Dear [Dr/Prof] [Last name]

Your letter of [date] addressed to the Rector has been passed to me. The Rector thanks you for your comments and apologizes for his inability to respond personally to the many individual letters of this kind that he receives, begging your understanding in the matter.

First, please accept my sincere congratulations on your recent retirement. The University has a strong desire to remain in contact with former staff members and to ensure that their contributions over many years continue to be appropriately recognized.

On the subject of your pension, I do appreciate the difficulties resulting from your unusual career path. However, under its standard terms and conditions of service, the University is not responsible for the superannuation arrangements of its staff prior to their most recent appointment. The University's pension scheme shows no contributions from you during the [number] years during which you were a PhD student on a tax-free scholarship, or the [number] years when you worked abroad as a post-doctoral scientist and junior faculty member. Unfortunately, where no bilateral arrangements exist between the governments concerned, pension contributions in one country cannot be counted towards those in another, nor is the pension transferable. I suggest that you take up the matter with the ministry responsible for handling social insurance matters in [name of country/countries]. The University pension scheme is also unable to credit you for the years during your career when you were on sabbatical abroad. This would have been strictly your personal responsibility or that of any sponsoring organization that supported you while you were in [name of exotic location]. I am also obliged to remind you that payment of your pension in future years is conditional on your continued residence in this country. I fully understand, as you write, that science is an 'inherently international business'. However, this is a matter of choice and thus is not the responsibility of the employer or taxpayer.

I am delighted to learn of your desire to continue as an active researcher in the Department of [name of Department]. The University will provide all necessary facilities for you, under the terms outlined in its current Guide for Research Grant Holders. As you will be aware, the University has recently switched to the full-cost accounting model. However, this does not mean, as you seem to believe, that the University provides matching funds for your external grant income. Such arrangements can only be negotiated for the University's own staff, exceptionally and on a case-by-case basis. You will therefore need to ensure that your funds are sufficient to cover all the additional costs of your future research, such as rental of laboratory space, equipment maintenance, insurances, computing and telecommunications costs, cleaning services, toilet supplies and so on. You will be billed by the Head of Department quarterly, in advance, for these costs, which will need to be passed on to your external funder(s) or covered from your own personal resources. I trust this meets with your approval.

Concerning your specific request for continued access to the research literature, the site licences currently operated by the University cover only its own staff and registered students. Your quarterly payments, as outlined in the above paragraph, will enable you to continue to access all publicly available online resources. However, where a fee must be paid to a publisher to download a specific article, this is your own responsibility, and you should therefore use your own private credit card or one validated and paid for directly by the funding agency that supports your research, otherwise the University would be in breach of the terms of its site licences.

Your future contributions to teaching, subject to the decisions of the [name of Faculty] Course Committee, would naturally be greatly welcomed. However, I regret to inform you that there is no 'hourly rate' that can be applied in such circumstances, even to cover the actual time spent lecturing, as

the lecturing fee for guest lecturers to which you refer was abolished in 1984. Any such payments that were made after that date by Heads of Department were, in fact, improper, and the University is investigating the matter further. I thank you for bringing this to our attention. The University will, nevertheless, be happy to cover your travelling expenses between your home and the campus, on those days when you are teaching classes in one of our certified degree programmes, provided of course that the total distance travelled in each direction is not more than 10 or less than 3 km. Such expenses are covered on a reimbursement basis only, on presentation of receipts, up to the level of the cheapest fare available on public transport and taking account of any senior traveller's discount to which you might be entitled.

The University's computing service has asked me to remind you to return promptly the laptop which was purchased for your use in [year], and which is needed urgently for existing staff. This obviously applies also to any books purchased using university-administered funds to assist your teaching or research, even if these funds originated from an outside body or were provided in connection with the award of a research prize.

I was pleased to learn that you have been invited to continue to serve on the Grants Committee of [name of research agency] and on the editorial board of [name of journal(s)]. I trust you will ensure that the University is duly credited for your activities in support of these organizations and that any associated emoluments continue to be paid directly into University accounts.

Yours sincerely,

[name of temp*]

Acting Director of Human Services,
University of [wherever]

*Currently Howy Jacobs (N.B. Deirdre and Roger both currently on long-term sick-leave)

Howy Jacobs

EMBO reports (2010) 11, 325. doi:10.1038/embor.2010.52