



29 January 2007

Professor Drummond Bone  
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Dear Professor Bone

I am writing to you in your capacity as President of Universities UK to let you know my union's opposition to increasing levels of private sector involvement in the provision of academic and other key university functions. My union is particularly concerned that companies such as Study Group International, KAPLAN and INTO have been in extensive discussion with some UK universities with the aim taking over the provision of courses in IT, vocational training and language teaching for – in particular overseas students.

My concern is at the possible negative impact of these ventures upon the quality of education provided and the impact on the terms and conditions of the staff where private provision replaces that of the institution itself. At the University of East Anglia, it is reported that the INTO venture is advertising for new staff with lower than usual qualifications and at lower levels of pay. At Newcastle, the local UCU has not been adequately consulted, with many of the details of the joint venture negotiations kept secret. In addition, that university is not fulfilling its obligations to HEFCE with regard to the need for an impact assessment before the transfer of the language centre to INTO. At Northumbria\*, redundancies were announced as part of the transfer of language courses to Study Group International's control.

The international market is of crucial importance to UK universities. It seems to me that handing responsibility for providing and preparing overseas students to the private sector is very dangerous. In addition to the concerns about quality and the conditions of the staff, what happens if and when a private provider decides that this "market" is not profitable enough? I find it difficult to understand why our universities would not want to control their own destiny in this area.

The proliferation of interest from private firms in higher education raises other issues too which go much wider than the provision of language courses for overseas students. Many

*\*It is a matter of record that Northumbria University had talks with SGI but UCU now notes that no transfer took place.*

UCU members are rightly concerned about the effect of being transferred to a private company on their future pay, pensions, workloads, job security and academic freedom.

For these reasons, UCU is committed to campaigning vigorously against the privatisation of higher education. We will resist any further attempts to transfer academic departments and staff into private ownership and will defend our members' terms and conditions, including pension rights, as well as the quality of students' education.

To this end, I will be asking UCU members to sign an open letter to every Vice Chancellor this week. Local UCU branches will be asked to approach their institutions to seek a commitment not to privatise academic departments or other key university functions, while I also be raising the issue with the UCEA at our JNCHES meeting this week.

In the meantime, I would be grateful to know your views, as well as those of UUK, and would urge you to use your influence as the President of Universities UK to ensure that institutions pull back from this trend which is already generating unwelcome publicity for UK universities about quality and treatment of staff.

I am also copying this letter to Peter Williams of the QAA.

Yours sincerely

Sally Hunt  
Joint general secretary

Copy: Peter Williams, QAA