Occupation of social learning space by protesters

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At approximately 11.45am on Monday 17 January, around 20 protesters took occupation of a social learning space that joins the Watson building to the Poynting building at the University of Birmingham, linking Maths to Physics.

The protesters were demonstrating against cuts to higher education provision and the introduction of higher student tuition fees.

Throughout the occupation, the University continued to allow protesters access to toilets, but did not allow additional protesters to join those in the occupied area.

The occupation came to an end at around 6.45pm at the point that protesters charged at security staff without warning, putting the safety of staff and students at risk. Six security guards, supported by two police officers, then moved forward into the occupied area. A number of protesters chose to leave; those that had initiated the charge at security guards were actively escorted from the building.

A spokesperson for the University of Birmingham said:

“Students and staff have a right to protest peacefully, however those protesting yesterday were not elected representatives of the student body. We were also concerned that continued action of this nature may have a negative impact on the quality of the learning experience for the rest of the student community. We continue to maintain an ongoing dialogue with elected representatives of the student body.”

In response to enquiries regarding staff job losses, a University of Birmingham spokesperson said:

“The University of Birmingham is in a unique position in the sector at present. At a time of economic downturn when other universities are making cuts in order to survive, at Birmingham, we are planning for long term growth.

“These plans focus on academic excellence and investment in areas of world-leading research and teaching, including enhancing the student educational experience.

“We are making savings as well as investments, and these equate to a reduction in the number of staff posts by approximately 200 over a period of three years, from a total staff population of approximately 6,000. A substantial number of these have already been achieved by voluntary means, including voluntary severance. We have also removed posts which have been vacant over a long period of time.

“If we hit our savings and income targets the number of full time equivalent posts will rise by 2013, as predicted in our financial forecast. This strategy will enable us to emerge from the economic downturn as a premier institution and secure an ambitious future for the university."

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