

2009 school leavers' prospects

Danny Dorling

We print below, with permission, an extract from the summary of a report, The prospects of this year's school leavers, prepared jointly by Sheffield University and The Prince's Trust. This section of the report, written by Professor Dorling, goes on to suggest that two job sectors - health and social care, and hospitality - 'might remain stable or have the potential to grow during recession'. It ends by referring to 'new schemes to support unemployed young people' currently being launched by the Prince's Trust.

Background

Approximately 3.5 per cent of young people with qualifications were claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) in 1998. It was twice as high for those with no qualifications, 7 per cent of whom were unemployed.

Youth unemployment fell between 1998 and 2002. As youth unemployment fell, it fell most quickly in absolute terms for those without qualifications. By 2002, the youth unemployment rate for young people without any qualifications was only 2.5 per cent higher than that of those young people with qualifications (which was 2.6 per cent). During good economic times, there are jobs even for the least skilled of young people.

Patterns in recession

The worst post war recession was that of the early 1980s. In 1984, over a million young people up to age 25 were registered as unemployed. This was including those aged 16 and 17, who were then permitted to register as unemployed.

In 2007, before the credit crunch, around 230,000 18-to-25-year-olds were claiming JSA. Today, this figure has increased to around 472,200 and we can expect this number to at least double - to a million - if trends follow those of previous recessions.

If the number of 18-to-25-year-olds in the dole queue exceeds a million in this recession, this summer's school leavers will be the hardest hit since the crash of 1929.

If trends follow those of the 1980s recession about 140,000 - or one in five - of this year's GCSE cohort will be claiming JSA by the time they are 21.

However, the rate of youth unemployment in the recession to come will depend almost entirely on what options they are offered. With the right opportunities and support, there are more positive prospects for even the most disadvantaged or under-qualified young people.

Young people with no qualifications

Young people leaving school with no qualifications are twice as likely to claim JSA before they are 25 as those with qualifications, with the absolute gap between their life chances likely to grow as recession worsens.

As jobs become very scarce we would expect the most rapid increases in unemployment in the UK to be experienced by young people. Those young people with the least qualifications will almost certainly bear the brunt of this, just as they benefited when there were so many more jobs to go around.

In 2000, young people with no qualifications were 2.0 times more likely than young people with qualifications to be claiming JSA. By 2007, as youth unemployment was rising, that ratio increased to 2.3 times. We should expect that ratio to rise given current trends and because of our kind of society.

News update: June - August 2009

Week beginning 29/6/09

[Previous week] UK Council for International Student Affairs chief executive officer (CEO) Dominic Scott tells a Westminster Education Forum meeting that, in the first few weeks of the new points-based system for visa applications to study in the UK, refusal rates rose to more than 60 per cent.

Evidence emerges of some misuse of Train to Gain funding. The LSC issues guidance to all providers warning against practices like the offer of bogus volunteering opportunities or the creation of 'jobs' with zero hours contracts. However, College Finance Directors' Group chairperson David Pullein (at Leeds College of Building) tells the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* that 'the LSC . . . is, to an extent, using this as a smokescreen' for the fact that 'Train to Gain has been massively overspent . . .'

Points in *Guardian* coverage of a report produced for Million+, (the body speaking for post-1992 universities) include: economists predict that more than a million under-25 year olds will be unemployed by September 2009; the number of applicants for full time HE places in 2009 could be 643,000, as against 590,000 in 2008; UCAS suggests that whereas in 2008 almost 44,000 people were given HE places via clearing, the number this year could be as low as 16,000; the Government will fund 466,000 places this year; this is an increase of 10,000 over last year, rather than the 15,000 originally

proposed, and is about 177,000 short of the expected demand; applications by black males have this year risen by 19.6 per cent, and by people over 40 by 21.5 per cent.

The UCU and NUT reach an agreement about the union organisation of staff moving between the FE, 6th form college and school 6th form sectors.

Points in coverage of the London Metropolitan University (London Met.) situation include: Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn has tabled a Commons motion demanding that Lord Mandelson intervene 'to protect the university and innocent students and staff from the funding row'; correspondence released under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) reveals that in December 2008 the board of the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 'had reached the point where it had no confidence in that leadership' (ie the senior management of London Met.); on 7/1/09, John Denham, then secretary of state for Innovation, Universities Science and Skills, sought legal advice to find out if he could remove London Met's governors and vice chancellor, but found that its limited company status ruled this out.

In the FE colleges buildings crisis, the LSC has now identified 13 colleges whose bids are potentially to be funded with the £500m made available in the Budget. These are: Barnsley, Bournville; Furness; Hartlepool, Kirklees, North West Kent, St Helens, Sandwell, South Thames and West Cheshire Colleges, plus Leyton 6th Form

College, the Manchester College Wythenshawe and Tresham Institute (in Corby). But all these must now make further cuts in their bids.

The National Star College near Cheltenham, which caters for people with severe and complex physical disabilities, is one of 160 institutions to have their capital funding bids turned down by the LSC.

Management at Liverpool Hope University issue a directive to staff requiring them to work a full 35 hours on the premises unless they obtain formal permission to be off-site. At the same time, a tribunal upholds the right of Kingston University to sack a lecturer, Regina Benveniste, on the grounds that she attended only for her timetabled lectures and specified student contact hours.

79 FE colleges have refused to honour an agreement that would raise by £550 the pay of staff earning less than £17,000 per year. UCU and Unison jointly issue figures for these colleges, showing that in 2007-08 they collectively spent nearly £40m on consultants and agency staff. Among the highest spenders on consultants were North Devon (£2,234,668), Shrewsbury (£1,341,406), Isle of Wight (£1,123,741) and Lewisham (£940,000). Among the highest spenders on agency staff were: City College Birmingham (£2,842,876), Lewisham (£2.6m), Ealing, Hammersmith and West London (£1,717,028) and Tyne Metropolitan (£1.7m).

Former Tyne Metropolitan College principal Les Walton is to chair the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA, ie the quango that will oversee local authority funding of 16-19 FE). The YPLA CEO will be Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) civil servant Peter Lauener.

More than 90 staff have since October 2008 left Thames Valley University (TVU) under its voluntary severance scheme. Sheffield University has offered all 6,000 of its staff voluntary redundancy in a bid to 'save' £2.5m a year.

A study by Worcester University visiting professor Peter Pumfrey finds that between 1998-99 and 2007-08, the annual number of people with disabilities who achieved degrees rose from 11,052 to 26,531.

Four colleges - West Notts, Barnfield (in Luton), Hull and New College Durham - have accepted government invitations to consider heading 'accredited schools groups' (ie groups of schools judged to be 'underperforming'). £20m has been earmarked for this scheme, announced this week in the *Your Child, Your Schools, Our Future* White Paper.

UCU members at Tower Hamlets College in London and The Manchester College take strike action over sackings.

Week beginning 6/7/09

Mid Worcestershire (Tory) MP Peter Luff, chairperson of the Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee (BISC), says that: 'I think there is every chance that universities will get a better deal out of BERR than they did where they were before'. (BERR was the department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform with which DIUS was merged in June to form BIS.)

Points to emerge from a *Guardian* feature on colleges judged by Ofsted to be inadequate include: Alan Birks, the former principal of South Birmingham College, who in the 1990s was assigned to rescue the situation at Bilston College, where there had been a high-profile franchising scandal, is now acting principal of Southwark College in London; problems became apparent at Southwark when 27 per cent of its students left in the first six weeks of the 2008-09 academic year; this was followed by the retirement of the principal Dorothy Jones and most other senior staff; (Jones was principal during the landmark strike struggle at Southwark in the 1990s; Birks is arranging for Southwark to scrap all its GCSE and A-level provision; he maintains that 'not everything at Southwark is bad'; meanwhile, Leeds Park Lane principal Maxine Room offers her views about the reported 'inadequacy' of Keighley College (now part of Park Lane), describing Keighley itself as 'a small insular town with low aspirations . . .'. (Room is shortly to replace Ruth Silver as principal of Lewisham College.)

According to HEFCE, seven (unnamed) HE institutions are 'at higher risk' financially. Four of these are post-1992 universities and three are specialist institutions.

David Cameron says that if he comes to power 'the QCDA [Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency] must go' and, regarding Ofqual: 'Instead of looking at thousands of exams every few years, it needs a narrower focus . . .' This is taken by some commentators to mean that a Tory government would leave universities and awarding bodies to determine the content of A-levels.

Edinburgh University is defending the right of Allyson Pollock, a professor there, to criticise a deal

between NHS Tayside and South African private healthcare provider Netcare. In a British Medical Journal article in May, Pollock alleged that this tie-up may have led to a £3m payment to Netcare for patients who did not receive treatment. NHS Tayside is seeking a retraction of this claim.

At a 'special summit of college leaders', LSC CEO Geoff Russell tells them that the 167 colleges whose bids to start building projects this year have been rejected will receive only a legal minimum of compensation for expenses they have already incurred. (The total spent by them is said to be around £220m.) A group of 10-20 managers from such colleges, headed by union-bashing Oaklands principal Mark Dawe, meets to explore other sources of finance.

HEFCE is reportedly 'coming under intense pressure' (*Guardian*) from the Russell Group (of large, 'research-intensive' universities) and the 1994 Group (smaller ones) to 'revisit' universities' quality-related funding allocations as based on the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). (This had the effect of distributing slightly more research funding than hitherto to post-1992 institutions.)

Government figures released originally in June indicate that the number of 16-24 year olds not in employment, education or training (the so-called 'NEETs') has reached record levels, rising in England alone to 935,000, up from 810,000 at the end of 2008.

It emerges that in the lead-up to local elections in June John Denham, then Universities secretary, said it was 'appropriate' for the 'purdah' rules (ie the conventions requiring public bodies to suspend in pre-election periods activities that might compromise their political neutrality) to be applied to academics whose research is funded by the Eco-

conomic and Social Research Council.

The LSC is tightening up on anti-fraud procedures in the lead-up to its dissolution in March 2009.

A Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) audit of Cranfield University's MSC programme in clinical research as delivered through four campuses of the Institute of Clinical Research, India (ICRI) identifies a 'string of failures' (THE), especially with regard to plagiarism.

In a bid to 'find' £340m of 'savings', BIS is considering proposals to extend the 'contestability' of adult skills contracts, such that bids could be made on price rather than on the standard costs per learner as now. This would allow colleges and private providers to undercut one another much more savagely than at present.

An annual Sutton Trust survey, conducted this year with 2,447 state school students aged 11-16, finds that 77 per cent describe themselves as 'fairly' or 'very likely' to attend university, up 73 per cent from last year and the highest figure recorded in seven years of this survey.

The LSC raises from green to amber the risk level for delays in EMA payments this autumn.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for 2007-08 show that 62 per cent of people who graduated from full time first degree courses in that year and whose destination is known were in employment, down from 64 per cent in 2006-07.

Points in a study by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR), based on a poll of 226 employers of graduates, include: 25 per cent of graduate positions have disappeared over the last year; the average number of applications for each such post is 48; the average starting salary for a graduate has remained at £25,000.

UCAS figures show a 10 per cent rise in university applications over last year (corresponding to 50,000 extra applicants).

Following a meeting between 'college leaders' and Lord Mandelson, the annual conference of the 157 Group (of large colleges rated highly by Ofsted), at which, according to executive director Lynne Sedgmore, 'we had 26 of the brightest and best principals around a table', decides to launch a 'manifesto' for the FE sector in time for the autumn conferences of political parties.

Week beginning 13/7/09

Commenting on an Open University (OU) document outlining 'cost-saving measures' related to its BSC in Natural Science, Bristol University lifelong learning for English director Tom Sperlinger says: 'The provision that survived the initial culls [arising from government cuts to funding for equivalent or lower qualifications - ELQs Ed.] often did so at a cost or in isolation, and this is vulnerable as wider cuts in higher education loom. The result is a vastly reduced curriculum for adult students . . .'

Tower Hamlets College principal Michael Farley tells the *Guardian* that: The governors are saddened that they have had to make this decision [ie cuts to ESOL provision Ed.], but are committed to the long-term health of the college and securing its future'. On the other hand, commenting on the Government's suggestion that other providers might make good cuts to ESOL in FE across the country, Tower Hamlets lecturer Perdita Patterson says: 'It is beyond me to understand how a miscellaneous collection of private providers, charities and religious organisations could possibly replace an established mainstream educational institution . . .'

A UCU report, *Betraying a Generation*, claims that almost 4,600 HE posts are under threat, about 2,000 of them at universities in London, with 45 universities already cutting jobs and 99 others planning to do so.

UCU claims that nearly 1,300 jobs are under threat in FE nationally, including 76 at City College Birmingham, 77 at City of Bath College, 40 at Liverpool Community College, 32 at Leeds College of Building, and 62 at Coleg Sir Gar in Carmarthenshire.

Queen's University Belfast is aiming to cut 103 jobs.

According to *Guardian* coverage of the Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills Committee's report on the FE buildings fiasco, in November 2008, LSC CEO Mark Haysom, since resigned, told the Commons Public Accounts Committee that: 'I think at the moment we are content, given the scale and nature of the project, that we are in good shape'.

Following the departure of vice-chancellor Simon Lee, Leeds Metropolitan University issues a statement saying that governors have decided to raise fees to the level of other universities (ie £3,312 per year) from 2010-11.

The Government is reportedly considering a scheme under which HE students who live with their parents would be exempt from tuition fees but also barred from applying for low-interest government loans and other financial support.

The management of University College London (UCL) are attempting to exclude elected staff reps from its governing board.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) serves Liverpool Hope University with an improvement notice which includes the words: 'You have failed to make a suitable

and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of your employees from exposure to work-related stressors . . . ' Commenting on this, 'a Hope spokesman' (*THE*) says: 'The level of stress related to work is extremely low at this university'.

HEFCE's Business and Community Interaction Survey records that in 2007-08 the total value of contract research (ie research paid for by private companies) conducted by universities in England was £835m, up 10 per cent on 2006-07.

The Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) offers the five HE unions (UCU, the Educational Institute of Scotland [EIS], GMB, Unison and Unite) a 0.5 per cent pay increase. (UCU is demanding 8 per cent.)

At an Academy of Social Sciences conference held in London, HEFCE Research Excellence Framework (REF - ie the arrangement which is to replace the RAE starting with the period 2008-2012) project manager Graeme Rosenberg reveals that 20 to 30

per cent of the value assigned to a department's research may be tied to evidence of its 'impact' (ie to obtain research funding from HEFCE, academics would have to 'show' that their work is having a practical effect on the world).

A HE Statistics Agency report covering 2007-08 shows that the highest earners from external research grants and contracts (ie as distinct from research council and RAE funding) were Oxford with £283m, Imperial College with £255m and Cambridge with £242m.

Week beginning 20/7/09

All five HE unions are now to consult their members on the UCEA's 0.5 per cent offer. All five jointly issue a statement in which the offer is characterised as 'appalling'.

Grimsby Institute of FHE is to seek a judicial review of the LSC's decision to use its extra £300m of capital to fund new projects rather than to compensate colleges

which spent money after the LSC had approved in principal the schemes they submitted. Hull principal Daniel Khan claims Hull spent £3.7m in this way. Over 60 colleges are thought to be in a similar position, having laid out over £200m between them.

Seeking to counter rumours, a HEFCE spokesperson says: 'We have not asked institutions to model a 20 per cent cut and have not done so ourselves'.

Points in a National Audit Office (NAO) report on Train to Gain up to March 2009 include: half of the £1.4bn worth of training paid for by the Government under Train to Gain would have been provided by employers anyway; success rates in some of the schemes put on by the 100 largest Train to Gain providers were as low as 8 per cent; about a third of next year's budget has already been committed because of 'over-recruitment' this year and the £50m overspend in 2008-09; until December 2008 the LSC had no reliable system for measuring Train to Gain activity; payments worth £11m have been made in error, of which £8.2 has been recovered; an internal audit within the LSC has found a lack of co-ordination with regard to anti-fraud activity.

In a partial reversal of the Government's clampdown on HE student numbers, BIS confirms it will allow universities to take on 10,000 extra full time students in science, engineering and/or maths (STEM) over three years starting this autumn, and will cover the costs of maintenance grants and tuition fee loans (but not the extra teaching costs) for these students.

The LSC's National Council is formally split into two 'shadow' committees, one of which will from March 2010 become the Young People's Learning Authority (YPLA), and the other the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

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

**For further information, contact the Secretary:
Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields, DUNSTABLE, Beds LU6
3NS; john.hewitt22@virgin.net**

Commenting on this in the LSC's annual report, titled Making Skills Matter, CEO Geoff Russell says: 'As the transition progresses over the next year, there are significant risks that the LSC will not be able to meet its objectives . . . and systems of internal control will break down'.

The LSC's annual report also reveals a 115 per cent rise over the last two years in referrals to its internal audit investigations unit (ie with regard to possible fraud). It emerges that in 2006-07 there was a case in which £2.5m of funding was at risk and which has led to five people being charged with offences which include corruption, money laundering and obtaining pecuniary advantage through deception. (This case will come to court in Birmingham in October.)

An analysis by Jane Wills, professor of human geography at Queen Mary, University of London, shows that a decision taken by this institution in 2008 to raise to £8.68 the hourly rate paid to its cleaning and security staff, and to bring such provision back in house, led cleaning costs to rise from £2,119,000 in 2006-07 to £2,197,000 in 2008-09. (Wills was involved in the broader 'coalition of faith and community organisations' which campaigned to raise cleaning staff earnings above the £11,173 they earned for 40 hours a week under the minimum wage of £5.73 an hour.)

UCU members employed at Oakhill Secure Training Centre near Milton Keynes by The Manchester College take strike action in protest at management's failure to deal with alleged bullying and harassment.

Unleashing Aspirations, a report commissioned by Gordon Brown from a group chaired by Blairite former minister Alan Milburn questions whether funding directed at widening participation in HE is delivering value for money

and proposes 'no-fee degrees for students living with their families.'

Staff at City University (in London) learn that the resignation as vice chancellor on 23/7/09 of music professor Malcolm Gillies was due to differences between Gillies and the governing body. There is a suggestion (*THE*) that 'disagreements arose from [Gillies'] preference for investment in teaching rather than administration and a liberal approach at odds with a business-focused board'.

Points in *THE* coverage of HEFCE's *Review of Teaching Funding: Consultation on Targeted Allocations*, issued this week for consultation till October, include: £65m overall is being cut from universities' teaching budgets in 2009-10; UCU equates this to 1,500 staff; there is a proposal to withdraw the £40m fund currently used to help universities maintain historic buildings; at present, Oxford gets £5.1m a year from this fund, and Cambridge £4.2m; HEFCE wants to close the £24m pool used to support institutions offering foundation degrees; nine universities now face cuts of over £1m each this autumn; these include the OU (£2.5m), Manchester (£1.4m) and Leeds (£1.3m).

Week beginning 27/7/09

Pearson, the company which, as well as the *Financial Times*, Penguin Books and half of The *Economist*, owns the Edexcel awarding body (and within that, BTEC), declares half year results judged to be relatively good given sharp falls in advertising revenues and subscriptions. According to the *Guardian*, Pearson's best performing division was its education business, where sales, including in the US, rose to £1.52bn.

Problems emerge over the extra STEM places granted by BIS. Several 'research-intensive' universities, including Cambridge,

Exeter, King's College London, Liverpool, Oxford and Southampton, decline the offer altogether. At the same time there are allegations that the expansion, when combined with new UCAS rules allowing applicants to 'trade up' during clearing, will lead to 'poaching' by unscrupulous institutions.

It emerges that the National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC), which is funded by BIS, has ruled that the International Certificate of Christian Education (ICCE), which derives from the (Texan) Accelerated Christian Education programme, and which is done by students at around 50 private Christian schools in Britain, is equivalent (eg for HE entry) to international GCSEs and A-levels available through the Cambridge International awarding body. (Science and history textbooks linked to ICCE assert creationism to be true and praise apartheid.)

In his first major speech on HE, given to 'university leaders' at Birkbeck College London, Lord Mandelson says he will launch the projected review of fees this autumn, such that it will report finally in about a year. He says that: [the introduction of fees in 2006 had been] 'a radical and signal success in strengthening the resources available to universities without sacrificing accessibility to students'; and that: 'Whatever funding mix . . . we develop, there must always be a link between what an institution charges and its performance in widening access'. He speaks also of the need to 'face up to paying for excellence'. (This is taken by UCU to constitute a green light for steep fees rises.) He adds: 'the taxpayer requires value and we shouldn't tolerate producer-driven attitudes prevailing . . . '.

It emerges that the 13 colleges whose building bids were approved by the LSC last month, following initial assessment by

PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), will not get the funding they anticipated. This is because PWC rated several bids equally, with the result that all the bids together total £547m whereas the money available is £500m. (This would imply an average cut of £3.6m per bid.)

An internal disciplinary hearing at the University of East London (UEL) finds UCU branch chairperson Chris Knight guilty of gross misconduct and he is dismissed. (The charges related to his involvement in the G20 protests in March/April and also to material on his website about the sacking of vice chancellor Martin Everett.)

Commenting on his research into the relative value of academic and vocational qualifications in terms of HE entry and progression at university and beyond, Oxford University Education Department researcher Geoff Hayward says: 'Some of those with vocational qualifications may be financially better off doing an apprenticeship than getting a degree. We should be honest about that'.

Accounts filed at Companies House by INTO University Partnerships (ie the company to which several universities have outsourced English for academic purposes and similar provision) and covering the year to July 2008 show that: INTO's partnership with Newcastle University had a deficit of £941,621; its joint venture with Exeter University lost £723,583; a joint venture with the Manchester (FE) College had debts of £1,423,339; INTO overall lost £1,173,239.

Ofsted announces changes to its inspection regime affecting colleges and private training providers, such that the 12 weeks notice currently given to the latter will be cut to two, and colleges will be graded separately for pre- and post-19 provision.

Manchester University closes its commercial archaeology unit, which provides field evaluations and excavations to property developers.

A Commons Public Accounts Committee report on the FE buildings fiasco finds that much of the debt incurred by colleges through this results from financial mismanagement by the LSC, noting also that DIUS 'failed to recognise that the LSC was no longer controlling the flow of projects'. The committee records that at the end of 2007-08 23 colleges had borrowed over 40 per cent of their income, while, according to accounts submitted last year to the LSC, the most indebted colleges included Chamberlain Sixth Form College in Birmingham (which had borrowed 134 per cent of its income), Epping Forest College (106 per cent), Middlesbrough College (99 per cent) and City College Coventry (also 99 per cent).

A survey by *The Bookseller* magazine of academic book sales reveals that in the first half of 2009 the sales of Oxford University Press (OUP) rose 13.5 per cent on last year to reach £14.6m, those of Palgrave Macmillan rose 12.8 per cent to £2.3m, Continuum's rose 20.1 per cent to £1m, and Sage's rose 24.1 per cent to £1.8m.

Former NATFHE official Tom Wilson is to succeed Liz Smith as director of the TUC's Unionlearn organisation.

Following an audit which revealed inaccuracies in the reporting of student data, HEFCE has ordered Wolverhampton University to repay £3.5m of funding. Wolverhampton now says it needs to make £8m 'savings' and is to cut about 250 jobs (11 per cent of its workforce).

Schools secretary Ed Balls announces funding for an extra 34,000 6th form and college

places for September, using the £655m earmarked in the Budget for this. 25,000 extra apprenticeships and 13,000 entry to employment (E2E) places will also be funded.

Week beginning 3/8/09

The *THE* prints details (obtained through the FOI Act) of the report on London Met.'s approach to student records compiled on behalf of HEFCE by independent auditors BDO Stoy Hayward, which was presented to HEFCE in January 2009, but which has remained unpublished following a threat of legal action issued by London Met. lawyers in February. The report essentially concludes that London Met.'s processes for compiling, reviewing and authorising data returns (ie regarding students completing courses as a basis for claiming funding) were ineffective. London Met.'s response is to blame HEFCE itself for the problems, while also claiming that the BDO report was compiled at least partly by former HEFCE staff who had themselves been involved in dealing with the university's data returns.

A 'lessons learned' report on London Met. commissioned by HEFCE from accountants KPMG is made public. It criticises HEFCE own procedures in several areas but essentially concludes that the blame for student data reporting failures rests with London Met. management and vice-chancellor Brian Roper in particular. It says that HEFCE's decision not to reopen London Met.'s data returns for 2003-04 and 2004-05 'may be difficult to justify when the outcome may have been a substantially higher clawback'.

In response to an approach from UCU in which the union points out that only one member has so far been notified of compulsory

redundancy, a spokesperson for London Met. says: 'approximately 53 full-time equivalent posts are scheduled for compulsory redundancy this summer'. (The overall number of likely redundancies is 550.)

The LSC publishes the results of its first Framework for Excellence assessment of post-16 provision. The scores refer to the year 2007-08, are restricted to colleges and training providers (ie school sixth forms will not be included until 2010), and are not broken down by individual provider (because of concerns expressed by providers themselves). These 'headline outcomes' figures are based on 'success rates' plus responses by students and by employers. More than 95 per cent of providers are rated good or outstanding. However, much more data was available about colleges than about private training providers.

After nine months of investigations, the Commons IJSS committee publishes its report on HE, titled *Students and Universities*. Points in this include: the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) should either be reformed (requiring it to review universities' degree-awarding powers, check the comparability of degrees and accredit a national pool of external examiners) or be abolished; legal protection for whistleblowers should be strengthened; existing government-commissioned research into the effect of top-up fees on poorer students should be published in time to influence the review of fees; the assumption that teaching quality is linked to research needs to be examined and, if it is substantiated, research funding should be disseminated as widely as possible; the system, especially as regards bursaries, discriminates against mature and part time students and this should be stopped; the powers of HEFCE to intervene in the running of institutions, especially with regard to fair admissions, should be

clarified. (The committee also suggests that expanding HE in FE could be one way of achieving a progression route similar to that between community colleges and state universities in the US, which would widen participation.)

UCU claims that, of 43 HE institutions which have indicated that jobs will shortly be lost, at least 21 have failed to produce adequate impact assessments in terms of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006. (Up to 6,000 staff are thought to be facing the sack.)

A report on the impending hand-over of 16-19 provision from the LSC to local councils, written by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) for the Local Government Association (LGA) and based on 54 interviews with people involved, finds high levels of unpreparedness.

The report of a Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee inquiry into the training of social workers reveals that in 2006-07 nearly half the students admitted to social work degree courses had less than 240 UCAS points (ie the equivalent of three C grades at A-level) and concludes that: 'It is unacceptable that social work courses . . . should have a reputation for being 'difficult to fail'.

The Welsh Assembly government approves the merger of Deeside College with the Welsh College of Horticulture, thereby creating an institution with over 800 staff, nearly 20,000 students and an annual income of just under £30m.

The increase from £80 to £95 in the minimum weekly pay of apprentices, announced by John Denham at the 2008 TUC Conference, comes into effect. The average weekly pay for an apprentice now exceeds £170.

Week beginning 10/8/09

An analysis of universities' finances and their prospects, prepared for the *THE* by the accountants Grant Thornton, essentially predicts that falling income and rising expenditure will lead to institutions closing unless managements take strong action now. From the standpoint of David Barnes, lead partner of Grant Thornton's education group: 'they [universities] need to put the business model first. Everything else follows from that, including academic research and teaching. There are a number of universities where the academics are still in charge. They are being led by people who put the academic focus first'. The only favourable sign is a 'liberalisation' in the tuition fees debate 'that suggests they are likely to be raised' [*THE*].

Points in a *TES* article occasioned by a letter sent in July by Peter Mandelson to South East England Development Agency chairperson Jim Brathwaite include: BIS is consulting on plans under which regional development agencies (RDAs) would take over the commissioning and funding of post-18 [sub degree level] education and training from the LSC, with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) being subordinate to them; one consequence could be that about 60 of the LSC's existing 3,000 staff will now transfer to RDAs (with 1,800 going to the SFA and others to the Young People's Learning Agency [YPLA]); for the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), LSC group president Ruth Serwotka points out that a Cameron government is likely to attack RDAs along with other quangos; both the AOC and the Association of [private] Learning Providers (ALP) broadly welcome this move by BIS.

Points in a *Guardian* article on the UCAS clearing situation include: UCAS CEO Anthony McClaran

says they expect 22,000 places to be available through clearing; (this needs to be set against the fact that in 2008 44,000 applicants missed the grades required by their first and second choices, and the fact that an extra 60,000 people overall have applied for a university place this year); several institutions, including Bristol, Warwick, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester and Bournemouth Universities and Imperial College London have either withdrawn from clearing altogether or are offering few places through it; Bristol has introduced 'disappointment training' for admissions staff; Oxford University is this year turning away 12,000 applicants who all have at least three A grades at A-level; Russell Group director general Wendy Piatt says most Russell Group universities have now refused to participate in the Government's extra 10,000 places initiative because it is not fully funded.

A study carried out for the LSC and based on a survey of 4,800 people who, as unemployed adults, undertook FE courses in 2005-06, finds that just over 40 per cent had jobs by the end of 2008, and that the single biggest factor working against this was disability.

Salford University management sacks UCU branch secretary Gary Duke, ostensibly on the grounds that a leaflet he produced about the alleged personal relationship between a head of school and a PhD student, now employed by Salford, contained 'malicious and personally damaging remarks', and that his distribution of this leaflet was an act of 'harassment and victimisation'. They intend also to review his position as a PhD student himself. (Duke was active in a campaign against management's attempt to make 150 staff redundant.)

HEFCE figures for the funding of HE teaching in FE colleges in

2009-10 reveal that the top five recipients of this are: Newcastle College (£11,687,000); Blackburn College (£9,428,000); Bradford College (£8,037,000); Blackpool and the Fylde College (£8,025,000); Hull College (£6,159,000).

Week beginning 17/8/09

Publication of A-level results reveals that the most popular subjects at A2 were English (taken by 91,815 people), Maths (72,475), Biology (55,485), Psychology (52,872), General Studies (50,012), History (49,071), Art and Design (45,839), Chemistry (42,491), Media (33,822) and Geography (32,227).

Quotes from *A Challenging Time for Universities*, a 'confidential' document produced by the Hay Group consultants, in which feedback from a workshop for university HR directors organised in June by Universities Human Resources is collated, include: 'Senior HR people believe that the time has come to challenge how the trade unions influence the 'business' of higher education . . .'; [universities should be] 'more assiduously leveraging academic excellence as an organisational strength'; and ' . . . the real squeeze is yet to come'.

Four FE institutions - Loughborough, Sussex Downs and Stoke upon Trent Colleges plus the Kingsland Skills and Enterprise Centre (in Bedfordshire) - have so far volunteered to become 'laboratories' in which the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) will, from September, test out ideas and approaches.

Birkbeck College London professor Claire Callender, previously associated with important research into, among other things, the damaging effects of HE top-up fees, is co-author of a report

produced by the Tory party-linked Policy Exchange thinktank. The report argues that money should be diverted from the Government's University Challenge programme (ie the scheme to launch up to 20 new HE centres in towns without universities) to support part time students in existing institutions.

The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning bill, due to come before parliament this autumn, will, if passed, allow sixth form colleges (SFCs) to bid for capital funding from the Building Skills for the Future (BSF) programme. (This would include the 15 SFCs which have made bids to the LSC and received nothing.)

A HEFCE report, based on data from 2006-07, reveals that there are 11 (unnamed) HE institutions with less than 40 per cent of their 'non-residential estate' (ie buildings other than halls of residence) in good condition. It claims that the cost of raising buildings across the whole HE sector to an acceptable standard would be £3.9bn.

Ofsted's second report on 14-19 diplomas maintains that whereas in colleges functional skills tended to be taught by staff used to embedding English and maths in vocational programmes, in about half of the consortia visited the teaching of functional skills 'lacked co-ordination'.

The UCU branch at the University of Ulster raises concerns about a decision by a Cayman Islands court to freeze £5.5bn of the assets of the Saad Group, a Saudi Arabian investment conglomerate, which in 2008 donated 'a large sum' to the university for a new pharmacy building, and with which Ulster has signed a contract to deliver nurse training in Saudi Arabia. (In 2007, it became known that Ulster vice-chancellor Richard Barnett, with two other senior staff, had accepted gifts of Rolex watches from Saad.)

DCSF figures for the second quarter of 2009 show that 835,000 18-24 year olds were neither in education, employment or training, up from 730,000 in the same period of 2008. There were also 233,000 16-18 year olds in the same situation, 13,000 more than at the end of 2008.

Unite has rejected the UCEA's 0.5 per cent HE pay offer. UCU will announce its position after an HE Committee meeting on 9/10/09, while Unison is consulting until 27/9/09, with results likely to be made public on 2/10/09.

Week beginning 24/8/09

Confusion surrounds the sudden decision by the LSC to withdraw support for Coleg Elidyr, a residential, Steiner-philosophy institution near Llandoverly in Carmarthenshire, which has up to now provided practical skills and general education for 22 young people with acute learning disabilities.

Points in *THE* and *Guardian* coverage of clearing and the HE admissions situation more generally include: out of the 22,000 places available through clearing this year, 12,318 were taken by lunchtime on 24/8/09; the equivalent situation in 2008 was 44,000 places, of which 4,767 were taken; by midnight on A-level results day this year UCAS had received over 1.2m clearing vacancy searches, nearly twice the 2008 figure; by 24/8/09, 141,130 people were still looking for places, compared with 118,511 a year ago; this equates to 14 people chasing each place; clearing may be over in a week, rather than a month as normal; the overall total of HE places allocated this year is 401,310, as against 361,760 in 2008.

Institute for Learning (IFL) CEO Toni Fazaeli announces that the IFL will in September enter talks with the General Teaching Council

(GTC - the equivalent body for schools) about an arrangement by which FE lecturers who have achieved Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status would be able to apply for jobs in schools without retraining.

A survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) indicates that nearly 50 per cent of employers have no plans to recruit school-leavers or graduates this summer.

A study carried out in 2008 for the DCSF by Exeter University researchers, in which senior managers and admissions tutors at 19 unnamed universities were asked about their attitudes to 14-19 diplomas, reveals that 69 per cent of those in former polytechnics were willing to accept a diploma as equivalent to 3.5 A-levels, as against 57 per cent at more traditional institutions.

About 320 staff, including 67 academics, at Sheffield University will over the next three months be leaving under a voluntary severance scheme by which the institution aims to 'save' £15m in staff costs, as part of a broader drive to 'save' £25m by 2011-12.

Major delays appear to be widespread in the processing of HE students' grants and loans by Student Finance England. This year for the first time all new HE entrants must apply for financial support through this body which is run by the Student Loans Company.

Sussex University vice-chancellor Michael Farthing warns 'senior academics' there that at least £8m in 'sustained savings' must be found over the next two years, and so 'some jobs could be at risk'.

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.

Report of the Sage Inquiry into Further Education, September 2014*

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, was today under great pressure to respond constructively to the publication of the conclusions reached by Lord Sage following his inquiry into the total collapse of confidence in Further Education provision in England and Wales. The crisis had developed because universities and employers asserted that qualifications and certificates did not adequately reflect an individual's ability in either academic or vocational areas.

Over the last five years, A-level and academic provision in purpose-built FE colleges has almost completely disappeared. Schools now effectively monopolise this service which has led to fewer students continuing on an academic route because many did not wish to remain within the school environment. Indeed, Lord Sage observed that many schools had been forced to take on A-levels despite lacking the necessary skills and experience among their teaching staff to deliver them.

College principals had been arguing that schools were the best places to provide academic courses because this helped provide a 'sense of continuity' from GCSE. Lord Sage dismissed this argument totally. He argued that it was better for academic students at the age of 16 to have a full choice of institutions and be encouraged to move as this will help prepare them for university - the ultimate objective of the great majority of A-level students. Moreover, vocational students have, on the whole, performed less well at GCSE and would themselves benefit from staying on at school. Perhaps somewhat controversially, Lord Sage implied that vocational students are less mature and benefit much more from the extra discipline of a school environment, whereas academic students are more able to take responsible choices over which institution they attend. Lord Sage asserted that "androgogy" - the teaching of adults - was an autonomous profession and should be recognised as such and distinct from "pedagogy" - the teaching

of children. "Professionally trained college lecturers, resourced in parity with schools, provides the ideal environment for most academic students aged 16 to 19", he concluded.

Lord Sage claimed that there was an ulterior motive for colleges abandoning A-level courses; they are externally assessed and therefore could jeopardise a college's capacity to reach "targets" set internally or by the Government. One of Lord Sage's most damning revelations, which has been splashed across many of the tabloids this morning, was his evidence that teachers of vocational courses in colleges have actually been completing work for students to ensure that they are successfully certificated, and that 100 per cent pass rates are recorded. Lord Sage asserted that external verification was 'woefully inadequate' and pointed out examples of students being shocked to receive certificates for courses they thought they had abandoned.

Bureaucracy

Lord Sage was clear in establishing ultimate blame for this situation. The conclusion is quoted as saying, "An alarming culture of a self-serving and self-perpetuating bureaucracy has established itself, most prominently in colleges of further education. College principals and managers, with little or no significant experience in teaching, but with an unnerving suspicion of and even contempt for that same profession, have acquired a stranglehold on the delivery of education to the great detriment of those they are supposed to serve". Lord Sage went on to argue that managers and principals, with the full support of politically motivated college governors, prioritised the destruction of the teaching unions and a "standardised, almost mechanical delivery of courses which were prescribed by college apparatchiks".

The collective attack on the teaching profession was not only motivated by a desire to reduce costs (while at the same time providing extraordinary levels of pay for college managers), but a fundamental fear that teachers were brainwashing students with left-wing ideas. This paranoid fear had led to the delivery of learning being grotesquely standardised, where teachers must follow fixed and inflexible schemes of work under close, watchful observations of managers who lack all knowledge, experience and sense of duty to students.

Lord Sage has come under threats of litigation from two institutions which he identified as the “tombstones” of further education delivery. The first is the “157 Group” - an association striving for more autonomy for larger colleges and empowerment of principals. The condemnation of them as “little more than medieval barons attempting to carve out petty power bases in order to restructure the provision of education on Fordian mechanical principles . . . had inflicted incalculable harm” has certainly infuriated their members. That they “sought to immunise themselves from every form of local, communal and democratic accountability demonstrated that they were not fit to govern the institutions that their similarly quixotic governing bodies bequeathed to them” was countered with accusations that Lord Sage was unbalanced and unreasonably vitriolic.

What Lord Sage mockingly referred to as the “second plinth of darkness” was the Association of College Managers; what he describes as a “pseudo-trade union” which “conspired with principals and governors across the land to create contracts of employment which were nothing more than ‘bureaucrats’ charters’.” The creation of ACM and its widespread recognition by principals aided in obscuring any perception that college principals were anti-union and helped to create a permanent segregation in many colleges, with managers earning far more than lecturers and having full disciplinary authority over teaching staff.

Lord Sage undertook thorough research into the backgrounds of many college managers and was appalled at their total lack of appropriate qualifications. “Any normal, functioning organisation ensures that those with the most talent and ability rise in status”, commented Lord Sage. “With teaching, we are faced with the problem that the better the teacher and the higher one rises in a college, the less teaching is undertaken in lieu of more ‘management’. This is clearly not in the interests of students”.

However, Lord Sage points out that the problem is a lot worse than it appears; he argued that it was not the case that good teachers were being lost as they became managers; on the contrary, it was

poor teachers, who could not cope in the classrooms, that were promoted to the junior echelons of management as they were considered pliable and resentful of their more successful colleagues by the principals.

As for senior college management, Lord Sage was aghast at the number of principals without any real experience in delivering education. He found a plethora of over-ambitious public and private corporation “carpet baggers” who would move from one “hermetically sealed world of puerile management speak to another; from a privatised utility, to an NHS Trust, to a community college, the bacilli of the unimaginative, cloned ‘manager’ is at large. We all know how little faith the autodidactic Bernard Shaw had in teachers when he said ‘Those who can, do - and those who can’t, teach’. But if Shaw were here today he would have added, ‘but those who can’t teach, manage’.” Lord Sage suggested that all college principals and managers should teach a minimum of eight hours a week to ensure that they are properly equipped to pass judgement on the teaching abilities of others.

Billions

Predictably, Lord Sage despaired at the vast amount of taxpayers’ money that has been wasted. “The sector is in crisis, so what happened to all the billions of pounds spent since the turn of the millennium? Great initiatives such as ‘Train to Gain’ and similar projects were simply used by colleges - who clearly abused the autonomy for which they had campaigned - to cross-subsidise lawsuits that they knew they would face when they terminated teaching contracts and replaced them with ill-qualified, non-unionised alternatives. Vast new faculties were built with as much glass as possible so that managers can watch everything a teacher does in a class, only to remain as polished white elephants as increasing numbers of students deserted their courses. All of this was done with the approval of the Learning and Skills Councils - aloof and irresponsible quangos, fully implicated in the politically motivated chaos we now experience”.

It has become apparent that, despite substantial extra resources provided at the taxpayer’s expense, mismanagement of colleges has led to vast budget deficits, regardless of “savings” being made on mass redundancies of qualified and experienced teaching staff. Lord Sage observed a common strategy where experienced teachers are retained long enough for them to prepare vast quantities of learning materials, and loopholes in contracts exploited so that these resources are retained when the experienced lecturer is dismissed, despite what

can be observed as a clear breach of intellectual copyright. However, the costs of training new staff to a minimum requirement and the inferior service provided, often compounded by litigation, pension and redundancy disputes, have meant that a false economy has arisen. Lord Sage argues that only a minority of institutions can claim “misadventure” here; in most cases such “staff restructurings” take place for political motives - namely to derecognise branch unions - and that allusions to cost savings, efficiency and even, on occasions, the desire to implement a new and radical “strategy for excellence” are entirely disingenuous.

Lord Sage went on to recommend a total restructuring whereby experienced teachers and lecturers have control over student intake, enrolment, course delivery and decision making, and that managers should simply serve to administer the expressed needs of teaching staff. “This way, everyone is engaged in the facilitation of learning”, said Sage, “as opposed to the purposefully-sought internecine warfare where managers deliberately obstruct teachers from delivering learning by ambushing them with diktats, bureaucracy and senseless directives, and then blame teachers for failing to deliver ‘excellence’ at the end of the year”.

It could not be denied that a root cause of this crisis was the obsession with “targets”. The desire for some form of objective data to discern performance was critical but, once again, according to Lord Sage, it was more about how the colleges abused and manipulated targets and data that is to blame. Targets exist with the objective of raising educational standards as high as possible. A well run college would help train its staff to reach those objectives. Instead, managers are devoting most of their limited skills to manipulating data for their own ends and shielding the reality of the situation. This is fundamental to the collapse of confidence in FE provision. There came a critical point where employers, universities and the public at large were no longer convinced by the statistics being published by colleges: “an unbridgeable credibility gap emerged which has shed light upon a betrayed generation”.

Statistics

Data collation was a topic studied intensively by Lord Sage. He observed that there were essentially four key statistics being used: Achievement Rates, which measured how many students achieved high grades; Pass Rates, which speaks for itself; Value Added, which judges how well a student performs compared to how they did at their previous level, such as GCSE; and Success Rates.

It is the last of these that Lord Sage asserts has been typically abused. Despite their name, “Success Rates” are no more than glorified retention rates; they measure how many students that began a course went on to pass it, as opposed to Pass Rates which do not count students who dropped out of the course at some point. It has become common practice for college principals to declare A-level courses as failing as a justification to abandon them; Pass Rates may be extremely high, and so might Achievement and Value Added, but Success Rates are artificially inflated in importance. Lord Sage condemned this as utterly cynical and clearly politically motivated. He said that academic students are encouraged to take four or five AS levels at the start of their course but are not expected to complete them all. There exists a flexibility which is to the advantage of the developing academic student, but the fear of collapsing Success Rates means that students have been deterred by colleges from trying different courses, and teachers often compete to retain students whereas they should be objectively advising them of the direction in which their studies progress.

Colleges then abuse Success Rates further by introducing “Exit Strategies”; if a student has no prospect of succeeding in his/her first choice of course, college managers can adopt a very short course, which is nearly impossible to fail, to which the failing student can be transferred. If a student transfers rather than withdraws, it does not contribute negatively to the Success Rate data. College managers further control teachers by refusing to put in place “Exit Strategies” for those that they consider to be failing to conform. At the end of the year, the teacher will be held responsible for the Success Rates despite the fact that the managers decide which students are enrolled to their course, including late enrolments, and whether or not to allow students to transfer. This fomented desperation among teachers who wanted to ensure their students “succeeded” and thus nurtured widespread malpractice - sometimes with the full collaboration of managers, sometimes without - it entirely depended on their perception of the teacher; the odd “failure” was always useful for management to eject non-conformist teachers. Ultimately this is why colleges were statistically achieving breathtaking excellence, while the incredulity among employers and universities increased.

Meanwhile, the schools could not cope with their near monopoly of Advanced Level provision, having to call upon former and part time FE lecturers to deliver classes within their newly enforced “sixth forms”. This created tensions between schools unions such as NUT and NASUWT, and the further

and higher education union, UCU. Lecturers who expected equitable terms and conditions in the schools were expected to join one of their teaching unions. Lord Sage said that he considers very seriously the allegations that the whole move towards vocational provision by colleges was politically motivated to smash UCU and had, to all intents and purposes, succeeded. This union had been created by merging the union for college teachers and that for university lecturers. The bridging point - teachers of academic subjects in colleges - has now almost disappeared. All that remains are teachers of vocational courses on one side, and university lecturers on the other. The prospect of "de-merging" is a strong one but, given the spiralling decline of members, the movement is on the brink of total obscurity and impotence. Many colleges have already succeeded in de-recognising them.

Complacent

Nevertheless, Lord Sage is not sympathetic to the union's plight. He accused them of being complacent, pointing out that this situation was rapidly developing more than five years ago but union officials refused to heed the warnings of their members, instead allowing colleges to unilaterally rewrite recognition agreements, permanent contracts and college procedures. "The writing was on the interactive whiteboard", quipped Lord Sage, "The union leaders were too focused on advancing their own personal egos to bother reading it".

As well as target setting, another major mistake by central government was the Corporation Act of 1992. "Establishing private sector dogma and establishing boards with no democratic accountability to the local community, save for a couple of nominal councillors, brought about inflexible municipal fiefdoms dominated by aging civic egos with no knowledge about the institutions they are supposed to serve. Such 'governors' insulate themselves from public opinion rather than engage with it, using clerks to filter correspondence and occasionally respond to it if it conforms to their prejudices. Such corporation boards are totally undemocratic and ineffective." Caught off-guard, Lord Sage was overheard saying at the press conference, "College managers, principals, college governors, examiners, invigilators, LSC officials, Ofsted inspectors - they are all cut off the same block of mediocrity and misanthropic bitterness".

Lord Sage insisted that the wrong philosophy had prevailed when it comes to public service provision, not just in education but in welfare and health care,

where similar problems of Kafkaesque bureaucracy can be observed. "It was upon an entirely false premise", said Lord Sage, "that the reforms of the public services were instigated 35 years ago. The idea that the public sector was less efficient than the private sector and that it was from the latter that we could be enlightened of our solutions was completely wrong. When we have a state sector of over 40 per cent of the economy but employ barely a third of the total workforce, this demonstrates that the public sector is more efficient; the moment creeping privatisation and the cult of the free market occurs, these public institutions then find themselves having to spend copious amounts of money on advertising, marketing, public relations consultants, employment and litigation lawyers, all to protect their 'product' from costly and artificially contrived competition. This diminished the entire public sector to 'choice for parents' where all options were substandard because resources were diverted from the delivery of education to the manipulation of data and public perception".

Such conclusions sit uncomfortably with the present Conservative administration, but there is no denying the appalling crisis that now confronts this country's prospects. It is the students who have been forgotten and indeed neglected in this conflict. Since the economic upturn, good teachers have been leaving the profession in droves, replaced by increasing numbers of ill-qualified substitutes whose minimum qualifications are rushed through on college premises, again the product of internally assessed accreditation. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, condemned Labour for allowing this situation to fester for twelve years in government. "They left a burden of debt so great that it was impossible to save education from their terminal legacy".

Having been recently recalled to the opposition frontbench, the education spokesperson Lord Mandelson acknowledged that errors were made but claimed that they were simply "maintaining the ethos" that had prevailed before, and that Labour secured no mandate to change it. He pointed out that it was the Conservatives who introduced internal market reforms and the Corporation Act; "We nurtured this fitful child as best we could, but ultimately this disastrous progeny sprang from their dogma." Asked what he thought about the political debate following the publication of the report, Lord Sage responded, "I found it surprisingly articulate. We should appreciate this while we can, for it will be lost on future generations".

*** The author has chosen to remain anonymous.**

Ten proposals

Learning for Democracy Group

Experience of previous recessions suggests that rising unemployment causes people to question much more sharply than in 'normal' times the aims of post-compulsory education and training. We print here ten proposals about community-based education which were developed in Scotland in 2007 by the Learning for Democracy Group. The editors invite readers to comment on these proposals. Please email us at post16educator@runbox.com with your views.

Learning for democracy means:

1. Taking sides

Educational workers are not merely enablers or facilitators. The claim to neutrality can reinforce and legitimise existing power relations. Practitioners need to be clear about what they stand for - and against.

2. Acting in solidarity

Practitioners should proactively seek opportunities to engage in a critical and committed way with communities and social movements for progressive social change.

3. Taking risks

Critical and creative learning is necessarily unpredictable and open-ended. Exploring official problem definitions and challenging taken-for-granted ways of thinking can be a liberating process.

4. Developing political literacy

Politics needs to be made more educational and education made more political. Learning to analyse, argue, co-operate, and take action on issues that matter requires a systematic educational process.

5. Working at the grassroots

Democracy lives through ordinary people's actions; it does not depend on state sanction. Practitioners should be in everyday contact with people on their own ground and on their own terms.

6. Listening to dissenting voices

Activating democracy is a process of creating spaces in which different interests are expressed and voices heard. Dissent should be valued rather than suppressed.

7. Cultivating awkwardness

Democracy is not necessarily best served by the conformist citizen. This means that the educational task is to create situations in which people can confront their circumstances, reflect critically on their experience and take action.

8. Educating for social change

Collective action can bring about progressive change. Learning for democracy can contribute to this process by linking personal experience with wider political explanations and processes.

9. Exploring alternatives

Learning for democracy can provide people with the opportunity to see that the status quo is not inevitable - that 'another world is possible'.

10. Exposing the power of language

The words used to describe the world influence how people think and act. Learning for democracy involves exploring how language frames attitudes, beliefs and values.

Who rules?

Philippe Harari

Aims of the session:

- To explain to students the key aspects of how the UK is governed
- To discuss how representative and fair our government actually is

Materials:

- PowerPoint: 'Who Rules?'
- Quiz: 'Who rules the UK?' plus answers
- Access to the internet

Background:

The aim of this session is simply to give students an awareness of how the country is run and, more specifically, how Parliament is constituted and how it works. It is a very brief overview but it is surprising how little some students know about the nature of our government. The PowerPoint runs through some of the key aspects of our political system. The quiz repeats some of these points and brings a few new ones up. The final exercise is to watch Prime Minister's Questions on BBC Parliament. This lasts half an hour but you do not need to show it all:

- The first question is always the same; someone calls out 'Number One' and the PM replies with a formulaic statement about his duties in the House.
- This is usually followed by a question from an MP in the PM's own party - this question is usually designed to make the PM look good!
- Then the leader of the opposition gets a chance to ask six questions, and the PM responds to each in turn.
- Then there is another question, this time from an opposition back-bencher, followed by three questions from the Lib Dem leader and then questions from other MPs.

Activities:

1. Introduce the session by asking the class what they know about how the UK is governed.
2. Go through the 'Who Rules?' Powerpoint (please email us if you would like to be sent a copy of this Powerpoint presentation).
3. Ask students in groups, pairs or on their own to answer the 'Who Rules the UK?' quiz, and then go over the answers.
4. Show the first 15 minutes of that week's Prime Minister's Questions - you can find this by typing 'BBC Parliament' into Google and the link to PMQ should be obvious. As a contrast, you can also show them the House of Commons and the House of Lords live - this is much less exciting than PMQ! Discuss what they thought of PMQ: are they happy to be represented by the people that they have just watched on screen?

Who rules the UK?

Answers in italics

1. What are the three main parts of Parliament?

The House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarchy

2. What 'g' is the name of the national election in which candidates compete to become an MP for a particular area?

General election

3. What is the key difference between how MPs and Peers get their jobs in Parliament?

MPs are elected and Peers are appointed

4. What 'c' is the name given to the areas in the UK each represented by a different MP?

Constituency

5. What is the name of the MP who represents the area that our college is in?

[]

6. What is the Royal Prerogative?

The Queen, who is the official head of State, gives all of her powers to the Prime Minister

7. Why do fringe parties, like the Green Party or UKIP, stand more chance of getting elected to the European parliament than to the Westminster parliament?

European elections use proportional representation - so if a small party gets 10 per cent of the vote in a region they get 10 per cent of the seats. Westminster elections use first-past-the-post. To become an MP you need to get more votes than anyone else in your constituency, and fringe parties can almost never do this.

8. Name the leaders of the three main parties.

At the time of writing: Gordon Brown (Lab), David Cameron (Con) and Nick Clegg (Lib Dem)

9. What is a 'back-bench' MP?

Someone who has been elected to the House of Commons but has not been appointed by the PM to join the Executive. The Executive is made up of around 100 MPs and a couple of peers, all from the largest party in the Commons.

10. What does a 'party whip' do?

Tries to make sure that all party members vote in line with their party leadership. If an MP defies the whip, his/her career prospects within the party could be damaged (ie the PM or the leader of the opposition will not pick him/her to join the Executive or the opposition front bench), or he/she could even be thrown out of the party.

Critical pedagogy podcasts

In 2008, Dr Gurnam Singh, a member of the C-SAP Pedagogy and Popular Education Special Interest Group obtained funding from C-SAP to develop a series of podcasts on themes associated with this field. We print below details of eight podcasts completed so far by Gurnam and other colleagues. The podcasts have all been uploaded onto the Coventry University Podcasting Service, where they can be accessed with the following URL:

<http://podcasting.services.coventry.ac.uk/podcasting/index.php?cat=CriticalPedagogy>

Philip Chambers on Critical Pedagogy and Critical Reflection

In this podcast Phil Chambers, in conversation with Graham Steventon, explores the importance of reflection in enabling critical thinking. In particular the discussion identifies the relationship between some of the principles of critical pedagogy and critical reflection, of the importance of locating self in the learning process, of voice, dialogue, respect and creativity.

Michael Williams on Indigenous Pedagogy

This podcast features Michael Williams, director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, which was set up in 1984 at the University of Queensland. Its objective is to become a centre of excellence and expert opinion on teaching, research and consultation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to maintain a committed system of personal and academic support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying at the University of Queensland. Michael discusses some of the pedagogical strategies that he has developed to address the silencing that takes place in traditional teaching and learning.

Jim Crowther on Popular Education and Higher Education

Jim Crowther, Senior Lecturer in Education at Edinburgh University, explores the ideas associated with popular education and their relevance to higher education. Through reflecting on his working class roots and educational journey, as an adult learner, Jim offers a unique insight into the ways in which the underpinning ideologies and practices associated with critical pedagogy and popular education can be deployed by academics, in their role as teachers and researchers.

Sarah Amsler on Critical Pedagogy, Critical Theory and Critical Hope

In conversation with Gurnam Singh, Sarah Amsler, Lecturer in Sociology at Aston University, shares some of her own praxis in this area of critical pedagogy. In particular, she discusses the relationship between critical pedagogy, critical theory and the sociology of 'hope'. In doing so she talks about how critical pedagogy comes to life in many roles as a teacher / researcher / activist / citizen.

Mogs Russell on the WEA and Popular or Informal Education

This podcast contains a conversation between Mogs Russell, who works for the Workers Education Association in Birmingham, and Gurnam Singh from Coventry University. The discussion explores the history, politics, practices and ideas associated with the Workers Education Association in particular, and popular and informal education more generally.

Stephen Cowden on Critical Pedagogy

Dr Stephen Cowden, Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Coventry University, discusses the idea of critical pedagogy. He explores the relationship between critical pedagogy, emancipation and Marxian thought. Specifically, he highlights the contributions made by the Brazilian radical educationist Paulo Freire and the French sociologist and public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu to his own understanding and application of critical pedagogy.

Poplar and what it means for us now

Colin Waugh

Janine Booth, *Guilty and Proud of It! Poplar's Rebel Councillors and Guardians 1919-25* (Merlin Press, 2009) 198pp, £12.95

Janine Booth is an activist in the RMT union, a community activist in Hackney and a prominent figure in a left group, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Her book contains two distinct sections.

In the first of these (occupying roughly the first hundred pages) Janine retells the story of the councillors in the borough of Poplar in London's East End, who in 1921 were imprisoned for contempt of court during a struggle over rates. (The point at issue in this struggle was in essence whether the recently elected Labour councillors in this docklands district should collude in the existing arrangement by which those who had work should bear the entire cost of sustaining those who, being deprived of it, were on the brink of starvation, or whether those councillors could force the ruling class and its agents, including in the Labour Party, to concede a less unfair arrangement.)

In the second section of her book (a final chapter of just over 20 pages titled 'Outcomes and Conclusions'), Janine addresses a range of arguments about - and interpretations of - what the Poplar councillors did. Some of the positions she discusses in this section were put forward at the time, others more recently, for example around the struggle by Clay Cross councillors in Derbyshire against the Heath government in the early 1970s, and in the aftermath of the high profile confrontations between a number of councils and the Thatcher government in the 1980s.

The story of the Poplar councillors is an inspiring one and Janine's book is well worth reading, but there are some problems with it which centre on the relation between these two sections.

Janine herself emphasises that the narrative section of her book leans heavily on Noreen

Branson's *Poplarism 1919-1925. George Lansbury and the Councillors' Revolt*, which came out in 197. As far as I know, the standpoint from which Branson wrote was close to that of the Communist Party.

Up to now Branson's has been, with the exception of some reminiscences by people who took part, the only book-length account of the Poplar struggle. To this extent, then, that struggle, despite the fact that most people on the left have at least heard of it, has been 'hidden from history'. Further, it is one of a number of struggles that took place in the first quarter of the 20th century which every working class activist now needs to learn about. (Other examples include the radical suffrage movement, the Ruskin College 'strike' of 1909, the Cambrian Combine strike in South Wales, the Dublin transport strike, the shop stewards movement in Scotland, Sheffield etc during World War 1, the growth of the unemployed workers movement, the growth of the minority movement in unions, and the General Strike itself.) The more understanding there is of what really happened in these and other comparable struggles both here and elsewhere during that period, the more chance there is of people taking effective action now. Several factors work against this. Sometimes, for example, it is asserted from what purports to be a leftwing standpoint that such events are water under the bridge and hence of academic or antiquarian interest only. Or again, a mythologised celebration of what happened is substituted for a serious reinvestigation. Or, finally, academic historians may present what happened as too complex for ordinary activists to understand. For all these reasons, then, Janine is right to bring the Poplar struggle to people's attention again now.

In seeking to do this, Janine was also right to start from Branson's book, which is a tightly organised, extremely well researched study by a

professional historian. Considered purely as an analytic historical narrative, Branson's is stronger, more coherent and, perhaps surprisingly, rather wider ranging than Janine's, and this is so despite the fact that Janine has done a lot of research of her own in primary sources such as newspapers, as well as via interviews, for example with a spokesperson for the solicitors Thompsons and the MP Stephen Timms. In short, Janine has not, so far as I can see, managed at the level of narrative to get beyond the paradigm set by Branson's account. However, this is not the end of the matter.

First, there is a problem with Branson's account, or rather, with what is not included in her account. Because she organised it in such a professional way, which in turn entailed drawing a clear boundary round the events to be described and explained, she left not merely unanswered but unasked a lot of questions about the Poplar struggle which need to be investigated if we are to conduct struggles about similar issues successfully now. It is at least possible that her approach, though fully justified by the requirements of producing a clear account, also happened to coincide with a political reluctance to address some of these questions. For example, she may have judged it best not to explore the tensions within the Communist Party around 1921. Or again, from the point of view of people who view the self-activity of workers as crucial, and who understand the value to the Poplar movement of having a daily newspaper under working class control, the role played by middle class intellectuals as paid journalists on the *Daily Herald* calls for investigation. But in any case, it is surely important, as with all of the other big working class struggles of that period, that people who are in a position to do so regularly reinvestigate and reassess the Poplar struggle, digging still more deeply into the evidence of what happened, drawing wider connections than have been drawn hitherto, and above all posing and trying to answer the questions which earlier investigators did not pursue.

Secondly, in her last section Janine does start - although only start - to do this. In that section she addresses the criticisms of the Poplar councillors made at the time by, for example, the movement around Sylvia Pankhurst, by the Socialist Labour Party and by the Unemployed Workers Movement, and she also takes up and argues against views of Poplar expressed by academic historians of local government and the like in more recent times. She is good at exposing the shallow and rightwing assumptions behind many such references. Like Branson, she effectively indicts the moves by Labour rightwingers around Herbert Morrison, and by union bureaucrats like Jimmy Thomas, to undermine and circumscribe the influence of the

mobilisations in Poplar, to which working class people locally gave overwhelming support. She discusses also the question of whether the councillors themselves eventually began to backtrack on some of their earlier principles. She places these issues in the context of the failure by leftwing council leaders in the 1980s to live up to the example of the Poplar councillors, discussing some of the attempts to excuse this, and countering eloquently the claims of those who contend that resistance to the ruling class by socialists through local government has become impossible.

Janine's arguments in her concluding section are powerful. She takes the criticisms of the councillors' actions and knocks them down decisively one by one. She may well have adopted this procedure in order to give priority to the narrative of events, and to avoid cluttering this up with arguments about the pros and cons. However, if time had been available, it might have been better to have cited the criticisms and her initial responses to them at the beginning of the book, and then used the narrative to put them to the test by marshalling evidence on either side.

Janine does add to Branson's account in certain respects. For example, she has found and included nearly twenty extremely valuable photos of the councillors and their supporters, and she brings out more fully than Branson the role played in Poplar by two educated women who were councillors: Minnie Lansbury and Susan Lawrence. Because of her final section, because of these additions, because Branson's book is in any case out of print, and because of her down-to-earth and positive account of the councillors' struggle, it would be good if as many people as possible buy and read Janine's book.

On top of this, there are particular reasons why people across UCU should do this. It may be coincidence that an important struggle about FE is going on now in Tower Hamlets, of which the former Poplar is a part. However, it is certain that FE teachers - and in particular UCU activists everywhere - are facing a situation where an understanding of the real history of local government, including of Poplar, will be crucial. All such activists, then, would benefit from reading Janine's book, and ideally Branson's as well.

We face this situation because the Government has decided to hand back about two thirds of colleges' funding - that covering the majority of students under 19 - to local authorities, overseen by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). In short, the Government is reversing in part the decision taken by the Tories under Major and implemented in April 1993 to remove colleges from local education authority (LEA) control and turn

them into free-standing corporations. It should be born in mind too that this move by Major followed a similar change to local authority-controlled HE institutions a few years earlier, from which universities such as London Metropolitan have developed.

We need to think about what renewed local authority control of FE is likely to mean, and especially, what it is likely to mean under a Tory government in a recession or its immediate aftermath, where there will for several years be high levels of unemployment and a struggle as the ruling class tries to force working people to rescue it from the crisis.

In FE this could accelerate the existing differentiation amongst colleges in such a way that those which are already relatively rich and flourishing (as for example those in the 157 Group) will become more so, and those which are on the brink of financial collapse now will be pushed into it. This in turn can be expected to lead either to an acceleration of mergers or, perhaps more likely, to the emergence of confederations of colleges led by the stronger ones, which will take control of any remaining successful areas of work in the weaker ones. With this we can expect a drive to achieve higher 'productivity' with lower staff numbers. In the move to incorporation in 1993, which took place against the background of the previous recession, nearly one third of lecturing jobs were axed, and it is reasonable to expect now a drive towards further cutbacks behind the smokescreen of a return to 'democratic accountability'.

We may, then, see the emergence of a limited number of large and powerful colleges, some of which may either be merged with or in some other way tied to post-1993 universities, and each of which will dominate its own 'federation' of nominally independent 'colleges' which will in reality be its local centres in each adjacent. This will enable these successful institutions to bargain more effectively than they can now with the Skills Funding Agency, with the YPLA, and with local authorities directly about pre-19 provision, and also with private training providers. We can expect, too, that such institutions will be able to order bespoke qualifications from awarding bodies, and that they may do deals with publishers of electronic training materials, e-books etc, thereby sharply accelerating the intervention of private capital in this sector of public provision.

In fact, another outcome of the recession could be the emergence of still more powerful groups of contractors to which nominally public services will be outsourced by the Government itself, by government agencies and quangos (including the SFA and YPLA), by bodies like NHS trusts, by local authorities, and by the managements of colleges.

While nobody knows for certain what the outcome of the London Met. crisis will be, it is likely that the situation there reflects a broader crisis across the former polys, and we should, as suggested above, be alive to the possibility that some of these and some FE colleges will be pushed closer together. This could happen both by an expansion of HE work in FE colleges, as the case of Newcastle College already indicates, and by an accelerated vocationalisation of curricula in Million+ HE institutions.

Beneath all such developments we can expect also that the capitalist class's response to the recession will include a drive, which again will necessarily be contested, to re-organise at the level of labour processes. Just as the last really deep crisis, that between about 1976 and 1985, included amongst its effects the accelerated rise of CNC machinery, flexible manufacturing systems and other automated systems, followed by so-called lean production and just-in-time sourcing, and just as the shallower recession of the early 1990s was accompanied by the restructuring of work around the internet, mobile phones etc, so this one too is likely to have a technical aspect, and with this will come pressure for changes in management practices and the organisation of humans within production processes. These changes, and the extent to which workers contest them, must sooner or later be reflected in school, FE and HE curricula.

That such developments are likely does not mean, however, that the partial return of colleges to LEA control will be a smokescreen and nothing more.

For a start, there is at least the possibility that the raised level of industrial struggle which has appeared with the onset of the recession may eventually find a valid expression at the level of electoral politics - ie that there will be a serious move led by workplace activists to reclaim (or more likely to reconstruct) the (or a) Labour Party. And, whether this happens or not, there is every reason for UCU activists and both FE and HE lecturers more generally to organise within the developments sketched out above in pursuit of a better outcome. Whatever the specific results of renewed local authority control turn out to be, there can be little doubt that what happens in local elections and how local councillors act will become much more important for us than it has been in the last 15 or so years. And in that case an understanding of the struggle of the Poplar councillors against the ruling class - locally, in the form of employers organised as the Municipal Alliance, regionally in the form of labour rightwingers on the London County Council, and nationally in the form of government ministers - will become essential for activists.

Poem

After many hours of starvation in a garret in an effort to capture the scansion, metre and poetic intensity of E.J. Thribb of *Private Eye*, PSE reader Cliff Jones presents his Magnum Opus:

So Farewell Then DIUS (an epic poem)

'We shall achieve world class Excellence'

that was your catchphrase

'We are building for the future'

that was another

'goodbye'

that was your latest

er that's it

Kevin's mum says 'What was DIUS?'

Cliff Jones (67 and a bit) cont'd p94



Post-16 Educator:

annual subscription rates (6 issues)

1. Individuals:

- 1.1 Unwaged - £3.00
- 1.2 Students / Part time teachers/lecturers / Retired - £6.50
- 1.3 First time subscription as full time teacher/lecturer - £9.50
- 1.4 Regular individual - £12.50
- 1.5 Supporting - £30.00

(All the above please use form below, personal cheque or bankers order only. Or for alternative payment methods such as Internet Bank Transfer, email us on post16educator@runbox.com)

2. Institutions (eg libraries, union branches):

- 2.1 New subscriptions - £18.50
 - 2.2 Regular institutional - £25.00
- (Official orders to address below.)

To: *Post-16 Educator*, 221 Firth Park Road, SHEFFIELD S5 6WW (Phone 0114 243 1999)

Name: _____

Address: _____

I wish to subscribe and enclose cheque payable to 'Post-16 Educator' for 1.1 £3.00 1.2 £6.50 1.3 £9.50 1.4 £12.50 1.5 £30.00 (Tick as appropriate)

Bankers Order:

To (name of your bank): _____

Address of your bank: _____

Your account number: _____

Your bank sort code: _____

Signature: _____

Please pay *Post-16 Educator* the sum of :
every year, starting on (date):