

# THE REAL PICTURE AT CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Staff are in an impossible position at City University London. They are facing increasingly severe and unrealistic performance management policies and threats over job security. New policies and procedures are introduced with no staff consultation and without adequate appeals processes. There is huge expenditure on estates projects while cuts continue to be made to staffing in professional services and entire academic departments feel under threat. Many staff feel disillusioned, demoralised and disenfranchised from the University's strategic aims. **Council needs to know about, and address, the real picture at City University London.**

## **Staff Morale**

The second iteration of the staff survey (Pulse Survey) ran at the end of 2014. It continues to show that staff morale and confidence in University management is dire. Only 10% of staff believe the University manages change effectively and a mere 15% have confidence in the University Executive Committee. 15% also reported experiencing bullying or harassment in the last year. A paper was presented to Council in March, but we are concerned that the "Big Six" plan put forward by UET masks the real staff experience.

## **REF**

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework was supposed to deliver concrete evidence of progress towards the Vice Chancellor's vision to be in the top 2% of universities worldwide by 2016. It was preceded by a traumatic time with the loss of many staff and the considerable expense incurred in the recruitment of 140 new academic staff – paid for in part by the Professional Services Review. Yet, the University fell from 45<sup>th</sup> to 49<sup>th</sup> place in the THES rankings. Any critique of our performance is met with 'a look where we would be if we had done nothing' defence – something that no academic member of staff ever suggested we do.

## **ARQM**

Immediately after the REF, academics were subjected to the new Annual Research Quality Monitoring exercise, a process implemented without consultation or negotiation with the recognised union and never approved by Senate. The ARQM measures individual academics' research performance and results feed into promotion and workload distribution. Yet, there is no appeals process and there are deep concerns over the methodology employed. Academic staff now fear appraisal as a measure of performance management rather than the supportive role originally intended.

## **Student satisfaction**

Faced with the above, is it surprising that the 2014 Student Satisfaction Survey saw City lose 10 places, falling to 109<sup>th</sup> out of 113 institutions?

## **Nominations for THE outstanding leadership award**

What is particularly galling for staff is the decision by the University Executive Team to nominate itself for the THE Outstanding Leadership and Management Team. In view of the recent 'pulse survey' results this decision has been met with incredulity across the University and shows the very opposite of outstanding leadership.

## **Diversity and Equality**

The University also made an unsuccessful application for the equality and diversity kitemark Athena SWAN Bronze Award. The blame culture that is so evident at this University will try to place the responsibility for failure on those who did their very best to make this application a success. Blame does not lie with the Athena SWAN Working Group and those who wrote our application but with a University leadership that fails to embrace diversity. Gender and race inequality is clear and visibly demonstrated by an all white UET with only one female member. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2015 the Times Higher reported that City University London had the highest academic pay gap among larger universities with an 18.4 per cent difference – equivalent to £12,222. Little wonder that our application to Athena SWAN failed.

## **Bullying and Harassment**

The Pulse Survey continued to show high levels of bullying and harassment across the University with 15% of staff reporting experience of this in the last year. Staff are increasingly forced into taking action through the Grievance Procedure and even then finding the University incapable of progressing effectively. The University need to address a bullying culture that flows from the top and is endemic in some areas of the University.

## **Relations between Human Resources and the trade unions**

The trade unions initiated mediated talks with HR and senior management via ACAS. We believe that this is the first time that employee relations have sunk so low that we have had to resort to outside help. All the City unions (UCU, UNITE and UNISON) want to engage with HR and management on the kinds of issues raised above, so that staff views can be represented and policies and procedures are implemented properly and fairly. We are proud of our University and we want to play our role in influencing its direction and when necessary making constructive criticism. Unfortunately at the present time we feel excluded and marginalised. Management either dismiss our views or on occasions even refuse to meet with us and hear our point of view. We are putting 100% of our efforts into making the ACAS talks work and we will continue to do whatever we can to restore good industrial relations. Unfortunately this unwillingness to engage with the unions in matters which have severe consequences for staff, fuels the poor staff morale and the disenchantment with our University leadership.

## **University of London & the Strategic Plan 2026**

The University of London application has been well supported by the majority of staff and students but the presentations from Management on this have failed to enthuse staff and to many the application looks more like a fig leaf to cover failures in the last strategic plan. Attempts are being made to involve staff in the plans for the next strategic plan taking us to 2026 and we welcome these – but they need to be real and positive changes that have at their heart the need for City University London to become a better and more pleasant place to work and study.

## **Staff need a voice on Council**

If we are successful in our application to the University of London, City will be unusual amongst the major colleges in having no staff voice on the governing body. We believe that our Council should include some elected members and some formal staff representatives. Staff need a voice on Council, as we believe that without this, the real picture at City University London goes unreported. The University's poor performance and the dire experiences of its staff must be addressed by the University's governing body. We want to place on record our thanks to the independent members of Council: we realise you have a difficult task to perform and acknowledge the hours of unpaid work that you do. We genuinely believe by having closer contacts with the staff and their trade unions we can help you in the work you do. Not all is bad at City, we have wonderful academics and professional staff and there are some great managers. Marvellous opportunities for the future are there to be taken – let the staff have a say in how we seize them.

**Thank you for reading,**

**City University London UCU Executive Committee**

