

University sacks whistleblower in grading row

Aban Contractor and Gerard Noonan

The man who accused the University of Wollongong of upgrading substandard honours students was sacked last night.

Associate Professor Ted Steele, of the Biological Sciences Department, received a letter of termination signed by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gerard Sutton, late yesterday.

Dr Steele, at the centre of the row over allegations of falling standards at universities, last night stood by his claims.

Professor Sutton said the action was necessary in the light of Dr Steele's "knowingly false allegations undermining the essential fabric of the employ-

ment relationship and [putting] at serious risk the good name of the university".

Last night, a fellow academic who acted as the outside expert marker on the disputed honours theses publicly backed Dr Steele.

Professor Robert Blanden, of the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University, described the sacking as a disgrace.

"He's been in all sincerity drawing attention to falling standards and he believes passionately that something ought to be done about it and so do I, and there are an awful lot of people in higher education who think likewise," Professor Blanden said.

A spokeswoman for the

National Tertiary Education Union, Dr Julie Wells, said the union was very concerned that someone who had been publicly critical of the university's practices has found themselves summarily dismissed.

Dr Steele told the *Herald* last month that he had been told to upgrade the marks of two honours students, one Australian and one an overseas student.

But the University of Wollongong, Australia's university of the year, has rejected the claim, and challenged Dr Steele to produce evidence.

Dr Steele signed a statutory declaration standing by his allegations and pointed to the outside examiner's report on

the students which claimed that the material of one student was the worst the examiner had ever seen.

He wrote to the NSW Ombudsman, who refused to investigate, saying it did not appear that the university had instructed Dr Steele to elevate or upgrade marks.

Dr Steele said he would put his evidence before the Senate inquiry into university funding and standards, which begins public hearings next month.

Dr Steele said that under the 1996 Workplace Relations Act, which the university had used to dismiss him, disciplinary action was to be used only as a last resort. He said he would fight the dismissal.



Stands by his claims . . . Ted Steele