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1. The New Policy Regime New Government

The Queen's speech gave notice that the new government would be introducing a number of bills that could impact on FE. These included an **Education and Children's Bill** which would reform OFSTED. An **Academies Bill** which has already been introduced, with the intention of it being law by September, will enable more schools to become Academies and remove the consultation processes that local authorities currently have over the creation of new academies. A **Public Services (Reform) Bill** would reduce the number and cost of public bodies (quangos) and establish a review of all quangos every 3 years.

On the 17 June John Hayes, the new FE minister, made a **speech** on FE and lifelong learning at City and Islington College. In it he outlined the first stage of the Government's new skills strategy. He announced that restrictions on colleges would be lifted: all colleges, apart from poor performers, will be able to move money between budgets; the requirement for Ofsted inspections of colleges rated as outstanding will be removed; the requirement for colleges and training organisations to complete Summary Statements of Activity has been removed and the regulatory requirement for college principals to undertake the Principals Qualifying Programme, recognising the range of development opportunities and qualifications open to Principals, will be removed.

There have been an increasing number of announcements from the new Government that will impact on FE. Most of these have come from the new Department for Education which has responsibility for 16 to 19 education. A number of quangos have been told that they will be abolished, including QCDA, BECTA and the GTC. The restrictions have been lifted on state schools offering the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) qualifications in key subjects and IGCSE results will be included in school performance tables as soon as possible. The new generic Diplomas in science, humanities and languages, due to

be introduced from September 2011, will cease immediately. £311m will be cut from local authority grants. This includes £6.6m from the teenage pregnancy reduction programme; £1.7m from the youth addicts programme and £1.4m from funds for the college place guarantee for 16 and 17 year olds not in employment/education. Some local authorities are making plans to make cuts to Connexions Services.

In his first major speech, David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science continued many of the themes in the Labour Government's HE policy document, 'Higher Ambitions'. He is clearly looking to more HE in FE, more distance learning and the involvement of private providers as ways of cutting the cost of higher education to the Exchequer. This, of course, is before the publication of Lord Browne's review of student finance which is expected to propose tuition fee increases. At first sight it looks like 'business as usual' but the announcement of 25 per cent cuts in department budgets, with higher education possibly being subjected to an even higher cut, suggests that some of these cost-saving measures will be upon us very soon.

David Willetts' speech can be read at:

<http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=413420&NewsAreaID=2>

As a partial antidote to Mr Willetts' view of the world of higher learning, see the new leaflet by the British Academy on the public value of the arts, humanities and social sciences:

<http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/uni-funding.cfm>. Full details of the various announcements and a full list of new ministers in both DfE and BIS can be found on the DfE web site www.education.gov.uk/ and the BIS web site www.bis.gov.uk

Congress 2010

Education policy figured prominently at UCU Congress 2010. Congress opened with a debate about the challenge posed to education and the profession by the policies of the new government, and how best to promote the union's alternative vision. It was agreed that alliances with others in a national campaign to defend public education was essential. An agreement with NUS on joint campaigning has already been concluded.

The 2010 Annual FE Sector Conference passed several motions on education policy. These included motions on OFSTED, lesson observation, democracy and management in FE colleges, 14 to 16 year old students in FE, academies and the involvement of FE colleges, franchising and cuts in FE, IfL and CPD. HE Sector Conference passed motions on governance, the REF, academic freedom, HE in FE, access and student finance.

The wording of these motions and those passed by Congress itself can be found on the UCU web site at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4412>

2. The Budget

FE

In early June the new Government made an announcement of the in-year savings that would be made. FE came off very lightly. Not only was its budget not cut, £200m was moved from the Train to Gain Budget - £150m to go to 50,000 new apprenticeships, particularly in small

and medium enterprises and £50m to go to college capital programmes. Around 150 colleges will be eligible to receive up to £225,000 under a £30 million Renewal Grant. A further £20 million would be made available to colleges through an Enhanced Renewal Grant. For further details go to:

http://nds.coi.gov.uk/content/Detail.aspx?ReleaseID=413974&NewsAreaID=2&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+bis-news+%28BIS+News%29

On 17 June Vince Cable the BIS Secretary of State **wrote** to the Skills Funding CEO Geoff Russell giving details of the funding available in 2010-11. The key priorities outlined are:

- To support the supply of level 3 technician skills largely through apprenticeships
- Reducing the number of 18-24 year old NEETS
- Training for the unemployed
- Providing independent adult information, advice and guidance
- Develop a programme of what are now called 'Lifelong Learning Accounts'
- Increase the numbers participating in adult and community learning

The new government's emergency Budget was announced on 22 June. A pay freeze on all public sector workers was announced, along with a rise in VAT to 20% in January 2011, a freeze on child benefit for 3 years and cuts to welfare benefits. A 25% cut in the spending of all government departments was announced too. However the details of how this will impact on each government department, and FE, will not be made until the Comprehensive Spending Review, now promised for October.

HE

There was little specific mention of higher education in the emergency Budget on 22 June. While the Chancellor of the Exchequer recognised 'the particular pressures on our education system', he did not refer in particular to higher education. We are likely to know a lot more about the fate of the sector when the government's spending review for 2011-12 to 2013-14 is published in October, which is likely to come after the report of Lord Browne's review of fees and student support. In his Budget speech, George Osborne said the government will aim to sell the student loan book. The previous government tried unsuccessfully to achieve this, and it is not known whether the proceeds of the sale would be ploughed back into higher education. Mr Osborne added that the government would 'look at options around early repayment for individuals', perhaps meaning that students who repaid their loans for tuition and maintenance might get a favourable financial deal. Although staff working in higher education are not in the public sector, it is likely that the two-year pay freeze for public employees earning £21,000 and above announced in the Budget, will influence employers' pay policies. The really big questions around the level of future spending cuts were unanswered, beyond the chancellor saying that departments - other than the protected NHS and international aid - would have an *average* reduction of 25% by 2014-15. We shall have to wait until October to know more about how the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills relates this overall cut to university funding.

3. Review of Postgraduate Education is Published

Last year the Government commissioned Professor Adrian Smith, Director General of Science and Research at Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to undertake a review of postgraduate provision in the UK. Entitled 'One Step Beyond: making the most of postgraduate education', the review makes twenty four recommendations on the future structure and funding of postgraduate education. Particular emphasis is placed on the need to tailor provision to deliver the skills to business, with funding explicitly linked to achieving this goal. Another key recommendation is that postgraduate research funding should be concentrated more heavily on the research 'elite'. In particular, it calls for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to "consider how to link future allocations of [the research degree supervision grant] more explicitly to research quality rather than volume as at present" (i.e. RAE or REF scores). Unsurprisingly, the review's direction in favour of concentration has been welcomed by both the pre-1992 'mission groups' (the Russell Group and the 1994 Group). However, UCU will continue to argue for a volume-based approach to postgraduate research funding as well as the importance of supporting a balanced range of subjects and disciplines at the postgraduate level.

The Smith report is available at:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/corporate/docs/P/10-704-one-step-beyond-postgraduate-education.pdf>

4. The Changing Academic Profession

UCU was one of the funders of a major international study on the Changing Academic Profession (CAP), conducted from the UK perspective by the Open University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Information. There have been a number of reports coming out of the research, including this one published in February 2010 at

http://www.open.ac.uk/cheri/documents/rd02_10.pdf . A more recent report, not currently available on the internet, was published in June 2010 to coincide with a conference in London. A key finding relating to academics in the UK highlights the differentiation of academic careers across the spectrum of teaching, research, business and community links, as well as management and administration. The report questions 'whether we can any longer speak of a single academic profession'.

One issue raised by the report is the well-being of the academic profession. The CAP report found relatively low levels of satisfaction in the UK, a problem which could be linked to the perception that academics' personal influence in shaping policies was low. There were telling differences between full-time and part-time staff. Part-timers were more likely to be female, junior, on a fixed-term contract, married, with children, taking career breaks, and more focused on teaching than research. The CAP report calls for institutions to engage effectively with part-timers, and to reduce and abolish inequalities in pay and conditions. As the report says, the UK survey results 'suggest that a more nuanced and differentiated approach is required if institutions and academics themselves are to achieve and sustain professional reward'.

5. Fees and Access

A recent Sutton Trust report on the deterrent effects of tuition fee rises received widespread media coverage. The coverage concentrated on the report's findings on how young people's intentions to seek places in higher education would be affected by different levels of tuition fee increases.

The following finding of the Sutton commissioned opinion survey received less comment but is worth noting:

Eight in ten (80%) of the pupils aged 11-16 at schools in England and Wales said they were either 'very likely' (39%) or 'fairly likely' (41%) to go into higher education.

This is by far the highest proportion since the Sutton Trust first commissioned the annual survey in 2003 (71%) and is significantly higher than in 2008 (73%).

The effort to encourage young people to aspire to higher education, particularly those from under-represented groups, has been a prominent theme of the policies of successive governments for at least the last twenty years. Having succeeded in raising aspirations their fulfilment is now under threat from massive spending cuts and increases in the cost to students and their families of participation in higher education. UCU, NUS and other allies will be fighting hard to deliver our promises to all potential students.

The Sutton Trust report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.suttontrust.com/annualreports.asp#June20100621>

6. Scotland Knowledge Exchange Consultation

UCU Scotland has responded to the Scottish Funding Council consultation on knowledge exchange by calling for a broader definition of activities funded by the stream and for less emphasis on the impact of research for industry. The response also criticised the proposal that knowledge exchange to public services should be of lesser importance and that to society and democratic structures was completely devalued. Further the UCU called for greater democracy in the decision making process if the funding moves to project based funding, instead as proposed decided by a sub-committee of the council.

Donaldson review of teacher education

UCU has also responded to the independent review of teacher education calling for greater involvement of teacher education departments in teacher and curriculum development and in particular increased resources for evidence based policy.

7. Northern Ireland Policy

The Widening Participation Strategy is being developed via the Department for Employment and Learning. UCU has met with Kieran Mannion (Head of the Widening Participation Branch at the Department) and has co-opted a regional council member on to the Strategy development group).

UCU will be responding to the current consultation on Teacher Education in a Climate of Change by the Department. Teacher training in Northern Ireland is already in a state of flux as Stranmillis Teacher Training College prepares to merge with Queen's University, while St Mary's catholic Teacher Training College faces funding issues.

The Department for Employment and Learning is consulting on a draft revised Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland – Success through Skills 2. The Strategy looks at our current skills base, examines the skills we will need in the future to grow the Northern Ireland economy and highlights areas for action. This document once published will be viewed as the overarching strategy for skills development in Northern Ireland over the next decade. The closing date for the consultation is 17 September 2010.

Legislative:

The Department proposes to introduce legislation to exempt student loans from individual voluntary arrangements (IVAs). A public consultation, which was open from 23 July 2009 to 24 October 2009, did not elicit any objection to the proposals. Executive approval to introduce the Bill to the Assembly was given on 13 May 2010, and the Bill was introduced to the Assembly on 25 May. The Second Stage debate took place on 8th June.

IVAs are the policy responsibility of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), and the Bill does not make any policy changes in relation to them. The Bill deals exclusively with a borrower's liability to repay a student loan if he or she enters into an IVA. An IVA is a form of insolvency similar to bankruptcy. In an IVA, the debtor agrees to pay a single, reduced, affordable monthly payment for between three and five years.

The second stage of the workplace disputes Bill was passed by the NI Assembly on 22 June. This Bill is the culmination of a review of the dispute resolution process in Northern Ireland which taken two years. This review has revealed a strong desire to see disputes resolved at an earlier stage, close to their original source in the workplace, thereby averting more serious confrontation and, potentially, legal action. The review also highlighted the need for alternatives to legal action without calling into question the absolute right of those who wish to do so to take their case to a tribunal.

8. Updated UCU Guidance on Online Learning

UCU's policy guidance on on-line learning has recently been revised and updated to include negotiating guidelines and scenarios for branches on online learning and case-loading, CPD and home working. For a copy of the guidance go to:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/s/h/ucu_edonline_guidance.pdf

9. Why Education for Sustainable Development is a UCU Priority

Adapting existing course programmes and introducing new ones is a priority for the UCU because it represents one of the best opportunities for saving and creating new jobs. At a time of savage cuts in the FHE sector one of the few growth areas will be in the demand for 'green skills'. This means behavioural skills as well as hard skills. For example, there is not a single programme area that could not be adapted to incorporate an examination of attitudes that are central to the understanding of sustainable development. By hard skills we mean those that are more career-focused.

Take the Construction Industry as an example. In FE that could mean Apprentices on Electrical Installation courses understanding the importance of energy efficient buildings as well as how to fit solar panelling. In HE it means students studying Architecture having the theory and practice of eco-design as a central theme in the syllabus. Some of these adaptations have already been made but to nowhere near the scale needed.

UCU has tried to set an example by making it one of our priorities. We have set up an ESD Working Group at Head Office. A guidance leaflet 'Education for Sustainable Development' on how to influence your institution has gone out to all branches. This is available with other resources on the UCU website.

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/t/I/UCU_Guidance_'ESD'2.doc

There is also a Facebook page to allow members to exchange information.

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=121143634572765>

If you want further information about UCU's work on ESD or have got some examples of what is happening in your institution or community please contact Graham Petersen

gpetersen@ucu.org.uk

10. Cuts in Guided Learning Hours

UCU members in London are finding that some colleges are cutting guided learning hours. They are seeing cuts in GCSEs English and Maths of around an hour a week, small but significant when taken over the full range of a programme of study. It would be good to get some information on cuts to guided learning hours not only for GCSEs English and Maths but other GCSEs, A levels and other more occupational and vocational programmes such as BTEC, City and Guilds, OCR; and not just programmes for 16 to 19 year olds, but cuts in hours to adult programmes. Send details to Dan Taubman in the Policy Dept.,

dtaubman@ucu.org.uk

11. Anti-Academies Alliance

The encouragement of schools to become Academies, as well as the creation of 'free schools', is a central plank of the new government's programme. This was made very clear by the speed with which the new secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, wrote to secondary schools inviting them to apply for academy status and introduced legislation to make the process easier.

UCU is strongly opposed to academies. They break links between schools and the communities that they serve, they threaten to recreate a selective system of education that favours children from better-off backgrounds, and they threaten teachers' pay and conditions. UCU sees the fight against academies as part of a wider campaign to defend the principle of free access for all to a high quality publicly funded and democratically accountable education system. Unfortunately, some universities and colleges have sponsored academies. Please let us know if your institution is involved or considering becoming involved (rcopeland@ucu.org.uk).

The Anti-Academies Alliance brings together unions, parents, pupils, teachers, governors, councillors and MPs in a united campaign against academies and in favour of 'a good school for every child'.

The UCU is affiliated nationally, but branches and local associations are also encouraged to affiliate.

The Alliances website has affiliation details as well as excellent briefing and campaign materials: www.antiacademies.org.uk

12. New Policy Briefing Available: Technical Academies

A new policy briefing is available on UCU's website at:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/technicalacademies>

The briefing covers the development of 'Technical Academies'. In 2009, Lord Clark, former Tory education secretary and currently chair of 'Edge', the vocational education lobby group, persuaded Ed Balls, former DCSF Secretary of State, to develop two 'University Technical College' (UTCs, 14-19 vocational education schools) sponsored by Aston and Wolverhampton Universities and local FE colleges, with a view to rolling out a further 100 by 2015 within the Academies Programme. This proposal has been enthusiastically promoted into the Coalition government Programme and its history and current state is analysed in the Briefing.

If you have any comments or feedback on PolicyNews, please send this to Diana Hendry dhendry@ucu.org.uk. The next issue will be out at the end of November.