



How do you feel, Dr Steele?

By ABAN CONTRACTOR

Sacked academic Ted Steele will get his job back at the University of Wollongong after the Federal Court ruled the university had acted unlawfully when it dismissed him.

Dr Steele, who was sacked without warning a year ago after saying he had been told to upgrade student's marks, said he hoped the university now would deal with him fairly and allow his allegations to be tested in a public forum.

"Fair play would be that, if they're going to try me again, it has to be in a proper court of law where all the truth comes out," Dr Steele said outside the Federal Court yesterday.

"I've been through almost 14 months of hell and I'm not going to go through a kangaroo court at the University of Wollongong."

In a unanimous decision, the Federal Court rejected an appeal by the university that it had the right to summarily dismiss an academic. The university was ordered to pay Dr Steele's costs, estimated to be about \$40,000.

The vice-chancellor, Gerard Sutton, later said he accepted the court's decision that he had breached the

university's enterprise bargaining agreement.

The university would negotiate with the National Tertiary Education Union, who bought the legal action on behalf of Dr Steele, to decide on "a process" for his reinstatement.

"We intend to reinstate him," Professor Sutton said.

"That won't occur until there's an agreement on a process to address the substantial issue of the allegations and the merits of the dismissal."

Asked if he would allow an independent outsider to oversee any hearing, Prof Sutton said "yes".

He dismissed claims that he had damaged the university's reputation at home and overseas by summarily dismissing Dr Steele for speaking out on falling academic standards at the height of a national debate on the issue.

Dr Steele was one of dozens of academics who contacted the Sydney Morning Herald early last year with examples of "soft marking", but the only one who allowed his name to be published.

Yesterday, students at the University of Wollongong called on Prof Sutton to resign, arguing it was the first step in repairing the

WINNING GRIN: A smiling Dr Steele, pictured outside the Federal courts yesterday, has won back his job at the University of Wollongong (above).

Main picture: SIMON ALEKNA

university's reputation.

The president of the post-graduate students association, Dave Coffman, said the vice-chancellor had lost the respect of many academics and senior administrators in the higher education sector because he had infringed a basic tenet of academic life the right to speak out on issues of public importance.

Students should also consider the enormous amount of taxpayers money that had been wasted by the vice-chancellor in unnecessary legal bills.

"That could have been better spent on addressing the crisis in the provision of library journals or creating sorely needed scholarships,"

Mr Coffman said. A spokeswoman for the union said Dr Steele had been without work and pay for more than a year. He had been pilloried by the university and he and his family had suffered as a result.

"We think that for the university to try and embark on another investigation of Dr Steele about the events that they've already sacked him for (is) not only double jeopardy he's already been through a lot but we would be concerned about bias," she said.

"How can Dr Steele get a fair hearing when the vice-chancellor has already determined that he should have been sacked?"

One.Tel gone to pot - Packer

Kerry Packer reckoned One.Tel co-founder Jodee Rich must have been "smoking marijuana" when he talked about the telco's aims of achieving a \$1 billion market capitalisation.

Mr Packer later felt he had been kept out of the loop and felt son James had done a poor job of keeping him informed about One.Tel's cash position, Mr Rich told the inquiry into One.Tel's collapse.

Mr Rich said both Kerry and James Packer were surprised at financial targets he gave them in 1998, which formed the basis for the \$7 million performance bonuses later paid to Mr Rich and fellow One.Tel joint managing director Bradley Keeling.

In response to questions from Michael Slattery, QC, for liquidator Ferrier Hodgson, Mr Rich said he discussed the \$1 billion market capitalisation target with the Packers around March to April 1998.

"Kerry said words to the effect I must be smoking marijuana", Mr Rich said.

"I somewhat cheekily replied he should remain tuned."

The Packers had a relatively small shareholding in One.Tel at that time but later increased that significantly, with Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp together holding around 40 per cent of One.Tel when it collapsed in May last year.

One.Tel in fact did reach the \$1 billion market capitalisation target, meaning Mr Rich and Mr Keeling were paid \$US1 million in performance-related bonuses. The pair received a total of \$US3.5 million each in bonuses.

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