, Human Rights and International Relations courses was taken before any consultations with unions were launched. Politics staff, kept in the dark about how many jobs were to be cut, faced a further consultation ending 31st July. Having drawn up lengthy proposals to save their department, the only one accepted for discussion was a merger with Criminology & Sociology. Several staff have already taken VS, and proposals are for future waves of job reductions in 2022/3 & 2023/24.

Management cited low student-staff ratios and poor forecasts for 'market-share' in these subjects. Staff repeatedly challenged the

accuracy of data on student-staff ratios, course rankings and recruitment, and questioned why Kingston wants to reduce its course portfolio and have fewer staff per student than its competitors at a time of **record-breaking applications** when pre-1992 university courses face being oversubscribed and more students are applying to study locally. These cuts have already damaged Kingston's reputation - professional organisations who have voiced their dismay include the [Royal Historical Society](#), [History UK](#), the [Society for the Study of Labour History](#), the [Political Studies Association](#), the [British International Studies Association](#), and the [Association for Contemporary European Studies](#). On the permanent withdrawal of History, the Royal Historical Society stated "we are all the poorer for the loss of this hub of historical excellence".

As covered in the local [Surrey Comet](#), staff have described the mental health impact of these consultations and the threat and reality of losing their livelihoods during a pandemic, in which they have made exceptional efforts to teach and support students, as inhumane. They have denounced the consultation process as a sham in which none of the issues raised over errors and omissions in the rationale, or counter proposals put forwards, were engaged with, with the substantive decisions having already been taken.



Surrey Comet front page 14th July 2021

Kingston UCU's view:

There has not been meaningful consultation about avoiding, reducing or mitigating job losses in breach of university policy on Managing Organisational Restructures and statutory obligations under the relevant law provisions in TULCRA Section 188(4). We have been ignored and sidelined, information requested has not been provided, and what has been put forward has been riddled with errors, omissions and misrepresentations.

These cuts follow a catalogue of poor management interventions and a series of course closures and job losses over the last four years. Warnings from staff about the damaging impact of management decisions have been repeatedly ignored. Management have acknowledged that poor decision-making in the past has resulted in this situation but refuse to be aided in improving their current poor decision-making by academic colleagues and trades unions.

Further issues related to these consultations

PGRs:

Worrying signs in treatment of PhD Students

The impact of consultation outcomes on the university's research profile and on post-graduate research appears to have been completely overlooked and downplayed. Doctoral students will lose supervisors as a result of staff leaving either by forced redundancy or voluntarily, many of whom made invaluable contributions to REF2021. Kingston UCU were deeply concerned to hear from History PhD students that they were told their historian supervisors could be replaced by non-specialists, namely art & design history staff from CHS. A majority of Kingston art and design historians signed a statement rejecting this on the basis of these being distinct disciplines with different methods, objects of study, training and expertise. Alternatively, it was floated by management that external supervisors could be contracted short-term for a very low flat-rate fee. This represents a shocking contempt for academic integrity and our post-graduate researchers, and reveals again that our management knows nothing about what the work of a Kingston lecturer actually entails.

UCU has launched a [postgraduate researchers as staff manifesto](#) and it is free for PhD students to join. Kingston UCU is looking for a Post-grad Student Rep, so get in touch if you are interested in taking on this role: email kingstonucu@gmail.com

EQUALITY:

Serious concerns over treatment of staff with protected characteristics

Kingston UCU has grave concerns about how staff with protected characteristics have been treated in consultation processes, including possible abuses of legal obligations related to pregnancy and maternity. Combined with significant and long-standing concerns about the university's capacity or willingness to act on safeguarding against sexual harassment, we believe this seriously undermines Kingston's claimed commitments to gender equality, and Athena Swan principles.

Kingston UCU is calling on all those involved in Athena Swan committees, working groups, and self-assessment teams to get in touch as a matter of urgency. Contact: kingstonucu@gmail.com

Kingston UCU has a new Equality Officer Lori Snyder. The more people involved, the greater is our potential to make change on Equality issues - there is scope for Lori to be supported by dedicated Black*, LGBT+, Disabled, Women and Migrant members reps. Get in touch if you are interested in taking on any of these roles (which can be shared): email kingstonucu@gmail.com

* UCU uses Black in the [political sense](#) – aware of the debate over the term we welcome discussion about whether others, e.g. BAPoC, Global Majority, would be better. A discussion in a recent BMJ plumped for "ethnic minority" as the least worst option.



CAMPAIGNS:

Decarbonise & Decolonise

UCU, Teach the Future, SOS-UK and the NUS have launched a joint campaign calling for the education sector to [decarbonise and decolonise](#) by 2030 ahead of November's COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Universities are urged to:

- embed UN Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) goals across all curricula by 2030
- consider ESD as it applies to different aspects of institutional practice including research, library and IT services
- establish a time-limited institutional decolonising commission with trade union, student union and local community involvement
- conduct a systematic review of representation across the institution to include staff, students and governance structures
- provide quality training for staff to prepare them for climate proofing & decolonising courses.

Kingston UCU are looking for a Green Rep to lead on issues of environment and sustainability, including the climate emergency and associated policies, energy and carbon management plans, ethical investment, food and land use, and ESD. Get in touch if you are interested!

Another restructure consultation, this time in IT

A restructure of IT provision has also been subject to consultation. Proposals are to reduce technician support at different campuses, to be replaced with a remote service from Penryhn Road. This will seriously impact teaching and learning, removing specialist support and expertise currently provided in different faculties catering to the bespoke demands of different courses, like the Digital Media Workshop support at KSA. UNISON colleagues have outlined the damage this would do in detail and depth. We await the outcome, but from our own experience this looks to be another detrimental restructure, rushed through via a disingenuous consultation during the summer when staff are exhausted and struggling to fit in statutory leave entitlements.

HEALTH & SAFETY: Ensuring a safe workplace in 2021/22.

In 2020 Kingston UCU fought for and won demands for mandatory indoor mask-wearing, and publication of risk assessments and positive case numbers. The outgoing Kingston UCU Health & Safety Officer, Fatima Felisberti, [raised numerous health and safety issues](#) related to equipment and working from home, the alert system and protocols for reporting and monitoring positive cases on campus, risk assessments being insufficient and out of date, oversights in access to inductions, and a lack of clear channels to escalate safety issues. In breach of legislation, there was a failure to meaningfully consult with trade union health and safety representatives, and the Health and Safety Committee failed to convene. Ultimately Kingston UCU branch passed a motion of no-confidence in senior

management's ability to provide staff with safe working conditions. The VC stated in an all-staff email in May that there had been no on-campus transmission of Covid-19, but Kingston's Health & Safety manager confirmed there had been at a formally minuted JNCC meeting.

Looking to the new academic year as cases surge in a third wave, UCU nationally is urging government to ensure all university students are offered full vaccinations before September and to work with universities to protect staff, students and local communities. In the new academic year extended cleaning protocols must remain in place and face-coverings should continue to be worn in indoor spaces (excluding those exempt), with high-quality masks provided.

Staff and students must also retain access to PCR tests. In line with legal obligations, Kingston UCU urgently need to see updated and robust health and safety risk assessments for both on-campus and at-home working. Modifications required to improve ventilation and allow for effective social distancing must be identified. Urgent steps need to be taken to improve mental health provision for students and staff following what has been for many (and disproportionately those with different protected characteristics) a traumatic year.

Kingston UCU branch is looking for a new Health & Safety Officer. Get in touch if you are interested or tell colleagues who may be interested in taking on this role (which can be shared) kingstonucu@gmail.com



CAMPAIGNS:

Defend the Arts and Humanities

Cuts and reorganisations at Kingston come alongside threats and cuts to jobs and courses at Chester, Aston, Leicester, London South Bank, Royal Holloway and Sheffield. This is part of a wider government-led attack on the arts and humanities that will see these subjects only available to students who are able and willing to go to a narrow set of elite universities long the bastion of establishment "privilege".

Going along with this flies not only in the face of Kingston's commitments to widening participation, but the VC's own much-trumpeted [Future Skills League Table](#) which highlights the importance of critical thinking, analysis, problem-solving, communication, and a questioning mindset, to employers. British Academy reports in 2017 and 2020 showed that disciplines such as history provide these skills, and yet the VC stated [on Radio 4](#) that Kingston was not a place for "more traditionally academic" subjects like History and Philosophy, and "other universities will do them". We think this is an appalling thing to say in any context, but especially on a nationwide broadcast, and does no service to Kingston University's wider reputation.

Meanwhile, the [government is happy to cut funding](#) for both humanities subjects and practice-based art and design courses by 50%, despite the fact the creative industries contribute billions to the UK economy (more than [£111 billion in 2018](#)). The VC needs to put his money where his mouth is and publicly confirm there will be no job cuts as a result of government decisions to slash funding to subjects in art and design, film, performing arts, journalism, and media studies.

Kingston UCU has been involved with the campaign to Defend the Arts and Humanities alongside branches at the RCA, Goldsmiths, UAL, UCL and many more. Sign the [petition](#) and sign up to [email updates](#) about the campaign. Follow on Twitter: [@defendthearts](#) and Instagram: [@defendartseducation](#)

UCU University of Liverpool have fought to reduce compulsory redundancies in health and life sciences from 47 to 2. A second wave of strike action starts Wed 4th August. Support on social media and [donate to the strike fund](#)

Kingston UCU bite-size

Promotions & Progression

We've had very worrying reports of how staff applying for promotion to AP or eligible for progression to SL have been treated, including breaches of [Incremental Progression and Academic Promotion](#) procedures, new processes in place unions have not agreed, bullying and discrimination. If you've had similar issues, please contact kingstonucu@gmail.com. N.B. KU UCU has not agreed Domains, which we believe breaches the national JNCHES pay framework ALL insitutions are signed up to.

St George's

KU UCU are concerned about the impact of plans to dissolve the partnership agreement by summer 2022 on jobs and terms, as staff face being transferred from KU to SGUL and vice versa.

Annual Leave

In June 2020, our request for enhanced annual leave carryover was rejected by management. Now, a week before the 2020/21 leave year ends, and having been pressured to take it, it's been announced staff can carry over up to 15 days with Dean approval.

Workload

At our June AGM, the ongoing workload crisis was raised. Proposals were put forward about how to deal with excessive and out-of-hours emails, maintain healthy work-life boundaries, and defend self-managed time. Staff need to stand together against performative presentee-ism and self-exploitation that damages our physical and mental health, and disadvantages people who lack different kinds of privilege. Help organise a campaign on the [Kingston UCU Discussion List](#).

Lecture Capture

This year KU UCU negotiated that lecture recording arrangements were a temporary emergency measure. We don't have a negotiated policy on the terms and conditions of lecture capture, but remind members that when audio or video of lectures are recorded for repeat or future use, the employer is holding personal data and must comply with GDPR. Consent to process this data must be informed and freely given, and can be withdrawn at any time. Assignment of licensing rights to recorded performances to the employer should be agreed not imposed. See [UCU Guidance on GDPR, moral & performance rights and accessibility in recorded lectures/lessons](#).

HEALTH & SAFETY: Mental health Research into university staff wellbeing during the pandemic

has shown that a majority are chronically emotionally exhausted, worried and stressed. 47% rated their mental health as poor and a higher proportion than the national average were unhappy and had high anxiety. What was already a crisis has become a catastrophe. We need active preventative stress control measure and management of stress-related issues, particularly in relation to ever-increasing workloads, not lists of links. Kingston UCU has a new Health & Safety (Mental Health) Officer, Georgia Butler. Get in touch to help us work and campaign on mental health and wellbeing.

EQUALITY: Anti-racism

This year Kingston UCU wrote to senior management and the Board of Governors with a list of [anti-racism recommendations](#). Get in touch if you are interested in starting / being part of an anti-racism working group

ANTI-CASUALISATION

Kingston UCU has a new Anti-Casualisation Rep, Eliza Tan. Given the shocking treatment of HPL and fixed-term contract staff – including a 'moratorium' on HPL conversion since 2017 – more than ever we need action against casualisation. If you are a member on a temporary contract, contact Eliza, if not encourage those you work with to get in touch / join.



Your branch, your union!

In view of these challenges it is crucial for Kingston UCU members to get involved. The branch is only as strong as the number of active members.. There are many ways to participate, and even small-scale actions make a difference:

- Come to branch meetings
- Sign up to the branch [discussion list](#) (personal email recommended)
- Be a departmental contact (see notice right)
- Become a [KU UCU Rep](#) (training and work time allocation available)
- Share your skills and time! Your help is needed with publicity, research, events organisation, education, design...
- Talk to colleagues in your department about branch activity, and encourage them to [join the union](#).

Departmental Contacts Needed!

To fight back together against attacks on jobs and conditions we need to ensure all members know what's going on across the university and can make their voices heard. Kingston UCU are looking for departmental contacts to: share branch publicity, feed local issues to the wider branch; and invite new staff to join. If interested, email kingstonucu@gmail.com and/or Comms Officer Maggie Gray.

Staying in touch

Email: kingstonucu@gmail.com
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Twitter: [@kingstonucu](https://twitter.com/kingstonucu)
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