

PROTEST AS DETAILS OF VIC UNI CUTS REVEALED

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Confirmation that 230 jobs are set to be cut at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington has been met with anger and sadness from staff.

On the lawn outside the Hunter Building which has stood for close to 120 of the university's 125 years, more than 250 staff and students stood in protest about the proposal.

During a staff forum yesterday morning, vice-chancellor Nic Smith confirmed 230 fulltime equivalent roles had been identified for redundancy as the university worked to overcome a \$33 million deficit.

The cuts target areas such as languages, secondary school teaching, tourism, management, geophysics and physical geography, with other programmes merging, and 39 general (non- academic) roles being targeted.

Programmes proposed to be discontinued included Italian, German, Latin, Greek, Design Technology, secondary school teaching, tourism management, and physical geography.

A consultation document outlining the proposed changes will be available to staff on Monday with a final decision to be announced on August 14.

Tertiary Education Union branch president at Victoria University of Wellington Dougal McNeill said there was "no academic rationale" and he understood the subjects most impacted were ones with lower student enrolments.

McNeill said there was "huge anger" and sadness among those affected. "It's going to cause years and years of damage to students. These disciplines take decades to build up and they don't come back."

He was especially concerned about similar cuts being made, like the disestablishment of German at the [University of Otago](#).

"You may see a situation where uncoordinated costs across institutions across New Zealand mean there's nowhere left to study. They're gone, and they're gone for good."

He was also particularly concerned about the loss of the secondary teacher training programme, describing it as an "act of vandalism".

McNeill said the universities existed in a funding model that pitted them against each other in competition.

He would be speaking at the university council meeting next week, when he would be encouraging members to vote down the proposal.

Despite meeting with Education Minister Jan Tinetti a fortnight ago, he said there were just weeks in which the Government could act. "These cuts will go through by August if they don't intervene."

Smith said the university had worked to retain as many programmes as possible to ensure a wide range of study choices. He confirmed all affected students would be able to finish out their studies.

He echoed McNeill's concerns about cuts at other universities, adding they would likely be to the same "financially struggling" programmes.

"We currently have a funding model that treats the institutions in isolation."

Smith was saddened about cuts to the language programmes, which he felt underpinned understandings of different cultural and belief systems, and to education given the teacher shortage.

He said it was an extremely difficult time for all, acknowledging the impact on people's lives and careers. Support was being provided to staff and they were working through the process as quickly as possible to reduce uncertainty, he said.

"I know this is a blow to our community, but I also want to acknowledge our areas of strength and distinctiveness, and our historical legacy as a university."

Smith said the Government response had been disappointing. At "bare minimum", he expected them to be open to having a discussion about the state of the sector and current funding model.

Tinetti said she had been talking with the Tertiary Education Commission about whether any further avenues could be explored.

"I know universities, and the wider tertiary sector, are currently facing a range of financial challenges due to declining domestic enrolments, high inflation and international enrolments yet to recover from Covid-19," she said.

Universities were not immune to wider changes in the economy and society. "They have to adjust," she said. "Changing what they teach and how they are organised is not unprecedented."

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