

Education, professionalism, solidarity

Philippe Harari reports on the 2008 NUT conference

The annual NUT Conference can be quite an argumentative affair, with delegates engaging in robust debate and motions being won or lost by pretty small margins. This year, there was a genuine sense of unity in the conference hall and just about every single vote was unanimous, or nearly unanimous. This is partly as a result of the fact that this year we all have a common enemy in a government that is trying to impose below inflation pay rises. But it is also a result of a genuine desire to act together in order to act more effectively.

There were several key themes to this Conference, and as delegates listened to the debates it became clearer how these different themes are all inter-related and underpinned by the Government's ideological approach.

Pay

At the time of the Conference, the NUT was still awaiting the outcome of its ballot for a national strike for all schoolteachers on 24th April, the first national teachers' strike for 22 years. (We have since heard that the ballot was successful and the strike will be going ahead.) UCU were balloting members in FE colleges for action on that day, and other public sector unions were also thinking of joining in. There was a real sense of common purpose in the Conference hall and a strong feeling that the action on 24th April would be the start of an ongoing pay campaign. The NUT agreed to ballot its members for discontinuous strike action, giving the National Executive real flexibility in pursuing the campaign. There is a real sense of anger amongst teachers about the Government's attempts to control public spending by cutting the pay of public sector workers, while people in the

private sector are seeing their pay rise by more than inflation and while billions of pounds of public money are being used to fight an unjust war in Iraq and to shore up a failing bank. At the same time as having our pay cut, we are being asked to work harder . . .

Workload

It is impossible to achieve a reasonable work-life balance if you are a full-time teacher, and the main driver of unacceptable teacher workload is the top-down target-driven agenda set by the Government via School Improvement Partners and OFSTED. This includes league tables, SATs, prescriptive target-setting, OFSTED and self-evaluation, performance management etc. When unacceptable workload is combined with pay cuts, is it any wonder that 1 in 3 newly qualified teachers leave the profession after one year? The Conference agreed that, following the pay strike on 24th April, we would link our campaigns on pay and workload when planning future action. Of course, one of the main factors in increasing teacher workload is over-sized classes . . .

Class size

The reason class-sizes are so large in our schools is very simple - the Government is not putting enough money into education. The UK comes only 23rd out of 30 developed countries in the 2007 OECD survey of average class size, and the gap between average class size in state primary schools (25.8) and independent primary schools (10.7) is higher in the UK than anywhere else in the developed world. The

body of research that shows that smaller classes lead to better education is enormous. The Conference called on the Government to implement a phased, legally binding maximum class size of 20 by 2020 in both primary and secondary schools, and a moratorium on school closures. As well as affecting attainment, large classes have a major effect on how students behave in the classroom . . .

Classroom behaviour

This year's Conference motion on classroom behaviour made it clear that there is absolutely no contradiction between defending members against harassment, abuse and assault on the one hand, and promoting a student-centred approach to classroom management on the other. The NUT is very effective in its robust defence of teachers faced with extreme forms of bad behaviour in the classroom, but now, unlike other teacher associations, it is trying to debate the root causes of problem behaviour, rather than retreating into an increasingly authoritarian position. The motion sets up a national NUT classroom behaviour working group whose role will be to produce and disseminate literature aimed at teachers, parents, policy-makers etc outlining the root causes of problem classroom behaviour and setting out strategies to create a classroom ethos that is fully inclusive and at the same time conducive to effective teaching and learning. As well as over-sized classes, factors that affect behaviour in the classroom include institutional racism, inadequate resources, the ethos of league tables and testing, an inflexible top-down curriculum, insufficient learning support, inadequate or over-authoritarian on-site provision for dealing with classroom incidents, and an ethos in which education is done 'to' students rather than 'with' them. The motion also referred to perhaps the most significant factor in determining how well students do at school: social class . . .

Poverty

In his address to the Conference, newly installed national President Bill Greenshields spoke at length about the links between social class, poverty and education. In 1931, R.H. Tawney wrote: 'The hereditary curse upon English education is its organisation along lines of social class . . . the barbarous association of differences of educational opportunities with distinctions of wealth and social position'. Since then, a wide range of educational researchers have reached the same incontrovertible

position: that there is a direct, sustained and devastating correlation between educational attainment and social class. The Government recognises this link; as David Milliband, then Schools Minister, said in 2004: ' . . . when it comes to the link between educational achievement and social class, Britain is at the bottom of the league for industrialised countries'. In Britain today, the richest 10 per cent of the population own 71 per cent of the wealth. Instead of setting the elimination of poverty as an absolute priority, governments have continued to blame teachers and the educational system for continuing inequalities in educational attainment. Of course, as teachers, we must continue to do everything to raise all students' aspirations, motivation and achievement, but we have to refute the notion that schools can in themselves put the matter right. The problem has its roots in our wider society, in a system that relies on the existence of 'have-nots' in order that the 'haves' can have a lot more of their share.

Other motions

The Conference also passed excellent motions drawing attention to the financial difficulties faced by young teachers and pledging robust support for Local Associations and School Representatives, who sometimes put themselves on the line in order to represent their members. There was a motion deploring the way that supply/agency teachers are exploited and another pledging support for overseas trained teachers, many of whom face serious discrimination. Delegates again agreed to campaign for the end of SATs and for the abolition of OFSTED and the creation of a much fairer system of inspection. The Union reaffirmed its strong opposition to academies and the way that the new specialist diplomas are being developed. There was a powerful motion on gender equality, including a commitment to defend abortion rights. A motion that was widely reported in the press will make it easier for teachers and students to oppose military recruitment in schools, and there was an excellent motion on inclusive education. More details of specific motions will appear in *The Teacher* magazine.

Finally . . .

This was a great Conference, showing the NUT at its best - united in fighting for a fairer education system within a fairer society.

Specialist diplomas

We print here the text of a motion passed overwhelmingly by NUT conference

Conference is alarmed that Government continues to press ahead with plans for new specialist diplomas, despite the concerns of many in the education sector, including the Union.

Conference does not consider that the announcement of new diploma lines in humanities, foreign languages and science represents a significant change in direction towards a diploma-led curriculum for everyone. On the contrary, it represents 'desperate diplomacy' by the Government in the context of continued ambivalence towards the diplomas from headteachers and universities.

Conference reaffirms the Union's view that the diplomas will create further division between schools and within schools and that they will not provide an adequate education for young people faced with the challenges of the 21st century. Rather than significantly improving the employment chances or educational aspirations of those who enrol on them, class and gender inequalities are likely to be reinforced. Conference also reiterates the Union's concern that many diploma students will have English and maths entitlements reduced to 'functional skills'.

Conference continues to be concerned about the workload and conditions of service implications of members involved with diploma implementation, the lack of adequate professional development and the potential effect on school budgets of large numbers of students studying elsewhere for part of their week.

Conference instructs the Executive to produce material to all secondary members to coincide with the implementation of the first diploma 'gateway' from September 2008. In addition to providing clear guidance on workload and time off for professional development, this material should reiterate the educational reasons behind the Union's opposition and promote its alternatives for 14-19 education, as outlined in *Breaking Down the Barriers* and *Road to Equality*, namely a multi-level general diploma with an entitlement to a range of learning experiences for students.

Conference instructs the Executive to convene a special meeting of the 14-19 task group and Secondary Advisory Committee members to assist with this process.

Conference further instructs the Executive to redouble its efforts to seek maximum unity with UCU, to organise further joint events and seek joint policy statements on 14-19 education.

Conference instructs the Executive to seek additional INSET time for schools involved in planning and teaching the Diploma.

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

- ◆ **campaigns against the decline in standards**
- ◆ **defends individuals against victimisation**
- ◆ **gives moral support and legal advice**
- ◆ **investigates malpractice and publishes findings**
- ◆ **seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations.**

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News update: March - April 2008

Week beginning 3/3/08

Rama Thirunamachandran, the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) official expected to implement the replacement of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) by the Research Excellence Framework (REF), announced last week that he is to leave in June in order to become deputy vice chancellor of Keele University.

Universities secretary John Denham announced last week seven government-initiated reviews of aspects of HE, including demographic change, new success criteria for institutions, student experience, intellectual property, international competitiveness, widening participation and policy advice.

In the ballot of UCU HE members completed last week, 10,126 (60.8 per cent of valid vote) have voted against accepting 'single table' pay bargaining, and 6,517 (39.2 per cent) have voted for it. For the employers, the Universities UK (UUK) spring conference agrees to go ahead with this bargaining anyway. Supporting this, UNISON HE head John Richards says: 'UCU has held us up long enough'.

Points in a *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* article on Harlow College include: in a letter to constituents, local MP and FHE minister Bill Rammell puts at £819,357 the cost so far of principal Colin Hindmarch's restructuring programme; the Tribal Education consultancy has been retained to work with Harlow's management team; two additional governors, Unite official Bill Pigram and former United Glass CEO Steve Hammond, have been appointed.

The British Sociological Association refuses to endorse a seminar titled 'Sociologists, the restructuring of higher education and the erosion of critical social science: the Keele case' which is therefore to be held as a fringe meeting on 28/3/08 at the BSA conference. (Keele vice chancellor and former sociology lecturer Janet Finch is trying to sack up to 38 out of 67 staff in the School of Economic and Management Studies as part of a restructure there.)

Points in a *Guardian* profile of newly appointed Association of Colleges (AOC) CEO Martin Doel include: he has been in the RAF for 27 years; he was trained as a school teacher and did three

months of a probationary year as a PE teacher at a special school; he is currently stationed at the MoD, where he is director of training and education across all three armed services, including for civilian staff.

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) issues a report, *A New University Challenge*, in which it announces that, over the period covered by the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (ie till 2011), the Government proposes to use £150m from HEFCE's strategic development fund to support the setting up of 'higher education centres', a majority of which would involve at least one FE college, in 20 new locations (ie 13 more than previously announced), thereby creating 10,000 extra student places. HEFCE is to consult on how the communities identified would bid for this money.

Having been announced as the first CEO of the (unnamed) body that will result from merging the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) with the (FE) Quality Improvement Agency (QIA), former 157 Group CEO and Warwickshire College principal Ioan Morgan decides not to take the job.

HEFCE announces funding allocations for 2008-09, totalling £7.48bn, 3.3 per cent up on 2006-07. This includes £4.63bn for teaching (up 4.1 per cent) and £1.46bn for research, up 2.9 per cent. Ten institutions, including the Universities of Lancaster, Warwick and Sussex, will get less than last year, while a further 49 will get an increase below the 2.75 inflation rate. The amount allocated for 'equivalent or lower qualifications' (ELQs) has been cut by about £25m (as part of the Government's plan to phase in £100m of 'savings' on these over three years). Because of this, the OU's increase is only 2.4 per cent.

At the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) conference, held in Brighton, secretary of state for Children, Schools and Families Ed Balls announces new plans for 'extended' 14-19 diplomas, to be worth 4.5 A-levels each. ASCL general secretary John Dunford remarks: 'With the greatest of respect to many of the diploma designers, many of them know as much about modern learning styles as I know about producing widgets'.

An Investors in People report on the Science and Technology Facilities Council finds that better management and consultation with its community of scientists could have avoided the hundreds of job losses and the probable closure of still more university physics departments that result budget cuts.

A report on FE by the Commission for Disabled Staff in Lifelong Learning, which is backed by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education, finds that, in the words of chairperson Leisha Fullick, anti-discrimination legislation 'is not having a sufficient impact on employment practice' there.

Spokespersons for a number of universities, including the London

School of Economics, express doubt about the requirement laid on them under the new points-based immigration system to tell the Border and Immigration Agency if any student from outside the EU is absent for more than ten days without 'reasonably granted permission'. (This requirement will apply from early in 2009.)

LSC figures for London reveal that: there are less than 7,000 16-18 year old apprentices there; this constitutes 4 per cent of that age group, while in the country as a whole the proportion is 7 per cent; at 80 per cent, the proportion of 16-18 year olds staying on at school or college is higher than anywhere else; in London, 69 per cent of working age people are employed, as against 74 per cent elsewhere; there are in London 1.2m 'workless' people, including 'active jobseekers'.

A HEFCE document on the outcome of its consultation into ELQ cuts says there is 'a great deal of opposition' among the 312 responses. A HEFCE board paper says: 'there is little at present we can do to mitigate this risk' (ie that people applying to do ELQs will conceal their previous HE qualifications); minutes of a HEFCE audit commission meeting on the consultation include the sentence: 'The board complimented the professional and measured treatment by HEFCE staff of some hostile responses'.

LSC figures for 2006-07 show that 482,000 19 year olds achieved a level 2 qualification and 313,000 achieved a level 3 (ie including both GCSEs and A-levels and vocational qualifications, achieved via schools, colleges and training providers). On the basis of these figures, Ed Balls says: 'I believe that those who claim many young people won't want to remain in training or education until 18 have got it wrong'.

The Pearson Group, which owns awarding body Edexcel as well as the Financial Times and Penguin Books, announces profits of £549m on revenues of £4.2bn in 2007, up from £502m and £4bn respectively in 2006.

The UCU branch at Essex University passes a motion calling on the vice chancellor to halt talks with INTO, the English for academic purposes firm.

Week beginning 10/3/08

A *THE* survey of vice-chancellors' pay and pension payments in 2006-07, covering all but a few institutions (though not London Metropolitan University) reveals that the average salary was £177,844 and the average pension contribution £22,452. Taking the two together, the highest earner was the vice chancellor of Nottingham University, on £308,103 (a rise of 27 per cent on 2005-06) plus £46,897 pension contribution, while the lowest at a general university (ie as distinct from a specialist art college or the like) was at the University of East London, on £119,000 plus £16,000. (The figures also show that Diana Green, union-bashing former vice-chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University, received a £123,000 early retirement package on top of her £181,000 salary and £22,000 regular pension payment.)

HEFCE figures for 2006-07, again omitting London Met. (and also Liverpool Hope) show that the average salary for a lecturer in England was £36,485 and in Wales £35,346. The highest figure for lecturers was at the London Business School (£111,314), the lowest at University of Wales, Lampeter (£23,474). The average salary for all full-time UK academics (ie including professors, senior lecturers and researchers as well as lecturers) was £41,128.

UCU begins balloting FE members over joint action with the NUT on pay.

From next year, the University of Central Lancashire will cut its Christmas break from five weeks to three and its Easter break from three weeks to eleven days. Leeds Metropolitan University has this year cut its Easter break from three weeks to two.

With debts of £129m, the private training provider Carter and Carter, which has 25,000 LSC-funded trainees and 2,000 other students on its books, as well as 2,500 staff at 100 locations, goes into administration (by Deloitte). The total paid to Carter and Carter by the LSC is about £90m. According to AOC president David Collins, at least one college claims to be owed £60,000 by Carters for work they failed to do. (It emerges that in 2005 the LSC put £100,000 into the start-up costs of the Craig Phillips Building Skills Centre, run in Liverpool by the first winner of Big Brother, which is now part of Carter and Carter, and would have put more if Sir George Sweeney, principal of Knowsley College, through which the funding was routed, had not intervened.) Guardian coverage claims there are ten private trainers big enough to take over Carter and Carter's work, although none want to do so for all of it.

Research by Claire Callender of Birkbeck College, University of London, reveals that universities are using bursaries as marketing tools rather than support targeted on those in need. On the ELQ situation, she says: 'This is the full logic of what a private system looks like . . . Unless people are studying subjects that fit in with the skills agenda . . . [they] are deemed by the Government not to be worthy of support'.

The LSC publishes research showing that 68 per cent of 16-19 year olds seek parental advice

about their 'learning options' and 4 in 5 parents urge their children to follow a GCSE/A-level rather than a vocational route.

A pre-hearing of an employment tribunal finds that Kaye Carl, a shorthand tutor at Sheffield University, had 'the trappings of self-employment thrust upon her' by the employer (ie in a bid to treat her unfavourably with regard to pay, holidays and pension rights). (Carl represented herself, after the UCU solicitors, Thompsons, said she would lose.)

A *Guardian* article cites the views of several prominent childcare academics, as well as evidence given to the parliamentary group on childcare by the CEO of a large private nurseries chain, that the existing (CACHE) qualifications in childcare are putting children at risk. One academic says: ' . . . the NVQ2 [in childcare] should be scrapped. It's useless, worthless, because the NVQ3 is only barely good enough'.

According to a *Guardian* article, those likely to bid for 'university centres' under the Government's new initiative include Thurrock Council, New College Durham, Bradford College, Peterborough Regional College and Blackpool College.

Imperial College has signed a deal, worth £25m, which will link its chemical engineering and materials departments with the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, which is being built by Saudi Arabia with a £5bn budget and will open in 2009.

Lancaster and Warwick Universities, both of which received cuts in funding allocations from HEFCE in the previous week, are challenging HEFCE's calculations.

In *Innovation Nation*, a DIUS White Paper, the Government proposes a scheme by which, from 2011, selected businesses will

receive vouchers totalling £3m a year as an incentive for them to commission universities to develop new products and services; another proposal is for a pilot of a new FE Specialisation and Innovation Fund 'to build the capacity of the FE Sector to support business'.

The budget contains an extra £60m for adult skills training.

Week beginning 17/3/08

Points in a *Guardian* feature on Harlow College include: in a letter to campaigners written during February 2008, local MP Bill Rammell says that as well as the £819,357 spent on redundancy payments, principal Colin Hindmarch's restructure incurred legal and recruitment costs of £167,000, leading Rammell to comment: 'These very high costs reinforce my view that the change strategy the principal initiated was not adequately thought through or effectively implemented'; the campaign against Hindmarch is now being led by, amongst others, Tony Edwards, partner of one of the 100 (out of 179) lecturers made redundant, and students' union president Victoria Broad; two new student governors have been 'elected' (ie appointed by Hindmarch) without Broad's knowledge; UCU has issued legal proceedings over the conduct of the redundancies, which could lead to group compensation claims of £500,000; Hindmarch says: 'We intend to make Harlow College a byword for excellence'.

Points in a *THE* article on the effects of the government's ELQ cuts on the Open University (OU) include: OU management is forecasting a deficit of £24.7m for 2011-12 (as against a £6.9m net surplus in 2007-08); it expects to have lost 29,500 students, equivalent to £40m in funding, as a result of the ELQ cuts; in a discussion paper, arts dean David

Rowland projects staff cuts and moves towards a more flexible (ie casualised) workforce.

The DCSF and DIUS jointly issue a white paper, *Raising Expectations*, in which they announce that: in 2010 the LSC will be closed down; 16-18 funding will be returned to LEAs (of which there are now 168); LEAs will also have to participate in 'sub regional clusters' to resolve boundary issues (eg about students living in one LEA and studying in another); unresolved disputes will be dealt with by a Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA); post-19 provision will come under a new body - the Skills Funding Agency (SFA); such provision will be mainly via 'skills accounts' (ie a revived version of the individual learning accounts scheme that had to be closed due to corruption, and mismanagement by the outsourcing contractor Capita etc) and Train to Gain; funding for pre-19 students will be equalised across schools and colleges; it is not clear if this will be by raising what colleges get or cutting what schools get; sixth form colleges (of which there are now 96) will be treated as a separate sector, rather than as part of FE as now.

The Future Size and Shape of the HE Sector in the UK, a report written by Nigel Brown and Brian Ramsden for Universities UK (part of a series commissioned by DIUS) says that on current demographic trends the full-time undergraduate population of UK HE in 2020 will be down by 4.6 per cent (or 70,000 full time student places).

Following Ioan Morgan's decision to pull out, AOC acting CEO Sue Dutton is to be seconded in May to the unnamed quango to be formed from merging the CEL and QIA. She will draw up a strategic plan for it, pending appointment, at a salary of around £200,000 a year, of a permanent CEO. (Dutton's CV includes conspiring with the corrupt College Employers Forum CEO Roger Ward to set up the

Education Lecturing Services - now Protocol Professional - agency to scab on lecturers resisting worsened contracts following incorporation in 1993.)

With other investors, the South Yorkshire Investment Agency is putting £250,000 into ABC (Assess by Computer) software developed by Assessment21, a Manchester University spin-off company, which, according to director Gerald Lennox, 'takes away the drudgery' while leaving marking judgements to academics.

Both the AQA and OCR awarding bodies express concern about a clause in the plans for Ofqual (ie the body to be split off from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority with effect from April 2008) which would allow it to recommend that awarding bodies compensate candidates for errors in the exams process.

Academics at Cambridge University vote by 711 to 344 (out of a possible 3,800) for a proposal by which the University's council will increase from 22 to 24 members, with the number elected by academics themselves remaining as now (at 12), the effect being to increase the powers of the vice chancellor, who will hold the deciding vote.

Board papers released by HEFCE show that the estimated total of fundable full time equivalent HE students in the current year is 1.14m, 10,000 short of the planned figure of 1.15m.

Compass pressure group chairperson Neal Lawson tells the audience at an NUS debate that: 'The whole point of [variable top-up fees in HE] is to drive institution against institution, student against student. It is about conditioning your minds so that you don't rely on the state, you don't rely on each other, you don't rely on society or community. You borrow money, get up to your eyeballs in debt and

then . . . go out and earn as much as possible to pay it back'.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) approves the AQA awarding body's 'Bacc' qualification (ie the scheme by which students who take three A-levels, plus an AS-level in either general studies, critical thinking or citizenship, and who also do 100 hours of enrichment activities and a 5,000 word research report get an over-arching qualification. This means that the AQA Bacc, currently being piloted at 36 schools and colleges, can from September 2008 compete against the Government's 14-19 diplomas and other qualifications such as the Pre-U, International Baccalaureate etc.

Week beginning 24/3/08

A Commons innovation, universities and skills committee report on ELQs: says the Government's policy could cause tuition fees for some students to rise by up to 200 per cent; denies that people doing ELQs were preventing others doing first degrees; says the Government should have consulted universities properly and in any case waited till the 2009 review of fees; claims that implementation of the cuts is 'inconsistent and unsuitable' and based on out-of-date HEFCE figures; challenges the Government's belief that employers will co-finance courses; demands the Government urgently issue guidance to institutions on dealing with people who try to hide previous qualifications.

It is announced that Newcastle College has taken over most of Carter and Carter's business. Points in *TES* coverage of this include: the deal is expected to raise Newcastle's turnover from £90m this year to £150m next, making it the biggest college in the country; Newcastle already 'owns' one private trainer, Lancashire-based TWL Training; the deal does

not include the motor vehicle side of C&C's provision; union-bashing Newcastle principal Jackie Fisher calls this 'a fantastic opportunity to create a strong, employer-facing business . . .'; for UCU, Barry Lovejoy says: 'We are please the business has been returned to the public sector . . .'

Former Man Group chairperson Harvey McGrath has pledged that he will give £4m to Cambridge University, to be added to the £3m it currently spends on widening participation.

The 2007 Work-Life Balance Survey, carried out by Coventry University, using a sample of 2,300 employees across ten sectors, finds that the 300 HE employees surveyed have markedly more adverse views of their managers than staff across the sample as a whole have for theirs (for example, less than a quarter of HE staff think their employer treats them fairly). The survey also reveals high levels of stress and bullying in HE.

Lancaster University issues a statement apparently preparing the way for job cuts in its continuing education department.

A survey by the Prince's Trust, based on focus groups conducted across the country with disadvantaged people who are in years 10 or 11 at school, are classed as 'under-achieving' and face exclusion, and who are involved in the Trust's two-year 'xl' groups programme, finds that, in the words of policy and development director Ginny Lunn: 'They say that many young people are already disengaged with education before 16, and raising the compulsory age to 18 will simply prolong the process. The young people felt the Bill threatened to criminalise them, potentially creating more young offenders'.

Figures for FE college accounts in 2006-07 show that by turnover the ten biggest colleges then were: City College Manchester (£81.8m);

Newcastle College (£73m); Cornwall College (£70.4m); City of Bristol (£62.8m); Bradford (£57.6m); Manchester College of Arts and Technology (£51.1m); Ealing, Hammersmith and West London (£51m); Sheffield (£50.4m); City and Islington (£46.6m); Derby (£46.3m).

Professor Robert Burgess, chairperson of the HE Academy (HEA), says he wants to raise the number of HEA fellows from the current 18,000 to 40,000 in the coming five years.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for 2006-07 reveal that the main groups of overseas students at UK institutions were: 49,595 from China; 23,835 from India; 15,955 from the US; 11,135 from Nigeria and 9,605 from Pakistan. The total of students from non-EU countries was 239,210. The highest total from a single EU country was 6,770 from Poland.

Following a meeting to protest about his plans for restructuring, University of Sussex vice chancellor Michael Farthing cites figures showing that the institution is set to lose £1.4m from government ELQ cuts, as well as getting £200,000 less for widening access and £600,000 less than last year for 'quality-related research', to support his claim that the position is 'very challenging' that 'lots of people are very enthusiastic' about his schemes.

UCU alerts members at the University of Lincoln to the fact that management is passing their personal details, including national insurance numbers, payroll numbers and home addresses, to the private employee benefits consultancy You at Work, to which it has outsourced part of the institution's human resources function.

Warwick University, hitherto the only institution to be a member of both the Russell Group and the 1994 Group (of smaller, 'research-

intensive' universities), leaves the latter.

The Government releases National Office of Statistics data showing that the HE 'initial participation rate' for 17 to 30 year olds in 2006-07 was 39.8 per cent (ie only a little higher than the 1999-2000 rate of 39.2 per cent).

UCU's national executive committee (NEC) votes 27 to 11 in favour of including in the 2008 annual conference agenda a motion 'committing the union to 'promote a wide discussion by colleagues of the appropriateness of continued educational links with Israeli institutions'.

Week beginning 31/3/08

Points to emerge from figures extracted from universities' financial statements over the period 2005-07 by the accountants Grant Thornton and published by the THE include: total income for all UK HE institutions in 2007 was £20.8bn, up 16 per cent on 2005; in 2007, each of the top five institutions - Cambridge, Oxford, Manchester, UCL and Imperial College had total incomes exceeding £500m, the highest being Cambridge on £958.2m; this figure for Cambridge included the highest figure (£495.7m) from sources other than funding council, research, teaching and overseas income, the nearest rival being Oxford on £155.3m in this category; in 2007, all the 20 or so Russell Group universities together earned £8.7bn, or 41 per cent of all HE income, leaving 59 per cent to be shared amongst the 110 or so other institutions; again, Russell Group universities' share of total research income in 2007 was 67 per cent (up from 65 per cent in 2005), as against 2 per cent for all the Million+ (ie post-1992) institutions put together (the same percentage as in 2005); a Grant Thornton analyst sums up the overall position by saying: 'A gap has opened between older,

wealthier institutions and the others that may be difficult to close . . . A lot of smaller and newer institutions are at greater risk [ie than in 2005. Ed.] unless they find themselves a niche'.

Ed Balls and schools minister Jim Knight launch a government paper which 'proposes' that: a new body, the Joint Advisory Committee for Qualifications (comprising HE, employer and teacher 'representatives') will take over from the QCA the role of accrediting qualifications for public funding; both vocational A-levels and Advanced Extension Awards will be scrapped, the former from 2013, the latter from 2009; Tony Blair's pledge that the International Baccalaureate will be available in every LEA will be dropped; from about 2012, the majority of existing vocational qualifications, including BTEC diplomas, done by 195,000 14-19 year olds in 2007, will either be no longer available to people under 19 or subsumed (in some cases as 'branded' units) within 14-19 diplomas.

Funding Higher Fees, an HE Policy Institute (HEPI) report, examines the advantages and disadvantages of four models for increasing HE fees, all based on two hypothetical caps of £5,000 and £7,000 a year.

Employability Skills Explored, a Learning and Skills Network (LSN) report, identifies a tendency for employers to want full time 14-19 courses to inculcate general 'employability skills' such as punctuality, a capacity for teamwork etc (ie rather than technical knowledge, which they can either provide themselves or arrange with colleges to provide via 'bespoke' courses for their employees).

UCU members at Keele University, plus supporters from elsewhere, demonstrate in solidarity with the 38 staff in the School of Economic and Management Studies there who vice-chancellor Janet Finch is trying to sack. (The branch has

been taking action short of a strike since 21/2/08.)

A government 14-19 education strategy paper contains a proposal for a unified credit accumulation framework embracing all 14-19 qualifications, to be introduced by 2013.

HEFCE unveils the first three 'employer-facing' projects to receive a share of the £105m for this announced by CEO David Eastwood in February: a £3m scheme involving Staffordshire University, Worcester College of Technology and Stoke-on-Trent College, and a £5.2m scheme at Teesside and Cumbria Universities.

From September the average cost to a school or college of an Edexcel A-level will be £90.52, as against £73.08 for an OCR one and £67.20 for an AQA one. A-level design and technology will cost £148.20 from Edexcel as against £67.20 from AQA.

HEFCE designates five university libraries - at Cambridge, LSE, Oxford, SOAS and Manchester - to be funded as 'national research libraries', excluding both the library at UCL and the University of London Senate House Library from this category. The existing £1.1m annual subsidy to the last of these will be phased out over two years, possibly leading to its closure.

The University of Bournemouth UCU branch passes by 184 to 16 a vote of no confidence in vice chancellor Paul Curran, because his restructuring plans will mean that, in the words of the branch secretary: '... the very bedrock of what makes a decent university will be trashed in a headlong rush to change'.

About 123,500 HE students are thought to be in accommodation outsourced by universities to private companies, one of which, Ubrique investments, is trying to

charge Jessica McNeil, a student who, before dropping out, spent six weeks at Huddersfield University at the beginning of the current academic year, the full £3,600 payable for a 42 week year. (Ubrique has nearly 2,000 students on its books.)

At the NUS conference, held in Blackpool, delegates: vote narrowly to reject the leadership's 'governance review' (ie plan to abolish what remains of democracy in the organisation); elect the Labour Students candidate, former Cambridge University student union president Wes Streeting, as NUS president; agree to Streeting's plan by which, in 2009 when tuition fees are to be reviewed, the NUS will emphasise opposition to lifting the £3,000 cap (ie rather than continued resistance to fees as such). (Streeting intimates that he will call one or more Extraordinary Conferences during the current year to reverse the decision on governance.)

NUT general secretary Steve Sinnott dies of a suspected heart attack.

A study by the Open University Centre for HE Research and Information, presented to the Association of University Administrators conference, finds that a high proportion of the 1,700 UK academics polled consider that the pressures on research activity are putting its quality at risk.

DIUS director-general for HE Ruth Thompson tells the Administrators conference that: 'I was at the Public Accounts Committee [hearing on HE success rates. Ed.] . . . and horrible people they were. It was an object lesson in not allowing a report that actually was quite a good news story to go anywhere near a load of MPs whose job it is to make difficulties'. Characterising as 'infamous' the target set by Blair in 1999 of 50 per cent of 17-30 year olds having experience of HE by 2010, Thompson says: 'We're not abandoning it

... and we are willing to explain to people why we will not reach the rate of 50 per cent participation by 2010, because we never thought we would actually'.

The annual conference of UCU in Scotland passes a motion calling on the Scottish Government to withdraw universities there from the research assessment exercise.

Week beginning 7/4/08

At Bristol Magistrates Court, City of Bristol College is fined £14,000, with £18,000 costs, in the case of welding lecturer Gary Baird, who was permanently scarred by an explosion of nitric acid following the employer's failure to provide a safe system of work.

HEFCE launches the South East Physics Network, a link-up between the Universities of Kent, Southampton, Surrey and Sussex and Royal Holloway and Queen Mary Colleges, aimed at attracting students onto physics courses via links with schools and employers, using £27.8m extra funding over the next seven years.

The QCA accredits Norwich City College to develop its own qualifications in the financial services sector. 14 other colleges are understood to be making bids for accreditation.

It emerges via HEFCE's annual conference, held in Warwick, that DIUS secretary John Denham is likely to postpone implementation of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) by one year (ie such that the first elements of it would be ready in 2010 rather than 2009).

HEFCE CEO David Eastwood tells the conference that the fiscal climate for the next spending review will be 'tight' and indicates that the issue of fees and the cap on fees may not be resolved by the Government's 2009 review.

Points in a *TES* article on alternatives to A-levels include: a head-teacher on the International Baccalaureate (IB) board of governors claims 90 schools have in the last few months applied to do it, such that the total doing so is likely to rise from 125 now to over 300 from September 2009; 30 institutions, including Eton College and Tower Hamlets College of FE, are expecting to offer the Cambridge International Exams Pre-U qualification by 2009.

Research by Leon Feinstein and Anna Vignoles at the University of London Institute of Education finds that people who are the first members of their families to go to HE make economic gains but also run a sharply increased risk of mental illness.

In *Counting What is Measured or Measuring What Counts?*, (a report written for HEFCE by the OU Centre for HE Research and Information and Hobsons Research), the authors, William Locke and Line Verbik, say of HE league tables (ie as published by newspapers etc): 'The resulting rankings largely reflect reputational factors and not necessarily the quality or performance of institutions'.

Week beginning 14/4/08

HESA figures reveal that universities' staff costs grew from £11.2bn in 2005-06 to £12.2bn in 2006-07 (an 8.7 per cent increase) while as a proportion of total expenditure these costs remained steady at 57.8 per cent.

LSC figures reveal that: in October 2007, the number of adult students was 1.04m, down 151,000 on 2006, a 12.7 per cent decline; there was a 3 per cent rise in 14-19 participation over the same period; over the last three years the numbers on 'adult safeguarded learning' (ie the £210m a year programme aimed at mitigating the effect of government cuts in adult funding) fell by 41 per

cent, from 440,000 in 2004 to 259,000 in autumn 2007; there was a 17.5 per cent drop in these numbers between 2006 and 2007; numbers on Train to Gain rose by 124,000 between September 2006 and September 2007, totalling 168,000 at the latter date.

UCU has given £2,000 to the Friends of Birzeit University charity in connection with the attempt to arrange Palestinian speakers to UCU branches following the motion to the 2007 annual conference.

The Government initiates consultation (running till 7/7/08) on its *Higher Education at Work* document, which proposes measures for linking universities more closely to employers' requirements.

Points in a *Guardian* feature on the Newcastle College takeover of Carter and Carter include: three banks and 'up to' 30 colleges are amongst Carter and Carter's creditors; the Corus/British Steel pension scheme had a 2.95 per cent holding in Carter, worth £15.6m in April 2007 but there is no chance of getting any of this back; LSC resources director David Russell denies that the LSC has given Newcastle any money to help them with the takeover; Newcastle's reserves prior to the takeover were just over £45m; what Newcastle has bought is Carter's contracts with the LSC and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), thereby avoiding taking over its £120m of debt; Newcastle's projected income for next year is £150m, up 122 per cent over the last published accounts (for 2005-06); Carter's contract with the LSC was worth £80m, twice as big as the next biggest such contract held by a single organisation.

It emerges that in November 2007, Ed Hughes, head of the team managing the RAE on behalf of the four national HE funding councils (ie including HEFCE) wrote

confidentially (ie secretly) to panels telling them to make sure that all notes kept by academics on these panels about their decisions be destroyed, to avoid attempts to challenge panel decisions using the Freedom of Information Act.

It emerges that in a letter to Ofqual, ie the body recently split off from the QCA so as to provide an 'independent' exams regulator, the Edexcel awarding body, which belongs to the publisher Pearsons, in trumpeting its Results Plus system, which allows candidates and institutions to find out details of performance, said that its 'philosophy is aimed at increasing student attainment across all grades'.

In a *THE* profile, NUS president-elect Wes Streeting says: 'I think it would be a wise vice-chancellor who recognises that the student union would be a wise place to invest, because only student unions can be effective agencies for representation of the learner voice'.

UCU announces the results of its ballot for strike action over FE pay on 24/4/08 etc as follows: 27,500 FE members of UCU were balloted, in 257 colleges; just under 38 per cent of this number actually voted; of those voting, 6,481 (65 per cent of valid vote) voted for strike action and 3,605 (34.5 per cent) voted against; 8,963 (86 per cent) voted for action short of a strike, and 1,430 (13.8 per cent) voted against. (The number of UCU members in FE is said by UCU to be now about 43,000, including about 3,000 who have joined since September 2007.)

HE Academy CEO Professor Paul Ramsden, who earlier in his career was involved with a student experience survey in Australia, from which the UK National Student Survey (NSS) is derived, has suspended Professor Lee Harvey from his post as HEA director of research, ostensibly because Harvey wrote a letter to

the *THE* without HEA clearance, but actually because his letter described the NSS as a 'hopelessly inadequate improvement tool'.

Chris Banks has agreed to go on chairing the LSC (for two days a week) up to 2010, when £7bn of its £11bn funding will be handed back to local authorities.

The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), which looks into complaints by students against universities in cases which do not involve academic judgement and where internal procedures have been exhausted, reports that applications to it rose from 586 in 2006 to 734 in 2007, 64 per cent coming from students aged 25 and over.

Eight general FE colleges in the vicinity of St Vincent Sixth Form College in Gosport are supporting an LSC-backed scheme to merge it with Fareham College, while ten sixth form colleges in the same vicinity, along with the Sixth Form Colleges Forum, support its continued independence.

According to vice-chancellor Les Ebdon, 30 (mainly non-academic) staff at Bedfordshire university have accepted voluntary redundancy so far during 2008. (Bedfordshire has borrowings of £17m.)

Toni Fizaeli, currently deputy director of the DIUS FE group (ie a civil servant), is appointed CEO of the Institute for Learning (ie the body which all FE lecturers are now forced to 'join' or lose their jobs).

UCU members at Keele University are to be balloted about escalating their action against redundancies in the School of Economic and Management Studies to include an assessment boycott.

In the *Guardian*, Edexcel managing director Jerry Jarvis warns that lack of training for teachers in advance of the September 2008

launch of 14-19 diplomas could lead to 40,000 students being saddled with qualifications that are 'worthless'. He calls the diplomas 'a huge educational risk'.

Week beginning 21/4/08

Explaining the thinking behind a manifesto launched by the 34 academics who have formed the Weston Manor group, which aims to improve assessment in HE, group member Colin Bryson (at Nottingham Business School) says: 'In expanded higher education, marking loads can be gigantic . . . meeting the demands of quality assurance means teachers spend too little time on good feedback sessions, fostering good trust relationships with students and enhancing their learning and teaching'.

A DIUS statement about the Research Excellence Framework (REF) reveals that the plan to use one method for assessing science research and a different method for humanities and social sciences has been dropped in favour of using a combination of peer review and 'metrics' for both. The statement confirms that full implementation of the REF has been put back one year (to 2014).

As a result of its takeover of failed private trainer Carter and Carter, Newcastle College now has centres in Hounslow, Peterborough, Derby, Sheffield, Nottingham, Sale, Glasgow, Cardiff and about 35 other places. Union-bashing principal Jackie Fisher claims that via Intraining, her name for the parts of Carter acquired by Newcastle, they now employ 900 of Carter's former staff.

Oxford University refuses to make public the findings of a survey commissioned from P.R. company Weber Shandwick in 2007 which aimed to gauge perceptions of Oxford amongst black and minority ethnic school students, university staff and media.

The US company Economic Modelling Specialists Incorporated (EMSI), which previously reported on the contribution to the economy made by Warwickshire College (ie the college where 157 Group founder Ioan Morgan is principal) issues a second report, this time on York College of FE. This report cost £7,500. EMSI is assessing 40 other colleges. The LSC is considering whether EMSI's reports could form part of its Framework for Excellence.

In the Quality Assurance Agency's annual report, CEO Peter Williams warns universities against 'gold-plating' their internal quality assurance activities in an attempt to get a better inspection outcome from the QAA. ('Gold-plating' involves such practices as mock audits, briefings to staff prior to inspection and the like).

In a *Guardian* article about the (still unnamed) body to be formed from merging the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and Quality Improvement Agency, Sheffield College principal John Taylor reveals the existence of two other bodies formed by colleges: the Improvement Partnership Board and the Single Voice (the latter involving also private trainers).

The Legacy of 1960s University Buildings, a report by the Association of University Directors of Estates, highlights the decaying state of buildings put up in the 1960s and early 1970s, estimating at £11bn the likely cost of replacing or refurbishing them.

Commenting on an attempt by the Tory Bow group think tank to create the impression of a crisis with regard to GCSE results, Cardiff University professor Ewart Keep points out that many of the nearly 90,000 16-year olds who last year left school without five GCSE Grade Gs may be responding to labour market requirements. He says: 'The idea that five good

GCSEs is somehow the benchmark, and that if you fall below that employers will stamp a skull-and-crossbones on your skull and throw your application in the bin is just wrong'.

An international campaign is developing in support of suspended HEA research and evaluation director Lee Harvey.

Minutes of a recent QCA board meeting reveal that it has decided to change from amber-red to red its assessment of the risk of 'being unable to deliver [its] key remit due to the loss of staff resulting from its move to Coventry and the increased workload resulting from the splitting off of regulatory functions into the new Ofqual organisation'.

UCAS figures reveal that the number of applications for full-time undergraduate courses beginning in September 2008 have risen from 446,765 at this point last year to 481,784 now (up 7.8 per cent).

Commenting on a Commons education select committee report which says that there is confusion about whether the DCSF or DIUS should take the lead with regard to 14-19 diplomas, a DCSF spokesperson says: 'We've been crystal clear from the start that DCSF is in charge of all 14-19 curriculum and qualifications'.

The CBI and Edexcel jointly issue *Taking Stock*, a report which supports the idea of financial incentives to encourage school students to do science and technology qualifications.

Manchester College of Arts and Technology principal Peter Tavernor is to be principal of The Manchester College, which will open on 1/8/08 following the merger with Manchester City College, and will have an annual budget of around £130m.

Where we stand:

Post-16 Educator seeks to defend and extend good practice in post compulsory education and training. Good practice includes teachers working with students to increase their power to look critically at the world around them and act effectively within it. This entails challenging racism, sexism, heterosexism, inequality based on disability and other discriminatory beliefs and practices.

For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.

Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.

Post-16 Educator works to organise readers/contributors into a national network that is democratic, that is politically and financially independent of all other organisations, that develops their practice and their thinking, and that equips them to take action over issues rather than always having to react to changes imposed from above.

What is happening to poor old FE in this new landscape?

Margaret Andrews details some of her research findings

Introduction

I spoke to eight FE staff, from junior support staff level through teachers and managers to principals in three FE colleges in London and the north of England. My aim was to find out the current influences on their work and what, if anything, had changed in the way that they were working in the last two years. When asked the question: what are the key government policies or agendas affecting your work?, all responded 'funding'. Three areas of funding were highlighted: the funding of programmes for adults, the increase in 16-19 year olds, and Train to Gain (T2G).

Background

Within the last two years, there has been a clearer focus on welfare reform and skills in FE following the White Paper *Raising Skills Realising Potential* (2006), the Leitch review of skills (2006), and the Government's response, *World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England* (2007). The LSC launched T2G in 2006, aimed at increasing training available to businesses by making funding available to providers who can demonstrate that they deliver high quality programmes. Skills for life and full level 2 qualifications are the focus of T2G funding (LSC 2006). To help raise individuals' and employers' awareness of the importance of skills, the LSC launched a national skills campaign on 9/7/07, 'Our future: it's in our hands'. From 2008 the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills will provide added support for and scrutiny of the employment and skills system (DWP 2007).

In July 2007, further welfare reform was introduced by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in the Green Paper *Work, Better Off and Ready to Work: Next Steps to Full Employment*. This Green Paper set out plans for the achievement of 80 per cent employment in the UK. Its emphasis is on reducing the number of benefit claimants, increas-

ing the participation of Bangladeshi and Pakistani women, and providing skills for young people, thereby signalling the new client groups FE would be expected to prioritise.

The Government's welfare reform and skills agenda has resulted in new priority groups and programmes of study that are eligible for LSC funding. These new funding priorities are well known both to FE professionals and to adult students who already possess level two qualifications and would like to attend an FE college: level two programmes; 'firsters'; programmes for students aged 14-19 given higher priority than those for 19+; a greater emphasis on work based learning (apprenticeships) and T2G; and a reduction in adult and community learning. At the beginning of the current academic year, the Secretary of State for DIUS, John Denham, wrote to every college in England to set out these priorities. His message was effectively communicated throughout the colleges as admin. staff, lecturers and middle and junior managers as well as principals repeated its content almost verbatim.

In March 2008 the White Paper *Raising Expectations, Enabling the System to Deliver* was presented to parliament. It announced the closure of the LSC by 2010 and the creation of several new bodies to take responsibility for funding post-14 education and training. The new structures will see FE colleges receiving funding from the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), the DWP via Job Centre Plus, universities (for HE programmes), employers and adult fees. The White Paper proposes that local education authorities and regional and sub-regional groups will participate in the planning of provision. There is insufficient space here to fully discuss these proposals, which also include the merger of the Quality Improvement Agency with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership. FE has only just begun to get used to the two recently-formed government departments (DCSF and DIUS) which split the responsibility for schools from FE and HE. The new

funding landscape suggests even more radical changes for colleges in the future.

Power and powerlessness

One junior manager I spoke to perceived the discrepancy between the recommended pay increases for lecturers and the college's ability to meet them as a major cause of disaffection. She did not think senior managers were aware of the breakdown of trust between lecturers and management caused by this unsettled pay dispute.

Senior managers had other concerns; they appeared helpless against the constantly changing agendas from Whitehall and the LSC. A London principal perceived the LSC as the 'real' managers of colleges.

Referring to the work done by his senior managers, a deputy principal from a London college described his college as 'implementing' and 'delivering' LSC priorities. Interestingly, he and a deputy principal in the North used similar words to express their perceptions of Whitehall policies. They both supported the Government's plans to develop a skilled workforce, but they disagreed with the approach that was being used to achieve it. They felt that FE's expertise in managing and implementing change were being ignored, and the pace at which FE was expected to deliver new provision, especially the high volume of work with employers, could not be achieved within the time scales specified. There was a risk that colleges were accepting impossible targets from the LSC, knowing that they were unable to deliver them, because rejecting these contracts would mean that they would fail to obtain sufficient funding to meet their staff pay and overhead costs.

A junior admin. officer spoke of unreasonable increases in workload and targets without any financial recognition or additional support. This member of staff is enthusiastic and enjoys her work with students, but in the past two years her rising stress levels have led her to come into work at weekends to ensure that she meets targets. She commented that her manager was under equally as much pressure to deliver, and therefore she felt unable to go to this manager for support. At the same time, she thought that her managers knew that she was working beyond her contracted hours, and she did not feel valued for this extra work.

Overall, there seems to have been a greater feeling of uncertainty among staff in the past two years than in previous periods of change. Both senior and junior managers have noticed that previously 'loyal' staff were now feeling overwhelmed by the relentless demands for training, new administrative processes caused by changed funding priorities, and an in-

creased volume of procedures generated by the requirement to provide performance evidence against new quality and accountability standards. These staff were complaining for the first time, and some of the most committed staff, who had dealt with previous changes with relative ease, were now choosing to leave or making plans to do so.

At the time of writing, colleges have not received their LSC funding allocations for the year 2007-08. A senior manager claimed to have been informed that the LSC's new funding formula had not been perfected and was under- or over-calculating institutional budgets based on the LSC funding priorities. This manager had not even received a draft allocation for planning purposes. Unaware of this, a junior member of the support staff at the same college criticised her senior managers for withholding information about funding, and expressed distrust about their claims to being open and transparent with information.

'I can teach my subject but I'm not a sales rep!'

Many colleges have experienced conflict between staff teams as they try to implement T2G, recognising that the skills needed to work with employers, including in the workplace, are not held by all FE teachers. Most colleges have recruited new sales teams to secure the interest of employers and obtain training contracts. The enthusiasm of these sales teams is not always matched by their understanding of FE teaching or teachers, and tensions developed between curriculum and 'business' development teams in the early stages of expanding T2G. These have largely been resolved but it remains a sensitive area.

The dress codes of some FE teachers are not always considered appropriate for working with certain employers, and many lecturers' contracts protect them from working during their holidays. Employers' selection of training times and dates often conflicts with college holidays and with the working hours that are traditional for most college staff. College managers are negotiating new, more flexible contracts for existing staff - not only teachers - with unions, and new staff are being recruited to meet the requirements for working with employers.

Which exam board?

The time required to complete many of the traditional FE vocational qualifications which are needed to work in certain professions (for example childcare) is often considered too costly for employers to release their staff onto these courses. On other occasions, the income from the LSC is insufficient to meet the cost

of an FE teacher both delivering (ie assessing) a reputable qualification in the workplace and teaching the knowledge that should underpin this. In such instances, colleges are selecting accreditation bodies which require less theoretical knowledge and place a greater emphasis on assessing practice. This has an adverse effect on adults, as they are more likely to be studying part time and in work. With full time 16-19 year old students on the other hand, not only are their programmes free of charge but they are also able to benefit from traditional FE vocational programmes and reputable accreditation bodies which provide robust practical work experience, in-depth theoretical underpinning knowledge, and qualifications that are recognised in the workplace and within HE as possessing rigour.

Contradictions and paradoxes

It is well known that many FE lecturers choose FE in order to work with adults, and do not want to teach young people. Among the people I spoke to, one junior manager and one senior admin. officer expressed concern that some FE teachers, even with training, will never work effectively with young people. However, due to the LSC's reduction in funding for adult learners and the prioritising of programmes for people under 19, FE teachers who wanted to be classroom based, teaching traditional FE qualifications, will have to teach mainly younger students.

Furthermore, while the Government's agenda of professionalising the workforce (DfES 2006) by having mandatory qualifications for teachers and leaders in FE is being implemented enthusiastically by colleges, managers are not managing, if, as one principal said, they are being 'micro-managed' by the local LSC. The directives and plans given to colleges by the LSC to 'deliver' and meet targets suggest that management theories learnt on Senior Leaders programmes, which require FE leaders to 'lead', will remain just that - theories.

And of course, when it comes to teaching and learning, those same teachers who must now be qualified or working towards being qualified are limited with regard to how far they can implement the theory and practice they have been taught in the process. Thus although assessment is an important aspect of teaching and learning, it is often assessment alone which colleges can 'afford' to provide - for example on certain T2G programmes. The differences in the LSC income between a professional programme funded through T2G and the same programme funded as an FE programme can be over 25 per cent in favour of FE-based provision. Colleges therefore cannot always afford to provide equal access to professional knowledge and skills to students in the workplace as those

within the walls of the college. FE teachers are reduced to being assessors - if they are lucky - or even made redundant because it is too expensive to employ them merely to do assessment. In other words, despite the concentration on equipping teachers with the necessary qualifications to deliver high quality teaching and learning, the necessity to meet targets and the needs of employers requires 'assessing', not teaching and learning!

Conclusion: is there any respite?

During my research I was told that teachers loved to be in the classroom, though they were dissatisfied with the lack of time to prepare lessons and the pressure to deliver to targets. Support staff spoke passionately about wanting the best for students. In fact, there are good, confident teachers who want to focus on learners, and who wish they could leave FE in order to do work with students that will not require so much admin. and will provide more opportunities to concentrate on learners and lesson preparation.

It is possible for support staff to leave and obtain better paid work in other public and private sector organisations, but those I spoke to saw the work that they do with FE students as unique, and the FE environment as 'special'. One senior admin. officer talked of her disappointment at the reduction of adult students in the college, at the same time expressing surprise at the ease with which young people, mainly of African and Asian descent, have come to form a high proportion of the formerly adult FE community.

Two senior managers, one in the north and the other in London, commented that there were a few positive gains from the changes in FE, for example that the closer monitoring of colleges meant that senior managers couldn't run them for their own personal benefit, and that teachers are being respected for being good teachers. However, the manager from London added: 'The anxiety takes away the fun and enjoyment, staff are less happy, it's tougher work in FE, it rubs a little of the shine off. Change is OK if there's some rest, but it's that uncertainty that makes it difficult for people'.

All of the FE policy literature of the past two years emphasises the empowerment of FE leaders, choice for learners and the professionalising of the workforce, and of course quality is stressed throughout. However, it is evident from the perceptions of junior and senior staff in the three FE colleges I researched that staff at all levels are feeling powerless, that teachers are being deprofessionalised, that students' choices are based on what colleges can afford to deliver and/or the ability of individual adult students to pay college fees, and that the demography of colleges is changing significantly.

Let the teachers teach?

Lawrence Nixon, Maggie Gregson and Trish Spedding

In one of Eugene Ionesco's absurdist plays of the 1950s the stage fills slowly but remorselessly with chairs. As the chairs pile up things begin to go awry and the main character's hope of delivering his message to the world is thwarted. Even the actors struggle as they seek to balance the needs of the roles they play with the quiet, insistent and persistent demands of the stagehands with their endless supply of chairs. Ionesco's image of the stage precariously over-stacked with chairs and players struggling to act is a striking one. It could be taken to convey the idea of people hard pressed to achieve what they see to be important given the way things are being done. Perhaps Ionesco's image captures something of the way teachers in the post compulsory education and training (PCET) sector have been feeling about their work recently? Our research suggests there could be something in this analogy.

We recently conducted a systematic review for the then DfES with support from the EPPI Centre at the University of London. We sought to answer the question: ***'What do practitioners say about their experiences of implementing national post-16 education policy at the local level?'*** This work involved reviewing over 500 published research reports and identifying key themes and issues as found in the remarks of teachers and managers in colleges and community settings. We found the term 'policy' used to cover nearly all educational practice, from ministerial announcements to the dictates of managers, orders commonly justified by the claim that 'it's policy'. Given these very broad parameters, the findings of the systematic review could be read to summarise the views of teachers on their own day-to-day practice. The research identified what practitioners saw to be the strengths of their practice and those areas where they felt there were difficulties. In this

respect, the review identified a number of common views, expressed by a range of teachers and managers, in a range of local PCET settings.

Comparing the set of common concerns that the systematic review identified with the personal views of teachers about their own practice could be useful in at least three ways. First, it might serve to bolster individual concerns - that is, make practitioners aware that their individual feelings are actually widely shared amongst practitioners in the sector. Second, the widespread nature of these concerns should alert us to the possibility that the causes of these concerns lie outside any particular classroom or department. Finally, if we take the identified concerns seriously we would also have to face the possibility that in some respects at least the current ways of organising the PCET sector are not 'letting the teachers teach'. That is, judged from the practitioner's perspective, current ways of organising teaching and learning do not make best use of the sector's most valuable and costly resource, namely its teachers.

Given the operative constraints we will concentrate on presenting the three review findings where practitioners express concerns about their current practice. We also offer some very succinct comments on what these findings imply for the future organisation of PCET practice. The first relevant finding of the review suggests that ***practitioners balance the duties placed on them by both marketing and pedagogic discourses which they perceived, sometimes, to be competing.*** The research of Coffield and Edward (2007) records how tutors struggle to translate priorities expressed as a simple linear set of steps (clear targets and an agreed time frame followed by teaching and learning practice, achievement and robust quality assurance) into the real world. Perhaps from a management perspective this linear

picture makes obvious sense. For teachers this picture of good practice is often challenged by the incredibly diverse needs of the learners they work with. This state of affairs is summed up in the following pithy statement made by Paul, a drop-in centre tutor: 'It feels to me like the audit process assumes a certain mode of learning, the students turn up and sit in the classrooms, which we simply don't do' (Gleeson, 2005). The tutor in this quote expresses exasperation at the marketised image of the student as orderly consumer. He finds this picture of the learner incompatible with the far more messy reality of the drop-in centre and the teaching and learning strategies that are actually appropriate to this context. The review found that teachers did work hard to fulfil these competing demands but that they felt that their organisations' prioritisation of targets and audit culture got in the way of them doing what they saw to be best for their learners.

The second review finding suggests that **practitioners, particularly tutors, identified concerns about their ability to exercise pedagogic judgement and agency**. The work of Hamilton and Hillier (2006) illustrates this finding. Looking at the development of adult literacy teaching over the last 35 years, Hamilton and Hillier explore how the teacher's sense of empowerment or constraint has changed over time. One striking contrast they draw is between the practice of the early literacy pioneers and those working in the field today. The early pioneers were free, or empowered, to practice as they saw fit but they were constrained by lack of formal, reliable funding and the lack of academic support and resources. The contemporary practitioners, by contrast, are shown to be empowered by increases in funding and resources. However, they also find themselves constrained by endorsed forms of curricula, targeted outcomes and quality assurance regimes. The contrast drawn between these two working contexts draws attention to the limited sense of agency and empowerment the contemporary practitioner feels. It foregrounds the way teachers feel that priorities have been imposed from the outside, as a tutor in another study puts it: 'We don't know what's happening as tutors - we're nearly always the last to know. And it's not been the programme managers' fault: they don't know either' (Edward 2007). The link between this sense of constraint and the view that teachers are required to satisfy competing demands is not hard to see.

The third review finding suggests that **tutors sometimes expressed attitudes of professional and pedagogic insecurity**. This statement sums up a view expressed by frontline tutors that sometimes they were unsure that they had, in their day-to-day practice, struck the best balance between attending to local teaching and learning

needs and the imperatives of the educational 'market'. The sense of disconnectedness, having to act in ways that do not necessarily make sense, is summed up in the following statements: 'The management will tell you that . . . it comes from outside, because the governments wants us to do things this way and the funding is this way. So you don't know who to blame for the changes . . .' (Edwards 2007). The term insecurity could be taken in at least two sense here. First, the sense that teachers are simply reluctant, even frightened, to express their views given their working regime. Alternatively, the term insecurity could suggest that these teachers lack the confidence necessary to robustly present their views and argue for them on sound educational principles.

If we take seriously these concerns of teachers then the timely question to ask is: how could the PCET sector make better use of the professional talents and abilities of its teachers? While the findings of the systematic review point to the relevance of this question, they cannot, by themselves, generate an unambiguous answer to it. We would argue that improving the professional understanding of teachers could play a significant part in enhancing the ability of practitioners to act within their organisations. Even this mild recommendation carries far-reaching implications for the reassessment of priorities and reallocation of resources. Working teachers and managers may have other more practical or more locally relevant answers to this question to present.

The point that our review foregrounds is that the search to find more effective ways to manage the PCET sector, ways that 'let the teachers teach', is a search that must be informed, in part, by the views of professional teachers. Without this input, we are likely to continue to work, as Frank Coffield has noted, in organisations that, absurdly, do not put teaching and learning at the heart of their activity.

Endnote:

The full report of this systematic review is published as an EPPI Centre *Technical Report*. It is titled: *Practitioners' experiences of implementing national education policy at the local level. An examination of 16-19 policy*. London EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London. The authors are Lawrence Nixon, Trish Spedding and Andrew Mearns. In the bibliography of the *Technical Report* you will find full details of the reports and studies cited in the paper.

For those who wish to further investigate the views of PCET practitioners captured in the research we would recommend beginning with the ten or so articles that were scrutinised in detail for this review. These articles are identified and summarised in Chapter Four of the *Technical Report* under the heading *In-depth review articles*.

The full Technical Report and a short summary of it are available on the EPPI Centre website.
URL: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2326>.

Deprofessionalisation: resistance is increasingly futile!

Richard Lawton *takes up the argument*

In my *PSE* article 'Deprofessionalisation: is resistance futile?' (Lawton, *PSE* 35, 2006) I highlighted the problems facing FE lecturers, focusing on the fact that, particularly since the early 1990s with incorporation, the sector has undergone a process of deprofessionalisation, with lecturers working in a climate of reduced trust and increasing surveillance in the drive of new managers to increase 'quality' and 'efficiency'. - a situation juxtaposed with an intensifying government intervention in which lecturers are teaching an increasingly 'product' based curriculum which is a lot more prescriptive and assessment based.

At that time I ended on a positive note suggesting that resistance was not futile and through a process of critical reflection and continuing professional development there is a chance that some claim on professionalism can be maintained. Since that time, however, it does seem as though the former is under attack, a problem identified by Robin Simmons and Ron Thompson in their commentary on the situation relating to teacher training. The fact that the Government 'intends to seize control of post-compulsory teacher training' places it alongside this detrimental shift already experienced by FE but also threatens FE directly if the likely outcome is newly qualified teachers lacking in critical ability (Simmons and Thompson *PSE* 35, 2006 and *PSE* 41 2007). The pernicious effects of government interference on FE and notions of professionalism are now being extended into this area and quite clearly Eynon's claim that 'professional expertise is increasingly controlled by the state rather than professional communities' is

increasingly valid and increasingly worrying (Eynon 2002, p321).

One factor in suggesting that the notion of professionalism in FE is not entirely at risk has been the move towards compulsory training for FE lecturers, which is widely regarded as a positive advance, enhancing lecturers' ability to claim professionalism and it does seem, as Ollin suggests 'that the government has finally legitimised the professional status of the FE teacher' (Ollin 2002, p136). However, if the quality of training diminishes then the term will be increasingly redundant. The potential consequence of this interference in teacher training is a loss of intellectual rigour and the loss of post-16 teachers with the tools to engage in critical reflection - the key element I suggested in the maintenance of professionalism.

Challenging

Reflection is a valuable tool but its value in relation to challenging deprofessionalisation rests not only in being able to reflect on one's teaching practice but by reflecting upon and understanding the role and place of the teacher within a wider conceptual framework. Increasing interference in teacher training threatens this ability and will inevitably mean that FE teachers will be unable to engage in reflection on those different levels identified by Kemmis (and outlined in *PSE* 35) - technical, practical and critical (Kemmis 1985). Technical reflection does not provide FE teachers with a wider understanding with which to comprehend

and negotiate their role. This it seems will become the full extent of teachers' capabilities if Simmons and Thompson are correct and the cost of increasing government interference is likely to be the loss of the critical function. The most pertinent form of reflective practice I previously outlined, offering the greatest barrier to deprofessionalisation, was critical or emancipatory reflection, the only level of reflection which 'provides you with a systematic means of critiquing the power relationships in your workplace', offering 'raised awareness and a new sense of informed consciousness to bring about positive social and political change' (Taylor 2002, p148).

Threatened

It is this type of reflection which is most threatened by these developments. This can only serve to enhance deprofessionalisation and exacerbate the situation I previously highlighted where in some cases the notion of professionalism is rejected or limited by the fact that some cannot adequately engage with the debate. This is the inevitable outcome if practising teachers are not provided with the tools with which to become critical practitioners early on in their careers - it seems safe to assume that they will not develop any awareness of their role beyond being a 'worker' in education. The continuing expansion of competence-based teacher training suggests that this will become the trend with a mechanistic technical-rationalist approach - the Cert Ed and PGCE courses risk becoming a variation of the same.

Alongside this, the moves to further integrate a 'common core' seem an unnecessary and unwelcome addition. The increasing focus on core elements, literacy, numeracy and IT was present at the time of my PGCE (albeit in its infancy) with a numeracy case study being an integral part of one of the units. This requirement at the time was regarded by myself and fellow students as being an unnecessary component, especially given that a place on the course already relied on a certain level of academic achievement in which the key elements are implicit. At the time I viewed this as a 'ticking box' type activity - something which had to be done but which had very little value to the course overall.

Overall my PGCE provided me with the tools to become a critical practitioner; it included essential technical aspects but placed them in a broader philosophical and social context. The course was intellectually challenging and stimulating in the same way as my other experiences of undergradu-

ate and post graduate education had been and how a university education should be. Indeed PSE was brought to my attention whilst doing my PGCE, as were wide ranging issues such as professionalism and reflective practice. The real risk that these elements may be jeopardised by changes to training is a worrying development. The by-product of this will be a loss of morale for lecturers delivering Cert Ed and PGCE courses with an increasing loss of control over the teaching process.

As the Government increasingly seizes control of post compulsory teacher training it does seem overall that resistance is indeed increasingly futile and it seems there will be no limits to government encroachment on further and higher education. Recently with one of my first year classes we have been considering National Socialism's attack on intellectualism, and came across an interview with a teacher lamenting (quite daringly) the Nazi regime's interference in education commenting: 'There is no longer any intellectual freedom and education is being degraded by political interference. Political agents, often ignorant and stupid men, interfere with my teaching'. Whereas it is not right to make direct comparison between our current government and the totalitarian and racist Nazi regime, it is a real shame that this 1938 comment seems so relevant to 21st century Britain. The pernicious effects of changes to funding, juxtaposed with increasing government interference and persistent attacks on professionalism may lead to the same situation the Nazi regime faced, with thousands of teaching vacancies and no one to fill them, with teachers turning elsewhere for status and recognition.

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Review: Kim Moody on U.S. unions - and the implications for UCU activists

Dave Welsh

Kim Moody, *US Labor in Trouble and Transition* (Verso, 2007), paperback £19.99

This book is an ABC of US labor history. It deserves to be read by all serious trade union activists in Britain. Kim Moody is a veteran of US labor movement struggles, and helped to found the hugely influential Labor Notes magazine. I came across Labor Notes in the 1980s through activists on the New York subway working around the Hell on Wheels rank & file group (later New Directions). At that time, militants on London Transport were beginning to organise around unofficial newsletters like 'Picc Up on the East', 'Close Encounters on the District Line' and 'Busworker'. The history of these kinds of initiative lay in the many new responses to working class recomposition in earlier decades. What they had in common was the aim to build an independent rank & file politics based on autonomous working class organisations and that's why Kim's book is a very timely account of what has happened in the USA.

Importantly, the book is built on the key notion of analysing the US workplace and the trade union movement. Kim does well to remind us of the industrial nature of US capitalism. His book chronicles the ebbing of the wave of militancy that had emerged from below in the 1950s, after the battering of two recessions. But this history is focused on the rank & file of the labor movement which had consistently come up against 'the bureaucratized and conservatized' trade union leadership (p107). Here is a key thread: that there is a rank & file in the workplace (wherever that workplace is located), not a set of 'service-users' who wait passively for their union to represent

them. That rank & file may be divided (as racism had divided the US movement), it may be fragmented and politically conservative at times but it is out there.

Kim outlines the management offensive that was to follow in the 1990s: the 'team concept', 'partnership', 'lean production'. Labor-management programs and 'jointness' came in at General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, bringing armies of 'clipboard' people into the workplace and spreading like wildfire across US industry. All this meant one thing: undermining the idea that unions were in the business of class conflict. Here again, he takes apart the union response: mergers, business unionism and reform from above. On mergers, for example, he shows that many mergers actually made no sense, can fragment their members and are, above all, top-down affairs. Mergers, he notes, became 'a substitute for new organizing in the period of retreat' (p119). He notes the Change to Win Coalition of SEIU, UNITE-HERE, the Teamsters and others as one model that has faults but is different to the old AFL-CIO business unionism. Change to Win came out of the split in the AFL-CIO over the issue of organizing the unorganized, not surprising when you remember that the unions had shrunk to 12.5 per cent of the workforce by 2005.

Thirdly, Kim discusses the many campaigns and initiatives that have emerged in recent years as an alternative to the business unionism model. He describes the worker-centers, non-majority unions, union reform and democracy movements, worker-based organizing drives and 'deeply-rooted' workplace unions. Usefully, he points out that a democratic social unionism can only emerge from struggle with the employers. The recent failures of

union reform suggest that change at the top of a union is never enough - we must change the relationship of leaders to members and that between leaders and the employer. He relates a number of specific resistance points in the movement like the 1997 UPS strike, the ILWU contract fight in 2002 and the TWU Local 100 strike on New York's transit system in 2005.

Rank & file?

So what does this add up to? Well, you can learn a lot about the US labor movement. But it also contains a number of points of discussion for British trade union activists. It's a book that will challenge you to think about rank & file movements, organizing and political interventions. What is the role of the rank & file today in Britain? Is the concept outdated? Should we be building rank & file organizations? If so, how do we build them? Are they viable in a period of retreat? But do not read this book if you're seeking the 'Hallelujah it's a strike!' strategy for class struggle. Most British groups/parties still persist in adopting the most shameless 'strike-chasing' mode. And don't bother if you think the current leadership of Britain's trade unions is 'doing a good job', that is, if you think that tail-ending the current bureaucracy and ignoring the rank & file is tactically necessary or whatever bizarre variant your party has dreamed up. Just think of the fate of the former NATFHE (UCU) Rank & File that had aimed to build a broad coalition of activists linked closely to the rank & file membership. It was hi-jacked by a party and turned into a fan club for the leadership (first Paul Mackney, now Sally Hunt). Don't read it if you subscribe to the notion that all the workers need is your party-line because the book asks its readers to think, discuss and debate in an open and democratic manner. If you do read it (order it from your college, university or local library) you'll note the many similarities between the US and British experiences. There's the merger-mania, the Blairite business unionism model, the sidelining of internal dissent and stifling of democracy by union bureaucrats and the current challenges of building a new rank & file unionism. That's plenty to be going on with.

Glossary:

SEIU: Service Employees International Union
 AFL-CIO: American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations
 ILWU: International Longshore & Warehouse Union
 TWU: Transport Workers Union

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Critical education

We print here the contribution by PSE editorial board member Colin Waugh to the document due to be produced by the Society for Research into HE following the 23/1/08 meeting reported in PSE 44

Critical education aims to produce people who think for themselves. In essence, this requires that three capacities be developed in students: a capacity for posing and solving practical and theoretical problems; a capacity for working assertively and democratically with other people; and a capacity for judging the quality of their own work and organising themselves to raise this where necessary. These capacities are best viewed as facets of one broad intellectual competence rather than as discrete 'skills'. They constitute a dimension of all valid learning at no matter how high or low a level, rather than a package that can be acquired once and for all as no more than a means to studying something else. However, if mainstream HE programmes are to provide in a systematic way for this dimension, those who design, teach and assess them would need consciously to organise to that end, including by ensuring that it is assessed with the same weight as all major course components.

This cannot be brought about solely or even mainly by official policy initiatives from above, because if it could, critical education would not be in such short supply as it is, and hence the current call to introduce it would not have arisen.

A turn towards critical education requires, then, that a section of lecturers adopt this perspective, in the process refining, strengthening and deepening it, and decide collectively to start putting it into practice. They would need to discuss the structure

of courses on which they teach, including assessment criteria and procedures, pinpointing where, if at all, a critical approach, in the sense set out above, is already in place (including where it may be in jeopardy), and identifying points at which it could most easily be extended or, if necessary, initiated. (Clearly if lecturers also have the opportunity to design critical elements into new courses, so much the better.) They would then need to develop, use, review and rework teaching strategies and materials and assessment instruments based on their findings.

For example, most if not all disciplines rest - at different levels of sophistication - on traditional conceptual tools which are commonly arranged in pairs of opposites, such as cause and effect, necessity and contingency, form and content, possibility and actuality, analogy and homology, essence and appearance. To varying degrees - and in most cases unconsciously - all students use these 'tools'. However, lecturers who had organised themselves to do so - which would include themselves exploring critically the history of these dichotomies, including the alternatives to them - could redesign existing units so that, as well as meeting mainstream objectives, completion of these units would, automatically and in an integrated fashion, lead students to become more conscious of such reasoning processes, more resourceful in using them, better able to see where specific ones are or are not applicable, less prone to becoming trapped in false contradictions, more capable of tolerating uncertainty and suspending judgement, more attuned to the fluid and dynamic character of ideas - in short, better able to think for themselves.

If lecturers in a range of disciplines and institutions start to work along these lines in a concerted fashion across the three capacities identified, an effective movement for critical education could be built.

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To subscribers and readers:

Over the past months union reps at London Metropolitan University have been struggling to counter management's attempts to de-recognise UCU. In the most blatant attempt at union-busting, the Director of HR has retrospectively seized on the creation of UCU to get out of recognising the union at all. In part this is revenge for members' earlier, successful dispute when she was prevented from imposing a new contract on 367 lecturers. However, there were practical reasons too. Since management has begun claiming that UCU is not recognised, HR have been rewriting a long list of policies and procedures in ways that are harmful to staff. Now comes the most outrageous move of all - up to 60 redundancies without any union consultation at all.

UCU annual congress passed a motion supporting London Met members' fight against attacks on the union. It called for a national campaign and a boycott of London met if management had not shifted from their position by September. In the light of management's latest move, the HE COmmittee has agreed that these measures be put into immediate effect. In particular we will be launching a campaign of protest and a boycott of the University, and calling on trades unions to withdraw their cooperation. London met UCU will almost certainly be balloting for action as soon as possible.

■ The editorial board of *Post-16 Educator* meets 5 times a year for about an hour on Saturday mornings, in central London, other business being dealt with by email. With the agreement of existing members, any subscriber who is a UCU or NUT member, supports the 'Where We Stand' statement (p10), and is willing to help with the running of the magazine (see p2) can join it.

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