Huw's Enquiry

July 2005

Dear John

I really enjoyed the course last week

I mentioned that I'm involved in a rather unfortunate situation in my Research Institute concerning PhD students and the early retirement of their supervisor.

Essentially both students were accepted to register for PhDs under the supervision of Professor Friend (one on a Research Council studentship and the other on a Teaching fellowship). At the time Professor Friend did not have research funding of his own and so the bulk of the labs work was funded from consumable funds awarded to me as part of a career development grant.

At the time I was also supporting my own PhD student (who is now writing up) and was also working in the lab. The projects the students were working on were closely related to my own work and used techniques and reagents I had generated and established. Due to this overlap it was a natural progression for me to take on the day to day supervision of Professor Friend's students in the lab while he carried out his rather heavy teaching load.

At the end of 2004 after a difficult period personally and professionally Professor Friend was signed off with work-related stress which was made official at the start of January 2005. He has since taken early retirement effective from 1st July. So I have suddenly become the only person at the University qualified to complete the supervision of Professor Friend's students. However my contract was due to run out on the 30th of June.

It became clear earlier in the year that Professor Friend was not going to return and that early retirement was a real possibility. However the students received no contact from the Graduate School at any point nor was I contacted about my role in supervision. It wasn't until the students filled in their 2nd year progress reports (in June 2005) and sent copies to everyone including the PVC that things started moving.

While I was awaiting the decision on a research grant at the end of of June, the students were effectively presented with 3 scenarios if my application failed (this came from the Director of the Institute and not the University):

- 1. Give up and start again possibly here at Barchester, or somewhere else.
- 2. Move to another lab and start a new project in a new system but with an extra year's maintenance and registration effectively a PhD in 2 years.
- 3. Move to another similar lab elsewhere in the country, again with an extra year's registration and maintenance.

Unsurprisingly none of these were considered acceptable by the students. Since I took over their supervision their projects have become productive and both are keen to have me continue as a supervisor for the rest of their PhD.

Of course the inevitable happed and my grant application failed (perversely one of the reasons cited was my lack of a long term commitment from Barchester forcing me to request my own salary as principle applicant). This suggests that until I have a secure

I am concerned the University/Biosciences will attempt to pass on any additional costs to the Institute (effectively what they are already doing). I'd just like to know that the University cannot use its lack of money (mainly due to gross financial mismanagement) to shirk its responsibility to the students.

Anyway, any advice that I can pass on to my students would be greatly appreciated. I will let you know of how things develop (if you are interested).

Thanks,

Huw

Team task:

Discuss this enquiry, and then on the acetates provided

- 1. List the main points of your reply to Huw, and
- 2. Indicate the main suggestions you have for the Institute and the University to address the issues raised