

Eloi and Morlocks

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<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/subtext/archive.htm>

The first priority for Human Resource Management (HRM) is to ensure that a workplace stays within the law in regard to minimum wage rates, holiday entitlements and so on. Thereafter HRM secures good practice as set down in codes of conduct, guidance for workloads etc. While codes and guidance may change, good HRM achieves this by consultation and agreement between the manager (hereafter, the 'University') and the managed (hereafter, 'colleagues'). Good HRM also seeks to reduce the trade-offs and to increase the complementarities between efficiency and collegiality.

Times may prove challenging. New pressures have arisen from REF 2014, where the University provides an assurance of remaining 'committed to treating all staff equally and fairly, irrespective of inclusion or non-inclusion in REF 2014'. That assurance appears not to be understood by some department heads (HODs). There are departments at Lancaster where colleagues sense their segregation. By their unequal treatment and entitlements they are identifiable either as Eloi or Morlocks (*aka*, racehorses or donkeys).

In 2009, one Management School (LUMS) HOD introduced a 'Department Research Strategy' document which painted a future where there would be an 'unequal distribution of teaching', because the investment 'for older staff to raise their game [in respect of research] would not have sufficient payback'. (*NB*: such a statement, explicitly evidenced and sent by a manager, is potentially open to a tribunal to infer discrimination.)

In 2012, that same HOD set workloads which left colleagues in no doubt of their status as Eloi (by the allocation of 'additional research hours to those who I think of as the people most likely to generate the highest quality outputs'). For the Morlocks ('who seem less likely to make important research contributions for us'), there was a corresponding reduction in research hours. That innovation was accompanied by the Orwellian comment: 'this seems sensible, efficient and equitable'. The LUMS Dean immediately overruled that HOD, after the university's grievance procedure was invoked.

There are a number of departments where CVs are being rented (at considerable privilege and remuneration) to boost REF 2014 returns. (A THES spreadsheet shows Lancaster ranked sixth, for staff recruited on 20 percent contract in the last two years and still in post.) No plaudits to UK VCs for compliance with such absurdity, or for the focus on 'selectivity' to boost 4-star papers for REF 2014 and beyond. Expect attempts across departments to syphon off more research time to Eloi, with more teaching and administration for Morlocks.

Whether workplace codes and guidelines implicitly form part of the terms and conditions of employment would be an issue for legal interpretation. (*NB*: if the contract is silent then a court will generally assess this as a matter of fact and degree.) At Lancaster, prime illustrations are the LUMS Workload Guidelines (introduced 2011; revised 2013) and the Performance and Development Review (PDR). In 2013, a revision to the LUMS Workload Guidelines of 2011 retrospectively legitimised the action of one HOD who, in extending further privileges to Eloi, had ridden roughshod over the earlier version.

Within recent weeks, the HRM Partner for LUMS (who has now left the university) was advising that it was 'entirely reasonable' to ignore the precepts of the PDR: to wit (1) that it should be an annual cycle; (2) that it should not be used to raise serious performance issues for the first time; (3) that reviewers attend initial training and then further training every three years; (4) that a reviewer should conduct no more than eight reviews. In duly ignoring those requirements, one HOD openly truncated the PDR process to 'gather information about an individual's activities at the end of the Lent Term' so 'that research activity should be incentivised' within the 2013/14 workload allocations.

Developments such as these are destroying collegiality and they sit uneasily with the principles that define the traditional function of a university: 'to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions' (*Education Act, 1988*).

For colleagues who are disadvantaged by any breach to a code or guideline, there is recourse: by the internal grievance procedure; by outside mediation and arbitration; or by taking a complaint to an industrial tribunal.

Such resistance has implicit backing from the Minister of State for Universities and Science: 'There is a nightmare scenario where what matters is research, not teaching. What matters in research is how you score in the research rankings. For that people think they have to appear in the prestigious journals. Now, anything that we can do in government to help break this cycle, we're up for it.' (Rt. Hon. David Willetts, MP, May 2013: <http://www.policyreview.tv/video/905/6812> - recording at 9 minutes 44 seconds onwards.)

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