

Staff at Heriot-Watt balloted over strike action

The university is threatening compulsory redundancies and the University College Union (UCU) say they are balloting their members at the three university sites in Edinburgh, Orkney and Galashiels over possible strike action.

Apparently 130 jobs are under threat among university staff, and a ballot will open today and will run until 20 October 2020. The first staff would leave their positions in November under the university's plans which the union says are rushed. They claim that the loss of such a large number of staff would leave the remainder with higher workloads and less contact time with students.

UCU's Scotland official Mary Senior said: "This decision to cut 130 jobs at Heriot-Watt University will add to the worry and upset among staff and students. The news comes at a time when staff have worked tirelessly to keep the university running during the Covid-19 crisis and when the chances of finding other work will be hard. That these cuts come so soon after jobs losses in 2017 raises questions about the university's management and whether managers are using the Covid crisis as a smokescreen for unjustified job cuts.

"UCU is open to negotiation and consultation to avoid compulsory job cuts. We urge the university to work with us to

identify alternative savings, not rush through job losses at this difficult time. However, we are clear that members need to show their strength of feeling against these job losses, and that's why we are balloting members for strike action to defend jobs."

Strike action took place in February over changes to the pension scheme and pay. In 2017 the union say 70 members of staff lost their jobs and recruitment was frozen, and they claim that the university is using the pandemic as a smokescreen for 'unjustified job cuts'.

In August Richard Lochhead wrote to principals of all colleges and universities reminding them of the government's commitment to Fair Work and that employers should look to 'maintain jobs, pay their workers and work with them throughout the crisis'. He also said that compulsory redundancies should only be implemented as a last resort, and after all other cost-saving measures have been fully explored.