

University of Glasgow makes £20 million cuts

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The University of Glasgow in Scotland is the first to announce comprehensive cost-cutting plans in response to the £63 million, or 6.4 percent, reduction in university funding outlined in the 2011-2012 Scottish budget bill passed earlier this month. The plans represent a blueprint for the assault that is to be carried out across the sector.

Last week, the University of Glasgow announced plans to merge a number of academic departments and eliminate courses as it looks to make £20 million in efficiency savings by 2012-2013.

Under the plans, history, archaeology and classics are to be merged. Anthropology, social work and nursing, as well as several modern languages—Portuguese, German, Italian, Russian, Polish and Czech—are to be axed altogether. The Centre for Drugs Misuse Research is under threat.

The Department of Adult and Continuing Education, which provides evening and weekend courses for 5,000 adult learners each year, will see its funding slashed. At the University's Dumfries campus, environmental management is to be expanded at the expense of the liberal arts. All non-academic departments such as libraries, student support and estates will have to make cuts of up to 15 percent.

The university has already shed 200 staff via a voluntary redundancy programme that has been in place over the last year, and management has refused to rule out compulsory redundancies. The University and College Union (UCU) is to ballot staff for strike action.

Over the next four years, Scottish universities face a funding shortfall of £450 million for teaching and research, and £200 million for capital spending, as the UK coalition government's 80 percent cuts in university funding are passed on to Scotland and the other devolved regions.

The primary concern of the Scottish government and university heads is that the shortfall will see Scottish

institutions lose out to foreign competitors, on revenue from private investment for research and development, as well as overseas students who pay market rates of up to £12,000 per year.

University management, in cooperation with the Scottish National Party government, intends to preserve the commercial value of the sector—£6.2 billion in the gross value added—at the expense of students and their families, lecturers and staff, as well as the quality and breadth of the education system.

As a University of Glasgow spokesperson underlined, the “approach is twofold: to generate more income, and to pursue cost savings.”

In other words, universities will be moulded ever more closely to the interests of big business, while all those departments that are not of paramount importance to the market will be cut or at least starved of funding.

The costs of tuition are also to be passed on to students. On February 21, the *Herald* published excerpts of a leaked paper authored by Universities Scotland, the representative body of Scottish university principals and management, which urges the reintroduction of tuition fees. It suggests that fees of around £3,300 per year, the current English rate, be introduced by 2012, and should be payable upon completion by those graduates earning £21,000 or more.

The paper also advises other revenue-raising measures, such as increasing the number of overseas students, and hiking charges for students from the rest of the UK from around £1,800 to £6,500 per year. The Scottish government is attempting to introduce market-rate fees for students from European Union member-states, who are currently entitled to the same benefits as Scottish students under EU law.

Scottish Education Secretary Mike Russell has already begun to prepare the groundwork for these discriminatory measures. He is currently pressing the

European Union education commissioner, Androulla Vassiliou, for a change in the European university funding rules. He has stated that “we cannot allow them [Scottish universities] to become a cheap option for students who have to pay to go to university in their home countries.”

Despite budget cuts, Scottish universities have agreed to maintain student numbers this year out of their own reserves. However, places will be drastically reduced in the following years as universities move to meet constrained budgets. The leaked paper threatens that first-year admissions could be reduced by as much as 40 percent, or 14,000 places, next year.

Students and academics have opposed the initial programme of cuts proposed at Glasgow. On February 16, more than 2,000 turned out to protest, marching through the west end of Glasgow before holding a rally in the central quadrangle of the university. A letter of protest, signed by 170 academics from the university and 150 academics from other institutions, has been addressed to the education secretary.

Since the beginning of February, students have occupied the Hetherington Building, which housed a research club for mature and postgraduate students that was shut down by management last year due to financial problems. The Glasgow University Anti Cuts Action Network (ACAN) and Glasgow Against Education Cuts (GAEC) moved to occupy and reopen the club, upon news of management plans to turn the building into offices.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), who predominate in both anti-cuts groups, are working to keep opposition under the official control of the trade union apparatus, as they have done since the onset of student unrest last November. As reported in the *Socialist Worker*, February 17, an ACAN spokesman said that students “are now organising for coordinated action around the UCU strike and looking to set up joint ACAN and UCU action meetings.”

On its web site, the GAEC cites two of its key commitments: “To be multi-political, not apolitical” alliances and “To build systems of trust between disparate political groups.” What this means in practice is the shackling of students and workers to the trade union bureaucracy behind calls for a “non-sectarian”—i.e., uncritical acceptance of the leading role

of the union tops. In its coordination document, GAEC states its “Solidarity with...Trades Unions, NUS, Formal Groups etc....”

No trust should be placed in the trade unions and their pseudo-left apologists. The UCU will limit industrial action to ineffectual one-day strike action designed simply to diffuse social antagonisms. Last June, the UCU called off strike action when the University of Glasgow agreed to rule out compulsory redundancies as it embarked on cutbacks in the faculty of education, the Archaeological Research Division and the Faculty of Biomedical and Life Sciences (FBLS). The university instead made the cuts through a programme of aggressive efficiency savings and the leveraging of great pressure on staff to take voluntary redundancy.

For their part, the Glasgow University Student Representative Council (GUSRC) limited its anti-cuts campaign to the FBLS faculty, through which it lobbied management to make cuts elsewhere within the university.

The GUSRC is gearing up to lead students down a blind alley once again. The vice-president, Fraser Sutherland, pledges simply to “encourage even more students to turn out” in future demonstrations if the proposals are not dropped. An open letter, dated February 16, encourages students to be “involved in as great a capacity as possible” in the management consultation process.



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