

The actions taken by Keele University senior management that made it impossible for Christopher Exley PhD FRSB to continue research on human exposure to aluminium at Keele University.

I have had the privilege of working with many collaborators during my 29 years at Keele. I have also had the good fortune of tremendous personal support including many whom have donated to our research. I have written this leaving statement for those who have provided this support over almost three decades. I want you to know that leaving Keele and, as it transpires, bringing my research on aluminium to an end was the hardest decision of my life. In my opinion, I had no choice. I have not abandoned you. I have, as I always have, simply tried to do my best in increasingly difficult circumstances.

Bullying and Birdseed

Some of you will already be aware of previous actions taken against me by Keele's senior management. These actions began in earnest about five years ago. It has taken a number of forms including disciplinary action against me. For example, in May 2020, in response to an article by Russell Reader (more on him later) in the THE online, I questioned the United Kingdom Government's priorities in relation to covid restrictions. I asked why it was that I could order birdseed (classed as an essential service by the Government) while my group was not allowed to continue our groundbreaking research on Alzheimer's disease and other human disease at Keele. Not until late July 2020 did my new head of school, Dawn Scott, (someone to this day I have never met in person) take up the role of lead investigator in initiating disciplinary action against me. Apparently for bringing the University into disrepute. The subsequent, seemingly delayed, disciplinary hearing took place in late December 2020. Perhaps delayed to accommodate Keele's nomination in September 2020 by the THE as University of the Year. When, in mid-December, nothing transpired from this nomination Keele, Wastling (The Dean) and Scott, took disciplinary action against me. I received a verbal warning for my transgression, a warning that remains on your HR record for 12 months. Needless perhaps to say, neither myself nor any other staff at Keele have voiced any criticism of Government policy on covid. Wither academic expression and freedom!

I present this vignette only as an example of my recent personal circumstances at Keele. For over twenty years, I had the full and unconditional support of the University.

Within weeks of being sentenced for my birdseed crime, the attack that finally broke this camel's back took place. The attack had significant practical consequences, I would be unable to raise funding for future research, but it also demonstrated the actions that Keele's senior management were prepared to take to undermine me and my reputation as a scientist. I think that when the full facts are known it should be clear to all that I could not return to my academic position at Keele.

I have written those 'facts' as I understand them below. As always, as a scientist, I await judgement by my peers.

A Brief History of Donations

Donations to support our research at Keele have consistently been the vehicle through which Keele's senior management have acted against my group.

I have always received unsolicited donations from the public to support our research. However, from about 2013, requests to donate became more numerous and I began discussions with Keele's research management and finance departments as to how the process of making a donation could be simplified.

It was not until 2016 that a colleague called Paul BATTERY in Finance established an online donations portal for my group.

<http://estore.keele.ac.uk/browse/product.asp?compid=1&modid=1&catid=66>

This online portal worked well. I would receive an email acknowledgement whenever a donation was made by this route.

Less than 18 months later I was informed in a meeting with Professor D Amigoni, at the time, the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Research, that the donations portal set up by Finance was 'unsuitable' and I should contact someone called Natalie Lloyd about changing it. I did this in February 2018 and subsequent emails involving someone called Lauren Huss (hear more about her later) suggested that action would be taken to provide an alternative online donations link. In October 2018, 6 months later, I sent an email to Lloyd, copied to Amigoni, to ask if there had been any progress in setting up the alternative donations portal. I received no reply.

On the 11th of April 2019, following receipt of a number of emails from potential donors unable to make a donation using the online link, I was told by someone called Lee Bestwick in Finance that he had been instructed to disable the donations portal set up by Finance on my behalf. He was not aware that there had been no prior discussion with me about this. An email from me to the Vice Chancellor of Keele University, Professor TJ McMillan, to ask about this was not acknowledged. Thereafter it transpired that Amigoni had given Bestwick this instruction. I am copying Amigoni's email to me on this below.

Dear Professor Exley,

thank you for your e-mails at the end of last week, following suspension of the donations portal which, as I explained, enacted (albeit belatedly) a decision which we had reached last year. I'm grateful to Louise Middleton for writing to you explaining my absence from the university on Friday. Louise indicated that I would bring you up to date, which I am doing in this e-mail.

I've had an opportunity to consult more widely across the University and presented a discussion paper to UEC today.

UEC have decided that, as a university, we need clearer principles of governance around the solicitation of crowd-funded donations. Natalie Lloyd, in liaison with colleagues in RIE, RaISE and Finance, will be working on these and they will return to UEC in due course for

discussion and approval. Until that time, UEC have agreed the continued suspension of your group's donation portal.

During the period of suspension, around which at this stage I am afraid I cannot set a precise time frame, UEC accepted that charitable donations, unsolicited by the university, may still be channeled to researchers by other means.

With sincere regards,

Professor David Amigoni

My reply, copied to the VC, is shown below.

This is completely unacceptable.

You made a grave mistake in accusing me of not complying with our discussions of February 2018. I have pointed out to you in the clearest possible terms your mistake.

There is no 'crowdfunding' here? There are no crowd-funded donations and there have never been any crowd funded donations. This is an irrelevant statement. Where is it coming from?

The fact is that you simply closed my charitable donations link without any prior consultation and without providing the alternative link, presumably already set up by Natalie Lloyd in March 2018 but without it being communicated to me.

Why are you preventing individuals making charitable donations towards our research?

I cannot even begin to understand your reasoning but what you have done is clearly unfair and will result in my research group losing valuable funding.

Once again, please explain why you disabled my charitable donations link without consultation and without providing any alternative.

Professor McMillan, please could you address this if, as it seems, Professor Amigoni is unwilling to do so.

I would also like someone to explain Professor Amigoni's statement;

UEC accepted that charitable donations, unsolicited by the university, may still be channeled to researchers by other means.

So, how might donors continue to support our research. What alternative mechanism are you suggesting? Please inform immediately so that I can let everyone know.

Best wishes

Chris

It is clear from the actions of Amigoni, seemingly fully supported by a compliant VC, that donations to our research were then and would become a vehicle through which senior

management would continue their actions against our research. Closing our online donations link without any attempt at prior discussion with me was a clear indication of their intention to target my research funding as a means of preventing our research.

It was not until the end of June 2019 that a new online donations portal was established for my group.

Details on how donations could now be made were made clear by me to all potential donors as indicated below.

Please Donate to Help to Support our Research

(choose Professor Exley's Research from the drop down menu)

<https://epay.keele.ac.uk/donations>

Donations were now managed by the alumnus office. This link worked successfully for about 6 months. However, in February 2020 I was informed by potential donors that the option of choosing my name had been removed from the drop down menu on the donations portal. Again, this change had been made without any prior consultation with me. Upon email consultation with Lloyd, I had to issue new instructions for potential donors, see below.

Please Donate to Help to Support our Research

(choose Advancing Research from the drop down menu and send an email to alumni.hq@keele.ac.uk to indicate that the donation is for Professor Exley, copy your donation receipt to me for peace of mind)

<https://epay.keele.ac.uk/donations>

Senior management at Keele seemed determined to make donations towards my research as difficult as possible for potential donors. This included refusing to inform me when a donation had been made. I had to rely upon donors contacting me to inform me that they had made a donation. However, donations continued to be received and this unconditional support of our research by individual donors was only brought to an end in February 2021 when Keele's senior management acted to prevent all donations to my group.

Above is a potted history of how senior management at Keele has used 'donations' to make life difficult for my research group over the last five years. Their actions were not successful and, thankfully, we continued to receive support for our research.

Their Final Act

Senior management at Keele has always contended that the University is not *per se* against me personally or my research. For example, the ‘official’ line since 2016 for not having issued a single press release about our research or even featured our research in any internal research documents is that it is ‘unremarkable’.

They even maintained this position of apparent ambivalence immediately following the recent article about my research and, specifically, research funding in The Guardian newspaper (9th February 2021). For example, see the statement by the Dean in an email to me below.

As you are aware, from time to time, concerns have been raised by both our external and internal communities, as a result of press stories, about research undertaken at the University by you and its use to question vaccine safety in a manner which may undermine public health initiatives. On this we make no judgment. (Email sent to me on the 25th of February 2021.)

Wastling, the Dean, states that the University makes no judgement on the subject of my research and research funding. However, I know now that this is not the case.

The truth, revealed through internal communications, is very much different. In particular, documents show that within one day of the publication of the article in The Guardian, the Vice Chancellor, Professor TJ McMillan, has openly branded me and my research as anti-vaccine and disseminated these views to senior management at Keele. These views are thereafter repeated by Keele’s ‘Chief Operating Officer’, Dr Mark Bacon and by Keele’s head of the alumnus office, Ms Lauren Huss. Is this what Wastling meant by ‘on this we make no judgement’?

At this point it is probably worth pointing out that I have never met in person any of McMillan, Bacon or Huss. I have never spoken to the VC nor have I had any form of two-way correspondence with him.

In internal communications all three, McMillan, Bacon and Huss, have no qualms in telling others that I am anti-vaccine.

Below are my notes on emails and attachments contained within these communications. They show unequivocally and contrary to Keele’s official view, that the VC has branded me and my research as anti-vaccine. His views are fully supported by Bacon (COO) and Huss (Alumni Office).

The communications also suggest some form of collaboration between Keele’s senior management (including the VC) and both The Guardian newspaper and Keele’s student newspaper, Concourse, in disseminating such branding to as wide an audience as possible.

My Notes

At 14.15 on February 10th 2021 the VC sent a ‘paper for discussion’ to senior members of the University Governance Committee for further discussion at 17.30 on that evening. These

senior committee members included the Pro-Chancellor (Jo Williams) and Deputy Pro-Chancellor (David Hall) of Keele.

This 'discussion paper' became available just 24h after The Guardian article appeared online. It is worth noting that at this time I was completely unaware of the University's 'position' on the article in The Guardian. No one, neither my head of school, Professor D Scott, nor my faculty Dean, Professor J Wastling, made any attempt to talk to me about what had been written in the newspaper.

The VC states in his 'discussion paper' that he is acting on behalf of the 'University Advisory Group'. This is not an officially recognised group at Keele. A search of Keele's website produces no hits for this group. Those copied into the VC's email as cc include Ormerod (Deputy VC), Bacon (COO), Dumbelton (Governance Manager) and Paddison (VC Office), perhaps these constitute this 'ad hoc' advisory group?

The University Advisory Group met and 'considered' the article published in The Guardian and, presumably, wrote the paper for discussion, sometime between the afternoon of the 9th of February (when the article was posted online only) and 14.15 on the 10th of February when the paper was sent to the Governance Committee. Again, it is worth noting that no attempt was made by this 'Group' to obtain any feedback from me about this.

Note that in the 'discussion paper' the VC does not address me as Professor Exley. He is perhaps giving the impression to the University Governance Committee (who will not know anything about me or my research) that I am a small fish / irritation at Keele and not, as is the case, one of Keele's longest standing and most celebrated and awarded academics.

The following comment from the 'discussion paper', shown below in italics, is the first to undermine significantly my research and myself.

The Advisory Group have considered the recent guardian press coverage of Dr Chris Exley's research and the link to anti-vaccination. Dr Exley's views on this area have been an ongoing area of concern for the University leadership, as although the scientific research he conducts is adequate; his conclusions and publicised views are less compelling and have limited academic integrity.

This is an outrageous comment and misinforms a committee membership that does not know me from Adam. As such, they will undoubtedly accept his personal views without any need of evidence to support them.

The VC states that my views on 'anti-vaccination' have been an ongoing area of concern for the University leadership. If this is true then he neither gives examples of my 'views' nor does he describe any previous occasions when this subject has been broached with me. In truth, this 'discussion paper' is the very first time that I have heard about such ongoing concerns.

The VC describes my research as 'adequate'. My 'adequate' research record, including over 210 peer-reviewed publications, an 'H' index of 50 (Web of Science) and external research income in excess of £6m, is second to none among my peers at Keele. Therefore, if my research record ranks as only 'adequate' then Keele's overall record of research must rank as extremely poor. The VC knows that the information he presents is untrue. The VC has access to research records and a simple search on, for example, Web of Science or Google Scholar,

identifies me within the top five researchers currently working at Keele. The VC will also know that I remain the only Keele scientist in the history of the University to have won and served a full term as a Royal Society University Research Fellow. He knows that such prestigious accolades are not awarded for adequate research.

He questions my academic integrity, misinforming the University Governance Committee, without offering any evidence. To my knowledge, my academic integrity has never been questioned and it is actually my integrity that is highlighted over and over again by my peers. I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology an award that recognises my pre-eminence in research and my academic integrity.

Once again, in the following statement the VC chooses to misinform the Committee presumably in order to undermine and besmirch myself as much as possible.

Funding for Dr Exley's research has been mainly through private donations, rather than more traditional research grants or University monies. The nature of any grants he has received have been from companies in the US, where it is difficult (sometimes impossible) to ascertain the origins of the funding or indeed much information about the grant-awarding group itself.

These statements are blatantly wrong. During my time at Keele I have won research awards amounting to in excess of £6 million. Over £5 million of this total has come in the form of traditional research grants, to use the VCs term. The latter include a significant number of grants from the UK research councils, MRC, NERC and EPSRC. I have also won significant grants from Europe (EU Framework Programme) as well as home-based charities such as the Wellcome Trust and The Royal Society. Why does the VC misinform the Governance Committee about this when all these details are easily available to him through Keele's funding office?

I have not obtained any funding from 'companies in the US'. Over the last ten years I have won research funding from a Washington DC –based charity called Children's Medical Safety Research Institute (CMSRI). Keele has openly and willingly accepted funding from this organisation. Indeed Keele recently (18th August 2018) used its Ethics Oversight Committee chaired by Professor Alistair Ulph at the University of Manchester to review funding from CMSRI, and this review body found no objection to receiving funding from them. It gave CMSRI a clean bill of health to continue to support our research.

Recently I have won two large donations (\$70K and \$100K) from the Mericos Foundation, a member of The Whittier Trust. These are philanthropic services, they are fully transparent and Keele has approved both of these donations. The latter donation was rapidly 'turned into a grant' by Keele to enable it to fund my experienced researchers, Drs Mold and Shardlow. The former (\$70K) remains unspent.

The VC's statement about the origins of my research funding is wrong and he is misinforming the University Governance Committee.

One has to wonder why the VC then needed to remind the same Committee of the only donation towards my research that Keele has actually rejected.

One specific anti-vaccination donation has previously been considered and rejected by the Nominations & Governance Committee

Surely, since approving such donations is the responsibility of the Governance Committee, they were already well aware of this, as it was only at the end of 2019 that they, purportedly, made this decision. The donation, a personal cheque for \$15K, was from RF Kennedy Jr. and since he is a lawyer, he will probably wish to deal with this slur against his name.

The VC clearly wished to highlight this donation, without providing any details, as an example of anti-vaccination funding destined for my research.

Contrary to that written in the VC's 'discussion paper' independent donations from individuals made through Keele's own online donations portal have amounted to less than £50K over the past five years. These donations are periodically made available by Keele research services to my group to use as we wish on our Keele-approved research programmes.

The VC has misinformed the Governance Committee about funding to my group, painting a picture of obscurity to support his contention that I am anti-vaccine and therefore, so is my research.

The following statement by the VC is obscure and misinforms further the Committee that my funding streams are out of step with those of the University.

No other person or group within the University receives funding or donations of this nature; therefore this research funding is very much out of line from the rest of the University and inconsistent with our normal approach to funding research activity.

The VC clearly does not recognise significant funding received by Keele from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (a US company) or Bet365 (a UK company) as being in any way equivalent. However, in this statement he does recognise that no other research within Keele is sufficiently prominent worldwide to receive unsolicited donations from individuals. Hence, Keele had no issues with closing down its only online donations portal for several weeks to prevent further donations towards my research.

The VC continues his wholly unsupported statements in the following passage.

Given the national importance of vaccination campaigns at this point in time, the University Advisory Group, in conjunction with the Faculty Dean felt that it would be inappropriate to continue accepting this piecemeal funding for the work that Dr Chris Exley is undertaking, especially as the research integrity of his conclusions is questioned by many of his peers.

The final line is personally insulting. When he wrote this paper he had absolutely no evidence to support this view. It was his view. However, he put it into the minds of the Governance Committee members that I did not have the support of my peers. Two of the main participants in this 'discussion paper' are the Pro-Chancellor (Jo Williams) and the Deputy Pro-Chancellor (David Hall). They have since received a copy of the 'letter of support' sent to the VC and Keele's Chancellor (Jonathon Porritt) and signed by over 100 of my peers. This letter is unequivocal in its support for myself and my research. The letter is available at this website. <https://tinyurl.com/mdtu5w6m>

If they have read this letter then Williams and Hall will know that they have been misinformed by the VC. Whether or not they have brought this up directly with the VC is unknown but this seems unlikely (see later).

The VC uses the misinformation in this discussion paper to ask approval of the Governance Committee to prevent me from receiving research funding from charitable and philanthropic services and, importantly, to disable my group website. The latter remains disabled without the VC providing any evidence whatsoever that it promotes any form of anti-vaccine sentiment. The VC asks the University Governance Committee for approval of;

- 1) That funding for Dr Chris Exley's research will no longer be accepted via private donation*
- 2) That private donations made to date to fund the research will be repaid to the donor, at the expense of the University*
- 3) That grant funding for the research will only be accepted from sources where the reputation and sources of income for the grant are clear and unambiguous.*

Note point 2) above. As of the end of August 2021 no private donations have, to my knowledge, been refunded and Keele has refused every donor who has asked for a refund. These are clearly issues for organisations such as the Charities Commission and the tax office, Keele having already claimed Gift Aid on these unspent donations.

On the 23rd of February, David Hall, the Deputy Pro-Chancellor writes to members of the Governance Committee in a clear attempt to rubber stamp decisions made by the VC. For example, he writes;

I commend Trevor for his open, thoughtful and balanced approach to these issues and for the care he has taken to consult widely.

and he follows this with his own personal recommendation to all Committee members;

I hope you will forgive me expressing my views up front in this e-mail, but Trevor or I would be very happy to speak to anyone with concerns individually or as a group if those concerns are significant and the member feels they would like to have a group discussion before reaching a conclusion. From Trevor's soundings I do not expect that to be the case and so perhaps you can indicate your approval (or otherwise) to Fiona by e-mail. As a Committee we have no direct responsibility to approve the actions to be taken in respect of the website, but you are welcome to comment on that aspect as well if you wish.

So, he is confident that information given by the VC is accurate and sufficient for them to accept it and act upon it without any further discussion. This is exactly what followed. Would they have made a similar decision if they had not been misinformed?

Further cementing the views expressed by the VC are those of Keele's Chief Operating Officer, Mark Bacon, in email correspondence on the 10th of February and prior to the discussion of the VC's paper, with Lauren Huss, head of the alumnus office.

At one point Huss writes the below to Bacon.

therefore donors are not giving specifically to research that may be damaging to the institutional reputation (although at this point most of Exley's research could be classed as such)

While Huss admits that donations received through Keele's online portal are entirely independent she then proceeds to defame myself with the following comment in brackets. Who is Huss, someone who has never met myself or probably looked at any of our published research, to state that most of our research is damaging to Keele's institutional reputation. It is, as if she is enjoying playing her part in the tyranny of misinformation against me. She goes on to say in the same email to Bacon.

However, it is ultimately impossible to always guarantee that someone hasn't donated because they have seen a video or article which promotes anti vax messaging which we don't know about.

The narrative is clear here. She has been led to believe that both my research and I are anti-vaccine. She doesn't need any evidence for this. She takes the word of the VC and COO.

Bacon replies at 20.18 on the 10th of February, presumably post discussion of the paper written by the VC since this meeting was scheduled for 17.30.

I think it is clear that the decision is in the best interests of the charity: accepting donations solicited by an individual supporting anti-vaccine misinformation risks a £9m research income per annum from NIHR being lost.

Bacon clearly defames my name, suggesting forcibly that this was also the conclusion of the discussion of the VC's paper, and adds that my remaining at Keele risks a substantial loss of income from NIHR. <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/> Note CEO of NIHR is Chris Whitty.

Bacon continues his libellous narrative with;

The Guardian headline is spot on: Keele facilitates money flowing to a prominent anti-vaccine academic.

He has clearly bought the messaging coming from the VC as Bacon does not know me or my research from Adam. He is simply repeating the prior discussion hosted by the VC. He goes on to say;

There is a clear link between his calls to action and the flows of donations: with the majority of donations by number and value being directed to CE.

An outrageous statement but again presumably one taken from the previous discussion with the VC. He talks about my 'calls to action' again without a shred of evidence of any such calls. He continues to defame my name. He calls me a high profile anti-vaccine academic. He can only have developed this opinion from the earlier discussion meeting with the VC.

I don't know of the detail of our gift acceptance policy to know whether it reads as sufficient or not. But the fact remains we facilitate donations to high profile anti-vaccine academic. So our gift acceptance policy does not therefore seem fit for purpose now, given today's likely decision: so it will have to be revised.

Bacon's libellous statements continue.

I would be interested to understand whether the commission would be acting in the public interest to fine Keele for aiming to reduce the influence of anti-vaccine movement, given the WHO estimates of avoidable deaths as a result of anti-vaccine propaganda.

He is clearly revelling in his position and he continues to confirm that which I said earlier that decisions would be made by chair's action, based upon the misinformation offered up by the VC.

I can also see that the Secretary to Council (David Hall) is suggesting chairs actions/via correspondence decision from nominations committee who are delegates to rule on controversial donations.

All of this correspondence demonstrates that the VC, of his own volition or otherwise, has branded me and my research as anti-vaccine in order it would seem to gain approval by the University Governance Committee of his proposed actions against myself and my research.

This decision is further reinforced by allowing the publication of a highly defamatory article by an anonymous author in Keele's student newspaper, Concourse. The VC was certainly aware of this article as he was alerted to it in emails by Russell Reader (Marketing and Bird Seed advocate). Despite the article painting me as a leading anti-vaccine advocate he did nothing to have it removed. He was happy to see this message about my research and myself sent to myriad Keele students past and present.

There is another significant issue that remains completely unresolved. No direct evidence has been forthcoming that The Guardian made a FOI request to Keele to obtain information on my funding. However, if such a request had been made then according to information from Lauren Adams in Keele's FOI Office, it should have been refused based upon the fact that it asked for highly personalised information specific to myself. To respond to such a request would presumably contravene the FOI Act.

I have repeatedly asked Keele's FOI Office for full details of the FOI request made by The Guardian. Anne-Marie Long, Keele's Data Protection Officer, has treated my formal requests as FOI requests. However, below is all the information they would provide me with, no original documentation, just information they have typed into an email to me.

FOI Request 1 - Please provide details of financial donations and gifts made to Professor Chris Exley's in the last two years. Detail who made the gift or donation to research, what it was/how much, and when it was made.

Answer - Please find attached the information held in relation to donations made to Professor Chris Exley in the last two years. The names of individuals are withheld under Section 40(2)(3A)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act, being personal information the release of which would contravene one or more of the data protection principles within the Data Protection Act 2018.

Please note that this data runs from May 2019 as information relating to the months prior was provided to you previously within an FOI response in May 2019.

FOI Request 2 - Please provide details of financial donations and gifts made to Professor Chris Exley's in the last two years that were rejected by Keele University. Please detail the reasons why it was rejected. Detail who made the gift or donation to research, what it was/how much, and when it was made.

Answer - One donation during the requested time period was rejected, as indicated in the attached document. Further detail is withheld under Section 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act as release would be likely to prejudice the commercial interests of the University. This is a qualified exemption and the public interest test applies.

Look at the underlined (my underlining) in both requests. Either the requests are incomplete or Keele's FOI Office has made two identical errors in transcribing the 'original' FOI requests. This information has been confirmed as being correct by Anne-Marie Long, Keele's Data Protection Officer, and so we must assume that the original requests from The Guardian were written in this form. Keele's FOI Office somehow managed to interpret these requests to provide the detailed information sent to The Guardian.

Independent requests to Keele's FOI Office for this information have, similarly, fallen on deaf ears, at least for now.

The information I present demonstrates that the VC, fully supported by senior management, acted to undermine significantly both my personal reputation and that of my 29 years of research at Keele. He has branded me as anti vaccine and my research as adequate. Would anyone expect me to be able to return to work at Keele in such an environment and with such rules, applicable only to me, on how research funding could be raised in the future?

Regarding the raising of external research funding.

Rather than celebrate the fact that I (and, according to the VC, I alone at Keele) have been able to bring in funding from charitable and philanthropic services amounting to in excess of £1m over the past 10 years the VC has decided that these previously Keele-approved sources of funding (primarily CMSRI and The Whittier Trust) are no longer acceptable. The result of his actions being that all research in my group stopped at the end of August 2021 and my two first class research fellows are out of a job.

The VC, through my lawyer, suggested I look to alternative sources of funding such as UK research councils. He should know the difficulties I have faced in recent applications to such bodies. If funding was possible then I would not be devoting significant amounts of time to alternative funding sources.

However, let us examine research funding in my field through the UK research councils. If we use the research councils' websites and use search terms such as aluminium and human health we can find out how many grants have been awarded in this area over the last 20 years in the UK.

BBSRC – number of grants awarded = 0

MRC – number of grants awarded = 1. Successful applicant, C Exley, Keele University

NERC – number of grants awarded = 1. Successful applicant, C Exley, Keele University

EPSRC – number of grants awarded = 2. Successful applicant (2) C Exley, Keele University

In the last 20 years, UK research councils have supported 4 grant applications in the fields of aluminium and human health (most recently in 2012) and all 4 grants have been awarded to me. The VC now proposes that I make multiple applications to the research councils to support my research, even though the probability of success is zero.

I have been successful in bringing in research funding from what the VC calls 'established funding bodies', amounting to over £5m during my time at Keele. I have not excluded applications to such bodies over the past few years for any reason other than the knowledge that they have zero chance of success.

In future, as suggested by the VC, I can make applications to the UK research councils and similar government-funded bodies as a box-ticking exercise. However, the stark reality of his actions is that if I returned to Keele I would no longer be research active. He knew very well that by withdrawing the lifeblood of research from my activities at Keele that I would not be returning.

I have written this statement to explain why I had no choice but to leave Keele. I express no judgement on those mentioned by name. I am not pursuing any form of direct justice. I am drawing a line under these highly unfortunate circumstances. I am proud of my achievements at Keele University and I have always been proud to be a Keele academic.

Dr Christopher Exley FRSB