

UCU policy summary

March 2014

Set out below is a summary of current UCU policy as adopted by the union's Education Committee during 2013/14. The full versions of all the papers are available at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/policyhub>

PAPER TITLE	THE FUTURE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
Key issues	<p>14-19 policy summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement an integrated 14-19 phase with a multi-level diploma based on credit accumulation and transferability to be taken by all students. ● Overhaul careers education, information, advice and guidance for young people to ensure it is independent, high quality and accessible to all. ● Employers, teachers and learners all have a valid role in designing vocational qualifications. ● Restore proper financial support for learners to replace EMA.
	<p>Adults policy summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● over-25s to have a bespoke career change/fresh start programme to replace apprenticeships in recognition of their different educational needs ● reverse the decline in workplace training with statutory time off for learning scrap equivalent or lower qualification policy ● skills support for unemployed adults matching local labour market needs using expertise of colleges and LEPs ● implementation of Youth Resolution for young adults up to 25 ● reconstituted sector skills councils in a social/industrial partnership model to include employers of all sizes, unions, learners, and FE and HE providers.
	<p>Apprenticeships policy summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● should revert to a programme for under-25s only ● move towards a statutory three year minimum duration ● have education at their heart, with mandatory off-site learning provision including wider learning aims ● abolish the gap between national minimum wage and apprenticeship minimum wage ● a certified professional title should be awarded upon completion ● financial support through fiscal measures that will work for small and medium enterprises – tax credits, wage subsidies, grants from levy system ● employers should contribute financially to training through levies proportionate to size.

Funding policy summary

- voluntary approach has failed; statutory underpinning of vocational education and training (VET) needed with, fiscal measures such as tax credits and levies to properly support and fund learning
- scrap failing 24+ advanced learning loans
- social/industrial partnership model to properly engage all types of employers, provide union role and representation, raise levies and provide grants
- government to fund VET seamlessly without an arbitrary divide at age 19.

PAPER TITLE**INEQUALITY, LIFE CHANCES AND EDUCATION****Key issues****Benefits of widening participation**

- UCU policy establishes a range of cross-life stage priorities for improving life chances, widening participation in higher education and ensuring that outcomes are not driven by an individual's socioeconomic background.
- Higher education is highly productive for both individuals and the economy.
- Despite society becoming wealthier, the UK has not become fairer.
- Widening participation can support the development of a socially mobile society.
- A number of crises require immediate attention including: poor investment in early years provision; the absence of a coherent information, advice and guidance system; and low male, part-time and mature student participation in higher education

Early years

- UCU should agitate for greater investment in early years provision.
- Government should establish a timeframe for the provision of free early education each week for all children aged 2 through to school age.
- Government should review and improved funding levels for family learning
- Government should review and regulate the cost of childcare supporting parents and carers to return to work and/or learning.

Information, advice and guidance

- UCU should develop proposals for a new statutory regionalised strategy. The strategy should comprise joint responsibility and accountability between primary and secondary schools, HE, FE, adult education and the local Enterprise Partnership and the local authority.

Key features could include:

- school, college, adult education and higher education visits linked in with civil society activity by employers – eg careers advice, interview practice offers, this is what I do...
- student financing and financial literacy support
- multiple sources of advice for all learners, multiple contact points
- careers weeks/days/regional careers fairs led by the local authority.

Government should:

- extend the remit of Sector Skills Councils to include setting a sector specific careers strategy
- review careers education qualifications and regulations
- include a statutory face-to-face offer and re-advertise the National Career Service
- provide funding support for postgraduate advice.

14-19**UCU should explore partnership opportunities to:**

- research and lobby for an integrated 14-19 phase with a multi-level diploma based on credit accumulation and transferability to be taken by all students
- lobby for the reintroduction of the universal entitlement to work experience at Key Stage 4
- research and publicise the negative impact of the increase in new and small sixth forms. Competition is reducing quality continue to campaign against plans to reduce the full-time funding rate for 18-year old learners to 17.5% less than 16 and 17-year-olds
- government to restore proper financial support for learners to replace the Educational Maintenance Allowance – explore HE funding opportunities for this launch the Youth Resolution.

Alternative pathways to HE

UCU should:

- continue to give publicity to the the collapse of part-time entry and the disastrous impact on widening participation and social mobility
- engage with membership to explore how accreditation of prior learning and labour market experiences breakdown might be better used across low, medium and high tariff institutions
- explore how HE could support the creation of more pathways from further and adult education to higher education, eg supplementary provision
- research and critique increasing BTEC uptake amongst more disadvantaged learners.

Admissions

UCU should:

- commission research on the crisis in male participation and explore partnership opportunities for this work
- commission research on the higher education pathways from BTEC qualifications
- lobby government to introduce financial incentives for colleges and universities who collaborate to widen participation
- engage with membership and partner organisations to test proposals for a new transparent admissions process, including the use of contextualised admissions and post-qualification assessment
- explore what mechanisms could be employed to make equality of access to higher education as explicit as teaching and research excellence
- lobby the Russell Group to set a clear target for how much progress its members are aiming to make in closing the 'fair access gap'.

Retention**UCU should:**

- call for an overhaul of the funding and support system. Learners should know what support they will get before they begin their courses. Student funding should always cover the cost of living support – at present it does not fully cover accommodation in all cases. The current model is unsustainable, especially in the light of the lifting of student number controls.
- review the National Strategy for Access and Student Success when published call for higher education retention strategies to be made more explicit and more transparent call for universities to work with HEFCE and OFFA to develop a collaborative research programme to establish which forms of outreach activity and fair access strategies are working
- champion induction processes which create an early sense of belonging that avoids the tension in a deficit model along the rhetoric of 'join clubs, go out, students=alcohol'
- work with partner institutions for call for more strategic use of peer mentoring – Harriet Bradley's paired peers project as an example of this
- interrogate the wider benefits of bursaries to students. How much financial support makes a difference, to learners, beyond retention e.g. attendance, hours of termtime employment, participation in non-course activities, attainment
- call on government to reward institutions which increase participation of students from under-represented groups and also to help these students to succeed.

Fair access to the professions**UCU should:**

- call for greater access to the professions with the development of non-academic routes. Accountancy and Surveyance as examples. In *Unleashing Aspiration*, Alan Milburn urged each profession to carry out a review of current practice on fair access with a view to developing practical ideas for improvement and report these publicly with a clear set of recommendations and an action plan by 2010. This has not been done. Government should enforce this.
- continue to give publicity to good examples eg UCU comment on Clifford Chance's announcement that it will make the final round of its applications CV blind so that assessors will be unable to see which school or university applicants attended explore how widening participation funding could include bursaries to support low income salaries during internships to support progression and fair access call on all universities and colleges to explicitly reject exploitative internships for their students

PAPER TITLE	WHAT ARE MOOCS?
Key issues	<p>Massive open online courses (MOOCs) – Free, open access and scalable online higher education courses.</p> <p>UCU supports the original goals of MOOCs: to offer free, high quality education to anyone and everyone with internet access. In principle, MOOCS represent the further democratisation of knowledge (albeit limited to those with proper internet access) and can be a good way for people to engage with higher learning with minimal barriers to entry.</p> <p>UCU policy is to oppose the development of MOOCs as a means to further privatise and commodify higher education and as a tool to undermine existing jobs and conditions of service.</p> <p><i>While traditional HEIs seek to charge high tuition fees to a controlled number of students, the ultimate aim of MOOCs is to charge hundreds of thousands of learners a minimum fee. This raises major issues for academic quality and working conditions.</i></p>
	<p>What are the plans for a British MOOC platform?</p> <p>In December 2012, the Open University announced the creation of a new MOOC platform – FutureLearn. It involves partnerships with 21 UK universities (+ two overseas institutions), the British Library, British Museum and British Council. The business model is a third party for-profit enterprise owned and funded by the OU.</p> <p>A charge for (optional) certificates and exam invigilation will form the company's primary revenue stream. The first 20 courses on FutureLearn were unveiled in September 2013 and include options in the sciences, arts, humanities and social sciences. Most of the courses are six to ten weeks long.</p> <p>When MOOCS first burst onto the scene in 2012, a number of bold claims were made about their transformative effect on traditional HE providers. For example, Sebastian Thrun, founder of the Udacity MOOC, predicted that by 2060 there would only be 10 universities left in the world.</p> <p><i>While MOOCs are likely to remain a new way of sharing and exchanging cutting-edge knowledge with bright, self-motivated learners, large numbers of 'typical' learners, who need guidance, encouragement, and regular feedback, will still rely on the infrastructure, staffing and resources of universities and colleges to succeed.</i></p>

PAPER TITLE **BEYOND THE CONSUMERIST AGENDA (TEACHING IN HE)****Key issues**

- a policy of 'student engagement' based on students as partners in the learning process, including revised student feedback mechanisms and proper collective student representation (pp 2–6)
- a staff entitlement to high quality training, support and professional development (pp 6–9)
- a promotion system that genuinely recognises and rewards good teaching (pp 9–10)
- a research assessment system that values research on the scholarship of teaching as well as subject-specific journal articles (p 10)
- a sector-wide conversion of hourly-paid teaching posts on to full-time or part-time, fractional contracts (pp 10–11)
- a demand for smaller class sizes in higher education (pp 11–12)
- UCU will continue to challenge the use of NSS scores as a means to discipline staff and cut course provision
- UCU will continue to highlight the methodological and pedagogical deficiencies with 'student satisfaction' surveys such as the NSS
- in the review of the NSS, to call for a student engagement questionnaire to replace the current satisfaction survey
- campaign for an enforceable code of practice on the use of survey data in the public arena
- to call for a strengthened student course reps structure
- to continue to campaign for better student and staff representation on governing bodies.

PAPER TITLE TRANSATLANTIC TRADE AND INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIP (TTIP): A THREAT TO UK EDUCATION

Key issues

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a proposed trade deal between the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA). It aims to liberalise trade relations, remove 'barriers in a wide range of economic sectors to make it easier to buy and sell goods and services', and open up 'markets for services, investment, and public procurement.'

The deal is being negotiated behind closed doors by representatives from the EU and US.

The scope of the proposal includes import and export tariffs as well as 'non-tariff barriers' like regulatory differences. It is hoped that the deal can be finalised by 2015.

UCU is calling for a cap on the expansion of for-profit post-compulsory education in the UK, and for a tough regulatory framework to be introduced for existing for-profit education providers.

UCU does not believe that the proposed trade agreement should apply to any form of education, as this is a service which is in the public interest and which needs to be closely regulated by the UK government in order to maintain quality and value for money.

UCU is therefore calling for a clear statement that all services which are in the public good, including all forms of education, are explicitly excluded from the terms of the treaty.

Summary

- The TTIP is a proposed trade deal which aims to remove trade barriers between the EU and the US; the deal would open public services to privatisation by US investors.
- It includes a mechanism which allows foreign companies to challenge government policies which reduce the value of their investments; this would make it difficult to regulate companies operating in our public services.
- The UK higher education market is a strategic priority for US education companies, and there have been several recent acquisitions by US companies including the for-profit giant Apollo, which took over BPP in 2009.
- For-profit education companies can access public subsidy in the form of student support. A rapid expansion of unregulated for-profit provision in higher education has led to a BIS budget deficit in 2013, resulting in deeper cuts to broader university funding.
- UCU is calling for a cap on the expansion of for-profit post-compulsory education in the UK, and for a tough regulatory framework to be introduced for existing for-profit education providers.
- However, the TTIP could be used by US companies to litigate against the introduction of tighter regulation for the private education sector, limiting the capacity of UK policy makers to implement or introduce regulations which promote the public interest.
- Therefore, UCU is calling for a clear statement that all services which are in the public good, including all forms of education, are explicitly excluded from the terms of the treaty.

PAPER TITLE THE FUNDING OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Key issues

UCU's established position is to:

- oppose all fees for tuition and other private contributions
- seek increased public investment to restore the OECD funding gap
- support targeted interventions to aid students such as the such as education maintenance allowance (EMA)
- argue for a broad rather than narrowly defined curriculum
- support reform of the current mechanism for funding.

Summary

There is significant evidence of real differences in the balance of public funding for higher and further education between the UK nations. Northern Ireland (3.45:1) and Scotland (2.9:1) prioritise higher education spending while Wales (0.68:1) puts further education first. Overall, across the UK £1.35 is spent on HE for every £1 spent on FE and skills.

Outcomes are also different with for example England having the highest percentage of working population with at least a first degree and Northern Ireland having much higher levels of people with no qualifications than the other nations. All nations have seen a substantial expansion in those qualified to degree level among the youngest cohort. In terms of widening participation to HE, Northern Ireland does best and Scotland worst using measures of class and state versus private school background.

A myriad of distinct student finance schemes have emerged since the introduction of fees in England with Scottish students paying no fees, Welsh students paying a net £3,575 and of course English students pay a maximum of £9,000. Similarly diverse student support systems exist side by side with this with England having a complicated system of maintenance loans and grants plus institution led bursaries and Welsh students enjoying higher maintenance grants.

The six tests

UCU proposes six key tests against which we should measure new funding proposals within the UK:

- 1 Will the proposal make it easier or harder for people to reach their full potential whatever their backgrounds?
- 2 Will the proposals increase or reduce the country's academic capacity and research base?
- 3 Will the proposals make the country a more or less attractive place for academic staff to work?
- 4 Will the proposals make it cheaper or more expensive to study both for young people, mature learners and those who want to learn flexibly?
- 5 Will the proposals broaden or narrow the subjects available for study?
- 6 Will the proposals lead to increased fragmentation and privatisation and an impact on quality?