

LETTER FROM BILL MCGEACHIE TO THE PUBLIC AUDIT COMMITTEE, DATED 21 NOVEMBER 2015

Coatbridge College Public Audit Committee Inquiry

Dear Mr. Martin,

My family have been watching with interest the proceedings of the above Inquiry. This matter affects us considerably as my late brother, Mr. Francis McGeachie, was a key member of staff at the College during the period of time covered by your investigation.

Tragically, towards the end of the merger he took his own life. Subsequently, my family sought to seek answers to many questions. Recently, we have held meetings with Education Secretary Angela Constance on this subject and following the outcome of your Inquiry, a further meeting will take place.

I wish to congratulate you on Chairing this Committee so well; I have been very impressed by the caliber of all members of your committee and the professional way they have all conducted themselves.

In order to help you in this matter I attach a copy of the findings of an investigation conducted by Mr Alex Linkston. He was commissioned to investigate Coatbridge College and he interviewed many of the people you have recently encountered. He looked into the governance of the decision making process surrounding the payment of severance packages as well as other matters of direct interest to us.

It has surprised our family that this report has not been widely circulated; as far as we are concerned it was never intended to gather dust on a shelf. Hopefully, many lessons will be learned as a consequence of the Linkston investigation and your own inquiry.

For the avoidance of doubt, you have the permission of my family to make reference to this report and use it in any way that you see fit; despite what representatives of the Scottish Funding Council may say to the contrary. I also provide a copy of an agenda item that was recently published in the Glasgow Herald which serves as background information.

Yours sincerely

BILL MCGEACHIE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY BILL MCGEACHIE

Agenda: What part did controversial college merger play in Francis McGeachie's suicide?

[Bill McGeachie](#) / Friday 25 September 2015 / [Opinion](#)

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By Bill McGeachie

Francis McGeachie, Faculty Director at Coatbridge College committed suicide on December 4, 2013.

Francis was a devoted father and loving husband and lived life to the full. His funeral was massive and the family received hundreds of condolence messages, many from his students. The family became determined to understand what had gone wrong to the degree that Francis' spirit was so destroyed, his mind so fractured that suicide was the only solution.

Coatbridge College was undergoing a merger process with New College Lanarkshire and Francis had shared his concerns with his family about how this was being handled.

The family made their own inquiries and were deeply concerned that the way the college merger was conducted had a negative impact on Coatbridge staff, and that Francis was not alone in finding it extremely difficult. Decisions were taken which saw Coatbridge College excluded from significant decision making processes around the merger, and as a consequence there was a belief that Coatbridge staff were being sidelined. Once the merger plans were underway, a number of senior managers in Coatbridge were absent and this added to the burden of those who remained at their posts. During this time Francis was appointed by the outgoing Principal as Depute Principal of the College, something Francis was proud of but he raised concerns with the process. Relationships among staff became strained. His appointment was revoked, then re-instated. Francis felt increasingly isolated and he stepped down. He felt humiliated, exposed, isolated and unable to know whom to trust. Despite this, he continued to work hard to support the merger and the establishment of the New College. Francis saw his future with New College Lanarkshire. He was 44 and felt that he had much to contribute to the future of the New College. He had no intention of leaving the college and when he thought he was being denied the opportunity of making such a contribution his world imploded. He was exhausted and devastated.

The family were shocked and wanted to find out if what they were being told could be substantiated. They harboured very real concerns for staff welfare in the college merger process. The family wrote to New College seeking answers to questions. Weeks went by with no response. This caused further distress for the family.

As a consequence the family approached Mike Russell, then Cabinet Secretary for Education. He commissioned the Linkston Report which reviewed the management of the merger and the impact on senior staff.

The Linkston Report found instances of “poor governance and decision-making which appear to have had a cumulative and negative impact on senior staff”. The report, shared with us nearly a year ago, sheds light on what happened at Coatbridge and made 12 key recommendations. However, with recent stories in the press, we believe that perhaps there is more to be uncovered and there are more lessons to be learned.

Moreover, the family have learned that there is a standard legal test that requires to be met when the death of an employee appears to be related to workplace stress. This test involves the employer having "actual knowledge" of the effect of workplace stress on the employee before they can be liable for any ultimate or tragic consequence, even if the employee was placed under unreasonable stress at work. Francis would have been reluctant to reveal his stress levels to his employer believing it would negatively impact on his chances of securing a position in the New College. We believe that the legal test must change, and that any employer must exercise their duty of care over an employee. Failure to do so should be enough on its own to secure redress.

Much has been written about the financial packages secured by senior staff. Our family want to put on record that this concern was shared by Francis. He had no part in determining the level of compensation offered, nor did he receive any payment.

The family want to see the 12 recommendations of the Linkston Report implemented. This is the best way of ensuring that no other family suffers as we have suffered. We would like to know from the Scottish Funding Council how many of these, if any, have been accepted? What will change as a result of Francis's death?

The family will never get over the loss of Francis. Francis's widow and their two children have been left without the care and support of their loving husband and father.

Dr McGeachie is the brother of Francis. He wrote this Agenda on behalf of the family.