

P-N-L

THE POLYTECHNIC OF
NORTH LONDON

MEMORANDUM

BF
25.7.88
13th July, 1988

DATE _____

From: Dianne Willcocks, Dean Designate

To:

Leslie Wagner
Dorma Urwin

CONFIDENTIAL

DIRECTOR'S WORKING PARTY ON THE SURVEY RESEARCH UNIT

Response from the Director of Research and Consultancy

I have now had the opportunity to look at the document prepared by the Working Party and I would like to offer a response. Should it prove helpful, I would be prepared to make a more detailed critique at some later stage. What I am concerned about at this stage is to put on record my anxiety concerning the method used; the way in which data was handled; and the outcome of the enquiry.

Conduct of the Enquiry: The level of generality achieved by the final report makes it impossible to establish who participated and gave evidence, and what constituencies they came from; how did the members of the panel handle the data and was there any equivalence between oral contribution and written contributions; what questions were asked; how did the panel disentangle earlier evidence of difficulties around the operations of the SRU; how did they deal with contentious issues; to what extent was comparison made with other areas of Polytechnic activity; who identified the people who should participate in the enquiry and where is the list of contributors to identify the range of interests that were involved.

Documentation: I am aware that the enquiry generated substantial documentation both from the SRU itself and from those who wished to highlight certain historical problems that have resulted from its operations. Where is this documentation now and can it be used to substantiate some of the statements made in the report.

Faculty Responsibility: It is not clear from the report what involvement the Faculty ever had with the SRU, irrespective of terms of reference which clearly identify a Faculty role. It would seem inappropriate to lay the blame for poor management at the Centre when the Faculty itself was not doing its job.

Managerial Contributions: Substantial contributions to this enquiry were made by the Director of Research and Consultancy; the Head of Financial Services; and the Dean of Faculty. All of these contributions highlighted substantial problems experienced with the SRU over a number of years. There seems to be little evidence in the written report from the Working Party that these accounts were taken seriously. How was equivalence decided between contributions from different people reporting to the enquiry panel.

Financial Matters: There appears to be no reference to the strong evidence of financial mismanagement which was presented to the Working Party. There was a direct loss to the Polytechnic of £7,500 on the Hackney Survey - with major managerial inputs required to limit the damage of this exercise. In addition, there is the matter of the exorbitant proposal for reimbursement from SRU, for undertaking the student survey.

External Organisations: There is no evidence that the Working Party made any serious attempt to follow up leads given to it concerning the reputation of the SRU with external bodies. An easy option seems to have been followed whereby the panel spoke to "the friends of the SRU". It would be possible to provide an alternative account by going to other sources who have worked with the SRU over the past decade.

Outcome: Whilst the Working Party's recommendations re PNL Policy are useful we did not necessarily need a special panel to highlight the need for clarity in our procedures. What we do need is a less general account of present operations of SRU - as compared with its perceived historic role in the Polytechnic. I look forward to identifying a system of implementation for the ASC/APC working party reports early in the next academic session.



Dianne Willcocks
Director, Research and Consultancy