

Uni axes 'fees' Prof

Academic sacked over 'false' claims

By KILMENY ADIE

The University of Wollongong yesterday sacked the academic who was at the forefront of a national debate about marking procedures for international full fee-paying students.

The university's controversial and outspoken Professor Ted Steele was hand-delivered a letter informing him of his dismissal a little after 5pm.

University of Wollongong Vice-Chancellor Professor Gerard Sutton said in a statement he "greatly regretted" the action.

"But it was necessary in the light of Associate Professor Steele's knowingly false allegations undermining the essential fabric of the employment relationship and puts at serious risk the good name of the university," Prof Sutton said.

"(His) portrayal in the media as a 'whistleblower' who has dared to speak out was totally unwarranted as at no time was Associate Professor Steele instructed or directed in any way to upgrade the honours assessments of the two students in question."

A NSW Ombudsman's Office examination into the matter found that there had been no instruction nor basis for the perception of instruction.

It had also found the normal procedure for examination of honours assessments had been followed.

Prof Steele said the decision caught him by surprise.

"I think it's extraordinary that I have been sacked for speaking out," he said. "It just got too hot I think and they decided they couldn't have any more exposure."

"They couldn't silence me by rational argument and now they are using the techniques of dictatorships - there is no other way to put it."

In January Prof Steele spoke out about what he believed were examples of overseas students receiving favourable treatment.

Prof Steele claimed he had been coerced into agreeing to the boosting of marks of some of his students, including one full fee-paying student.

Prof Steele said he still stood by his statements regarding marking procedures.

"The truth's the truth," he said.

"(The university is) viewed as a major employer - fine - but we are also academics and our job is to pursue the truth."

"We're trained to sense it out and argue it and defend it. I'm trained to know what is the truth and not - I'm a scientist."

Prof Steele said would meet with his solicitor to discuss legal action over his dismissal.

Illawarra Mercury, 27 February 2001, p 3