

SCIENCE POLICY UNDER THE WHIP

Brian Martin

In academia, the standard myth is that advancement is directly related to scholarly performance. Unfortunately performance and position are all too often unconnected. But the myth persists because it is useful in legitimating the power and privilege of those in high places.

There are all sorts of ways in which people can fall from grace on the path to academic success, such as lacking a patron or working in an unfashionable area. For the discussion here the following three factors are relevant:

1. Being a highly talented person. Although brilliance, hard work and scholarly output should enable a person to get ahead in academia, sometimes the opposite occurs. Highly talented and high performance individuals may be resented precisely because they are so good. If those already in positions of power are mediocre in scholarship, then they may be threatened by a talented person. From the point of view of the mediocrities, opposition to high-fliers may be rationalised by perceiving them as arrogant, conceited and overrated. There is a tradition of this in Australia, known colloquially as “cutting down tall poppies”.

Opposition to talented people may also come from other talented people who want all the power and glory for themselves. Some eminent scholars prefer sycophants to potential challengers. Safe mediocrities are chosen for positions, given grants, and invited into coteries of the powerful.

Opposition to talented people must be rationalised on some other grounds than their talent, of course. This is often done by denigrating the value of their teaching or research, for example by disdaining the importance, rigour or difficulty of their area of specialisation. Another rationalisation is that the talented person has an “unacceptable personality”, an allegation that is often so subjective that it is impossible to refute.

2. Obtaining publicity. Academics who gain publicity for their work are often suspect, especially when they are not in official positions of eminence. When intellectual dissidents gain publicity, this is a direct threat to the power of academic elites. But even those who gain publicity for quite normal academic pursuits may face antagonism: somehow it is not the scholarly thing to be well known outside one’s narrow speciality. The main reason for this is that public attention and acclaim is a form of success that is not readily under the control of academic elites, and therefore is distrusted by them.

Another reason for antagonism to those who gain publicity is envy and jealousy. Success

in the eyes of others is a valued commodity in academia, and those who achieve high visibility may be resented because of this. In my opinion, one reason why Harry Messel, Head of the School of Physics at Sydney University and for many years the academic best known to the Australian public, has been looked down upon by some academics is because of his success in gaining publicity.

3. Being a woman. Discrimination against women is deeply entrenched in academia.¹ For many years, women aspiring to be academics were not treated seriously: they and their contributions were not seen to provide any status for a department or discipline. With the rise of the second wave of the feminist movement since the 1960s and the increased assertiveness of many women, the more blatant forms of discrimination have become harder to sustain, though they still occur. It still remains widely true that women, to obtain jobs and recognition on the basis of their scholarship, must be twice as good as male competitors.

One of the most difficult problems faced by women is common social expectations, or rather lack of expectations. Women are not expected to be in desperate need of a job, to deserve the most rapid promotions, or to gain the best opportunities. Women are not expected to be as aggressive as men in personal style, for example in academic debate, and when they are this is seen as objectionable and an affront.

Put together these three factors, and a potent combination results: a highly talented woman gaining lots of publicity for her efforts, thereby upstaging academic elites. That is what the case of Ann Moyal is about. But before describing the case, some of the context is worth describing: Griffith University and science policy.

Griffith University in Brisbane was one of several universities set up in the mid-1970s in the last years of the Australian boom in higher education. Like others of its type, such as Murdoch and Deakin Universities, Griffith was established to be different from the usual university divided into disparate disciplines. Its organisation was based around schools, whole areas of intellectual discourse combining several disciplines in which scholarly interaction was to be encouraged. Many recently established universities, drawing on the University of Sussex model, have aimed at problem-oriented, multi-disciplinary education and research. But the realities have seldom lived up to the plans.

Many academics prefer working in narrow disciplines because this provides a safe power base. Only the other "experts" in the discipline, it is alleged, are able to judge research and teaching in the area. This protects academics, especially elite academics, from outside scrutiny. La Trobe University, in Melbourne, established with a non-disciplinary structure, soon reverted to the traditional form as the professors built up disciplinary empires. Significantly, it was staff with previous academic experience who promoted this process, whereas staff drawn from government and industry were more satisfied with the non-disciplinary structure.²

At Griffith, the pattern was different from this.³ The University had been established with a decision-making procedure based largely on committees rather than the usual structure with professors in positions of dominance. At Griffith, much more power than usual was given to the Vice-Chancellor and to the heads of the schools of which the university was composed. As one of the last new universities before the government funding squeeze began, Griffith has never reached its planned size. This has meant that there is insufficient size for professors or others in key positions to build up positions of power in particular subject areas. In effect, the committee system plus the small size of the University has meant that more power than usual has flowed to the Vice-Chancellor and a few other key people at the top.

One of the innovations at Griffith was the Science Policy Research Centre. Science policy⁴ is a relatively new area for academic study. Its importance expanded greatly after the Second World War, during which heavy government funding of, and involvement with, scientific research developed. Nuclear weapons, nuclear power, space programs, defence,

agricultural research, industrial research and development: in these and many other areas science was increasingly interlinked with political and economic policy-making. Science policy is the study of such interactions. Sometimes science policy is seen to be "policy for science", namely allocating monies and resources to various branches of science. Another perspective is "science for policy", namely formulating general social goals and then mobilising scientific resources to achieve these goals. "Policy for science" assumes that scientists and especially scientific elites are best equipped to decide the best directions for scientific research, whereas "science for policy" puts government in this role.

Ann Moyal was and is an eminent science policy researcher. She received a First Class Honours B.A. in history at Sydney University, and then worked at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, at the South Pacific Commission, as a research assistant to Lord Beaverbrook, and in the early 1960s jointly as Research Fellow in history at the Australian National University and Research Associate of the Australian Academy of Science studying the history of Australian science. In 1972 she became a senior lecturer in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the New South Wales Institute of Technology. She taught in the fields of science and government, technology and society and the history of technology. She was known as a researcher of formidable critical abilities, as illustrated by her penetrating study of the Australian Atomic Energy Commission.⁵ She was author of the landmark study *Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia*⁶ and in 1976 was a visiting fellow at the University of Sussex, in the Department of History of Science and the Science Policy Research Unit. Beginning in 1973 she received Australian Research Grant Committee grants on science and technology policy in Australia. Her reputation as a historian of Australian science and as a science policy analyst was recognised overseas and she became the key reviewer on these topics of international science policy for the prestigious United States journal *Science*.

Of course, many scholars can boast an impressive sounding background of degrees, jobs and publications. Ann Moyal's career has been more than this. In essence, she has been a pioneer in two fields of study: the history of science in Australia, and Australian science policy.

The Science Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at Griffith had been founded in December 1975 by a recent arrival from Manchester University, Jarlath Ronayne. But he left to become a professor at the University of NSW. Ann Moyal applied for the vacated position. There was some stiff competition for the post. In December 1976 Ann Moyal was offered the post of Director of the SPRC in Griffith's School of Science, and Senior Lecturer in the School. She took up the position in February 1977.

Officially the job entailed 70 per cent teaching and 30 per cent Centre activities, but it became clear that this was unrealistic. When she took up the post, nothing had been done about research or policy for the SPRC: there were no records or correspondence. Ann Moyal saw her foremost job as establishing the activities and reputation of the SPRC, especially since its existence was to be reviewed at the end of 1979, and because it lacked much overt support from the traditional discipline-oriented scientists in the School of Science.

To accomplish this aim, she proceeded on a punishing round of activities to establish a viable research centre in addition to teaching undergraduate courses in science and society and in science policy, supervising honours students and heading the masters degree course in science, technology and society. To promote the SPRC, she made numerous grant applications to funding bodies, made overtures to Commonwealth government departments and other bodies, developed contacts with a variety of relevant Commonwealth ministers and parliamentarians, published papers, invited distinguished Australian and international visitors to give papers at the SPRC, and launched the SPRC Occasional Papers Series.

There can be no doubt that Moyal was a conspicuous person of talent who gained widespread publicity. She was active in giving invited talks on science policy, budgetary issues and other topics on the Science Show on the ABC, and gave an ABC talk on

technological change in late 1978 on the program "Encounter". She also appeared on the Queensland ABC and commercial radio stations. During 1978 she became a member of the Science Advisory Committee of the ABC. Minutes of an SPRC Management Committee in July 1978 noted that "a major part of media coverage of Griffith University for 1977 had originated from the Science Policy Research Centre".⁷

The attention bestowed on Ann Moyal and the SPRC may have left senior academics at Griffith feeling upstaged. During 1977, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Queensland, Sir Zelman Cowan, held a special lunch party for Mrs Moyal, to which he invited his science deans and major science professors. But at Griffith no such welcome was made. In 1978 Senator John Button, then Shadow Minister for Education and Science, made a weekend visit to Griffith, for which the Vice-Chancellor and the Professor of Asian Studies made themselves available. Their cold response when Senator Button asked to see Ann Moyal and complimented them on having someone so outstanding, led him to make a point of visiting her at home. In late September 1978, the then Minister for Science and the Environment, Senator J. J. Webster, rang to ask if he could visit the SPRC, and at Ann Moyal's invitation addressed a large body of students, making himself available for questions on science policy issues. Both the Vice-Chancellor and the Head of the School of Science entirely ignored this visit.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor F. J. Willett, showed hostility to the SPRC as early as November 1977, when a letter of his appeared in the *Great Griffith Gazette*. In an earlier issue, both the editor of the *Gazette* and Ann Moyal had written about science policy and discussed the views of Alvin Weinberg, a prominent United States science administrator who has often commented on the relation of science and society. Professor Willett's reply is reproduced here in full:

In a field notable for its portentous [sic] clap trap, the work of Weinberg — if you [the editorial contributor] and Mrs Moyal have dealt with him fairly — will be remembered for a richness of platitude and some tautology.

Questions about decision frameworks for the allocation of scarce resources, especially ways of recognising, evaluating and incorporating value judgements are of venerable antiquity.

They are treated in depth — and sometimes with elegance — in the administrative literature of Rome, China and the industrial West.

Weinberg's codswallop could be discussed for its intrinsic worth if it did not reflect a larger, and questionable premise; that somehow and for some reasons Science is different.

Maybe one reason for the often distasteful standard of literacy in this field is that much is necessary to obfuscate that false premise.⁸

Although Professor Willett later claimed in a private letter⁹ that this letter to the *Gazette* was an attempt to put ginger in the *Gazette's* correspondence columns, and that it paid a compliment to Moyal, others might prefer to infer an underlying hostility to science policy studies.

It is also true that Ann Moyal did not behave obsequiously to those in positions of power above her. Her style has been to pull no punches and to refuse to put up with hectoring or condescension. For many elites who are used to obeisance or toadying, such independent behaviour by a person in a lesser position may be seen as insubordination, or worse — especially if the person is a woman.

In January 1978 Ann Moyal spent a week in Canberra negotiating possible grants for the Centre with the Department of Science, CSIRO, the Australian Institute for Nuclear Science and Engineering, and the Australian Science and Technology Council. The Vice-Chancellor revealed antagonism to these efforts.

At the end of 1978, matters came to a climax. Teaching in the Science, Technology and Science group had increased due to reduced tutorial help. Ann Moyal was working a seven-day week to keep up with her teaching, SPRC activities and research undertakings. Three

further commitments added to the pressure. She accepted an invitation from the Joint Academies of Science, Technology and Social Sciences to be one of several major participants in a workshop in April 1979 on "Science and Technology for What Purpose?". She was invited to prepare a paper for the January 1979 Congress of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, to be held in New Zealand. She also was under pressure to complete a longstanding research study of the Australian Academy of Science which had been promised for the journal *Search*, but which had been held up by her various duties. A special place was reserved for the paper on this in the March 1979 issue, which coincided with the Academy's 25th anniversary.¹⁰

With these deadlines and important commitments, Ann Moyal sought cooperation from the Chairman of the School of Science, Dr David Doddrell, to reduce her load of marking some of the first-year essays. This was refused. She then refused to mark more than 18 essays.

The Chairman sent her a letter "suspending" her from the University. Moyal sought legal advice. Letters from her solicitors to the University received no satisfactory answer, but the notice of "suspension" was waived by the University as if it had never been sent. The next week, the Vice-Chancellor requested Moyal to visit him. She took a representative of her solicitors along with her, but he was refused entry to the room. The Vice-Chancellor indicated to Mrs Moyal that there was a prima facie case for her dereliction.

Shortly afterwards, she received notice that a staff Conduct Committee acting as a Tribunal had been set up to hear four allegations against her. It was a remarkable Tribunal. Made up of three members of the University Council including the former Treasurer of Queensland, the Honourable Sir Gordon Chalk, plus a member of the University and the Administration, it was chaired by Queensland Supreme Court judge Mr Justice J. D. Dunn. A member of the University administration assisted the Committee as "prosecutor". The four allegations involved her refusal to mark a certain number of essays and to undertake the invigilation of one of three examinations allocated to her by the Chairman of the School of Science.

The hearing, on 21 December 1978, which dealt with only one of the four allegations, that of refusing to mark some first-year essays, found this allegation proved and decided that no penalty should be imposed. The Tribunal found that Ann Moyal was "a valuable and enthusiastic member of staff" and suggested that the University not carry the matter further.¹¹ However, this was not satisfactory to "the University". At the administration's insistence, a second hearing before the same tribunal members was held on 27 February 1979, at which all four allegations were found proved and a reprimand was administered concerning two of them. In the light of this experience, Ann Moyal decided to free herself from Griffith University and resigned in April 1979.

The first thing to note about the tribunals is that the charges were trivial in every instance. For example, one charge was that a third-year student's oral examination had been assessed by a research assistant instead of by Moyal. In fact, the assessment was done by Moyal based on a written essay. And is it really so heinous for a research assistant to help out occasionally in teaching?¹²

For every charge there were highly persuasive extenuating circumstances, based on other commitments, which any reasonable person would have accepted and which were raised at the time. For example, in one case a change in plans was required to accommodate a sudden request from the Minister for Science. In normal circumstances the charges laid would never have been brought against a valued member of staff. In most cases, arrangements are willingly made for a high-performance researcher with extra commitments. As it was, the minor breaches of regulations were used as a pretext for formal procedures which had the net effect of severe harassment.

The second important aspect of the tribunals is that they highlighted objectionable features of the University regulations and their implementation. These matters are dealt with

in a report, inspired by the Moyal tribunals, by the Executive of the Griffith University Faculty Staff Association (GUFSA), dated 12 June 1979. The points raised include¹³:

The Statutes laid down for Griffith University give the Vice-Chancellor an extraordinary amount of power. For example, clause 10 of Statute 4.1, Conduct of Staff, permits the Vice-Chancellor to summarily dismiss a staff member if in the Vice-Chancellor's opinion the member has committed a gross breach of the conditions of employment. This is highly unusual for a university statute, and appears to override the whole principle of tenure statutes.¹⁴

The Vice-Chancellor has the power to refer a matter to a Staff Conduct Committee, and is also empowered to appoint a person to act in the role of Prosecutor (as happened in the Moyal case). Furthermore, the University, through the Council, also appoints the Staff Conduct Committee which acts as judge. Thus the University may act as both prosecutor and judge.

Although in the Moyal tribunals the prosecution case was presented in a highly legalistic fashion, no legal advice was allowed to Ann Moyal, who had to present her own case. The tribunal may refuse to allow an open hearing, as happened in the Moyal tribunals. In the second tribunal for Ann Moyal, the Registrar, Mr Topley, presented the University's case. The Executive of GUFSA noted that this "created a strong implication of deliberate connivance between the person laying the complaint and the University who, through the Registrar, took upon itself the burden of prosecution as well as, through the Council and the Staff Conduct Committee, the right to judge. In the case of the Registrar, with his privileged access to documents beyond the reach of most members of staff, he was in a position to prejudice Mrs Moyal's presentation of her case in ways which would not withstand outside judicial scrutiny, particularly as the first hearing had suggested that the further three charges be not proceeded with".

The third important point raised by the tribunals is the implicit double standard inherent in their application. Neither Griffith nor most other universities make regular reviews of staff and use the findings to take formal disciplinary action against staff for poor teaching, poor or nonexistent research, or failure to follow all administrative regulations. Universities have their share of people — at all levels — who are incompetent, do little work, or flout regulations. If such people are so seldom disciplined, why was a talented and hard-working person like Moyal singled out for minor violations?

Ann Moyal calls herself a survivor. Other members of staff at Griffith had been victimised and there was a history of nervous breakdowns and divorce among the staff. Moyal had come to see Griffith as an institution deficient in moral and educational standards and totally lacking in integrity. "I was very lucky to get out", she said. "Others, including some very good members of staff, are trapped there."

Returning to Sydney, she became Visiting Fellow in the Department of Government at the University of Sydney and later Visiting Fellow in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. She kept up her science policy research, and can be considered one of the leading members of that field. She was commissioned by Telecom Australia to write a history of telecommunications in Australia¹⁵, was appointed to the National Committee on the History and Philosophy of Science, and in 1983 became Honorary Editor of the new journal of issues in technological change, science policy and innovation, *Prometheus*, and Honorary Editor of the Australian scientific journal *Search*.

There are several lessons which may be drawn from the Moyal case. Among them are the following:

- Harassment concerning apparently the most trivial matters can be a potent form of suppression.

- Violation of the narrow letter of regulations provides leverage for those in positions of power to act against a person. Minor violations that can be formally substantiated can be blown out of all proportion and so outweigh major contributions to scholarship.
- There is no penalty for administrators who fail to accommodate the research needs of staff.
- Regulations, although they may seem innocuous when they lie unused for years, are nevertheless dangerous if they permit the arbitrary use of power.

Acknowledgements

I thank Ann Baker, Clyde Manwell, Ann Moyal, Cedric Pugh and others who prefer to remain anonymous for useful advice in writing this chapter.

References

1. For an analysis of this in Australia see Bettina Cass, Madge Dawson, Diana Temple, Sue Wills and Anne Winkler, *Why so Few? Women Academics in Australian Universities* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1983).
2. Miriam Henry, "The La Trobe concept: an idea for a new university?," in: Donald E. Edgar (ed.), *Social Change in Australia: Readings in Sociology* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1974), pp. 563–82; Neil Marshall, "La Trobe University: the vision and the reality", in: Stephen Murray-Smith (ed.), *Melbourne Studies in Education* (Melbourne University Press, 1981), pp. 1–41.
3. On Griffith and also on the Moyal case, see Adrian McGregor, "The end of the god-professor", *National Times*, 1 December 1979, pp. 59, 61, 63.
4. On science policy see the major international work Ina Spiegel-Rösing and Derek de Solla Price (eds), *Science, Technology and Society: A Cross-disciplinary Perspective* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977).
5. Ann Mozley Moyal, "The Australian Atomic Energy Commission: a case study in Australian science and government", *Search*, vol. 6, no. 9, September 1975, pp. 365–84.
6. Ann Moyal, *Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia* (Cassell Australia, 1976).
7. Griffith University School of Science, Science Policy Research Centre Management Committee, Minutes 1/78, document SC/414/78, 20 July 1978, p. 1.
8. F. J. Willett, "Is science different?" (letter), *Great Griffith Gazette*, November 1977, p. 2. See also the letter in reply by Ann Moyal on the same page.
9. F. J. Willett, letter to R. D. Guthrie, Chairman of the School of Science, 16 February 1978.
10. This appeared as Ann Moyal, "The Australian Academy of Science: the anatomy of a scientific elite", *Search*, vol. 11, nos 7–8, July/August 1980, pp. 231–9, and no. 9, September 1980, pp. 281–8.
11. "The decision of the tribunal of 21 December 1978" as dictated to Ann Moyal by the Acting Registrar, Mr Hault, on Wednesday afternoon 4 p.m., 21 December 1978. See also letter from C. B. Hault, Acting Registrar, to Ann Moyal, 21 December 1978, which did not include the statement about her being "a valuable and enthusiastic member of staff".
12. I find this charge rather extraordinary since, as a research assistant myself, I have taught and assessed four entire third-year courses with full support by my department. The Dean of Science certainly has not brought charges against the Head of the Department for allowing this.

13. "Some comments on the operation of 'Statute 4.1 — Conduct of Staff' by the Executive of the Griffith University Faculty Staff Association", 12 June 1979.
14. On this see the comments by Les Wallis of the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations in McGregor, *op. cit.* note 3, p. 61.
15. Ann Moyal, *Clear Across Australia: Telecommunications 1854–1983* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984).

Postscript

On 3 April 1984 I sent a copy of this chapter to Griffith University inviting a response from someone representing the University, or anyone else appropriate, to be included in this book. On 18 May the Acting Vice-Chancellor, Professor Robert Segall, replied as follows:

Dear Mr Martin,

I read your article with interest. I can say personally that I endorse your comments on Ann as a highly talented historian. I very much admired her scholarly study, "Scientists in Nineteenth Century Australia".

She was a colleague of mine in the School of Science as you may know and I greatly enjoyed her company and was extremely sorry when she left.

As to the content of your article, I feel obliged as Acting Vice-Chancellor to say that I think you need to be cautious as to what you publish.

Yours sincerely,

(signed) R. L. Segall

Acting Vice-Chancellor.