

19th of April, 2011

To: Professor Malcolm Gillies,
Vice Chancellor,
London Metropolitan University

Dear Malcolm,

We are writing to express our astonishment and dismay at the events of the last two weeks that have led to the decision to close some of the most successful and prestigious courses offered by the University. The decision was, to say the least, unexpected and came as a complete shock to us. Such has been the rapidity of its implementation that we and our students feel that we still know very little about the deliberative process by which the University arrived at this decision or the reasons upon which it was based.

Surely those most affected by the closures deserve an account and explanation of just why the University felt that it had no other option? This is not just a matter of natural justice or due process; it is also of vital importance to future relations between management and staff, and the University and its students. Those students, who may feel that the vocations they have chosen to pursue are slighted by this decision, or perhaps fear that the quality of their education will be compromised by it, need reassurance. Those academics, who have devoted their skills and energies tirelessly and selflessly, some of them for the whole of their working lives, to creating the centres of excellence that these courses undoubtedly are, need to know why they are being dismantled. We urge the University to start communicating with its staff and students about these decisions.

We also would also like to use this opportunity to set on record our experience of the consultative process and to highlight what we consider to have been its most salient features. The account that follows concentrates on philosophy, but that is not to be mistaken for any kind of special pleading. We are simply focusing on what we *know* to have happened. We have no doubt that History and Performing Arts have very similar stories to tell.

- **Lack of participation**

Up to the 22nd of March 2011 (the submission date *within the faculty* for the New Portfolio proposals) faculty senior management provided no clear direction to staff and barely participated in the review process.

- **The Dean of HALE has been conspicuous by his absence during the whole RUGE process.**

Before Christmas the Faculty Forum issued a demand that the Dean inform staff whether the faculty was making an official submission on the UG Review draft, and if so that it be circulated for comment beforehand. The Dean did not reply.

The Dean has, to our knowledge, only participated in one round of staff meetings since the New Year. Up until the 6th of April 2011 he had not liaised or communicated with any of the staff actively involved in drawing up the Portfolio proposals.

- **No guidance was provided by faculty senior management on the compilation of the RUGE New Portfolio proposals.**

In particular, none of the senior management was willing to advise on the level of detail that was required in specifying the proposed course structure. Since the UG Review was not yet complete, there was as yet no officially agreed degree structure to work to. Staff therefore felt that the Portfolio proposals could only be indicative of structure.

It now appears that central management may have been demanding more detail. If this is the case then staff compiling the proposals should have been informed either by faculty or central management.

If central management had already decided what the degree structure for 2012/13 was going to be, and were expecting Portfolio Proposals to reflect that structure, then staff needed to be told. It is manifestly unjust, not to say inefficient, to expect course proposals to conform to an undisclosed structure.

- **No member of senior management at faculty level actively participated in the RUGE New Portfolio process.** The drafting of the course proposals was left entirely to course and academic leaders already swamped by full teaching loads.

In particular, no member of senior management took charge of the development and construction of multivalency in the faculty. The task was left to individual subject areas which had to try to sort out possible multivalent combinations between courses on their own and on an ad hoc basis. Clearly the problem of constructing viable and plausible multivalent modules is a complicated one; without any management guidance or oversight, it was a virtually impossible one.

- **Lack of consultation**

The HALE submission to the New Portfolio proposal (presumably compiled from the individual course submissions demanded by the faculty for the 22nd March 2011) was not circulated to staff, *either for comment or correction*.

On the 5th and 6th of April 2011, members of the faculty senior management informed staff at meetings that apart from the additional deletion of American Studies the Portfolio proposal from HALE had been accepted by central management.

On the 6th and 8th of April 2011, philosophy staff members were called upon by the Dean to produce at very short notice (less than an hour) first a grid specifying *precisely* the module structure for the course in 2012/13, and then the *actual titles* for these modules. Similar demands were made of History and Performing Arts.

- **No explanation was provided for why this information was suddenly needed or what purpose it was going to be used for.**
- **The Dean did not inform staff of any criteria to which these new details were expected to conform.**
- **The Dean did not inform staff of any objections raised by the central management to the course proposals, so that staff could then respond to them.**

- **The Dean did not let staff see the proposals as they had been submitted so as to check whether the data (staff FTEs, student numbers, etc.) was correct.**

- **Lack of transparency**

On Monday 11th of April 2011, a meeting of the Deans was held at which the deletion of Philosophy, History and Performing Arts was agreed.

On Thursday 15th of April 2011, a meeting of the Academic Board voted to approve this decision, and an hour later a specially convened sub-committee of the Board of Governors ratified the decision.

- **None of this has been officially communicated to the staff.**
- **Despite repeated requests, the evidence and the methodologies used to arrive at this decision have not been released to staff.**
- **The criteria for evaluating the viability of courses have never been made known to staff either during the compilation of the course proposals, or once the decision to close had been taken.**
- **No opportunity has been afforded staff to respond to the decision or to challenge the evidence and modelling used to reach it.**

- **Lack of justification**

No effort has been made by either faculty or central management to justify or explain this decision publicly. We can therefore only speculate on the reasoning that led to it. Rumours suggest that some of the reasons listed below have been advanced in closed meetings, but we suspect that none of them withstand scrutiny.

- **Economic?**

By the University's Director of Finance's own admission the potential savings from these closures have not yet been calculated. What makes central management think there are going to be any at all?

Philosophy provides a full single honours degree with only 2.6 staff. That is as efficient and cut to the bone as it gets. (Teaching loads of 8 modules per staff per year implies 20.8, say 21 modules in total. It requires 22 modules to run a full single honours programme with a 30 credit dissertation in the 3rd year.)

We are told that Humanities degrees cannot be offered at the level of fees (6.5K) that the University is considering. But why not?

Teaching costs for Philosophy do not exceed 130K. That is covered by 20 students across all 3 years, i.e. an intake of just 7 students! Obviously there are other costs, but what are they? They have never been specified, but we suspect that for an academic humanities subject such as ours, they cannot be great. All we need to provide excellent teaching is a room and a whiteboard.

The loss of income from the closure of all 3 courses is going to be considerable. There appears to be no good evidence that this measure will even break even.

– **Demand?**

We understand that the Dean of HALE has suggested that there is no demand for philosophy.

This is contradicted by all independent surveys. Nationally there is very strong demand for philosophy, and it has been growing year on year for the last 10 years. Sadly there are now very few new universities still offering philosophy. If the only remaining places to study philosophy will be charging 9K then there is every reason to believe that there will be a strong market for a 6.5K philosophy course. We are convinced that with proper marketing (sadly lacking hitherto) the very good student satisfaction rating we achieve can be communicated to prospective students and translated into applications.

– **Multivalency?**

We also understand that the Dean has claimed that Philosophy and History did not embrace multivalency and were still demanding too much optionality. **But this is simply untrue.**

The proposed Philosophy offering offered no optionality whatsoever for the simple reason that 2.6 staff cannot provide it. There was however plenty of multivalency. Each year had one 30 credit and two 15 credit multivalent modules – that is 50% of the entire offering. These modules were to be co-taught with the other subject areas involved.

From our own experience, then, as outlined above, we fear that the decision to close Philosophy, History and Performing Arts – a decision that may deprive HALE of 40% of its student intake – is based upon a process hopelessly mismanaged at faculty level, consequently flawed and inadequate data, and criteria that were never made available to the staff charged with executing the process. Moreover, we are very concerned that none of the possible reasons for closure that have – reportedly – been proffered within closed meetings appear capable of withstanding critical scrutiny.

It is for these reasons that we ask you to reconsider the decision to close History, Philosophy and Performing Arts, so as to avoid not only further loss of revenue for the University, but also further damage to its reputation.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Grant, Philosophy Course Leader

Dr Adam Beck, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy

Dr Chris Ryan, Lecturer in Philosophy