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Academics criticise HEA for flouting principles of intellectual freedom

17 April 2008

By [John Gill](#)

The Higher Education Academy has suspended its director of research and evaluation after the publication of a letter in *Times Higher Education*.

Lee Harvey's letter, which he wrote in a personal capacity, criticised the National Student Survey. Academics have condemned the suspension as a restriction of academic freedom. *Times Higher Education* understands that Professor Harvey is accused of breaching his contract by writing a letter for publication without HEA clearance. The decision to suspend him was taken by HEA chief executive Paul Ramsden, against whom Professor Harvey had previously lodged a grievance on an unrelated matter.

Earlier in his career Professor Ramsden was involved with the pioneering student experience survey in Australia, a forerunner to the UK NSS. Professor Harvey described the NSS in his letter as a "hopelessly inadequate improvement tool".

Today, in another letter to *Times Higher Education*, four academics condemn the HEA's handling of the case, which they say is a "breach of academic freedom".

Lyn Fawcett, chair of the University and College Union higher education committee in Northern Ireland, said he would consider quitting as a member of the HEA if Professor Harvey were not reinstated.

He said: "One has to question the integrity of the HEA if they are not prepared to allow someone who is a specialist in an area to have an expert opinion. It also raises questions about not just academic freedom but personal freedom. That an individual should not be allowed to express an opinion in a personal capacity outside of work is a disgrace."

Another fellow of the HEA, speaking anonymously, said: "You don't shut down a debate that has never been had. There's an atmosphere of intellectual terror surrounding this that is indicative of how afraid people are to speak out about anything."

Bernard Longden, professor of higher education policy at Liverpool Hope University, said: "We talk about the need for higher education to be a 'critical community'. Is this the most effective way that it can handle criticism?" Sean Mackney, HEA deputy chief executive, refused to comment on the suspension or the prior grievance between Professor Harvey and Professor Ramsden. He said: "The academy is a strong believer in the freedom of academics to publish and say what they wish about any matter. It would not be proper for me to comment on (this case) further."

However, a member of HEA staff, speaking anonymously, said there was a "great deal of unease" in the organisation, adding: "If, as we understand, the suspension is retaliation to the letter, then it is absolutely ridiculous and actually very damaging to the academy."

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Readers' comments

- **James Williams** 17 April, 2008

It is astonishing that Lee Harvey should be suspended as a result of voicing important concerns about the NSS. The letter concerned reflected ideas he has raised before, memorably in the THES (December 2003). This is a worrying assault on academic freedom. It is a shame that the HEA, which theoretically provides a valuable resource for the

sector and venue for discussion, appears to be becoming a tool for government and the agencies in pushing through the latest fads. The NSS is problematic for several reasons - notably it fails to take account of issues within individual institutions and it fails to reflect improvements that have occurred over time.

- **Liudvika Leisyte** 17 April, 2008

I realise the academic freedom has been slowly curtailed in England, but it reached such an extent that people are sacked from their jobs! This is ridiculous. Prof. Harvey is one of the highly regarded experts in the field of higher education research in the UK and I cannot believe that he cannot express his professional views in the press without being sacked from his job. This is a disgrace indeed and tarnishes the image of UK academic system. Really sorry to see this happen.

- **Paul Gorman** 17 April, 2008

It seems ironic to me that the intended purpose of the National Student Survey is to give students the opportunity to express their views and criticisms about their institution, yet Lee Harvey is not extended the same courtesy by the very people responsible for introducing this approach. What makes this scenario even more ridiculous is the fact that Lee Harvey expressed his views on a personal level, outside his role at the HEA! How can anything improve if academics are restricted and scorned for being critical?

- **Tamsin Bowers-Brown** 17 April, 2008

I find it shocking that a body claiming to be an 'authoritative and independent voice on policies that affect the student learning experience' who claim to 'foster robust debate, challenge received wisdom and create a forum for new thinking' is stifling this important debate in such a way. Professor Harvey is one of the world's leading experts on student experience surveys and therefore it is paramount that he is able to contribute further to the improvement and development of more effective research tools. His critical analysis of existing tools is for the purpose of improving the student experience, something for which everyone in HE should be aiming.

- **Jason Lemman** 17 April, 2008

Having worked with Professor Harvey I greatly respect his views on Student Satisfaction. However, seeing the changes that the NSS has prompted in many universities I believe that it has been a force for good. Yet as much as I disagree with Professor Harvey's view, there are improvements that can be made to the NSS, such as course specific results to better inform institutions. Furthermore, for institutional level surveys I believe a mixture of the short length and simplicity of the NSS, combined with the customised questions and the feedback cycle of the student satisfaction methodology is most effective. Whilst there are clearly difficulties in the working relationships at the HEA the silencing of free debate is of no benefit. Methodologies should not be ideologies, they should be constantly evolving and responsive tools that best serve the experience of students and the work of universities. I hope the HEA allow such debate and look to moving forwards rather than standing still.

Yours faithfully,

Jason Lemman
Research Associate
Centre for Research and Evaluation
Sheffield Hallam University

- **Maria Smith** 17 April, 2008

I am shocked that the debate about the student survey is being closed down in this manner. Professor Harvey knows more about student experience than the majority and his views are invaluable. Whether one agrees with his views or not, the most important issue is to keep progressing knowledge and this cannot be achieved by silencing those that we don't agree with.

- **Chris Rust** 17 April, 2008

Speaking as a Senior Fellow of the Academy, I am shocked and appalled by this action taken by the Academy's Chief Executive. It is totally unacceptable that any academic employed by the Academy should have been deemed to have given up their rights to speak in a personal capacity on any issue, let alone one that so clearly falls within their area of professional expertise, as in this case. This reflects very badly on the HEA, and its image as an organisation, and I would suggest that both the Academy and Paul Ramsden need all the friends they can get!

- **Kathy Lockett** 17 April, 2008

Professor Harvey is regarded as one of the most acute researchers and commentators of QA in the English-speaking world and his work is highly valued in South Africa. It is shocking to us in the South that the HEA has sought to silence him and prevent robust debate (a precondition for knowledge production) that we always assumed

was guaranteed in a country like the UK.

- **Watson Scott Swail** 17 April, 2008

If it weren't for the personal dilemma that Professor Harvey must now currently go through, this would be somewhat humorous, per the prior emails. Perhaps the suspension should be aimed at the executive chief of the HEA, who quite apparently has some control issues (and people can get 'help' with those things). The only bad judgment here comes from the HEA.

With one quick statement, this can all be fixed, but only if Mr. Ramsden is willing to acknowledge his mistake(s).

- **Catherine Rytmeister** 17 April, 2008

The suspension of Professor Harvey in apparent retaliation for his expression of a view critical of the NSS is a very worrying development. I am a higher education researcher, familiar with the work of both Professor Harvey and Professor Ramsden. Both are highly esteemed scholars. I am disappointed to see the HEA's response to Professor Harvey's letter and greatly concerned at the implications for academic and intellectual freedom in the UK.

If it is true that Professor Harvey's suspension is due to a breach of his contract with the HEA, this raises a broader question as to why the HEA feels the need to require staff to obtain "clearance" to publish, even as private citizens. I understand that the HEA is seen as a valuable resource for the HE sector in the UK - its value and legitimacy surely derive to a great extent from the academic standing, reputation and integrity of its staff. If this restrictive contract is becoming the norm in such agencies it directly threatens the very values on which their authenticity depends. I am sure this is happening here in Australia, too, but we have not (yet) had such a high profile case to draw our attention to the issue.

The reputation and effectiveness of the HEA is at risk as long as action such as suspension can be taken in response to legitimate public comment by an academic staff member. In effect, this action treats the expression of an opinion as gross misconduct; clearly this is an untenable stance for the HEA to take. Professor Harvey must be reinstated without delay.

Catherine Rytmeister

Sydney, Australia

- **Orlando Albornoz** 17 April, 2008

Dear Sir, I was highly surprised to know about the recent incident concerning Professor Lee Harvey. I understand that he was suspended as director of research and evaluation of the The Higher Education Academy after the publication of a letter in Times Higher Education. It is a devastating news for people like me, scholars living in remote countries like Venezuela where we are struggling against authoritarian government in order to keep alive the academic principles that protect our integrity as people able to criticize and express views that are often found "dangerous" by the autocrat that at least in the Venezuela case is in power, imposing the will of the military outlook to those of the scholarly institutions. I feel sorry about what it has happened in this case in Great Britain, a place we still look as a place of academic freedom and open society.

- **Richard A. Voorhees** 17 April, 2008

From my experiences working with Lee Harvey on critical international issues in higher education both here in the U.S. and abroad, I was most disappointed to see this story. Lee Harvey has never advanced a professional opinion for personal gain or revenge. In fact, I've come to appreciate a sense of integrity and fair play from him in all interactions. If a "party line" has been developed around a survey tool as implied, and there is no room to improve that tool through public debate, all members of the international higher education research community have been set back.

- **Professor John Rouse** 17 April, 2008

I can only reinforce the points made above - shocked, astonished, appalled that such a suspension has taken place. It is absolutely vital that the HEA encourage debate and discussion not suppress it. Lee Harvey's criticism, built on years of experience in this field, should be seen as a way of moving the NSS on and the HEA should be in the vanguard of the quality enhancement movement, celebrating the values of reflective practice, not gagging them.

- **James L. Ratcliff** 17 April, 2008

Crafting a student survey that produces useful, timely, accurate information is a complex endeavor, and there is most certainly more than one view of the matter. Lee Harvey is an internationally-accomplished and -recognized expert in quality assurance and assessment. To suspend him for expressing his opinion on a matter to which he brings significant knowledge, skills and abilities is nothing more than suppression of academic freedom, an act more

likely in a totalitarian state than the United Kingdom. As one of the first Americans invited to serve as Senior Fellow to the Society for Research into Higher Education, I must say I have great sadness not only for the situation in which Professor Harvey finds himself but also for my many colleagues in British higher education for whom Professor Ramsden's actions have not commended their enterprise to the rest of the world.

- **Lyn Fawcett** 17 April, 2008

So what happens now? From the assembled blogs it is clear that the "community" considers that the HEA has acted improperly and is bringing itself into disrepute. Quis educat ipsos magistros?

- **Stephan Laske** 18 April, 2008

It was with great dismay that I read the news that the internationally eminently respected expert in Higher Education Prof. Lee Harvey is to be stripped of his post due to a critical comment. It is beyond comprehension that in a democratic society with such a great tradition of "critical spirit" something like this can happen and thereby jeopardize one of the pillars of science – namely intellectual freedom. As a member of the University Council, as Dean and as a scientist I hereby declare my absolute solidarity with Prof. Lee Harvey. I only hope that as many scientists as possible add their support and his displacement will be revoked.

- **Professor Andrew Hannan** 18 April, 2008

This issue raises serious questions about the nature of the HEA. The ILTHE had the credibility of being a professional body subscribed to by its members whereas the HEA seems to be a puppet of the Vice-Chancellors who are, of course, beholden to the government. It would help the HEA's reputation enormously if Paul Ramsden were to have the courage to withdraw this suspension and apologise to Professor Harvey.

- **Poppy Turner** 18 April, 2008

I write in support of Lee Harvey's view that the National Student Survey is a "hopelessly inadequate improvement tool" and of his absolute right to say so in the Times Higher. The action of the HEA in suspending him is shocking indeed. Once I was proud to be FHEA but no longer.

- **Graham Badley, Professor Emeritus** 18 April, 2008

I wrote the following email to Paul Ramsden on 10 April - I have yet to receive a reply.

Dear Paul

I understand that Lee Harvey has been suspended from his post as Director of Research and Evaluation in the HEA following publication of his letter in THE. If this is the case, may I ask how this suspension squares with the HEA's admirable policy aim which is to 'foster robust debate, challenge received wisdom and create a forum for new thinking?'

Graham Badley

- **Harold Silver** 18 April, 2008

Alas. We had such high hopes of the Higher Education Academy. It is becoming, if nothing else, a laughing stock.

- **Professor Chris O'Hagan** 18 April, 2008

Should we be surprised? The old ILT (Institute for Teaching and Learning) was pretty defensive in the face of criticism and shy about revealing comprehensive data on its activities. The HEA is formulated in an even more corporate way and so perhaps we should be even less surprised if it behaves like an IBM when a member of staff appears to 'step out of line'. This incident perhaps reveals something of the real nature of the HEA, and such defensiveness probably reflects a desire to keep hidden deep truths about its organisation and effectiveness. Maybe we should see this incident as a crack in the facade through which we might probe some more. Or maybe Professor Ramsden now can open up the debate he has apparently sought to suppress, by reinstating Professor Harvey and asking him to expand on his observations on the HEA website, and inviting online comments. This surely would be more appropriate given the declared aims of the HEA.

- **James Hartley** 18 April, 2008

Colleagues might be interested to note that Prof. Ramsden is Editor in Chief of the journal Academy Exchange. In the instructions for authors, it states 'The Editors reserve the right to edit, amend or abbreviate copy without notice.'

- **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon** 18 April, 2008

In suspending Professor Harvey, HEA is behaving the same way as some HEIs, i.e. shooting the messenger. This is not very surprising and reveals that the same mentality that prevails in some HEI, is also in place at the HEA. What

chance for HEIs to change when the HEA leads by example?

- **Graham Lewis** 18 April, 2008

It is never a good idea to mix personal 'issues' with professional opinion in public. I suspect both parties here could have dealt better with this difference of opinion and not allowed it to progress to this point.

The NSS is a blunt instrument but as long as this is recognised it does have value and it better than no instrument at all.

Graham Lewis
(As a private citizen...)

- **David Feinstein** 18 April, 2008

The staff of the HEA do a good job and sometimes a terrific job. However, there ought to be a thorough investigation of its top management and their management style.

- **Sue Drew** 18 April, 2008

Given that the NSS is not conducted by the HEA it seems strange that Lee Harvey's criticism of it should lead to his suspension (I agree completely with his contention that it is an inadequate tool to improve the student experience).

The action of Paul Ramsden is, to say the least, disappointing for those of us who see debate as essential within HE and who particularly value Lee Harvey's insightful, informed and never personalised contributions to those debates.

- **Jeff Wilson** 18 April, 2008

Having heard of this appalling attempt to suppress academic freedom and read some of the opinions already expressed it is obvious that Paul Ramsden has made a serious error of judgement in suspending Professor Harvey. Under these circumstances it would not be sufficient for the suspension to be lifted. If the HEA is to survive my opinion is that Paul Ramsden should resign.

- **Anne Marie Delaney** 18 April, 2008

Professor Lee Harvey is an accomplished researcher who has contributed significantly to the quality and scope of research on higher education. He is highly esteemed and warmly regarded by many colleagues in the international research community. I have known him to be generous in sharing his knowledge and very supportive of professional colleagues. Lee is a caring person who fosters open discussion of intellectual and professional issues. Therefore, it is deeply troubling to learn that he has been suspended for honestly expressing his ideas, particularly in area of his professional expertise. I strongly hope that the Higher Education Authority will reinstate Lee Harvey in his position.

- **Harvey Woolf** 18 April, 2008

The OED defines an academy as 'society or institution for the cultivation and promotion of literature, of arts and sciences...'. Since when has cultivation and promotion been achieved by silencing expert comment? As others have already noted, the decision to suspend Lee Harvey does nothing but harm to the HEA's reputation.

- **Dr Robert Edwards FHEA** 18 April, 2008

In my developing years as a lecturer I was impressed and strongly influenced by Paul Ramsden's writings, for which I have great respect. A little later I read some of Lee Harvey's publications on students' experiences at university, and how these may be measured meaningfully. His work, too, impressed me greatly. I was an eager and active proponent of ILT, in its early days, in my own institution, and pleased to become FHEA (although somewhat bemused by the process, in which I seemed to play little part).

Now this staggering news! That's the word, for me. I stagger as I try to regain my balance and make some sense of what I read. I hope that there might be some cool and accurate analysis of what is going on, and that we may soon learn the full story.

How long should I wait before I resign from the HEA?

- **Emeritus Professor Peter D Ashworth FHEA** 18 April, 2008

My I simply add my voice to the concerns that have been raised about academic freedom in a key arena of H E thinking, where the reigning value should be that everything is contestable. Let Paul Ramsden reply to the question at issue rather than sack an opponent.

- **Charles Bélanger** 19 April, 2008

This "d'jà vu" cannot win. Parallel cases have been seen in the medical / pharmaceutical area, to name one, where top-notch health researchers with no-disclosure contracts with a company, eventually went public to protect the public, before the company released an aborted clinical result or a harmful product. Initially they were bullied, gagged, dismissed, but in time, the company was left holding the bag. Intellectual highjacking works with the weak but ends up to be costly with the strong.

I am financially committing to a defense fund...if it comes to uphold a basic democratic principle.

- **Helea Sebkova** 19 April, 2008

I am not the expert who would evaluate or criticise NSS as the good or bad instruments. But I am sure that to have the critical point of view to my own work from such excellent and eminently respected expert as Lee Harvey will be the high benefit which will urge me to think seriously about myself and my own work, not about how to make him silent.

To control or even to stop the free debate on research topics is dangerous – I know very well what I am speaking about due to the past long time "experience" from my country !

I agree fully with the ideas already expressed among the Readers' comments that the restrictive contracts allowing the suspension based on critical research view rise the broader question on this issue and possible change.

Helena Sebkova, Prague, Czech Republic

- **Professor Alexandre Borovik FHEA** 19 April, 2008

To say the truth, I am not surprised at all by the developments at HEA: as well as its predecessor, ILT, it is designed and built as a bureaucratic superstructure and is unable to understand, express or defend even basic academic values (including principles of academic freedom which are completely alien to its corporatesque ethos).

- **Ib Andersen & Claus Nygaard** 19 April, 2008

We are not at all surprised to learn that the chief executive of HEA Paul Ramsden has suspended director Lee Harvey for stating the obvious that the NNS "is a hopelessly inadequate improvement tool."

Similar managerial actions have been a feature of institutional bureaucracies since the prehistoric age.

We are more surprised to learn that anybody with the slightest insight into quality enhancement of higher education and learning process theory can seriously link the 22 questions of the UK NSS to matters like quality enhancement and learning outcomes.

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/ourwork/research/NSS_2008_questionnaire_hardcopy_version.pdf

In our humble opinion, someone in the political system ought to honor Lee Harvey for his encouragement to speak out, when he sees tax payers money spent in such ways.

This story certainly doesn't help shine a light on HEA, nor the NSS.

- **Jude Carroll** 19 April, 2008

I have read the comments of others and the article in the Times Higher. I am adding my own, not because I have anything new to add but because it seems important to show that many people view the reaction of the HEA to be at best, inexplicable and at worst, unacceptable. Like many who have already responded, I am a FHEA (though like several others, too, the way in which my ILT membership transformed itself into this new status baffles me). One way to express unacceptability is by resigning - again, a measure others have mentioned. Resignation might turn out to be the only option. However, I'm hopeful that more positive ways to show this is unacceptable might emerge. At the moment, I can't imagine what. So I will watch this issue in the coming days (...?and weeks?).

- **wietse de vries** 20 April, 2008

I am shocked to see that an organization as the HEA, which set out to hear student opinions, proceeds to fire one of its members for voicing an opinion (without the permission of the HEA). The firing of Prof. Lee Harvey puts in doubt the objectivity of the whole HEA exercise.

Wietse de Vries
Autonomous University of Puebla
Mexico

- **Janice Orrell** 21 April, 2008

The higher education sector has benefited internationally because of the existence and work of the HEA. I am so disappointed to find that its actual and potential value for improving the student experience and the quality of higher education generally has been brought into question by Lee Harvey's suspension. The values and actions of the leadership and governance of such organisations have a pervasive effect on the impact and achievement of its mission. Sadly, once personal interests overtake those of its constituency and mission the potential value can be irretrievably damaged. There is an important responsibility that the HEA leadership, both Professor Ramsey and the governing council, have to ensure the maintenance of respectful, robust debate and academic freedom. A failure to do so by the HEA leadership, especially a failure to protect the right for Lee Harvey to exercise his professional expertise and academic freedom is deeply concerning for us all. The scholarly standing and contribution to Higher Education of both Paul Ramsden and Lee Harvey are unquestionable; therefore, it will be a poor state of affairs if their ideological differences were allowed to undermine the HEA and the confidence all academics have to exercise their academic freedom.

- **Dr. Frank Schmidlein** 21 April, 2008

I was completely shocked by the news that Lee Harvey was removed from his position as Director of Research and Evaluation for the HEA for expressing his honest opinions regarding the National Student Survey. I have listened to many presentations by Professor Harvey and found him one of the most insightful and knowledgeable experts in this field. I was particularly surprised because I found his views particularly insightful if, at times, contrary to the ideological leanings of some governmental officials. I had more faith in the protection of academic debate in England than is apparently the case.

Quality is the sum of all that an institution does to promote learning and research. Almost inevitably qualitative attempts to measure what always are limited aspects of what an institution does, and to communicate those findings to those outside of an institution, come up very short of giving an accurate and useful understanding of what is needed and certainly rarely give a full understanding of what actions are needed to improve performance. I have not yet had an opportunity to read Professor Harvey's article but if, as I suspect, it questions the completeness and accuracy of the data involved in government attempts to quantitatively measure quality he was addressing a very serious problem in many of the schemes now being attempted around the world. In any case a leading academic scholar should not be penalized for honestly expressing his views on policy issues.

- **Brian Jolly** 21 April, 2008

As an academic with interests in higher and professional vocational education, who has read and used both Ramsden's and Harvey's work I am mystified by this episode. I suppose that, as an officer of the HEA, Lee Harvey's comments might be seen by it as incompatible with its stated position. But in academic circles this would normally result in, admittedly sometimes surprisingly acrimonious, discussion and debate. Government agencies concerned with education do seem, across the world, to have become more 'corporate' in their philosophy. However, while one would not expect a senior executive of Coca Cola to publicly admit to drinking Pepsi, or vice versa, I believe I read somewhere that it happened. I don't know what ensued. I would be interested to know. In any event, I would have thought that academic institutions, and individuals within them, could behave in a more cooperative manner than multi-national giants usually do.

- **Helena Sebkova** 21 April, 2008

I am not a person who would evaluate if NSS is the good or the bad tool of students' surveys. But I am sure that if I would receive the critical point of view concerning my research results from such excellent and internationally highly respected expert as Lee Harvey I would seriously think about my work and about myself, not about how to make him silent. The free debate within the academic community can bring only benefit for all involved parties and it is very difficult and dangerous if it is restricted from any reason – I know very well what I am speaking about having the highly negative experience from the past times in my country. I agree with the thoughts expressed already in several readers' comments above that this unhappy event would rise the broader question regarding the strange requirements of contracts which prevent the development of critical spirit and intellectual freedom.

- **Lyn Fawcett** 21 April, 2008

I am still waiting to see a competent response from the board and chief executive of the HEA. At this belated stage a resignation by the chief executive would appear to be the preferred option from the membership.

Lyn Fawcett Chair UCU HE N Ireland

- **Gut Neave and Alberto Amaral** 21 April, 2008

Those who observe Britain's higher education from across the Narrow Seas, cannot but shake their heads at the distasteful but nonetheless hilarious spectacle of an Academy vigorously stamping on one of its associates for what it holds to be heretical and vexatious behaviour. Quem vult perdere Deus. This is without precedent in the UK, though some historians might recall a similar penchant amongst Academies during the days of Joseph Stalin and

Romania's Ceausescu. It is desolating indeed to see an agency of public purpose, for despite its name, that is the real status of the Higher Education Academy, playing fast and loose with the central value of the institutions it is intended to serve. Still, something constructive may emerge from the wreckage. The Academy's Chief Executive is also a member of an International Advisory Committee to the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities. By happy coincidence, Sweden has recently put in place a Commission to look into Academic Autonomy, chaired by Daniel Tarschys, one time Secretary General to the Council of Europe. Professor Ramsden could render both academia and his Academy a singular service by voluntarily presenting a case study of the incident to the Swedish Commission. It ought to prove enlightening, if only to alert our colleagues to the necessity of ensuring that a similar example of administrative vindictiveness has no part in the world of higher education in Sweden.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Neave and Alberto Amaral

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- **Professor Alan Middleton** 21 April, 2008

At the meeting of the Board of Directors of the HEA in June 2007, the Chief Executive indicated that the organisation aspired to be an international leader in its field and he emphasised the importance of the credibility of the Academy's interface with the sector. The suspension of Lee Harvey for voicing his opinion on the inadequacies of the NSS completely undermines these aims. The survey is undoubtedly methodologically flawed but, more importantly, when a body that claims to represent higher education can attempt to suppress the critical academic opinion of an acknowledged international expert in the field of HE quality, it does a disservice to the whole sector.

Perhaps a way out of this would be for UUK or the Secretary of State to invite Professor Harvey, through the HEA, to produce a rigorous methodological critique of the NSS, which could then be circulated throughout the sector for consultation.

- **Karl-Axel Nilsson, Lund University** 21 April, 2008

Lee Harvey is a recognized expert in the field of quality assurance and development. He has generously shared his knowledge with colleagues at Swedish universities. At my institution we have successfully implemented his views on Student Satisfaction Surveys. And we also understood his concerns about the NSS a long time ago. If such a standpoint today is appalling to such a degree that you are expected to hold your tongue, then the HEA is in trouble.

- **Vicky Seddon** 21 April, 2008

I know Lee Harvey from his time at Sheffield Hallam University when we were colleagues. He was highly regarded by academic staff there. I find it extraordinary that the simple act of writing to the press on an issue on which he has expertise and which does not reflect on the HEA itself should have triggered a suspension. This is usually reserved for cases of gross misconduct. What price academic freedom? That the HEA is supposed to protect?

HEA members might like to reflect whether they can exert some influence here, and if not, what that means about Governance at HEA.

- **Vic Thorn** 22 April, 2008

It would appear that any organisation or 'academy' that has government strings attached, tends to be very robust in its defence of organisational agendas. Short shrift is given to any criticism, one is mindful of old Joe's attitude, You can have an opinion as long as it agrees with mine. This and the RAE instruction to destroy evaluation notes so that no argument or debate can take place is Stalinist in the extreme. Academic freedom is dying to be replaced by government or puppet dogma. Transparency and debate is the lifeblood of academia and democracy.

- **Phil Race** 22 April, 2008

Student feedback is vitally important as a means whereby we can improve our teaching, and all discussion of how best we can develop better tools to gather and analyse such feedback should be welcomed. Regarding Lee's suspension, I can not see how it could be claimed that it was his actions which have brought the reputation of the HEA into disrepute. Opinions from the many replies to this issue, regarding the apportionment of blame seem to be convergently pointing elsewhere!

- **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon** 22 April, 2008

What constitutes 'gross miss conduct' is purely - and simply - in the hands of executive academic managers who are

known in many cases to have abused their power in order to label good academics. The onus - sadly - is on the victim to take the matter further and clear his/her name. The case of Professor Harvey is not the only one but is one that is attracting attention right now mostly due to his high profile position with HEA. There are many others that we do not hear about. In some ways this is sad, i.e. academics not being able to fight back because they do not have a prominent presence in academia. What the HEA did is no different from what other universities have done, i.e. shoot the messenger. We need to rally around Professor Harvey and expose the HEA for the 'groupthink' that prevails.

- **Charles W Eliot** 22 April, 2008

I really cannot believe that the CEO of the HEA has made this decision. Lee Harvey, a world renowned expert on the subject, has expressed a well-founded opinion in a private capacity about the NSS and is suspended. Surely the right of an individual to express their opinion is unquestionable in a free society. If this is the only reason for his suspension Lee Harvey should be reinstated immediately and the HEA CEO consider his position. I am sure that there are many people working at the HEA who are very uneasy about this decision, yet (on this evidence) unwilling to speak out. Shame on all those involved in this regrettable episode and the prescient it sets.

- **Liz Wright** 22 April, 2008

Professor Harvey's most heinous crime was probably that he submitted a grievance. For that action he had to be silenced.

- **Jane Farrow** 23 April, 2008

I would just like to add my support to Lee whom I know as a person of great integrity, who is often self-effacing but always professional.

- **Matteo Turri** 23 April, 2008

Lee Harvey's letter raises some points with which we fully agree. In Italy where there is a well-established tradition of government intervention in the higher education field, national surveys frequently bring about behaviour aimed at fulfilling the criteria on which the survey is based. This is a form of perverse learning which recalls Goodhart's law and its ever-topical theory "When a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure". We would like to express our support for Professor Lee Harvey.

E. Minelli, G. Rebora & M. Turri

- **Johanna Witte** 24 April, 2008

The HEA, when taking this decision, was probably not aware of the fact that Professor Lee Harvey is an academic who enjoys such esteem internationally. I cannot judge the incident itself from outside, but from my perspective the HEA could have been very happy and feel honored to have Lee Harvey as their research director - someone who combines intimate knowledge of British higher education with deep insights into European and worldwide developments in the field, who combines compassion for improving student learning with innovative scholarship and who has contributed significantly to advancing consciousness and action in the field of quality of teaching and learning in Europe. Such personalities as Lee Harvey need to be given adequate freedom, because even the controversy they may sometimes cause spurs development.

- **Trevor Habeshaw** 24 April, 2008

Paul, Either one of you or both have made a mistake here. I hope that you and your colleagues will read these contributions and realise this not least because the consequences of the dispute have already gone beyond the specific case in question and has become seriously unhelpful..

As the guy who wrote the 'Student Grievance ' procedures at Bristol Polytechnic a few years ago, the usual procedure in cases such as this is to invite the parties to put the handbags down, meet with each other and talk about the issues person to person. If this has been done already in this case, it seems as if it hasn't been done very well. Try again, perhaps in the agreed presence of conciliators with experience in these matters. This is too serious a matter to be allowed to go on unresolved.

With best wishes,
Trevor

- **Pierre-Joseph Proudhon** 25 April, 2008

Who will forward all the above comments to Mr Ramsden so get a feel for the widespread opposition to his action?

One also wonders about the 'legality' of suspending Harvey. Is there not a sequence of steps that has to be followed before suspension, or is it because the actions of Harvey are considered to be 'gross-misconduct' the suspension

has some legitimacy? And is not HEA obligated now to run an investigation into the reasons leading to the suspension? Or is the suspension - against what employment law says - a punitive and not neutral act, trying to force Harvey to resign?

Shame on you Ramsden, shame that you are using a bullying tactic to get rid of what seems to be a good academic. But then again didn't Kenneth Westhues write about the 'envy of excellence'!

I have lost faith in the HEA. Full-stop.

- **Jane Hill** 25 April, 2008

We the undersigned wish to express our deep concern at the attack on academic freedom indicated by the Higher Education Academy's suspension of Professor Lee Harvey as Director of Research and Evaluation. This appears to be an inappropriate use of disciplinary procedures. Many of us have worked closely with Professor Harvey and know that he has always been deeply committed to improving the quality of the student learning experience. To that end he has never been afraid to raise important issues and encourage thoughtful debate. We fear for the future of academic freedom if academic experts in any area are not allowed to express their considered opinions, even in a personal capacity. We firmly believe that academic freedom is a crucial right that must be maintained; free inquiry is not merely a right; it's a necessary element of any system that strives for progress.

Steve Aldred
 Matthew Badcock
 Professor David Boyd
 Dr Joyce Canaan
 Veronica Coatham
 Matthew Cremin
 Dr Haydn Davies
 Gary Hazeldine
 Professor Ann Hill (NTF; FHEA)
 Dr Jane Hill
 Professor Howard Jackson
 Dave Keefe
 Professor Julian Killingley
 Anthony Lewis
 Barbara McCalla
 Alan Mabbett
 Dr Bill Madhill
 Dr Rob Mawby
 Professor Chris Painter
 Bill Roper
 Professor John Rouse
 Professor Douglas Sharp
 Greta Shields
 Cynthia Slater
 Professor Philip Smallwood
 Dr George Smith
 Dr Neil Staunton
 Graham Wright

- **Dr Howard Fredrics** 27 April, 2008

I'd like to add my name to the list of signers of the petition posted by Jane Hill.

The taking of disciplinary action against Prof Harvey is a travesty and makes the UK begin to resemble a fascist state when it comes to matters of academic freedom.

Shame, shame!

And, I'd add that the NSS is routinely subjected to manipulation by institutions who pressurize their students to write positive things. Therefore, it has no use whatsoever except as a propaganda tool for such universities.

- **Professor Lothar Zechlin** 28 April, 2008

From many international conferences I have known Professor Lee Harvey as a distinguished scholar and expert on higher education quality management. The freedom of academic discussions is not only an individual right but equally a need for the fruitful development of the higher education area. Therefore, the suspension of Professor Harvey as director because of his letter to the editor is not only unacceptable with regard to academic freedom but

damaging our mutual learning from each other. I very much do hope that this measure will be cancelled.

- **Airi Rovio-Johansson** 30 April, 2008

I wish to express my deep concern at the attack on academic freedom indicated by the Higher Education Academy's suspension of Professor Lee Harvey as Director of Research and Evaluation. If this appears to be an appropriate use of disciplinary procedures I am worried. The freedom of academic discussions is not only an individual right but a need for the development of the Higher Education Area. Professor Harvey is very well known expert among several of the Swedish Universities for his work on improving the quality of education and of the student learning experience in Higher Education. I fear for the future of academic freedom if academic experts in any area are not allowed to express their opinions, even in a personal capacity. I believe that academic freedom must be maintained and, as many of my colleagues have pointed out, it is a necessary element of any academic system in development

- **DOUG BLACKMUR** 12 May, 2008

Dear Mr Kelly

I am deeply concerned at the suspension "pending an investigation" of Professor Lee Harvey as Director of Research and Evaluation at the Higher Education Academy.

I have read Harvey's letter, sent in his private capacity, which allegedly provides the grounds for the suspension.

This letter, however, could not possibly justify suspension. Rather, it provides a warning that various processes can be gamed and that this, combined with the shortcomings of league tables, raises reasonable questions about the reliability of the National Student Survey to serve as a improvement instrument in higher education. Harvey should be commended, not condemned, for his contribution to a vital area of public policy.

How his letter could be thought to have an adverse effect on the Academy exceeds the bounds of reason. Lee Harvey brings credit to HEA, in this and many other instances, by his fine contribution as a public intellectual- were more like him!

I smell a rat in all this. The Academy should come clean on the real reasons for Harvey's suspension. The Academy's own behaviour clearly risks bringing itself into disrepute.

Yours faithfully

Professor Doug Blackmur Ph.D., F.Instit.D.SA.
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
SOUTH AFRICA

- **Cordelia Bryan** 15 May, 2008

I wish to add my name to the growing list of academics who are outraged at what appears to be a flagrant attack on academia and democracy - if indeed expressing his views is the real reason for Lee Harvey's suspension.

In response to the question above (Vicky Seddon) as to whether HEA members can exert some influence on this matter, other than voicing our opinions via this arena, I do not know what other means we have. The HEA is, as Philip Burgess points out, financially unaccountable to Fellows and the Leadership is patently not listening to nor serving its members.

- **Kate Chanock** 11 June, 2008

At the risk of being seen as a humorless whiner, am I the only reader to have taken exception to the language employed by Trevor Habeshaw, 24 April: "the usual procedure in cases such as this is to invite the parties to put the handbags down, meet with each other and talk about the issues person to person"? Put the handbags down? Or is this a general term that should be understood to include man-bags, like mankind etc.?

(and yes, I'm for freedom to dissent.....)