



The University of Manchester

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Dear [REDACTED]

I hope you are well.

I am writing to you to let you know that your name is included on a list sent to me by Faculty of Professors/Senior Lecturers in SALC who have neither held nor applied for a research grant in the last three years. It is possible that the data held by Faculty is flawed, or that it has failed to collect very recent activity. I apologise if this is the case and I would be grateful if you could provide the relevant information to Jonathan Starbrook, Head of Faculty Research Support Services, with a copy to me. There may also be mitigating circumstances explaining why you have not made an application and, if so, I would, again, be very grateful if you would let me know.

As you will have heard, the University recently approved a revised Research Strategy that includes a 'Statement of Research Expectations' part of which is a commitment for academic staff to 'Apply for and win research funds from external sources at a level which allows them to be competitive in their field and to create opportunities for next generation researchers'. It is important for your own benefit that you know, therefore, that a lack of recent research grant bidding activity will from now on be considered to constitute performance that falls below the University's expectations. You may also recall that the recently approved increase in the School Personal Research Allowance from £600 to £1000 per annum is funded entirely from projected increases in external grant income; it is vital that we all do our best to contribute to this goal.

You will have an opportunity to discuss your wider research plans as part of your PREP and your annual Performance & Development Review (P&DR). However, I strongly urge you to address the issue of research grant capture now and to take advice from your Head of Division and your School Director of Research well in advance of these reviews.

Please note that this letter does not constitute part of any formal process, but is intended to highlight the issue and to give you an opportunity to address the matter in good time. The School now has an outstanding system of support for staff planning to apply for grants and I would recommend that you talk to your divisional research coordinator and, if necessary, to Roy Gibson, our School Research Director, for information on how to access this support.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Best Wishes,

Steve

**From:** Adam Ozanne  
**Sent:** 06 July 2016 14:09  
**To:** Colette Fagan  
**Cc:** University and College Union; Andrew Mullen  
**Subject:** SALC Research Expectations warning letter

Dear Colette,

I am writing to you on behalf of the UMUCU Executive Committee to complain about the attached letter, which has been sent by the Head of SALC to one of our members. Since the letter refers to a list sent by Faculty, we assume other colleagues in Humanities are receiving similar messages and that you, as Deputy Dean for Research, are ultimately responsible for them.

Please, therefore, can you explain to us how such letters are consistent with your previous assurances that the university's Research Expectations Statements (RESs) represent a collective approach and would not be used to assess individual performance. Some months ago, you pointed out to me that you had written to Humanities staff saying that, "This benchmarking data provides a more informed understanding of what the collective research funding ambition of a discipline should be," and confirmed that the statements are only for collective (i.e. discipline level) use and are not intended for assessment of individual performance. However, the attached letter – with its statement that a "lack of recent research grant bidding activity will from now be considered to constitute performance that falls below the University's expectations", its veiled threats regarding future PDR and PREP reviews, and its gratuitous and unnecessarily alarming reference to a "formal process" (disavowed at present but clearly by implication being thought about in the future) if our colleague does not take the "opportunity to address the matter in good time" – is clearly aimed at the individual the letter is addressed to.

Quite frankly, we are appalled by the bullying tone of the letter and its utterly unfair and unjust suggestion that this particular colleague has not been making sufficient effort to obtain research grant funding. I could add further information here to explain exactly why the suggestion is so unjust and unfair, but to do so would risk revealing the recipient's identity, which we have promised to protect. If you wish to know more, by all means ask me, but I would need a guarantee that the information would not be passed back to the School without our member's agreement.

All of this only increases our misgivings about RESs and how they can be misused. As you may know, we raised these concerns in the last meeting of the UCU/University Joint Negotiating Group, as a result of which Karen Heaton agreed to ask Luke Georghiou to provide a clear statement on the use of RESs. Pending a response from Luke and completion of negotiations over the contractual implications of RESs, and to avoid further upset amongst colleagues, please inform Heads of School that they should desist from sending any further letters of this kind and inform those staff who have already been sent them that they have been withdrawn and should be ignored. Until this matter has been resolved we will be

advising our members not to respond to such messages – whether written or delivered verbally – and to report them to the UMUCU Office so we can deal with them collectively.

Please note also that while we understand you will have to speak with Stephen Hutchings, under no circumstances must any attempt be made to identify or contact the recipient of the letter and discuss UCU's intervention without our agreement. The member already feels bullied by the tone of the letter (to quote, "I work incredibly hard to be a good teacher, researcher and colleague, and I have rarely felt as demoralised, bullied and dispirited as I do today") and any such attempt will be construed as further evidence of intimidation and bullying.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards

Adam

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Out recently: "*Power and Neoclassical Economics: A Return to Political Economy in the Teaching of Economics*", Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Available from:

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*Defend the public university; defend academic values; resist casualisation.*

<http://manchester.web.ucu.org.uk/>

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July 11 2016

c.c. Andrew Mullen, Deputy Director of HR

Dear Adam

Thank you for your email of 6 July in which raise concerns about a letter sent to a professor in SALC by the Interim Head of School.

This correspondence relates to the lack of grant applications in the period since August 2012. It is not about setting individual grant income targets. It is part of a regular review of grant seeking activity where we have looked at which of our academics at SL and above hold, previously held, or have applied for external research funding in this period. Mitigating circumstances are taken into account and this is part of a wider exercise to identify how we support academics in their research.

The expectation that colleagues with research duties in their contract are active in applying for external research funding is one part of their normal academic duties, reflected and made explicit in recruitment and promotions criteria. This pre-dates the University Statement of Research Expectations.

My communication on research funding and discipline benchmarking in the March Humanities eNews (see link below) is consistent with this statement and the longer standing expectation that grant seeking activity is a normal part of the responsibilities for academics with research duties in their contracts.

<http://facultyofhumanities.newsweaver.com/Newsletter/1qty3zh6b6hsd9r5avtpxd?a=2&p=50023456&t=21801785>

I do not consider the tone or content of the letter to constitute bullying (see link below to the University's Dignity at Work and Study Procedure for Staff and associated definitions). Nor do I see the expectations set out as unreasonable.

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=22735>

The letter makes clear that it is not part of a formal process, and this statement was intended to reassure those colleagues that, notwithstanding we regard the lack of grant bidding activity as representing underperformance, we were not about to move matters into a potentially punitive, formal process. The emphasis is very much on:

1. Setting out clear expectations about performance in this area.
2. Signposting the ways in which colleagues can access guidance and support (i.e. via their Head of Division and the School's Director of Research) in order that they can address the matter.

The letter also gives prominence to mitigating circumstances considerations and a clear route for raising these matters.

I will be pleased for you, Andrew Mullen and I to meet at an early opportunity to discuss the matter in more detail should you wish. In the meantime, I am advised that it is neither necessary nor appropriate to withdraw the letters already sent. I don't believe there are any such letters outstanding, but we will double-check the position.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Corlette Fagan". The letters are connected and fluid, with a prominent 'C' at the start and a long, sweeping 'a' at the end.

Deputy Dean and Vice-Dean for Research

Faculty of Humanities

**From:** Adam Ozanne

**Sent:** 18 July 2016 21:44

**To:** Colette Fagan

**Cc:** University and College Union; Andrew Mullen; Registrar; Colin Bailey; Graham Smith; Adel Nasser; Roger Walden; Gregory Lane-serff

**Subject:** RE: SALC Research Expectations warning letter

Dear Colette,

I write to thank you for taking the time to reply, but also, I am afraid, to say that I and the other UMUCU officers find your response wholly inadequate, both in its failure to appreciate how inappropriate the letters from Steve Hutchings are and because of the way you both seem intent on putting pressure on hardworking and conscientious colleagues instead of developing a coherent and credible research strategy. This is bad management, pure and simple, and far from the kind of collegial behaviour we expect in the University.

You claim to find nothing untoward in the tone of the SALC letters despite the quotation in my previous email from a colleague who described feeling "demoralised, bullied and dispirited." Allow me to quote now from another recipient who has written to us:

"The letter was sent to me personally, advising me that my work on grant capture constituted 'performance that falls below the university's expectations'. I felt shocked, insulted and humiliated by this letter. I work a huge number of hours, often putting in 60+ hours per week (and regularly coming into work on weekends, i.e. not just working from home on weekends). I do so gladly, as I love the University and have dedicated my life to it. I do not expect thanks, or extra reward beyond pay, but I don't expect to be insulted and humiliated in this way when, in all respects that matter, I know I am doing an excellent job and I am working extremely hard." (As I indicated in my previous email, under no circumstances must any attempt be made to identify or contact either of the colleagues quoted without UCU's specific agreement; any such attempt will be construed as further evidence of intimidation and bullying.)

You and Steve Hutchings may see nothing wrong in the tone of such letters and may not feel the need, at the very least, to adapt them to individual cases and circumstances, while we, UCU's officers, disagree, and the recipients feel, to quote these two again, "demoralised, bullied and dispirited" and "shocked, insulted and humiliated". Clearly perceptions are subjective. However, we can share the anonymised letters and your and my correspondence with a wider audience, beginning with UMUCU's membership in our next branch update, and see what colleagues round the University think.

However, we do not only object to the tone of such letters. We also view them as part of a broader failure by senior management to develop a coherent and credible research strategy for the University, which is leading to you instead unfairly criticising individuals. What is the University's objective with this strategy? Is it to get staff to make more applications, as an end in itself; or is it to improve the success rate for grant capture as a whole? If it is the latter, as one would hope it would be, simply asking staff to churn out more applications as a means

to this end is woefully naive. It is more likely to reduce the net success rate of grant applications as it sends the message that the University's priority is quantity rather than quality. It creates an incentive for staff to put in frequent, small, poorly thought through grant applications (so as to be seen to be "active"), rather than pooling their energy into better, larger, less frequent grant applications, which would allow time for good ideas to be developed and honed. Indeed, this strategy actively distracts staff from generating better grant applications through a pressure to get something in – indeed to get just anything in. Instigating a "matter of course" mind-set to grant applications is also not the best way of fostering imagination and creativity in the sort of projects being put forward. Most destructively of all, this simplistic management strategy communicates to academic staff that they are seen as nothing more than worker drones, rather than the intellectually gifted and creative individuals we all know them to be.

What is particularly Kafkaesque is that academics are only being asked to apply for grants, not to be actually successful in those applications, and are being encouraged to jettison what is often far more crucial work in order to satisfy a crude management target. It is hard to imagine a strategy more pointless and misguided. Put another way, it is hard to imagine a more efficient way of wasting staff time. There are a finite number of grants available, of which there will be fewer now the UK is leaving the EU. Insisting that colleagues churn out grant applications, of which only a small percentage can ever be successful, and for which they will be in practice competing against each other, seems to us a complete waste of staff resources. Surely it makes more sense to focus grant applications, prioritizing quality over quantity, and providing resources so that applications are well-targeted and more likely to be successful: i.e. using fewer resources to achieve greater success. In contrast, your statistical, scatter-gun approach to grant capture does not appear to have been well thought through – especially as it is eroding staff morale in the process.

We would also like to remind you that the only performance management process agreed with UCU at this University is the PDR process. There is no agreed basis for the so called “informal” procedure embodied in these letters, or the additional “research income target setting” meetings being introduced in FEPS, which seem to be clear attempts to sidestep and subvert the PDR process. UCU has an agreement with the University that participation in PDRs – the only agreed mechanism for looking at issues of career development in a constructive and collegial manner within the University – is voluntary. We have never agreed to the setting of research income targets for individuals and have been assured by the University that Research Expectations Statements represent collective (i.e. discipline level) expectations that will not be used to assess individual performance.

All of this only increases our misgivings about RESs and how they can be misused. Quite frankly, it seems to us that, having made strategic errors in the REF (e.g. Project Diamond did not lead to the “step change” it was supposed to produce, and choosing too low a return rate), the senior leadership of the University is seeking to blame people lower down when the real issues lie higher up. RES targets are ill thought out, should not be aimed at individuals, and are being used as a substitute for having any sensible research planning and management.

Finally, we are also not impressed by the supposed reassurance in the letters that they are not (as yet) part of a "formal process" and hope the University will bear in mind the sad case of Professor Stefan Grimm. You may recall that his suicide was described by the coroner as a "needless" death and came after Professor Grimm had been told he was "struggling to fulfil the metrics" of his professorial post at Imperial College. At the inquest, the Imperial Director of HR said Professor Grimm was "not under formal management procedures" but had faced only an "informal process" regarding his performance. (THE, 9 April 2015)

I and the other UMUCU officers would be happy to meet with you and Andrew to discuss the matter further, though it cannot be before mid-August now due to holidays. We raised the matter at Friday's University/UCU Joint Negotiation Group meeting, when I am pleased to say Colin and Will agreed to investigate the matter. In the meantime, since you have refused to withdraw them, we will continue to advise any members who receive such letters to politely inform their line managers that they have been advised by UCU not to respond to them.

Kind regards

Adam

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<http://staffprofiles.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/Profile.aspx?id=adam.ozanne>

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**From:** Colette Fagan

**Sent:** 20 July 2016 09:48

**To:** Adam Ozanne

**Cc:** University and College Union; Andrew Mullen; Registrar; Colin Bailey

**Subject:** RE: SALC Research Expectations warning letter



Dear Adam,

Thank you for your reply which followed your meeting with members of the University's Senior Leadership Team at the University/UCU meeting on Friday.

I would like to put on record that throughout my working life I have been a union member and have worked constructively with, and for unions. Your reply contains factual inaccuracies about the Faculty Research Strategy, despite us having discussed the different strands of the strategy in various forums, including Senate, and you have, I assume read the distillation in *Humanities eNews*.

Given your plan to share our correspondence with a wider audience I hope you will note the above and the mentions made in the letter of adjustments for mitigating circumstances and the wider (and expanding) support for research which we provide in Humanities. You will appreciate no doubt that selective quotes are often misleading and unhelpful..

A more detailed reply on behalf of the university will follow from Karen Heaton within the next weeks in response to your concerns on this and other matters. Given this matter is being addressed via the University/UCU joint negotiating committee, the initial offer of a meeting with myself and HR is now redundant .

Colette

**Professor Colette Fagan**

**Deputy Dean (and Associate Dean for Research)**

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**Research and knowledge exchange**

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Colette.fagan/>

Policy impact:

<http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/research/research-impact/international-employment-policies>

European Commission's European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (ENEGE) - UK academic expert and steering group member: [www.enege.eu/home](http://www.enege.eu/home)

ESRC Seminar series 'Work-life Balance, the Recession and Beyond':

<http://www.esrc-work-life-seminars.org/>