

APPENDIX D: STAFFING

5 December 2005

GS LETTER 2009/2005

At a recent meeting of the National Executive Committee I agreed that I would present a paper to the committee for consideration on staffing. This paper was intended to deal with the current vacancies for national officials, of which there are two, the demand from conference for a health and safety officer and likewise the demand for an information officer. It was intended that once the paper has been adopted by the NEC, then it would form part of our report to annual conference. It is not possible to write a paper on staffing in isolation from the other priorities that exist within the union, and therefore this paper takes a wider look at what BECTU's priorities are for the next few years.

I believe that BECTU's continued independence as a trade union is paramount and therefore any decisions we take must not put this in jeopardy. In order for us to remain an independent trade union we must operate within a balanced budget. In recent years we have been working with bank loans and overdrafts and since we concluded the property project our loan with the bank has been reduced to £300,000, reducing further each month when we make a repayment. Once the redevelopment has commenced at Clapham Road the vast majority of this loan can be repaid. It is, however, important to remember that like any business a trade union needs a financial reserve. We have during this year successfully built up a reserve of £300,000. I believe we need to try to build that reserve up to £1m. There are two reasons for this. (1) Even when operating to a balanced budget something unexpected may happen, e.g. a dispute involving a group of members that requires significant expenditure that could not be planned for. (2) A sudden collapse can occur in one or more of the areas in which we organise or a financial disaster on a scale that could not be foreseen. In the event of the second of these points a proper financial reserve would allow us to be able to make decisions in a thought-out and organised way. Without such a reserve we could be driven into the arms of the first large union prepared to take us on, therefore restricting our ability to negotiate a transfer deal which was in the best interests of BECTU members and BECTU staff.

In 2005 we are close to our target income of £4,629,000. This is a remarkable achievement if you think that in 2002 our income was £3,995,017. Recruitment and retention, along with servicing existing members, is the number one priority for BECTU officials and lay representatives. In recent years we have added a number of different services for members, some available to all members, others available to certain sections of the membership, such as the professional indemnity insurance, which is extremely popular amongst the freelance membership. A number of discount packages are also available to members. However, it remains the case that most people join a trade union for individual and collective representation, and the delivery of this is very much labour intensive.

At recent annual conferences there has been a demand for the appointment of a health

and safety official and an information officer. It is worth reminding ourselves that, with pension and employer's national insurance and a level of travel and subsistences, the annual cost of employing an official is approximately £50,000. It would be impossible to employ two officials without providing additional secretarial support. Again, the cost of employing a secretary, including pension and national insurance contributions, is approximately £30,000. I am aware that discussions have been held with the shops regarding the appointment of an information officer which resulted in the shops agreeing to this appointment but only at the same time as one of the vacant national official posts could be filled, and that the second national official vacancy must be filled before the appointment of a health and safety official. There is also a need for some secretarial assistance for Lynne Korniak, who works out of the Birmingham office. Leaving aside the support for Lynne, the cost of filling the two vacant officials positions, the health and safety official and the information officer, plus one additional secretary, would be £230,000. Bearing in mind that the budget for 2006 allows a surplus of £4,000 then you can see that it is impossible for us to commit to employing any additional staff at this stage.

The income target which was agreed for 2006 (£4,700,000) is very much subject to the effects of redundancies, especially in the BBC division. It is also clear that the decline in the Laboratories division is happening faster than we had originally envisaged. You will have received a paper from AGS Gerry Morrissey about the possibility of us organising the computer games industry and it is clear that we will need to organise a new area to replace the lost income from laboratories. There are opportunities we need to take advantage of in the fast developing Independent Production sector.

We also have the continuing problem of the BECTU pension deficit and this is likely to remain a drain on the union's finances for some time to come.

Notwithstanding the above observations I do believe we need to give consideration to the requirement for the additional officials and my views on them are as follows:

- **Vacant NO positions**

In an ideal world I would like to fill either one or both of these positions as soon as practically possible, as I am conscious that there is, and has been for some time, an increasing burden on a number of officials. However, I do not believe that we will be in a position to fill these within the next few years. In order for us to be honest with our staff and with the shops who represent the staff, I believe that to fill these two vacancies and sustain the employment we need a membership of 30,000.

- **Health & Safety Official**

From the survey presented to the NEC at the last meeting which contained the views of health and safety representatives on what the responsibilities of a health and safety official would be, it is clear that in most cases what health and safety representatives want is access to legislation and information as quickly as possible. Many would also like a union health and safety official to carry out inspections. Even if we were in a position to employ a health and safety official he or she could not undertake the number of inspections that would be required, nor would it be desirable when we have health and safety representatives who are trained and are employed at the workplace. I think we need to find a way of ensuring that health and safety representatives have access to the appropriate legislation in order to deal with their queries.

- **Information Officer**

On the position of an information officer, from looking at the work carried out by the communications committee it is clear that in order for BECTU to be able to have a co-ordinated communications policy which includes the development of the BECTU website, then the appointment of an information officer is crucial. Therefore subject to finances I would propose that we recommend to conference that such an appointment will take place in 2007, so long as it can be achieved via a balanced budget. However, I also suggest that we inform conference that we are not and are unlikely to be in a position to fill the vacant national official positions or the health and safety official position that is desired in the short or medium term.

In conclusion I believe BECTU's independence is conditional upon our having a sound financial basis and that this is achieved through the union delivering quality services to existing members and continuing to recruit and retain members in our existing areas, as well as organising in new areas; the appointment of an information officer will improve BECTU's ability to deliver these objectives, and therefore at this stage this is the only additional position we should commit to. For financial reasons I believe that secretarial support for an information officer will have to come from within the existing workforce.

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