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### 1. **Defend Public Education Conference, Saturday 10 March**

On 10 March the union's education committee held a very successful conference on the defence of public education. About 90 members, together with colleagues from other unions and organisations, attended to discuss the attack on public education and our response.

The contributions from the different sectors of education represented at the conference brought out the threat posed by current policies to the concept of education as a public service open to all. A number of speakers contrasted the political and public reaction to threats to the National Health Service with the reaction to policies like academies, free schools and tuition fees.

How do we revive an understanding of and belief in the right of access to all to a free, publicly-funded high quality education service? There was an interesting debate about such issues as what we mean by "public" in this context and how we might challenge the government's notion of education for employability without falling into the trap of appearing to undervalue vocational education.

One suggestion is to try to draw up a set of principles that could form the basis for a broad alliance of organisations committed to the defence of public education. This and other ideas and materials from the conference will be posted on the UCU website shortly (keep an eye on [www.ucu.org.uk/defendpubliceducation](http://www.ucu.org.uk/defendpubliceducation)). It will be important to maintain the momentum from the conference and to widen the debate as much as possible.

## **2. Independent review calls for scrapping of compulsory fees for college lecturers**

UCU welcomed the news that staff in further education colleges would no longer be forced to pay a fee to do their job. An independent panel set up by John Hayes said the IfL could not remain a compulsory body and money should be refunded to staff who had paid to join.

As well as welcoming the news that IfL membership is no longer compulsory, the union said it was looking forward to playing a role in the wider review of professionalism that the Review Panel will be moving on to consider.

Sally Hunt said: "We are pleased that the panel has recognised compulsory membership of the IfL is a bad move. We are also delighted that the relatively small number of people who did pay the fee will now be reimbursed.

"Boycotting the IfL was not a decision UCU members took lightly, but to be effective as a professional body it must enjoy the confidence of the majority of practitioners."

The full report can be found on the department for business, innovation and skills website here: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/p/12-670-professionalism-in-further-education-interim.pdf>

The report says: "The panel recommends that, as already planned, public funding to the IfL should come to an end in the financial year 2012-13. When combined with our recommendation to revoke the 2007 Regulations, this advice will restore the IfL to its original status as a private membership body, dependent on voluntary subscriptions in return for services."

For UCU and its members issues around professionalism in the sector have not been put to bed in the report. This is an interim report dealing with the IfL issue. UCU, like others involved in FE, want the best teachers in or colleges delivery high-quality education with the appropriate qualifications and access to further training and personal development. UCU is looking forward to contributing to the wider review of professionalism of further education, where UCU will continue to make those points.

## **3. Policy in Scotland**

### **Governance Review**

The Education and Culture Committee took evidence on the review of higher education governance report on Tuesday 13 March from the chair of the review panel, Professor Ferdinand von Prondzynski.

Ahead of the meeting UCU sent the MSPs on the committee a briefing and issued a press release encouraging them to endorse the report.

However during the session there was a long discussion about FE governance, the ability of universities to attract staff if salaries are more open, remuneration of chairs and the desirability to include staff in Rector elections.

One of the themes of the session was lack of evidence that the proposed changes would improve universities and their provision. This misses the point that the present systems are failing as shown by our examples where these changes would have provided better outcomes.

Latest information and documents can be found at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/RHEG>.

### **Post-16 education reform**

In a statement to Parliament on 29<sup>th</sup> February, Education Secretary Michael Russell confirmed the Scottish Government will introduce legislation in the next parliamentary session to take forward changes to the post-16 system. The government also published the summary and response to the post-16 education consultation.

The main theme of the response is putting the learner at the centre including whether legislation could be used to strengthen the role of community learning and development.

On widening access the government will intend to legislate on outcome agreements to support activities to widen access to higher education and will work with the Scottish Funding Council, the NUS and universities to build on the SFC's report into improving articulation, advanced entry and flexible learning in HE.

Research funding is to be concentrated on 3\* and 4\* research as set out in the grant letters so that for the first time research funding in Scotland will be as concentrated as in the rest of the UK.

Since the statement discussions with civil servants have revealed that a draft bill will not be published in the spring but that a bill may be submitted in the autumn. However, any governance statute will be included in a later bill.

Further the proposals on governance are expected to be clearer by the summer recess following consultations with the sector.

### **4. New: 'Academic Freedom: A Guide for Early Careers Staff'**

UCU's survey of younger members in 2009 (see [here](#)) found that a common experience for new entrants to the profession was not feeling able to question established practices or express their own ideas about how things should be done. UCU believes strongly in the principle of academic freedom and the role of education professionals to question and test received wisdom and we are pleased to launch a brand new publication '*Academic Freedom: A Guide For Early Careers Staff*' here:

[http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/5/r/Academic\\_freedom\\_info\\_ec\\_members.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/5/r/Academic_freedom_info_ec_members.pdf)

## 5. OFSTED

A new chief inspector a new OFSTED regime: the new Chief Inspector at OFSTED is Sir Michael Wilshaw, ex-head of Mossbourne Academy in Hackney. No sooner than his feet were under the desk than he has announced changes to OFSTED inspections. There is consultation open on the changes, available at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-education-for-all>. The consultation is on changing grade 3 'satisfactory' to grade 3 'requires improvement'. If a college or service receives a grade 3 or 4 then it will be re-inspected within a year or 18 months. If it is still grade 3 or 4 there will be another re-inspection and if it is still a grade 3 or 4, then 'special measures' will be implemented.

The other changes are a tightening of no-notice inspections and that a grade 1 will only be given if teaching and learning are grade 1. Those providers which have had a grade 1 but whose teaching and learning may have a lower grade will be subject to inspection.

All this means that colleges will be even more worried about OFSTED grades and this no doubt will manifest itself in even more draconian lesson observations.

## 6. Higher Education Course Provision

The total number of full-time undergraduate courses offered by UK universities and colleges has fallen by more than a quarter since 2006 as funding cuts and increases in tuition fees hit higher education. And analysis of a sample of single-subject degree courses showed a 14% cut since 2006, although the number rose slightly in 2012.

Research by University and College Union based on data provided by UCAS shows that between 2006 and 2012, the total number courses offered in the UK fell from 70,052 to 51,116, a reduction of 27%.

Since institutions may withdraw offered courses during the applications cycle because, for example, insufficient students apply for them, UCAS also produces data on the number of courses available at the end of the applications cycle. This is called the final or published number of courses, and showed a fall of 29% in the UK, from 50,077 to 35,687 courses, between 2006 and 2012.

The reduction of total courses on offer during the applications cycle was greatest in England, with a drop of 31%, followed by Northern Ireland (24%), Wales (11%) and Scotland (3%). Public spending cuts are the most severe in England, where funding reductions are being implemented at the same time as public spending on teaching in higher education is being replaced by full-time undergraduate tuition fees of up to £9,000 a year.

Nevertheless, within the regions England there is a wide range in the extent of course cutting. Nearly half (47%) of undergraduate courses are being cut in the South West, but only 1% of courses are being cut in the East Midlands.

Philip Schofield, professor of the history of legal and political thought, and director of the Bentham Project at University College London, told UCU: '... limiting the number of courses will diminish the student experience by curtailing their choice of subjects. It will adversely affect new and innovative research by taking away the opportunities for researchers to

present their latest findings and discussing their latest theories to a receptive and inquisitive audience of students. It will close off sources of knowledge. To sum up, it will make UK universities a much less attractive proposition for both home and international students, who value the depth and diversity of our research and teaching.'

\*<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2267>

## **7. Policy in Wales**

### **Plaid Cymru elect Leanne Wood as new leader**

On 15 March, Plaid Cymru elected Leanne Wood AM (South Wales Central) as their new leader. The other two candidates in the election were Elin Jones AM (Ceredigion) and Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM (Dwyfor Meirionydd).

In the first round of voting, Ms Wood won 2,879 votes to Ms Jones's 1,884 and Lord Elis Thomas's 1,278. As no candidate had more than half the votes, Lord Elis-Thomas was eliminated and the second-preference votes of his supporters were redistributed, giving Ms Wood 3,326 and Ms Jones 2,494.

Ms Wood after her election called for "real independence". She is currently learning to speak Welsh and promised to be an "open, forward looking, positive and constructive" leader.

Ms Wood is a pro-independence, republican, feminist who is also a committed trade unionist and is a member of Unison. She also chairs the National Assembly's PCS Cross Party Group.

In a previous life before her election to frontline politics in 2003, Ms Wood worked as a probation officer, as well as being a support worker for Women's Aid. She also lectured in social care at Cardiff University from 2000 to 2003.

During her time in the National Assembly she has campaigned on numerous issues. Her scrutiny work in the past led to the unveiling that the Welsh Audit Office had authorised a redundancy package for its former CEO for £750,000. Other work has identified that thousands of workers in Wales were paid less than the minimum wage since 2003. Most recently, her work has focused around Cardiff University, unveiling that they planned to spend £675,000 on a new house for the new VC, and that currently 237 members of staff now earned more than £100,000, up 14 from the previous year.

Her policy development work has seen her publish two papers, one on making communities safer by calling for the justice system to be devolved. The most recent paper was a "Greenprint for Valleys", where she argued for job creation and the regeneration of Valleys coalfields.

Many political commentators in Wales have suggested that her election will see the party being able to challenge for votes in the less traditional Welsh speaking and more socialist areas of the south Wales valleys.

## 8. AQA Request UCU Nominee

AQA the exam body has written to UCU asking for a UCU nominee to sit on its curriculum and assessment quality committee from April 1 2012 for 3 years. We can submit more than 1 person and then AQA would select the person to sit on this committee from those names submitted. They also state that they would welcome the nomination of women and from BME groups and individuals. This Committee meets 3 times a year. Nominations should be from people who are active in their field (subject) and with current or recent exam and assessment experience in AQA qualifications. If UCU nominated a person and they were selected by AQA, support would be available from the Policy Department and it would involve sending a regular report to UCU. Nominations close March 31. UCU members interested should contact Dan Taubman by 26 March with contact details and a short CV: [dtaubman@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dtaubman@ucu.org.uk).

## 9. Policy in Northern Ireland

### Consultation into future of Department of Employment and Learning continues

The OFMDFM is consulting with stakeholders regarding the future of the Department of Employment and Learning. UCU has submitted its response, with a clear preference for further and higher education to be placed under the Department of Education.

The Committee for Employment and Learning has been running its own consultation with stakeholders; and is holding a 'stakeholder event' on 18 April.

The decision is expected in May 2012, but there is a strong lobby from various stakeholders in further and higher education – in particular from Colleges NI and the two universities, and also for the business sector, for FE and HE to be placed within the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry. It is possible it will be renamed the Department for the Economy.

On 29 February the vice chancellors from the two higher education institutions here presented their joint position on the future positioning of the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

They believe higher and further education should be lodged under the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Industry, despite the fact that the further education budget alone is higher than the entire budget for the DETI (£207 million) and despite the fact that DEL's budget is almost four times that of DETI.

Both universities highlighted their links with industry here – that the potential for HE and FE to be forged within DETI is at the heart of the Programme for Government, the economic strategy and the skills agenda.

The VCs would be happy for teacher training to be under the Department of Education. This they say would end the anomaly whereby teacher training is commissioned by the Department of Education and funded by DEL.

Committee chairman basil McCrea suggests that as education is a continuing spectrum, it should surely be within the Department of Education?

So will it be more of a merger – whereby Department of Employment and Learning merges with DETI to form a super Department of the Economy?

If so, would that remain under the leadership of the DUPs Arlene Foster?

And what would a Department of the Economy look like? And as a result, Minister Farry would lose his job, which was in effect what the whole scenario is all about. (*When powers of justice were devolved to Northern Ireland last year, an additional department was created – The Department of Justice. It was politically prudent that the Minister should be the leader of the Alliance Party. This meant that Alliance, the fifth ranked party in Northern Ireland, had two ministries – twice what the Ulster Unionist Party and SDLP were entitled to, even though they had considerably higher mandates. Basically, Farry is the fall guy and DEL was always viewed as one of the 'weaker' departments, set up in effect to give the NI Assembly enough Ministries to go round as per the D'Hondt system, as employed here).*

### **Other Policy Decisions in Limbo?**

The future of Educational Maintenance Allowance remains in limbo. It was to go out to consultation in spring 2012 with a decision expected in the autumn, but no document has been forthcoming (as of 12 March).

### **Programme for Government**

On 17 November 2011, the First Minister and deputy First Minister published the draft Programme for Government 2011-2015 for consultation. The draft Programme for Government is a visible commitment by the Executive to work with you through the issues which we all face and to provide the groundwork for economic and social recovery.

It aims to highlight the actions the Executive will take to deliver what it views as the number one priority – a vibrant economy which can transform this fragile and vulnerable society while dealing with the deprivation and poverty of some local communities.

The consultation closed on 22 February.

The consultation into the economic strategy ran parallel to this, also closing on 22 February.

The Assembly endorsed both the Programme for Government and the NI Economic Strategy on Monday 12 March 2012.

Commitments under the Programme for Government 2011-2015 include:

- making the Education and Skills Authority operational by 2013, which will involve bringing legislation before the Assembly that will allow for a single and functional education authority for Northern Ireland?
- ensure there are no increases in student fees for Northern Ireland students studying here
- up-skill the working age population by delivering over 200,000 qualifications
- improve literacy and numeracy levels among all school leavers, with additional resources targeted at areas of educational underachievement.

The Action Plan for the Economic Strategy appears to recognise that Further and Higher Education are core to its implementation – in particular:

- Under Theme A: Stimulating Innovation, R&D and Creativity;
- Theme B – Improving Employability and the Level of Relevance and Use of Skills; and Theme F – Rebuilding, Improving Employment Opportunities and Employability, Promoting Employment
- Investment in further and higher education is the thread that links the overall action plan for the economic strategy.

## **10. Governance and New College Structures**

As part of the Education Act passed last year the Government has abolished the model Instrument and Articles of Governance for FE colleges. This means that colleges are able to come up with their own. This was in line with their policy to give colleges ‘the freedom and flexibility’ to respond to local needs. It would have also meant that colleges would no longer be required to have staff and student governors. UCU, NUS and UNISON lobbied very strongly to retain staff and student governors and succeeded in retaining the requirement for staff and student governors. Indeed the only requirement now for governing bodies is to have staff and student governors. Colleges can start on having new model instruments and articles of governance from 1 April. They will have to publish these and consult on them.

### **Colleges declared part of the private sector**

Last year the Office of National Statistics decided that FE colleges should be classified as part of central government. The decision was largely technical but goes alongside changes that are being introduced in April removing a range of controls on further education and sixth form college corporations, putting them on a similar footing to charities operating within the independent/private sector.

UCU believes that the government has used the original ONS decision as a peg to hang their stated intention to encourage restructures of colleges and unleash market forces in learning and skills development with very few constraints from government. UCU considers that colleges remain in the public sector despite the ONS decision. They are a public good with assets and reputations built up over many years. They are not the playthings for a few to dispose of or plunder for profit. UCU will remain vigilant that any structural changes contemplated by colleges do not depart from their mission of meeting the learning needs of the communities they have always served. UCU is keeping a very close watch on developments under the guise of shared services for example which involve the establishment of separate companies, strategies for outsourcing and injection of more private capital. However we are aware of some colleges already being well advanced on new kinds of structures, partnerships and governance arrangements. If you become aware that your college is contemplating changes, let both your regional office and Dan Taubman at head office know. UCU is committed to fighting any attempts to privatise colleges and developments that will have adverse effect on staff conditions of service or access for students.



## 11. HEFCE Consultation on Student Number Controls and Teaching Funding

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has launched a consultation on 'Student number controls and teaching funding – arrangements for 2013-14 and beyond'. See [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2012/12\\_04/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2012/12_04/) for the consultation document and questions HEFCE is asking (the list of questions is on p. 64-5).

The consultation includes issues such as future limits in England on student numbers, 'core and margin' funding, the amount of teaching funding available for different subjects in higher education in England in 2013-14 and beyond, funding for widening participation, HE in FE, the protection of strategic and vulnerable subjects, flexible learning, and the possibility of private providers entering 'the system' from 2013-14.

If you would like to contribute to this consultation via UCU, please ensure that any comments reach Stephen Court, UCU Senior Research Officer, at [scourt@ucu.org.uk](mailto:scourt@ucu.org.uk) by the end of April.

## 12. ESOL Manifesto

Coming out of the successful ESOL Campaign of last year, a group of ESOL teachers have together launched a short pamphlet, '**The ESOL Manifesto**' with their views of their teaching and professionalism and what ESOL students require as rights in relation to acquiring English. The Manifesto was launched at UCU Head Office on 3 March. A short film of the launch is being prepared. This will be made available on the UCU web site and the Action for ESOL Campaign web site ([www.actionforesol.org](http://www.actionforesol.org)).

If you have any comments or feedback on PolicyNews, please send this to Diana Hendry [dhendry@ucu.org.uk](mailto:dhendry@ucu.org.uk). The next issue will be out in June.