

INTO a risky business?

A UCU briefing for senators on the proposed joint venture between City University and INTO University Partnerships

City University is considering a joint venture with a private education company called INTO University Partnerships.

UCU opposes this proposal because:

- We believe that staff across the sector are opposed to this company
- INTO are on public record as paying their staff less than partner universities
- Staff and students at City have not been consulted
- We believe this proposal represents a gamble with City's excellent reputation

At this Senate meeting, you will be asked to endorse the academic and management aspects of a proposal for a joint venture with INTO. If you do this, it will be put before Council for final approval.

We are asking that you do NOT endorse this. We believe that this is a critical issue and that the case for a joint venture has not been made.

In this briefing we provide you with what we believe to be key information about INTO and its Joint ventures.

Who are INTO?

INTO is a private company that offers to form joint ventures with universities in which it assumes control of the recruitment and teaching of international students for universities and runs it as a for-profit enterprise.

The company also offers to take over and develop university property, turning it into new facilities for international students. The land is leased to INTO for 35 years and the facilities are owned by INTO.

Staff opposition to INTO

UCU believes that academic staff across the sector are opposed to joint ventures with this company. UCU has polled staff in three universities on how they thought a joint venture with INTO would affect their university's reputation.

1. At Queen's University Belfast **96%** of those voting said that they thought a joint venture with INTO would **adversely affect the reputation of the university**.
2. At Goldsmiths College **94%** said they thought a joint venture would **adversely affect the college's reputation**.
3. At Essex University, **90%** said they thought a joint venture would **adversely affect the college's reputation**.

Why are staff opposed to a joint venture with INTO?

One of the main reasons that staff are so opposed to INTO is that their chairman, Andrew Colin is on public record admitting 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.**'

Universities turning away from INTO

Essex and Goldsmiths have subsequently rejected a joint venture with INTO and opted to explore in-house options, joining Oxford Brookes, Royal Holloway and Queen Mary in turning the company down. UCU members at Queen's are still campaigning to persuade the university not to go ahead with their joint venture.

Risky business?

UCU considers that joint ventures with this company are a particularly risky proposition – we say that universities are risking their finances and their hard-won reputations.

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.

In May 2008, the company announced losses of £1.7 million.

INTO's growth plans are ambitious. They began planning their project in 2005 and according to their promotional film, aim to have 25 centres by 2012. More than three years into this plan and with only another three years to run, they have signed only five contracts for joint ventures and we 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.

At this Senate meeting...

The university's management are trying to push this process as fast as possible. At this senate meeting, you will be asked to endorse the academic and management aspects of the proposed joint venture. If you approve this, the proposal will then be taken to Council, and the deal will be all but done.

But staff unions and other key university stakeholders have not been consulted.

City has recruited very well among international students, largely through direct recruitment to in-house provision. We are not convinced that there is any case for a joint venture with INTO and we are deeply concerned that City is rushing into a highly risky enterprise.

We believe that there are serious questions concerning the detail of academic control and quality assurance in these joint ventures. This is important since any reputation damage would be directly suffered by the university seen to be controlling standards, rather than associated with a partner company.

We believe that the proposals for the operation of academic controls laid out in the papers put before senate are too vague and lack the necessary detail to allow any decision to be safely taken that might have such potentially profound consequences for our university.

What you can do

We are not asking you to make a judgment about a partnership with INTO now. We do not believe that such a decision can be taken now, with the information supplied by the university.

We are only asking that you do NOT endorse any proposals regarding any aspect of a partnership with INTO at this stage.