

IAN PARKER RESIGNATION STATEMENT

I have resigned from Manchester Metropolitan University.

My position there now is untenable. I was suspended for questioning workload arrangements and appointment procedures. The university then issued misleading statements to the press implying that there were other reasons for the charge of 'gross professional misconduct'. This attack by the university on my rights as an academic, on my scholarly work and on my trade union activities has had lasting effects, and every attempt to try and repair the damage done has been blocked by them. Written evidence presented to my disciplinary hearing by one of my managers included the unwittingly telling sentence: 'I deeply regret the situation and the inexorable damage incurred by my Department and the University'. I must say I agree! The basis of the campaign to support me was that issues of secrecy and control were at the heart of the activities that led to my suspension, and that the documents should be released to make clear what the charges were and so clear my name. An archive of material about the case was accumulating throughout the campaign at www.asylumonline.net/ian

Key documents

There has been a sustained attempt to silence me, and suppression of the documents has (as the university well knows) worked against me. This is why I am now making these documents available so readers can make up their own mind as to whether I was absolutely right every step of the way, whether what I did was silly and rude or whether I committed heinous crimes that should be punished with an attempt to end my academic career.

On 18 May 2012 during my time as a University and College Union (UCU) campus representative I sent a 'confidential' email to some individual colleagues in my department about workload for the next academic year [www.parkerian.com/120518.rtf]. This email was leaked to the head of department by one of the recipients, and I was called to a meeting, before which I sent an open email on 21 May to the departmental list so that it was clear what I had done [www.parkerian.com/120521.rtf]. A warning letter sent by the head of department constitutes what MMU refer to in the second of their two charges as 'a reasonable management instruction' [www.parkerian.com/121003.rtf].

On 26 Sept 2012 I sent an email to the head of department questioning secretive procedures over a new lecturer appointment [www.parkerian.com/120926a.rtf], and following their reply, which did not allay my concerns and invited me to consult Human Resources [www.parkerian.com/120926b.rtf], I sent an email to the department, copied to the head of Human Resources (HR) and the Vice-Chancellor [www.parkerian.com/120926c.rtf]. It is this email that MMU refers to in the second of the two charges as the email 'intended to undermine the credibility of a Head of Department'.

On 2 Oct (at just before 16.00) a disciplinary letter called me to a meeting at 11.00 on 3 October [www.parkerian.com/121002.rtf]. I said I could not attend this meeting because it was too short notice for my union representative to attend with me, and so on 3 Oct I was suspended [www.parkerian.com/121003.rtf] with immediate effect. To cut a long story short, the disciplinary hearing on 7 October resulted in a verdict that my first email about the appointments in September was within the remit of my work as a UCU representative,

but the email copied to the whole department (and HR and Vice-Chancellor) was designed to undermine the head of department and thereby also disobeyed the reasonable management instruction not to send such emails. The charge was downgraded from 'gross professional misconduct' to 'professional misconduct' and the penalty was that I would be issued with a 'final written warning' which would mean that I could be dismissed instantly for any further perceived wrongdoing. I was also instructed to write a letter of apology to the head of department (for sending emails that undermined her authority). While I was tempted to be stubborn about this, I realised after some discussion with friends that there were aspects of the emails I could and should apologise for. So I did write and send that apology [www.parkerian.com/121204.rtf]. The way was then clear for me to return to work. I was also clear, however, that I was not returning to a department where I had been bullied and harassed (as I explain below). An appeal date was set for 30 January 2013, but by then it became clear that this appeal, like the hearing, would not be fairly conducted.

I appealed on the grounds that, in the words of the MMU disciplinary procedure, 'the penalty is disproportionate to the alleged disciplinary breach' (an email copied to colleagues questioning appointment procedures while I was UCU campus representative does not constitute gross misconduct), 'the disciplinary procedure was not correctly followed' (the composition and conduct of the panel was inappropriate, it included HR personnel who had already sent disciplinary letters) and 'new evidence has emerged' (of the Vice-Chancellor's involvement and prejudgement of the outcome of the process, which I will return to below).

Personal attack

I have been personally attacked and my work has been undermined in the past year. I have been particularly unlucky because I have spoken out, but I am not the only one in my department (or in MMU) to have suffered from intimidation that falls within the scope of the university's bullying and harassment policy.

For example, a date (21 June 2012) was agreed for my own annual Professional Development Review (PDR) with the head of department, but this was cancelled, and replaced by a PDR with two managers, head of department and the dean, on 10 July. At this PDR (where I was told that I had published too much and that I should stop my trade union representative activities on campus) I was set 'objectives' for the year ahead by the dean. I acknowledged that these were the objectives set for me on the PDR form sent after the meeting to the dean, and in August I was called to another meeting with the head of department and dean about the PDR. I consulted my union branch officers, and on 12 September I emailed the dean questioning the way my PDR was conducted and asking for alternative PDR arrangements. The eventual response to this email from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor was to refer the matter to Human Resources as a disciplinary matter. I began preparing my grievance against managers in MMU for bullying and harassment (eventually formally lodged after I was suspended, and which I had to prepare when I had no access to my MMU emails to gather the information I needed to make my case) with a statement outlining my case submitted on 3 November.

When my suspension was lifted I was instructed to return to my department the next working day. I went to my doctor and obtained a medical note for anxiety / stress at work. A date for my grievance was set on the morning I was due to meet again with my doctor. By this time it was very clear that the grievance, to be conducted by a member of the MMU

directorship would (as with many other such grievances taken out in the university) be conducted as if it were a disciplinary hearing. I now have to think of my health in these intolerable circumstances, and this is one reason I have resigned.

Professional position

My professional work as an academic has been undermined to the point where there is now nothing left to return to in the psychology department. Not only have my conditions of work changed, but the research base I helped to build in the last 27 years at MMU has very rapidly been dismantled. I have organised conferences and research seminars with visiting scholars, travelled and made links with universities around the world, and worked with colleagues to write research material that have helped put MMU on the map as a centre for innovative research methods and critical work in psychology. I have taken pains to ensure that this work feeds into teaching at postgraduate and undergraduate level. Even during my four years from 1996-2000 at Bolton Institute I carried on supervising PhD students registered at MMU and co-organised an international conference in 1999 at the psychology campus.

In the past year obstacles have been placed in the way of research visitors, I have been prohibited from travelling during term time, and my courses in critical psychology and psychoanalytic research have been cut. I have been undermined personally and professionally, and MMU psychology is now oriented to mainstream models and methods, so losing the basis of its distinctive reputation in relation to other psychology departments in the UK. Courses in disability studies and community psychology have also been cut. The reputation of MMU psychology for innovative critical research has been extinguished. It has been made patently clear to me that there is no place for me now in that department.

My students

I have attempted to engage with MMU during this difficult time, and to appeal to those who might have some remaining sympathy for an academic ethos of open inquiry in the university. At the same time as the National Student Survey (NSS) is invoked as a reason to ratchet up workloads of teaching staff, the university actually seems to have contempt for the students themselves. Beyond responses to the NSS, the self-activity and questioning spirit of students is treated with suspicion or (in the case of the campaign to support me) demeaned.

I have endeavoured to find a solution that would protect the careers of my PhD students. I carried on meeting with PhD students and there have been sometimes agonising discussions about how we can continue with their research, how I might continue to be involved in supporting it. I have made the case to MMU for me to be transferred to another department, and I have even offered to do this on a fractional contract so that I can carry on supervising those students already registered. The university has made it clear that it will not agree to this reasonable request.

The union

I attempted to raise issues about secrecy and control as a campus representative of UCU, but this has proved to be a near impossible task over the past year. In my emails about

workload I attempted to raise the question of increasing pressure on staff, first in 'confidential' emails and then in an email to the whole department. I thought the level of fear was such that it was necessary to first canvas opinion privately and thereby to facilitate the accumulation of information about workload for open collective discussion. I sent these emails while I was UCU representative on Gaskell Campus, and at the disciplinary hearing argued that this was in the remit of my trade union activities. The disciplinary panel agreed that I had the right to raise these questions, but disagreed with the way I had done it.

There was an attempt in my PDR on 10 July 2012 to prevent me from acting as trade union representative. The UCU branch was one of the few 'safe' spaces to discuss matters of workload and intimidation (indeed an open Gaskell branch meeting on intimidation had been arranged by me for the end of the week of my suspension). Now I discover that the head of department has arranged to transfer into the Gaskell branch of UCU. I fear for the ability of my colleagues to organise now to defend their conditions of work. It is clear that there is little I can do to help them with the restrictions imposed on me.

Institutional context

I wrote to the Director of HR on 10 December 2012 to tell them that my work is no longer valued in the Department of Psychology. There has been a deliberate change without discussion of my conditions of work and status in the department, a breakdown of trust, and my complaints have been ignored. I told HR that I believed that there would be a resumption of the bullying and harassment I drew attention to in my grievance. I requested that I be transferred to the Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on a fractional contract which would cover supervision of my existing PhD students and enable MMU to enter my publications in the 2013 REF (with the Education Unit of Assessment, as it was in the last RAE). ESRI indicated to me that they would have been agreeable to this if there was agreement inside MMU to transfer resources from the Health Faculty to Education.

Discussion with colleagues in other departments has revealed a pattern across MMU to the secrecy and control that I drew attention to in my emails about workload and appointment procedures, and of victimisation of those who dare to speak out. The head of department claims that she is merely implementing what she calls the 'change agenda' in MMU, and the problem may be that she is obediently and enthusiastically doing what senior management in the university tells her to do.

When I appealed to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for research for help after my PDR he referred the matter to Human Resources, with the implication that even for that I would be subject to disciplinary action for complaining about the way I had been treated. During the period of my suspension MMU has insinuated in press comment that my suspension was for matters more serious than sending emails about workload and appointment procedures. The Vice-Chancellor himself made such comments when a group of students and visiting researchers delivered the petition about my case to him on the morning of my disciplinary hearing.

Support campaign

Had I obeyed the 2 October management instruction not to discuss my suspension with anyone I would have been finished. The UCU branch at MMU has been steadfast in their

support for me, and their members have taken initiatives to protect all our trade union rights that have put them personally and professionally at risk. They gave me good advice when I was at a loss to know what to do, and they accompanied me through the process. I admire all those activists who spoke out and organised, and they will now carry on battling against MMU management from the inside. My friends in different universities around the world mobilised to defend me even when they did not know exactly what I had done wrong. They trusted that the insinuations by MMU must be a ploy by the institution to undermine my case, and through their emails of protest and the petition they consistently called for the university to be open about what it was doing and why.

Activists in the democratic psychiatry movement supported me, including through keeping a page of the Asylum website open with information about the campaign. Comrades in the left in different organisations were a source of political strength. Colleagues in psychoanalytic organisations also came to my aid, and insisted on the ethical dimension of the questions I was asking and my right to ask them. And a group of students and international visitors who suddenly found their academic work disrupted by what has happened rallied around and did many surprising and wonderful things to support me and my loved ones. I can't imagine what it would have been like if I had remained silent and isolated. What I have learnt through the course of this campaign is that there are many who have been attacked and defeated and rendered invisible and miserable.

The future

There are some remaining issues.

While my disciplinary hearing was taking place on the morning of 7 November a group of students and visiting international researchers delivered a petition to the Vice-Chancellor in his office protesting against my suspension and about the secretive way that MMU has managed my case. I was astonished to learn he told this group that he had 'never come across anything so serious' and that even after the outcome of the hearing 'not all the facts will be made public'. The implications of this statement by the Vice-Chancellor, if it is true, are very worrying, for it indicates not only that he had prejudged the case, but that at no point would MMU release full details of the case so my name can be cleared (and this is one reason to make the documents available now). I wrote to the Vice-Chancellor, and the student/researcher group issued an open statement (both are at www.asylumonline.net/ian). His response was simply to refer the matter to HR, and I was told that my correspondence with him will be dealt with at my appeal. This is grotesque, and I am still demanding a retraction of his comments and an apology.

In the psychology department there is much unhappiness but now no voice of protest. In that sense the head of department has succeeded in implementing what MMU calls its 'change agenda'. The fiction is enforced that everyone is a willing accomplice, but not all of them are. I have been in contact with a number of colleagues in that department, and four of them who have disagreed with the way I raised the issues about workload and appointment procedures have nonetheless indicated that they are willing to speak anonymously to the press.

I have to carry on now outside MMU. I have editing and writing projects and psychoanalytic work which will keep me busy. I will continue to work in the context of the Discourse Unit,

and in association with different academic institutions around the world. The university was making me sick. It was time to get out.

Ian Parker