

Yale professor denounces UU decision to 'abandon' Magee Troubles resource



Garrett Hargan
garrett@derrynews.net

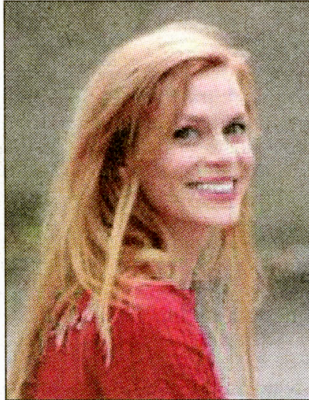
A professor from one of the world's most respected universities has issued her "strongest possible appeal" for Ulster University to reconsider its decision to abandon the CAIN Troubles archive at Magee.

Lecturer of Political Science at Yale University, Professor Bonnie Weir, described UU's proposed closure of CAIN as "mystifying" and one decried by scholars, researchers and citizens around the globe.

Last month, the Derry News revealed the CAIN Web Service, which is the most comprehensive "Troubles" archive in Britain, was under threat of closure after Ulster University (UU) decided it was no longer financially sustainable in its current form.

A consultation is underway on CAIN's future as a live research project, but if that is not possible then the staff at the Magee campus in Derry would be made redundant and online access would be ensured by making CAIN a special digital collection within the University's library.

However, in the absence of dedicated staff, no new material would be added, no updates carried out, and no queries or



Yale University Professor Bonnie Weir.

permission requests would be dealt with.

The events which transpired in Derry last week with the Bloody Sunday prosecutions announcement demonstrate how important it is for CAIN to be updated, Prof. Weir believes.

Prof. Weir has therefore written to UU Vice Chancellor Paddy Nixon to "strenuously" request that he revisit the decision taken by senior leadership at the university to "abandon the conflict archive on the Internet (CAIN) web service as an actively maintained research project."

Prof. Weir's work focuses on political violence and post-conflict politics with an empiri-

cal concentration on Northern Ireland. She has visited Derry for the past decade to carry out research, once or twice a year, and lived in the city for a period.

In the letter to the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Weir said she understood that UU was taking steps to explore alternative funding opportunities for the web service, but respectfully proposed that in the meantime, UU "allocate funds from the university budget itself to the extent that live maintenance of CAIN would require."

She described the CAIN archive as the "best-known" and most "highly-respected" part of Ulster University which is relied upon by scholars, students, journalists, and citizens the world over as a source of information about Northern Ireland, its politics, history, and society.

'Mystified'

Speaking to the Derry News this week, Prof. Weir said: "I'm worried about CAIN not being maintained as an active research project, even the announcement in Derry last week regarding the prosecution of soldiers, I think that should make it incredibly obvious that information relating to the past, and extending into the present, must be made accessible.

"It's beyond my comprehen-

sion why such a valuable resource would be taken away from the global community of students, scholars, and regular citizens who turn to it for information.

"Aside from the fact that CAIN has an effect on real world understanding of politics, and justice, and legacy, there are also scholars doing more abstract or esoteric work that's still very important that they

“If you have a world-renowned resource, why would you not allocate university resources to cover its funding. I'm confused, disappointed and angry about the whole thing”

contribute to CAIN. It's not obvious to me how any of those collaborations would continue if CAIN is confined to scholars who would update it or grow it on what seems to me an ad hoc basis.

"They've talked about growing it using new technologies, but none of the explanations they've given are entirely clear."

On the Pat Kenny Show last week, Dr Conor Mulvagh of

UCD said a Belfast-centric approach is what caused a lot of civil rights issues and made Derry the centre of the civil rights movement. He explained that CAIN is a resource Derry was rightly proud of and this is seen as another "grab from Derry".

Dr Mulvagh added that running costs of CAIN were understood to be around £170,000 per year for three researchers. While he said, Vice-Chancellor Paddy Nixon "earns £264,000 or £311,000 if you factor in pensions, benefits etc... it is half of what the V.C. is earning to run a project that is globally recognised."

As someone who has visited Derry over the years, Prof. Weir said she was "mystified" as to why Ulster University would take a decision that "so many prominent scholars around the globe are decrying".

She said she believed Derry had been "neglected" and, while she recognised it as "wonderful" that Belfast had received investment, could not understand why the university would "take these resources from Derry and move them towards Belfast."

"It makes no sense, this is the most successful part of Magee, and it's the best aspect of Ulster University globally but they're just going to strip it away from Magee.

"If you have a world-renowned resource, why would you not allocate university resources to cover its funding. I'm confused, disappointed and angry about the whole thing because it is used for teaching and research by so many people."

“It's beyond my comprehension why such a valuable resource would be taken away from the global community of students, scholars, and regular citizens who turn to it for information.”

There has been speculation that a decision has already been made by UU despite the consultation process.

In response, a UU spokesperson said: "To avoid any doubt, the CAIN resource is out for consultation.

"The consultation will close on 2nd May 2019. No, staff have not been given notice to quit."

If you feel that you would like to contribute to the consultation you can contact the CAIN Director, Martin Melaugh, by ringing 028 7167 5517 or emailing m.melaugh@ulster.ac.uk