

## Towards a UCU Policy on Professionalism

### Introduction

ESOL teacher professionalism is not only a matter of individuals evolving their classroom skills. The classroom cannot be isolated from the institutional and social world, and to focus solely on classroom methodology leads to a narrow and restrictive idea of professionalism. Language education, like all education, encompasses issues of power and culture. It is inherently political. For ESOL teachers to be truly professional, they need the opportunities to learn about and discuss the political context of ESOL, i.e. the social, cultural and political realities that shape migrant lives and which often cause exclusion and marginalisation. ESOL teachers have both a right and a responsibility to engage with the political and policy issues that affect language students and in particular to challenge discriminatory practices and policies at the local and the national level.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation is taken from the ESOL Manifesto. This publication arose out of successful campaign by ESOL teachers and students to change the rules for eligibility to access to free provision. These were to have been implemented in September 2011. These changes would have denied free learning to those adults who were on 'inactive' benefits, benefits such as income support, disability and incapacity benefits, housing benefit and working tax credit. The largest single group of students in FE colleges to be affected by this would have been ESOL students. The ESOL community, supported by UCU, fought a very creative and committed campaign to get this policy changed. The campaign was successful in that the government did a u-turn, leaving it to individual colleges to decide whether to charge these students fees.

Arising out of the Campaign, but also preceding it, ESOL teachers had fora and networks to discuss their work and pedagogy around their 'subject', ESOL. Partly because these teachers and their students are often marginalised within FE provision, the ESOL community has over time developed a very powerful discourse around their own professionalism. The ESOL Manifesto collected their thoughts and conclusions about ESOL provision and their place within this. This quotation above continues and discusses other aspects of professionalism, such as pay and conditions of service, continuous professional development (CPD), casualisation of the ESOL workforce, research and their own pedagogy.

This quotation gives an excellent starting point to undertake what this paper attempts to do. The paper is intended to start a discussion within UCU about professionalism and a concept of professionalism that fits UCU members and the various roles that they have in universities, colleges, and adult and prison education services. The quotation places this particular group of FE lecturers' ideas of their own professionalism within a

---

<sup>1</sup> The ESOL Manifesto Action for ESOL Campaign 2012. Published UCU

social and political context. It does talk about their particular subject, but what it says about ESOL practice, can be read across to any subject area/discipline that UCU members work in. Similarly it and a more general UCU concept of professionalism should be applicable across the education sectors in which UCU members are employed, and should be applicable to all the roles they occupy, including academically related ones. Similar debates are happening across the UK education system, almost certainly for similar reasons.

This paper then is a starting point, and any ensuing discussion will be to establish a common understanding and ownership of a basic concept of professionalism that runs across all UCU members. It will then be necessary to build onto this basic and underpinning concept, further elaborations to explore the particular circumstances and issues for particular sections of UCU membership: for those in FE, those in adult and community learning and those in prison education. For UCU members in HE, it will need to develop the concept for those of UCU members primarily engaged in research, those who are primarily engaged in teaching and those in academically related areas of work and roles.

In considering and reconfiguring UCU's members' professionalism, reference will have to be made to their professional identity. But this paper will only touch on issues around professional identity. Discourses on professional identity extend to the farther shores of post-modernism. This paper has not delved too far in this for fear of never emerging from these farther shores.

The paper will attempt to explain why professionalism is an urgent issue that UCU needs to debate and to draw some conclusions now and for the immediate future. It will go on to discuss various definitions of professionalism and how these may fit UCU members and their concept of professionalism. It will set out two basic current models of professionalism: what has been termed a 'managerialist' model, and a contrasting and opposed concept of 'democratic' or 'activist' professionalism.

This latter concept draws on the work of an Australian academic, Judyth Sachs<sup>2</sup>. Her paper attempts to re-define professionalism, not as a return to some of the traditional concepts and deployment of professionalism, but to re-conceptualise it in the light of developments in education, and especially in teaching and learning, so as to take account of the social and political context that education professionals and UCU members are now facing. Such an analysis will take on how UCU's members' professional identities have been formed and shaped, and how these may need to be redefined and re-focused to that of a democratic or activist identify.

Any explanation of the kind of professionalism that is now required will need to take account of the external forces and circumstances facing education and educationalists. It also must take account of the very insidious ways that the culture across education has become infected by managerialism, commodification and marketisation, and how these processes become internalised and then eat away at the professional soul of UCU

---

<sup>2</sup> Teacher Professional Identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes  
Judyth Sachs University of Sydney Nov 1999

members. This process has been referred to as 'performativity'. Stephen Ball describes this as:

the work that performance management systems do on to the subjectivities of individuals. Performativity invites and incites us to make ourselves more effective, to work on ourselves to improve ourselves and to feel guilty or inadequate, if we do not. It operates within a framework of judgements within which what is improvement is determined for us, against which we are expected to position ourselves... Performativity 'works' most powerfully when it is inside our heads and our souls.<sup>3</sup>

Ball goes on to show how this begins to change professional identity and how that: the idea of being a professional is reworked and re-orientated, both in terms of goals and commitments...the re-invention of professionals themselves as units of resource whose performance and productivity must be constantly be audited so that it can be enhanced... We are re-made as units of resource and activity within the knowledge economy...<sup>4</sup>

Ball links these changes in professional identity to the ever increasing moves towards marketisation and privatisation which are increasingly the direction of travel enforced by successive governments on all parts of education.

Any re-articulation of professionalism by UCU and its members must encompass these elements and present a concept that describes the kind of professionalism that UCU wishes to be part of creating, but also offers an analysis and practice which UCU members can recognise as meeting their aspirations and what they do. This must be set within the social and political context that UCU members operate in of increasing marketisation and privatisation. These seem to be reaching a new crescendo with the Coalition government's use of the economic crisis to pursue an ideologically driven agenda of rolling back the public sector.

Over two decades, there has been an overt culture and practice in education that has shifted towards a concept of being more economically instrumentalist. In this culture and practice, the main purpose of education and learning is to improve the competitive position of UK PLC. Assisted by rapid technological change and the use of information technology, this has been forced through and reinforced by the emergence of a culture of audit and inspection and driven by use of targets at all levels. This is the culture of managerialism.

Judyth Sachs, writing on teacher professionalism as early as 1999<sup>5</sup>, stated that managerialism made two distinct claims: that efficient management can solve any problem; and that practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector. Furthermore Sachs went on to state that the values of managerialism have been promoted as being universal. Thus

---

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Ball 'Performativity, privatisation, professionals and the State' Pages 51 and 52 in Bryan Cunningham 'Exploring Professionalism' Bedford Way Papers Institute of Education University of London 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Op cit Ball Page 55.

<sup>5</sup> Judyth Sachs 'Teacher Professional Identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes' University of Sydney Nov 1999

management is inherently good, managers are the heroes and should be given the room and autonomy to manage, and other groups should accept their authority. This form of institutional and ultimately state control needs a hegemonic concept of professionalism to ensure its dominance. Professionalism becomes divorced from the social and political context in which it is practiced. It relies on regulation and compliance rather than springing from the lived experience and knowledge of the participants, the professionals. Such a concept leaves aside the realities of the particular situation and context in which the professionalism is practiced.

A concept of professionalism that UCU puts forward must be one which UCU members can own. It is one that will arise from experiences and knowledge of UCU members, but within the context of, and informed by, current social and political realities. It will be a professionalism that seeks to foster, encourage, and reflect on not only what these professionals do, but how and why they educate.

## Why professionalism now?

The various discussions on professionalism that have prompted this paper have both positive and negative. Some of these have impacted on the general workforce, some on particular parts of the workforce, some on those in the public sector. Some of the causes are particular to the education workforce, and still others to FE and HE, and UCU members working in those sectors.

### **The growth of professionalism**

There has been a growth in professionalism among various parts of the UK workforce that now claim or wish to see themselves as professional. This is in part a result of the growth of the welfare state since 1945. The post war settlement that lasted in some form for forty years brought with it a commitment to full employment, secondary education for all and public sector welfare and health services that sought to ameliorate poverty, deprivation and disadvantage.

The latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth saw additions to the old established professions such as the law and medicine. These 'new' professions were often technocratic such as engineering and architecture. The period from 1945 saw the proliferation of yet more professions, and the sub-division of the existing ones to give substance and status to new occupations and roles. In this period the characteristics of particularly these 'new' professions have been increasingly determined by the state which became the main force in defining professionalism, usually through state regulation and usually as the employer. Geoff Whitty puts forward the view that 'professional status therefore is typically dependent on the sort of bargain an occupation has struck with the state – what is called the 'professional mandate'".<sup>6</sup>

It is this 'professional mandate' that is now contested by and for UCU members. The nature of it, if it still exists, has become a key policy issue within the broader scope of educational change and reform.

The spread of education including higher education, meant that the specialist

---

<sup>6</sup> Geoff Whitty Page 32 'Changing modes of teacher professionalism' in Bryan Cunningham op cit

knowledge and expertise that classic professionalism laid claim to as part of its meaning, was expanded by the expansion of higher education and the promotion of the production of knowledge, encouraged by the state. New knowledge have been used to reinforce claims to professionalism by new groups. These can also act as barriers to entry into the profession and so protect these new forms of professionalism. So concepts of autonomy and accountability that were used by traditional professions were utilised by these new professions in the welfare state. This gave an appearance of public accountability and control.

Teaching, whether school teaching or post-school teaching, has been among these emerging professions. Teacher professionalism may have its roots in the status and position of those teaching in the private sector, the public schools. However with the extension of compulsory education, the emergence of more theoretical knowledge within vocational education and the expansion of higher education in the 1960s, teacher and educational professionalism blossomed. All of the various teacher trade unions claim to be professional associations, and to an extent act as such, especially when as part of an educational establishment they were part of formulating and implementing education policies at local and national levels.

Given the lack of sustained state intervention in the content of education and learning until at least the late 1970s, teacher autonomy in the classroom and the lecture hall were central to this growing concept of educational professionalism. Whilst education professionals never enjoyed the traditional licensed autonomy of doctors and lawyers, there was throughout the 1950s and 1960s, none the less, a considerable degree of autonomy. State interference and control of the curriculum was negligible until late 1980s. Indeed local autonomy was often cited as one of the crowning glories of English education where the only prescribed school subject was religious education. This period has been seen as the golden age of teacher control and professionalism. Parents, pupils and the general public were expected to trust teachers to know best. The teacher's role included the freedom to decide how and what to teach. The state did not actively intervene in teacher training or teaching in the classroom.

This began to change in the 1970s. These changes were aligned with growing criticisms of the public sector and the 'swollen state'. The welfare state, it was claimed, had delivered neither efficiency nor equity. Thatcherism developed this into attacks on the public sector, accusing public sector professionals of abusing their autonomy. The remedy was to lie in subjecting professionals and providers to greater accountability through meeting centrally-set targets. Both teachers and their university based teacher education were seen as left-leaning and favouring progressive and pupil/student centred approaches. This was blamed for a levelling down of education standards. The overall affect was to erode public trust in education and education professionals. This increasing state intervention in education was asserted in post compulsory education too. In vocational education the Manpower Services Commission began to promote the state's role in vocational education and training and skills development. The traditional tripartism between the state, the trade unions and employers that had underpinned vocational education and training through the apprenticeship system, began

increasingly to break down with the decline of traditional industries and manufacturing and Thatcher's attacks on trade union power. One of the ways of both reducing the costs of vocational training and hand it over to the unfettered control of employers was through the promotion of competence as the underpinning concept of vocational training and qualifications. Even higher education, which had been the bastion of traditional professionalism and autonomy, began to be the subject of state management firstly through funding regimes, and through the insertion of employability into higher education curricula.

Accompanying these moves of state control in education has been the growth of an increasing tension, and now clash, between the long standing views and value of education professionals and those of the state in areas traditionally held to be the preserve of the professions. This makes this current examination of professionalism by UCU particularly pertinent.

A key policy strand in these attacks has been the introduction of market forces and competition into public sector education. Increasingly both budgets and managerial power has been handed over to the institutions in the expectation they would respond to choice as expressed through the market. The state would retain overall strategic control by setting the outputs the various providers have to achieve. These become operationalised at institutional and individual levels through targets and performance indicators. These could be justified as providing information for the 'consumer' and greater accountability. But it also allowed the government to scrutinise and direct providers.

In the late 1990s this approach evolved into what Whitty calls 'New Labour managerial professionalism'<sup>7</sup>. This became a basic policy framework for quasi or bureaucratic markets harnessed to much more explicit attempts to rethink and control education professionals in line with the New Labour policy project. This reinforced the role of the state as more assertive in outlining what the outcomes of teaching and learning should be, rather than trusting in, and leaving these to education professionals' judgements. This in turn led to micro management of the details of education processes, including the day-to-day running of institutions and teaching and learning. For example Whitty cites over 2000 downloadable model lesson plans as well as the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies<sup>8</sup> for schools. Again the current Government have managed to top this by prescribing a single approach to reading, phonics, on which not only will schools be judged but also teacher-training providers.

With this growth of professions and professionalism, a new factor has emerged for many long established, as well as the emerging, professions that needs to be examined when trying to develop a new concept of professionalism. This is the emergence of multi-agency approaches to a range of issues both social and technological. This fits well into a multiplicity of professions and professional standpoints that have developed over recent years. What is needed alongside this multi-agency practice is a widening of the concept of professionalism to encompass multi-agency professionalism. If built on

---

<sup>7</sup> Geoff Whitty op cit Page 37

<sup>8</sup> Geoff Whitty op cit Page 38

respecting and valuing different ways of working and knowledge, skills and expertise, this multi-agency professionalism can be a source of strength to UCU members, as it strengthens the professionalism of different groups including that of educationalists, and allows each profession to defend its professional integrity and practice, and fight against its dilution.

### **Professionalism and the economic crisis**

The developments in professionalism in general and educational professionalism, both in terms of the growth of professions and the threats to it, can be traced back over at least the last thirty years. The growing state and government intentions to contest various elements that professions and professionals have tried to keep within their own control can be seen in education, as well as across almost every part of public life. It is these developments that have been nourished by the growth and almost universal acceptance of managerialism as the dominant discourse and narrative for the public sector.

However these trends have been given added impetus by the long-term and sustained global economic crisis that the UK and the world have lived with since 2008. The austerity that seems to be the only solution to this crisis for many governments is being driven through in the UK by savage cuts to public services, the home of many of these new professions. It also means severe cuts in incomes and living standards. Social mobility, having increased slightly over the last half of the twentieth century, has first become stagnant and now seems to have stopped altogether. Politicians, at least in the UK, talk about the 'squeezed middle' and that today's young people will be the first generation since 1945 where children will not be seen to be better off than their parents' generation.

In this context, social and professional status becomes more important to individuals and groups of individuals. These layers of status and potential social mobility are becoming more problematic, and perhaps threatened by myriad external pressures. Again UCU members need a conception of professionalism through which they can make sense of their individual and personal, as well as their collective and professional, identities and selves.

### **Technological changes and the opening up of knowledge and expertise**

It is axiomatic to discuss the type and pace of change that modern life entails in terms of both the speed of technological developments and how these are re-making the world with new and very different forms of communications. This in turn impacts on how knowledge is produced and disseminated. There are also ambitious claims for teaching and learning in an electronic and digital era.

New technology has certainly made the emergence of the audit culture in education and elsewhere possible. It has enabled every conceivable aspect of education to be counted, tabulated and audited. It has also enabled the use of quantitative measures and targets to control institutions and the professionals working within them. These developments go to the heart of the claim of professionals to have an expertise and specialist knowledge which they are trusted by the state to use autonomously and virtuously on behalf of their students/clients. However with the development of new

technology and the internet, what constitutes knowledge and expertise becomes opened up to groups beyond the particular profession. Thus one of the underpinnings of professionalism becomes weakened. Taken with the spread of commodification in education, that is seeing education and learning as yet another good to be bought and sold in the market place, access to professional knowledge and expertise is broadened. Students/clients become 'customers' to be satisfied. Previous concepts of professional trust and autonomy become broken down into service satisfaction and adherence and meeting performance standards, measures and targets.

If a UCU concept of professionalism takes on the social and political contexts in which this professionalism is exercised, then it must also taken on board a notion of what Ingrid Lund calls the 'ethic of provisionality' and the existence of, and potential validity of, different forms of knowledge and expertise stemming from diverse viewpoints and beliefs. Lund states that this:

implies a greater degree of negotiation and acknowledgment of mutual expertise rather than the traditional hierarchical model of expertise and authority, and the paternalism of assumptions of professional infallibility.<sup>9</sup>

A UCU concept of professionalism must acknowledge that professionalism, with its claim to specialist knowledge and expertise, has also been a means of mystification through which a privileged position can be maintained and defended. By taking on the social and political contexts in which their professionalism is deployed, UCU members begin a process of de-mystification about their specialist knowledge, expertise and role. This is not to deny their roles as producers and disseminators of knowledge, and the students' and learners' roles as the recipients of this knowledge and expertise. But it adds in elements of uncertainty in, and provisionality of, this knowledge. These discussions again add weight to the importance of UCU re-defining its concept of professionalism.

### **Ideological attacks on the public sector and education**

Since the late 1970s, the UK has seen sustained attacks on the public sector. These began under the Thatcher governments of the 1980s. Given impetus by economic downturns and the seeming failure of the welfare state to deal with both deprivation and disadvantage that stubbornly remained, these attacks took the form of actual cuts to funding and swingeing attacks on public sector professionals, with accusations that they were abusing their professional autonomy and trust for narrow sectoral interests. The neo-liberal critique which accompanied these attacks on public services and professionals also contained a critique of public sector management. The answer governments of the 1980s and 1990s was to subject the public sector, including education, to market forces and competition, coupled with increasing amounts of state regulation and surveillance through quality assurance schemes and inspection.

The education systems of schools and colleges had been subject to the democratic control of and accountability to local education authorities, even if this tended to be more theoretical than actual. Local authority control and co-ordination of schools and colleges was progressively undermined by first local management of schools and then

---

<sup>9</sup> Ingrid Lund Page 89 'Ethical issues in professional life' op cit Bryan Cunningham 'Exploring Professionalism'

colleges, giving these institutions control of budgets and devolving real decisions to institutional managers and leaders. Local educational landscapes became further fragmented as institutional and sectoral competition was encouraged by government. Education professionals, whether teachers, college or university lecturers, became characterised as partial and partisan, undermining and levelling down educational standards in pursuit of progressive and pupil/learner centred education. Education and learning became commodities which students are able to choose what they wished to buy. Overall strategic control remained in the hands of central government setting the outputs that providers need to achieve.

Under New Labour these trends continued, although the pace of funding cuts slowed down and market forces and competition were mediated by state regulation, and the use of central audit mechanisms and targets. This left central government with the power to control both the direction of policy and the institutions themselves. It was during this period, from the last years of the twentieth century, and the first decade of the twenty first, that learning and education establishments became increasingly marketised.

These moves within the public sector and education to ape the forms and practices of business required managerialism and a managerialist form of professionalism to secure its goals. This process of managerialism is more than organisational practices. Managerialism becomes the dominant culture. The boundary between the professional and the manager became blurred, with managerialism dominating vocabularies and thinking. So the managerial paradigm of the primacy of student throughput and income generation is set against a 'professional' paradigm of student learning and teaching. Within FE and increasingly in HE, this changing discourse made it increasingly difficult for lecturers to put pedagogy over the demands of the market ideology of managerialism which became the dominant model of professional activity. Managerialist organisation cultures beget a managerialist concept of professionalism. Instead of being bottom-up, it is top down and is dependent on regulation and compliance rather than self-actualisation and ownership by the professional. A classic example of this New Labour managerialist concept of professionalism was that which was enacted in 2007 in the FE and skills sector. Professionalism became compliance to a series of regulations and requirements which could be ticked off to signify one's professionalism.

This managerialist professionalism was also bound up with the general rising distrust of bureaucracy and spread of knowledge and expertise beyond the ranks of professionals noted earlier. Gleeson and James describe a senior government figure stating that improvement can only come out of a pincer-like movement in which the recent growth in top-down regulation through targets and standards is augmented by a new encouragement to bottom-up mechanisms for greater consumer or user 'voice'. In this description the professional is simply someone who does a thorough job exactly in line

with some sort of specification such as a service agreement.<sup>10</sup>

Since the arrival of the Coalition Government in May 2010, the privatisation has moved on to what Ball describes as 'exogenous' privatisation which involves the opening up of public education services and institutions to the private sector.<sup>11</sup> In school education, the Government has intensified its drive to make every school an autonomous institution freed from democratic control and accountability the local authority by extending Labour's push to make poorly performing schools academies, to all schools. One higher education institution has already been sold to a private equity company, and at least one FE College has proclaimed it intends to be the first for-profit FE college in the country.

At the same time the government has a macro-narrative of rolling back the layers of regulation that New Labour introduced. The General Teaching Council for England, the government backed professional body for school teachers, was abolished in April 2012, and in FE the government's intention is to rescind the Regulations and requirements on FE sector lecturers not only to be mandatory members of the FE professional body, the Institute for Learning, but also the requirement for lecturers and teachers in the sector to have or obtain a teaching qualification. It has to be said that neither school teachers nor FE lecturers will spend time mourning the GTCE or the IfL as both were prime examples of top down initiatives that operated within the paradigms of managerialist professionalism and a compliance culture and never commanded ownership by their reluctant members.

These attacks on education and across every education sector are ideological. They are part and parcel of the same neo-liberal policies that have been present in UK politics since Thatcher in the 1980s. They were continued by New Labour. The current economic crisis has provided the current Government with the opportunity to launch the most sustained attack so far on the public sector and on education. This government recognises, as does UCU, that public education and its values have to be subverted and destroyed to encourage and nurture marketisation and privatisation. Education becomes a commodity to be bought and sold. Post-compulsory education, both FE and HE, are in the front line of these attacks. If these policies succeed then many people young and old will be denied educational opportunities. The consequence of this will be damaged and stunted lives, thwarted aspirations, a waste of talents and static social mobility. This has immense implications for professionals, for education professionalism and their professionalism and identities. These attacks are attacks on the values and ethics that should underpin professionalism, and the values and ethics of UCU members.

These ideological attacks are given very practical effect by the funding cuts imposed on FE and HE as a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010. The government's primary objective is to reduce the structural deficit. The principal means for this was massive cuts across the public sector. From 2010 to 2014/5 the FE and skills sector is

---

<sup>10</sup> D Gleeson and D James The Paradox of Professionalism in English Further Education: a TLC-FE Project Perspective

<sup>11</sup> Ball op cit find reference

to be cut by 25%. In HE higher student fees have been introduced and the student loan system re-vamped. In 2012-2013 80% of all government funds for HE teaching will be removed, leaving only government subsidy for the teaching of science, technology, maths, engineering and clinical subjects. There are also to be large changes to adult access to learning, with the statutory entitlements to free provision restricted to those under 24 in 2013, and government funding for higher level qualifications for those 24 and over replaced by HE-style loans .

### **Performativity, commoditisation, marketisation, privatisation and their impact on professionalism**

So far this paper has sketched out the main common issues confronting UCU members in all the sectors in which they work, and how these issues impact on professionalism. However it is these inter-connections between the various developments and issues that make a discussion on professionalism ever more pressing.

UCU members have been increasingly faced with an agenda that puts forward the view that education is no longer, or at best, not just a public good that has both intrinsic and instrumental worth. Instead education is presented as a commodity that can be bought and sold. Learning becomes an instrument to gain certain ends – income, employment, position, status – rather than something to be enjoyed for its own sake and pleasure as well as for these instrumental ends. If education is a commodity, then it follows that there has to be a market. If there is an education market or markets depending on what is being bought and sold, then educational institutions will have to compete with one another. One of the arenas where competition is fostered will be a price. Any competitive institution will then need to control, and if possible reduce, its price or obtain more from the various resources that make up the costs of education through increased productivity. One of the principal costs of any education process is staffing. So one strategy for competitive institutions is to increase staff productivity. The management in these educational institutions have increasingly turned to the use of managerial processes, managerialism, to achieve their ends.

With increased managerialism, professionalism and professional identity becomes measured in outputs. All aspects of professional practice become colonised by managerialism and performativity. Professionals then begin to weigh up the costs and benefits of their behaviour and see their activity in terms of the investment in productive outcomes. This drives out all that cannot be justified in managerialist terms. Quality is seen as meeting predetermined outputs and targets which in turn have to be checked, and even if met, improved on in a never ending spiral of quality improvement. Ball's performativity shows that these processes can become internalised so that individuals also begin to measure themselves through meeting targets and performance indicators. Performativity cannot work simply as an oppressive force. It will also carry with it satisfactions and rewards, at least for some. It works best when professional values are bent to managerialist and marketised values.

Thus a general sense of personal insecurity and a loss of meaning in what individuals do, and what is important in what they do, grows. The impact of the internalisation of a managerialist set of values is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activity to that

which is likely to have a impact on measurable performance outcomes. There is then a deflection of attention away from aspects of social, educational, emotional and moral development that have no immediate measurable performance value. This is one of many compromises that ultimately hollow out education professionalism and make professionals malleable for managerialism. Professional judgements can become subverted and superseded by the demands of performance management and measurement.

Also professional perceptions and experience of their work change, as may the satisfaction professionals can and want to get from the deployment of their professional expertise and skills. Their sense of moral purpose and of feeling of responsibility for their students becomes distorted. As Ball put it 'commitments are sacrificed for impression'<sup>12</sup>. Professionalism contains its own dynamic and justification because it becomes hard not to follow its logic because it becomes part of long standing values such as such as not letting oneself and colleagues down. Professionals become reinvented as units whose performance and productivity are constantly measured and audited. What is required is to spend increasing amounts of time in making oneself accountable. Accountability in turned from being a desired end to yet another weapon to bind the professional tighter to set a set of values they may feel profoundly uneasy about. The result can be the professional ends up reporting on what they do instead of doing it. A new set of skills have to be acquired, skills of presentation and of inflation. Ball <sup>13</sup> puts it thus:

We make ourselves calculable rather than memorable' Experience ends up counting for nothing and productivity everything The professional has to keep up, meet newer and ever more diverse targets in which they collude in setting. Appraisal can become a form of confession where the professional is encouraged to confront her/his supposed weaknesses and receive absolution through professional development, in order to become more productive.

Ball <sup>14</sup> concludes that:

All of this takes its toll; performativity comes to be inscribed in our bodies as well as our minds making us anxious, tired and stressed. It individualises and fragments the issues. Around professionalism and leaves us to struggle along without doubts and fears. The result of this is to break down our defences against marketisation and managerialism. That's its intent.

So the relationship between the internalisation of managerialism and commodification of education and marketisation and privatisation becomes clear. The processes of education come to be represented as products. Both individuals and institutions are required to account for themselves in ways that represent education, learning and their outcomes as standardised and measurable items. Both individuals and institutions are managed through the use of regulation, targets and benchmarks and become rewarded differentially in relation to their productivity or achievement. Individuals can then be

---

<sup>12</sup> Ball find the reference op cit

<sup>13</sup> Ball find the reference

<sup>14</sup> Ball find reference page 57

contracted on the basis of their outputs through fixed term and individually negotiated contracts. Institutionally this achieves its apotheosis in whole institutions and services being contracted to deliver a range of services to standardised measures and performance. From there it is an easy step to move to tendering out these services to a variety of new providers who are able to avoid any consideration of professionalism as long as the targets are achieved. Targets become glorified and detached from any social and professional purposes.

The move to services delivered through contracts reshapes the culture and structures of governance. These in turn will impact on professionalism which can become more individualistic as the contract and competitive culture becomes cascaded through the institution. Thus these processes also eat away conceptions of public values which will have often underpinned the institution concerned, and the professional values that UCU members hold. These have focused on public service, equity, empowerment and inclusiveness. But in a marketised system, social and professional relationships become commercial relationships. Knowledge becomes part of the market place, and is no longer 'legitimised through grand narratives of speculation and emancipation' but instead concerned with 'the creation of skills and profit'.<sup>15</sup> Indeed Ball quotes Lyotard that the question becomes not 'is it true but is it useful, saleable and efficient'.<sup>16</sup> Marketisation and privatisation change what is important, valuable and necessary in education. The market sets the moral and ethical cultures for producers and consumers, rather than lecturers and students or learners. Both the educational institution itself and its staff have to adjust to a culture in which self-interest predominates. Ball describes it as:

the private sector is now embedded into the heart and sinews of the state education services at all levels, intertwined into the day-to-day business of decision making, infrastructural development, capacity building and service delivery.<sup>17</sup>

Privatisation means public sector organisations behave increasingly like private sector ones. It also means the participation in the education 'market' of increasing numbers of actual private sector organisations. For over a decade successive governments have encouraged more new private providers in the FE and Skills sector. 2012 saw the first public sector higher education institution sold off to a private equity company. In the schools sector, Gove, the current Secretary of State for Education, has driven through more and more schools being turned into academies, even against their wishes. In his evidence to the Leveson Committee in late May 2012, he openly declared that his intention was that free schools should become for-profit schools.

To achieve first marketisation and then privatisation, concepts of education workers' professionalism has been hollowed out. The internalisation of managerialism and the reframing of accountability mean that the state increasingly turned to regulation as a means of controlling professionals. This is making a break with the 'professional

---

<sup>15</sup> Ball Page 62 in Cunningham op cit

<sup>16</sup> Lyotard ...

<sup>17</sup> Ball Page 63 Cunningham op cit

bargain or mandate' referred to above, which the state and traditional professionals made. This gave the profession autonomy and freedom from state micro-management, if the profession and its members adhered to a set of professional values, and did not abuse the power their professional expertise gave them. But there is now a government that has a grand strategy of rolling back the public sector and the state through tools, such as de-regulation. How this affects professionalism and the role of professions may still be an open question. It certainly makes a UCU discussion of professionalism urgent and timely.

These are the interconnections between the attacks on the educational values that UCU and UCU members hold dear, and the policies and values promoted by successive governments' policies in education, and specifically in post school education, expressed through marketisation and privatisation. UCU members through their concept of professionalism can be seen as the guardians of educational values against the barbarism of managerialism and privatisation.

### 3. Definitions of professionalism

The Encarta Dictionary English (UK) gives a number of definitions and descriptions of 'professional'. As an adjective it states it means 'engaged in an occupation as a paid job rather than a hobby' and 'conforming to the standards of skill, competence or character normally expected of a properly qualified and experienced person in a work environment' and 'showing a high degree of skill or competence'. As a noun it gives 'somebody whose occupation requires education or specialised training'. Wikipedia gives the following for 'professional'

A professional is a person who is paid to undertake a specialized set of tasks and to complete them for a fee. The traditional professions were doctors, engineers, lawyers, clergymen, and commissioned military. Today, the term is applied to architects, accountants, educators, engineers, scientists, technology experts, social workers and many more. The term is also used in sports to differentiate amateur players from those who are paid - hence "professional footballer" and "professional golfer". Many companies include the word professional in their store name to signify the quality of their workmanship or service. In some cultures, the term is used as shorthand to describe a particular social stratum of well educated, mostly salaried workers, who enjoy considerable work autonomy, a comfortable salary, and are commonly engaged in creative and intellectually challenging work. Due to the personal and confidential nature of many professional services, and thus the necessity to place a great deal of trust in them, most professionals are subject to strict codes of conduct enshrining rigorous ethical and moral obligations.

If the history and development of professionalism is examined, it can be seen that its origins go back to the Middle Ages in Europe, with the earliest forms of professionalism being around medicine, the law and religion. In as much as the clergy became increasingly educated in early universities, it could be said that academics were among the oldest professions, although not of course the oldest. The nineteenth century and industrialisation saw an extension of the professions, often into higher level

occupations associated with technology, and a technical knowledge base and expertise. The twentieth century, especially the creation of the welfare state, saw further extensions of professionalism to aspects of the welfare state such as social work and teaching, as well as sub-divisions of the traditional professions into new professions grouped around particular specialisms.

So a definition of professionalism seems to involve implied membership of a distinguishable group with a number of characteristics. These would include skills based on theoretical knowledge, trust based on and in the client relationship, adherence to a professional ethical code of conduct and independence and altruism.

Whitty<sup>18</sup> quotes Milleson who ascribed 23 traits to professionalism including the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge, education and training in these skills that was certified by examinations, a code of professional conduct orientated to the public good and a powerful professional organisation.

Among common elements running through the various definitions of traditional professionalism, a number of common elements predominate. These would include:

- A definable group of workers usually dealing with 'complex and unpredictable situations;
- Extended and systematic preparation with an intellectual component taught in an institutional setting that upholds quality and competence of the profession;
- A body of specialist knowledge and expertise including the use of skills based on theoretical and applied knowledge;
- The use of skills based on theoretical and applied knowledge, in accordance with the professional values and ethics that provide the state and the public with the means through which accountability is exercised;
- Through this accountability, the profession and the professionals are accorded trust and freedom from unnecessary state micro-management and interference. This allows the professional to have some autonomy in their work;
- The updating and extension of the specialist knowledge and skills through continuing professional development;
- A set of values and ethics pertaining to the exercise of the knowledge and expertise;
- A code of professional conduct orientated to the 'public good' and an expectation of the professions' members to observe norms or codes of conduct;
- Emphasis on service ahead of personal reward; an expectation that the professions' members will demonstrate a high level of personal integrity<sup>19</sup>;
- At times some professions have also controlled entry into their ranks.

In practice in most of the developed world, professional characteristics are now defined by the state which has become the major stakeholder in defining professionalism. With the rise of the welfare state most professionals have been employed, or at least regulated by government. The nature of the professional mandate has been part of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Whitty op cit look up

<sup>19</sup> David Crook 'Some historical perspectives on professionalism' op cit Bryan Cunningham

broader attempt to redefine professionalism, especially in the public sector. Regulation of professionalism has at times become the subject of specific education reforms such as the creation of the GTC in 1997, or the 2007 Regulations on FE workforce professionalism.

UCU members do encompass some of the elements above. In both the FE and Skills Sector and in higher education, there are definable sets of workers. Such workers deal with 'complex and unpredictable situations' and use their professional judgment to find solutions to these. All UCU members possess detailed and specialist knowledge in their subject areas and in both knowledge creation and dissemination. But UCU members do not meet all the traditional definitions. This underlines just how urgent the need for UCU and its members to define and conceptualise a form of professionalism that they can meet, engage with and own.

It is true that there is not a definable professional body for UCU members in higher education. There is the Higher Education Academy which does cover some aspects of promoting professionalism without mandatory individual membership. It does have a definable set of values and accredits specialist knowledge and skills both in the subject area and in the broader concepts of teaching and research. For UCU members in the FE and Skills Sector, there has been a failed attempt by government to promote a mandatory professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL). This floundered partly not least because it tried to be simultaneously the regulator and a membership organisation. This might be something traditional professions could manage with hundreds of years of existence. It was impossible for what was a new profession caught up in deeper government policies around deregulation.

Although there are education and training programmes around teaching in both higher education and the FE and Skills Sector, these are not mandatory in HE and may not be for much longer in FE. For those that undertake them, there can be an extended and systematic preparation with an intellectual component taught in institutional settings. UCU and its members would claim that there is an emphasis on service ahead of personal reward and an expectation that the professions' members will demonstrate a high level of personal integrity.:

Within these core elements in definitions of professionalism, there are some that require further analysis when considering them in relation to a UCU concept of professionalism. These are around the bodies of specialist knowledge and expertise including the use of skills based on theoretical and applied knowledge; the application and dissemination of this knowledge and skills; that professionals have a degree of autonomy in their practices; a set of values and ethics around the use of that knowledge and those skills that build trust from the state and the public; and a degree of autonomy and freedom from state micro-management and interference.

## Areas of uncertainty

### **Specialist knowledge and skills**

One of the underpinning elements of professionalism is the specialist knowledge, skills and understanding that professionals possess. This expertise is what the 'professional

mandate' rests upon: that the professional will exercise their knowledge and skills according to a set of values and ethics. These mean that the position of power that this expertise gives is used positively for the good of the client, or in the case of UCU members, the student and learner, and not abused. In return the public and the state demonstrate trust in the profession. This is expressed in terms of autonomy for the professional in her/his work, and a limit to the interference and micro-management by the state.

However this body of underpinning expertise is increasingly being challenged by what can be termed 'the information age' with an increasing reliance on global sources of electronic and digital information and the internet. Within what can be termed the knowledge society, there are threats to long-standing notions of professional expertise and authority, unique knowledge and infallibility.

Access to what previously had been unchallenged knowledge and expertise can alter the relationships between the individual professional and the client/student. With marketisation and privatisation there has been an accompanying growth in consumer power which it is said will lead to a less deferential and better informed public. In a marketised age the client/student can shop around. The economic balance of the relationship is altered which then can threaten the previous knowledge and expertise on which the authority of the professionalism is based. Part of the underpinning of professionalism rests in this knowledge and that the professional will work disinterestedly for the client/student. But in a globalised world in the age of information, knowledge and trust can be relative.

Established notions of professionalism change and even disappear as they are overtaken by the concepts of entrepreneurship, managerialism, and quality assurance and student satisfaction.<sup>20</sup> In the knowledge society everyone can be knowledgeable, at least to a certain extent. In this environment claims for professional knowledge can be seen as self-interest.

The last decade has seen well publicised high profile cases of misconduct and abuse of professional trust and authority in the traditional professions of law, medicine and accountancy. At times this has meant for some professions a greater state intervention, often in the form of regulation, and reduced professional autonomy. The status, the mystique and mystification that traditional professions have claimed, has given way to greater transparency and accountability, often through external controls and regulation. Professional autonomy is challenged and greater accountability may be introduced through more formal mechanisms of standard setting. Accountability is seen as being the outcome of performance tables and measurable information that can be available to all.

Within education, there can be difficulties even defining what the appropriate body of knowledge is. For example in FE, the range and diversity of teaching both in terms of subjects and levels may mean that trying to find the essence of teaching can become

---

<sup>20</sup> Sally Power op cit Page 192

irrelevant.<sup>21</sup> Plowright and Barr in an article in the *Journal of Further and Higher Education* cite Bottery<sup>22</sup> that

an educator cannot act as the disseminator of unchallengeable information for two main reasons. The first is in most situations which the professional encounters; the solution is not readily apparent but must be constructed. The second and equally important reason is the re-definition of professional practice is that the professional cannot be certain what is fact and what still opinion in their spheres of expertise is.”

One solution to this difficulty is the concept of dual professionalism that was espoused by the IfL. This puts forward the view that a lecturer possesses two forms of professional expertise: around their subject and around the practice of teaching. One could add that there may be multiple professionalism for an educational professional depending on their mode and manner of their teaching, for example if they teach on-line, or a particular student group that they teach, be it young people or adults or at what levels they are teaching. Plowright and Barr’s critique of the IfL’s notion of dual professionalism stems from what they allege is context-free. For them and for UCU’s notion of professionalism, the context within which professional expertise is deployed is vital. It is the interaction between the lecturer and the student/learner that allows issues to be identified and for these to be placed within the context of previous learning and the students’ prior experience and understanding. Professionalism of FE teachers therefore is rooted in the fusion of the subject and all aspects of its teaching, and not in a context-free dual professionalism.

What applies to FE can equally apply to HE, although there the emphasis may be more on the context of the deployment and dissemination of knowledge. In higher education, academics are recruited for their expert knowledge in a discipline or professional area. Scholarship in relation to this area must continue to be fostered throughout their career. On recruitment to higher education, the new academic will have a proven ability and qualification in relation to their subject. The professional knowledge that most new entrants may lack, therefore, may be in the area of pedagogy or research methodology. For some perhaps many new academic staff, teaching and learning may be a completely new discipline. Any programme of initial staff development, must address the professional knowledge of education. All professional teachers must have a good understanding of how learning happens, and the implications for learning of their actions in the role of teacher. Beyond this, they must learn to create a synthesis between their knowledge of the discipline and their knowledge of how students learn, that is to understand how students learn.

The professional teacher must develop many skills essential to the art of teaching, such as the communication of ideas through presentation, promotion of interaction and discussion and giving feedback. These skills involve basic interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities which can be built on. What these methods and techniques may

---

<sup>21</sup> David Plowright and Glenn Barr ‘An Integrated Professionalism in further education: a time for phronesis’ *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol 36 No 1 Feb 2012

<sup>22</sup> Bottery look up

be is a further area of professional knowledge needed by the teacher. How and when to apply them, requires skill including the development of awareness and the qualities of expert judgment. Unlike the knowledge component, skills can be difficult to teach directly. They can be built on, especially with the aid of mentors and coaches. They are part of on-going development of the professional.

UCU's concept of professionalism not only allows that specialist knowledge can be relative and provisional. It also allows for that fact that specialist knowledge in any discipline is dynamic and is continually growing and developing. The educational professional must take account for this growth in knowledge in their subject/discipline. Indeed they may well be part of this growth of new knowledge. Keeping abreast and for some the creation of new knowledge through 'scholarly' activity and/or continuous professional development (CPD) is an essential element of UCU's professionalism. For UCU members it is must be part and parcel of their work as professionals and be integrated into normal workloads, not become an addition to normal workloads, not undertaken as an extra, unpaid overtime. However more importantly it must be recognised as such by their employers.

Professional development requires isn't always easy. A professional teacher must be a self critical, competent practitioner responsible for his/her own decisions and actively engaged in continuing development of themselves and their discipline. Professionals have to experiment with new approaches and techniques, to be critical about their own performance in relation to objectives and those of the students. In other words they have to find out how effective the learning has been and to ask for help from those who have greater knowledge and skill. Development is not a clean linear movement. It is jerky and untidy. It can include the dangers such as getting blocked or picking up poor learning habits. To develop as a teacher requires a belief that improvements can be made. It also requires an open and enquiring mind, one that is interested in learning and in how to enable learning to occur.

Part of the UCU 'professional mandate/bargain is academic freedom. In this context this means freedom, within the law, to hold and express opinion; question and test established ideas and received wisdom; and present controversial or unpopular points of view educational professionals must be free to explore all appropriate knowledge and be free of undue and unnecessary external control. The underpinning ethics and values that education professionals hold is the bulwark for the state, society and their students against abuse. Their assessments of learning should be their own and taken as being impartial and independent. Professionals cannot be put under pressure to change their assessments for reasons other than arise normally in the course of assessing learning.

### **Professional values and ethics**

The second area that needs more examination and analysis in creating a UCU concept of professionalism is around what kind of values and ethics should underpin any notion of educational professionalism. It is these values and ethics and the adherence to a practice that is based on these values, that is one defining element of professionalism. It is professional practice exercised according to a set of values and ethics that

underpins what has been referred to above as the professional bargain or mandate. It applies to the professionalism of UCU members.

It is through this kind of professional bargain/mandate that needs to be made between UCU professionals and their students, colleagues and peers and the general public, that the trust and accountability that professionals and society need will be demonstrated. It is through this 'bargain', where competence and integrity are exchanged for the trust of students/clients and society that professional freedom will be free from unwarranted and unnecessary supervision and interference. It will also provide the professionals with protection against dilution from cheap, un- or part-qualified labour.

UCU and its members bring a set of values and ethics to this process of creating a professional bargain that it contrasts with the set of values that now predominate in UK education. These latter values, as has been laid out above, derive from and are part of the dominant paradigm of managerialism, marketisation and privatisation. Ball and others have shown how these values become to some degree internalised within education professionals. This in turn creates a series of tensions and conflicts. A UCU concept of professionalism will be amongst other things, a defence of those long standing educational, human and progressive values and against managerialism and its values. The values espoused by UCU members are the values of UCU as an organisation that represents these professionals. 'Performativity' and managerialism seek to hollow out education professionals to make it more vulnerable for marketisation and privatisation. UCU's professionalism is built around long standing education values of empowerment, equality of opportunity, inclusiveness and the liberation that the creation, dissemination and utilisation of knowledge and learning bring to society and individuals.

A set of values that can be part of modern ethical professionalism has to be described and lived. The values and ethics of traditional professionalism stressed adherence to a set of ethical codes. These could become rule-bound and prescriptive of practice. They could also become used as disciplinary controls. Lund<sup>23</sup> characterises the values and the use that was made of them as being 'male' in that only mature ethical reasoning could be used to describe ethical dimensions. This was through employing universal principles and appealing to a hierarchy of right. These sets of ethics tend to use western scientific methodology and often ignore other ways of seeing.<sup>24</sup> So professionals need to develop a moral and ethical sense, sensitivity and an ability to read the ethical complexities of individual and collective situations through educational and human values. UCU members find and see themselves as professionals through adherence to a practice that is mediated by a strong belief in this set of educational values. This underpins professional conduct and is at the heart of UCU's definitions and meanings of professional status.<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes the sets of traditional values and ethics have been brought together in a code of professional conduct, often with a professional body as their guardian and

---

<sup>23</sup> Lunt look up

<sup>24</sup> Ingrid Lunt look up

<sup>25</sup> David Plowright and Glenn Barr op cit

ultimate authority. Breaches of professional conduct in many professions could lead to expulsion from the professional body and loss of the 'license to practice'. However for UCU and its members, ethical practice goes beyond merely abiding by a code of conduct. The education professional needs to be more than simply aware of and accept the contents of any code. They will also need to consider carefully the implications of any code to their practice and use any code to reflect on and refine their practice over time. A code of conduct can provide a backdrop to reflective practice. It does not tell the professional in detail how to act. The nature of professional practice is the requirement to make sensitive and sensible judgments within the spirit of any code of conduct.

The central features of a profession, ethical conduct, integrity and moral probity remain in modern professionalism. But the major changes in society mean growing complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability in the society in which these attributes are deployed. This can undermine previous certainties in relation to professional practice. Modern professionalism has to reinterpret these central features for the realities of the current paradigms of education. They have to move away from the characteristics that accompanied traditional professionalism which were often class based, privileged, male and patriarchal.

The formal codes of traditional professionalism are only one source of values, attitudes and beliefs that inform and contribute to professional behaviour and identity. Modern and UCU professionalism has been informed by a much wider range of much more complex influences. Sometimes these can be in conflict. Individuals' professional values and identity arise through a range of influences such as family, peer group, religion beliefs, cultural, social and community norms and values, political convictions, ideology, employers' policies, individual conscience and personal values. They are complex and multifaceted and an individual professional may experience tensions between their personal and professional, and different views of the professional. This can lead to profound ethical dilemmas which are not resolvable through formal codes. Modern professionalism has to offer a means of resolving of these dilemmas.

Ethical values and codes are and should be based on recognised and valued standards that the professional creates and maintains. However professional standards have been absorbed and recreated by managerialism. In the hands of managerialism, professional standards can become opaque, complex and over elaborated. A wonderful example of this were the professional standards created by the post compulsory education Sector Skills Council Lifelong Learning UK for 'professional FE teachers, lecturers and trainers'<sup>26</sup>. They ran to xxx pages. Professional standards need to be reclaimed from managerialism and be re-created by the professional practitioners themselves. Only if this is done, can these professional standards be owned by the professionals.

It is interesting to note that these FE standards were rewritten in 2007 just as FE professionalism was being corralled and regulated by government. They were couched in terms of 6 domains: professional values and practice, learning and teaching,

---

<sup>26</sup> find date and reference to LLUK professional standards

specialist learning and teaching, planning for learning, assessment and access and progression. These became performance benchmarks for teachers drawing on highly specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria with only limited opportunities for professional mediation determined by individual and local need. They were ideal for the state's vision of further education and skills development. Plowright and Barr<sup>27</sup> quote Elliot (1996)<sup>28</sup>: 'the political context of FE is indeed one of hegemonic influence and control, where debate is constrained within a technocratic market discourse, to the point where many lecturers are experiencing the fundamental contradiction of educational practice, the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation'.

Lund quotes Bottery who postulated 5 values to inform professional practices which are very different than the traditional codes. They reflect a different set of values that take in uncertainty, unpredictability and contestability in both the contexts of professionalism and the specialist knowledge that underpins it.

These are expanded so that 'provisionality' is accepting the contested and provisional nature of knowledge and the existence and validity of different views and beliefs. It means greater negotiation and acknowledgement of mutual experience by the professional rather than reliance on a hierarchical model of expertise and authority which often rests on paternalistic assumptions of professional infallibility.<sup>29</sup> Truth is not absolute. So there is a greater tolerance and acceptance of uncertainty and provisionality.

Truth searching becomes being prepared to struggle to understand complexity and if necessary tolerate ambivalence and discomfort.

Reflective integrity acknowledges the complexity of each situation and that it is value laden and culturally bound. There is then a need for professional practice to transcend technical rationality.

Humility accepts personal fallibility and sees it not as a failing, but part of the human condition. It is then possible for professionals to make mistakes, but learn from them. Finally there is what Bottery calls humanistic education which is genuine unconditionality about views of the nature and source of knowledge and involves positive regard for others and empathetic understanding and respect of others. Such a set of ethics calls into question traditional notions of expertise and the power relations behind this. A UCU concept of professionalism then will take these ethics and values and turn them into elements of both a professionalism and professional identity that can be a powerful defence against the encroachments of managerialism, marketisation and privatisation. UCU professionals can become the guardians of education and progressive values and ethics.

## Different concepts of professionalism

This paper sets out three dominant conceptions of professionalism: the traditional, the

---

<sup>27</sup> Plowright and Barr JFHE op; cit looks up

<sup>28</sup> look up Eliot reference

<sup>29</sup> Lunt look up

managerialist and the democratic. This paper has attempted to show that the traditional concept does not meet the needs of UCU and its members. There are some of the characteristics of this traditional concept that do not apply fully to UCU members. It also does not take account of the current social context of neo-liberalism times in which UCU members work nor does it take account of the changes that have been wrought on the public sector and public sector professionalism by marketisation and privatisation of public services including education.

There then remain two competing discourses shaping the professionalism and professional identity of education workers now. These were first outlined by Sachs<sup>30</sup> studying Australian teachers. She put forward the concept of 'democratic professionalism', a professionalism which emerges from the profession itself. This is contrasted with 'managerial professionalism'. As has been spelt out above, 'managerialism' has two distinct claims: that efficient management can solve any problem and that the practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector.

Sachs's work was based on the Australian education systems which had gone through a period of devolution and decentralization. Teachers had been placed in a long line of authority in terms of their accountability for reaching measurable outcomes. The corporate management model emphasised a form of professionalism that was focused on meeting corporate goals, set externally. Professionals were expected to manage a range of students and document their achievements and problems for public accountability purposes. The criteria of the successful professional in this corporate model was one who worked efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardised criteria set for the accomplishment of both students and teachers, as well as contributing to the institution's formal accountability processes. Managerialist professionalism laid no claim to specialised knowledge but only to an 'elite generalism'. Generalised knowledge was held to be superior to specialisation because it could be organised rationally and efficiently. In this concept of professionalism, the status and power of professionals become increasingly dependent on their ability to cast goals and objectives in appropriate terms such as managerial asset.

This description of what had happened in Australian education and the analysis of how this changed professionalism could describe what has happened and is happening in English education. Managerialism and managerial professionalism have increasingly become the dominant discourse in education. The managerial paradigm of the primacy of student throughput and income generation has been firmly established. This has been set against a professional paradigm of student learning and teaching. This changing discourse within colleges and universities has made it increasingly difficult to put pedagogy and research over the demands of the market. So ideas and practice based on moral principles or educational aims becomes futile.

---

<sup>30</sup> Judyth Sachs 'Teacher Professional Identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes'  
University of Sydney Nov 1999

However this seemingly iron grip of managerialism does not and must not go unchallenged. Gleeson & Shain's 1999 study of FE staff found forms of professional resistance and response that challenged the hegemony of managerialism from within: if at one level market and managerial reform in FE is seen to have undermined professionalism and collegiality at another it has paradoxically exposed anomalies and myths surrounding the very existence of such values.<sup>31</sup>

The way that this managerialism is being inserted into education can be seen in the current government's proposals for initial teacher education. These will enshrine the managerial ethos ever further. By moving to a teacher education system away from higher education and into schools, future teachers will be driven to focus on the skills involved in teaching without any theoretical underpinning and understanding of the processes of teaching and learning. The conclusion that can be drawn from what is being proposed for initial teacher education is that the professionals involved are no longer trusted by the government and that this process is now controlled via rules, 'standards' that in turn reflect the features and values of an audit culture. Thus managerialism will be driven into the very hearts of future teachers. In the words of Coffield 'practitioners will become regarded as licensed deliverers of nationally produced materials, targets and provision licensed rather than as trusted public professionals'.<sup>32</sup> Against managerial professionalism, Sachs and others such as Whitty<sup>33</sup> and the RSA<sup>34</sup> have put forward the concept of democratic or activist professionalism and identity.

This does not seek to mystify professional work, or to unreasonably restrict access to it. Democratic professionalism facilitates student and other stakeholders including communities' participation in decision making so as to develop a broader understanding in the community of education and how it operates. Education professionals must be responsible and accountable for that which is under their control, both individually and collectively through their unions.<sup>35</sup>

At the core of democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between education professionals and other education stakeholders. This encompasses strategies for education development, skill development and work organisation. The professional's responsibility reaches beyond the single classroom, lecture hall, laboratory or workshop and includes contributing to the institution, the system, other students, the wider community, and collective responsibilities of teachers themselves as a group and learners and to other professions. Democratic professionalism involves being sensitive to a range of stakeholders, some of whose voices have been silenced in traditional professionalism. It seeks to demystify professional work and forge alliances between educationalists and the excluded, students, and wider communities. It allows different viewpoints to build a more

---

<sup>31</sup> Gleeson and Shain look up

<sup>32</sup> find.

<sup>33</sup> Whitty look up

<sup>34</sup> RSA look up

<sup>35</sup> Sachs quoting Preston 1996, p. 192 Australian Teachers Union, 1991, pp. 1-2,

democratic education system and ultimately a more open, more democratic society.

Democratic professionals are not static. They seek out and utilise opportunities to continue to develop their knowledge, expertise and skills as part and parcel of their professionalism. Guile and Lucas in their writing in 'The Learning Professional'<sup>36</sup> speak of those with a positive approach to professional development that seek out opportunities for this within institutional constraints to extend their professional understanding of skills rather than just reflect on those they have. Guile and Lucas write of extended and restricted and formal and informal concepts of professionalism that goes beyond reflection and becomes a dynamic activity.

Sachs builds on democratic professionalism an activist professional identity. This recognises starting points from which the democratic/activist professional works collectively with her/his fellow professionals to achieve their strategic ends. It operates by developing networks and alliances between professionals and the wider communities that they seek to serve. These alliances are not fixed, but form and reform around different issues and concerns. The democratic or activist professional takes responsibility for their on-going professional development and work in communities of practice which develop in larger historical, social, cultural and institutional contexts. The education professionals re-conceive themselves as agents of change rather than its victims. But it is not an easy path as the neo-liberal and continuing government policies constantly threaten to undermine the professional's morale and the public's trust.

## **A UCU concept of professionalism and professional identity**

UCU members are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds, employment, roles and motivations. They consistently demonstrate dedication, enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge. They possess and develop subject knowledge and expertise. They also have a good understanding of the best ways to teach their subjects so that students and learners are engaged 'with the big ideas, key processes, modes of discourse, and narratives' of their subjects. UCU members sustain others and their own learning through hard work and commitment. They are often involved in the genesis of innovation and flexibility in their subjects and sectors. They go on to analyse and build these innovations into lasting and productive learning experiences. UCU members are skilled in maximizing individual and collective learning opportunities. They are able to respond to the personal and cultural experiences of the different students and provide activities and structures of intellectual, social and emotional support to help learners to move forward in their learning.

However the current systems in which education professionals' work have become bureaucratized and increasingly marketised. More and more they are based on low trust in practitioners' professionalism. These systems rely on mechanistic quality assurance policies and procedures at both national and institutional level which are implemented by regulation and meeting arbitrary benchmarks. Training and development becomes a standardised, well defined, and unproblematic and is based on

---

<sup>36</sup> Guile and Lucas 'The Learning Professional' look up

a seeming unchanging body of knowledge and skill. The scope of professionals to make their own judgments becomes ever more limited.

The activities undertaken by UCU members developed over time and in relation to the students and learners. As professionals UCU members form communities of practice that can acknowledge new knowledge, changing circumstances and new learners. These can produce new problems for the professional who needs the capacity to respond to new and unexpected situations.

The UCU member as an education professional understands learning to be an active and reciprocal process, combining research and reflection. It is created and re-created by groups as well as by individuals, with a range of possible outcomes and wider benefits from learning at the level of the individual, the group, the community and society.

UCU members' professionalism requires time for reflection, updating and continuous development both in subject knowledge and as teachers and educators. Professional practitioners do need, and should be actively engaged in, the setting of standards for themselves and these should not be created from afar. Their creation should be undertaken in an open and transparent way so that it can be made and owned by the professionals, not imposed on them. These standards will have evolved from the educational values and ethics held by professionals. They will be commonly held, and upheld and policed by the professionals in a fair and equitable manner so that students and the state and society can accord them both autonomy and trust.

This has implications for training and development. This needs to operate at both initial development and throughout a professional's working life. It has to operate in the arenas of subject and pedagogy and research. Training and development need to keep abreast of development in subject areas and in teaching and learning. This needs time and resources and to be part of normal workloads. Here professional issues meet the industrial relations agenda of UCU. Professionalism has then to be part of the broader agenda of collective organising and bargaining.

A UCU's professionalism is based firmly within a concept of democratic professionalism. It is based within a lived context of political and social realities. It is not a neutral professionalism that seeks to defend narrow range sectarian vested interests. It is an active and dynamic and seeks to build a better and more humane society. It seeks to defend and assert long standing educational values such as the liberating and empowering force of education and learning and equity of opportunities and inclusiveness.

Lund <sup>37</sup> expands Bottery's five values set out above into a number of underpinning principles and ethics for new professionalism. These are:

- Competence: this is reframed as an understanding of competence which accepts the provisional and contested nature of knowledge and therefore competence. Traditional notions of professional competence carried with them a lifelong

---

<sup>37</sup> Lund op cit look up

licence to practice for those achieving any entry qualification and met standards set by the professional body. This is no longer adequate or acceptable in a fast changing world. Professionals need to learn from experience and update their competences and ensure that their knowledge, skills and understanding are up to date. This then ties into lifelong learning, CPD and revalidation as a formal and compulsory part of any licence to practice. This can lead to enhanced professional practice. Such a reframing extends the usual notion of competence and implies an ability and willingness to learn from mistakes and reflect on practice and think through both successful and unsuccessful situations.

- **Respect:** this is a reframing and extension of the notion of respect. It implies an ability to listen, to help and to empower. It is an attempt to achieve greater equality and mutual understanding and gives validity to student/learner views. It is a partnership approach to the provision of services which needs mutual respect between the professional and the client/student and between different professional groups. It also means inter-professional collaboration and team work. It means a different mode of relating to other professionals and an extended notion of respect and acceptance. It means respecting the inherent dignity of all humans regardless of gender, culture, social, class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, sexuality or perceived ability. It is a stance based on empathy, care and compassion.
- **Integrity:** this implies self-awareness and a realisation of one's own values, prejudices, beliefs, limitations and fallibility. It means an extended understanding of professional integrity which involves the development of what Lund refers to as 'reflexibility', the ability and willingness to reflect on and use previous practice and the ability to reflect on the professional relationship of all parties involved in development. It implies a commitment to ethical intelligence and sensitivity.
- **Responsibility:** this becomes an extended notion which involves an acceptance of dilemmas inherent in professional work and the increased complexity of the current and future professional-student relationships. It can call into question lines of professional responsibility and therefore accountability in the one-to-one relationship between the professional and client/student that is implied in the traditional professionalism. This then gives way to other forms of relationship which can at times be mediated by other agencies and professions. It can lead to a different set of dilemmas and challenges. Among the first of these is the economic dilemma: there are finite resources but infinite demands and contentious priorities. Professionals are and will be required to take decisions. This can be particularly acute in education now when education and learning as a public good and service are being challenged and eroded. There are also issues around the nature of knowledge reflecting its potential contestability and provisionality. Professionals have the responsibility to work to a professional ethic that promotes evidence-based practices with demonstrable value for their students and themselves.

These new values can be set alongside the long established education values and have

implications for professional practice. It begins to set out a reformed ethical code that can be used as a basis for the trust to be accorded to educational professionals by the public and the state. Trust is thus earned and deserved.

As professionals, UCU members have a deep knowledge of a particular subject area and are self-motivated to develop this knowledge. They have sophisticated skills that are based upon this self-development, aligned to an active awareness of the ethical impact of their work within wider social and political contexts. UCU professionals have to be able to make decisions autonomously at all levels of their work, yet monitor the standards of their work and influence these in the light of their evaluations. They are innovative and have reciprocal and community-orientated attitudes to other professionals within their contexts and institutions.

In the words of Bea Groves, current IfL President and UCU member:

This professionalism goes beyond the current corporate use of the term professional as a pacifier to placate a workforce which is routinely treated as a source of inexpensive, compliant, eminently replaceable 'drones'. In effect, many of these educational businesses don't really want nor need professionals. Professionals would be far too much trouble to manage, as they demand a majority say in their own work practices at every level, ask too many awkward questions about management integrity or standards, and are insufficiently 'corporate' to conform unquestioningly to bureaucratic systems. The net result of such corporate cultures is an increasingly 'infantilised' workforce which has little sense of itself, little reciprocity, diminished pride in its work, and ends up inadvertently lowering the very standards of learning it purports to sustain. The great unspoken irony of course, is: that we try to cultivate autonomy and expertise in our students, but often find it denied to us in our day-to-day work.<sup>38</sup>

This is a state of affairs that UCU professionalism recognises and seeks to oppose and rectify. Thus professionals need to come together to develop and maintain standards. Standards have to become based on proper educational values because practitioners/professionals have participated in their creation. UCU members acknowledge the existence and utility of other professions within education and learning. UCU's professionalism is a collaborative professionalism that works alongside other professionals who are not teachers. This collaborative professionalism recognises the values of, and respects for other professions and their professionalism. Such collaborative professionals work alongside one another sometimes in and through multi-agency approaches and teams.<sup>39</sup> This means active collaboration with other professions and para-professions.

UCU members are proud of, and celebrate their autonomy and professionalism, but this has to be connected with, and to, accountability. UCU's concept of professionalism is not just about protecting their own interests. At the core of their professionalism is a concern about students and learners and a desire to deliver the highest quality of services. In campaigning and fighting for its members' professionalism, it also fights for

---

<sup>38</sup> Lund look up

<sup>39</sup> Whitty op cit Page 38 and RSA.....

education and learning. This links to UCU's industrial strategies aimed at securing salaries and rewards that recruit and retain the highest quality staff and working conditions which foster and protect professionalism. It links to UCU's concerns about the governance of the institutions and services in which UCU members work. The structures and form of institutional governance are increasingly under threat from the threats of marketisation and privatisation. This goes directly to the concepts of professionalism accepted by institutions.

UCU in seeking to formulate its concept of professionalism and to advocate its acceptance in the wider context of society, will need to challenge some of the trends and developments that accompany marketisation and privatisation of the institutions in which UCU members are employed. A recent Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland <sup>40</sup> speaks of a discourse centered on the best ways of practicing management. This it states, has been displaced by a culture which can be seen as entrenching managerialism. It goes to outline a discussion on 'a broader idea of the 'democratic intellect', suggesting that the pursuit of learning and scholarship is one in which society as a whole has an interest that should be reflected in the development of higher education'. The Review continues:

Universities in today's world play many roles of direct significance to society, going well beyond the personal interests of those embarking on higher education, well beyond the organisational ambitions of individual institutions, and well beyond the expectations of those who employ graduates. They stimulate economic development; they provide a focus for cultural growth; they are engines of social regeneration; they play a major part in establishing a positive view of Scotland internationally. Universities are major employers and providers of livelihoods, and they own and control buildings, land and infrastructure that are vital assets for communities. They instigate and nourish public debate, and provide necessary critical analysis of the ideas and actions of public bodies and politicians. For all these reasons, university governance is not just a private matter. Indeed, the public interest in university governance arguably extends beyond that which applies to corporate governance in the business world. It is not just a question of assuring the integrity and transparency of processes, it is a question of allowing society to protect its broader investment in education, knowledge and intellectual innovation in a way that makes the most of a long Scottish tradition adapted to the needs of the 21st century world"<sup>41</sup>

UCU believes that these words could and should apply to all institutions in further, higher and adult education across the UK in which UCU members work. Within such a conception, there should be a central place for UCU members who are both staff of these institutions and as professionals.

From the concept of professionalism that UCU considers fitting for its members, UCU will also need to establish an accompanying professional identity for its members.

---

<sup>40</sup> Scottish Government 'Report of the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland' Feb 2012 Page 2-3

<sup>41</sup> Op cit above

Sachs<sup>42</sup> formulates an activist identity which emerges from democratic professionalism. This can be characterised as arising from

the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity which enable people to be as fully informed as possible. It is focused around faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems. It uses critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies. It is concerned for the welfare of others and "the common good".

It recognises the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities. This new democratic or activist professional identity understands that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealised" set of values that must be lived and that must guide professional life.'

Then professionals can see the organisation of social institutions as promoting and extending the democracy and a better society.

Democratic professionalism and activist professionals are concerned to reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression. Accordingly the development of this identity is deeply rooted in principles of equity and social justice.

A revised professional identity requires new forms of professionalism and engagement. Redefining education professional identity as an activist identity involves attempting to move on from previous ways of conceptualising professional identity. This allows a new attitude towards future professionalism that can challenge any illegitimate domination by some individuals or groups over others.

Discussions around this concept of an activist professional identity allow communities of practice to develop. These are not located in ivory towers, but develop in larger contexts – historical, social, cultural, and institutional and with specific reference to resources and constraints. Within these communities, there are various levels and degrees of expertise that should be seen as a shared set of professional resources. Communities of practice require sustained engagement, and at the same time demand discussion and debate to share meanings about both the subject and practice of education and learning. They can become a force to be reckoned with and involve both engagement of and the imagination of professionals. This is fundamental to the development of an activist professional identity. Communities of practice provide the conditions and the opportunities for the role of activist professional to be legitimated, recognised and practiced.

Communities of practice created by education professionals facilitate the values of respect, reciprocity and collaboration. Communities of practice and an activist identity exist alongside one another. They reinforce and support each other. Democratic professional identity provides the conditions for the development of communities of practices. These communities of practice are collegial, negotiated and they can form and reform around specific issues or be around other perhaps longer standing issues around the subject and the discipline. Communities of practice are primarily concerned with engaging with some activity but also in figuring out how this fits in the broader

---

<sup>42</sup> Sachs op cit

scheme of things.<sup>43</sup>

These communities of practice will need to develop and enhance critical pedagogies and practices. Critical pedagogies and practices should stress the need to understand the wider social conditions and structures in society. They should also be looking for ways to use this learning whilst at the same time seeking opportunities for action through and as learning. The aim is to enable people through education and learning to interrogate their lived experiences, and find ways to transform their lives and affect the conditions in which they live and seek ways to be truly human.

The changes that have and are taking place in education involve struggles over what it means to be an education professional or, as Ball graphically puts it, 'a struggle over the soul of the professional'<sup>44</sup>. These new forms of professionalism cannot be achieved without engaging with the professionals themselves in the wider contexts in which they work. Without this there can be demoralisation, and sometimes defeatism in the face of the daily struggle at work. To survive in today's education systems can involve compromise and accommodation, and may not appear to challenge the prescriptive curriculum and pedagogic and other requirements placed on the professional. It becomes all too easy for a gulf to build up between individual professional and visions of democratic practice and professionalism. Bathmaker<sup>45</sup> has drawn attention to the danger that practitioners may become seen as dupes or devils and seen by managers and policy-makers as failing to comply with the new externally set dogmas, and thus undermining 'a system of rationally structured education and training'. This can rebound on the professional with accusations that they are ideologically driven and have no understanding of classroom practice. There has to be recognition of the complexity, contradictions and sheer messiness of education and learning practice.

UCU's definition of professionalism has to recognise the multiplicity of professionalisms and identities that many UCU members have. These include both to their subject or discipline and as a teacher, researcher or other professional role. There needs to be opportunities for an education professional to pursue all their professional interests and identities. Sometimes there can be tensions between these myriad professions and identities. Sometimes education professionals' first loyalty may be to their subject professionalism and culture. This has to be recognised and worked with.

UCU's professionalism has to be both alert and cognisant of the changes and developments in education and around learning that are taking place. It must be aware that as many of these developments can be seen as a possible dilution of professionalism and practices, others can, if engaged with and approached positively through the analysis that comes from democratic professionalism, be used for the immense benefit of students and learners as well as education professionals.

### **Closing Remarks**

This is a starting point. There are many areas that have been not adequately discussed and examined in this paper. Other may have been gilded over too smoothly and

---

<sup>43</sup> Wenger find

<sup>44</sup> Ball find

<sup>45</sup> Bathmaker look up

quickly. Amongst them would be:

- Further exploration of what would be the dimensions of UCU's professionalism in the various sectors and roles in which UCU members work and fulfill. If the concept of professionalism put forward in this paper is accepted in whole or in part, how does this then work out in the realities that UCU members face on a daily basis in their work? What are specific issues that need to be discussed within FE, HE, prison and adult learning and for academically related UCU members? How far can the common elements be taken before sector specific issues need to be dealt with?
- There needs to be clearer links made between a final UCU concept of professionalism and the other areas of UCU's work. There will need to be clear links to industrial relations that inform and expand both the policies around pay and conditions of service and around professionalism. UCU needs to make stronger links between professionalism and the policy development and formulation within UCU in relation to education and learning policies and practices, and in what UCU says about institutional governance. It is hoped that a clearer understanding of UCU members' professionalism can be a fundamental part of UCU's campaigning work. If UCU can come forward with powerful arguments and analyses of what is happening to UCU members out there and offer solutions, comfort and support to UCU members, then this can be a powerful recruiting and organising tool. UCU's concept of professionalism has equality and diversity and inclusiveness at its core. This should assist making the connections between UCU's stances on both equality and education and learning.
- The paper may need to develop further the analysis and concept of professionalism in relation to the smaller sections of UCU members. In writing it, one is conscious that despite efforts to curb this, it can read as being about teacher' professionalism, and so leave out other roles such as research workers and UCU members in academically related roles.
- The paper touches on the multiple professionalisms and identities that UCU members can have. This needs to be developed further and links sought between the other 'professionalism' and the UCU concept of professionalism.
- One issue that this paper is silent on is the possibility and need for separate professional bodies. Some UCU members are members of professional bodies in relation to their particular role or subject/discipline. There have been so far largely unsuccessful attempts to create and in some instances foist professional bodies for or on sections of UCU members. Should UCU co-operate with future such professional bodies and on what terms? If UCU does co-operate and work with them, what are the minimum terms for such co-operation and bodies? UCU states that it is a professional body, as did NATFHE and AUT and all the other education unions. What does this mean? If it means that it could and would discipline its members for breaches of professionalism and any professional code how can these be squared with the need to defend its members when they are threatened?

The intention of this paper was to stimulate discussion and thought within UCU about

what is meant when it speaks of its members as being professionals. In undertaking this, it is hoped that the discussion will re-affirm and reconnect members and the organisation itself to UCU's analyses of what is happening in education, its defence of long held educational values and its visions of better and different systems. All of this build to assert the validity of UCU's stance of committed action to oppose those who not only wish to take apart what still remains of public service and sector education, but actually replace it with systems that would embed all that is worst in what has and is being promulgated through marketisation and privatisation. It can also give a vision of how education and learning could be so different and a genuine positive power of equity, inclusiveness and empowerment.

It will be a hard and long struggle to establish a UCU concept of professionalism to a wider audience. However in undertaking this, various strands of UCU members and UCU's work come together. A democratic professionalism can only exist properly where there is the work culture, conditions of service and remuneration to foster and maintain it. It is through this professionalism that UCU members show their true accountability to their students and learners, their colleagues and society and so earn trust and autonomy. This professionalism enables UCU and its members to have a very strong basis for promotion of its campaigns in defence of education values in the face of the neo-liberal managerialist onslaught that seeks to render education and learning to the market where education can be bought and sold and profits made.

---

<sup>i i</sup> Scottish Government 'Report of the Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland' Feb 2012 find precise reference