



Staff refuse to work with Steele

Patrick Lawnham

TED Steele's colleagues at the University of Wollongong are refusing to work with him until his soft-marking claims are dealt with by an inquiry.

They say they are the "real victims" in his public allegations, while Dr Steele says they are "trying to defend the indefensible".

Dr Steele is due back at work in Wollongong's biological sciences department on April 22 after being sacked illegally over his allegations more than a year ago.

In another twist, a senior lecturer in Wollongong's accounting and finance department, Henry Collier, has made a series of new soft-marking claims going back a decade and has written to vice-chancellor Gerard Sutton saying he will give evidence to a Steele inquiry.

Professor Sutton has reinstated Dr Steele after unsuccessfully defending his summary dismissal of him in the Federal Court, which found he had to follow misconduct procedures in the enterprise agreement, including a joint inquiry with the academics' union.

Professor Sutton has said the molecular biologist would be based in his old department because of his skills.

But yesterday the department released a letter signed by almost all of its academics, saying they "find it unacceptable to reinstate him" in the department until Dr Steele's "vexatious" allegations are exam-

ined by an inquiry and Dr Steele accepts the outcome — which could result in another dismissal.

In particular, they said it was "absolutely unacceptable" for Dr Steele to be involved in teaching duties "while he persists in misrepresenting our examination procedures".

The letter to Wollongong council secretary David Rome, appealing for management and the union to agree on an inquiry format, is signed by 12 academics including department head Mark Walker, acting head Bill Buttemer and former head and science dean-designate Rob Whelan.

Dr Steele, to be reinstated as an associate professor, alleged two hon-

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University of Wollongong colleagues

ours students he had supervised in 1997 and 2000 were undeservedly marked higher by department markers than by Australian National University expert Robert Blanden, and he felt forced to accept the resultant high averaging.

Professor Blanden and Dr Steele are research associates. Since his dismissal, Dr Steele has been working part time as a visiting fellow in Professor Blanden's ANU immunology laboratory.

The decision on which work space

to offer Dr Steele will be made by pro vice-chancellor and interim science dean Margaret Sheil and Professor Sutton, who insists he can work with Dr Steele "professionally".

Professor Sutton has told the HES: "There is unquestionably a good deal of hurt among his colleagues within the department [about] the allegations he made that impinged on their academic integrity and academic reputation.

"The working through of where his office might be and where the laboratories might be will be for discussion with the union, Dr Steele and the department," he said.

Professor Sutton last week agreed to a reinstatement without prior agreement by Dr Steele and the National Tertiary Education Union on a formula for testing Dr Steele's claims under the enterprise agreement — which Dr Steele assumes foreshadows a disciplinary inquiry.

Dr Steele and the union beat a full-bench Federal Court appeal by the university just before Easter.

The vice-chancellor has the right under the enterprise agreement to call a misconduct inquiry but faces the problem in this case of avoiding conflict of interest.

The university has offered Dr Steele and the NTEU new options for an inquiry under the enterprise agreement, including a joint committee with an external chair to decide on any further action.

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