

British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA)

The leading association of academics in industrial relations and associated disciplines

www.buira.org.uk

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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163 Professors and Readers sign protest letter against Keele job cuts and attack on critical social science

163 Professors and Readers* from every continent have signed a protest letter launched by the British Universities Industrial Relations Association (BUIRA) against the threat of draconian academic job cuts at Keele University, UK. Amongst the over 400 academic signatories are world-renowned scholars in the study of work such as Professors Arlie Hochschild and Sanford Jacoby, both from University of California. They also include the editors of leading journals in employment and organisation studies, such as Professor Mick Marchington of the Human Resource Management Journal and Professor Stephen Deery of the Human Relations journal.

If Keele's senior management implement their proposals, 38 out of 67 academics posts will be cut in the School of Economic and Management Studies in the fields of Human Resource Management (HRM)/Industrial Relations (IR), Business Administration, Economics, and Health Planning and Management to create a streamlined 'business school'.

Their rationale for the job cuts is set out in a 'consultation' document, released in late December, where they claim that the HRM/IR area is of particular concern because of 'disappointing' recruitment figures – despite their relative buoyancy. They also claim that current HRM/IR academics at Keele possess inappropriate 'skill sets' to teach HRM effectively. Of the 12 academics in the HRM/IR group, management are earmarking 10 for redundancy and closing down all stand-alone courses in HRM/IR at every level. This is despite Keele possessing a deserved international reputation for excellence in IR teaching and research.

BUIRA, the leading association of British academics in industrial relations and associated disciplines with over 670 members, views the

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Keele proposals as an overt attack on the academic legitimacy of industrial relations as a field of study and on the competence of its academics. In its open protest letter, BUIRA argues that, “the stated rationale for selection of the job cuts is an attack on the validity of critical social science as a field of academic inquiry and teaching”. In addition, BUIRA is flabbergasted that IR (aka Employee Relations), a core, taught element for the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) professional qualification, is deemed to be irrelevant in a modern business school. As we state in the open letter:

“[W]e find it disingenuous to suggest that individuals with a background of teaching and research in industrial relations do not have the ‘appropriate skill sets’ to teach HRM. Wherever HRM is taught in British universities, staff are able to combine both sub sets of the discipline within their teaching portfolios..., with the two strands complementing each other and adding to the richness of the field of inquiry.”

BUIRA’s incredulity and outrage is compounded by the knowledge that all “the major journals in the subject field... regularly feature articles, which would claim to be from either an HRM or IR perspective ” and “that the vast majority of Professors of HRM in UK universities live happily within the two sub sets of academic inquiry”. This is borne out by the large number of leading HRM academics in the UK signing the open letter.

The fact that the letter has been signed by leading academics in IR, HRM, Management, Economics, Organisation Studies and Sociology from across the globe, demonstrates that the Keele proposals represent an unprecedented and serious attack on critical social science and on academic freedom within management and business education.

BUIRA can only speculate as to the real reasons behind senior management’s attack on IR. BUIRA President, Professor Rosemary Lucas believes that no matter how flawed and disingenuous the attacks on IR, it is a serious challenge:

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“BUIRA is gives its full support to our members in Keele in resisting what we see as a direct attack on their jobs and subject field, and urge the University’s senior management to reconsider its approach in the light of staffs’ willingness to accommodate changes to their teaching portfolios.”

*Readers or their equivalent (Professorial Fellows, Associate Professors and Principal Research Fellows)

ENDS

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Additional document attached

BUIRA open protest letter and list of 408 signatories’ names, positions and institutions

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