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for members of the
University and College Union
Summer 2011

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and humanities

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baby boom went bust

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new class war in education

John Rentoul and
Richard Murphy
fight it out over who should pay
- students, state or big business



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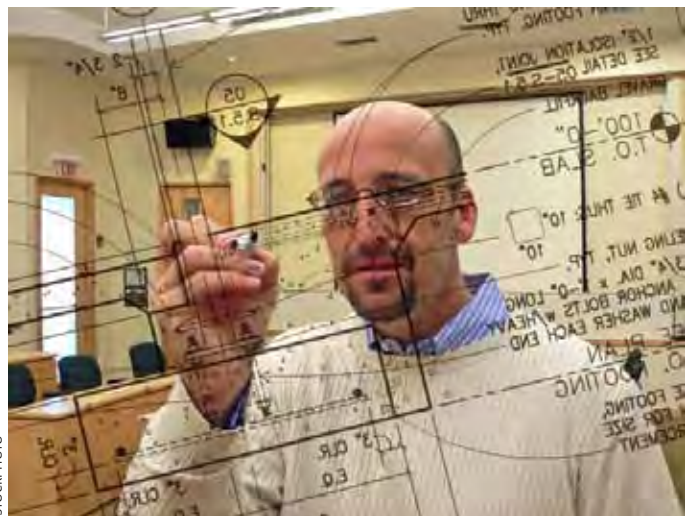


Sally Hunt

General Secretary, UCU

Welcome to the first edition of UC Online. When we asked members what they wanted from the new magazine most said they wanted to see real, in depth debate about topical issues, great writers and an open space for the views of members too. In short a magazine that, in keeping with UCU's heritage, would make you think, laugh, cry - and maybe, even on occasions, want to throw something at the computer screen! We hope you like it and want to get involved. If you think you can do better or want to suggest something to cover in the next issue contact the editor at mwaddup@ucu.org.uk.

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ISTOCKPHOTO

The humanities are a satnav system for exploring civilisations across time and space says ANDY MARTIN

In defence of our noble humanities

Everyone who has ever studied any 'humanities' subject at university will have had the experience.

I can remember it happening to me twice. I was writing a PhD thesis at the time called 'The Knowledge of Ignorance' – a title plainly asking for trouble. "Ha!" said my American mining engineer friend, 'what is the point of that?' Another time a computer engineer friend asked me what I was working on. 'Well,' says I, 'it's about something rather important that happened in Tahiti in 1768 when Bougainville...' He cut me off. 'Are you joking? That is so pointless!'

Seriously, I love engineers. I sometimes wonder if a world made up of nothing but engineers could be a mistake. But even they may have been taken aback by the apparent mathematical absurdity of a forecast 8 per cent surgical snip to military expenditure set against the proposed 80 per cent war on the humanities budget of universities.



Andy Martin is a lecturer in French at the University of Cambridge. He is working on a book called *Hell Is Other People: Sartre vs Camus*.

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I have never felt that the customary justification of the humanities degree, that it equips you to blag your way into a better job with a higher salary, is quite strong enough to answer the ‘Just remind me, what exactly is the point of what you are doing, anyway?’-type question. A decent how-to-give-a-good-interview course could be wrapped up in a lot less than three years, I reckon.

Which is why I want to bring in the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein.

And before the engineers throw up their hands in despair and start saying ‘Ha!’, can I quickly point out that he started off as an engineer and used to recommend to his students that, if they wanted to be good philosophers, they ought to go out and become car mechanics. In keeping with our austere times, he also had a habit of giving away nearly everything he owned or earned.

He came up with his ‘picture theory’ of language in between battles in the First World War when he came across a forensic report of a car accident in Paris. Obviously, he thought, language works like this, by reconstructing a scene with the aid of lots of labels (words) and arrows (‘ostensive definition’). His first work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, is Wittgenstein and the art of car maintenance.

Somewhere down the road, however, he realised that things are not quite this simple (if only). Language is not a perfect ‘mirror’ of ‘everything that is the case’. When I pray, or write a poem, or ask you to pass the salt, or declare war, or campaign for election, or sex-up a report about weapons of mass destruction, is that a mirror of anything? The car manual approach doesn’t really fit. So what we are doing? Is it art, truth, beauty? Whatever it is, this is the stuff that people over on the humanities side of the academy, philosophers, historians, literati, anthropologists, are mostly concerned with most of the time (to be fair, they read car manuals too but it’s not really their strong suit). Wittgenstein came up with three metaphors (in the *Philosophical Investigations*) to explain what is going on.

Language games. OK, engineers, you have language games too, don’t deny it. Everyone does (especially, for example, politicians). Games have rules. Classicists, historians, students of literature and language and speech acts generally: they are all analysing the rules according to which the games are played. And thus understanding the minds that play them.

Toolbox. You can do things with words (language is ‘performative’). And it is actually quite useful in improving the world (or, to be fair, the exact

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opposite). The humanists accumulate tools for intellectual DIY. The bigger the toolbox the better.

The city (or cities). We tend to get stuck in our own neighbourhood (or ghetto). The humanities are a satnav system for exploring civilisations across time and space.

I would add a fourth: the Crash. Wittgenstein crashed (he thought). Engineers crash. In the humanities we are always looking at crashes, with the idea it could help to avoid crashing in the future – or at least understand the art of the crash.

→ *This article first appeared in the Independent on Sunday*

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The selfish giant generation?

MICHAEL WHITE who was born in 1945 'near the front of what turned out to be a big queue' for access to education wonders how we got here.

I don't know who exactly introduced me to the concept of 'inter-generational transfers,' probably our universities minister whom I once nicknamed David 'Two Brains' Willetts in a *Guardian* article. He matters to your life more than you may realise.

At the time it wasn't strictly true that the cerebral Tory MP for Havant was 'known to his colleagues as "Two Brains",' as I suggested in a mischievous moment. But six months later, when the *Sun*'s splash headline proclaimed 'Two Brains Gets The Sack' (over some misdemeanour in the whips office), it officially became an established fact. Who says the broadsheet press has no influence?

I digress. Willetts is that rare creature, a public intellectual who is active in politics, a clever grammar school boy from Birmingham. He went from Oxford, to the Treasury, then into think tank land and Westminster under Margaret Thatcher. Alas, Two Brains was squeezed out of David Cameron's cabinet to make space for some Lib Dems. Also for having one brain too many.

Earlier this year Willetts wrote a book called *The Pinch*, in which he argued that the post-war baby boomer generation, born in the 20 years after World War II grabbed more than its fair share of society's fast-expanding goods, jobs and services. It has also managed to hang on to them at the expense of the generations coming up behind them. This Selfish Giant of a generation has taken precisely 118% of what it put it in, claimed Two Brains.

Many generations long dead did the same. As Chinese consumers, held

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down by Maoist austerity and oppression, are now proving, when the brakes are taken off we can all behave quite badly.

Unless the rise of China/ India triggers a complete collapse of western economies – unlikely – the next generation’s chance will come. Even today I am amazed how much the young think globally while leaving the lights on locally, not to mention wasting food, drink, clothing, DVDs etc on an heroic scale. As for walking round clutching little bottles of over-priced tap water, don’t get me started! War babies don’t do that. We hoard everything on the grounds that it might be useful.

Myself, I was born in October 1945, a good time to arrive near the front of what turned out to be a big queue. As Malcolm Gladwell memorably explained, it’s a bit like being a potential sports star born at the start of the season – not in August when last September’s rivals, older and bigger, are way, way ahead.

I arrived at the History Department on Gordon Square in September ‘63, a few weeks short of my 18th birthday. Within eight weeks prime minister, Harold Macmillan, rocked by the Profumo scandal, had resigned and been replaced by the 14th Earl of Home (he was *chosen* not elected by MPs). Nikita Khrushchev had also been overthrown in Moscow and Mao Tse Tung had exploded China’s first atomic bomb. Oh yes, and President John F Kennedy had been murdered in Dallas.

Lively times, and in South Africa Nelson Mandela was waiting trial and possible execution. When he went to jail for what turned out to be the larger part of my working life – 27 years – I predicted in the UCL bar that one day Pretoria would be renamed Mandela. I expect to be vindicated quite soon now. Tutu just sounds wrong.

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Did we feel privileged? Yes, sort of.

As few as 6% of young people went to university in 1963, and most of us were our families’ first graduates. Coming from a small town in Cornwall it was a big jump for me and I was often miserable as well as shy in that first year.

But Alfred Cobban, head of the department and author of a 3-volume history of modern France, said a kind thing. He told the freshers first meeting: ‘Over the next three years, one of you may have a breakdown and one of you may get pregnant, but you will all get degrees. That was still daring in 1963 because the Sixties had only really started that summer. But it was true.



Money-wise, there were no fees, of course. The 1962 Education Act had entrenched local authority responsibility, alongside means-tested grants of up, so I recall, £360 a year in London, a little less elsewhere. My father, on a decent £1,000 a year or so, was expected to contribute about £60.

Those from better-off families, eligible for only the minimum £50 grant, were often worst off – and had to work in term. But then, they seemed so much more sophisticated to us country bumpkins. To augment my grant I delivered Christmas mail and sold summer ice creams and pasties on Polzeath beach, a David Cameron haunt though he wasn't quite born then. 'What 2/6d (12.5p) an hour plus tips? We wouldn't get out of bed for that,' scornful lads from Liverpool told us. Bumpkins again! I wonder how many of those Scousers are still in bed.

When I got my first job on the Reading *Evening Post*, my gross pay was £15.7s.0d (35p), £12.0s.3d net of tax and stamp. Rent was £3 to £4, beer in the university bar must have been pushing 20p by then, a bottle of wine cost a quid, but few drank the stuff. Drugs? There weren't many around yet. Sex? All right for some, though it took some of us bumpkins until 1965 to get across Tottenham Court Road to the pioneering Brooke Advisory Clinic in Whitfield Street.

When I got my first mortgage it was 1973, I was on £3,000 by then – and the mortgage a hefty £13,500. Do the sums: we took in lodgers. I still live there.

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All of which is to say that, with hindsight, a lot of things were better during Britain's sluggish post-war recovery.

But a lot of things were worse. The country was a great deal poorer, shabbier, dirtier than we realised at the time. 'Poms stink on the Tube,' as my Kiwi wife used to explain. It also took several months in the queue to get a telephone and not just because Anthony Wedgwood Benn – as Tony B still called himself then – had been in charge of the nationalised phone system either. It's just the way it was. There seemed to be more jobs around, white collar and blue, though they were mostly for men. Trade unions were rarely out of the news, the prevailing mood resigned and pinched even before flared trousers.


Where is this leading me? To saying that things are indeed both better and worse, but mostly different. The Right won the market arguments, the Left won most of the cultural ones, though no victory is ever forever and


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the world's axis is tilting east. But in 2010 we are where we are, let's get on with it.

Me, I've paid back the cost of my education many times, through a lifetime of work and higher rate taxes. I will also make sure UCL gets something in my will if there's anything left. But co-payments or user fees, the idea that citizens must contribute more in direct payments for the social services they consume rather than burden the (shrinking) taxpayer base, won't just apply to students. They will also apply to care of the elderly infirm. So there may not be anything left for UCL. I'd let you know, but I won't be here. You'll be in my shoes by then.

 **Michael White** read *History between 1963-66. He subsequently worked for the Reading Evening Post, The London Evening Standard and the Guardian where he was parliamentary sketchwriter (1977-84) Washington correspondent (1984-88) and political editor (1990-2006). He still writes stuff (2006-).*

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'We have not been in a prison, just a library...'

Professor JENNY HARTLEY has been running reading groups in prisons for ten years. here she tells UC why.

'It lifts my spirits'; 'Talking in the group made me want to read'; 'A lifeline'; 'Today we have not been in a prison, just a library' ...

Some of the tributes paid by members to the reading groups which are flourishing behind the bars of British prisons.

For the last ten years my colleague Sarah Turvey and I have been running reading groups in men's and women's prisons in the UK. It has been an exhilarating and rewarding experience; and we look forward to some exciting developments.

These are reading groups which meet in prisons once a month, much like any other reading group on the outside, to discuss a book which we have chosen together and read in advance of the meeting. Each group has about a dozen members; in some prisons there are waiting lists to join. The only funds we need are for books. Each prisoner gets a copy of the book we are reading that month (one of our few rules is 'paperback only'). We do of



Professor Jenny Hartley is currently Head of English and Creative Writing at Roehampton. Her most recent book, *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women*, was published to great acclaim in 2008.

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course rely on assistance from prison staff, usually the hard-worked but supportive librarians, who help with notices, getting prisoners unlocked, and rooms organized.

And now we are expanding. In the past charitable grants, small trust funds, and support from the University kept us afloat. This year, an AHRC Knowledge Transfer award in partnership with the Prisoners' Education Trust is enabling us to start and grow a batch of new groups, and build a network of communication between existing ones. Prison librarians who like the idea get in touch with us, as do potential volunteers to run the groups. We supply funding for free books for a year, plus visits, advice and mentoring.

Most members of our prison reading groups are reasonably fluent readers – although not always, and new groups are devising brilliant initiatives to work with emergent readers. Not all our members are confident readers. 'I've only read four books in my life,' admitted one dyslexic member; others had bad experiences of education. One benefit the group can confer is reading stamina: you are more likely to finish a book if you have a date to discuss it in a month's time. But this is the informal end of learning, as opposed to the uphill slog of formal prisoner education, sustained by dedicated teachers like Jenny Rathbone, writing eloquently in UC last May.

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If we are, then, the icing on the cake of prison arts and education, it could be said that we are invisible icing.

Reading has low visibility because of the absence of output: no play or opera, no artwork or poetry. The May 2008 issue of the PMLA devoted many pages to the impressive work of education and the arts in prisons, but had nothing to say about reading in groups. I am, however, fully convinced from my observation over the last decade that prison reading groups can have a huge impact, and in two ways: because of what they read, and because of how they read.

First, the what. The Director of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning, Tom Schuller, maintains that prisoners need to grow three sorts of capital: human capital (skills and qualifications), social capital (networks and shared norms), and identity capital (a sense of personal worth and belonging). In addition, I would argue, prisoners also need to develop a fourth asset: imaginative capital. This is where reading groups come in.



Reading for empathy and for extending our moral horizons are not new goals, but they are difficult to achieve. Prisoners are often wary of Offending Behaviour programmes and prescribed reading, whose designs on them are too obvious. 'We know what we're supposed to think.' The imagination, it seems, must be ambushed unawares.

'I never thought to say it', remarked a member about Kate Summerscale's account of a Victorian murder, *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*, 'but now I'm feeling sorry for the detective; they've got him in far too late.' In more meditative vein, the last seventy pages of Eric Lomax's *The Railway Man*, in which a POW returns to the site of his former imprisonment, was described by one reader as 'both painful and helpful'. He had been forced to rethink his attitudes about victims and his previous impatience. His line had always been, 'Why can't people move on; the past is the past'. This book had made him see, feel, even, the experience of something very much otherwise. It is the particular combined with the unpredictable which does the trick, as we see time and again: the trick of surprising someone out of his or her reading security zone, of sparking unexpected empathy, of jolting the reader into reflection.

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Fiction can hold the key, although male readers often resist.

At a session attended by Penelope Lively to discuss her book *Making it Up*, a group member told her that in past he would never read fiction. He thought there would be nothing in it for him because of the lack of reality. However, he has had to go along with the group's choices, and now 'fiction has made me realise that there's someone else in the room, and what's going on in their head you have no idea, and fiction makes you think what's going on in that other head.' 'Couldn't have put it better myself', commented Penelope Lively.

Perhaps the main point about what we read is that it is for the group to choose. As for any reading group, deciding what to read next can be a lengthy and tricky process. Our method is to bring in single copies of books, magazines such as *Waterstone's Quarterly*, recent newspaper reviews and synopses from Amazon. The last part of each session is spent picking the next book. Choice is crucial. This is not a class, or a course with a certificate at the end, or bibliotherapy, where particular texts may be prescribed by a leader, in terms of aesthetic brilliance or artistic greatness (although we have read some of those), or moral or therapeutic potential. All of us as readers have to learn to choose, to make mistakes,

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to come across something by chance, to pick up suggestions from others, but discard some too. Reading resilience, in other words. Further, we also need to develop a sense of what might be a good book group.

This brings me to how these groups read: what reading together does. As well as reading stamina and resilience, there are those other skills developed by being in a group, such as learning how to persuade the group to choose the book you want, how to negotiate, and how to respect the choices of others. It is often the interaction of the group which members commend: 'It's good to talk with people you might not otherwise get to know and hear their opinions about a book.'

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Could reading groups help with rehabilitation?

This would be difficult to evaluate, although we have heard from members who have gone on to university. We also know that the group can strengthen ties with the world outside. Members like to choose 'live' books being talked about outside; friends and family have joined in as virtual members via phone conversations or letters in the week before the meeting.

In broader terms, I would look at the public dimensions of this social reading: presenting your point of view concisely, waiting your turn, not interrupting (one of the very few ground rules we suggest), learning to listen, and to appreciate the legitimacy of different opinions, of another perspective. These may be things we take for granted, but some members come to them for the first time, and comment with surprise: 'Oh, so it's OK to disagree about a book is it, not like school'; 'Who'd have thought we could spend all this time just talking and arguing about a book?'

A prison librarian recently reported: 'The group has been especially beneficial to one member, a man who has been in prison for twenty-two years and who was very withdrawn and institutionalised – he has become far more outgoing and confident and both prisoners and staff have commented to me about the change in him. He is like a different person.'

➔ For more about Professor Hartley's groups, see www.roehampton.ac.uk/prg

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THE BIG DEBATE 1



Fees are the answer. Now, what was the question?

JOHN RENTOUL, Chief Political Correspondent for the Independent on Sunday, argues that, despite what the UCU might think, tuition fees are here to stay.

John Rentoul is chief political commentator for The Independent on Sunday and a visiting fellow at Queen Mary, University of London

What is it with student finance that makes politicians break their promises?

First Labour in 2001 promised not to raise tuition fees. Nine years later it was the Liberal Democrats, not only opposing higher fees in their manifesto but signing personal pledges to vote against any increase in the House of Commons. For which most of them are now going to vote. There are two possible explanations.

Explanation A is that politicians are liars. Explanation B is that the issue is difficult and humans are tempted to believe that there must be a simple and painless solution to it. Most people go for option A. My task is to try to explain why I think that explanation B is the right one.

I believe that it was the making of these promises that was the mistake, not the breaking of them. The easy way to win votes is to promise hippie student paradise paid for by the tooth fairy; but anyone who has looked at the issue with a view to designing a system that will work on planet Earth realises that the options are limited. They are even more limited when public spending is being squeezed. But let us remind ourselves of recent history, given that few people know much about the system of student funding apart from the three years they were at university or the year or so before their children are.

Long ago, when we last had a Conservative government, it brought in a system of loans to pay students' living costs, in order to save money

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on grants as student numbers increased. The Blair Government then brought in means-tested fees of £1,000 a year, paid in advance by two-thirds of students, the amount depending on their parents' income. Tony Blair then broke his 2001 manifesto promise, by raising fees to £3,000, but charging them to soft loans paid by students once they were earning after graduation. This was actually a much better system, and despite all the scaremongering about loading up a generation with debt, student numbers, including students from low-income homes, continued to rise.

Then, in 2009, as it became apparent that, whichever party was in government, public spending would have to be cut deeply while still more young people would want to go to university, John Browne of BP was appointed to look at the options again, to check that the tooth fairy was still not available and to make himself very unpopular.

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At this stage, two real-world options were ruled out. One was to reduce the number of students going to university.

That had been popular with a certain kind of Conservative before David Cameron became leader. He rightly put an end to such state-sponsored snobbery, that the man in Whitehall knows best how many people should be entitled to take degrees.

The other option was to increase funding for universities out of general taxes. That would not be popular at the best of times, and now is not one of those times. But more than that, it would not be right. To ask all taxpayers to pay more for an education enjoyed by perhaps half of young people – an education that, on average, increases that person's earning power – is wrong in principle.

That is why it was brave of Wes Streeting, president of the National Union of Students until last summer, to persuade his members to maintain some contact with the mother planet and drop the union's long demand for 'free education' – that is, education paid for by someone else.

The price of that victory was that he persuaded his members that an extra income tax on graduates was the solution, because that was a way of wishing away the difficult words 'fees' and 'debt'.

So the NUS drew up a plan for a graduate tax and got Liberal Democrat MPs to sign a pledge to vote against any attempt in the House of Commons to increase fees. And we all know what happened next. Liberal Democrat MPs found themselves, rather unexpectedly, in a position of responsibility.

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On planet Earth. Where the options are few.

In last month's Spending Review, George Osborne, the Chancellor, at last put a figure on the cut in university funding. The taxpayers' contribution will be reduced by 40 per cent over the next four years. As David Willetts, the universities minister later admitted, although not in quite so many words, that means that humanities degrees will no longer be subsidised by the taxpayer at all.

Now, you could argue that it should not be cut so deeply, but Labour would have cut too, and so the argument is one only of degree. The immovable object is that more money has to come from students, either before or after they graduate. Finally, we are down to two options: a graduate tax or higher fees paid for by bigger loans. Nick Clegg, Vince Cable and Danny Alexander came down in favour of higher fees, not because they are bad people (explanation A) but because it is the right answer (explanation B). But they are weak people, because they knew that before the election, and had tried repeatedly to change their party's policy. When they failed, they still signed up to the NUS pledge.

Listen to Alexander squirm when asked about it by *The Independent on Sunday*: 'Look, we had a debate within the party, I argued for changing our policy, others did too, on all sides not just the leadership. As a party we concluded that we wanted to go into the election with the policy in our manifesto, as a collective process, we all signed up to that quite rightly so too. The pledge that we signed reflected that policy.'

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The main feature of a graduate tax is that it separates payment from the product being purchased, namely tuition.

Instead of receiving a fee from the student, the university would receive a grant from central government, paid for by a tax that would not produce revenue for a while. And it is a tax that could not be levied on foreign students, including those from other European countries.

So the Lib Dems decided to support a scheme based on Lord Browne's report, which retains an element of progressive taxation from the idea of a graduate tax by charging high-earning graduates more than they borrowed, or a penalty charge if they pay their fees early. It is not exactly the worst of all worlds, but it is intellectually unsatisfactory and therefore rather hard to explain.

The problem arose because Lord Browne was asked to do something about


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the fear of greater debt putting off potential students from low-income homes. His terms of reference asked him to take into account ‘the goal of widening participation’. This was defined, among other things, as ‘the avoidance of the creation of barriers to wider access’ (not a model of syntax that I would commend to my students) and ‘promoting fair access to all institutions’.

This is a foolish confusion. There is no evidence that the prospect of debt deterred working-class students from applying in greater numbers to go to university so far – indeed the evidence is that it did not. It seems a mistake to ask the system of student finance to do two separate things. One is how to pay for universities to expand when funding from the taxpayer is going to fall; the other is to take from the rich to give to the poor. The system of fees and loans should do the first job; the tax and benefit system should do the second task, separately. However, given that the coalition’s policy is primarily a fees-and-loan system, with a bit of decorative confusion on top dressed up as ‘added fairness’, it is broadly the right answer. No wonder nobody likes it.

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THE BIG DEBATE 2

Everyone benefits from education. So why make students pay?

Self-confessed 'militant chartered accountant'

RICHARD MURPHY argues that it is big business who should pay university and college fees, not students.

The funding of university education is controversial.

It has been it seems from time immemorial, but all the more so now when the government is proposing substantial additional fees for all students from England (but not Wales and Scotland) who wish to attend university, and is proposing massive cuts in universities budgets to match.

I have recently argued¹ that the proposed increases in fees, with increased debt obligations to match is not an education policy: it is, I suggest, a policy designed to provide the financial markets with a new form of collateralised debt obligation that they can trade now that mortgages are not available to meet the demand for such products.

This is a contentious view, but one which accords with rumours about the need for such products that I hear in the City of London. Those who challenge that view demand that suggestions for alternative funding systems be made if this debt mechanism is not to be used to fund university education in England. I think such alternatives exist. More than that: I think there is compelling argument for their use.

Education is, in my opinion, a human right. More than that, it is a necessity if the knowledge of one generation is to be passed to the next. This inter-generational compact is one that I argue is fundamental to the modern economy. Indeed, the transfer of capital, whether financial, human or social is essential if the fundamental pension equation that must exist in society is to be fulfilled at a time when the elderly can no

1
www.taxresearch.org.uk/Blog/2010/10/13/we-can-afford-university-education-for-all-who-want-it-but-it-pays-a-few-to-deny-it/

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longer rely on their families to support them during retirement. That pension equation is that one generation, the older one, will through its own efforts create capital and infrastructure in both the state and private sectors which the following younger generation can use in the course of their work. In exchange for their subsequent use of these assets for their own benefit that succeeding younger generation will, in effect, meet the income needs of the older generation when they are in retirement. Unless this fundamental compact that underpins all pensions is honoured any pension system will fail.

This equation suggests that the benefits endowed by a university education are not just for the benefit of the recipient of that education. Far from it in fact: the provider of the capital that endows the education is, according to this equation, as likely to benefit from it as the recipient is because they are bound in an unwritten but essential contract that ensures duties arising from mutual obligation, each to the other, are being fulfilled within the collective transfer of knowledge, wisdom, intellect and capacity to enquire that a university education should endow.

This suggests that the idea that the student pay for their own education, with the ownership of the debt that they owe belonging (inevitably) to the older generation who should be party to the transfer of knowledge that a university education requires, but who by charging are absent themselves from this relationship, is a fundamental failure of this contract within society.

The inevitable consequence will, at some point, be an at least partial break down in the pension contract of which this transfer of knowledge is a part, with those who are still paying for their education denying at some time in the future their duty to care for those in old age who should have provided them with an education as of right without their making additional charge. If at that time the elderly do not have capacity to pay what is demanded of them by generation who owe them nothing the consequences could be severe and this should be a matter of considerable concern for all in society.

So what is the alternative?

Clearly no one expects the contract between generations to which I allude to be personal: that would suggest parents should be sole providers for their children. But this makes no sense: some chose not to or cannot have children. They are still party to the fundamental pension contract and so they too should provide for the cost of university education. That means

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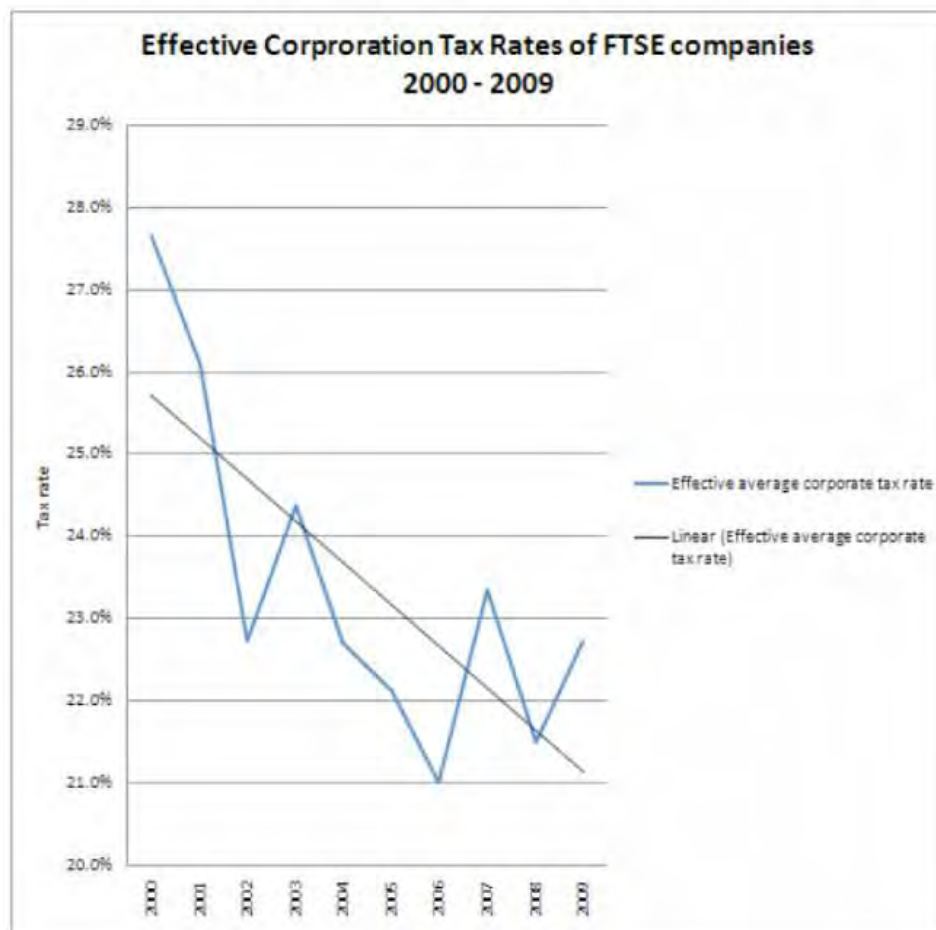
the payment has to be funded by taxation.

But which tax? A graduate tax fails, once more, to reflect the social contract in society: the recipient ends up paying. A higher rate income tax could meet the purpose. When about 50% of all young people go to university and just 15% or so in society pay higher rate tax then the chance of significant overlap between those going to university and those paying higher rate income tax is high. This provides an immediate, effective and extremely cheap to administer source of funding. But, there are objections, not least that this increases the incentive to tax avoid (and even evade) in society because differential tax rates are increased as a result.

Thankfully there is another alternative which is that the agents of those who do, perhaps, benefit most from the transfer of knowledge pay on behalf of those who should be footing the bill.

This needs explanation. The suggestion I am making is that companies should pay an additional tax to provide university education for all those wishing to participate, and that they do so from payment of an additional corporate tax payable only by large companies in the UK (the UK corporate tax system is already split so that large companies – basically those making profits of more than £1,500,000 a year). According to the theory of tax incidence companies do not actually pay tax at all, but do only do so as agents for their shareholders.

Since, however, the shareholders of large companies are, almost invariably, amongst the top 10% of income earners the suggestion I am making creates a progressive tax alternative which meets the needs of society, and which also reflects the fact that large companies are the biggest beneficiaries of students trained by the state because they employ more of them than anyone else to enhance their own profits.



There is no doubt at all that the largest companies in the UK have the capacity to pay such a tax.

This is demonstrated, in no small part, by the work that I've undertaken on behalf of the TUC. In a report published in October 2010 I showed that the effective rate of corporation tax paid by the largest companies in the UK has fallen by an average of more than 0.5% for a period of over a decade and is now little more than 21%, as indicated by the graph above.

The decline is so dramatic that because corporate tax rates for large companies in the UK are set to increase by 4% over the next four years we will end up with a situation where large companies based in this country have an effective tax rate of about 17% on average, which will be lower than that of small companies, will be paying 20% (or more) and lower than the rate at which the vast majority of their staff will be paying tax when the basic rate of income tax is 20%. The rate will also be lower than the standard rate of VAT by then, which is also said to be 20%. In other words we are creating a progressive tax system in this country in favour of the very largest corporations, and this is wholly unjust.

If further evidence were also needed of the extent to which large companies have been able to exploit the current tax system, the scale of the losses available to the UK's high street banks provides it.

As a result of the losses they incurred during the course of the financial crisis in 2007 – 2009, which losses were entirely underwritten by the UK government and in turn the UK taxpayer, they now have losses available to them to carry forward against their future profits which have a cash value of about £19 billion meaning that they will avoid this sum in tax payment over the coming years. They, therefore, have received subsidies amounting to many years of the total cost of providing university education in the UK whilst the students of this country have to beg them for credit. The paradox is only too readily apparent.

It is for this reason that I propose a tax on UK corporations to pay for university education in this country.

They have the capacity to pay. Each additional one per cent of corporation tax for large companies in the UK is likely to raise an additional £800 million a year in tax revenue. As such a 5% increase in corporation tax would more than meet the needs of the university sector and of students in this country whilst leaving the effective tax rate little above that of small

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companies and the rate paid by most income tax payers in this country.

The large companies of this country can afford to pay this tax – which would simply cancel most of the concession granted to them by the Coalition government and at most restore tax rates to what they were a decade ago – before successive rounds of tax avoidance abused our tax base.

But most especially our largest companies cannot afford the alternative to this tax rate – which is a reduced supply of trained students coming from universities of the highest calibre in the world where research equal to that of any found in the world is undertaken.

They need that supply of graduates, research, and business opportunities more than they need reduced tax because our students and universities increase their profit to greater degree than the loss of tax revenue will harm their bottom line. And this, therefore, is another fundamental relationship like that essential intergenerational pension contract that they cannot afford to ignore.

➔ **Richard Murphy** *blogs at www.taxresearch.org.uk*

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PHOTO: ALAMY

Coalition cuts take us back to the future

Professor Keith Ewing argues that UCU members can learn lessons from the cuts inflicted on education in the 'eighties.

I was appointed to my first academic job at the University of Edinburgh in 1978.

Within a year we had a Tory government, and within three years we had the announcement of major public sector cuts with threats to the universities and elsewhere.

As a raw recruit I took an interest in the affairs of the union, then the AUT, led locally by dedicated and committed activists.

For everyone involved at the time, real cuts were a new experience to which the union nationally and locally had to adapt. There were lobbies and demonstrations, including long train

trips to Parliament, and even longer trips home,

There were also local campaigns and meetings, using old fashioned technology, long before the ubiquity of the personal computer, and there were local agreements with a generally sympathetic local management to safeguard this or that priority.

The AUT and its sister union NATFHE (as they then were) were by no means alone. These were bad times for all unions in the public sector and beyond, as steelworkers, printers, dockers and seafarers also found themselves in the firing line.

In those days the public sector unions in particular were hamstrung by the fact that there was then no collective

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memory within the trade union movement of this kind of butchery or of how to deal with it.

It was a butchery that led to a loss of jobs across the public sector, and the introduction of a wave of privatisation, and the beginning of the process of contracting out of public services.

But it was also a period in which hard won employment rights were brutally slashed in a country where there was no minimum wage, no regulation of working time and no right to a holiday, never mind a paid holiday.

It was also a time when the ideological assault on trade unions got underway. A ban on closed shop agreements, the removal of a statutory procedure for trade unions to secure collective bargaining, and swingeing attacks on the right to strike.

These developments were all the more dramatic for the relative strength of the trade union movement, which boasted 13 million members, almost double today's levels, with much higher levels of penetration and impact.

Yet it was not only members' jobs and working conditions, and not only our core rights as trade unionists – to organise, bargain and strike – that fell to the sword. There was also an attack on our political freedoms.

New legislation would require all unions to have a political fund if they wanted to engage in election campaigns to attack the Tories, and in what was seen as a naked attempt to cut Labour funding, all unions would need approval to maintain their political funds every ten years,

beginning in 1986.

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**Unless this reckless
Con Dem government
without a mandate is
stopped, we are about to
see an action replay of
the developments of the
1980s.**

Stage 1 is already in train, as the trains carrying protestors head for London once more.

We have had an announcement of half a million public sector jobs to go, with many more promised as a result of the re-organisations of local government and the NHS, to say nothing of the impact on higher education of the funding madness.

As is widely predicted, these cuts will have major implications for the private sector, which is expected to absorb redundant public sector workers at a time when the very private companies supporting the government are themselves shedding staff.

So far as the war on our employment rights is concerned, the campaign has already started.

The snipers are at work on the agricultural wages board and the civil service compensation scheme.

But the main threat to employment rights will not be from new laws but from the growing impossibility to claim or enforce existing rights. The employment tribunals are already groaning under the strain of under-funding and inadequate resources.

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As soft targets, how are the tribunals to cope with cuts to their own budget as their case loads continues to grow, partly as a result of new legislation – like the Equality Act - coming on stream, and partly as a result of the extra work generated by the cuts?

True, the government has no plans for new trade union laws – yet.

But they are under serious pressure from their own Continuity (CBI), Lunatic (Mayor's Office) and Juvenile (Policy Exchange) wings respectively, to tighten the law still further.

Alongside which is the continuing threat to trade union political freedom, with the Liberal Democrats desperate to get their hands on public money (even in an age of austerity) to guarantee their political survival, in the face of their abject treachery.

This will be secured under cover of Clegg's ill-conceived plan to 'clean up politics', with a ban on donations to political parties, including the trade union donations that sustain Labour.

So what is to be done? How can this be challenged? What lessons can be learned from the trade union response in the 1980s?

Can anyone remember? Was anyone involved?

Many trade unionists look sympathetically at the vital and vibrant trade union protests in Greece and France, and wonder why we cannot do the same here, and why British workers cannot be more animated in defence of their rights.

The question can be asked with greater urgency in the context of a government

without a mandate. A government without a mandate is a government without legitimacy, and consequently without the authority to command unquestioned obedience.

Yet even in the context of such provocation of an illegitimate kind, British trade unionists remain constrained, first by an ingrained sense of deference in which we draw attention to our grievances, but in the most polite, apologetic and ingratiating fashion.

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This is an approach with a long pedigree.

Witness events in 1889 when the trade unions of the Second International organised a global May day of protest for the eight hour day. That is global except in Britain where the demonstrations were postponed to Sunday, because May day in 1889 fell on a working day.

It is an approach that can be seen in 1926, when the General Council of the TUC called strike action in sympathy with the miners, locked out for the best part of nine months in a bitter dispute with the coal-owners, a disaster beached on fears of constitutional propriety.

And it is an approach to be seen in the 1980s, when the TUC organised a Day of Action to protest against the Thatcher government's Employment Bill 1980 (the first of many). On this occasion the newspaper proprietors got it declared unlawful in the courts because it was political not industrial.

The Day of Action case in fact raised a

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second reason for trade union restraint in this country. Here, trade unions may lawfully engage in industrial action only in disputes with their employer (not the government) and only in relation to matters like terms and conditions of employment (not government decisions).

Since the court case in 1980 the law is even tougher. Then the employers could only get an injunction against the organisers, not the union. Now they can go directly against the union itself, with the law an even greater threat to trade union protest action.

The problem for the union on the receiving end of an injunction is that if the injunction was not complied with, it is open to the employer to return to court to commence contempt proceedings against the union, giving rise to a chain of consequences which are now prepared to contemplate.

This is not to suggest that large scale demonstrations and strikes should be off limits.

But it may suggest the need for a more strategic and perhaps effective use of the strike weapon. So yes to big demonstrations for awareness, but yes too to more targeted action for impact.

As the casualties start to mount, there are lessons to be learned from the tactics of the civil service unions in the past (targeting GCHQ) to the construction workers at Lindsey Oil refinery. Who amongst us has power? Who amongst has the capacity to take action that will have maximum effect at minimum cost?

But just as industrial action is to be

used effectively, so too must trade union engagement in the political process. A new politics needs a new response, which means better use of the guerrilla campaigning opportunities that are presented by fairly basic measures.

If this is to be a one term government, we need to disrupt the time they have available.

A brilliant step in that direction is the amendment to the Academies Bill in the House of Lords requiring consultation – not only to delay the process, but also to allow real work to be done to block its use.

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The courts too are to be seen as instruments of political resistance.

No longer there imperfectly to protect employment rights; but there as a forum also for challenging government decisions that undermine trade union members' jobs and conditions at work.

This was a technique pioneered by NALGO (as it then was) in the 1980s, and is now being spearheaded by organisations like the Fawcett Society, challenging government policy in the courts because of its disproportionate impact on women. Many of these challenges will fail. But none will succeed unless they are lodged.

Otherwise the new politics means new kinds of campaigning. Working with users of public services in common cause against the government, at national and local level in constituencies where the Lib Dems are vulnerable. There are now real

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weaknesses to exploit, on health, local authority services, and education.

Look no further than the CWU campaign in the Post Office: trade unions have a powerful voice when the producer makes common cause with the consumer. And no further than the trade union backed campaign against the BNP: trade unions have a powerful voice when making common cause with local communities.

So as the clock counts down in the second half of my working life, I reflect back to the early days, and draw uncomfortable parallels.


But then we were inexperienced and unsophisticated, the lucky generation who new only about growth and progress, and little of cuts and resistance.


But we know now. There is enough collective memory in the trade union movement to learn from the grim days of 1981, as well as the naivete of the response at national level, as trade unions were caught unawares by political forces never encountered by their generation.

All of which is to say that we need to learn quickly and adapt to the new political scene. We are not in government, and there is no point pretending otherwise. We need a new strategy for trade unionism, and a new strategy for the protecting trade unionism and its achievements.

In the meantime, brilliant and selfless

work will continue to be done locally by those who follow in the footsteps of dedicated local officers such as George Hammersley (who also taught me history when I was his student) and John Duffy. After Browne, their jobs are going to be very much more difficult, as universities become more brutal places in which to work.

 *Keith Ewing is professor of Public Law at King's College London and the author of The Bonfire of the Liberties*

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Equality really is better for everyone

WILL HORWITZ of the Spirit Level Foundation argues that equality, not social mobility, should be central to public policy.

'Fairness' is back at the heart of British politics, but what does it mean?

Nick Clegg has claimed that measuring fairness on the basis of income alone is 'nonsense'. Instead he says 'the kind of fairness this Coalition Government aspires to [is] future fairness, improving the life chances of our children.' The Spending Review document claims to 'set out a new vision for a fairer Britain. At its heart is social mobility.'

Social mobility was one of the many measures Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett compared with income inequality in their book *The Spirit Level: Why equality is better for everyone*. And as with everything else they looked at, they found that amongst developed countries, more equal ones do better: greater equality correlates with higher social mobility. Comparable international data on social mobility is hard to come by, so when the book was published they could only compare eight countries. Since then, data for a further three have strengthened the case.

In his speech lauding 'future fairness' Nick Clegg was launching his Fairness Premium – a package of education measures designed 'to give the poorest students a better start in life.' The importance of education is one of the few ideas that unites people across societies, and across the political spectrum. It's good for society, and it's good for individuals. People with more education earn more, are more satisfied with their work and leisure time, are less likely to be unemployed, more likely to be healthy.

Success in education is strongly determined by family income, so perhaps it is unsurprising that again, when Wilkinson and Pickett looked at the relationship between income inequality and educational attainment,

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children in more equal countries do better. They found the same result comparing US states. This effect isn't just confined to children from the poorest backgrounds – in more equal countries it seems like almost all children do better, although the benefits are felt most keenly by those at the bottom.

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So in trying to prioritise social mobility over greater income equality, Nick Clegg is missing a trick.

The two are not distinct they are closely linked. Intuitively this makes sense – as the rungs of society's ladder become further and further apart it becomes increasingly hard for those at the bottom to leap from one to the next, while those nearer the top cling ever-more determinedly to where they are, for themselves and for their children. Indeed, David Cameron seemed to recognise this last year when he said that 'We all know, in our hearts, that as long as there is deep poverty living systematically side by side with great riches, we all remain the poorer for it.'

The Spirit Level describes the effects of inequality among rich democracies on a broad range of health and social problems, far more than just education or social mobility. Indeed, as epidemiologists, the authors began by looking at the relationships between health and inequality, and it was these that led them on to consider other measures of health and social wellbeing. They tested these patterns in two separate test-beds, not only among the rich, developed countries, but also in comparisons of the 50 US states. The picture that emerges is almost identical in both settings and confirm the widely-held intuition that inequality is socially corrosive.

Measures of trust and social cohesion are higher and violence is lower in more equal societies, school children experience less bullying, people have more time for each other and community life is stronger. And similarly, studies show the reason that rates of imprisonment have increased in more unequal countries and US states owes much more to harsher sentencing, than to rising crime rates. Even small differences in inequality seem to make a huge difference to our quality of life - mental illness is three times more common in more unequal countries than in the most equal, obesity rates are twice as high, rates of imprisonment eight times higher, and teenage births increased ten-fold.

In the UK and USA we perform badly and are among the least equal of the rich countries, with the richest fifth earning 8-9 times the poorest fifth. In contrast, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Japan all perform well and are among the most equal countries with a difference of around 3-4 times. By

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halving our income gap to the level of Scandinavia and Japan we could see dramatic improvements to all our lives.

It might be thought that more unequal societies do worse because they have more poor people, but this is only a small part of the explanation.


Just as health inequalities are not simply differences between the health of the poor and everybody else, but instead go all the way up the social ladder with even those close to the top doing a bit worse than those above them, nor is the impact of inequality confined to the poor. Indeed, you cannot explain such big differences in rates of health and social problems between more equal and more unequal societies by what is happening among the poor. The differences are big because everybody is affected. Greater inequality seems to harm almost everyone.


Where the data allowed comparison of people at each level of income or education or social class between one country and another, it is clear that even the comfortably-off middle class does better in more equal countries. Even well educated people with good incomes will be likely to live longer and enjoy better health, and their children will do better in school, will be less likely to take drugs and less likely to become teenage parents. Everyone will enjoy the benefits of living in a more trusting, less violent society. Although the benefits are much larger lower down the social scale, they are still apparent even among the well-off.

So fairness measured in terms of income is not ‘nonsense’. Improving the life chances of children from poor backgrounds is inextricably linked to closing the gap in income between rich parents and their own. And this isn’t through lowering achievement amongst rich children, because on a whole range of health and social measures, including educational attainment, it seems everyone would do better.

However there is perhaps one area of common ground with Clegg. He dismisses fairness ‘seen through one prism and one prism only...the tax and benefits system.’ And he’s right that lowering the gap needn’t be through redistribution. Japan is significantly more equal than the UK, but achieves this through a more equal distribution of wages, rather than through redistribution of earnings. It seems as though the mechanism for ensuring people’s incomes do not radically diverge is not important, but the cohesiveness of a society in which everyone can participate more equally brings untold benefits.



 *Will Horwitz is a volunteer with the Equality Trust, which was set up by the authors of The Spirit Level to coincide with its launch. For more information visit www.equalitytrust.org.uk*

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The Executive Suite tendency

PRIYAMVADA GOPAL says the new cry of vocational qualifications for the poor and university for the rich is tantamount to an education class war



Priyamvada Gopal teaches in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge

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Corralling the young into vocational factory farms or apprenticeships splits further the educated elite from those who service it.

In the fuzzy language of options and alternatives, a class war is being waged.

Complete with the rhetoric of increased social mobility, a political offensive from above threatens to change the social landscape of Britain for the worse. Its visible targets are welfare, jobs and wages, but behind these selective ‘austerities’ a more insidious form of social engineering is also taking place. If the assault on universities and the thousands who

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aspire to higher education succeeds, Britain is in danger of reversing decades of gain to become a nation further divided between those with privileged access to university education and those denied it.

Already, tens of thousands of students with good A-levels find themselves scrounging for alternatives to hoped-for university places. A disproportionate number come from comprehensive schools and economically weaker backgrounds. The severe admissions crunch caused by punishing cuts has been worsened by a near halving of clearing places to 18,000 from 32,000. Anticipated further cuts of to the higher education budget over the next four years will greatly worsen the situation. By contrast, record increases in applications in recent years demonstrate a widening desire for higher learning and all that it promises in personal and professional terms.

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The coalition government's response to this paradoxical situation is breezy condescension masked as hard-headed practicality.

'Let them have apprenticeships!' pronounce the universities minister, David Willetts, and the business secretary, Vince Cable, from the safe heights enabled by their own university educations.

Beating that tired political drum – more vocational training – Cable touts skills that 'enable people to be productive in creating high-value goods and services' as a replacement for university education. His vocabulary exemplifies what the late Jimmy Reid, in a 1972 University of Glasgow rectorial address, described as the executive-suite tendency 'to see people as units of production, as indices in your accountants' books'.

Quite apart from the ongoing bureaucratic failure story that is vocational training, we must question the ethics of stratifying society in this way. The already advantaged will be able to afford and profit from higher education; the poorer must train in lower paid skills to service the former's lifestyles. The claim that a university education is not for all embodies what the educationist Jonathan Kozol calls 'fear of equalising'. There are sound economic reasons to get a degree. Universities still control access to nearly all the major professions, from law, engineering and medicine to journalism, finance and teaching. The earnings gap between the university-educated and those with vocational qualifications remains consistently large in favour of the former.

But the more fundamental fact remains that real democracy and a truly

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integrated society require citizens who have had the chance to develop skills such as independent inquiry and critical thinking, neither of which need mean devaluing other skills. Despite their own increasing corporatisation, universities still provide an environment that expands our capacity to think and engage creatively with other people's ideas. Of course, informed, sceptical and independent-minded citizens don't make ideal subjects for an increasingly plutocratic governing class.

Unsurprisingly, the vacuum created by slashing publicly funded university places has immediately lured profiteering transnational companies offering degrees at designer price tags of nearly –£10,000 a year. They include BPP, the first private institution since the Thatcher era and only the second ever to be granted university status. Hailing the entry of US-based testing corporation Kaplan into the market as 'the first glimmerings of the opening of universities to supply-side reform', Willetts makes the old mistake of confusing human needs with market demand. Higher education, a shared resource, which ought to be available to all who seek it, has become yet another social responsibility outsourced towards private sector profit. In the process, it will spiral out of the financial reach of the vast majority of young people, again turning universities into the hereditary domain of the financially advantaged.

Nick Clegg conceded recently that 'for too many, birth and destiny are closely intertwined' turning inequality into full-fledged 'social segregation'. Yet nothing this coalition has done so far evinces a desire to change anything. On the contrary, restricting access to higher education, in conjunction with vicious attacks on the support base of schools, wages and housing, only accelerates the drive towards absolute economic segregation. A mature democracy thrives by widening access to higher education. Corraling young people into vocational factory farms does not equal progress. Life is not a television show where gruff millionaires airily dismiss formal education and magically transform eager young things into corporate high-flyers.

What is masquerading as the good old-fashioned common sense of apprenticeships and skills over higher education is really the politics of dismissing the intelligence and abilities of ordinary people. We must fight hard to retain common ownership of education and have a real discussion about the role we want it to play in our lives and society.

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BOOK REVIEW

This is no time to be young

ALAN WHITAKER
reviews a 'cogent, well
argued and timely' new
pamphlet from UCU
member Sean Vernell

Don't get young in the third millennium!

Sean Vernell
Bookmarks
Publications
£2.00



ISBN: 978 1905 192632

When Pete Townshend sang 'Hope I die before I get old' back in the sixties, he was presumably at least contemplating the prospect of a few years of youth. Sean Vernell in this magnificently angry pamphlet suggests that even this might be a dubious pleasure, and reading his relentlessly depressing statistics on the barriers erected in the way of today's young achieving happy and fulfilled lives, it is hard not to think he may be right.

There can be little doubt that it is far more difficult to be a young person today than it was when I was growing up in the 1960s. Then you could be reasonably certain that a night out with your mates was not going to end in bloodshed, that the state would provide you with a university or college education, as well as with a reasonable amount of money to live on while you were there, and that at the end of your time in education a job would be waiting for you. It is frightening to consider how in the space of little more than forty years all of these desirable features of a young person's life have been removed, leaving them instead in a world which is full of uncertainties, uncertainties bound to increase as a result of the coalition government's policies.

One of the great virtues of Vernell's pamphlet is the way in which he contextualizes the progressive demonization of young people throughout the industrial age and establishes an unbroken line from the gangs of young pickpockets depicted in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* to the ASBO culture and the casual labelling of young people as 'feral' that characterize present day society's interaction with its youth. Young people are actually

far more likely to be the victims of crime than its perpetrators, yet, as Vernell points out, the number of children and young people locked up in England and Wales doubled in the decade to 2006, with a disproportionate increase in the number of boys and girls from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.



Nor do the afflictions of the young stop there. In section after section of his pamphlet, Vernell shows how the youth of today are disadvantaged in the labour market, access to affordable housing and, particularly important to us, education. He points up the way in which the expansion in education over the past thirty years has been undermined by

the narrowing of the curriculum, the relentless pursuit of targets and meaningless indicators of 'quality', and a corresponding increase in teacher workloads, with teachers being able to spend less time on doing the things they went into the profession to do while they spend hours of their time on unproductive paperwork. To anyone who works in a further education college, all this will be depressingly familiar.

Not surprisingly, all this has had an effect on the health and happiness of the young. The report into child well-being in the twenty-one OECD countries published by UNICEF in February 2009 put Britain in 20th place on every criterion. Only the US came lower. Accordingly, rates of mental illness, self harm and anorexia are increasing, while suicide rates among young men in the 15-24 age group rose from 9.8% in 1976 to 15.8% in 1996.

As Vernell points out, although there are many reasons why young people decide to take their own lives, it is surely not chance that this period coincides with a period when young people have seen an intrusion of competitive values into every aspect of their lives.

If Vernell's pamphlet were merely a catalogue of woe, it would make for very depressing reading. However, the latter part of the pamphlet creates a picture of young people's political engagement which effectively debunks the idea that today's young are self-interested, politically apathetic and lacking any sense of collectivism.

He quotes young people from Britain, France and Greece, and cites the involvement of the young in the anti-war movement as evidence that young people are getting involved in radical political movements, if not the traditional party political activity of previous generations.


The final section sets out a list of steps which would improve young people's lives and here the emphasis is on allowing the young to determine for themselves the direction of their lives and construct alternatives that work for them.

I was particularly struck by the proposal to start a building programme for youth clubs and shocked to learn that three out of four 11 to 16 year olds do not at present have access to one.

Don't get young in the third millennium! is cogent, well argued and timely. It makes a compelling case for a radically

different approach to the way we regard and treat young people in this country. You might quibble with the odd detail – *Cathy Come Home* was a drama rather than a documentary – but no-one in UCU reading this will want to dispute the main thrust of the analysis or the proposed remedies. In his foreword the poet Michael Rosen urges everyone to read it, 'especially any young people wondering how and why all this stuff goes on'. I would add that it should be made compulsory reading for anyone involved in working with and for young people, and in particular by those with the responsibility for setting the laws and policies which affect young people's lives.

 **Alan Whitaker** is
UCU's National President

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ANALYSIS



Subprime education? Lessons from the USA

The evidence from the USA shows creating a wild west style open market in education will be a disaster for students and staff says VICKY WILKS

The coalition government seems increasingly determined to commodify higher education and has recently shown enthusiasm for private providers to enter the field - UCU believes this could prove a dangerous road to go down.

The union has published a new report, highlighting a series of scandals in the USA which has led to a major Senate inquiry, and planned legislation by the Obama administration to tackle some of the worst abuses.

‘Internationally, for-profit higher education providers are becoming more significant. They are a natural response to the global hunger for higher education and better qualifications. Unencumbered by the weight of history, these providers can grow quickly and change fast. They offer a salutary challenge and new approaches to delivering higher education efficiently – and, in turn, cheaply for students. The acid test for HE providers is whether they offer excellent teaching and a high-quality experience for students. If they can do that, at a fair price, then it doesn’t matter whether they are old universities or new ones; for-

profit or not for-profit. They have something to contribute and should have the chance to do so. That is the case for a more open market.’

This extract, from a [speech](#) by universities minister David Willetts



to Universities UK Conference in September 2010, leaves us in no doubt the coalition government is considering radically changing the landscape of British higher education by welcoming private providers into the fold.

In the context of a £2.9bn cut to the higher education

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budget announced in the Comprehensive Spending Review, and a confirmed figure of 209,000 applicants turned away from university this summer, Mr Willett's words have even more resonance. The Browne review, if implemented, would make the creation of a marketplace in higher education a reality – manna from heaven for private providers.

But UCU warns going down this path is a major risk that could have dire consequences for UK higher education. A UCU report, *Subprime Education?*, highlighting some very negative experiences in the US, proves the union's concerns are well-founded.

Currently in the UK, for-profit education providers face significant barriers to entering higher education. The first and most significant is accessing public funding through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). To date, if a private provider has wanted to access HEFCE funding it has had to accept the £3,290 cap on tuition fees, along with HEFCE's standards and practices of accountability. In most cases, the limited potential earnings have not been worth the higher levels of public accountability. But that looks set to change dramatically

in the light of Lord Browne's review. Although the coalition government has rejected Browne's recommendation to lift the cap on fees completely, and set fees at a maximum of £9,000.

The second barrier has been access to publicly funded student loans. To date, private companies have had to seek the Secretary of State's support for individual courses to be 'designated' as eligible. Also, the majority of students studying through private companies are part-time and to date, they not been allowed access to the student loan system so have had to pay thousands in tuition fees upfront. However, Browne recommended that part-time students should be able to access the student loan system for fee loans. This would be a major boon for private providers.

Finally, private companies have faced barriers with status. One of the most prominent private education companies operating in Britain, BPP, has been lobbying for university status and in the summer of 2010 was given permission by David Willetts to use the title 'university college' – the first time this has been awarded in more than 30 years. To gain the full title, any private provider has to go to the Privy Council and meet stringent criteria,

including having taught degree-awarding powers and having at least 4,000 full-time equivalent students on roll - 3,000 of whom are on degree-level courses.

In America, the key factor behind the development of for-profit education companies has been that they have been able to access the state student loan system. The US government provides loans to all students regardless of income but provides specific grants and loans to lower income students. These loans go directly to institutions. Figures from the US Senate show for-profit providers rely on these state funds for between 80 and 90% of their revenue. Their business model is to offer flexible, vocational courses to lower-income students charging relatively high fees, and getting this state subsidy in the form of student grants. They are also dependent on Wall Street finance which puts great pressure on them to enroll. Many of the US scandals have been about recruitment as companies have resorted to foul play to get their numbers and so income up.

There are many examples highlighted in the report but amongst them was Kaplan in the US, which suspended enrolments at campuses in Florida and California after

undercover investigators posing as applicants found admission officers, 'lied about the college's accreditation and admission-test proctors who coached the investigators on the answers. The [investigation](#) also encountered recruiters who scolded and mocked them for being hesitant to take out government subsidised loans to pay the tuition'.**

Non-completion is another major problem. A recent [Senate report](#) estimated that almost as many students dropped out of for-profit colleges over the year as enrolled at the beginning of the year. The same report found the rate of default on student loans for graduates of for-profit institutions is almost twice as high as at public institutions.

Amongst the examples is Apollo's University of Phoenix which according to a report in 2007, has a graduation rate of 16% compared to 55% in the sector as a whole. At one Phoenix Campus, Southern California, the graduation rate fell to an incredibly lowly 4%***

In [December 2005](#), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools placed Career Education's American Intercontinental University on probation for two years after it failed to meet 14 standards.

The concerns raised included integrity of student records, accuracy of recruitment materials, questions around its governance, information given to consumers, and student complaint procedures****

The situation has got so bad that in June this year, the US Department for Education proposed 14 new rules aimed at tackling abuses in US for-profit education. The department is seeking to protect taxpayers from loan defaults, and to prevent students from taking on debt for programmes that don't lead to higher incomes. The department will get greater powers to act against institutions engaging in deceptive advertising, marketing and sales practices.

A separate Independent Senate inquiry was commissioned and found that drop-out rates were very high, and that public money was financing these institutions but few tools were in place to gauge how well that money was being spent. It also found some schools devoted huge sums of money to recruitment. Worryingly, while relying on public money for 80% of their funding, they were reporting profits of 20% and higher to investors.

The report concluded: 'The publicly available date, in tandem with mounting

reports of questionable practices and poor student outcome, yields a mixed portrait of the for-profit education sector that calls into question the taxpayers' return on their multi-billion dollar investment.'

The US experience has raised major concerns for UCU in addition to its longstanding concerns: inferior treatment of staff, the absence of academic freedom, lack of transparency and accountability, and prioritising of shareholder concerns.

→ Read the full report at: www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/k/l/ucu_subprimeed_briefing_sep10.pdf

→ * www.bis.gov.uk/news/speeches/david-willetts-UUK-conference

→ ** bit.ly/cibz3s

→ *** www.nytimes.com/2007/02/11/education/11phoenix.html

→ **** www.chronicle.com/article/The-Chronicle-Index-of/6601/

ANALYSIS



Don't believe T.I.N.A

There is an alternative to cuts and higher fees
says ROB COPELAND

One of the prevailing myths of the current debate about how education is funded is that 'there is no alternative' to increased tuition fees and cuts in public funding.

Other nations, however, have adopted different paths for their higher education and research systems. Countries such as Finland and Norway, for example, continue to combine high levels of public spending with high levels of student access and equity. And despite the global financial crisis, national governments, such as those in the United States, France and Germany, have increased HE public funding as a vehicle to stimulate wider economic growth. This article summarises recent international comparative research on affordability and accessibility in higher education and on responses to the deficit in the public finances. It argues that the UK Government's HE proposals – trebling tuition fees and cutting public funding by 40% – is not the only policy option.

Affordability and accessibility in comparative perspective

A recent study of 15 countries undertaken by the Canadian

research group Higher Education Strategy Associates (HESA) classified England and Wales as one of the most expensive public HE systems in the world. In a report published in October, England and Wales were classified 11 out of 15 in the overall affordability rankings – with only USA, Australia, Japan and Mexico ranked as less affordable.¹ The country rankings were derived from a composite of six different measures of affordability including education costs, living costs, grants, loans and tax expenditures (one of the ranking measures – net cost after tax expenditures – is listed as [table 1](#)).

Of course, these affordability rankings are based on the current system of loans, grants and public subsidies for teaching. The authors speculate that the implementation of the Browne report will 'move the UK out of the middle-band and towards the very high-cost band that the US and Japan inhabit'.² It would also represent 'the single largest one-year increase in net costs anywhere in the world since mass higher education began... Nothing on this magnitude has ever been contemplated before'.³ The

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Canadian report chimes with a UCU analysis of the OECD's Education at a Glance 2010 indicators. Based on a pre-Browne assessment, UCU found that increasing fees to £5,000-a-year would be enough to give England the 'unenviable tag of supplier of the world's most expensive [public] degrees'.

The Canadian HESA report also challenges the notion that there is no alternative to high tuition fees. Finland – with no domestic tuition fees - tops the poll as both the most affordable and accessible system of higher education, closely followed by Norway. These countries are 'models for the international community when it comes to accessibility and affordability' and exhibit 'high rates of access, high attainment rates, extensive programmes of both loans and grants, and student bodies that are reasonably reflective of broader society'. One of the reasons for this is that many of the Nordic countries continue to invest considerable amounts of public funding in their HE systems.

International responses to the economic crisis

The centre piece of the UK coalition government's response to the deficit in the public finances is to slash public spending. In higher education, this amounts

to a 40% cut over a four year period, including a possible 80% cut in the core teaching budget. How does this compare with other countries? It is true that a number of other administrations are also targeting HE for public spending cuts (e.g. at state level in the USA and at the provincial level in Canada). However, a recent report commissioned by Universities UK shows that more national governments are maintaining or accelerating pre-recession investments in higher education (e.g. the Netherlands, Sweden, India, China and South Korea). Moreover, some of the UK's main competitors (e.g. at the federal level in the USA and Canada, France, Germany and Australia) are increasing public sector funding to HE as part of an anti-recessionary economic policy. Various funding approaches have included developing infrastructure through building programmes, financing student expansion and participation and strengthening initiatives in research.

Some have argued that the UK coalition government is using the deficit in the public finances as a cover for an ideological assault on all forms of public provision, including higher education. Commentators have pointed

out the similarities with the policy agenda adopted by the Canadian federal government in the 1990s. During the 1990s the Canadian government also responded to the cyclical debt/deficit problem with deep and permanent cuts to public services. For example, in his 1995 budget, the Finance Minister, Paul Martin boasted that his cuts would mean that programme spending as a share of GDP would be reduced to its lowest level in the post-war era. Major cuts were made to Canada's unemployment insurance program and to federal transfers to the provinces (which fund education, social services and health).⁷ Unsurprisingly, the impact on the higher education sector was devastating. Overall funding levels declined by more than 12%, even as enrolments rose. Tuition fees skyrocketed by 126% between 1990 and 2000 and the number of full-time academic staff fell by about 10%.⁸ Canadian trade unions have told us that this is not a policy agenda to emulate; on the contrary, it should be a case of 'Beware the Canadian Austerity Model'.

Developing an alternative agenda

Before the proposed cuts were announced in the spending review, UK public

Table 1: Net Cost After Tax Expenditure Rankings

Source: Usher and Medow, Global Higher Education Rankings 2010, p23

Country	Net Costs After Tax Expenditures	Median Income	% Median Income	Rank
Australia	\$17,618	\$23,017	76.54%	13
Canada	\$9,959	\$26,623	37.41%	8
Denmark	\$5,229	\$22,929	22.81%	2
England and Wales	\$13,772	\$24,652	55.86%	11
Finland	\$5,641	\$21,010	26.84%	4
France	\$6,395	\$20,660	30.96%	7
Germany	\$3,352	\$22,020	15.22%	1
Japan	\$24,376	\$22,790	106.96%	14
Latvia	\$5,258	\$13,646	38.53%	9
Mexico	\$8,020	\$4,615	173.80%	15
Netherlands	\$8,111	\$28,032	28.93%	5
Norway	\$6,276	\$26,623	23.57%	3
New Zealand	\$9,328	\$19,265	48.42%	10
Sweden	\$6,056	\$20,716	29.23%	6
USA	\$18,369	\$26,990	68.06%	12

Table 2: Public expenditure on higher education institutions as % of**GDP 1998-2006** ie 2006-7. Includes private expenditure on institutions subsidised by public funds.Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance* (series), table B2.4 (Data for earlier years was not in a directly comparable series).

	France	Germany	Japan	UK	USA	OECD average
	%	%	%	%	%	%
1998	1.01	0.97	0.43	0.83	1.07	1.06
1999	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.8	1.1	1.0
2000	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.7	0.9	1.0
2001	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.8	0.9	1.0
2002	1.0	1.0	0.4	0.8	1.2	1.1
2003	1.1	1.0	0.5	0.8	1.2	1.1
2004	1.2	1.0	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.0
2005	1.1	0.9	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.1
2006	1.1	0.9	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.0
2007*	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.0

expenditure on higher education as a proportion of GDP was already one of the lowest in the OECD see table 2. In our submission to the spending review UCU has put the case for maintaining the current level of public spending on higher education in terms of GDP, and increasing the proportion of UK public expenditure on higher education to the OECD average when conditions allow. In the interests of access and affordability, tuition fees should also be abolished, instead charging large employers, who benefit from the plentiful supply of graduates, a Business Education Tax, generated through increasing the main rate of corporation tax to the G7 average of 32.87p in the £.10 Over the coming period UCU will continue to argue that 'there is an alternative'.

ANALYSIS



EMA abolition: triumph of dogma over evidence?

Was the Education Maintenance really a 'deadweight' as ministers suggested?

JOHN OFFORD looks at the evidence.

Michael Gove's clear assurance given during a *Guardian* interview two months before the last general election that 'Ed Balls keeps saying that we are committed to scrapping the EMA. I have never said this. We won't'¹ was completely undermined by Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne in his CSR statement in October 2010.

In fact, the EMA is to be effectively abolished.² This decision was based on two arguments.

First, raising the compulsory learning participation age to 18 from 2015 nullifies the need for any financial incentives:

'As we move towards full participation by 2015 we will secure reduction in individual unit costs'.³

Second, 'Ending EMAs, which have deadweight costs of around 90%, saving £0.5 billion, and replacing them with targeted support for those who face genuine financial barriers to participation'.⁴

'Deadweight' here means that

students in receipt of the EMA would have continued in education even if they had not been paid the allowance, an argument that is both in itself flawed, based on unrepresentative research undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) for the DfE.⁵ The NFER research was only undertaken in a small sample of schools using a small number of students from Year 10 and 11 only. The NFER research also excludes all students in receipt of EMA studying in FE colleges and neither does it have an effective analysis of the impact of the EMA on staying on and certification rates.

These limited findings are contradicted by other comprehensive, large data set longitudinal research and analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies⁶ and the comprehensive review of the EMA by education economist Mick Fletcher⁷, who found that the 'deadweight cost' is around 36%. His analysis is supported by research undertaken by NUS, which found that 55% of

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EMA recipients said that they could not continue in education without the allowance.⁸

Contrary to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove's emphasis on the 'deadweight' argument, the Institute for Fiscal Studies' careful, long-term analyses, found that the impact of EMA was found to be 'quite substantial'⁹.

Participation in the first year of a course increased by 5% for males, for females by 4%. The EMA increased the proportion staying on in full time education for two years by 7.4% for males, 5.9% for females, 'suggesting that the effect of the policy is to increase not only initial participation but also retention within full-time education'

'The initial effects are largest for those who receive the maximum payment (£30 per week)', i.e. young people from the poorest families. It is estimated that around two-thirds of individuals who stayed in education were drawn from inactivity rather than paid work'.

'The effect of the EMA is found to be largest for children with lower levels of prior educational achievement'.

On this evidence, the EMA is a very substantial return on

investment for some of the most disadvantaged young people in the country.

Depending on how it is measured, it is estimated that between one fifth and one third of all young people aged 14-16 are disengaged from education (Steedman and Stoney, 2004), the main reason England still performs very poorly in comparison to other OECD countries in post-16 staying on rates.

The implication of this for the young person and for wider society are well known, leading to poor labour market opportunities (McIntosh and Houghton, 2005) and the risk of being 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET), alongside other associated negative outcomes including teenage pregnancy (Hosie, 2007) and drug use (Beinart et al, 2002).

EMAs were designed to address both disengagement from education and the associated poor international performance, a policy that has been a substantial success, payments being made to the most disadvantaged young people in England and Wales as the DfE responses to a recent Information Disclosure request¹⁰ show.

In answer to the question: 'In 2009-2010 how many students in England and

Wales received the £30 per week (the maximum weekly payment) means tested Educational Maintenance Allowance?'

The answer was: 'As at 24 June 2010, take-up was 538,101 for the academic year 2009/10, which includes a small number who are not means tested, for example care leavers'.

According to the same Information Request, the cost to the Exchequer for 2009/10, including staff and administration costs, is £585, 614,052, so that the £0.5 billion cut announced by the Chancellor effectively abolishes the EMA scheme.

This is not a social, educational or labour market policy to support fairly the most disadvantaged but an opportunist deficit reduction policy which also hits disadvantaged young people regionally as well as individually. In 2008/09, take-up of EMA was highest in London, then the English Region with the highest rate of youth unemployment; at 24 June 2010, take-up of EMA was highest in North West England, which now has the highest rate of youth unemployment. In both regions unemployment was coupled with very low levels of qualifications.

- 1 'Why Should Any Teacher Vote Tory?', Education Guardian, 2 March 2010: www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/mar/02/michael-gove-readers-questions-ofsted
- 2 Page 21, HM Treasury, Spending Review 2010: cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sr2010_completereport.pdf
- 3 <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/spendingreview/a0065470/2010/012>
- 4 As 3.
- 5 <http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DFE-RR009.pdf>
- 6 IFS, Education Maintenance Allowance: the first two years – a quantitative evaluation, 2002
- 7 M. Fletcher, 'Should we end the EMA?', CfBT Educational Trust, October 2009, at: [www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/1.EMA_v4\(FINAL\)W.pdf](http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/1.EMA_v4(FINAL)W.pdf)
- 8 NUS, EMA Satisfaction Survey 2010, at: resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/emareport2010.pdf
- 9 IFS, as above.
- 10 <http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/foi/disclosuresaboutchildrenyoungpeoplefamilies/a0065442/education-maintenance-allowance-ema>

APPRECIATION

Kate Heasman

Kate Heasman's untimely death from cancer aged 61 in July 2010, robbed us of a remarkable teacher, trade unionist and equality campaigner whose contribution to UCU and, before it, NATFHE, was enormous.



I met Kate Heasman for the first time on a Saturday in January 1997.

We were on our way to Accrington in Lancashire to protest against the sacking a month previously of an activist, Pat Walsh, and we travelled the last stage of the journey together standing surrounded by football fans in one of those horrible trains that look like 1970s buses and which the railway companies still imagine it is alright to inflict upon travellers in the north of England and Wales.

Kate was NATFHE President that year. I was a long way off becoming an NEC member but I recognised Kate from photos in the magazine and from seeing her at annual conferences. Naturally she spoke, passionate and full of anger. I could rephrase that sentence: Kate was a natural speaker who was passionate about standing up to injustice, whether the injustice was being done to an individual member or to a whole oppressed minority.

Some months later I saw Kate preside over that year's annual conference. The union was in turmoil: a week before, the

then General Secretary had been shown the door. Kate's calm handling of the unprecedented situation – she carried on as though nothing had happened – meant that the union recovered its poise and became stronger.

Only years later, when I became an equality activist, did I have the chance to work with Kate and see the extraordinary quality of her work as NATFHE's and UCU's Equality Official. The responses to consultation documents that filleted proposed government policies and laid bare their shortcomings, while giving due acknowledgement to the things that we approved of, played a large part in establishing the Union's reputation in the Trade Union equality movement.

As we worked together more, we became good friends. Kate had a huge capacity for friendship and spending a day or an evening in her company was always fun. I miss Kate terribly, but I count myself so lucky to have known her.

Alan Whitaker

‘ Kate worked a long apprenticeship in NATFHE. She was secretary of the Arnold and Carlton branch during the testing period leading up to and through the Incorporation. Kate loved teaching but perhaps her favourite course was the A level English night class. Students realised their potential and, in many cases, became friends. She grew totally committed to the union cause when she found that the new managerialism threatened the educational experience of her students as much as the conditions of her colleagues. Her greatest talent was

to make friends and to build a branch that brought out the best in people and enabled them to play a full part in the struggle. She was never the diva but always the team builder who was never afraid to do the mundane hard work. Kate was involved in the Nottinghamshire Liaison Committee and then the East Midlands Region. She cut her teeth on equal opportunities in the Regional Women’s Panel and, strengthened by that experience, went on to become Chair of Region and then entered the national sphere. ’

Julian Atkinson



‘ Kate Heasman is greatly missed not just because she was a friend to so many, but also because she was quite simply the best National Equality Official in the trade union movement. The TUC and many other unions benefitted from her pioneering work. ’

Paul Mackney



‘ Kate was my friend and my colleague. I had the privilege of chairing the Equality Committee for both NATFHE and UCU when Kate was the Equality Official and she was a joy to work with. Her knowledge of equality issues was second to none. She pushed the boundaries on issues such as religion and belief well before any legislation. She did not subscribe to any separatist view of equality and strove to bring all the strands together in the firm belief that we can all learn from each other’s struggles.

But beyond what she did in the ‘day job’ she was also the most magnificent and non-judgmental friend, who was always there to listen, to advise, to get very drunk with, to sing and laugh with, and just to enjoy life to the full with.

The world is a darker and sadder place without her.

Angie McConnell

APPRECIATION

Hugh Langford



It is with great regret and much sadness that I have to report that Hugh Langford has died. His partner, Marion, phoned me last night to inform me that he passed away on Sunday. In the end it was all rather sudden.

Hugh had not considered his prospects for a long life good, right from when he was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus two years ago. He was determined, however, to try to enjoy life as much as possible.

He certainly pursued his interests with incredible vigour, especially considering how he must have been feeling much of the time. Like me, he was not a man of faith and believed very much in living life to the full, the way he wanted. Thus he continued right to the very end – last week, Marion tells me, he went flying (paragliding) one day, cycling another.

If any of you had heard him play he was an impressive guitarist, so it's wonderful to know that they played music together on Saturday.

Perhaps we can draw the conclusion that that was a pretty impressive final week – and quite a bit more than many of us do in good health. He certainly didn't want to become incapacitated. He would only have wished to sit around watching his beloved cricket for some of the time!

When I first encountered Hugh I must confess to finding him a bit grumpy, maybe brusque, testy even. Essentially a very private person, he didn't wear his heart on his sleeve and I expect others, too, might have found him not easy to get to know. I'm glad I did though. The initially-perceived cantankerousness quickly became evident as erudition, shrewdness and tenacity.

Aside from possessing a huge intellect and knowledge on a range of subjects he was rather a good wit, too. I've spent quite a bit of time in his company – and last visited him about a month ago – and he was incredibly well-humoured to the last. Courage and stoicism hardly come into it.

He's taught me so many things, from batting strategies to points of grammar

to the finest blues musicians. On the latter, for example, he let me know that “the blues should be played with a smile on your face.”

If you didn’t know our former Branch Secretary (of Dewsbury College, then Kirklees College, and going back to NATFHE days) then you should know that we will never again see such a committed union comrade. Our branch is, I hope, stronger today because of what I, and others, learnt from his skilful negotiating on collective issues and abilities in representing individual members. I will miss him enormously.

Raise your UCU mug, or glass of something later, to our much-missed colleague.

David Paine



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