

V-C continued to work for KordaMentha despite UOW saying he was on leave

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The University of Wollongong's interim Vice-Chancellor has *continued* working for consultancy firm *KordaMentha* during his tenure, despite UOW saying he had been on unpaid leave from the company.

Documents revealed under freedom of information laws show UOW Chancellor Michael Still had known interim V-C Professor John Dewar would continue *to work* one day a fortnight *for KordaMentha* - as early as June last year.

Yet when asked about this apparent conflict late last year, UOW had repeatedly responded that Professor Dewar was on leave from *KordaMentha* (KM), where he was a partner.

He had actually been doing one day a fortnight unpaid "leadership" *work* with KM's higher education consultants, while working a nine-day fortnight *for UOW* for the pro-rated equivalent of a million-dollar annual salary.

KordaMentha had been contracted by UOW *for work* on its cost-cutting project, which recently delivered cuts of 91 jobs.

The National Tertiary Education Union, which has furiously opposed the job cuts, uncovered Professor Dewar's *continued* involvement with *KordaMentha* through a Government Information (Public Access) request *for UOW* documents.

NTEU general secretary Dr Damien Cahill called it a "shocking example of poor governance".

"It beggars belief that this conflict of interest could be managed adequately," Dr Cahill said.

"The chancellor was well aware of Dewar's *work* at *KordaMentha* - in fact he explicitly noted it in an email *to* him a whole month before the tender panel that the chancellor was a part of selected *KordaMentha*.

"Why on earth would you choose *KordaMentha*, fully aware your hand-picked interim vice-chancellor was going *to* continue *to work* for them, *to* review the university if you took conflicts of interests seriously?

"It's now obvious why UOW has been doing everything it can *to* avoid scrutiny about this conflict of interest, which is a shocking example of poor governance showing contempt *for* the entire community."

The UOW documents show *KordaMentha* was invited *to* tender *for* the "Enterprise Wide Review" restructure *work* in June, with applications closing on June 21, and a panel approving its proposal on July 2.

They also include a contract showing Professor Dewar started on June 3, and a letter on the same date showing Mr Still approved of the plan *to* continue *work* at KM.

Yet on September 3 last year, UOW told the *Mercury* Professor Dewar "was not employed by the university during the tender process" ... "all of which took place before his employment began."

"These documents appear *to* directly contradict UOW's assertion that *KordaMentha* were only selected *to* review operations after John Dewar was appointed as interim Vice-Chancellor," Dr Cahill said.

The UOW documents also show that Professor Dewar was not on the tender panel that selected *KordaMentha*, and they outline the panel's assessment of *KordaMentha*'s tender as clearly superior *to* the rival consultancy firm's proposal.

KM's bid was more tailored *to* UOW's needs and was significantly cheaper, and its team had senior staff and experience in higher education, the panel decided.

The *Mercury* asked Mr Still and UOW if it had been misleading *to* insist Professor Dewar had been on leave from *KordaMentha* while continuing regular *work* there.

A response from a UOW spokesman did not directly address this question, instead saying any conflict of interest had been managed.

"Professor John Dewar has taken unpaid leave from *KordaMentha* *for* the duration of his tenure as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Wollongong," it said.

"Upon his appointment, Professor Dewar formally declared his ongoing association with *KordaMentha* in accordance with the University's Conflict of Interest Policy. A comprehensive management plan was established and has been rigorously followed.

"Any potential, perceived, or actual conflicts of interest have been and will continue *to* be managed in full compliance with UOW's Conflict of Interest Policy.

"It is also important *to* note that *KordaMentha*'s appointment followed a robust and transparent tender process, assessed by an independent panel. Professor Dewar was not involved in any part of the appointment or assessment process."

Professor Dewar's term was originally intended *to* finish at the end of December but has been extended into February.

On Monday UOW revealed it had started another process of job cuts and restructuring that would affect non-academic staff at the university.

While the 91 job cuts concerned academic staff and would save \$21 million, the new round aimed *to* save \$30 million, UOW said.

CREDIT: Ben Langford