

Towards a UCU Policy on Professionalism: Summary

Introduction

- This paper is an attempt to take further the debate within UCU and its members as to a concept of professionalism that UCU members can own and use as one of the foundations of UCU's strategies in industrial relations, education policy, campaigning, organising and recruitment.
- Such a concept will speak to UCU's members' various roles as teachers and lecturers, as research workers and in a variety of academically related roles.
- Similar debates are taking place across education for similar reasons.
- UCU's concept of education professionalism must arise from UCU members and practitioners.
- The paper aims to establish a common understanding and ownership of a basic concept of professionalism that runs across all UCU members. Further elaborations will need to explore the particular circumstances and issues for particular sections of UCU membership.
- The need for UCU to create and maintain its concept of professionalism is urgent and pressing.
- 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 insidious ways that the culture across education has become infected by managerialism, commodification, marketisation and privatisation, and how these processes become internalised and eat away at the professional soul of UCU members.
- A UCU concept of professionalism not only should describe the kind of professionalism that UCU wishes to create, but also offer an analysis and practice which UCU members can recognise as meeting their aspirations and their activities. This must be set within the social and political context that UCU members operate in, with increasing marketisation and privatisation.
- Over two decades, education has been moved to a culture and practice that has shifted education towards a concept of it 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. These changes have been forced through and reinforced by audit and inspection and is driven by use of targets at all levels. This is the culture of managerialism.

Why professionalism now?

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.
- The characteristics of particularly 'new' professions have been increasingly determined by the state which became the main force in defining professionalism, usually through regulation.
- Professionalism in part rests on what is known as the 'professional mandate or bargain'. The state and society accord professionals some autonomy and freedom from interference because professionals are trusted to use their specialist knowledge and expertise ethically and without abusing their position. It is through this professional bargain/mandate that professionals are accountable to the people who use their services and to society.
- Teacher trade unions claim to be professional associations, and to an extent act as such, especially when as part of an educational establishment they have been part of formulating and implementing education policies at local and national levels.
- Teacher autonomy in the classroom and the lecture hall were central to the growing concept of educational professionalism until the 1970s and 1980s.
- From the 1970/80s this began to change with growing criticisms of the public sector. Thatcherism developed these into attacks on the public sector, accusing public sector professionals of abusing their autonomy. This was to be solved by subjecting professionals and providers to greater accountability through meeting centrally set targets and the emergence of audit culture in educational institutions. This has been accompanied by increasing state intervention in the details of the content and curriculum of education. This had been an area where educationalist autonomy had been exercised.
- This increasing state intervention in education was asserted across post compulsory education. Accompanying these moves has been an increasing tension, and now clash between the long standing views and values of education professionals and those of the state. This is an area that has traditionally been the preserve of the professions.
- A key policy strand in these attacks on the public sector has been the introduction of market forces and competition into public sector education.
- In the late 1990s this approach evolved into 'New Labour managerial professionalism'¹. This became a basic policy framework for quasi or bureaucratic markets harnessed to much more explicit attempts to rethink and control education professionals. 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.

¹ Geoff Whitty op cit Page 37

Professionalism and the economic crisis

- There has been the long term and sustained global economic crisis that the UK and the world since 2008. The austerity claimed to solve this crisis is being driven through in the UK by savage cuts to public services.
- Austerity and severe cuts impact on incomes and living standards. Social mobility is now at a standstill
- In such a situation, social and professional status becomes more important to individuals and groups of individuals.

Technological changes and the opening up of knowledge and expertise

- The speed of technological developments is re-making the world with new and very different forms of communications. This in turn impacts on how knowledge is produced and disseminated.
- New technology has 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.
- With the development of new technology and the internet, what constitutes knowledge and expertise becomes opened up to groups beyond a particular profession. Thus one of the underpinnings of professionalism becomes weakened.
- The spread of commodification in education means that 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.
- A UCU concept of professionalism will need to take on the social and political contexts in which this professionalism is exercised. It has to accept the existence of and potential validity of different forms of knowledge and expertise stemming from diverse viewpoints and beliefs.
- A UCU concept of professionalism must acknowledge that professionalism 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.

Ideological attacks on the public sector and education

- There have been increasing moves within the public sector and education to ape the forms and practices of business required managerialism and a managerialist form of professionalism.
- This process of managerialism is more than organisational practices. Managerialism becomes the dominant culture. The boundary between the professional and the manager became blurred.
- This means it is increasingly difficult for lecturers to put pedagogy over the demands of the market ideology of managerialism which became the dominant model of professional activity. 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.
- The Coalition government has a macro-narrative of rolling back the layers of regulation that New Labour introduced.
- These attacks on education and across every education sector are ideological. They are part and parcel of the same policies that have been present in UK politics since Thatcher in the 1980s. The current economic crisis has given the opportunity for the current Government to launch the most sustained attack so far on the public sector and on education. This government recognises, as does UCU, that direction and values of public education have to be subverted and destroyed so as to encourage and nurture marketisation and privatisation.
- 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.

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

- If education is presented as a commodity that can be bought and sold 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, not least on the basis of price.
- Because one of the principal costs of education is staffing, any competitive institution will need to control, and if possible reduce its price or obtain more from the various resources that make up the costs of education which is often trying to increase productivity.
- With increased managerialism, professionalism and professional identity becomes measured in outputs. All aspects of professional practice become colonised by managerialism. All that cannot be justified in managerialist terms is driven out. Quality becomes meeting predetermined outputs and targets which have to be checked, and even if met, improved on in a never ending spiral of quality improvement.
- These processes can become internalised so that individuals also begin to measure themselves through meeting targets and performance indicators.

- There can be a general sense of personal insecurity and a loss of meaning in what individuals do, and what is important in what they do. The impact of the internalisation of a managerialist set of values is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activity to measurable performance outcomes. Work becomes a series of many compromises that ultimately hollow out education professionalism and make professionals malleable for managerialism.
- Professionals become reinvented as units of whose performance and productivity are constantly being audited so these can be enhanced. Accountability is 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 relationship between the internalisation of managerialism and commodification of education and marketisation and privatisation is that individuals and institutions have to account for themselves in ways that represent education, learning and their outcomes as standardised and measurable items.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 bargain or mandate' referred to above, which the state and traditional professionals made.
- 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.

Definitions of professionalism

- Definitions of professionalism seem to involve implied membership of a distinguishable group with had a number of characteristics.
- 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 integrity²;
 - 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.
- UCU members do encompass some of the elements above. But UCU members do not meet all the traditional definitions.
- 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.

² David Crook 'Some historical perspectives on professionalism' op cit Bryan Cunningham

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.
- However this 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.
- Access to what previously had been unchallenged knowledge and expertise can alter the relationships between the individual professional and the client/student.
- Established notions of professionalism change and even disappear as they are overtaken by the concepts of entrepreneurship, managerialism, and quality assurance and student satisfaction.³
- 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.
- A notion of dual professionalism has been put forward. This states that a lecturer possesses two forms of professional expertise: around their subject and around the practice of teaching. This has been criticised as being context-free. For UCU's notion of professionalism, the context within which professional expertise is deployed is vital.
- UCU concept of professionalism allows that specialist knowledge can be relative and provisional. It also allows for that fact that specialist knowledge in any discipline is dynamic: it is continually growing and developing. The educational professional must take account for this growth in knowledge in their subject/discipline. Keeping abreast and for some the creation of knowledge through 'scholarly' activity and/or continuous professional development 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. This must be recognised by their employers.
- Part of the UCU 'professional mandate/bargain is academic freedom. 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 view⁴. Educational professionals must be free to explore all appropriate knowledge and be free of undue and unnecessary external control.

³ Sally Power op cit Page 192

⁴ Scottish Review of Higher Education look up

Professional values and ethics

- Professional values and ethics and the adherence to a practice that is based on these value is one defining elements of professionalism.
- It is through a professional bargain/mandate that needs to be made between UCU professionals and their students, colleagues and peers, the general public that the trust and accountability that professionals and society need, will be demonstrated.
- It is through this 'bargain', the professional 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. These contrasts with the set of values that now predominate in UK education. These latter values derive from and are part of the dominant paradigm of managerialism, marketisation and privatisation.
- A UCU concept of professionalism will be a defence of long standing educational, human and progressive values and against managerialism and its values. The values espoused by UCU members are also the values of UCU as an organisation that represents these professionals.
- UCU's professionalism is built around long standing education values of empowerment, equality of opportunity, inclusiveness, sustainable development 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.
- 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.
- 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 ultimate authority. Breaches of professional conduct in many professions could lead to expulsion for the professional body and loss of the 'license to practice'.
- 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.
- 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. 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 class based, privileged, male and patriarchal characteristics that often accompanied traditional professionalism.

- The formal codes of traditional professionalism are only one source of values, attitudes and beliefs that inform and contributing to professional behaviour and identity.
- Ethical values and codes are and should be based on recognised and valued standards that the professional creates and maintains. In the hands of managerialism, professional standards can become opaque, complex and over elaborated.
- 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.
- There can be five values informing professional practices. These 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.
- 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. These 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 managerialist and the democratic.
- The traditional concept does not meet the needs of UCU and its members. So there remains two competing discourses shaping the professionalism and professional identity of education workers now.
- One is the concept of 'democratic professionalism' first set out by an Australian academic, Judyth Sachs.
- Democratic professionalism emerges from the profession itself.
- In the UK managerialism and managerial professionalism have increasingly become the dominant discourse in education. Within colleges and universities it has become increasingly difficult to put pedagogy and research over the demands of the market.
- Democratic professionalism 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. Education professionals must be

responsible and accountable for that which is under their control, both individually and collectively through their unions. 5

- At the core of democratic professionalism is an emphasis on collaborative, cooperative action between education professionals and other education stakeholders. The professional's responsibility reaches beyond than the single classroom, lecture hall, laboratory or workshop.
- Democratic professionalism involves being sensitive to a range of stakeholders. It seeks to demystify professional work and forge alliances between educationalists and the excluded, students, and wider communities.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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. UCU members sustain others and their own learning through hard work and commitment. 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.
- As professionals UCU members form communities of practice that can acknowledge new knowledge, changing circumstances and new learners.
- The UCU 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 standards for themselves and these should not be created from afar. This should

⁵ Sachs quoting Preston 1996, p. 192 Australian Teachers Union, 1991, pp. 1-2,

be created 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 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. It has to operate in the arenas of subject and pedagogy and research. 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.
- The five values set out above can be expanded into some 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. Professionals need to learn from experience and update their competences and ensure that their knowledge, skills and understanding are up to date.
 - 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.
 - Integrity: this implies self-awareness and a realisation of one's own values, prejudices, beliefs, limitations and fallibility.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- UCU members have a deep knowledge of a particular subject area; and are a 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.

- 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.
- Sachs ⁶ 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"
- 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. 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. Communities of practice provide the conditions and the opportunities for the role of activist professional to be legitimated.
- 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 will need to develop and enhance critical pedagogies and practices.
- These new forms of professionalism cannot be achieved without engaging with the professionals themselves in the wider contexts in which they work. 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. There needs to be opportunities for an education professional to pursue all their professional interests and identities.
- UCU's professionalism has to be both alert and cognisant of the changes and developments in education and around learning that are taking place.

Closing Remarks

This is a starting point. There are many areas, if not this whole paper, that have been not adequately discussed and examined in this paper. 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 in and fulfil.

⁶ Sachs op cit

- 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.
- Further analysis in relation to the smaller sections of UCU members. Is it too focused on teaching?
- Developing the ideas around multiple professionalisms and identities.
- Is there a need for separate professional bodies. There have been so far largely unsuccessful attempts to create and in some instances foist professional bodies for sections of UCU members. Should UCU co-operate with future professional bodies, and if so on what terms. If UCU does co-operate and work with them, what are the minimum terms for such co-operation and bodies? What does it mean to state that UCU is a professional body? 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 with 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 builds 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 defence 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.