

Staff at Queen Margaret University vote to strike

Queen Margaret University staff overwhelmingly back industrial action in row over job losses.

Staff at Edinburgh's Queen Margaret University have today backed strikes in a dispute over plans to axe 40 jobs.

In the ballot of University and College Union (UCU) Scotland members, 64% of those who voted backed strike action on a turnout of 72%.

The union says that QMU proposes to cut 40 jobs and has refused to rule out compulsory redundancies. The union also explained that in their view the university has not fully explored other options such as sharing resources, seeking savings elsewhere – particularly amongst the management team – and extending the period of restructuring.

The university has around 400 staff and UCU said that cutting 10% of its workforce would impact negatively on students' experience and the university's reputation. The local branch is due to meet later this week to consider its next steps.

UCU Scotland official Mary Senior said: "UCU members at Queen Margaret University have made it absolutely clear today that they have no confidence in the university's plans. The ballot result is a clear mandate for industrial action and to oppose plans for compulsory redundancies. Axing 10% of the workforce would have a huge impact on the student experience and on the university's reputation. Strike action is always a last resort but unless the university is prepared to reconsider its approach, disruption is a real possibility."

We asked the university for comment. A spokesperson from Queen Margaret University said: "Along with the rest of the higher education sector, QMU faces financial challenges with grant funding falling in real terms over recent years and rising costs such as pension and National Insurance contributions.

"Despite a positive growth trajectory overall at QMU, with costs increasing faster than our income, we have had to take action to reset the balance, and thus ensure we can continue to lead in providing relevant teaching and research and to continue to provide the supportive and stimulating learning environment of which we are so proud.

"We have been engaging with our staff and our trade unions on this for several months, and continue to engage with them and to consider fully all options. The University has not declared compulsory redundancies, committing itself to seeking to achieve the required reductions in staff costs voluntarily, and is making good progress on achieving this. We are disappointed that UCU members have voted for strike action, and will continue our consultation with staff and trade unions."