

Off message

UNIVERSITY of Sussex chiefs, also touchy about criticism from staff, have ordered a union rep to remove from emails he sends on union business a tiny image supporting colleagues under threat from privatisation plans.

The university is outsourcing many of its non-academic services, including catering,

building maintenance and cleaning, which will see 235 staff transferred to an as yet unknown private employer in August.

University and College Union (UCU) rep Rob French added a small yellow "support the 235" logo to his emails. At the request of the university's HR department, he removed it from emails purely about his own work, but continued to use it on messages related to his role as the staff union rep, for which he is allowed to use workplace facilities. But after he emailed university registrar John Duffy on union business he was told in no uncertain terms to remove the image from any emails sent using university computers, even internal messages between union members. A staff member who is facing being outsourced was also told to remove a small lapel badge reading "1/235" before a meeting could begin.

So much for the university's statute on freedom of speech, which guarantees "the right of any member of staff to express political, religious, social and professional views, both privately and in public, provided that this is within the law and is done explicitly in his or her own name".