

The Corner-Esler Report (version sent to the Principal on 28 September 2001)

(2)* Do Grounds Exist for Considering Disciplinary Proceedings against Any Member of Staff?

Having spoken to every academic member of the unit, we are of the view that several types of unprofessional and unpleasant behaviour have occurred in the last few years, including:

- (i) failure to shoulder a fair share of the administrative duties of the unit, in breach of the contractual obligations of members of staff and occasionally on the basis of transparently specious protestations as to inability to undertake this or that task;
- (ii) failure to attend to administrative tasks in a timely and efficient fashion, causing difficulties for others, even to the extent of other colleagues having to take on these tasks;
- (iii) offensive, abusive and occasionally obscene communications delivered by e-mail or face to face, the latter at times in the presence of students;
- (iv) derogatory, perhaps defamatory, remarks made about colleagues to those colleagues and other colleagues and even to students, some quite recently and in spite of the conduct of this investigation;
- (v) failure to relate to colleagues with appropriate civility;
- (vi) breakdown of expected levels of collegiality;
- (vii) inappropriate threats to work to rule or to go public with problems in the unit;
- (viii) intimidating behaviour towards junior members of staff and students;

Although we have persuasive evidence which enables us to attach a name or names of colleagues to each of the above pathologies in relation to particular incidents, we have thought it best not to mention individuals at this stage, but to keep the matters documents and on file in the event that the action we recommend below does not produce the desired effect and further action is taken against a member or members of the unit. For the present, we propose that the Principal should issue a general admonishment to all colleagues to avoid the behaviours just mentioned.

(3) Are changes necessary in the Way the Department of Social Anthropology is Managed?

We consider that, in what was admittedly a difficult situation, there has been a failure, at the unit level, to manage the unit in such a way that duties were fairly distributed and tensions lessened and a failure, at the school level, sufficiently to intervene when necessary to facilitate more effective management.

It is self-evident that in a unit with a comparatively small number of colleagues such as this, everyone needs to work in an efficient and collegial fashion, in a context in which duties are spread equitably. The expression of negative feelings about colleagues, either to their face or behind their back, is unprofessional and self-indulgent, wastes time and does nothing to help anyone.

We have explored a number of options for the unit but do not consider that they are practical or would assist the unit move on from its current predicament.

We consider that the best solution is to remove the present chairman from her duties at the earliest opportunity and to introduce an experienced and fair-minded academic from outside the unit, but from within the school, to manage it for one year, ensuring that tasks are equitably distributed and giving everyone confidence that his or her career development is important to the unit and to the University. This will allow a transformation in the current social dynamics so that colleagues can get on with their responsibilities and move their interactions forward in a more collegial direction. Most, perhaps all, members of the unit would be happy with this solution. Everyone in it seeks an improvement to its current position.

D J Corner
P F Esler

28 September 2001

* Section (1) referred to a separate matter: a promotion appeal.