


(Schwanecke, G., 2023)

WHAKATAIRANGA KI PUNA

Thursday, November 9, 2023

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## Six courses cut, 140 redundancies at Victoria University

 Gianina Schwanecke | September 21, 2023



The full number of jobs made redundant and programmes cut at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington was revealed to staff on Thursday. (File photo)  
JOHN NICHOLSON / STUFF

Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington's theatre and music schools might not have been cut completely but will still have some work to do after the university announced it had cut 140 jobs and six courses.

The university has been working through a range of cost-cutting measures to address a \$35 million to \$38m deficit, exacerbated by a drop in student enrolments.

Earlier this year, it announced 229 roles had been identified for redundancy, meaning significant changes for close to 60 programmes. Consultation was paused in June after a \$128m Government funding boost for the tertiary sector, of which Victoria would get an extra \$12.3m over the next two years.

The final decision revealed on Thursday, confirmed an additional 65 roles were likely to be made redundant on top of 75 voluntary redundancies having already been taken up.

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A drop in student enrolments was seen to have exacerbated the university's financial issues, with it now facing a deficit of between \$35 and \$38 million. (File photo)  
MONIQUE FORD / STUFF

Six courses have also been discontinued, including: Greek, Latin, Italian, Geophysics, Geographic Information Systems and Physical Geography.

This marked a significant reduction in the number of originally proposed changes.

Several other programmes were earlier placed on managed pathways, including Theatre, the New Zealand School of Music, Modern Languages, and the Master of Design Technology.



Theatre and education lecturer Dr Kerry Palmer. (File photo)  
MONIQUE FORD / THE POST

Theatre and education lecturer Dr Kerry Palmer said though staff were happy to have been listened to, there would be a lot of work to redo the curriculum and the loss of three staff would reduce research capacity.



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“Overall we are really happy that theatre has been effectively saved as a standalone programme.”

The university would have to build back trust after the “brutal” process, she said.

The music school’s director, Professor Sally Jane Norman, said it would have a “huge impact”.

Of an initial proposal of 11 roles to be cut, nine were still being disestablished, including three roles held by more senior female staff.



Staff and students have been vocal in their opposition to the proposed cuts throughout the process. (File photo)  
BRUCE MACKAY / THE POST

Dr Nicola Gilmour, Head of the School of Languages and Cultures, said it had been an “arduous process” and was a “bittersweet” day with some wins for the school and plenty of losses, including Italian, which this year marked its centenary at the university.

She was pleased staff would be able to continue their research.







Dr Nicola Gilmour, Head of the School of Languages and Cultures. (File photo)  
DAVID UNWIN / THE POST

Vice-chancellor Nic Smith said the process had been “extremely challenging” and a “thankless task that no-one wanted to do”.

He spoke of the value of the “thoughtful, solution-oriented commentary and suggestions” that had allowed the university to find “innovative and sustainable solutions” to its financial challenges.



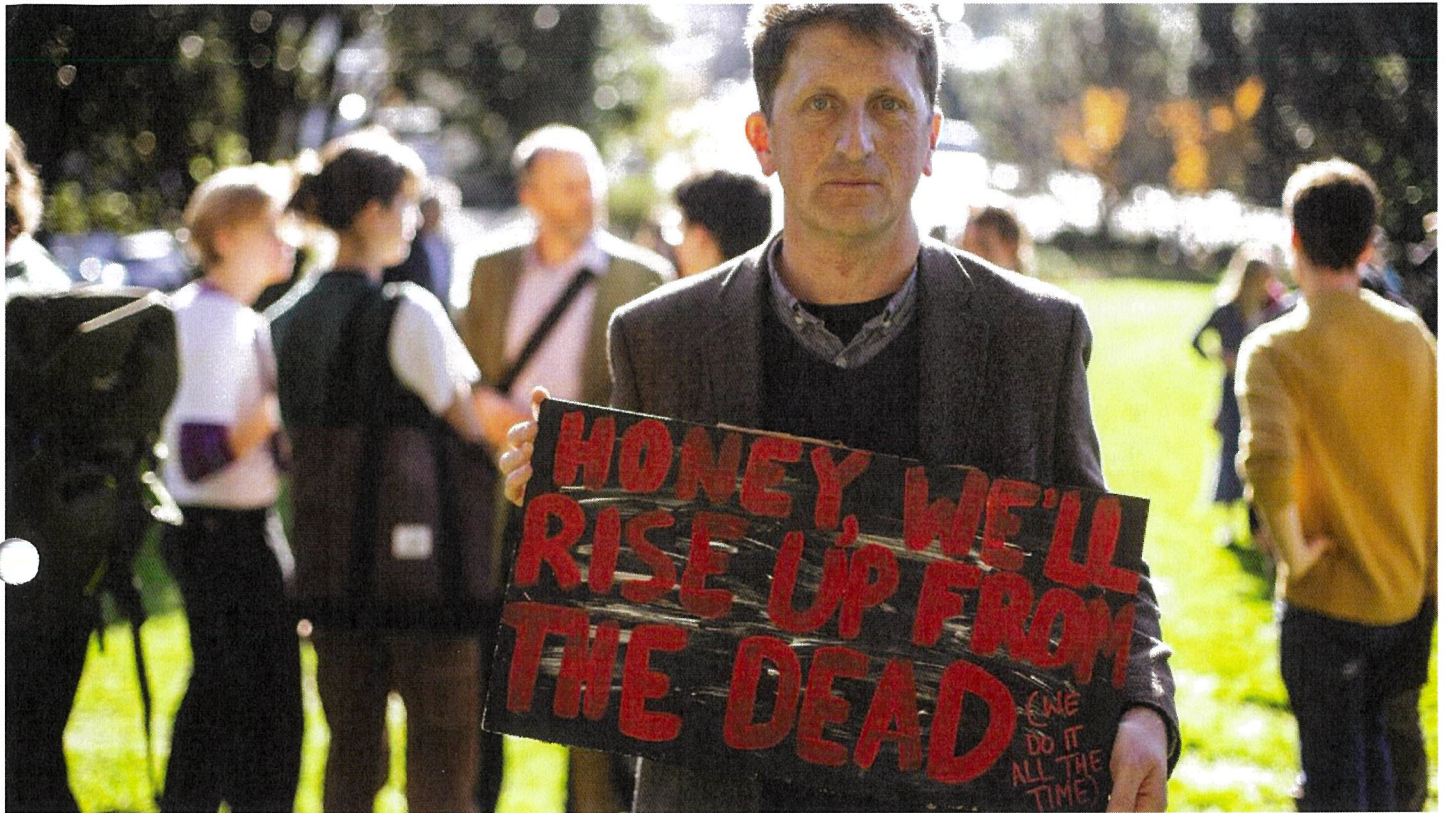
Vice-chancellor Nic Smith says the process had been “extremely challenging”. (File photo)  
JERICO ROCK-ARCHER / THE POST

“In a number of different areas – secondary teaching, theatre, languages – actually really innovative solutions have allowed us to retain staff to [a level] I think will produce actually an even better student experience and keep capability here in the city.”



Tertiary Education Union branch president at Victoria University of Wellington, Dougal McNeill, said it still represented a “significant loss” in teaching and staff felt a “deep disappointment and anger” about the impact it would have on students.

The union was especially embittered about the Government’s response, McNeill saying at the same time Education Minister Jan Tinetti promised more funding, the [Tertiary Education Commission informed her it intended to claw back money from universities.](#)

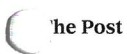


Dougal McNeill, the Tertiary Education Union branch president at Victoria University, welcomed the reduction in staff cuts. . (File photo)  
DAVID UNWIN / THE POST

McNeill was relieved management had “pulled back from the brink some of the worst decisions”, but felt the targeting of languages and humanities subjects had been “ideological decisions”.

Just eight months into the role, Smith was aware the sector was under pressure prior to arriving but had not expected to have to undertake such significant change so soon.

Smith expected things to have settled by the end of October, with the university aiming to be “back in black or close to it” by next year.



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