

Professor David McKitterick FBA, Vice-Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and Chairman of the IES Advisory Council to Professor Roger Kain FBA, Dean and Chief Executive of the School of Advanced Study, University of London

15 May 2014

Dear Roger

To say that I am sorry that it has come to this is a vast understatement. The recommendation to close the IES is bound to have repercussions. It will damage the reputation of the University, calling into question its academic commitment both to the subject and to wider responsibilities. Goodness knows how the closing of an institute that is part Hefce-funded is dealt with by Hefce. This is something of which I know nothing, but speaking as an outsider I assume, in the interests of proper and understood use of public money, that the SAS grant will be reviewed.

I had hoped, as decisions were made and rumours circulated over the last several months, that I was wrong: that there was still determination that the IES should continue to succeed. I should not have forced myself to be so optimistic. You explained to me that the decision to close the IES has been made by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, a body consisting overwhelmingly of administrators rather than those engaged in teaching or research. No doubt committees and individuals will hide behind each other's coat tails, but it looks to me that people have been at the least evasive; and that a vast amount of time has been wasted. It became clear (when you last wrote to tell me that the interviews for a new Director were not to proceed) that the University administration and those who advise it concerning monies available were either not awake, or were being misled. As I understand it, the post was advertised despite the fact that the money was not firmly in hand. Money was spent on advertising. Candidates spent a great deal of time assembling their applications. We went through a process of short-listing, and only then did I learn that there was no money for this appointment. A very great waste of time and resources.

In our recent exchange of emails concerning the status of the very substantial reserves built up by the IES, you also asked the University's Director of Finance, Andrew Murphy, for a clear statement. He has today supplied one, not materially different from your own summary intimating that 'My anticipation is that the word will be that there is no IES-owned reserve, nor for that matter SAS reserve but rather general University of London reserves which are needed for fiduciary reasons to underpin this institution's (as all others) activities. IES/SAS are not separate incorporated bodies but parts of the whole (as are departments in 'regular' universities). We can wait for his reply but I am not sanguine that it will answer your question in the affirmative.' I am deeply disappointed that it should have taken so long for such clarification. Questions and enquiries about the whereabouts of the reserves, and the extent to which the IES could, or could not, benefit from its own efficient management, have consumed an inordinate number of fruitless hours.

I understand from our conversation that three of the IES activities are to be moved to the IHR: palaeography, the history of the book, and the Ministry of Information project. Other parts, where appropriate, are to be made the responsibility of the Institute of Modern Languages Research. As I outlined in my email to you of a few days ago, this is far from the whole of English studies: a glance at the current programme of lectures, seminars, workshops etc., makes this clear. The proposed fragmentation does not add up to a commitment to the subject, nor does it come half-way to defining it. The falling away of staff (both professors soon gone), leaving just Wim with a much more confined brief, adds further to the impression of abandoning national commitments. Is there any reason why there should not be a centre for English studies within the IHR? That would at least send a better signal to the community.

I had decided last weekend that I would resign this week from my post as chairman of the advisory council. In the absence of the IES the post will disappear in any case, but for clarification I resign with immediate effect.

Yours sincerely

David