

CAFAS Update No. 78

17 March 2014

Council for Academic Freedom & Academic Standards

Temporary website: www.cafas.net

AGM & Ordinary Meeting:

Saturday 29 March 2014

AGM 1.30. OM 2.00 pm

Room 252

Birkbeck College

Malet Street

London WC1

Underground: Goodge Street, Euston Square, Euston, Russell Square, Holborn

Happy New Year to all our readers.

This issue of Update contains the first three responses to the two reports that were published in *Update Special*, November 2013. They are in chronological order. We hope that many of you will be able to attend the CAFAS AGM and Ordinary Meeting on 29 March (details above) to discuss and develop the proposals. We shall continue to publish further contributions on the reports when they are received.

Casework, where possible in conjunction with the union, continues. We hope to publish reports on this in the next issue. Readers will appreciate that as Cafas aims to resolve cases as quickly as possible, it may not always be helpful to publicise them in their early phases. Members who wish to assist in casework would be most welcome.

CAFAS depends on an active membership. Please contact the Secretary, Ben Cosin, the Casework Coordinator, Colwyn Williamson and/or other members of the Committee if you could help.

PB, GT

COMMENT

1. Professor Richard Hyman

1.12.2013

Dear colleagues/comrades

You invite comments on the two reports.

First, they are not alternatives. Report 1 (Pickering & Blumsohn) is primarily about strategy; Report 2 (Collett) is primarily about tactics.

I like the idea of a strategic discussion, and to start with a SWOT analysis is a good idea. All the suggestions in Report 2 are sensible ideas, but they hardly amount to a blueprint for the future. My problem with Report 1 is that its ambitions would make the aims of CAFAS diffuse, extending far beyond academic freedom and standards; and that while a larger organisation with proper staff support would be desirable, there is little indication of how we might get there (which is what report 2 attempts to do).

What I find remarkable is that neither report mentions the elephant in the corner: the UCU. What Report 1 seems to be calling for is a trade union (case work) and professional association (campaigning over HE issues). Does this imply creating a substitute UCU? Is the UCU part of the problem, and could it be made part of the solution? If so, how? We can scarcely define a future for CAFAS without confronting this question.

In solidarity

Richard Hyman

Emeritus Professor of Industrial Relations
Editor, European Journal of Industrial Relations

2. Professor Michalis Lianos

05.12.2013

Dear Colleagues,
Following the request for comments in the newsletter of November 15, I think it may be useful to contribute the thoughts below. Obviously, this is no more than a personal view but it takes into account converging trends affecting HE in various countries, including the UK.
With kind regards,
Michalis Lianos

Michalis Lianos
<http://univ-rouen.academia.edu/MichalisLianos>

1. CAFAS is facing an essential dilemma: It will either continue as an unfocused, marginal advocacy group on HE or it will focus on its unique, distinctive reason to exist, i.e. independence and probity in the production and transmission of knowledge. In my view, this choice should be easy. There are many institutions of militantism and advocacy in HE. Their impact seems to be weakening, as it happens with most organisations of that sort these days, possibly because the majority of the public increasingly looks at them as corporatist defenders of specific interests. At any rate, if CAFAS moves in that direction, its best option is to merge with a more influential organisation, which is a euphemistic way to suggest that CAFAS disappear since its message would be absorbed within a trade-unionist environment.

2. Inversely, what HE crucially lacks – not only in the UK but also in Europe and beyond – is (the recovery of) its status as an ethical actor in the field of science and knowledge. The contribution that is crucially needed therefore is not ‘more of the same’

defence of professional interests but defence of the Academia as a principled high ground. At the same time, this is the only effective way of defending professional interests because it establishes why there should be legal and financial guarantees so that Academics be independent from all sorts of pressure. In other words, these guarantees are necessary if the public wishes to know if its medicines really work, if public policies are really efficient, if climate change is really happening or if crime really increases. This is exactly where CAFAS is positioned. For example, it does not defend HE workers against managerialism, it defends the conditions that are necessary for scientific truth to be produced. From the CAFAS point of view, gagging clauses and zero-hours contracts, are not mere ‘industrial relations’ problems but major ethical issues too.

3. Ethically, strategically and tactically, CAFAS should place itself as *an ethical voice that defends values, not individuals or professions*. This is what will give it the necessary legitimacy to grow and move towards a clear objective, i.e. to become an ethical arbitrator in all issues that concern the Academia, from student fees to casual employment, from various buzzwords around “excellence” to managerialism. CAFAS should not make any compromise in that positioning. Its stance in most cases will disagree with either trade unions or the government, private corporations or student unions, and in some cases, with all stakeholders involved. Only that type of approach will establish a useful influence in the HE field.

4. Of course, CAFAS needs to increase its appeal and, to a useful extent, its resources. In order to do so, it will probably need to elaborate a twofold communication strategy for introducing the perspective of ethics, probity and independence. Firstly, a clear and consistent message to all HE employees, including non-academic staff. Secondly, a media strategy, that asserts that new position in public debate.

In conclusion, although it is understandable that “a clear majority of Committee members were very critical” of the Pickering/Blumsohn report, it would seem that it is really worthwhile to invest in a sophisticated position for the future if CAFAS is to make a substantial contribution to HE in the UK and beyond.

CAFAS Update seeks to provide an open forum for opinion and discussion. Items do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.

3. University of KEELE UCU Committee

23.01.2014

Dear colleagues,

Here are some thoughts from the Keele UCU committee in response to the consultation in the CAFAS November newsletter. I hope that they are not too late to be considered and that you find them stimulating.
May I say how much we appreciate CAFAS's work.

Best wishes,

Peter Fletcher,
for the Keele UCU committee

CAFAS should not try to imitate UCU or NUS, either in its remit or in its operations. It should understand and stick to its niche, namely providing a specialist service that unions, because of their generalist mission, are not able to provide to the same depth.

CAFAS should not promote public debate on wider controversies unrelated to academic freedom and academic standards, as suggested by J.F. Pickering and A. Blumsohn's paper.

CAFAS should not seek to professionalise itself, or to expand its budget massively, or to take on paid staff, or to build up a large legal fund. It should aim to get the full benefits of amateurism and voluntary work. It should seek to recruit expert advisers on relevant specialist topics such as

- commercial influence on medical research
- scientific fraud
- open-access publishing and its implications for academic freedom
- intellectual property
- private HE providers such as INTO and SGI
- Moocs
- university governance

etc. There are plenty of academics and retired academics with expert knowledge of these topics, and strong views on them, who would be only too willing to assist with CAFAS casework and publications. The problem is simply finding them.

There is a synergy between individual case work and public campaigning: an individual case can be used as a basis for campaigning on the general issues raised. A press release on some aspect of academic

freedom or academic standards is more likely to be noticed if it is linked to some specific case. Hence CAFAS should do both. However, CAFAS should co-operate with UCU and not compete with it; e.g., CAFAS could offer specialist back-up to UCU local case officers (different from the type of support that UCU's regional offices provide). We do not accept the argument in

J.F.Pickering and A.Blumsohn's paper that 'The role of a trade union is doubtful in such cases ...'. Local lay representation, with legal back-up where required, is the strength of a trade union, and CAFAS needs to consider how it can supplement it, not replace it.

On the question of organisation, it is quite likely that the existing arrangements are inadequate. Few members are in a position to attend a general meeting in London. Probably the best way of involving members is a series of occasional meetings in different parts of the country, supplemented by intelligent use of the internet. There is no need to resort to any fashionable or expensive technological tools; what is required is an effective combination of simple and well-established methods such as e-mail lists, a web-site and web forms.

CAFAS's main problem is that most of its potential supporters have not heard of it. CAFAS should promote itself firstly by a drive to persuade UCU branches to affiliate, then by working through them to reach individual members.

NOTICES

The Annual General Meeting is at 1.30 pm on Saturday 29 March 2014. Further details below.

Please send nominations for the Committee to the Secretary, Ben Cosin
brcosin1926@yahoo.co.uk

AGM 1.30; Meeting 2.00pm
29 March 2014
Room 252

Birkbeck College

Agenda

- 1. Attendance & Apologies**
- 2. Minutes & Matters arising**

3. Responses to the Reports

4. Casework

5. AOB

Pre-meeting from 1.00pm. All welcome.

CONSTITUTION

CAFAS' aims are outlined on the membership form. The full constitution can be obtained from the Secretary or www.cafas.net.

CAFAS was founded in February 1994. It depends on subscriptions and an active membership. It meets in March/April, July and September/October.

MEETINGS 2014

29 March 2014 Room 252

28 June 2014 Room 252

Committee

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Founding Members

Michael Cohen

Colwyn Williamson

DO YOU BELIEVE

- That academic standards have been dumbed down throughout the higher and further education sector?
- That this decline has been accompanied by the escalating rhetoric of 'excellence' and 'world-class'?
- That the number of contact hours between teachers and students, which the Dearing Report described as a proper measure of the quality of education, has been reduced across the board?
- That there are all sorts of pressures on examiners to pass candidates who would previously have failed?
- That it is far easier to obtain Firsts and Upper Seconds than it used to be?
- That practices which used to be treated as academically unacceptable, or even as cheating, are now widely regarded as normal and inevitable.
- That the effect of the RAE and other pressures on academics is to increase the quantity of research, not the quality, and to restrict innovative and critical thought?
- That there are pressures, often of a commercial nature, to avoid certain areas

of research, or to falsify results or to distort their conclusions and significance?

- That, despite lip-service to the importance of teaching, universities and colleges take little account of this in career advancement?
- That academic values have been largely displaced by market values?
- That the stated 'mission' of universities to serve the community has been abandoned in favour of commercial priorities?
- That education in the UK no longer has the status of a right bringing social benefits, but is instead treated as a commodity to be bought and sold?
- That discrimination against women and ethnic minorities is still rife in the employment and promotion practices of tertiary education, despite the multicultural community it is supposed to serve?
- That the work of the union in fighting discrimination and victimisation can usefully be supplemented by specialised advice and support from an organization which focuses on issues of academic freedom and standards?

If you believe that many or most of these propositions are true, you ought to be a CAFAS member and your UCU branch ought to affiliate.

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**If you would like a speaker from
CAFAS to address a branch meeting,
contact: Colwyn Williamson, 07970
838 276
cafascoordinator@gmail.com**

payment on the address label? If you should find there "**" or "****!!!" could you please send a cheque without further delay as your contribution is absolutely crucial to the well being of CAFAS. Many thanks for your contribution.
Your Treasurer and Membership Secretary,
Eva Link**

**Next deadline:
2 June 2014**

Please send letters, news items and articles to:
Pat Brady
patrick.brady28@googlemail.com &
Geraldine Thorpe
thorpegm@googlemail.com

You can also send us items at any time for earlier publication on the website.

SUBSCRIPTION

**Dear Members
Some of you have forgotten to pay your membership fee.
Could you please be kind enough to check the date of your last**