

New LSC CEO's funding model

We print here the full text of the letter by PSE subscriber George Arkless to the TES FE Focus (29/5/09)

It was somewhat ironic (if not downright irritating) to read the proposals of the new leader of the LSC on funding given the background from which he has emerged (FE Focus 15/5/09). I hardly think that the public sector is going to be too willing to listen to outcome focused approaches from someone steeped in the financial sector.

The reported approaches were naive and patronising and could only have come from someone with little knowledge of the sector. Does he really think that the post compulsory sector has been allowed to drift by government, the funding bodies, colleges and their staff and leaders in a world where improving retention and success at an ever-increasing level of efficiency have not been central to their agenda? Is he unaware of the current funding formula's 'success factor' which impacts on funding where success is low? What of Framework for Excellence?

There are real dangers in too simplistic a model of funding being rushed in. I am a great believer in targets for learners and for colleges. But all targets have to come with a huge health warning as otherwise they distort behaviour and move organisations away from their underlying beliefs and values.

Beware too the law of unintended consequences when putting forward ideas that appear to have common sense credibility. If you punish providers too much when learners do not all achieve

then they will not take any risks when recruiting. If a potential level 3 learner has (on best evidence and experience) an 80 per cent chance of success then why take the risk? Why not put that person on a level 2 course, knowing that they will succeed and then progress to level 3? Great for your success and progression data but it will have taken twice as long and twice the cost to achieve the outcome. Where is the 'Value for Money' then? Think too about those who are at the bottom end of the educational ladder or have a range of disadvantages - how will their entitlement be met if no one dares take them on for fear of failure?

There fact that there have been so many attempts by so many different groups over many years to come up with an effective funding model should of itself suggest caution. The one thing we do know about the sector is that it has shown its skill time and time again to discover ways to manipulate the funding rules to its own advantage.

If he wants a genuinely 'needs based' funding system perhaps he should consider the need to do something about the disparity between FE pay and conditions and those in schools, or the needs of adult learners for affordable provision, or the need to meet the re-training needs of those affected by the current economic climate largely precipitated by the financial sector.

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.

News update: April - June 2009

Week beginning 27/4/09

The *Education Guardian's* 'Note-book' column claims to have a leaked document showing that the additional cost of the LSC's decision to keep its London office at Centre Point in Oxford Street is £2,154,509.

The University of East London (UEL) is suing the chairperson of its UCU branch, Chris Knight, over material about the dismissal of former vice-chancellor, Martin Everett, which Knight put on his website while suspended for his part in the G20 protest. The branch supports Knight.

Due out on 7/5/09, figures from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) are expected to show that the UK is likely, by 2020, to be ranked 23rd out of the 32 OECD nations for low level skills and 21st for intermediate level skills, and to miss most of the Leitch report's targets. (UKCES's annual budget exceeds £90m, £76m of which is passed to the 25 sector skills councils.)

The five HE unions reject as 'derisory' a 0.3 per cent pay offer made by the University and College Employers Association (UCEA) at the Joint Negotiating Committee for HE Salaries (JNCHES) meeting on 27/4/09, with UCU claiming that 'up to 100 universities have signalled their intention to make redundancies' and UCEA agreeing that 'nearly 100' are 'considering job reductions' (*THE*).

Points in a *Guardian* feature on the LSC rundown include: the quango has 50 local offices; 19 of these will be used for the successor quangos, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), but the remaining 31 must be disposed of via the Treasury; the cost to the public purse of doing this may be nearly £42m in payments to landlords; ending the lease on one building alone, that in St Albans, which houses 32 staff, is expected to cost £12.5m, with those at Milton Keynes and Northampton costing £3.9m and £3.2m respectively; the PCS union, representing more than 3,100 LSC staff, is balloting for action, claiming that the Government is ignoring their employment rights.

Figures obtained under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act appear to demonstrate that the clawback by the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) of money from London Metropolitan University was justified - ie that management there really did make false claims and the dispute is not just about marginal cases. Thus in 2005-06 3,388 of 11,263 full time undergraduates on modular courses failed to complete their programmes, and 1,099 part time undergraduates (a quarter of the total) failed to complete a single module. (HEFCE is expected to claw back over £36m paid between 2005 and 2008 and has cut the university's 2008-09 grant by £15m. UCU spokesperson Barry Jones comments: 'UCU appears to have been misled'.)

The most recent principal of Doncaster College, Rowland Foote, is now on 'sick leave', having been suspended while the corporation investigates the financial management of the college. Doncaster management plan to appoint 50 vocational assessors and look likely to make up to 160 lecturers redundant.

The University of the Creative Arts has cut more than 50 posts, most by voluntary redundancy without, according to UCU, going through the proper consultative procedures for so doing.

NUT and NASUWT members formerly employed by Park College (a 6th form college in Eastbourne which in 2003 was merged with FE colleges in Eastbourne and Lewes to form Sussex Downs College), are taking industrial action against attempts by management to force them onto new contracts which involve worse pay and conditions than those of regular FE staff there.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for 2007-08 show that the total income of UK HE institutions rose 10.3 per cent over 2006-07 to reach £23.4bn, while expenditure rose 8.9 per cent to £22.9bn. Staff costs rose by more than 8 per cent to £13.1bn, constituting 57.3 per cent of outgoings.

The LSC makes it known that, following permission from the Treasury, it expects to approve during June 2009, FE building

projects worth about £750m, £500m of which will come via LSC grants.

A *Yorkshire Post* investigation of Leeds University spending reveals that: between June 2006 and December 2008 Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education credit cards were used to spend £600,000 on sport; that a further £40,000 went on sending staff to the Beijing Olympics; in 2008 trips by the vice-chancellor's wife to Bavaria, Bangkok, Ethiopia and Limoges were also financed on a credit card belonging to an employee of that faculty. (Vice-chancellor Simon Lee's resignation takes effect in August.)

New LSC CEO Geoff Russell, formerly a partner at accountants KPMG, writes to FE principals to explain how the LSC will allocate the additional £300m for college building from 2009-11 made available in the budget. The procedure will be as follows: first, the consultants Lambert Smith Hampton will identify which colleges are ready to start building this summer; secondly this company and the accountants Pricewaterhouse-Coopers will jointly use five weighted criteria - impact on education and skills (20 per cent), economic, social and environmental impact (15 per cent), importance to wider regeneration (15 per cent), condition of current buildings (20 per cent) and value for money (30 per cent) - to allocate the money. (Russell will head the LSC until March 2010.)

A HE Policy Institute (HEPI) survey of 2,000 HE students finds that, although the proportion of total teaching time devoted to small group work seems to have risen from 6.4 to 10.3 per cent since top-up fees were introduced in 2007, formal teaching time continues to average 14.5 hours a week.

The Government's new National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is formally launched and the minister

responsible, former CWU leader Lord Young, announces £7m of additional funding which is meant to encourage businesses and training providers to take on apprentices during the recession.

Week beginning 4/5/09

Commenting on a draft research misconduct policy document issued by Research Councils UK, former Sheffield University whistleblower Aubrey Blumsohn says: 'Experience from a multitude of cases has rudely shattered the idea that it will ever be possible for institutions to investigate themselves . . . It is a bit like using a condom with hundreds of holes and calling it safe sex'.

Resentment is expressed by several of the 24 other institutions which were formerly part of the London Providers Group (of teacher training) at the decision by three of its members - London University Institute of Education, King's College London and UEL - to go ahead separately with a bid for a new masters degree in teaching and learning after a bid by the whole group, made in 2008, was turned down. Middlesex University professional development director Ian Terrell describes the conduct of the relevant managers as 'disgraceful, unprofessional and morally bankrupt'.

In her first annual report, Ofqual chairperson Kathleen Tattersall criticises the rushed introduction of changes to qualifications but explicitly exempts 14-19 diplomas from this, thereby going against the opinion of awarding bodies, including Cambridge Assessment, the CEO of which (Simon Lebus) told the Commons schools committee in April that ministers' aim of diplomas becoming by 2013 the 'qualification of choice' is a fantasy.

There are credible rumours that Thames Valley University (TVU) may be preparing to close its

Slough campus, which is focused mainly on NHS-funded provision.

The annual survey of adult participation in education carried out by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), based on figures for 2006-09 and this year titled *Narrowing Participation*, finds that overall participation by adults is now 18 per cent, the lowest since 1997, and notes a sharp drop in the involvement of skilled manual workers, which has returned to the 1996 level. A DIUS spokesperson responds: 'We utterly reject NIACE's suggestion that we abandon our skills strategy . . .'

Higher Education in a Web 2.0 World, a report produced by the Committee of Inquiry into the Changing [HE] Learner Experience, finds that 'information literacy' is a 'significant and growing deficit area' (ie students are making uncritical use of Wikipedia etc) and notes that students tend to be uncomfortable with staff-initiated online discussion, setting an increasingly high value on face-to-face contact with lecturers.

In an AOC poll to elect a new president, St Helens College principal Pat Bacon wins with 122 votes, to her opponent Nigel Robbins' (of Cirencester) 105, representing a two thirds turnout of eligible voters.

All the HE unions, with NUS support, launch a draft redundancy-avoidance strategy which would demand the ring-fencing of posts, redeployment opportunities and retraining.

The UCEA claims that more than 60 universities are set to challenge the legality of a UCU ballot for action over pay which began on 1/5/09.

UCAS research indicates that 14-19 diplomas will be accepted as entry qualifications on about 80 per cent of undergraduate courses

overall, but on only 40 per cent of courses at Russell Group universities.

Following the requirement in the Budget for the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to make 'savings' of £400m in 2010-11, there are strong rumours that universities will come under pressure to make cuts when the final grant announcement for 2009-10 comes out, probably at the end of July.

Bath Spa University vice chancellor Frank Morgan writes to warn staff that the institution is facing a £4.6m deficit by 2012, which he expects to involve redundancies, restructuring and a requirement for staff to be 'flexible and adaptable in carrying out their jobs'.

157 Group (of big, 'successful' FE colleges) executive director Lynne Sedgemore claims that HEFCE's cap on student numbers on foundation degree courses run in such colleges is 'impeding some in their ability to respond to local community and business needs'.

In a letter to the LSC, Skills secretary John Denham says: 'I would like the council to take a robust approach to withdrawing funding from poorly performing providers and colleges', and asks colleges to find £240m of 'efficiency savings' in 2010-11.

Staff and students at London Metropolitan University hold a one-day strike on 7/5/09 over the threat to 550 jobs there.

A HEFCE board meeting on 7/5/09 announces plans to seek £65m in 'efficiency savings during 2009-10, the details to be agreed by its July meeting.

Week beginning 11/5/09

LSC CEO Geoff Russell tells a *TES* interviewer: '... the surpluses are disappearing and the need to

manage is becoming greater. The flexibility we have to deal with problems is diminishing. The money is slowing and demand for services is rising. We have to move away from budget management to performance management'. Another *TES* article quotes him as saying: 'The people that have a low record of achievement for the students they put through can expect that we will allocate more money away from them', adding that: '... we will be doing some kind of mystery shopping to assess how learners feel ...'

A UCU witness tells a Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills (IUSS) Committee hearing about the case of Julia Charlton, a senior nursing lecturer at Northumbria University who was subjected to a disciplinary procedure for opposing cuts in healthcare education budgets. On 27/4/09 Charlton told a national newspaper: 'The staff-student ratio is already the worst in Europe ... If the cuts get even bigger it's just not possible to teach them how to communicate with patients or take blood. They can get to the end of their training not competent to practise'. (Management dropped the case when a branch meeting was called to oppose it.)

An AOC survey based on returns from 59 colleges finds that 77 per cent plan to increase fees for adults with effect from September 2009.

The Apollo Group, which has a Washington DC-based private equity partner called The Carlyle Group, owns the University of Phoenix in Arizona, which, with almost 400,000 (largely part-time, vocational) students is the largest private university in the US. Apollo and Carlyle last year bought or acquired majority stakes in universities in Canada, Chile and Mexico. They have now approached the parent company of BPP, the only for-profit degree awarding body in the UK, which provides legal and accountancy

qualifications and which they have valued at £303m. (In 2008, Phoenix was found to have misled investors by not disclosing government criticism of its recruitment practices.)

A policy forum held by the Association of Managers in Education (AMIE) hears anecdotal evidence from David Green, joint director of employment services for AMIE and the Association for College Management (ACM), which allegedly suggests that colleges are cutting back on human resources managers.

An 18-month English Heritage study focused on archaeology courses as representative of university-level adult education more generally finds that such provision is 'on the verge of extinction' across the UK.

In a speech to the Association of [private] Learning Providers (ALP) annual conference, chairperson Martin Dunford says of the 2010 shift from LSC to YPLA and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) control: 'Let's be quite clear, our view is that the changes overall are unlikely to be helpful'.

Sussex University students campaigning against the intended closure of linguistics courses there are trying to persuade the students union to withdraw responses made to HEFCE National Student Survey.

The LSC and Merseyside police are investigating claims made last year by a whistleblower at Liverpool Community College that the institution awarded qualifications to people who had not attended courses.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) issues the final report of its investigations into allegations that HE is being dumbed down, in which they make recommendations about assessment practices, the appointment of external examiners, contact hours and

English language provision for international students.

In Wales there are accusations that the £8.9m extra funding for 16-19 provision announced in April is being disproportionately targeted on FE colleges rather than sixth forms, with redundancies possible in both sectors.

Southampton Solent University vice chancellor Van Gore and union-bashing Southampton City College principal Lindsey Noble plan to introduce at the end of 2009 or early in 2010 an arrangement by which City College will become a subsidiary of the University within a limited company structure.

Student supporters of the 'Education Not For Sale' campaign successfully disrupt a conference on knowledge transfer organised in London by the Association of University Research and Industry Links.

In FE pay talks the six unions involved, jointly representing 250,000 staff, reject the AOC's 1 per cent offer, made in response to their claim for 6 per cent.

600 economics and finance students at Bristol University have signed a letter complaining that teaching standards have dropped since the introduction of top-up fees in 2006.

The Financial Services Skills Council's future is to be reviewed in autumn 2009 following its failure in a National Audit Office (NAO) review, which is required as part of DIUS's relicensing procedure.

Cardiff University management writes to staff about plans to scale back provision at its Centre for Lifelong Learning. Staff there say this could involve the closure of 250 courses, affecting 2,000 students. The UCU branch claims 140 jobs could be lost.

The trustees of London University's Senate House library vote to reject a take-over bid by University College London (UCL), opting instead for reductions in staff and space 'and other savings', which will supposedly allow the library to run without a deficit by 2012-13.

Figures given by the Government in response to a parliamentary question by Tory DSCF spokesperson Michael Gove reveal that the sum charged by Edexcel, OCR and AQA to schools and colleges for allowing them to conduct GCSEs, AS/A-levels and vocational qualifications (including staff development but excluding invigilation) rose from £155,611,000 in 2002-03 to £265,305,000 in 2007-08.

John Denham tells the last of the Commons IUSS hearings on HE dumbing down that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) should not be turned into an HE version of Ofsted.

The LSC allows FE principals to log on to its 'Provider Gateway', thereby revealing that changes to its Framework for Excellence performance indicators (relating to success rates for long courses at Levels 1 to 3) will make several colleges look less successful than expected when the LSC publishes these figures in the summer.

Week beginning 18/5/09

The AOC Governors' Council contains one college governor elected from each of the nine English regions. These governors are from Barnet College (for London), Newbury (for the South East), Norton Radstock ((South West), Great Yarmouth (Eastern), Northampton (East Midlands), South Staffordshire (West Midlands), Thomas Rotherham (Yorks), Bishop Auckland (North East), Accrington and Rossendale (North West). There are also five co-options.

On the basis of a new survey of 38 universities, the Research Information Network predicts big cuts in book purchases and journal subscriptions by university libraries in 2009-10, noting that nearly 40 per cent of institutions plan such cuts.

AOC CEO Martin Doel has written to John Denham for clarification of figures which, in the AOC's view, suggest that Denham's demand for £340m of 'additional cashable efficiency savings' from FE represents a bigger cut than the proposed £180m (3 per cent) cut in the HE teaching budget. (The implication is that FE is being asked to cover an expected £160m HE student support overspend, thereby reprising last year's transfer to HE of the Train to Gain underspend.)

A British Council reassessment of its own figures suggests that in 2007-08 there were in fact 513,570 international students in the UK, rather than 389,330 as previously claimed. (This results from counting by nationality rather than domicile. The largest number of such students in any one country was 623,800 in the US.)

Research by Anita Wilson (at Lancaster University) suggests that prison education's focus on basic skills is having a damaging effect on the growing numbers of young prisoners who are trying to do GCSEs, NVQs and AS/A-levels. (At present there are 1,883 15-17 year olds and 6,638 18-20 year olds in the system, of whom 2,224 are enrolled on NVQs, 934 on GCSEs and 284 on AS/A-levels.

Following the resignation of Brian Roper, London Met. University governors appoint as interim vice-chancellor Alfred Morris, currently acting vice chancellor of the University of Wales at Lampeter.

Commenting on published minutes of the February and March London Met. governors' meetings, a

London Met. spokesperson says that: 'Our most recent forecast shows net assets at 31 July 2009 as £100.9 million before pension liability and £53 million after it . . . the university is putting in place a robust cost reduction programme designed to ensure our costs match our new income base . . .' (The March minutes include an estimated fall in assets to £34.4m and a proposal to spend £200,000 on 'a PR campaign to combat stakeholders' concerns about the future viability of the university'.)

NASUWT members at Sussex Downs College in Eastbourne take strike action in the pay dispute there.

Hours after Leeds Metropolitan University vice chancellor Geoff Hitchins announces job cuts, management also announces that the institution is giving up its stake in Leeds Carnegie Rugby Club. (The club's 2007-08 relegation from the Guinness Premiership left the University with a deficit of £1.1m.)

Sussex Downs College principal John Blake tells a commons IUS hearing that the LSC encouraged him to swap his £8m refurbishment bid for a £175m rebuild.

The Economic and Social Research Council unveils plans to concentrate social science research in about 25 'doctoral-training centres'. At present it supports activity in about 700 departments across 85 institutions.

Points in a *TES* article on FE job cuts include: UCU members at City College Birmingham are considering whether to ballot for action over 74 planned redundancies declared by the principal, former AOC CEO David Gibson; 100 jobs may be at risk at Solihull College as a result of an LEA decision to put adult education out to tender; UCU has also been warned of likely job losses at Warwickshire, Northumberland, Stratford-upon-

Avon, York, Worcester, West Anglia and Stoke-on-Trent Colleges.

An Employment Appeal Tribunal reverses a previous tribunal's finding that former Bournemouth University archaeology professor Paul Buckland had been unfairly dismissed. (Buckland resigned following an incident in 2006 in which he failed 14 out of 16 candidates in a resit paper, only to find that the exam board chairperson had altered his marks and passed them.)

Following a threat by the UCEA that 87 institutions will take legal action against the union over inaccuracies in the ballot for action over HE pay, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt writes to members to say it will be postponed to the autumn term, stating that: 'I am concerned that there may have been a software problem with our central membership records'.

A government decision to cut to 40,000 (from 60,000 in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review) the amount by which universities would be allowed to expand student numbers between 2008-09 and 2010-11 is likely to result in an additional reduction of £83m in overall HE funding.

After receiving from the Government only £491m of its £503m forecast requirement for recurrent funding, the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) announces cuts in support for research .

Following a student sit-in and walk-out, Manchester University vice chancellor Alan Gilbert calls off a scheme to cut from 30 to 20 hours the lectures per module available to students in the School of Law there.

65 jobs are to be cut at Surrey University. Warwick University is seeking to save £12m by redundancies and other measures.

Gloucester University says compulsory redundancies will be needed to achieve savings of £5m. Chichester University is to close its youth and community work degree.

Salford University management suspends UCU branch secretary Gary Duke, ostensibly because he issued a leaflet implying that there was a personal relationship between a head of school and a PhD student who the former had encouraged to apply for a temporary job (which is now permanent), but actually because he has opposed 150 threatened redundancies.

All the HE unions reject an 'improved' UCEA pay offer of 0.4 per cent.

It emerges that HEFCE uncovered inaccuracies in London Met University's data as far back as 2003-04. In the Commons (20/5/09), HE minister David Lammy appears to agree to an independent inquiry into this, but next day DIUS denies this. Meanwhile, HEFCE claims that a review by the consultants KPMG into HEFCE's own functioning will cover the audit of London Met. ordered then.

Week beginning 25/5/09

A *TES* feature on FE finances includes the following predictions: 'There are always 15 to 20 per cent of colleges in the financially weaker categories. I suggest that this will rise to up to half of the sector. We are looking at wholesale redundancies across the sector over the next couple of years' (David Pullein, finance director at Leeds College of Building and chairperson of the College finance Directors' Group); 'Colleges will have really difficult decisions to make to survive the next few years and those that are financially less well run will be vulnerable' (Julian Gravatt, AOC

assistant CEO); 'They [ie the recent funding announcements. Ed.] would devastate the infrastructure of FE . . .' (Barry Lovejoy, UCU head of FE).

Features of the situation at King's College London include: in March, management advertised the post of voluntary [ie unpaid] research assistant in the Institute of Psychiatry; At the same time, it gave 24 hours notice to 30 information resources staff that they must reapply for their jobs, with only 15 such posts available, some on salaries downgraded to £14,000; in April, vice chancellor Rick Trainor wrote to staff saying redundancies might be required because of a projected £14m recurring deficit; on 8/5/09, credit agency Standard and Poor's raised King's rating from AA- to AA, on the basis that in March it had reserves of £185m; the UCU branch claims 188 King's staff earn over £100,000.

Learning and Skills Network (LSN) employee Stephen Bartle claims that 286 FE colleges now offer HE courses. (There is concern that HEFCE's 10,000 limit on extra HE students in any sector in 2009-10 will lead universities to end franchise deals with colleges and recruit them directly.)

Up to 20 jobs are rumoured to be under threat at Imperial College London as management makes sweeping cuts to language courses.

The report of the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning, written for NIACE by Lindsay Simpson and directed by Professor Tom Schuller, urges colleges to work with or take over private training providers, and to consider dropping their emphasis on qualifications in order to facilitate this.

ALP is protesting against a decision by LSC CEO Geoff Russell to restrict to FE colleges the 75,000 extra training places for

unemployed people made available in the Budget.

Thames Valley University (TVU) confirms that it will close its Slough campus in 2010.

Plymouth University has cut 220 jobs, supposedly without making any compulsory redundancies.

UCU conference passes a motion expressing concern about campaigns by students at Central Lancashire, Bolton and Manchester Metropolitan Universities which are aimed at making lecturers provide better feedback.

David Cameron visits Barnsley College for an AOC-organised meeting involving six Yorkshire and Humberside principals.

Week beginning 1/6/09

A British Academy report on foreign language provision in HE finds that modern languages are now 'concentrated in a small number of predominantly older universities' (*Guardian*).

Points in a *TES* feature on FE college mergers include: the AOC says 83 mergers have taken place since incorporation in 1993; in 2008 Salisbury College became part of Wiltshire College, Truro and Penwith merged, Bede 6th Form College became part of Stockton Riverside College, East Devon became part of North Devon College, Huddersfield Tech and Dewsbury became Kirklees, Mancat and City College Manchester became The Manchester College, and Rodbaston, Cannock Chase and Tamworth and Lichfield became South Staffordshire College; in 2009, Eccles, Pendleton and Salford have become Salford City College, and Leeds College of Technology, Park Lane and Thomas Danby have become Leeds City College; the LSN has published Understanding FE

Mergers, a report by Natasha Calvert; this implies that 'further education could soon be dominated by a few dozen very large institutions acting as hubs for families of colleges, which they have merged with or collaborate with by offering central management services'.

Points in a *TES* feature about the calling off of the HE pay/anti-redundancies ballot and its repercussions at UCU annual conference, held on 27-29/5/09 in Bournemouth include: according to an unnamed UCU HE Committee member, the ballot was called off not only because of the threat of legal action by employers but also because a UCU survey held ten days into the ballot found that more than 90 per cent of the 75 branches surveyed 'did not support [it]'; the same informant claims that Sally Hunt decided unilaterally to conduct the ballot; another anonymous delegate claims the HEC had not authorised it; a motion put to a (supposedly closed) session of the conference objecting to 'the apparent lack of a democratic mandate for the ballot' was lost; this was allegedly because Socialist Workers Party (SWP) delegates opposed it; yet another anonymous delegate alleges Hunt set up head of HE Michael MacNeil to take the blame for the ballot fiasco.

A letter sent by the LSC to principals on 2/6/09 may indicate that the Government's attempt to resolve the FE buildings fiasco via the Budget is in difficulties. Several principals allege that the procedure for deciding which colleges are 'shovel-ready' - ie will be funded to proceed - favours colleges which acted recklessly earlier on. But according to a memo leaked from consultants Turner and Townsend even these may have to wait until August to know where they stand.

It emerges that Chesterfield College management, having

spent nearly £500,000 on architects' and consultants' fees for a £37m bid, were then encouraged by the LSC to make a £107m bid for a total rebuild, which has since been abandoned.

UCU has applied for a 'protected award'- ie lodged a legal claim - against the University of Hull, which, if successful, could result in the institution having to pay up to three months' salary to as many as 100 fixed-term staff whose contracts have been ended in a cost-cutting exercise.

The OCR awarding body launches a GCSE in Thinking and Reasoning Skills, to be piloted for two years from September 2009.

An Employment Appeal Tribunal rejects a claim, made with UCU support by part-time journalism lecturer Kaye Carl, that Sheffield University discriminated against her by failing to pay her for preparation time.

UCU members at Liverpool Community College take a day of strike action over attempts by management to raise from 25 to 28 hours the maximum weekly class contact time there and to force them to undertake higher levels of evening, weekend and bank holiday working.

The provost of University College London writes to all departments asking them to cut their budgets by 6 per cent.

Week beginning 8/6/09

In the process of reshuffling his Cabinet, Gordon Brown abolishes the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (set up two years ago at a cost estimated by the First Division Association union for top civil servants at £7m) and with it John Denham's post. DIUS is replaced by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and Denham by Lord

Mandelson. (There are now seven peers in the Cabinet. Recently appointed FE minister Sion Simon moves to Culture.)

Points in the 238-page final report of the 6-year *Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education*, headed by Oxford University professor Richard Pring, include: the Government's creation of trust schools, community schools, specialist schools and academies alongside FE and 6th form colleges has led to reduced choice for students, especially because the proliferation of small 6th forms has narrowed the choice at A-level; the right course would be to move towards tertiary federations; the three track arrangement of GCSEs/A-levels, diplomas and apprenticeships is already 'obsolete' and should be replaced by Tomlinson-style diplomas; the attempt to force people to stay in education till 18 should be dropped in favour of an 'enticement' approach, as in Wales; because school teachers cannot deliver vocational courses, it should become easier for people with industrial and commercial experience to become qualified teachers/lecturers; institutions similar to the LEA-run teachers' centres that existed till the 1980s should be reintroduced as a way to returning control over curriculum design to practising teachers; colleges and school funding should be equalised.

A leaked document on 'cost-saving opportunities' due to be considered by Open University managers includes the options of cutting from 13 to 5 the number of regional OU centres, and cutting the number of residential summer schools (currently 17).

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK, the sector skills council covering FE) publishes two reports. The first, a survey by GHK Consulting of 160 providers, finds lecturing staff shortages in the arts, media, construction, engineering, health,

IT, leisure and tourism, retail and commerce, science and maths. The second, by FDS International, finds that there are two main causes for this: FE's low media profile and low pay.

A study conducted for the HE Policy Institute (HEPI) finds that in 2007-08 49.2 per cent of women aged 18 to 30 had had some involvement in HE-level study, as against 37.8 per cent of men, and draws the conclusion that measures should be taken to encourage more involvement by men. London Met. professor Carole Leathwood challenges this. Her analysis of figures for UK-domiciled female undergraduates in 2008 shows that women are disproportionately concentrated in low prestige universities.

Points in reports issued by qualifications regulator Ofqual (formerly part of the QCA) include: the AQA awarding body is now using agencies in India, China and the Philippines as part of the process of arriving at GCSE and A-level marks; Edexcel will use a centre in Australia to mark 12.5 million answers from 133 different exam papers; although the marking of 14-19 diplomas should be completed successfully for the 'several hundred' people completing the first five this summer, problems in aggregating marks could develop as more students become involved.

An NUS report, *Funding Our Future: Blueprint for an Alternative Higher Education Funding System*, calls for the establishment of a 'people's trust' for HE as an alternative to lifting the cap on fees. This would involve graduates making a monthly payment into an independent central fund for 20 years after graduation.

ALP claims that the LSC's refusal to make clear how much Train to Gain funding will be available for 2009-10 is causing some private training firms to cut provision.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for young full time undergraduate entrants to universities in 2007-08 show that entrants from 'low' socio-economic groups constituted 54.9 per cent at London Met. as against 10.5 per cent at Oxford, 11 per cent at Cambridge and 13.9 per cent at Bristol. Figures for dropout rates among first year full time undergraduate entrants in 2006-07 show that the rate at Bolton was 27 per cent, whereas at Cambridge it was 1 per cent and at Oxford 1.8. (It emerges that just before his job was abolished, John Denham wrote to HEFCE to say that 'it seems likely that the quality of teaching and the student experience will be important components' in these dropout rates.

FE unions reject the AOC's 1 per cent 'final' pay offer.

Leeds University UCU branch is opposing a management scheme to draw up profiles of all academics through which data about their levels of research activity, success in obtaining grant income, involvement in 'third-stream' activities (ie external contracts) and student feedback ratings will be displayed in numerical form. (60 jobs are already under threat in Leeds' biology faculty and 20 in its nursing and midwifery unit.)

UCU members at Leeds College of Art and Design and Suffolk New College take strike action in the IOU pay scale harmonisation dispute.

The University of the West of England (UWE) is to close its languages department.

Birmingham City College UCU members are to strike on 16/6/09 over the proposed 76 job cuts. Action is in prospect also at Barnsley College, where 53 jobs are threatened.

John Freeman, director of the Raising Expectations Action (React) Programme, an

organisation set up by the Local Government Association (ie by local authorities, including LEAs) to 'ensure a smooth transition' (TES) to the arrangements which in March 2010 will supersede the LSC, tells a conference, held in London, that although 'technically it would probably fall to the Skills Funding Agency to decommission courses and colleges . . . in practice local authorities would wield considerable influence in identifying and seeking action over substandard provision . . .'.

Roger McClure resigns as CEO of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (formed in October 2008 from the merger of the QIA and Centre for Excellence in [FE] Leadership), in order that 'it could be led by someone from a college or training provider background' (TES).

Week beginning 15/6/09

In a *TES* opinion piece, outgoing Barking College principal and erstwhile London School of Economics (LSE) student activist and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) firebrand Ted Parker says of the FE Funding Council (FEFC - ie the body which preceded the LSC): 'There are few who worked with the council - either as employees or within the sector - who do not regard it as one of the most highly professional and effective bodies ever to have been involved in college affairs'. (Set up by the Tories to enforce incorporation from 1993, the FEFC presided over levels of franchising-related corruption unequalled even today. Parker is to be succeeded at Barking by former Willesden College of Technology and Outer London Region NATFHE careerist Cathy Walsh, currently vice principal at the College of NE London and before that at Uxbridge College, where she tried to sack branch secretary Roger Cox for union activity.)

US 'brain scientist' Steven Pinker and 24 other prominent academics have written to UCL protesting about the suspension by management there of Heather van der Lely, director of the Centre for Developmental Language Disorders and Cognitive Neuroscience, after she protested about being moved to inadequate laboratory accommodation.

As budgets are slashed and redundancies proliferate across FHE, Peter Mandelson tells *Guardian* readers: 'Maintaining and improving this [ie the FE] service . . . is an integral part of a sustained recovery . . .' and ['universities and colleges'] 'need a strong and stable funding environment . . .'.

Senior managers at the London School of Communication, part of the University of the Arts London, are planning to close 16 of the 19 courses run in its School of Creative Enterprise in an attempt to 'save' £7m over the coming year.

UCU and former NATFHE senior national education official Dan Taubman receives an MBE.

Retiring AOC president and South Trafford College principal David Collins is to succeed Roger McClure as CEO of the LSIS (for one year). At the same time, Lewisham college principal Dame Ruth Silver is stepping down as LSIS co-chair, with the result that ALP CEO Graham Hoyle will become its sole chairperson.

Lord Mandelson says in a speech that the rationale behind the creation of BIS stems from *New Industry, New Jobs*, a policy statement issued by the Government earlier this year, which speaks of the need to join up government departments across traditional boundaries 'in order to promote business competitiveness'.

Points in press coverage of a letter sent by the LSC to colleges include: the letter says that next year it is 'unlikely that there will be sufficient funding to meet the high level of demand from employers and learners' for apprenticeships and Train to Gain; colleges have been told that the LSC faces a potential deficit of hundreds of millions of pounds because of higher than expected recruitment; new apprenticeships for people over 25 will lose 10 per cent of their funding from August 2009; all Train to Gain funding will be lower than expected; large companies are being offered a reduced rate for Train to Gain. AOC assistant CEO Julian Gravatt comments: 'I wouldn't underestimate how chaotic the situation in Train to Gain and apprenticeships is for colleges'.

King's College London management are to decide later in June whether, as is likely, the institution's engineering division should be closed.

UCU members at Askham Bryan College (near York) take strike action in the IOU campaign. (Earlier this year, UCU officials removed Askham Bryan from the campaign on the grounds that this had already been achieved.)

Westminster University management are still refusing to give staff the back pay due to them under the 2006 framework agreement.

Government figures for 2008 show that the proportion of 16-18 year olds not in employment, education or training rose to 103 per cent from 9.7 per cent in 2007, and for 18 year olds specifically the figure was 16.6 per cent, up from 14.2 per cent.

Following the departure of Rowland Foote over 'financial concerns', former Park Lane Leeds and Sheffield College principal John Taylor becomes the latest principal of Doncaster College.

Week beginning 22/6/09

Next week's Sixth Form Colleges' Forum (SCF) conference, hosted jointly with the AOC, in Cambridge is due to see the launch of two initiatives: a finance paper claiming that the funding per student gap between such colleges and school 6th forms may be as much as 20 per cent; and the Sixth Form Bac[calaureat], a course framework supported by the SFC and by London University Institute of Education, to be piloted at 'up to 10' colleges from September.

A report presented by retiring London Met. University vice chancellor Brian Roper to governors in November 2008 claims that HEFCE had in effect sanctioned the definition of 'completion' used by London Met. management to claim funding. A HEFCE spokesperson comments: 'The suggestions that HEFCE condoned the incorrect reporting of non-completion by London Met., or that earlier audit reports did not identify data problems at the university relating to non-completions, are wholly without foundation'. UCU takes the line that London Met. management and/or governors should mount a legal challenge to HEFCE on this issue. (112 staff have already taken voluntary redundancy, and the first phase of compulsory redundancies is due to start in July with 550 jobs at risk.)

National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) CEO Simon Waugh claims that, by the end of this year 60,000 over-25-year olds will have started an apprenticeship during it.

Following the arrests in 2008 of research student Rizwaan Sabir and clerical assistant Hicham Yezza on the grounds that the latter had downloaded from a US government website a copy of an al-Qaeda training manual, Nottingham University's School of Politics and International Relations has set up a 'module review

committee' to check topics covered, assessment methods and to see whether 'any material on reading lists could be illegal or might be deemed to incite people to use violence'.

Points in a *TES* feature on the approach likely to be taken by incoming LSIS CEO David Collins include: earlier this year a question in the Lords revealed that LSIS has entered into contracts worth over £56m with private consultants, including Tribal, Nord Anglia and Deloitte, some of which have in turn used publicly funded bodies such as the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) as sub-contractors; BIS is to cut LSIS's budget by £50m in 2010-11; Collins thinks that 'Some of the [LSIS] programmes are being delivered by people who left the sector a long time ago, and when they were in the sector they were not necessarily at the cutting edge of training or development'.

Oxford Brookes University is likely to cut up to ten posts in its School of Technology in an attempt to 'save' £500,000 a year.

Liverpool city councillor Malcolm Kennedy resigns from Liverpool Community College's governing body on the grounds that 'Stalinist' rules are preventing governors from speaking to the media about the findings of a £100,000-plus report commissioned by the College. This followed allegations made last year by IT lecturer Tom Hanson about students being awarded bogus qualifications.

Michael Farley, newly appointed principal of Tower Hamlets College, is consulting (till 5/7/09) on a plan to cut ESOL provision and over 40 full-time posts in response to reductions in LSC funding.

What was NATFHE Rank & File?

PSE spoke to Jan Pollock and Dave Welsh, grassroots activists in the former National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education

How did NATFHE Rank & File come to be set up?

Jan:
NATFHE Rank & File was set up in the mid-1990s (1) after the Government's 1992 insistence on incorporation of colleges encouraged increasing attacks on lecturers' pay and conditions. But it was also needed because of the failure of the SLA (2) to be an effective organisation for ordinary lecturers.

Some of us who started teaching in colleges in the 1990s had had experience of more useful groups in our previous trade unions than the SLA was in NATFHE. Once we heard vague references that there was an SLA, Dave and I (and, no doubt, many others) had independently attempted to join the SLA - only to discover there was no point of contact, let alone a structure/organisation! (I was told it had collapsed after the SWP had withdrawn from prioritising union work. [3]) Certainly, there was a vacuum at the very time organisation and leadership were needed.

Phil Griffin from Manchester and myself (from London) had worked together well in Unshackle the Unions, which had been set up from the Socialist Movement (4) to campaign against the anti-union laws. We'd started discussing the need for effective organisation for ordinary members in NATFHE and realised a Rank & File was needed.

I remember writing the five or six point draft basis for Rank & File one evening after work. I suppose it was what some people have called a united front - some basic points of agreement and much that could still be debated and discussed (5).

There was a founding conference in Manchester at the Mechanics Institute and only the SWP (being the no-longer-functioning SLA) were opposed. They stood against Rank & File candidates at several NATFHE National Executive elections. Once

NATFHE R&F proved to be popular, the SWP wanted to take it over.

Dave:
NATFHE R&F was set up because of the clear failure of the SLA to be an effective voice for rank and file lecturers. When I first started teaching in FE in 1991/2 I immediately searched for some rank and file organisation in the union. I heard vague reports of SLA in the Midlands etc but there was no point of contact and in fact no structure/organisation to join . . . There was clearly a vacuum and when I heard that NATFHE R&F was being formed I turned to it as a key development in the union, and wanted to help build it.

What, if any, models was it based on (ie including historically, in other unions etc)?

Jan:
I'd been in the NUT for 16 years before joining NATFHE and had been one of the founding members of - and a consistent activist in - the Socialist Teachers' Alliance (6). The six points basis and many of my ideas for NATFHE Rank & File were based on my experience - generally very positive - of organising both nationally and locally (in London and Leicester). Phil had a lot of experience of the T&G, but thought that coordinating committees from unions like the NUR were positive. Dave's earliest work years were spent in ASLEF. His experience at national and London levels of Rank & File Railworker and Unity in Action on the London Tube was generally positive. We had all come into contact with the Broad Lefts, set up by the Communist Party in its 'parliamentary road to socialism' days in our various unions, and found them to be merely electoral mechanisms and very bureaucratic, and often - certainly, in the NUT - extremely reactionary organisations.

Dave:

The model for it I took to be to get activists/militants together across the sectors in UK: this for me was based on previous rank and file organisations I had been in at national and London levels eg R&F Railworker, Unity in Action in London. I had not been involved in Broad Lefts (eg in the TGWU) in the traditional sense because I saw them as electoral bodies and preferred practical, day-to-day activity (not excluding electoral activity within the union). I was aware of the various rank and file traditions eg IS/SWP and the historical models/debates.

Was the experience of the College Rank and File organisation and/or of the Socialist Lecturers' Alliance taken into consideration?

Dave:

See answer to question 1. Clearly the SWP opposed R&F, including standing against us in NEC elections at various times.

To what extent was Paul Mackney becoming general secretary a factor, and what effects did this have?

Jan:

Paul Mackney had been a member of IS twenty or more years before his candidacy for NATFHE general secretary. He knew NATFHE was the only union in which the SWP have always had a substantial number of members. He was able to ensure they were his keenest supporters. Previous to Mackney's period as general secretary, the SWP as a whole paid little attention to ongoing TU work.

Of course, we all supported Mackney's anti-war policy, but unlike NATFHE R&F the SWP did not criticise his decision, year after year, to do very little about a national campaign we so needed on pay and conditions. As a brilliantly titled *Post-16 Educator* article by Pete Murray once put it: 'Excellent foreign policy, shame about the pay and conditions!' This was the union's outstanding weakness, and union members are continuing to pay the price for this terrible failure.

It was on the basis of the need for an effective, fighting alternative policy on pay and conditions that NATFHE R&F decided to stand a candidate against Mackney in 2000, when he stood a second time as general secretary. On hearing about this, the SWP sent in more than forty of their members to stop this and take over NATFHE R&F's small AGM meeting. Unfortunately, by 2000, R&F's original supporters had run out of steam and it was acting much like a national executive caucus, rather than a R&F group for ordinary members. The NEC caucus role

increasingly dominated in the minds of most NEC R&F members.

The one regret of my political life is that I wasted all of 1999-2000 attempting to prevent our national executive members insisting that the SWP were 'the left' and that we had to join them and must do whatever they wanted. This useless fight damaged my health. I should have recognised by then that, if everyone else wants an easy way out, you should walk away and leave them to offer themselves on a platter to a political party who were, in fact, pretty rightwing at that time (you know, the swing from extreme left to extreme right pendulum syndrome) and not interested in the rank and file of the union. Hardly anyone (except one SWP member who phoned me in tears to sort-of apologise two days before the take-over) felt anything untoward had happened. It seems they wanted to be given 'the line' from on high - rather than having to think the latest political developments through for themselves. So R&F was closed down and the UCU left replaced it. Of course, it changed again at G20 time, when the line flipped to 'March on the banks!' and 'Occupy, occupy!']

What relation did NATFHE Rank & File have at the start, or early on, to the SWP lecturers' fraction (7)?

Dave:

I don't recall any relationship with the SWP fraction - I don't think it had much role and therefore didn't seem relevant. In most colleges I worked in (quite a few), the SWP played little or no role at that time and certainly had no role at Executive level.

To what extent do you think NATFHE Rank & File was able to develop beyond being a left caucus on the NEC? What were its relations with the left caucus (ie which included such people as Sam Allen [8])?

Jan:

I think at first, when Phil and I were able to work together and he was our first R&F convenor, it really did reach out and start to gain genuine rank and file support. but I think Dave is correct [see below. Ed].

Dave:

I think NATFHE R&F was first and foremost a national organisation for activists/militants involving building rank and file activity at local/regional levels. I certainly did not see it primarily as a left caucus for the NEC. I think it turned more and more into an NEC caucus, which I attribute to its failure to develop at mass level in the colleges/regions.

Were NATFHE Rank & File publications effective? Did you feel that there was enough commitment to producing and selling these? Do you think the approach to publications was broadly right?

Jan:

At first when Phil Griffin was bulletin editor and R&F convenor, I think the bulletin did reach out and gain us support. It printed news about disputes and reports [which] the official union publications had no interest in disseminating.

But some years later, on the big demo at Accrington and Rossendale College (9), I was shocked to discover that some leading members of NATFHE R&F had never sold the bulletins they were being sent - and declined to do so at my request on the demo which had been built by NATFHE R&F. An organisation can only be as effective as its members. By the time Mackney was general secretary, I realised that more members, especially if they were on the National Executive, felt it was someone else's job to build support, recruit new members and pioneer new campaigns. I couldn't understand their logic, as it wasn't mine. No wonder only London and Manchester regularly held local R&F meetings and sold dozens of bulletins - though Yorkshire did try holding meetings for a while . . .

Dave:

I think the bulletin was essential and an important vehicle for building R&F activity. More leaflets might have helped. I don't think there was sufficient commitment to building such publications and/or selling them vigorously by members. I don't know why. I don't think some people really understood what the purpose of a rank and file organisation is . . .

Did you try to get NATFHE Rank & File to take up 'educational' issues as well as 'union' ones, and how far do you think you succeeded?

Jan:

Yes - but not always very effectively. I'd experience in the STA of trying to get the organisation to take up educational issues - for example, over the sacking of the William Tyndale teachers. (My friend, Clara [10] and I were told off by several of the STA's leading members for insisting these sackings were on educational grounds as opposed to what they called 'trade union' issues!) I couldn't understand the false divide between pay and conditions and educational issues. After all, lecturers spend most of their time actually teaching, so you surely can't

help thinking about content and method, where the curriculum comes from, and why it's so poorly designed! But, in those days, the majority of activists seemed to feel education was a soft, 'girlie' issue - not something real activists bothered about.

This wasn't true of members on NATFHE's Equality Committee, who tended to have a more holistic and integrated perspective. But, in the same way that equality (if we are still permitted to call it that!) is no longer seen as an entirely minority interest, so education has made some progress as an acceptable issue for trades unionists in UCU. At the same time, though anti-racism is now seen as suitably 'macho', we must remember that straight, white men still find it difficult to raise issues like disability or sexuality - or even to perceive that such issues exist sometimes within other issues. So lotta continua as regards raising both education and equality as trades union issues that affect us all. Yet the comparative 'respectability' some aspects of such issues now receive is due, in part, to some of the R&F activists' work.

Dave:

I didn't personally try to get R&F to take up educational issues.

Did NATFHE Rank & File win support amongst vocational lecturers?

Jan:

Some, but it did remain overwhelmingly people who taught GCSE, A-levels, Access to HE and TU Studies in colleges, plus a handful from Adult Ed. and a handful from HE.

How many people belonged to it at the highest point, and in how many branches did it gain active supporters?

Jan:

At its highest about 200 paid-up members. As I've already said, only Manchester and London had regular local meetings. I think Wales also held its own meetings - with Yorkshire also having some meetings for a while.

Dave:

I don't know how many people belonged to it. London had good numbers in the early days with regular well-attended meetings.

Was it equally spread across HE and FE, and/or was the split between the sectors a problem?

Jan:
It was predominantly FE college lecturers.

Dave:
I took it to be mainly organising FE people. I'm afraid HE didn't really figure in it, although I became aware of adult Ed. in later years.

Was it successful in tackling equality issues?

Jan:
I've already referred to equality issues earlier. My work on Equality issues through NATFHE structures was my most enjoyable, educational and positive work in the whole era of NATFHE R&F.

Dave:
I think it took up equalities issues more effectively than most R&Fs I'd been in before.

Do you think it was as internally democratic as it could be / needed to be?

Jan:
It certainly began with a solid basis of internal democracy. Our National Coordinating Committee met at least once a term - often twice when things were fast-moving - with a representative from the majority of union regions. The majority of such meetings were held in Manchester with a pooled fare. Some meetings were held in Birmingham, with more in London. But without active local groups functioning in most areas, things were not ideal.

Dave:
It seemed to me to be reasonably democratic. AGMs were open and conducted debates. The key was that it was not in the rigid control of a party and was therefore open enough to include the pink elephants (11) as I think they were dubbed. It had a political perspective which is what I expected of a rank and file organisation - pro militant action, supporting rank and file action, building local groups, standing candidates at all levels, bringing in and supporting new activists, acting to pull together the mass of lecturers who could be won to its approach, ie the middle groupings.

Was there a set of ideas that everyone subscribed to? If not, could/should there have been? Did this have any bearing on the SWP takeover?

Jan:
I originally drafted a 'What We Stand For' list of points which was amended somewhat at our

founding conference - and then again a little more at an AGM two or three years later.

One reason why the SWP was able to take it over fairly easily was (apparently) because a group of prominent R & F members wanted to ally with them. Why did they feel like this, and did the others R & F activists deal with it as well as they could have done?

Jan:
I think they wanted to believe that a political party could lead them - and sort out the constantly growing problems - particularly in FE. (Since 2000, of course, problems in HE are now repeating the demoralising FE pattern.) NATFHE R&F's leading members, therefore, ran out of steam and desperately wanted to believe they could be rescued by a lovely non-sectarian political party on a white charger!

Dave:
I think a number of people who were involved had a party agenda and subordinated R&F to their party line; this seriously deflected its direction at times.

I think prominent members accepted the SWP's analysis - it was easier than thinking critically about the issues. Others mistakenly thought the SWP's influence was key simply because it had lots of members. Most SWP members in colleges were totally useless at organising and simply put the line with no thought to local conditions etc. We should also note that many prominent members of R&F were in small left groups which meant they had an agenda similar to the SWP's, ie recruitment, or were tail-ending the SWP. Some saw R&F as a R&F simply of groups - ie get some form of unity of party militants. Whilst this is desirable, it is easy to end up with just the left talking to itself in some form of spurious unity.

What were NATFHE Rank & File's main strengths and weaknesses? How far was it successful or unsuccessful in achieving what it set out to do?

Jan:
It began on an excellent basis, but ended up depending on a very few people to do the building of a rank and file movement. As defeats on pay and conditions multiplied, self-confidence in rank and file was drained from most members. Without well organised regional and local groups it could not succeed. I think self-confidence that ordinary members are much more capable of thinking and acting collectively to protect their own interests than are the professional bureaucrats will return at some

point soon. The fact that Mackney and his allies, beguiled by the prospect of the false idol of merger, abolished the democratic collective power of Regional Councils (12) has made the future of a new R&F, perhaps, more difficult - but by no means impossible.

Dave:

Those who criticise R&F need only to look to the present set-up in UCUleft. The weakness was that it failed to build a durable organisation at all levels but particularly at local levels. The issues were there - ie post incorporation - and new contracts offered many opportunities. However, there were defeats and therefore demoralisation amongst members, which made it more difficult to win local battles. The period of 1992 was defensive, but more could have been done to build the organisation perhaps, if the left had had that orientation. At the same time, rank and file do not last forever and R&F was probably in sharp decline by the time the SWP took over. By this time a 'left' leadership under Mackney had taken over, especially over Iraq, and he had the organisational background to impose a more decisive leadership compared with the people who had been in charge.

Its strengths were its direction / perspectives. It offered a national 'real' organisation with a clear politics which was open to non-party militants and newcomers.

Do you have any general views about rank and file organisations, syndicalism, industrial unionism etc that are relevant to this or future groups in UCU?

Jan:

Like Dave, I think the need for a rank and file group is likely to return to some UCU members and that they will decide they have to do something about the situation for themselves. It may not re-emerge as a national organisation at first, but more locally. I think of historical examples, such as London Rank & File Bus-worker in 1937. But it could also be useful to look to other countries' history too.

Dave:

I think that it will be relevant again as the current leadership fails to rally the activists, especially under a Cameron government's attacks. It can't be long till the SWP turns against the Hunt leadership as a vacuum is likely to open, especially in FE, with a crisis over PFI cuts etc over the coming five years. This doesn't mean the SWP will provide decent leadership, as it will zigzag from right to left. But a serious R&F could be built (?).

Notes:

1. NATFHE R&F was founded in 1996.
2. The Socialist Lecturers Alliance (SLA) was set up in the mid 1980s mainly by two lecturers at the then Handsworth College in Birmingham, Sue Thomas and Barry Lovejoy.
3. It seems likely that this in fact referred to the earlier SWP-dominated College Rank and File organisation, which existed until the early 1980s.
4. The Socialist Movement was a development from the Socialist Society, founded in the early 1980s by, among others, Raymond Williams, the then owner of Pluto Press Richard Kuper, and Hilary Wainwright, now proprietor of *Red Pepper* magazine.
5. These points included: '... to unite all NATFHE members committed to actively campaigning not only to defend the tertiary education sector and our role within it, but also to improve both. NATFHE Rank & File is a non-sectarian organisation bringing together socialists, militants and activists with the aim of transforming NATFHE into a fighting, democratic union. A union capable of defending and advancing the interests of all lecturers in post sixteen education. NATFHE Rank & File is a national body organised through regional groupings. We produce a regular national Bulletin and seek to influence the policies and actions of NATFHE at all levels of the union - branches, regional, national executive and conferences. NATFHE Rank & File seeks to mobilise practical support for members in dispute and to forge links with other progressive elements in the trade union and labour movement'.
6. The Socialist Teachers' Alliance (STA) was founded in 1976 by NUT members reacting against the Socialist Workers' Party's approach within that union.
7. This refers to SWP members in NATFHE and/or the AUT when organised as an intra-party caucus.
8. This refers to the way in which careerists such as Allen were allowed at one time to attend meetings of leftwingers held to prepare for NATFHE National Executive meetings.
9. The demonstration was in protest at the sacking by the Accrington and Rossendale principal of prominent NATFHE Rank & File activist Pat Walsh for union activity there.
10. Clara Mulhern was a prominent figure in the early years of the STA.
11. This refers to a statement made by Socialist Party and NATFHE NEC member Andrew Price.
12. Paul Mackney used the merger talks with the AUT to reduce the powers of the former NATFHE Regional Councils, some of which had opposed his policies on pay.

Working as learning

Colin Waugh

Alan Felstead, Alison Fuller, Nick Jewson and Lorna Unwin, *Improving Working as Learning* (Routledge, 2009), 231 pp

This book deals with interesting and important questions and arises from worthwhile field studies, but in itself is rather disappointing.

One reason for this may be that it forms part of a series on 'improving learning' in various fields. Another may be that it has been written by four people - hence has probably gone through a process by which, in order to achieve consensus, each has left out his or her more challenging ideas. However, the main reason is that the academic framework within which it is located - that of the sociological study of work - seems to seal the authors off from important aspects of the topic.

The book reports on six field studies conducted by the authors. It does this mainly through the prism of a conceptual device called the working as learning framework (WALF).

The WALF is in essence a taxonomic matrix intended to help investigators make sense of specific working situations. Its vertical axis is concerned with how and by whom strategic decisions are taken about what work is to be done. A given work operation may, for example, result from a decision taken by the board of a multinational company or by one private individual. Its horizontal axis, in contrast, is concerned with the technical relations between the operation being studied and others which form its preconditions or consequences. For example, for a piece of wood to be machined there has to have been a forest, a logging operation, a transport system, the manufacture of a tool and so on, and, on the other side, this work-piece can be assembled with other parts to form a piece of furniture or whatever. Clearly every working situation can be placed on both axes, and it may also be possible to compare one operation with others by seeing how they interconnect in each case.

The authors clearly regard this framework as an important step in the study of work, and it may perhaps be that. However, although several of their specific studies touch on the relation between power exercised from above and informal control exercised by practitioners from below, they seem reluctant, as with other interesting concepts they employ, to propose an overall view.

The field studies focus on a centre set up by a county council so that residents can ring in for advice on entitlements and the like, an urban health visiting service organised via primary care trusts, exercise to music, contract research, the production and distribution of sandwiches; and supermarket stock control. In each of these areas, the study contrasts two approaches or practices. In the first for example, the contrast is between the generic advice service studied and the arrangement which preceded it, in which each branch of the council's services had its own arrangements for giving advice. In the study of health visitors, the focus is on the tension between a group of health visitors who are trying to defend and extend their professional autonomy and attempts by their employers to make them do routine tasks like weighing babies. With exercise to music the opposition is between instructors who choose their own music and develop their own exercise routines and those who participate in a franchised model in which every detail is laid down in advance. In the contract research field, the contrast is between, on the one hand, the relatively privileged position and strong esprit de corps of engineers employed by a software development company and, on the other, researchers employed by a university. In sandwich making the contrast is between companies which make to order for big distributors (eg supermarket chains) and those which liaise directly with a variety of retail outlets. In stock control, the main focus is on the role played by the introduction of a 'gun' - ie a handheld electronic device used to determine which lines should be developed and which

dropped - which paradoxically allows some managers to exercise an unexpected degree of local control.

Obviously there could be a discussion about the decision to investigate these areas rather than others, and about how far the findings are valid for production in general. Each study makes you want to know more, and this tends to reinforce the feeling that collective self-censorship may have restrained the authors from investigating (or reporting) more deeply.

The book addresses issues which are important to readers of *PSE*. It is not possible to make sense of our own work situation in FE and much of HE now without understanding what colleges and polytechnics did a generation ago. The vast majority of FE colleges then, for example, were geared primarily to the development of (at least nominally) skilled labour power via the apprenticeship system and industrial release and it was assumed that work processes and education were inextricably linked. Since then, social, economic, technical and political changes have battered but not abolished, let alone replaced, that assumption. The specific links which existed then may have been in need of radical reform, but for those who think that working class people can together bring about a better world the underlying principle must stand. So for us nothing can be more important than to think about what work teaches.

Given this, then, it is important that we re-open the debate which took place in the 1970s about what academics called 'labour process theory' and which a larger group of people referred to as 'deskilling': in short, the debate triggered by Harry Braverman's book *Labour and Monopoly Capital*. This debate ended without any firm conclusions. Some of us hoped it would explain why FE curricula had begun to emphasise 'skills' just when work skills were being flung on the scrapheap. But I for one did not know that we were rehearsing at the level of discourse struggles which had been fought out in industry around World War 1, with the rise of Taylorism, syndicalism and the shop stewards movement.

An attempt to re-open debate would do well to start with historical accounts of that earlier period, such as David Montgomery's *The Fall of the House of Labor* and James Hinton's *The First Shop Stewards' Movement*. The issues involved have also been addressed from the standpoint of workers themselves by Studs Terkel in *Working*, and more recently (2008) in Sheila Cohen's collection *What's Happening: The Truth about Work and the Myth of 'Work-Life Balance'*. Other texts worth renewed attention include Mike Cooley's *Architect or Bee?* and Cynthia Cockburn's *Brothers*, a study

of changes in the printing industry. Behind all of these stand Antonio Gramsci's discussion of 'Americanism and Fordism', William Morris' *Useful Work Versus Useful Toil*, and the arguments put forward by Marx and Engels.

The authors of *Improving Working as Learning* know about some of this literature, because they make statements like (p33): 'Dialectical struggle generated by sources of internal contradictions, and ultimately revolutionary transformation, is yet another possibility [within non-linear systems]', or (p195): '... the reliance that some trade unions and the TUC now have on government funding ... may mean they will not, necessarily, be sympathetic to researchers who ask searching questions about this relationship ...', and conclude (p205) that: 'Ultimately, then, the arguments presented in this book build towards the most important challenge of all; namely, improving learning by reorganizing and improving work'. It is to be hoped, then, that they will find more direct ways of taking up this challenge.

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A guide to alienation in further education teaching

Kevin Orr

In consequence of the rationalisation of the work-process the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as mere sources of error when contrasted with these abstract special laws functioning according to rational predictions. Neither objectively nor in relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of this process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system. He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it or not.

The Hungarian philosopher and socialist George Lukacs (1974: 89) wrote this passage ninety years ago and it is prophetic of much present-day white-collar work and of teaching in FE in particular. Though the features Lukacs describes exist elsewhere in education, the acute intensification of centralised control over FE teaching means idiosyncrasies are even less tolerated as practice becomes more closely controlled within a system that many teachers experience as 'pre-existing' and '[functioning] independently'. The Government and institutions precisely prescribe not only the appropriate outcomes of teaching, but even what constitutes 'good' classroom practice. Lukacs was describing alienation in the passage above and this notion can help us to understand the situation of teachers in FE today.

Raymond Williams (1983: 36) traced the term alienation back through philosophy and religion to a 'feeling of a division between man and society' and it commonly refers to a state of mind or angst. However, for Marx this division is not just a psychological dislocation, even if that is how it may be experienced; instead alienation is rooted in the economic exchanges of capitalism, which distort human relationships and limit human agency. According to Marx human consciousness was adaptive because it was determined by the material situation of existence, but he argued that humans' fundamental nature lies in our ability to consciously shape the world through our labour. Marx (1976: 284) famously wrote that:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee would put many an architect to shame in the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existing ideally.

This consciousness of what we do, of our labour, allows humans to have a history that we can learn from, building on successes or avoiding previous failures. Working on the world as we find it also alters humans in two ways; firstly and directly through the consciousness required for a particular task or activity; and secondly indirectly through collectively shaping the world people transform the circumstances that then shape consciousness.

However, in the first chapter of Capital Marx describes how in capitalist society workers must sell their labour in order to earn a living and so do not own or control the product of their labour. It becomes the property of the capitalist, and thus it becomes alienated from the worker. The primary meaning of the labour consists of providing income, not in the product of the labour itself. So, in this materialist definition alienation above all entails a loss of control, specifically a loss of control over labour, and labour is fundamental to what defines human nature. Marx (1975: 353) refers to this as 'the objectification of the human essence' which he explains in this allegory:

[T]he dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value, and not the beauty and peculiar nature of the minerals: he lacks a mineralogical sense.

Marx identified four aspects in the alienation of humans (Marx 1975: 326-328), which may be recognisable to many working in education:

- a. People are alienated from the world because they do not control the product of their labour.
- b. People are alienated from themselves through not

controlling their own process of labour.

c. People are alienated from their 'species-being', from their essential humanity. This is a consequence of the first two because purposeful labour is central to what makes us human.

d. People are alienated from each other because society's economic processes distort all human relations through the division of labour and its concordant differences in social status, and through the commodification of every aspect of life.

These are most obvious in manufacturing where workers produce tangible goods which are then sold as commodities. How do these processes relate to teachers? A society as complex and textured as modern Britain cannot simply be explained by the functioning of production and exchange, so any developed understanding of society, and therefore of alienation must look beyond the bare economic determinants that underpin society.

[T]he crucial issue for any established society is the successful reproduction of such individuals whose 'own ends' do not negate the potentialities of the prevailing system of production. (Meszaros 1975: 289)

Even those who do not have a direct relationship to the means of production, such as FE teachers, are still shaped by society's fundamental economic relations. The ideological domination of ideas relating to capitalist economic relations is not the result of indoctrination or coercion, but comes about because most people, most of the time 'go along with' society as it is run; because the way that society is run, and the values that underpin it, have become internalised. These dominant ideas have assumed what Gramsci termed 'hegemony'.

Yet education in general and FE in particular are often considered means of escaping or alleviating society's social failings by widening opportunities and expanding aspirations. Education is considered as inherently useful, and a moral good existing above any political machinations, which was why Tony Blair's famous appeal to education was so effective. Teachers' belief in the value of education is not ersatz or naive; indeed those most committed to decent education will be those most prepared to defend it, and they are often the best teachers too. However, education reflects society more than it alone can transform society. FE teachers can find themselves in a double bind of alienation where they may seek to escape or alleviate society's ills and inequalities, and yet they find themselves subject to exactly the pressures that they had sought to avoid or assuage. The kind of restrictive, instrumentalist education that Blair extolled was not what they had in mind.

The constraint on teachers' autonomy and individuality is clearest in the banal detail of the LLUK Standards document which includes (p4) a commit-

ment to: '[u]sing a range of learning resources to support learners'; and (p5) the requirement to '[s]tructure and present information clearly and effectively'. Lukacs (1974: 97-98) can help to explain the consequences of this lack of control in FE. He refers to 'the contemplative nature of man under capitalism' where:

man's activity does not go beyond the correct calculation of the possible outcomes of the sequence of events (the 'laws' which he finds 'ready-made'), and beyond the adroit evasion of 'accidents' by means of protective devices and preventive measures (which are based in their turn on the recognition and application of similar laws).

FE teachers may feel able to do little more than efficiently apply the standards and procedures they are given without even considering the adoption of new ones. As the logic of the system is internalised the limits of aspiration are defined as teachers confine themselves to 'contemplating' (in Lukacs' term) how their part of the educational system is organised, but do not, in normal circumstances, engage in altering that system. Competencies or learning outcomes may be accepted, and effort is confined to how they can best be achieved. Moreover, the experience of alienation does not necessarily unify teachers, instead it may atomise them because relationships with each other are distorted by the necessity to meet the reified standards of the system. Teachers may remain at their desk at lunchtime and work long hours alone at home in the evenings, for example.

Although alienation is a consequence of an objective situation, how it is experienced is subjective and differs from one group of teachers to the next and from one individual to the next. That subjective experience will be mediated by individual history and temperament, as well as most crucially, social relationships, but what is perhaps most remarkable is how well teachers in FE sustain not just themselves, but their commitment to their ethics and their students. So, when teachers present a topic in an unorthodox way, or exceed the dull objectives of awarding bodies, or collaborate with colleagues in the union, or even just have a collective moan, they are resisting alienation by asserting their own agency. That matters, because each such act provides a glimpse beyond the current stifling strictures that alienate teachers and students alike.

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Sex and society

Philippe Harari

Sex is often perceived as one of the few human activities that are 'natural', unlike playing computer games, say. However, sexual attitudes and behaviours are just as susceptible to the influence of culture and ideology as any other form of human behaviour. The aim of this session is to get students

discussing attitudes towards sex, hopefully leading to a realisation that these can differ greatly between individuals and between cultures.

Some of the statements in the table below are quite challenging, and not all teachers will feel comfortable talking about these issues with young people.

In small groups, please discuss each of the statements below and say whether you agree or disagree with them. If your group really cannot come to an agreement about a particular statement, tick the box in the 'uncertain' column.

	Y	N	?
It is embarrassing if you are not sexually active by the age of 18.			
Sex education in schools does not really tell young people what they need to know.			
There are too many sexual images in the media nowadays.			
Sex is more fun for boys than for girls.			
At some point in their lives, most people have sex when they don't really want to.			
There is nothing wrong with pornography.			
It's disgusting when old people have sex.			
You shouldn't have sex with people much older or younger than you.			
You cannot truly love a girl/boyfriend if you don't have a sexual relationship with him/her.			
People who masturbate are sad.			
You shouldn't tell children about sex so that they do not lose their innocence.			
People should be more open about sex than they are.			
Two consenting adults should be allowed to do anything they like together.			
Sex before marriage is wrong.			
Sex is over-rated.			

SOAS occupied in support of victimised cleaners

Students and allies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) occupied the university's admin offices on Monday 15th June to protest against managers' attacks on migrant workers.

Nine cleaners from the university were taken into detention after a dawn raid by immigration police on Friday 12th June. By 15th June, five cleaners had already been deported, and others faced deportation within days. One had suffered a suspected heart attack and had been denied access to medical assistance and even water. One was over six months pregnant. Many had families who had no idea of their whereabouts.

The cleaners had won the London Living Wage and trade union representation after a successful 'Justice for Cleaners' campaign that united workers of all backgrounds and student activists.

Activists believe the raid was managers' 'revenge' for this campaign. Immigration officers were called in by the cleaning contractor ISS, even though it had employed many of the cleaners involved for years. Cleaning staff were told to attend an 'emergency staff meeting' at 6.30am on 12th June. This was used as a pretext to lure the cleaners into a closed space in which the immigration officers were hiding to arrest them.

Riot gear

More than 40 officers were dressed in full riot gear and aggressively undertook interrogations, and then escorted the arrested cleaners to a detention centre. Neither legal representation nor union support were present, due to the secrecy surrounding the action. Many were unable to communicate, let alone fully understand what was taking place, due to the denial of interpreters.

SOAS management were complicit in the immigration raid by enabling the officers to hide in the meeting room beforehand and giving no warning to the cleaners.

The cleaners were interviewed one by one. They were allowed no legal or trade union representation,

or even a translator (many are native Spanish speakers).

The cleaners are members of Unison at SOAS. They had recently (Thursday 28th May) gone out on strike to protest against the sacking of cleaner and union activist Jose Stalin Bermudez.

The occupation issued a list of demands to SOAS management:

1. We call on the directorate to request the Secretary of State to immediately release the detainees and to prevent the deportation of the three cleaners who are still in detention in the UK.
2. For the directorate to release a public statement condemning what has happened to the cleaners and calling for their immediate release and return.
3. To campaign for the return of the cleaners who have already been deported.
4. To bring all contract staff in house. SOAS should not use any contractors, ISS or others.
5. To keep immigration officers from entering campus under any circumstances or other forms of collaboration with immigration or police. Universities are for education not for state violence and oppression.
6. A year's wage as reparations for all detained and deported staff.
7. To hold accountable SOAS managers who were complicit in facilitating the raid and detention of the cleaners, refusing to aid a sick worker and a pregnant woman.
8. To reinstate Jose Stalin Bermudez, the SOAS Unison branch chair.
9. To respect the right to organise in trade unions unimpeded.
10. To provide space and resources for a public meeting to build support for the SOAS 9 and other migrants, in education and beyond, affected by immigration control and racism.
11. Amnesty for all those involved.

One of the detained cleaners stated: 'We're honest people not animals. We are just here to earn an honest living for our families. SOAS management are being unfair'. One of the occupying students said: 'Universities should be sanctuaries, places free of violence and aggression. SOAS's

reputation as a university has been tainted today due to the complicity in state brutality in the arrest of the cleaners’.

Graham Dyer, SOAS UCU branch chair, said: ‘Our fight has united lecturers, staff and students, and has rocked SOAS management. Those managers are now lashing out. It is a disgrace that SOAS management saw fit to use a seat of learning to intimidate migrant workers. This is their underhand revenge and we will do all we can to stop migrant workers paying the price’.

The campaign to stop the deportations was supported by Tony Benn, MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn, film director Ken Loach, and many trade unionists and student activists.

John McDonnell said: ‘As living wage campaigns are building in strength, we are increasingly seeing the use of immigration status to attack workers fighting against poverty wages and break trade union organising. The message is that they are happy to employ migrant labour on poverty wages, but if you complain they will send you back home. It is absolutely shameful’.

Ken Loach said: ‘This raid is the action of a bully. Migrant workers are amongst the most vulnerable - poorly paid and far from home. Recent action by Unison to secure better wages and conditions at SOAS was good news. Now we wonder if the SOAS cleaners are being targeted because they dared to organise as trade unionists.’

The occupation was a reflection of broad outrage against what had happened. The raid was widely seen as a continuation of current trends to remove immigrant labour and to maintain impossibly low wages.

Cleaning contractor ISS had used the same tactics against London Underground cleaners who had gone on strike, with the result that key activists were deported. Immigration law is being used for union busting.

The occupation continued until Wednesday 17th June, and ended with concessions from the SOAS administration. They agreed to write to the Home Secretary asking for leave to remain for the cleaners not deported; to ‘discuss the possibility of bringing cleaning in-house; to ‘acknowledge’ UCU’s policy of non-cooperation with immigration raids; and not to take action against the occupiers.



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