

Summary

Queen's University Belfast is considering a joint venture with a private education company called INTO University Partnerships. Academic staff at Queen's are deeply opposed to this proposal. Queen's UCU members are campaigning to persuade the University not to go ahead with this Joint Venture.

INTO *a risky business?*

The facts

- ▶ In a recent poll of Queen's UCU members, 96 per cent of those voting said that they thought a Joint Venture with INTO would adversely affect the reputation of the university.
- ▶ In similar polls at two English Universities (Essex and Goldsmiths College, London) 90 per cent and 94 per cent, respectively, said they thought a Joint Venture would have a bad effect their university's reputation. Both universities subsequently rejected the proposed Joint Ventures.

Who are INTO?

- ▶ INTO describe themselves as "a unique, sector-leading initiative for international students, offering new and higher quality standards of preparation for undergraduate and postgraduate study in the UK."
- ▶ They offer to form Joint Ventures with universities in which they take control of the recruitment and teaching of international students on a for-profit basis.
- ▶ They also offer to take over and develop university property, creating new facilities for international students. The land is

leased to INTO for 35 years and the facilities are owned by INTO.

Why staff are against this

- ▶ One of the main reasons staff are so opposed to INTO is that its chairman, Andrew Colin, has said on record that "Rates of pay are probably worse," in his company than in the partner universities.
- ▶ In addition, Mr Colin appears to favour more private delivery of university education.
- ▶ In 2000, having just sold his previous company, Study Group International to the Daily Mail Group in 2000, Mr Colin was quoted in the Times Higher Education Supplement saying:

"I developed partnerships with universities in Australia, North America and the UK, Mr Colin said. Some see their core business as brand identity, postgraduate teaching, research and quality control – not necessarily teaching undergraduates. **There is nothing to stop undergraduate teaching being outsourced.**"

INTO *a risky business?*

More facts about Joint Ventures

- ▶ At their new joint venture with Glasgow Caledonian University, INTO have set a target to recruit 120 international students in the first year. Currently, the INTO joint venture has only recruited 11 students.
- ▶ INTO's growth plans are ambitious. They began planning their project in 2005 and, according to their own promotional film, aim to have 25 centres by 2012. More than three years into this plan, and with only another three years to run, INTO have signed only five contracts for Joint Ventures. We also know that they have been turned down for Joint Ventures by at least five more universities. Many institutions are wary of this latest version of public private partnership.
- ▶ We need to ask what will happen to the students if the company, which announced losses of £1.7 million in May this year, fails to meet its targets? This looks highly possible.

UCU's position

- ▶ UCU considers that Joint Ventures with this company are a particularly risky proposition. We say that universities are playing with fire in financial terms, and in terms of their hard-won reputations – which is equally important.
- ▶ UCU believes that Queen's University plays a key role in the Northern Ireland economy. This role should be protected by ensuring that delivery of courses – and control of reputation – remain in the public sector.
- ▶ We are not convinced that there is any case for a Joint Venture with INTO and we are deeply concerned that Queen's is rushing into a highly risky enterprise without observing proper process.
- ▶ We believe that any such decision should only be taken after there has been a comprehensive service review and appraisal of the options. This should involve trade unions and other stakeholders in line with best practice in the public sector. As this hasn't happened, what evidence is there to justify this arrangement?

What you can do

We are asking Members of the Legislative Assembly to approach Queen's and ask for information on the process used to establish the need for a Joint Venture and whether any government department has given funding for this development. We want MLAs to press for a comprehensive review involving unions and other stakeholders in Queen's University Belfast.