

CMC/SOKL

V-C's letter to Bill Rammell,
Universities Minister.

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[Redacted]

Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

9 September 2008

Following our conversation on 26 June, I said I would write to you in due course about the incident in May when [Redacted] were arrested under the prevention of terrorism legislation. [Redacted]

[Redacted]. Rather than wait until all the facts are in the public domain, I thought it better to write now.

I would be happy to talk to you or your colleagues about this report, if that would be helpful to you.

Please find attached our report.

With best wishes

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Report on Recent Arrests at the University of Nottingham

[REDACTED]

First, it is difficult to see that we (or anyone) could have handled matters differently. We did the right thing in calling in the Police and they conducted their investigations appropriately. Although there have been concerns expressed from certain quarters, including a small number of staff and students within the University, this has been fairly modest compared to the general level of support (or absence of concern) about the actions taken.

Significant issues in the situation were:

- [REDACTED] a manager accessed his computer (within our guidelines) for a specific piece of work. An electronic copy of an Al-Qaeda Training Manual caught her eye, particularly as the subject area of the department was not connected to this.
- [REDACTED] the manager also saw some suitcases and a large number of boxes.
- She contacted her Head of Department, and the matter was referred to the Registrar. The Registrar, in discussion with our Head of Security, referred the matter to the Police. The West Midlands counter-terrorism branch came on to campus and inspected the office. [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] there are no issues of academic freedom, although this is an issue picked up by members of the press.

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I would highlight the following points:

- Maintaining effective relationships with different groups within the University before, during and after the event was very important: this includes faith groups and leaders, the Students' Union, lay members of the Council and members of Senate. The explicit support of Senate and Council for the actions taken was particularly valued.
- The existing DIUS guidance is useful and, in general terms, sufficient for incidents less significant than this one. I am not at all convinced that further guidance from the Department is needed.

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- Our ability, in general terms, to work with the media meant that the story lost its profile very quickly (except in THE, which is not read outside the HE sector).
- In June, our Registrar spoke to UUK and a Deputy Director at DIUS [REDACTED]. This was helpful and, indeed, no specific assistance was needed by us. An earlier courtesy call would have been welcomed though. We also spoke to HEFCE early on in the process.
- Overall, we sought to be as open and transparent about the position as we were able to be (noting that some matters in relation to the former employee are still *sub judice*). This was the right thing to do and we kept our communities briefed via statements on our intranet portal (see <http://my.nottingham.ac.uk>).
- A small incident management team chaired by the Registrar and with a Pro-Vice-Chancellor as alternate met frequently during the first four weeks following the incident. This helped with responding to challenges.
- We actively invited comment and critique by asking people to email the Registrar. In the end, we received fewer than 200 emails and letters and have replied to each one.
- Our final piece of advice to anyone dealing with this issue in universities is to treat Al-Qaeda material as if it were toxic waste and handle with great care. Academic departments need to be clear about the implications of material they encourage their students to access. We are confident that our research ethics policies are appropriate. It may be that all HEIs will review their own ethics policies in light of our experience.

Colin Campbell
September 2008

[REDACTED]