

# ***CAFAS Update No. 79***

***16 June 2014***

***Council for Academic Freedom & Academic Standards***

*Temporary website: [www.cafas.net](http://www.cafas.net)*

***Postponed AGM & Ordinary Meeting:                      Saturday 28 June 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***

## **PhD Student Exploitation**

Over the last 10-15 years, there seems to be a pattern of overseas PhD student exploitation emerging in the country. Students lured to Britain by universities advertising commercially in foreign countries, offering vastly inflated higher education courses, find themselves shortchanged, in the process of seeking that pot of gold. Not only do they not receive that cherished qualification, but unceremoniously find themselves deported back to their countries of origin, accused of overstaying in the UK.

In the wake of the aggressive neo-liberal globalization policies of the UK, the recognition that the UK finds it necessary to develop the “knowledge industry”, to compete with the likes of USA, Australia, Canada, demands for the running of HE institutions as commercial institutions. The commercial hype has emasculated the cherished values of HE institutions. These values are fast becoming the norm even in countries like India, who

are applying the same neo-liberal standards, to entice foreign students to their shores. They are talking of the “tourism education industry” as part of their developing “medical tourism industry”.

As a result of the UK government policies of funding for the HE sector, the universities have been forced to find other sources of funding, to run their institutions. The “market” has become the final and efficient arbiter of the courses to be offered by the universities. Popular courses that make profits are encouraged. The philosophy and humanity departments are taking a hard knock.

PhD students who come into this environment, find that the tutorial supervisor hours, written into their contract with the universities are not honoured. When they do complain, they are seen as troublemakers and treated as such. They then find themselves being classified as “academically deficient” and therefore become the “problem”. The universities in their attempts to produce profits, cut down on tutorial supervisor hours. The universities refuse to accept that the problem lies with them, in the breach of their contract. It seems that the grievance procedure that the student has recourse to, favours and is biased towards the institution. The student is denied justice.

It must be remembered, that these students possess the required grades and have gone through a selection procedure by the university and considered suitable and capable to be on the course. A number of these students are scholarship students, who will be expected to be of a higher caliber to be recipients of the scholarship. It remains for the universities to explain, why these students are failing to gain their PhDs.

**John Fernandes**

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

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## **The Future of CAFAS: A Personal View Eric Barendt, Co-Chair of CAFAS**

At the AGM last year CAFAS accepted my suggestion that we set up a small Working Party to examine the future of CAFAS and to make proposals for its activities and governance. Unfortunately the members of the Working Party (John Pickering, Aubrey Blumsohn, and Janet Collet – all either past active or current active members of the Committee) were unable to reach agreement on a single report; so two separate reports were produced. They were reproduced in the Special Issue of Update which was sent out to all members in November 2013; members were invited to send in their views on the ideas in the two reports, but only three people took advantage of the opportunity.

The report was discussed briefly at the CAFAS meeting held in September 2013, and then again more fully at the last meeting held on 29 March 2014.

There was little support for the concrete proposals in the majority report of John Pickering and Aubrey Blumsohn, in particular for the particular recommendation in Part IV of that report for organisational changes, for example, the appointment of an executive officer responsible to a CAFAS Board – membership of which should be limited to people who have been staff in a HE institution.

Although I was rather more sympathetic than most other CAFAS members to the proposals in the Pickering/Blumsohn Report, I accept that we cannot take its ideas any further. They mark too radical a change from the way in which CAFAS has traditionally conducted its business. Nevertheless, I do think CAFAS must continue to explore ways of raising its profile, of recruiting new members and of expanding its activities.

We urgently need to recruit new members and I suspect we can only do this if potential members, particularly academics in post, rather than those who have retired, are persuaded that CAFAS is an effective organization for the defence of academic freedom and the maintenance of academic standards. The trouble, as we all know, is that academics have little, if any free, time and energy away from their teaching duties and research to defend their academic freedom by participating in organizations like CAFAS. Other organizations like the Council for the Defence of British Universities (CDBU) – despite its influential supporters – face the same difficulties as we do. So although the growth of managerial culture in British universities poses a real and increasing threat to the traditional freedom which individual lecturers and other academic staff have usually enjoyed, it will not be easy for us, or for CDBU for that matter, to recruit new, active members.

I doubt whether there is a magic solution to these difficulties. If there is, I certainly do not have it, nor I suspect does any current member of CAFAS – if so, it would be helpful to know what it is. Maybe small groups of members could produce short, punchy reports on some current problem affecting UK universities, or a particular university, along the lines of the CAFD reports prepared by the late John Griffith at LSE – this is one of the ideas recommended in both the majority and Janet Collett's reports. With appropriate publicity in newspapers and specialist journals, such as THE, we could in this way raise the profile of CAFAS and perhaps attract a few new members. But like political parties, we have little alternative to soldiering on, occasionally winning a small skirmish against an over-confident VC, and flying the flag for the causes we believe in.

# Notes on a Combined Strategy

Following the meeting of March 29 in which I took remotely part as a listener, I would like to contribute some comments which seem to me constructive in terms of energising CAFAS.

There are clearly two approaches to the future of CAFAS that could be described as “local” and “national”. Although these approaches have much in common (e.g. support to victimised colleagues) they involve some different aspects:

Local	National
<p><u>Main specificity</u> Action and recruitment of members institution-by-institution.</p>	<p><u>Main specificity</u> Widely publicising breaches to academic independence within the Academia and beyond.</p>
<p><u>Benefits</u> Continuous flow of information towards CAFAS, thus capacity to know of many “silent cases” and show the extent of the problem.</p> <p>Larger base of support.</p>	<p><u>Benefits</u> Impact that isolated institutions cannot contain.</p> <p>Legitimacy of CAFAS as a permanent, specialised whistle-blower of high ethical standing.</p>
<p><u>Risks</u> Wrongly applying the approach, with CAFAS being seen as a (superfluous) actor of trade unionism rather than an ethical agent on the production and diffusion of knowledge.</p>	<p><u>Risks</u> Weak recognition by academics and low capacity to act efficiently. Inadequate human and financial means.</p>

It seems to me that instead of debating the right choice between the two approaches, CAFAS would need to fully apply both. A one-page protocol could be drafted to allow believers in either approach to proceed towards specific objectives, e.g. for the next 12 months: locally, 50 new members in at least 10 HE institutions; nationally, one case that reaches major media headlines and is successfully taken to court.

Such a synthesis would allow one approach to balance the risks of the other, so that CAFAS both become locally relevant and maintain a distinct status of an agent defending academic values, not employment-related interests or social and political values in general (such as various forms of injustice and discrimination). In this sense, individual cases of victimisation taken up by CAFAS will exemplify a certain conception of the Academia instead of mere work-related conflicts and antagonisms. This is in my view the shortest way to bring the general public to bear on the issue of academic freedom and produce enough pressure so as to redress the balance between interests and values in Higher Education and Research.

**M. Lianos, 29.4.2014**

# CAFAS now back on the WorldWide Web: [www.cafas.net](http://www.cafas.net)

Ian Hewitt's various efforts in exploring the possibilities and advantages of establishing the CAFAS website with the servers of GreenNet, an organisation that specialises in activist organisations like CAFAS, has a reputation of maintaining security and is itself an advocate for internet freedom, have met with success. This website should now allow CAFAS to mount articles and information that search engines, like Firefox and Safari, can pick up readily and so provide a new line of publicity for CAFAS' interests and work. To Ian, together with Rashid Mehmood who has very efficiently put material on the new CAFAS site, we owe very special thanks for their successful efforts. We are also grateful for the support of members whose contributions allow us to pay £180.00 per annum for this facility.

So CAFAS can now move on to use our website to good effect. Some members will know that it was via searches of the old (and corrupted) website that some of the most alarming personal cases have come to CAFAS. It is hoped that this site will continue to be a resource for these important contacts. But to what other uses should CAFAS put this newly revived facility? We, the present committee, would greatly appreciate members' ideas, information about how other similar mission-directed organisations use the web and their experiences of successes (or less) of organisations' use of the web.

As well as providing good example of the possible in using the web to expand public knowledge and understanding of the current dilemmas and contradictions of principles and practices facing the professionals serving higher education and the simple requirement of academic freedom in teaching the skills of critical thinking in a democratic society, there may also be opportunities for effective affiliation with other organisations with interests in higher education and other professional activities. While the organization *38 degrees* has concentrated, very effectively, on NHS issues, its interests range more broadly. It has recently, for example, organized a meeting with Vince Cable about the use of "zero hour" contracts – which of course include very many teachers and staff throughout HE.

So, dear members, please send us your thoughts, your interests and your readiness to contribute e.g. pieces for the web, a web blog, a news aggregating service, particular interests for

new members, etc.! Just email me, or any member of the committee.

Janet Collett

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## Comment on Madam Janet Collett's contribution to CAFAS on the WorldWide Web

As Madam Janet has directed us we should always remember that CAFAS's Web Site should be maintained for potentially raising vital issues of academic freedom and academic service.

Amir Ali Majid (Summer 2014)

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## Academic Freedom Books and Articles

1. 'Academic freedom is being restricted, scholar says,' by Matthew Reisz, THE 5-11 June 2014, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/academic-freedom-is-being-constricted-scholar-says/2013710.article>

The full findings are published in *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, eds Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, 2014, University of Minnesota Press.

2. *Academic Freedom and the Law: a comparative Study*, Eric Barendt 2010, Hart Publishing Ltd.

3. *Academic Freedom, Autonomy & Accountability in British Universities*, Robert Berdahl, Studies in HE, Vol 15, No 2 1990, pp169-180, Taylor & Francis

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## Defending-Academic-Freedom JISCMail List

You can join by going to the Cafas website [www.cafas.net](http://www.cafas.net) and opening the link.

There has been some discussion on it recently. You can read more about it via a petition for a PhD student at Leeds on <https://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/vice-chancellor-university-of-leeds-stop-treating-international-students-like-2nd-class-citizens-2>

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# NOTICES

**The postponed Annual General Meeting is at 1.30 pm on Saturday 28 June 2014. Further details below.**

**Please send nominations for the Committee to the Secretary, Ben Cosin [brcosin1928@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:brcosin1928@yahoo.co.uk)**

## **AGM 1.30 Reports Elections**

**28 June 2014  
Room 252  
Birkbeck College**

**Meeting follows at 2.00pm**

### **Agenda**

- 1. Attendance & Apologies**
- 2. Minutes & Matters arising**
- 3. CAFAD Archive**
- 4. Casework**
- 5. AOB**

**Pre-meeting from 1.00pm. All welcome.**

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## **CONSTITUTION**

CAFAS' aims are outlined on the membership form. The full constitution can be obtained from the Secretary or [www.cafas.net](http://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.

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# Committee

### **Co-Chairs:**

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### **Membership Secretary & Treasurer:**

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### **Students' Complaints:**

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### **Website**

#### **Ian Hewitt, Rashid Mehmood**

### **Cafas Legal Advisors**

#### **Professor Eric Barendt**

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### **Health & Safety**

#### **Ian Hewitt**

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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.**

**Membership Secretary & Treasurer:**  
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**02089982569;**  
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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](mailto:cafascoordinator@gmail.com)

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## 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 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**

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**Next deadline:**  
**8 September 2014**

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

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

