

# Equity bosses under fire over Scotland office restructure

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*Paul Fleming speaks to journalists outside Westminster. Photo: Mark Thomas*

A row has broken out between Equity's leadership and its members in Scotland and Northern Ireland over planned cost-cutting measures that will result in redundancy.

The changes impacting the union's Glasgow office have been criticised for taking place without the consultation of Scottish and Northern Irish members, leading to the loss of staff expertise and going against the principals of a trade union, the plan's critics have argued.

In a statement on Twitter, general secretary Paul W Fleming said a restructure is necessary to secure the union's survival, as he outlined a number of measures that he says will save £457,000 next year. He said savings are "badly need[ed]" as the union is facing a £600,000 deficit this financial year.

As part of this, a full-time organiser will be cut from the Glasgow office, which has responsibility for both Scotland and Northern Ireland. The office will cover only Scotland in the future. Fleming said it is his intention to recruit a dedicated organiser for Northern Ireland in the medium-term, but responsibilities for the country's members would be led by Fleming in the meantime.

The general secretary said he could not discuss the individuals involved before the full redundancy process is completed, however in a series of tweets Equity's president Maureen Beattie identified the organiser affected as longstanding Equity staff member Lorne Boswell.

According to Fleming the changes also include restructuring staff responsibilities in other regions – but this will not result in redundancies – as well as senior salary reductions, not replacing certain posts following retirement, and four voluntary redundancies. In some areas new members of staff will be recruited.

The changes were voted through 21 to three by Equity council earlier this month. The Stage understands the three councillors who voted against the move were the national councillors from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Fleming said the cost-cutting in Scotland was based on the fact the country "accounts for 5% of the union's membership but 15% of its organiser resource", while Beattie described the Glasgow office as "overstaffed".

"Nobody is happy with this state of affairs – but we are in the middle of the largest economic and social crisis since the Second World War. My primary duty as general secretary is to plan to protect our union's independence and act in a way that creates ongoing stability for our members and staff into the future," Fleming added.

The restructure plan has been heavily criticised by members in both Scotland and Northern Ireland, who claim implementing compulsory redundancies is "anti-trade unionist".

A petition started by actor Kirstin McLean, who sits on the Scottish National Committee, calls on Fleming to halt the redundancy process while the furlough scheme is still in place to allow for full consultation with members, as well as to "reverse the centralisation of Northern Ireland staffing to London". [It has so far been signed by 1,294 people.](#)

McLean told The Stage: "Whatever [financial] figures Paul Fleming is putting out there do not and cannot take away from the fact the most experienced member of staff in Glasgow, with irreplaceable experience, is being made compulsorily redundant a week before Christmas, when there is a furlough scheme in place until the end of March."

She believes it is unfair that Equity's council should "decide on the fate of a member of staff in a nation that most of them do not live in", describing the absence of consultation with Scottish and Northern Irish members as alarming and "completely wrong".

McLean added: "I can't put into words how much of a loss it will be if it's not reversed... Lorne is Equity in Scotland, that's not an exaggeration."