

Jobs and education

regaining the trust of young people



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This pamphlet began as a paper presented by NEC member Sean Vernell to UCU's Further Education Committee. The committee adopted it as a campaigning tool to help defend further and adult education in the face of the growing crisis in post-16 education and as a response to the riots by young people in August 2011.

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Introduction

UCU has always argued that if further and adult education is to continue to play the vital role it has done in the past, then it needs to be properly funded.

Further and adult education has always played a central role in giving a second chance to young adults who may not have achieved as much as they would have liked at school. Every so often events occur that underline the importance and significance of the sector to achieving social cohesion and providing hope for some of the most disadvantaged in our society. Following the 1981 riots significant sums of government spending were channelled into YTS, YOPS and other training schemes, often of dubious value. There was also an increase in the funding of further and adult education.

Alongside this increase we saw an acceleration of the shifting of the sector from one based primarily on training and skills for local employers, to one where values of general education, encompassing both vocational and academic elements, coexisted. As a result of this, there was an increase in access to further and higher education by young people who had not previously seen tertiary education as a path to developing their abilities.

UCU has consistently argued that if further and adult education is to continue to play the vital role it has done in the past, then it needs to be properly funded. Its educational role cannot be driven by a narrow vocationalism.

For those who work in further and adult education the civil unrest that erupted onto our streets in August 2011 was predictable. The abolition of the education maintenance allowance (EMA) and the raising of university fees confirmed the sense felt by many young people that the government had written off their futures. For many of our young adults there is a deep sense of anger, frustration and fear about their futures. This, in turn, has led some to feel alienated

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and distrustful of a society that fails to provide space for their concerns to be listened to and does not make them feel secure. Furthermore, the cuts in teaching and course provision will accelerate the drive towards elitism in education, which will cascade throughout 14–19 education resulting in the narrowing and stratification of the curriculum offer.

The government's response was as predictable as the reaction of those young people to their feelings of insecurity. All the old dogmas of 'criminal classes', 'parental discipline', 'greed', 'feral underclass' and 'lack of values' were used alongside mass arrests and imprisonment to regain order. These kinds of explanations and resorting to tactics which create fear will only deepen the sense of alienation that many young people feel.

We in UCU believe that the riots should be wake-up call to all those who work and run education services in Britain. As educationalists, we believe that further and adult education can play an essential part in helping win back the trust and respect of young people. However, for this to happen there must be an urgent reassessment of the role of further and adult education and how it is funded.

The job creation schemes that the government has put forward seem to have learnt very little from the disastrous YOP schemes of the 1980s.

Jobs: the bedrock of security

The government's recent announcement to invest £1bn over a three-year period into creating training for 16-24-year-olds was a response to the riots that took place in the summer. Although the extra funding is welcome, it is far too little to resolve the national scandal of 1.02 million unemployed young people. It amounts to only just over £330 million per year. The money is not new money, it's taken from the working family tax credits which will be frozen for the next three years. By giving a small amount to young people on the one hand they are simultaneously hitting them, and their families, even harder on the other.

The job creation schemes that the government has put forward seem to have learnt very little from the disastrous YOP schemes of the 1980s. As the BBC reported Brendon Barber, the general secretary of the TUC, say:

There are already widespread reports of young people on the programme being exploited. Keen unemployed youngsters desperate to find work shouldn't be conscripted into edging out other workers who should have been paid the going rate for the job.

In the foreword written by Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, to Professor Alison Wolf's report into further and adult education, he states:

We already know what good looks like. Apprenticeships at BT or Rolls-Royce are more oversubscribed than the most desirable course at the best university. These types of courses offer a route to good salaries and quick promotion at world-beating firms. What's more, many of the best courses – like those offered by BT – hold open the door for further study in higher education.

It is good to see that the Secretary of State has discovered vocational education and the importance of apprenticeships.

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The problem is the government are not implementing policies that will create jobs or apprenticeships. In fact they are cutting budgets and presiding over another economic downturn that has already raised youth unemployment to one million. One in five 16–24-year-olds are without work or education. Fifty percent of young black men are unemployed. As one of the heads of the IMF recently stated:

It's probably too much to say that it's a jobless recovery, but it is certainly a recovery with not enough jobs. Especially because of youth unemployment... There is now a risk that this will be turned into a life sentence, and that there is a possibility of a lost generation.

Indeed young people have taken the brunt of the economic crisis (although the notion that there has been a recovery seems rather far fetched). Over the past 30 years, youth unemployment has become institutionalised; now only a minority of 16-25 year olds are in the workforce. This was not always the case. From the end of the Second World War to the end of the 1960s unemployment rates among young people were lower than those in the working population as a whole.

One million climate jobs

UCU believes the government must act immediately to create real jobs and apprenticeships for young people. We have a global economic crisis and a global environmental crisis. Finding a solution to the climate crisis will help us to solve the economic one. That is why UCU supports the demand for one million climate jobs. We need jobs that deal with the impact of climate change as well as those that will prevent a further descent into global warming.

The government's strategy document *Enabling the transition to a Green Economy* (August, 2011) falls well short of what is required. There is no clear strategy for delivering green prosperity. At the heart of the problem is the view that an 'employer-led' approach will deliver. The experience since the

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signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 shows this is wishful thinking. The green skills gap is now a major stumbling block to delivering the transition to a low carbon economy. UCU believes that an integrated skills strategy should cover:

- the effective embedding of Education for Sustainable Development across the curriculum
- the rapid introduction of a short-course sustainability skills programme to train the existing workforce
- an expansion of quality apprenticeships based on a coherent system of delivery
- addressing the inequalities in apprenticeships to ensure access by under-represented groups
- promoting effective community engagement by the further and adult education sector to support the supply and demand issues of skills and jobs
- ensuring that employers take the educational needs of their employees seriously. They should be given a statutory right to paid educational leave and to workplace training committees. Trade unions must be given negotiating rights for education and training.

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A diverse curriculum

The Wolf Report makes some valid points but it is too narrow in its approach and does not locate the root of the problem to succeed. If young adults are going to give education a second chance they have to believe that it is worth their while. To do this we have to create a different narrative of education for young people. The narrow employer-driven entwining of education with employment has led many to become disillusioned with education. Especially when the skills they are learning are for non-existent jobs. They simply ask: 'what's the point?'

The obsession with exams and grades has forced students to follow narrowly-based criteria to pass exams at the expense of developing the ability to think critically and be creative.



Students from working class and disadvantaged backgrounds have been taught to believe that courses only have a value if they are directly relevant to the particular needs of employment. Therefore, learning History or English literature, as an example, is seen as pointless. Successive governments have done a great deal of damage to our young people's understanding of what education is by pandering to the right wing populist newspapers' bias towards what they see as 'Mickey Mouse' courses.

There needs to be a fresh approach coming from government that disentangles education from employment. This requires

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the creation of a vocational educational curriculum that includes apprenticeships. This involves creativity in problem-solving and democratic citizenship concerns as well as a more broadly-based work skills – approaches that will increase engagement with learning and society. In fact this approach not only helps to create a more rounded student but one who is also able to navigate his/her way around challenging and difficult social and economic climates.

The obsession with exams and grades has forced students to follow narrowly-based criteria to pass exams at the expense of developing the ability to think critically and be creative. The shift in many vocational courses from an overwhelming focus on outcomes at the expense of valuing the process of learning has often led to a ‘tick box’ approach that offers no depth of study and limited opportunities for developing transferrable skills.

There is often a false dichotomy within education between the vocational and the academic. We in the further education sector have a proud history of teaching and preparing young adults for employment as well as providing a wide range of opportunities for academic study.

UCU believes that:

- A levels should not become an elite entry qualification to an elite higher education system
- those learners who are not suited to, or choose not to take, A levels or apprenticeships must be provided with alternative programmes. These should offer wider learning experiences that are an integral part of a vocational curriculum. Our students need to learn about their rights, the role of trade unions, citizenship, discrimination, participating in democracy and environmental issues
- a multicultural education is essential to the social cohesion of our communities.

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UCU is for:

- bringing back democratic control of awarding bodies
- reinstating a full information, advice and guidance programme by reversing the 8,0000 Connexions redundancies
- providing personalised career advice, face-to-face with students rather than the electronic and telephone contact that will be offered by the new national career service
- a real engagement with the needs of young people. We oppose forced education to age 18, community volunteering projects, a return to YTS-type schemes, national service or other forms of coercion of young people alienated by the education system
- the promotion of multiculturalism, throughout the curriculum, as a positive development within British society.

The government proposal to withdraw all subsidies for learning programmes at Level 3 and above and replace them with a system of loans for those over the age of 24 will do irreparable damage.

Funding

Since the coalition government came to office there has been no new money put into 16–19 provision, and adult education has been significantly cut. Thousands of lecturers have been made redundant since 2010. UCU welcomes the government's decision not to make cuts to funding which would have excluded up to 75% of adults on so called 'inactive' benefits, who want to learn to speak English (ESOL) and excludes asylum seekers. However, it is very concerned that this decision is only for one year.

The government proposal to withdraw all subsidies for learning programmes at Level 3 and above and replace them with a system of loans for those over the age of 24 will do irreparable damage to the whole infrastructure of education and training for adults at Level 3 and above.

We also believe that the funding mechanisms are riddled with inconsistencies and inequalities. For example:

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- The 16-19 funding cut has led so far to a 75% decrease in resources for tutorials and activities outside the classroom.
- The government has announced 16-19 funding will be cut by 1% over next two years. This money will put into academies and free schools.
- The introduction of loans for FE courses at Level 3 and above in 2013-14 for over-24s will hit young people's learning just as they emerge as adults.
- The introduction of fees has meant that there will be loans for apprenticeships and over-24s, with the entitlement for Level 2s and 3s restricted to those under 24.

We propose that:

- funding per student be levelled upwards to that in schools, not schools levelled down to FE
- full funding for fees be restored to all adult and further education courses
- EMA and ALG be fully restored
- there should be no tuition fees
- student loans should be abolished and replaced with a living grant and the new FE loans proposals be dropped
- there should be clear funding commitments to further education provision over a 10-year period, not the stop-start approach currently adopted
- the cuts in adult learning should be reversed
- adult learning should be given equal funding status with other provision
- asylum seekers should be given the right to free education.

The Market and competition

At the heart of what straightjackets the sector from being able to meet the needs of all its students are the market mechanisms and competition that have been brought into the sector since incorporation in 1993. UCU has often pointed to the absurdities of competition that drives college managements to create policies designed to sink their competitor colleges.

Despite the talk of putting the student at the centre of college life, the attempt to compete for funding means that real choice is denied as colleges serve up a menu based upon the cheapest ingredients and the quickest and underhand ways of ensuring that their neighbouring college is put out of business.

The increase in competition between schools, colleges (and between colleges) and the growth of academies, free schools and university technical colleges will not and cannot meet the challenges that face our young people. The government needs to create an education system that is genuinely responsive to the needs of our communities. We need to remove the market from education and replace it with a system that is genuinely planned and based upon the needs of learners and providers.

UCU proposes planning

We believe that the sector needs to be planned around an educational rationale as opposed to blind competition. Colleges need to work alongside all education sectors – nursery, school and university – within a strategic plan which meets the needs of the whole community.

At present colleges will not spend money on expensive infrastructure because it is far too costly in terms of finance and space. If such considerations could be consigned to history, and if colleges and schools worked democratically together

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on such a plan, not in competition, then the lives of millions could be transformed, and FE could help to drive forward economic regeneration.

We propose that:

- the further and adult education sector is brought back under the democratic control of local authority / regional bodies
- further and adult education is brought back together into the same government department
- borough-wide cross-sector education forums be established with representatives from local unions, parent groups, student unions, community leaders and employers. Their role would be to map out the educational needs of the community and to develop a joint education sector plan
- a skills audit is conducted to gauge what skills will be required to develop the economy now and in the future.

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Colleges for the community

We believe that colleges must be responsive to all those who live and work in a local community: pensioners, young adults, faith groups, cultural groups, families and local employers. A community-based college is a place where the people of that community come to gain qualifications, to learn a trade, gain skills or learn simply for fun. It needs to become a centre which all the community feel belongs to them. The following steps need to be taken to re-engage the community with our colleges:

- There should be regular feedback forums and outreach with local groups to explore the real educational needs of all those in the community.
- Fees should be scrapped and all courses in further education should be free.
- Adult learning services provision should be rebuilt and the offer of outreach provision should be reinstated.

Respecting the role of the professional teacher in further education

We have witnessed the teacher's role change in recent years. We believe that the role of the teacher should be valued and respected. An erosion of pay and conditions has resulted in a workforce that is overburdened and stressed. We call for:

- an increase in the democratisation of colleges to value the professional judgements of teachers
- FE teaching to be seen as a transformative profession, not merely skills preparation for jobs
- an end to casualisation
- a reduction in levels of administration and red tape
- equal pay with similar professionals.

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UCU believes that, together, we can campaign and create a sector that can raise the expectations of our learners to prepare them for the difficult times that many will face in the future.



Campaigning suggestions

UCU believes that, together, we can campaign and create a sector that can raise the expectations of our learners to prepare them for the difficult times that many will face in the future. To do so we need to get our message across. Here are three suggestions for your branch:

- Approach your senior management team and suggest organising a *conversation with the community*. This is where the college invites local youth leaders, trade union organisations, religious leaders, local MPs, councillors, employers, community leaders and pensioner groups into the college to speak about their needs and how they think the college can help to meet them.
- Organise a themed learning week entitled *The riots: if Britain is Broken how do we fix it?*
- Build links with local trade unions, community, faith and youth groups to campaign to promote the further and adult education issues in this paper.

