

January 2010

Staff Cuts Will Affect Teaching Former UCU Boss Tells *Forge Press*

Prior to his departure from the University under the voluntary severance scheme, former UCU Branch President, Steve Collier, took the opportunity to warn the University's student newspaper about the impact of VSS and to reveal the truth about the poor handling of the LETS review.

Here are extracts from the interview, which made the front page of *Forge Press*:

"Departed (UCU) President, Steve Collier, has dismissed the University's insistence that teaching standards will be maintained in light of the recent staff cuts.

Collier, who worked as a Producer and Educational Designer within Learning and Teaching Services (LETS), [...] said that the reduction in staff within professional services will result in remaining members of staff, or even academics, having to work twice as hard to compensate for the shortfall.

He said: 'So far the Vice-Chancellor is full of rhetoric about how this will not affect students' experiences. But I do not see how it cannot.'

Vice-Chancellor Professor Keith Burnett detailed in June that a budget deficit of £25million needed to be bridged by the year 2011/12, with £15million being generated through reducing staffing costs.

Collier claimed that since the failed closure of the Biblical Studies department, the University are anxious not to sack academics over members of staff from professional services.

He said: 'The students jump up and they listen. They're far more scared of you guys.'

[...] He has also hit out at the 'secretive' handling of the restructuring of the Learning and Teaching Services (LETS) department and claimed that the University failed to inform staff until July 2009

that a third of LETS employees would lose their jobs. [...] He said the job cuts were a 'knee-jerk' reaction to the University's financial troubles [...] and claims the job losses were confirmed as new positions at the top of the University hierarchy were created, which he estimates add half a

million pounds to the University's wage bill.



[...] Collier claimed that the cutbacks have been made because of ignorance on the University review panel about the function which LETS performs.

He said: 'The review panel have obviously got the opinion that if someone can press the record button they can make educational programmes. It's a bit like 'if you can use a word processor, you can write a novel'.'

Along with many of his colleagues, Collier opted to take early retirement under the Voluntary Severance Scheme (VSS), but argues that he took it because 'there would not have been a job anyway'.

Collier said: 'They told us we must not tell anyone what was going on. I suspect they were waiting for the VSS people to leave and then they could blame it all on the VSS.'

'I do not think there is a single person who has left LETS on the VSS that would have taken VSS if they had not known that they had no job. Ironically the two people that wanted to leave were not allowed to take it. They have kept them, which is just the craziness of it.'

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Resurrection Time!

Department of Biblical Studies Rises Again!

After a review concluded that undergraduate teaching in the department of Biblical Studies was no longer sustainable due to falls in undergraduate applications, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities decided to disband the department and turn it into a postgraduate research centre. The loss of teaching and support staff jobs, not to mention of the cultural and academic capital the department brings to the University was, presumably, viewed as the price that had to be paid.

Reliable sources have spoken of extensive manoeuvring behind the scenes and the bullying and gagging of Biblical Studies staff in the months leading up to the announcement of the closure. The decision to close the department attracted worldwide interest, becoming a *cause celebre* for some elements of the religious press and prompting protest letters from all over the world.

Matters came to a head following UCU's grievance submission, when a student protest spilled over on to the floor of a live senate meeting, reportedly prompting a round of "pass the buck" with no one apparently willing to accept responsibility for the decision. The University Senate was forced to reconsider and then to reject the Faculty decision. The Vice Chancellor has subsequently apologised for the lack of communication, amidst concerns that many members of staff and Biblical Studies students hadn't even been aware that their department was about to close.

Senior Management Agrees to follow UCU Demands in Conduct of Future Reviews

Following the debacle of the LETS review and the furore surrounding the decision to close Biblical Studies, Senior Management have conceded that they have much to learn in terms of the conduct of reviews and restructures.

The UCU branch committee put in collective grievances in both cases, accusing Senior Management of failing to consult staff and the campus unions and of insufficient communication with affected staff. The University was also charged with a failure to undertake meaningful Equality and Health and Safety assessments (to measure the likely stress impact on staff).

The University has acknowledged that there were procedural failures. As a result of the committee's intervention and demands, in any future review or restructure, the University has committed to:

- review current practice and university guidelines
- undertake a review of how the LETS review was conducted and produce a report that demonstrates how lessons learned regarding risk assessment will be implemented
- ensure that campus union input will be a major part of this work
- provide clear and explicit good practice guidance on the management of change to managers (to include clear instruction on engaging staff, risk assessment, Equality Impact Assessments etc)
- ensure that managers have insight to understand how these activities can cause stress for others
- promote skills to deal with difficult issues with transparency and respect
- establish an audit mechanism to determine whether the good practice guidance is being followed
- advertise and promote good practice
- engage with stakeholders to ensure there is clear understanding of responsibilities and duties

The UCU Branch Committee are committed to working with the other campus unions and University management to negotiate and introduce changes to improve members experience of any future reviews. Documentation and meetings to begin this process are currently being prepared by both sides and shared. We are looking forward to a more structured and transparent approach from management. We will keep you posted.

Are you aware of a review or restructure in your department? Are the commitments listed above being observed? Please let your branch committee know and keep us informed by emailing ucu@sheffield.ac.uk

Smile!—You're On Campus Camera!

Since 1998 most public areas around the University have been covered by CCTV, but the new Jessop West building has brought sharply into focus the fact that the University's surveillance system falls below the standards spelt out in the Information Commissioner's 2008 Code of Practice (ICCoP). This came to light due to understandable staff alarm resulting from the appearance of a discreet 360° dome camera outside glass-fronted teaching rooms. While the University insists individuals are not targeted, this is a potentially worrying development since the use of information can easily change – remember University assurances SRDS information would not be used for setting pay? New arrangements on setting professorial pay now precisely include SRDS data. Teachers in schools regularly have their lessons monitored by managers using CCTV. If, as management claim, the cameras are only to watch property that may be left in the rooms then why not have cameras in all teaching rooms and all offices? This prospect is, no doubt, one few members would find very comforting.

The University's CoP (UCoP) currently limits access to recordings, but the possibility of managers viewing live footage is less clear. Issues also arise from the fact that the system is not anonymous, since the university holds photographic records of all staff and students and room bookings can be checked online. Safeguards can be removed with a few mouse-movements, and other amendments can easily be made without any consultation with unions. The ICCoP requires an impact assessment be taken before the deployment of cameras, including consultation with those who will be under surveillance to ascertain their views. This has never been done, which is hardly a surprise since many other statutory stress risk assessments have not been carried out either, leading to a

series of stress-related incidents being reported. ICCoP also requires prominent signs to be deployed at the periphery of the system, *reinforced by signs within the control zone* telling people they are under surveillance and who to contact about this. This is held to be especially important *when cameras are discrete or deployed in areas where one would not usually expect to be monitored*. Both

conditions apply to Jessop West, where there is no signage at all.



Following a meeting with the unions, at the request of SUCU, the University has now agreed to investigate the issue of signage and to incorporate certain elements of the ICCoP into the UCoP. It will be interesting to see the outcome of this

consideration. Adherence to the bare minimum provisions of the Data Protection Act does not make failure to meet the standards set by the ICCoP acceptable. We would be interested to know if there are any other cameras about which members feel uncomfortable and what level of consultation with staff about the location of cameras has been carried out across the university. Vigilance is necessary if the rights of staff to go about their work without being constantly monitored are not to be sliced away like slivers of salami.

The ICCoP is available online at:

www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/data_protection/detailed_specialist_guides/ico_cctvfinal_2301.pdf

Your Union

Meetings

Meetings are open to UCU members only. A sandwich lunch is served from 12.45pm. All meetings will start promptly at 1pm and finish at 2pm.

Monday 8th February, 2010	Fulwood Room
Tuesday 9th March, 2010	Fulwood Room
Friday 23rd April, 2010	Fulwood Room
Wednesday 9th June, 2010	Abbeydale Room

Subscriptions

Earnings	Subscription
£40,000+	£17.17
£20,000—£39,999	£15.68
£10,000—£19,999	£9.32
£5,000—£9,999	£4.60
Below £5,000	£2.23 (no local sub)

Please note: these are the monthly rates including the local subscription

Workload Increases

The full impact of the voluntary severance scheme (VSS) has yet to be felt across University departments, yet already Sheffield UCU members are alarmed at the effect the scheme is having on workloads. Heavy workloads have long been recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as a cause of workplace stress, and during its inspection of the University in 2007 the HSE was concerned at the lack of formal procedures to address possible work related stress.

Employers are required by law to “undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment the risks to the health and safety of employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work”. Stress arising from excessive workloads is one such risk.

Sheffield UCU has in the past been reluctant to argue the case for formal workload measurement believing that work can be fairly managed in departments without recourse to such an approach. However the increase in concerns raised by members suggests that this is clearly no longer the case, we believe that the only way to ensure that members are not overburdened, that increasing workload is shared equally amongst individuals, irrespective of their grade or status and that workloads are manageable within the contracted hours of work is to use appropriate and fair workload measurement. The Committee view is that workload measurement should be

open, transparent and that the tools used within departments are not imposed, but devised with the full involvement of those to which they apply. With these



principles in mind we will continue to work with HR to ensure that members are not subjected to unreasonable workload pressures, and that the University fulfils its legal obligation to fully address the welfare needs of its employees.

We are keen to put together information about the different workload models currently in use or being developed across the university. You can send information about this to ucu@sheffield.ac.uk together with any information or concerns you have.

We will be continuing to hold workload drop-in sessions on a regular basis. These have proved popular and useful to those who have taken advantage of them.

Our New Branch Organiser

Supporting UCU members at University of Sheffield
Anna Symington (lately of LETS) has joined us in the role of temporary Branch Organiser.



You can contact her on
Wednesdays and
Thursdays

0114 2228976

ucu@sheffield.ac.uk

UCU Support

Got a problem at work and need to talk to someone?

Email ucu@sheffield.ac.uk with contact details and a clear but brief description of the issue and we will respond as quickly as possible.

Need additional personal support? The College and University Support Network (CUSN) offers UCU members a range of services from factsheets to counselling.

Access these services online or via the 24/7 telephone support line:

<http://cusn.info/>

Freephone 08000 329952

This Bulletin is a campaigning newsletter published by the UCU Committee at the University of Sheffield. If you wish to comment on an item, to suggest a topic for coverage in future issues, or to contribute as a member, please email ucu@sheffield.ac.uk.