



ARU and the donation of £50,000 to the Conservative Party

At Anglia Ruskin University, we are now presented with a crisis and a scandal, so severe and far reaching, that we must call into question the willingness and capacity of university leaders to fulfil their obligations to our community.

On Friday, June 7th, colleagues at ARU, including UCU Branch President Dr John Hogan, were contacted by an investigative journalist working on a story about a £50,000 donation made to the Conservative Party by LCA London Limited, which trades as ARU London. Information about the donation has been published on the Electoral Commission's political finance database (see below).

UCU Branch Officers have refrained from cooperating with the investigative journalist in order to give the university time to explain what has been going on and to guard against any claims from management that we might be somehow implicated in bringing the university into disrepute.

On June 11th, the Branch President spoke with Roderick Watkins, who provided the following explanation. According to the Vice Chancellor, the university only found out about the donation to the Conservative party on June 7th, consequent upon the inquiries made by the investigative journalist who approached a number of staff within ARU. The university are surprised and worried by the revelations. The understanding is that the donation of £50,000 was a personal donation and made in error. Apparently, the "owner" of ARU London was seeking to rectify the situation. As our VC made clear, ARU London is not permitted to make such donations. The donation was made by Ravi Gill in a personal capacity and wrongly attributed to the company.

UCU Branch Executive has reflected upon the "explanation" provided by the VC and the implications of what this scandal says about our university.

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The independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK

[Home](#) > [Donations](#) > Conservative and Unionist Party (Great Britain), Cash (C0578436)

Donation summary

Donation type:	Cash
Value:	£50,000.00
Time period:	Q1 2024, Quarterly (Donations)
Click for more details:	C0578436
Reported date:	30/04/2024
Published date:	04/06/2024
Accounting unit:	Central Party

Donation details

Received date:	04/01/2024
Accepted date:	10/01/2024
Is bequest?:	No
Is sponsorship:	No
Is aggregation?:	No
Accounting units as central party?:	No

Donor details

Donor status:	Company
Donor name:	LCA LONDON LIMITED
Company reg. no.:	03914791
Address line 1:	19 Charterhouse Street
Town:	LONDON
Postcode:	EC1N 6RA
Country:	United Kingdom

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Attempts by our leadership to distance themselves from the owner of ARU London simply do not wash. Ravi Gill has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate from ARU, and in the press release accompanying the conferment of such a prestigious accolade our VC commented that Ravi Gill is a “remarkable educator and philanthropist, and a long-standing and dearly valued partner of our university, he is a powerful role model for business students.”

What kind of role model are we called upon to celebrate? Ravi Gill is a qualified and certified accountant and must know ARU is a registered charity and as such is not permitted to make donations to political parties. He must also be aware that he is not allowed to use business accounts for personal expenditure. The claim that the donation to the Conservative party was of a personal nature rings hollow, for the £50,000 gift was not made in the name of the “owner” of ARU London, but in the name of the company. We are also appalled that our leaders only became aware of the donation when presented with the findings of the investigative journalist on June 7th, even though the monies had been deposited by LCA (ARU London) with the Conservative Party many months before, in January 2024.

This explanation gives the local branch of UCU considerable concerns about what is going on. Two of the directors of LCA London Ltd, and therefore presumed to have sanctioned the donation, are Prof Roderick Watkins and Paul Bogle. While our Branch President has been led to believe that neither Professor Watkins nor Mr Bogle were aware of the donation, we are left wondering what this all implies about the rigour and competence of these two highly paid custodians of our university. ARU London carries our name and these two leaders sit on the Board of Directors, presumably to safeguard our collective interests and reputation, and not least to ensure rules, statutes and laws of the land are upheld at all times. The explanation also raises concerns about whether, and to what extent, the 'owner' of ARU London has inadvertently used ARU London as his personal 'piggy-bank' on previous occasions? What does it say to us when law breaking is discovered only after the interventions of an investigative journalist? In short, we have concluded that ARU leadership has failed to execute financial oversight and has potentially brought our university into disrepute.

For many years ARU UCU has expressed misgivings about the relationship our University has with ARU London. We have brought questionable practices to light and our members continue to raise concerns about poor working conditions for staff and dubious student recruitment methods, along with retention and progression procedures. When the union demanded recognition at ARU London and the VC was called upon to lend his support, we were met with refusal.

Before releasing this statement, we wrote to the Vice Chancellor and our UCU Branch President met with Professor Watkins and other senior university leaders in a last ditch attempt to find a way forward. On June 24th, Professor Watkins responded to the Branch Executive and provided the following additional explanation:

The donation referred to was a personal donation, initially paid in error by LCA London Ltd. This was an administrative error that has been rectified. The owner, as a private individual, can do as he pleases within the law and his donation has no relation to or implication for ARU's charitable status. The payment was not and could never have been sanctioned by the ARU Directors because it was made in error, and then rectified.

In addition, he stated, "ARU does not hold any share of the company."

So, Professor Watkins is asking UCU to believe that there is nothing to worry about and there is nothing to see.

After consulting with UCU regional officials, the local branch at ARU has concluded that further discussions with the university leadership on this matter can no longer be justified and that the principles of accountability must not be compromised but upheld rigorously and without fear or favour.

The Vice Chancellor has failed to elaborate or offer any explanation. This is particularly around the assertion that the position with LCA London Ltd (ARU London) has been 'remedied'. He has provided no indication as to how or when this took place.

While Mr Gill is entitled to spend his own money in any way he pleases, our concern is that this episode demonstrates that Mr Gill has adopted a cavalier attitude to spending large sums of money that belong to someone else - in this case, LCA London Ltd (ARU London). The fact that such a large sum can be paid as a result of an 'administrative error' shows, at best, an absence of appropriate financial controls within the company. It is worth noting that the other director of LCA London Ltd, besides Messers Gill, Watkins and Bogle, is Roger Leung - the Finance Director of LCA London Ltd (and another qualified accountant).

The explanation of 'administrative error' does not stand up to scrutiny in any event. Such a large payment would require the authority of the Board of Directors (including Professor Watkins and Mr Bogle). Even if the ARU directors have delegated the day-to-day running of ARU London to Mr Gill, they are still expected to make themselves aware of what is going on in the company and to ensure that it is operating lawfully. The suggestion that the payment could not have been sanctioned by Professor Watkins and Mr Bogle because it was 'in error' is illogical. It is perfectly possible to sanction an erroneous payment. That error is not removed, even it is later 'rectified'.

'Administrative error' does not hold water given the rules that operate around the making of political donations by private companies. If we accept the argument that LCA London Ltd (ARU London) is a private company, political donations by private companies can only be made lawfully with the consent of their shareholders [[Companies Act 2006, s 366](#)]. The Shareholders for LCA London Ltd are listed as LCAE London Group Ltd (a company controlled entirely by Mr Gill) and Anglia Ruskin University Higher Education Corporation [[see confirmation statement](#)]. The share held by ARU is restricted, but still entitles ARU to vote on resolutions. To be a lawful donation, ARU would have to have voted on the resolution, which means ARU must have been aware of it, even if Mr Gill outvoted them. If the payment was not approved by shareholder resolution, all directors of the paying company become jointly and severally liable to reimburse the company [[Companies Act 2006, s 369](#)].

The position becomes even less transparent and murkier if it is decided that LCA London Ltd is a partly owned subsidiary of ARU. This is a very grey area at the moment, but, if this is the case, the political donation would have required approval by a resolution of the members of the 'holding company' - i.e. ARU as a whole.

The assertion that ARU owns no shares in this company is entirely inaccurate. As per the confirmation statement above, it holds one share (out of three), which gives ARU certain rights of appointment of directors, etc., but does not provide a right to a dividend. Nevertheless, ARU is still a shareholder.

These shocking revelations of the £50,000 donation, of questionable legal status, damage industrial relations and shatter trust between staff and management. We are particularly concerned about why the Conservative Party would accept large sums of money from an institution which is not allowed, in law, to make party political donations.

Finally, how on earth do our university leaders expect to be able to represent our collective interests to the incoming government, when large donations have been made to their predecessors and political opponents?

In order to rebuild trust, UCU calls upon university management to:

- 1. Make a public statement explaining how the owner of ARU London came to make a £50,000 donation to the Conservative Party, in contravention of our Charity status and without the knowledge and agreement of other members of the Board of Directors, including Professor Roderick Watkins and Mr Paul Bogle.**
- 2. Make a public statement apologising for the failure to safeguard the reputation of our community, consequent upon the owner of ARU London making a £50,000 donation to the Conservative Party, in contravention of our Charity status and without the knowledge and agreement of other members of the Board of Directors.**
- 3. Sever all ties and dealings with ARU London, including the removal of the honorary doctorate conferred upon Ravi Gill, on the grounds that our community cannot and will not tolerate rule breaking and any contraventions of the law.**
- 4. Work in a joint committee with UCU officers dedicated to upholding academic standards and the reputation of the university as a community of scholars, so as to guard against opportunist profiteering and unlawful party political activity which undermines our good name and interests of our community.**

ARU UCU Branch Executive, June 28th 2024