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Leaked Plans on Job Cuts and Pay Freeze

In the same week that the government launched Colleges Week, "a celebration of the opportunities colleges create for individuals, business and Britain", and a new national skills strategy white paper which aims to "get skill policy right in a way that no Government has fully done before", a leaked document seen by the Observer and UCU outlines plans to axe more staff, and suggests wage freezes to meet huge budget cuts!

In the April budget the government announced what were termed 'efficiency savings' to cut public expenditure in response to a growing budget deficit as a result of the recession. DIUS, now BIS, announced that they would be making £400m cuts in 2010-11, of which £340m would be in the FE sector. Based on a leaked civil servant paper to the Minister of State, Kevin Brennan, the Observer ran a front page story on Sunday 8 November giving details of these and even more cuts. The leaked paper contains the following recommendations:

- Additional funding cuts of £252m for 2010/11 hitting hardest those providers with large Train to Gain and lower level Skills for Life provision
- As staffing is the largest proportion of expenditure for colleges these cuts should be passed on as pay freezes and/or redundancies and fewer learner numbers

- Ending the £4.6m to learner support funds that were introduced after ESOL fees were imposed
- Co-funding (i.e. employers contributing to costs) of repeat T2G level 2 which the paper admits will mean likely decrease in learners
- 3% cash cut on LSC adult responsive funding stream
- Raising minimum performance levels even further and applying more stringently
- Stronger measures to ensure providers raise income from fees (which in 2010 will mean 50% cost of course for level 3 and above programmes)
- 10% reduction in adult apprenticeship rates
- More reductions in LSC non-participation funds- learner support hardship funds and capital
- More "realistic" Train to Gain starts (which probably means fewer)
- Reduce adult safeguarded funds by £21m (10%) This is for ACL non accredited work) and is pretty much the sum put in earlier under the "Learning Revolution White Paper
- Remove funding for low priority provision which could be programmes that are not national target programmes, eg low level Skills for Life.

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The paper suggests that overall there will be a loss of 133,000 learners. All of these cuts will have impact across the board but almost certainly hit urban colleges and those with mostly adult work the hardest.

Sally Hunt, UCU General Secretary, has written to Kevin Brennan expressing the union's shock and anger at the prospect of further and deeper cuts into the very structures which should be being used to get the country out of recession, not make it worse. Sally's letter is downloadable at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/c/I/brennan_secretfecuts_nov09.pdf

She states: "my members transform people's lives and particularly the lives of the most vulnerable within our society. To have them as the number one target for frontline cuts at a time when clearly you expect them to deliver 'volumes of learners more in line with the higher, pre-efficiency savings' is self-defeating".

UCU is calling for an urgent meeting with the Minister. All FE trade unions are demanding an urgent rethink of these plans which hit at the heart of frontline services in our sector.

UCU is planning to hold a national lobby of parliament at the end of January on "Defending Education". If members vote yes in the forthcoming industrial action ballot, this lobby will coincide with FE members taking strike action over the current 1.5% pay offer. We will therefore be able take the message of no cuts and no pay freezes directly to MPs.

Institute for Learning Elections

IfL have agreed a new constitution. In place of a single council consisting of elected members of IfL and stakeholder representatives, there will be a larger council with elected members in a clear majority and 15 stakeholder representatives including UCU. There will also be a non executive board elected from the larger council, again with elected members in a clear majority of the seats.

Elections for the new council run from 16 November to 3 December. There are a variety of different seats for the different parts of FE, regional reps and for various equality strands.

IfL claims to be member driven and this is an excellent opportunity for UCU members to put this to the test. UCU is encouraging its FE members to vote in the IfL elections for candidates who represent your views. Candidates' election statements should be on the IfL web site www.ifl.ac.uk

Head office would also like to know of UCU members who have put themselves forward as candidates. Contact Dan Taubman at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk. One is known, Angie McConnell, who is standing as the North West member. UCU members should be voting for Angie.

UCU-NUT briefings on the future of 16-19 education

The LSC will be abolished in April 2010. Planning and commissioning of 16-19 education and training provision will soon pass to local authorities. Local authorities will be taking crucial decisions as to which providers will be delivering which programmes for young people. NUT and UCU are holding a joint national briefing on the changes on February 4th 2010 at NUT Head Office Hamilton House, Mabledon Place WC1. Each English UCU Region is asked to nominate two representatives to attend. For further details contact Dan Taubman at:

dtaubman@ucu.org.uk

FE Staff Governors Conference, 3 December 2009

This event, on the theme of 'Hearing the Voice of the Staff Governor', and scheduled to take place on 3 December at UCU's head office in Carlow Street, is open to all staff governors.

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The event will be interactive with both keynote speeches and interactive workshops, covering topics like recommendations arising from the current AoC-LSIS review of FE governance, an introduction to the forthcoming LSIS Guidance for College Staff Governors and FE Common Inspection Framework for Excellence. It is open to all FE Staff Governors and interested UCU members. There is a small charge of £30 including VAT to cover refreshments.

If you would like to attend, a full invitation letter, programme and details of how to register are available here:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4249>

Need for NEETs information

The Children, Schools and Families Select Committee has announced an inquiry into young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs). UCU will be making a written submission. The inquiry will be looking at:

'Strategies for the identification of young people at risk of falling into the "NEET" category; services and programmes to support those most at risk of becoming "NEET", and to reduce the numbers and address the needs of those who have become persistently "NEET"; the effectiveness of the Government's NEET strategy; the likely impact of raising the participation age on strategies for addressing the needs of young people not in education, employment or training; Opportunities and future prospects in education, training and employment for 16-18 year olds.'

The date for written submissions is 16 December 2009.

UCU would like any UCU members working with these young people to let the UCU Policy Dept know of any projects they are working on which can give examples of either good or bad practice. Please contact Dan Taubman at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk by Wednesday 9 December.

ESOL: new policies on prioritising funding

In January 2008, after the imposition of fees for ESOL programmes, the government undertook a consultation on how ESOL funds could be prioritised. The result, 'A New approach to ESOL' came out in September: http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/skills_for_life/esol

This document sets out the experiences and early lessons of the 31 ESOL 'new approach' pathfinder areas that were set up in 2008/9. The proposals call for local authorities to set up a committee drawing in ESOL providers and community organisations representing ESOL and potential ESOL students, to identify local priorities for ESOL provision, ways of reaching such people and changes to ESOL provision. They also set out a greater role for local authorities in working with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), providers and other partners to identify and meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in their area who need to improve their English skills. Supporting tools and information have been produced to help local authorities and their partners understand and take forward implementation and can be found on at the LSC website:

www.lsc.gov.uk/whatwedo/adultlearner/esol.htm

For further information contact Dan Taubman at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk

UCU professional policy networks – get involved!

UCU runs a number of networks that help UCU members get involved in shaping the union's policy agenda. If you are interested in professional issues connected with ESOL, Diplomas, FE initial teacher training or HE in FE, contact Dan Taubman to find out more details at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk