

# Dissent over staff issues at King's

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By [Melanie Newman](#)

Offer of voluntary post in the face of redundancies results in union's anger. Melanie Newman reports

King's College London has been criticised for advertising for an unpaid voluntary researcher while making 15 support-staff members compulsorily redundant.

An advertisement for a "voluntary research assistant" in the Institute of Psychiatry was carried on the university's website in March.

The post holder will be responsible for running a cohort study examining physical health and substance use. A masters in behavioural sciences is required, and a relevant PhD and clinical qualifications are "preferred".

King's said that the post was only advertised internally, involved "basic" tasks and was akin to a placement, and insisted that it could not replace a "regular" paid job - "if the volunteer were not there, no paid job would be created", a spokeswoman said.

But the unpaid role was criticised by the University and College Union, which is currently fighting plans to make 30 information resources staff redundant.

The 30 staff have been asked to reapply for 15 posts, some of which have been downgraded to grade one, with a salary of about £14,000.

Rick Trainor, the principal of King's, wrote to staff last month raising the prospect of redundancies and referred to a projected £14 million recurring deficit.

In a letter to the principal on 8 May, the UCU highlighted the decision by the ratings service Standard & Poor's to raise King's credit rating from AA- to AA. The service said King's held cash reserves of £185 million as of March this year and that its level of net debt was low compared with other institutions.

The UCU letter said: "We do not consider that a convincing case has been made for a single redundancy." It added: "If the financial situation really does require savings to be made from the payroll, the first thing to look at would be the 188 college employees earning upwards of £100,000 a year, at a combined cost of close to £27 million."

A £100,000 salary cap would save more than £8 million a year, the union argued.

The letter said many staff believed that senior management were using the global financial crisis as a pretext for pushing through restructuring. "Consultation at King's has now become a monolithic and unilateral process which involves staff simply receiving information," it said.

The campus unions had been given 24 hours' notice of the plan to make the information services staff redundant, and rooms were being refurbished to accommodate a centralisation of professional services before staff had seen the university's consultation document, the UCU said.

The university said that the restructuring of information services was unconnected with the financial situation and that staff had been consulted appropriately.

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