

CAFAS Update No 10

1st May 1996

Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

Next Meeting:

Saturday 22nd June 2 - 4:30pm

Room MB307,
Birkbeck College,
Malet Street,
London WC1

Nearest Tube: Goodge Street

Crisis @ CAFAS

CAFAS has been too successful, with more and more desperate calls from academics, administrators, post-graduates and students asking for our help. To help overcome the problem we need more caseworkers. To this end we are holding a workshop to train new caseworkers in May. This is your opportunity to help CAFAS in a practical way. Details are enclosed.

The Thomas Gradgrind Award

The most coveted award was announced at the AGM of CAFAS but will not be announced in the Update until the next issue.

AGM

The current holders gave reports of their activities for the year and the accounts were distributed. The following officers were elected:

Case Co-ordinator: Colwyn Williamson

Chair: John Fernandes

Secretary: Michael Cohen

Treasurer: Sara Brown

Membership Secretaries: Geraldine Thorpe and Pat Brady

Data Collection Secretary: Gill Evans

Update Compiler: Rob Bowman

Auditor: Stanley Jenkins

David Regan Appeal Coordinator: Irene Bruegal & Janet Collett

The Case of Joy Baszucki

Joy Baszucki, a lecturer at Gorseinon, an FE college in South Wales, was accused in October last year of meeting one of her students outside official hours and writing letters to him critical of senior colleagues. The college made clear that there was no suggestion of moral impropriety, but Joy was summarily suspended, charged with gross misconduct, and urged by the Principal to resign forthwith. There were, the Principal said, "irreconcilable differences in educational philosophy" between herself and Ms Baszucki.

Joy brought her case to CAFAS. It had always been her policy, she said, to prioritise the welfare of her

students, and this had resulted in high academic achievements and praise from parents. But it had been evident for a number of years that the Principal frowned on her methods and felt that she did not show sufficient respect for the divide between staff and students. The letters, she suspected, had been seized on as a pretext to get rid of someone who did not toe the line. The general view in the college was that dismissal was inevitable if the Principal was determined to get rid of her.

Her case was taken on by the CAFAS Co-ordinator, who wrote to the college pointing out that the suspension was ultra vires, since the college's disciplinary procedure permitted suspension only after a "detailed investigation" of a complaint. The charge against Ms Baszucki, CAFAS said, was ludicrously out of proportion to the alleged offence and bore no resemblance to the examples of "gross misconduct" cited in the procedure (dishonesty, theft, assault, etc.). And moreover, the college had made it impossible to operate the procedure, which required the Principal to act as "adjudicator", because the Principal had declared her profound opposition to Ms Baszucki before any investigation had been held.

The college reacted by bringing in their solicitor, who took a tough line, and there ensued a lengthy and complex correspondence about the correct interpretation of the college's disciplinary procedure. The general effect of this was that the college tied itself in even more knots. CAFAS took Counsel's opinion. Counsel ruled that there had been on the college's part "a complete disregard of the prescribed process and a premature attempt to suspend Ms Baszucki which would be resolvable in law".

Still the college pressed on and, in a further exchange of letters, said they were now conducting an investigation, at the same time issuing a threat of legal action against the CAFAS Co-ordinator, which received a brusque response. CAFAS advised Ms Baszucki not to participate in the investigation, on the grounds that all the proceedings had been irredeemably tainted, and instead the Corporation Board (the old Board of Governors) was petitioned. MPs in the area were approached and letters sent to the local press.

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

CAFAS was brought into existence by concern for academic freedom and standards.

CAFAS welcomes widened access to further and higher education. But expansion without a corresponding increase in funding and the attempt to run education on commercial principles have led to standards being undermined and to staff who protest being victimised. Many are too demoralised, or too pressured by inadequate resources, to challenge the decline; others are fearful of redundancies or intimidated by the threat of victimisation.

CAFAS faces the fact that the British educational system is decaying. The Council will not collaborate with the pretence that this is not happening nor will it compromise on the right to say so. The principle of academic freedom enshrined in the Education Reform Act 1988 - 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" - is increasingly under attack, particularly when staff expose instances of corruption and shoddy standards.

- CAFAS**
- * campaigns against the decline in standards
 - * defends individuals against victimisation
 - * gives moral support and legal advice
 - * investigates malpractice and publishes findings
 - * seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations

Everyone who shares these objectives should join and persuade their local union branch or association to affiliate. Affiliations from students are welcome.

For information contact CAFAS: Tel: 0792-205-678 ext. 4770 / 4773 / 4774

Please photocopy this application for membership and distribute it among your colleagues.

Send to CAFAS Membership Secretaries, 7 Benn Street, London E9 5SU

Name.....Address.....
.....Post Code.....Date.....

I/we wish to join/affiliate to CAFAS and enclose a cheque for.....
(£10 p.a for individual membership, £5 p.a for students and unwaged, £25 p.a for trade union affiliation.)

Bankers Order

To (name & address of your bank).....

Your Bank Sort Code.....Your Account Number.....

Signature.....

Please pay CAFAS the sum of.....every year starting on.....(date)

For Bank Information

Account: CAFAS Sort Code: 30-95-46 Account No: 1868136
Lloyds Bank plc, Swansea Branch, PO Box 66, Swansea SA1 3AP