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1. Consultation on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – views sought

The UK higher education funding bodies are currently consulting over the future shape of the 2014 REF. In particular, they are seeking views on the draft panel criteria and working methods of the REF panels http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/03_11/ The consultation document outlines how the REF panels will deal with research outputs, the 'impact' of the research and the environment element of the submissions.

As with the previous RAE there are important sections on equality and diversity. In particular, the draft panel criteria includes a new centralised tariff system for dealing with individual staff circumstances, such as part-time working and disability, which may affect participation in the REF. However, strong concerns have been expressed about how the tariff deals with maternity and adoption leave and UCU is calling on the funding bodies to adopt an alternative approach, i.e. one which recognises each period of maternity and adoption leave as sufficiently disruptive of an individual's work to merit the reduction of an research output.

The 2014 REF will have a major impact on all academic careers and consequently the union will be responding to the consultation exercise as well as providing briefing to branches on how best to protect members. We would welcome comments on all aspects of the draft REF draft panel criteria, though we are particularly interested in views on the equality and diversity elements. Please can you send in any comments to Rob Copeland, policy officer rcopeland@ucu.org.uk by no later than Friday 30 September.

2. Further Education Policy Consultations

BIS, DfE and OFSTED have launched a series of consultations on various aspects of Further Education. UCU will be making responses to all of these. If UCU members would like to comment on any of these consultation documents and/or make suggestions as to what should go into the UCU responses, contact Dan Taubman at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk.

The consultations are:

BIS

New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme

This consultation paper makes proposals to promote the government's main aims for adult skills: high-quality teaching and learning at all levels of the adult education system; to 'free colleges and other skills providers from as many bureaucratic restrictions as possible' in order to allow them to respond more effectively to the needs of their local communities; and to secure a fairer balance of investment in skills between the taxpayer, individual learners and employers. Proposals for the next stage of reform are made in the following nine areas: vision for the FE landscape and shape of the sector; introducing Level 3 and 4 loans and sharing responsibility for investing in skills; FE college and training provider freedoms and flexibilities; simplifying the funding system; teaching, learning and qualifications; review of Informal Adult and Community Learning; review of literacy and numeracy provision for adults; delivering higher education and skills; and deregulation and devolution.

New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme: FE Loans

This consultation examines how BIS can implement the loans policy and delivery model to ensure that there is an 'efficient and effective' loans system in place. Loans will apply to all provision at Level 3/4 for those aged 24 and over, including Access to HE courses as well as Advanced and Higher Level Apprenticeships.

New Challenges, New Chances: Next Steps in Implementing the Further Education Reform Programme: Review of Informal and Community Learning

This consultation sets out the BIS intention for informal and adult community learning (IACL) to 'continue to contribute to people's quality of life, health and well-being'. As a result, BIS will review the use of the Adult Safeguarded Learning (ASL) budget to maximise its contribution to wider policy objectives, such as building the Big Society; delivering value for money by focusing public funding on people who would not otherwise have access to learning and maximising income from learners who can afford to pay; and supporting progression, including to further learning, training and employment. BIS is also undertaking reviews of adult literacy and numeracy.

NIACE Online Survey

As part of the informal adult and community learning (IACL) consultation, NIACE have been funded to undertake an on-line survey for learners and other members of the public to have their say about the future of informal adult community learning. This survey is at:

<http://www.niace.org.uk/current-work/the-iacl-review> and is sponsored by BIS as part of its review of informal adult learning. NIACE believe that this is a real opportunity for individuals to influence policy regarding the future of informal adult community learning. It is urging learning providers and others in the sector to encourage and support people to access and complete the survey. The closing date for responses is **Monday 31 October 2011**.

The closing date for consultations above is Friday 21 October. They can all be found at:
<http://www.bis.gov.uk/Consultations/fe-and-skills-new-challenges-new-chances?cat=open>

LSIS have produced quick guides to the consultations which are available at
<http://www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Policy/Pages/Brief-Guides.aspx>

BIS will issue a new policy framework for the FE landscape during 2011/12, replacing the current framework, Further Education Colleges – Models for Success. This will contain advice and information on the wide range of possible organisational and business models that are available for colleges and training organisations to consider. BIS will also be setting out 'further freedoms' including streamlining the approval process for vocational qualifications, and removing the contractual requirement for providers to submit an annual self-assessment report to the Skills Funding Agency and Ofsted, in favour of this becoming a sector-led approach to performance scrutiny.

DfE

Consultation on Care To Learn

This consultation is on how changes to how *Care to Learn* will continue to support teenage parents in education and unpaid training in England. This consultation closes on Friday 28 October.

The DfE consultation can be found at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm>

OFSTED

Consultation on Revisions to the Common Inspection Framework

Within the direction of policy to have an overall policy to have a more proportionate inspection regime with a light touch or no inspection for colleges previously judged as 'outstanding' or 'good', but with more focused inspections for those judged 'satisfactory' or 'poor'. Such inspections, it is intended, will result in fewer judgements and grades, leading to reports on the most important aspects of learning and skills provision. The proposed revised Common Inspection Framework can be found at:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/common-inspection-framework-2012>.

The closing date is Thursday 24 November 2011.

3. Policy in Scotland

Governance Review

The Scottish Government has announced a review of governance in Scottish Universities which is to report by the end of the year. The STUC is represented by Terry Brotherstone,

former UCU Scotland President, on the five person panel which includes a Principal, NUS and two representatives of governing bodies. UCU Scotland is submitting written evidence to the panel using examples of good and bad practice in governance and is calling for an overhaul of governing bodies to increase democracy. Further, UCU will submit evidence highlighting the lack of consultation and accountability of senior management to both the governing and the university body.

Legislative Consultation

Following a consultation on higher education prior to the election in May, the Scottish Government is to introduce a bill on both higher and further education by the end of 2012. The first stage in this process is pre-legislative consultation which was formally announced on 14 September. The consultation will cover all areas of higher education from the learning journey to research funding in Scotland.

Fees for rest of UK students

UCU has objected to the proposal that universities in Scotland can charge other UK students a variable fee, introducing a market. In responding to a legislative consultation UCU has called for a system that dissuades other UK students coming to Scotland for purely financial reasons but is cost neutral for institutions. Two universities have announced they will charge the highest fees in the UK.

4. Policy in Northern Ireland

NI Executive announcement, Thursday 8th September 2011: Tuition Fees Frozen for Four Years – and £40m budget deficit for HE

UCU strongly welcomed the decision taken by the Northern Ireland Executive not to increase tuition fees (beyond the rate of inflation) for higher education students for the duration of this Parliament. UCU had campaigned alongside the National Union of Students/Union of Students of Ireland, for the NI Assembly not to follow the Westminster government in permitting universities in England to increase tuition fees up to £9000pa. UCU along with NUS/USI had organised a march and rally in Belfast involving several thousand students, lecturers and their supporters just before the Assembly election earlier this year to highlight the issue.

Following Minister for Employment and Learning Dr Stephen Farry's announcement yesterday afternoon, Regional Official Jim McKeown said:

"This is really good news for students and their parents here. Students can now plan for their future without the fear of accumulating the massive debts faced by students in England. Our universities can also plan their courses without the fear of a huge funding hit in their budgets. This is a really big decision by the Northern Ireland government which everyone will welcome. It underlines the commitment of our politicians to put the education of our young people to the highest levels at the centre of social policy. It is a huge investment for the

future by way of developing the talents and skills of our brightest young people. This will greatly benefit our economy in the long term."

On the same day it was also announced that Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, secured additional funds from the Executive to address the £40million higher education budget deficit that will allow tuition fees to be kept at current levels.

The funding package that has been put in place will ensure the sustainable funding of the higher education sector and address the resultant budgetary pressures.

Minister Farry said: "My overarching concern is to ensure that Northern Ireland continues to have a world class higher education system and that university study is available to all, irrespective of background. I am now in a position to take final policy decisions that will shape the future of the higher education sector in this region.

"The Executive's decision clearly demonstrates the recognition of the importance of higher education for our economy. Our universities fulfil a crucial role as economic drivers, contributing positively to skills, research and development, and a knowledge based economy."

The Minister set out his decisions on the future policy on higher education tuition fees and student finance arrangements in a statement to the Assembly on 12 September.

Minister for Employment and Learning Addresses Assembly – Monday 12th September 2011:

In his address, the Minister for Employment & Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, outlined how the consultation into tuition fees garnered a high level of response from wide-ranging interests, but that the consensus opposed increased tuition fees. The £40m funding deficit would be found from other measures such as reduction or cessation of funding for innovation, for example. Painful budget adjustments would have to be made. There will now be a consultation document into Education Maintenance Allowance and decisions made around that in the autumn. He said his Department is not looking to abolish EMA but 'unlock inconsistencies in the current system'. There would be challenges for all other departments, and for the HE sector, he said, but he believed the decision by the executive could be justified.

Addressing the issue of tuition fees for the 30% of under-graduates who leave NI to study in GB, the Minister said that he could confirm that domiciled students who want to attend universities elsewhere in the UK would be supported in fees up to £9,000; a decision which will allay the concerns of many young people – but that this may be reviewed in future years.

The current repayment regime will remain as it is now, with the repayment threshold just over £15,000.

He said that the decision on tuition fees was 'good news for Northern Ireland' and its economy, and would help take forward the Higher Education strategy which will be published in the autumn.

The Minister also confirmed that the further education sector would not be affected.

'Not a penny is coming from the FE sector as the skills agenda is crucial to our economy', he said.

5. Policy in Wales

UCU Wales has responded to a consultation on the future governance arrangement for further education institutions in Wales. The consultation closed during the summer, and we are currently awaiting a response from the Welsh Government on their next steps.

During the summer, HEFCW have issued guidance to the Welsh Minister for Education and Skills on the future structure of universities in Wales. HEFCW's guidance included plans to merge several universities in Wales, to create a sector with six institutions by 2013, in line with the Welsh Government's plans. The proposals include for Cardiff University to become a world leading institution, and for Swansea University to achieve its ambition of becoming a Million+ group member. The other proposals include the merger of Trinity St David's and Swansea Metropolitan universities, the merger of UWIC, Glamorgan and the University of Wales Newport, the merger of Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities, and for Glyndwr University to work in further collaboration with the FE sector in North Wales. UCU Wales is currently drafting a response to the consultation.

The Welsh Government has issued another consultation on the funding for part time higher education and part time students. The proposals include the way that universities receive funding for part time students as well as tuition fee loans and grants for part time students, ending up-front tuition costs for part time students. UCU Wales is currently drafting its response to the consultation.

The Welsh Government has also issued a consultation on its draft budget for 2012-2013. The Welsh Labour Government, in their election manifesto, committed to increasing the number of apprenticeships available in Wales, as well as the creation of a youth fund for jobs and training. UCU Wales have responded noting that it is essential that any fund to support apprenticeship opportunities should have regard to the disproportionate impact that apprenticeship funding can have on women, whilst also considering the possibilities of part-time or flexible apprenticeships to allow women to undertake caring responsibilities and an apprenticeship. On the future job fund, UCU Wales have noted the Welsh Government should take into consideration any additional support such as childcare, to ensure that young women are able to take advantage of the proposed young people's jobs and training fund. In addition, UCU Wales have noted that each measure of the budget has the potential to further the progress of equality, and that any budget produced should be analysed to determine whether there is a disproportionate impact on any equality groups.

6. NUT-UCU-Institute of Education 14-19 Education

In the spring of 2011, UCU and NUT together with Professors Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours of the Institute of Education, started a research project into practitioners' views of developments in 14-19 education and training. The first part of this work was a survey that was sent to UCU and NUT members, on their perceptions of the various policies and changes that had taken place in this phase of education over the last decade. The survey was followed up by a conference. Both the conference report and the findings of the survey are available from Dan Taubman at dtaubman@ucu.org.uk. The work will be continuing this year with another survey, this time trying to discover practitioners' perceptions and views of the current Government's policies in 14-19 education and training. The survey will be in the spring 2012 and it is hoped to follow this up with a series of focus groups/seminars in various centres around the country. If you are interested in taking part in the work contact Dan Taubman at the email address above.

7. DfE Consultation on Initial Teacher Education June 2011

The Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, published his consultation on Initial Teacher Education (ITE), 'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers: An improvement strategy for discussion', Department for Education (DfE) June 2011 (deadline 28 July), which pursues the argument in his November 2010 White Paper that ITE should become 'school-led' on-the-job training as 'teaching is a craft...best learnt as an apprentice'. UCU is completely opposed to any wholesale shift of ITE away from the currently highly successful HEI-school partnership model which received the best OfSTED evaluation ever in the HMI Annual Report 2010.

The UCU response is available at:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/7/g/UCU_response_to_Training_our_next_generation_of_outstanding_teachers.pdf. Email dhendry@ucu.org.uk for copies of the responses from the National Union of Teachers and the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET).

There is a unanimity in these responses which is also reflected in the response of the 'Million+' HE mission Group, available at:

<http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/newsandviews/who-teaches-the-teachers>

8. Whole College Behaviour Policy Project

Behaviour and classroom management are a continual issue for UCU FE members. With the Wolf Report's recommendation that colleges start enrolling students full time from the age of 14, and with both adult and young students facing increasing poverty and other pressures, behaviour problems will increase. Last year UCU made a successful application to LSIS for funds for a project to develop a whole college policy and approach to behaviour management. Such a policy should be pro-active and be about promoting good behaviour across a college rather than just focusing on poor behaviour and essentially being a student disciplinary policy. There are examples of such policies in some local authorities and schools but rarely

are FE colleges included in such approaches. So far the Project has been collecting college policies on behaviour to see if there are elements of good practice that can be incorporated in any new policy that the Project can utilize in its work. The Project will also be undertaking an on-line survey of UCU FE members' perceptions of behaviour issues and what does and doesn't work for them. The Project will be establishing an Advisory Group to assist it. If you are interested in participating in the survey and/or would like to know more about the Project and/or joining the Advisory Group, contact the Project Worker, Dave Parry on dparry@ucu.org.uk or Dan Taubman dtaubman@ucu.org.uk.

9. Forthcoming Events

Briefings on changes to education policy in adult and community learning, October

UCU and regional offices have organised a series of briefing meetings for UCU members working in informal adult and community learning. If you would like to attend, contact the member of staff listed under each region and date.

London, South East, Anglia, Southern, South West Regions

Saturday 1 October, 2.30pm at UCU head office, Carlow St, London NW1. Contact Noreen Lee at nlee@ucu.org.uk.

North West and Yorkshire and Humberside Regions

Wednesday 5 October, 12.00 noon, at UCU Manchester (FE) Office, Lancastrian Office Centre Talbot Road, Old Trafford, Manchester M32 0FP. Contact Rob Crowther at rcrowther@ucu.org.uk or Neva Blakesley at nblakesley@ucu.org.uk.

East and West Midlands Region

Friday 28 October, 11.00am to 3.00pm at UCU Birmingham Office, 2nd Floor, Alpha Tower, Suffolk Street Birmingham B1 1TT. Contact Lesley Foley at lfoley@ucu.org.uk or Jennette Estridge at jestridge@ucu.org.uk

Academic Freedom Conference, Sheffield University UCU, Friday 21 October

On Friday 21 October Sheffield University UCU will be hosting a one day conference on Academic Freedom. Guest speakers will include:

- Professor Philip Moriarty, School of Physics and Astronomy, University of Nottingham

Apart from pursuing path-breaking research on nanoscience, Philip has taken a keen interest in science funding policy, has been a vocal critic of the RCUK/HEFCE schemes related to the use of impact as a criterion in the assessment of research proposals. He

also has particular concerns regarding the distortion of academic research via the imposition of near-term and near-market objectives.

- Professor Marie Breen-Smyth, Department of Politics, University of Surrey

Marie is one of the initiators of a critical approach to terrorism studies and a founding editor of the journal *Critical Terrorism Studies*. She has raised publicly concerns about sources of funding increasingly coming from organizations with political agendas which can lead to serious distortions in the understanding of policy issues.

- Rob Copeland - UCU Higher Education Policy Officer

For further information and details of how to book a place please email ucu@sheffield.ac.uk or visit our website at:

http://ucu.group.shef.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=2&Itemid=4

UCU-LSIS-UNISON FE Staff Governors Conference 2011

The annual UCU-LSIS-UNISON FE Staff Governors Conference will be on Thursday 24 November, 10.30am to 4pm at UCU's head office on Carlow St, London NW1. The title of this year's conference is 'New Government, New Institutions: Change and Development in College Structures and Governance'. Rob Wye, CEO of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, will be the keynote speaker and there will be case studies from colleges. The conference will explore some of the developments around college structures and partnerships that are beginning to emerge. There will be a small fee of £35 for the conference. Those interested should email: dhendry@ucu.org.uk.

If you have any comments or feedback on PolicyNews, please send to Diana Hendry at dhendry@ucu.org.uk.