

Post-16 Educator how should we gear up?

We invite all contributors, subscribers and readers to take part in this debate. Please email us on: post16educator@runbox.com

Patrick Ainley (22/11/09):

Post-16 Educator under Colin Waugh's editorship has consistently upheld the tradition of General Educator, the publication of NATFHE's General Education Section, by maintaining the centrality of a general education to students on increasingly debased vocational courses in FE.

Today, the need for such an education is central also to students in schools and universities, as well as in FE and sixth-form colleges, adult education and on training schemes and apprenticeships. This is because education at all levels of compulsory and post-compulsory provision has been constricted, on the one hand by the academic and traditional discipline-centred National Curriculum leading to cramming for largely unchanged and narrowly defined undergraduate HE, and on the other by the supposed vocational relevance of increasingly competence- or 'standards-based' training programmes that tend towards 'key'/'core'/'basic' and now 'functional' so-called 'skills'.

To meet this need, teachers at all levels from primary to postgraduate schools and, indeed, all who work with and for young people, have to reassert their expertise. This requires fundamental debate with students over the purposes of pedagogy that have been largely lost to centralised accountability for assessment. A new publication can provide a forum for such discussion by setting it in a wider context to relate understandings at different levels and in various sectors of formal and informal learning to one another, thus challenging the social control imposed by the new market-state system of lifelong education and training by comprehending it as a whole.

Despite the global financial crisis of the new market-state, in the absence of any alternative, a state-subsidised private sector remains dominant over a semi-privatised state sector of the economy. As a result, cuts in public services are seen as the only way to pay for the crisis of private finance capital. Teachers and students are woefully unprepared, ideologically and organisationally, to resist such attacks. They can only do so on the basis of a unity indicated by the recent formation of UCU and

its understanding with the NUT. This needs to be developed and extended to NUS.

Another consequence of the dominance of private over state capital is the concentration of media ownership that has become even more Flat Earth. This however creates space for new critique and publication using new technology, like *PSE*'s updated website. Ideally, this would be supported by the teacher unions and the student movement as indicated above. Print publications could supplement such an approach, exemplified by *PSE* with its practitioner perspective and contributor control.

PSE already informs readers through its news round-up of latest developments in F&HE. Widely advertised and with free access, this could be opened to the whole of education and training. With appropriate safeguards, it can be updated in real time in the way that the newsletter-blog of *Keep Our NHS Public* receives contributions from across the Health Service and broadcasts them to campaigners.

Other sections of *PSE*, whether on-line or as one-off hard copy publications of the type that have recently attracted a readership exceeding that of regular subscribers to the journal, can contribute to creating the forum for discussion and debate on the fundamental purposes of pedagogy that should infuse resistance to the cuts which have already begun.

Colin Waugh (2/12/09):

Given that no one else has responded so far to Pat's points, I offer a few preliminary comments:

I agree with the idea that there should be both electronic and print publication, and that these should complement one another.

The key problem that *PSE* faces at the moment, I think, is the lack of involvement by FHE practitioners in its production. We need to find ways of overcoming this in the near future - for example within a year from now.

This is both a technical problem and a political one. It's a technical problem because the channels through which we would at one time have drawn

practitioners' attention to the publication have been closed. It's a political problem because there is not a strong, shared ideology drawing people towards it - in the way that liberal education used to draw Liberal and General Studies lecturers together.

These two problems feed off one another. For example, if there was an ideology that practitioners were loyal to, some younger people would be drawn towards participation in *PSE* and they would also find new ways of letting people know about it.

As regards putting the news section of *PSE* online, I think this is a good idea, but unless it is to be just the present news put on our own website (which would be fairly easy), it would entail the involvement of some new people, including both people with the relevant IT capability, and a network of people spread across the country who were trained to pick the right material from local newspapers and send it in regularly and punctually.

This would need to be a collective effort by people who are serious, committed and reliable - people with a stake in FHE. It would almost certainly involve forming an organisation, however small and informal. It could not be done just by casual contacts. The people concerned would need a certain amount of training, and they would need to have a shared ideological basis. (The news as it is now in *PSE* is only sustainable and only worth having because there is an ideological commitment behind it.)

Unlike every other editorial board member, I have been lucky enough to be involved in three organisations of this type in the past: the Association for Liberal Education, General Studies Workshop and the NATFHE General Studies Section. In other words, organisations of this kind are - or at least have been - possible.

It is quite possible to imagine some arrangement that links FHE with other sectors of education, including statutory schooling - but it is futile to do this unless a clear voice specific to FHE exists within it. FHE is not a sort of less important part of statutory schooling; it's fundamentally different. This difference would have to be recognised by all concerned.

It is even more important now than it was 20 years ago to have a publication about FHE which is produced by practitioners independently of management, government, unions, charities, political parties etc.

Dave Welsh (10/12/09):

Here are some FHE ideas for *PSE's* future as part of the debate in 2010. Pat has already given some good ideas but these could be added for discussion:

1. I think *PSE* should have a trade union education section in each issue. This will connect with the new discussion deriving from *Plebs* and will put *PSE* at the centre of the debate on the future of TU education.

2. *PSE* should join the debate on development education which is currently being taught at places like UEA [University of East Anglia Ed.]. There are many students, especially postgrads, who are deeply concerned about education in the former 'third world' and we could develop a specific tendency within this growing area of learning/activism. This is clearly linked to the environment debate and the wide social movements to be found there.

3. *PSE* should have an 'activists' column each issue which would give a specific view on an educational issue in our sectors. This would be particularly key in regard to the Cameron government in 2010.

4. *PSE* should have a history section/article in each sector but it would be, for example, a history of comprehensive education (most people don't know when or how it started); so it would be modern history ie post 1945 (possibly with a clear timeline). This would provide teacher training students with some useful information. It would also link to point 3 above.

5. *PSE* should enter the citizenship debate more fully, ie education entitlement etc. And should attack private education in the post-16 sector.

6. *PSE* should endorse the People's Charter in order to develop policy on post-16 education for the coming period.

Colin Waugh (31/12/09):

The context includes at least the following features. First, very deep cuts in public services, including in schools, colleges and universities, are taking place, and one likely concomitant of this is that - as in the post-incorporation period that followed the recession in the early 1990s - a big swathe of tenured jobs in FHE will be lost, including both amongst lecturers and support staff, especially those whose functions are essential to teaching and learning. Secondly, we can expect the next few years to bring sharp changes across many areas of industry and commerce, including both technological changes, changes in how work is organised, and changes in the composition of the workforce, as part of the process by which the employing class reshapes its operations to come out of the recession. Thirdly, this must affect what colleges and universities are called upon to provide, including at the levels of qualifications, curricula, teaching and learning

methods, assessment instruments, materials and study modes. Fourthly, despite manifestations of renewed militancy over the last 18 months or so, the UCU is not in a condition which will allow it to do more than, at best, contain some of the effects of this. Fifth, there is also no political or ideological movement that can, in the timescale required, alter this scenario. Sixth, nevertheless there will be resistance, including both workplace struggles and things like street riots, which themselves will generate, amongst other official responses, curricular changes. Lastly, there will be a lot of demagoguery and factionalism, as different groups and individuals try to place themselves at the head of resistance. The question is, how can we - ie people involved in PSE - help build amongst FHE practitioners and others a capacity to act validly within and upon these circumstances?

Dave's proposals:

1. (A TU education section in each issue). As a result of us producing the *PSE* occasional publication '*Plebs*' to mark the centenary of the Ruskin College students' 'strike' of March/April 1909 and to remind people about the Independent Working Class Education movement that followed it up to the 1960s, a small group is exploring the possibility of reviving this tradition. I hope this may, among other things, lead to a regular section in *PSE*. (There is no certainty that it will.) I think that such a movement is in the end the only reliable source of valid proposals about what education and training should be like, and at the same time that it can generate such proposals only in dialogue with practitioners in mainstream FHE. If, in the 1970s, someone had explained to Liberal and General Studies teachers like myself what was at stake at Ruskin in 1909, FHE might not be in its present state. So we need people who are or have been TU education tutors or similar to write for us, starting with issue 56.

2. (Development education.) This is a far-sighted proposal. It would be good if every issue could carry one or more articles about, on the one hand, the theory and practice of education, especially adult education, technical education etc, in the countries Dave is referring to, and, on the other, how this area is theorised, researched, taught and learnt in universities here. If possible, *PSE* should carry a running debate about the ideas of Paulo Freire and other thinkers in this area, including especially Antonio Gramsci, as for example in his essay on 'The Southern Question'. Better still, *PSE* could, through this coverage, try to stimulate a layer of young people interested in development education to take work as basic skills teachers and the like in FE colleges. So who can we get to write in *PSE*

about this in the near future - for example in the March 2010 issue?

3. (Activists' column.) One problem with *PSE* at present is that it contains, on the one hand, summaries of FHE news, and, on the other, discursive articles about the field, but not a section where practitioners put an independent view about current news stories, thereby starting to challenge the dominance of mainstream commentators. It would be good to have two or three short articles like this in every issue and to put them on the website.

Another point. If by activists Dave includes union activists writing about 'union' issues, we face a more intractable problem. *PSE* sometimes carries articles about disputes, but we have failed to get people whose main thing is to be union activists to write regularly for it. This must be partly because we can only manage to bring it out bi-monthly, and partly to do with the workload activists have. We need an editorial board member with union experience to get material from disputes and put it on our website, updating it frequently.

4. (History section.) One of the most desirable things *PSE* could do would be to make available, especially to FHE teacher training students, material about the real history of FHE itself - and of schools where relevant. To do this, however, we would need either to get people who specialise in this history to write on it for us, or write it ourselves. (Interviewing retired practitioners could be one aspect of this.)

5. (Citizenship debate.) Tim Herrick referred to this in his article on Paulo Freire in issue 54. It would be good if we could have articles about government policy on immigration, including the ideological and educational side of this as reflected in FHE curricula, especially ESOL. The problem, again, is how to attract practitioners to write regularly about it. We should try to extend our coverage of issues in ESOL, Skills for Life etc, starting now.

6. (People's Charter.) This is one of several responses to the recession put forward by sections of 'the left'. As with any of these, if someone who supports the Charter wants to write about it in *PSE* showing what it would mean for FHE, he or she is surely welcome to do so. Similarly, if the people around the Charter constitute a forum for discussing policy alternatives, including in FHE, then it would be good if *PSE* readers, subscribers and editorial board members were to take part. (If doing so required that they endorse the Charter, that would be up to them as individuals.) *PSE* as such does not have a structure which would enable it to do this, and this may be another reason why we should look again at developing a *PSE*-related organisation.

News update: November - December 2009

Week beginning 2/11/09

Points in the Government's 10-15 year strategy paper, *Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy*, include: an increased role for businesspeople 'in influencing course provision'; a greater role for private providers with degree-awarding powers; mergers between existing universities; a requirement on HE managers to control wage bills; an intention to divert funds 'away from institutions whose courses fail to meet high standards of quality or outcome'.

A parliamentary question by Tory FHE spokesperson David Willetts leads to the release of information from an LSC report suggesting that some colleges are manipulating success rates.

Points in *Times Higher Education (THE)* coverage of the situation at Gloucestershire University include: up to 30 compulsory redundancies are planned, including 17 academic posts; further redundancies are likely to follow as a result of 'ongoing efficiency reviews'; the deficit at the end of the last financial year was over £6m; all the current redundancies are in the faculty of Education, Humanities and Natural Sciences, which has a £3m deficit; there is a plan to sell two campuses - one in Cheltenham and the other the £8.3m campus in East London opened seven months ago.

A *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* article on changes to the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) planned by CEO David Collins reveals that: colleges rated outstanding may be invited to bid for work via the Improvement Adviser Service (ie the arrange-

ment by which at present the Tribal organisation receives £7.8m a year to send consultants into colleges identified by Ofsted as failing); the World Class Skills programme contract, through which the accountants KPMG have received £21m of public money, is due to end in March 2010; Collins' general approach is to invite colleges to bid for contracts adding up to 80 per cent of LSIS' £97m annual budget.

The Impact of Universities on the UK Economy, a document produced by Universities UK (UUK - ie the vice-chancellors) claims that in 2007-08: the HE sector's overall income was £23.4bn, up 39 per cent from 2003-04; £14.3bn of this came directly from the public sector via research council grants, state tuition fee payments etc; its expenditure was £22.9bn; the sector directly employed a total of 372,400 people (1.2 per cent of the UK workforce).

The Government has validated the Cambridge International Certificate IGCSE qualification, which provides exams in English, maths, science and nine other subjects, such that state schools which offer it to students over 16 can receive public funding for doing so.

Birmingham University vice-chancellor and former HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) CEO David Eastwood, currently trying to axe the sociology department at Birmingham, is to donate £40,000 of his own money to the university's £60m Circles of Influence funding campaign.

Summary Review of Further Education Provision in Higher Education 2003-09, an Ofsted report on four FE colleges involved

in tie-ups with universities, concludes that: 'The mergers of higher education institutions with satisfactory or failing FE colleges that had a broad academic and vocational curriculum have not led to significant improvement in the quality of the FE programmes'.

Former (HE) Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) head Peter Williams says of the Commons Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills committee that: 'Its vision of quality assurance goes no further than a crudely disciplinary police force'.

The 157 Group (of large FE colleges with favourable Ofsted reports) publishes *One in Eight: the Voice of Higher Education Students in FE Colleges*.

The managements of FE colleges in Wales (organised through Fforwm, equivalent to the Association of Colleges [AOC] in England) are expected to impose a 2.3 per cent pay rise rejected by unions there.

Week beginning 9/11/09

The Impact of Train to Gain on Skills in Employment, an Ofsted report covering the year 2008-09 and based on surveying employers of 11,000 workers involved in Train to Gain schemes as run by 40 providers, finds that Skills for Life provision was 'insufficient' (*TES*) in two thirds of cases.

The Government launches its review of HE top-up fees, which is expected to report in autumn 2010, with any changes introduced in 2011-12 at the earliest. The review is to be led by Lord Browne of Madingley, who in 2007 resigned

as head of BP after it emerged that he had lied to the High Court, and includes among its panel members the former NUT official turned Thatcherite 'educationist' Sir Michael Barber, now head of management consulting firm McKinsey's Global Education Practice.

A CBI paper, *Reforming Skills Funding: Delivering Productive Results*, advocates a 'fully market-led approach' to the funding of colleges, with money cut in such areas as 'adult safeguarded learning' and directed towards apprenticeships and related education in science, technology, engineering and maths. It is argued that this 'would ensure funding genuinely followed employer choice and that providers had to compete for funding based on quality of service'.

Launching a two-year 'fundamental review' of how the HEFCE funds university teaching, CEO Sir Alan Langlands direct those involved to consult on how to bring about a situation in which there is a greater element of competition for funds, with the 'winners' being 'those who can best respond to . . . evolving economic challenges'.

The UCU branch at London University Institute of Education (IOE) aligns itself with Waltham Forest NUT in opposition to the Leyton Learning and Leisure Trust scheme being as promoted by Waltham Forest Council, IOE management and some governors at Norlington School for Boys in Leyton.

Of the five unions involved in the HE pay negotiations, only one (Unison) has so far accepted the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA)'s 0.5 per cent offer for 2009-10. However, seven institutions - University College London (UCL), Worcester, Oxford Brookes, Kingston and Swansea Metropolitan Universities plus University College Birmingham and the Royal Agricultural

College - have breached the terms of the negotiations and imposed the 0.5 per cent.

Brooklands College (of FE, in Surrey) announces that it will close its Ashford campus and end A-level provision at its main site in Weybridge. The Ashford campus is the former Spelthorne Sixth Form College which two years ago merged with Brooklands on the understanding that rebuilding would take place. As a result of the LSC's 'Building Colleges for the Future' fiasco, Brooklands now has £11m of debts, incurred in preparing a bid for £96m funding under this scheme. (There are over 1,000 A-level students as Ashford.)

UCU in Scotland is taking legal action against the management of Stirling University which is trying to cut 123 jobs by voluntary severance (about one third of them academic staff), and ending at least 54 short-term contracts. UCU claims consultation requirements were breached.

An internal memo from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) projects £340m of 'efficiency savings' to FE, involving a £100m cut to FE quangos, plus cuts to frontline provision estimated to imply the loss of 133,000 student places.

The Ross-CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) annual survey of HE fundraising for 2007-08 reveals that: gift income rose 54 per cent on 2005-06, representing a total of £682m in new gifts in 2007-09; 47 per cent of this new income went to Oxford or Cambridge; £484m of it went to Russell Group (of large research-intensive universities) institutions; £48m went to 1994 Group institutions (small, research-intensive universities).

The Government intervenes to restrict the power of the exams regulator (Ofqual) to limit the fees charged by exam boards. This

reflects lobbying, especially by the Edexcel awarding body, which belongs to the Pearson publishing group, and which argues that fee restriction may hamper 'innovation'.

Tory HE spokesperson David Willetts tells the Commons that the Government's HE strategy announced last week 'reflects the influence we've been having on the debate. It's a big advance on what's been said before'.

The Government publishes its *Skills for Growth - The National Skills Strategy White Paper*, the proposals in which include: the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) must by 2012 reduce substantially the number of sector skills councils, and oversee a broader reduction in publicly-funded bodies dealing with FE skills etc; colleges and other providers judged to be 'outstanding' will be given funding in bigger allocations; a range of measures, including a 'traffic light system', will be introduced to measure providers' success in becoming 'market-driven', ie doing what their 'customers' want; individual 'skills accounts' for everyone over 18, with the money paid directly to providers; regional development agencies will be responsible for making sure providers meet employers' requirements; £100m of the skills budget will be targeted on key industries such as low carbon technologies and IT; lower priority courses will be cut; 14-19 institutions called 'university technical colleges' will be introduced on the model of academies as advocated by Lords Baker and Dearing; universities, in conjunction with FE colleges and employers, will be required to validate and accredit joint honours degree and masters degree programmes linked to apprenticeships; this will be backed up by an Apprenticeships Scholarship Fund providing 'golden hellos' of up to £1,000 each to 1,000 of the best apprentices seeking to enter HE; the number of Advanced Apprentice-

ships will be increased by up to 35,000 over the next two years; UCAS tariffs will be applied to Level 3 and 4 Apprenticeships; 75 per cent of people must have either participated in HE or done an advanced apprenticeship or technician-level qualification by the time they reach 30; there must be an extra 35,000 advanced apprenticeship places, with investment in this programme rising from £17m in 2010-11 to £115m in 2014-15.

The *Skills for Growth* White Paper also includes a proposal that the £5m or so a year of public money currently supplied to the Institute for Learning (IFL - ie the body which FE lecturers are forced to 'join' on pain of not being allowed to work) should stop with effect from 2012. This money currently pays the £30 a year 'subscriptions' to IFL of 180,000 'members'. CEO Toni Fazaeli, never herself a lecturer, suggests that people would from that year have to find between £60 and £120 a year from their own pockets to support her organisation.

UCU members at Westminster University are due to strike on 13/11/09 over management's refusal of back pay arising from the National Framework Agreement.

The Government releases figures 'revealing' that the number of unemployed 16-17 year olds has fallen from 206,000 to 197,000. Schools secretary Ed Balls hails this as a triumph for their 'September Guarantee'.

In a lecture to a meeting of the Association of Law Teachers, held in London, former QAA CEO Peter Williams claims that, as a result of government pressure, HEFCE is trying to increase its influence over quality assurance (ie at the expense of the autonomy of universities, which he believes is 'a basic requisite of modern democracy'). Urging academics to take an interest in this, he maintains that: 'Universities have to stand firm, they have to argue,

they have to speak the truth to power'.

The Government announces that from 2013 all nurses will have to be educated to degree level.

Week beginning 16/11/09

A *THE* feature on the 'mission groups which universities belong to reveals that: 26 universities are not affiliated to any group; The Russell Group (of large, research-intensive universities) now has 20 members, each paying a £35,000 annual subscription; the 1994 Group (of smaller, research-intensive universities) has 19 members, each paying £20,000; the former polytechnics are organised in two groups - Million+ (with 28 members, thought to be paying £20,000 each) and the University Alliance (with 22 members paying £10,000); lastly, the GuildHE group (comprised of mainly former teacher training or art colleges) has 21 members paying subscriptions that range from £11,000 to £30,000.

The Guardian gives prominence to a suggestion by former Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) chief education officer Sir Peter Newsam that grammar schools be turned into 6th form colleges (ie stop admitting students below 16).

A CBI report, *Future Fit: Preparing Graduates for the World of Work*, places emphasis on employers' demands for 'soft skills' such as abstract reasoning, problem-solving, communication and teamwork.

In its first disciplinary hearing, the IFL 'reprimands' Julian Salisbury, a sociology lecturer at South Cheshire College, because of his involvement in a fight with a bouncer in Crewe, for which he had already been fined £600 by Chester Crown Court. (This 'reprimand' will, unless he appeals successfully, be on Salisbury's record for two years.)

Points in a *THE* article on threats to HE jobs surfacing in the past seven days include: Bristol University vice-chancellor Eric Thomas has written to staff to say that 250 jobs (about 5 per cent of all posts there) must be cut by 2011-12 in an effort to save £15m; Manchester Metropolitan University announces an intention to cut up to 127 support staff posts; a report to the governors of Birmingham University recommends closing the sociology department there; management at the University of the Arts London is seeking to close 16 courses (out of 19 in the school concerned) and sack 37 staff at its London College of Communication site.

Protecting Services to Students by Targeting Cuts and Embracing Efficiency, a 157 Group policy paper written mainly by the consultant Mick Fletcher and circulated at the AOC conference, argues that the funding of the Young People's Learning Agency and Skills Funding Agency (ie the two quangos which from April 2010 will replace the LSC) should be cut back to the level paid to the former FE Funding Council (ie the body which funded FE from 1993 until the LSC was set up by the then education minister David Blunkett, and which presided over massive corruption associated with the franchising of courses), and at the same time, school sixth forms should be forced to function on FE-style budgets.

Points in a *Guardian* feature on HE cuts, based mainly on information from UCU campaigns officer Matt Waddup, include: Leeds University is seeking to make 'savings' of £35m a year from 2010, and this could equate to 700 job losses; Gloucestershire University is cutting a further 30 posts on top of the 100 already axed; King's College London is estimated to be planning 390 job cuts, and UCL is planning a 6 per cent reduction in running costs; UCU estimates that 1,300 posts have already gone and 5,000

members' jobs are at risk nationally, with 80 universities having now announced job losses.

In a speech to the AOC conference, Margaret Eaton, (Tory) chairperson of the Local Government Association (LGA - ie the body speaking for local councils collectively) argues against both national planning of post-compulsory education and against planning by Regional Development Agencies, calling instead for everything to be put under local authority control. (Official Conservative policy favours restoration of the FEFC.)

Imperial College rector Sir Roy Anderson sends an email to staff resigning from this post (though not from his professorship) with effect from 1/1/10. This decision is thought to reflect strife between Anderson and Imperial chair of governors Lord Kerr of Kinlochard. (Kerr apparently thought Anderson was too blatant in demanding that research funding be restricted to elite institutions like Imperial.)

The Government releases its *Skills Investment Strategy*, concerned with the funding of FE courses in 2010-11. This includes: a 6 per cent cut in funding for Train to Gain; a 3 per cent cut in funding for all courses; a 10 per cent cut in funding for apprenticeships for people over 25; an increase in 'employer-responsive' places for people over 19 from 1.41 million now to 1.72 million then, and a reduction in 'learner-responsive' places from 1.5 million this year to 1.12 million then.

The report of the second phase of the *Futuretrack* study finds that nearly 40 per cent of people who applied to but did not enter HE in 2009 were put off by the cost, and 32 per cent by the anticipated level of debt on completion. (In the first phase, 130,000 HE applicants were surveyed, and in the second 50,000 full time students were surveyed at the end of their first year. The study is funded by the

HE Careers Service and conducted by staff at Warwick University.) An Institute of Employment Studies investigation for BIS reveals similar findings.

An Ofqual report on the year ending in summer 2009 reveals that 212 candidates completed a whole 14-19 Diploma in that year; 894 candidates completed the 'principal learning qualification' (PLQ) for a Diploma; 10,262 students were doing diplomas.

HEFCE is expected to vote through 'within weeks' a cut of £40m in the money paid to universities for the upkeep of historic buildings. (This year, Oxford University has received £5.14m, Cambridge £4.2m and King's College London £2.2m from this source.)

Geoff Russell, CEO of the LSC and expected eventually to be confirmed as CEO of one of its successors, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), apologises to colleges for the Building Colleges for the Future fiasco, exonerating colleges themselves on the grounds that: 'The decisions on capital that colleges made almost without exception were made in good faith'.

Oxford and Cambridge: How Different Are They?, a report by the HE Policy Institute in which these universities are compared with Imperial College and UCL, notes that: almost 60 per cent of entrants to Oxford have eight or more A* grade GCSEs, as against 14 per cent at Imperial; 55 per cent of Cambridge entrants have over 540 UCAS points, as compared with 33 per cent at Imperial and 18 per cent at UCL; in 2006, 42 per cent of Oxford entrants and 47 per cent of Cambridge entrants were from private schools, as against 38 and 34 per cent for Imperial and UCL respectively; annual transfers from Oxford University Press (OUP) to the university total about £25m. When these and other factors are taken together, the

report concludes: 'these two really are different from other universities in the sector, including the small number of institutions with which they are sometimes compared'.

Lord Mandelson tells the AOC conference that: 'We expect businesses to invest, and keep investing, in skills. And often the most effective way of doing this is going to be to build strong collaborative ties with colleges. And because they are the key beneficiaries of these new skilled people, we are going to expect businesses to bear more of the cost'.

During debate in the Lords on the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill, the Government concedes an amendment saying that in future Ofqual 'must keep under review any system used by the Secretary of State for allocating values to qualifications' This arises from disquiet about the value given in school league tables to Level 2 Key Skills in ICT, but is thought likely also to affect the value given to 14-19 diplomas, by which at present a student passing a higher Diploma (including functional skills tests) is deemed to have achieved the equivalent of eight and a half A*-C grade GCSEs, even though the recommended teaching time for such a diploma is only two days a week.

Proposals in *The FEFC Funding Model and Skills Accounts*, a Tory strategy paper released for consultation by David Willetts at the AOC conference, include: a version of the FEFC should be re-introduced in place of the YPLA, SFA and Regional Development Agencies; FE institutions should be able to gain a status equivalent to that of academies in the schools sector, thereby allowing universities, faith organisations, private companies and philanthropists as well as ('high-performing') colleges themselves to fight for market share; colleges that fail to recruit the students they expect should be able to trade their unwanted places with other colleges.

Commenting on the BIS HE framework document published earlier in November, HE Academy CEO Paul Ramsden tells a 1994 Group conference, held in London, that: 'Students are not passive consumers, searching for 'satisfaction'. They are active partners in a relationship'.

Week beginning 23/11/09

No Strings Attached? Funding Body Grant as a Proportion of College and University Income, a report produced for UCU by senior research officer Stephen Court, shows that: as a proportion of institutions' total income, the funding body (ie in England HEFCE) grant fell from 41.6 per cent in 1995-96 to 36.4 per cent in 2007-08, while over the same period the proportion of income from fees rose from 23.4 per cent to 26.8 per cent; in 2007-08 HEFCE funding constituted 29.4 per cent of the income of Russell Group institutions as against 46.8 per cent of Million+ institutions; in 1995-96, only one in seven institutions took less than a third of their income from the relevant funding body, whereas in 2007-08 one in four did so.

Gordon Brown announces a review of qualifications and English-language courses that are below undergraduate level, which is linked to a proposal that would withhold visas from non-EU students seeking to take such courses here. The AOC claims that about 60,000 students and £30m of income would thereby be lost to FE colleges each year.

An analysis by Evidence, a research arm of the Thomson Reuters group, based on citations of research papers between 2002 and 2006, finds that, although research by the so-called 'golden triangle' universities (Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial College, UCL and LSE) is on this count amongst the best in the world, research

done at the other 15 Russell Group universities is on average slightly less 'good' than that done at the nineteen 1994 Group institutions.

Points about the inspection of post-compulsory provision in Ofsted's annual report include: in 2008-09 59 general or tertiary colleges, 27 sixth form colleges and three specialist FE colleges were inspected; 63 per cent of these were rated good or outstanding, as against 72 per cent of those inspected in the previous year; 4 per cent were judged inadequate as against 6 per cent in 2007-08; in 42 per cent of the colleges where overall self-assessment was judged to be satisfactory, the self-assessment of teaching was judged to be 'too generous'; of 72 basic skills programmes in colleges that were inspected, one was judged inadequate and 34 satisfactory; literacy, numeracy and ESOL were judged to be the weakest areas of adult education, one recommendation being closer integration with students' main programmes; ; Askham Grange, a women's prison near York, is the first prison to be rated outstanding for education; 5 per cent of work-based training provision was rated outstanding and 37 per cent good.

A report on the funding crisis at London Metropolitan University, conducted by former Kent University vice chancellor and FEFC CEO Sir David Melville at the request of London Met itself finds that: London Met vice chancellor Brian Roper operated a 'dictatorial regime' and knew perfectly well that the method used to claim student completions represented non-completions at 3 per cent, when by HEFCE rules that should have been 30 per cent; London Met. governors could and should have challenged this but failed to do so; if HEFCE had been quicker to investigate practices identified in its 2003 audits, the position might not have become so acute. In the light of Melville's report,

HEFCE has written to Peter Anwyl, chair of governors at London Met., asking governors and senior staff to 'consider their position'.

There is evidence of post-1992 universities axing philosophy courses, with three closing them in the last two years, and only 19 out of 64 running undergraduate programmes last year.

A study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and led by Professor Alison Wolf, finds that the Skills for Life programme has done little to improve people's employability, productivity or earning capacity.

The University of East Anglia is trying to recruit students, not necessarily from overseas, for its Newton Programme. This is an arrangement between the university and the private contractor Into University Partnerships, by which 'high-flying' A-level students would live and study for a year on the East Anglia campus, in the process receiving coaching in how to apply to university, including 'dedicated preparation for Oxbridge'. This will cost each student £12,750 in fees plus £6,771 in accommodation charges.

Malcolm Gillies, who in July 2008 resigned as vice-chancellor of City University after disagreements with its council but is still a professor of music there, has been appointed vice-chancellor of London Met University with effect from early 2010.

The ifs [sic] School of Finance 'charity' becomes the fourth private body to be given degree-awarding status by the Privy Council on the recommendation of the QAA. Ifs claims to have about 60,000 (mostly employed) students in 60 countries.

A survey of 1,200 HE students conducted by the NUS and HSBC bank finds that two thirds see their personal tutor less than once a

term, and only 25 per cent receive one-to-one feedback on coursework.

In her opening address to the London regional conference of the Association of University Administrators, Greenwich University vice chancellor (Baroness) Tessa Blackstone maintains that: 'Some of the easier [admin. Ed.] things should be done in part by academics', citing as examples pastoral care and admissions. Responding to questions, she elaborates: 'I would like to see young academics accepting that is part of their contracts. I would like to change this sort of attitude that all you really do is teach or research . . . and that you don't have a sort of common responsibility towards helping to run the institution'. Commenting on this, Jon Richards, Unison senior national officer for education, says: 'This is the most ridiculous suggestion I have heard'.

Launching a UUK publication called *Securing World-Class Research in UK Universities: Exploring the Impact of Block Grant Funding*, UUK president Steve Smith says the percentage of REF-allocated funding determined by 'impact' should be reduced to 20 per cent from the 25 per cent currently proposed.

Following the final negotiating meeting on HE pay on 24/11/09, the Educational Institute of Scotland next day rejects the UCEA's 0.5 per cent offer, but on 26th November Unite's education conference votes to accept it.

Shadow schools minister Nick Gibb tells the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust's conference, held in Birmingham, that the Tories, if elected will remove the requirement on schools to make all 17 14-19 diplomas available at all three levels to students. Association of School and College Leaders general secretary John Dunford welcomes this move.

Welsh Assembly education minister Jane Hutt announces a new strategy for spending the Assembly's £450m HE budget, which includes the expansion of foundation degrees offered jointly with FE colleges.

Interviewed during a live webcast which crashed under the weight of people trying to access it (2,000 simultaneously and 6,000 during the day), Leeds University vice-chancellor Michael Arthur, discussing his plan to 'save' £35m a year by 2011, says that he cannot rule out compulsory redundancies and refuses to discuss the closure of courses or faculties.

Against the background of an adverse Ofsted report and the £11m debt arising from the LSC's buildings fiasco, Brooklands College of FE principal Colin Staff takes early retirement.

Week beginning 30/11/09

The Government approves the merger, from 1/1/10, of Thurrock and Basildon College (itself the product of an earlier merger) with Southeast Essex College (formerly Southend College, the domain of Thatcherite principal Tony Pitcher) to form South Essex College of FHE. This follows a bid by South-east Essex to lead a consortium building the Thurrock Learning Campus, phase 2 of which alone was expected to cost £60m. (This project collapsed in the LSC Building Colleges for the Future fiasco.) The merged institution, which claims to have 20,000 students, intends to 'partner' South East Essex 6th Form College (SEEVIC), which has opened a new campus in Basildon.

Over 13,000 academics, including 2,500 professors and 6 Nobel laureates, have signed a UCU online petition calling for the proposal to include 'impact' amongst the criteria for allocating research funding under the REF to be dropped.

Commenting on the Ofsted report on FE inspections and also on the allegations from two 'senior people within the sector' about college managers manipulating student success rates, Ofsted director of learning and skills Melanie Hunt says: 'We want to use evidence from the widest possible source, not slavishly follow a programme given to us by the college. We will go off piste, talk to people when they're having a cigarette or go off to different campuses'.

Suggestions put forward in *Developing Future University Structures: New Funding and Legal Models*, a report written for UUK by the law firm Eversheds, include: an increasing overlap between universities and schools, including university take-overs of private schools; the emergence in five years or so of global 'HE brands'; universities creating new companies that purchase that university's assets from the university as a public body and are then floated on the stock market; such companies might then buy-in state-funded work, including teaching and research. Commenting on the report, Eversheds partner Glynne Stanfield says: 'There is a lot of pent-up capital ready to invest in things that are seen to be safe. Education is a recognised market. There is a lot of American capital that, if the conditions were right, would come into the British market'.

Core Business, a report written for the rightwing Reform thinktank by 'former City headhunter' Dale Bassett, former Oxford Union president Luke Tryl (22), and Reform director Andrew Haldenby, calls for all school pupils to be compelled to do five academic GCSEs.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has produced a *Digest on Job Security* as a 'reference document' containing advice from the UCEA and HE unions, that universities etc can

use when making people redundant.

An initial analysis by AOC assistant CEO Julian Gravatt of the Government's FE spending strategy, as set out in the *Skills Investment Strategy* White Paper suggests that, along with the declared 3 per cent cut in the national funding rate and the additional 3 per cent cut in Train to Gain, this 'may be hiding a far greater cut to college budgets' (*TES*). (Gravatt's calculations show that in 2003-04 the average funding per full time HE student was £882 higher than for an FE student. By 2006-07 this discrepancy had fallen to £762, but it then rose, in 2007-08 to £1,045, in 2008-09 to £1,686, and in 2009-10 to £1,719. The projected gap for 2010-11 would be £2,054.)

Awareness, Take-up and Impact of Institutional Bursaries and Scholarships in England, a report written for the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) by Birkbeck College professor Claire Callender, and based on a National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) survey of nearly 5,000 full time undergraduates as well as universities, parents and HE advisers in schools and colleges, finds that 61 per cent of all students surveyed are unlikely to have been influenced in their study decisions by bursaries, because information about the availability of bursaries is not reaching a majority of students and would-be students, especially black people.

The IFL claims that 116,000 people have now 'declared' their continuing professional development (CPD) for 2008-09, up 6,000 from a month previously. This constitutes 62 per cent of the 188,000 people required to do this by the original deadline of 31/8/09, leaving 70,000 who have so far opted not to do so. (The deadline has since been extended to 31/12/09. Commenting on this situation, IFL CEO Toni Fazaeli says: '. . . we would not go down that route [ie of

trying to ban non-compliers from doing their jobs] until we felt that every avenue had been explored. We do not want to undermine people's professionalism'.

In an email to staff, Sussex University vice-chancellor Michael Farthing announces that management is consulting on 115 job cuts to be made from July 2010, in an effort to overcome a £3m deficit.

Newly appointed Brooklands College acting principal Steve Hutchinson is to look again at the future of the Ashford site, scheduled for closure following the failed £96m Building Colleges for the Future bid.

Bournemouth University is cutting 15 academic staff in its Business School.

Former Canterbury College principal Susan Pember, now 'director of SFA transition' at BIS, announces that from September 2010 the 'top' 15 per cent of colleges will: receive their funding as a single budget; be free to make their own decisions about student numbers and types and levels of courses; come under reduced audit scrutiny; be free to determine their own level of borrowing; be encouraged to develop their own qualifications.

The University of Cumbria announces an £8.4m deficit for its second year since it was founded, and has put on hold plans for a £70m campus in Carlyle.

Points in a *TES* article about the education of young offenders include: at the end of the 2008 academic year, over 1,000 15 to 17 year olds, and over 5,000 18 to 21 year olds were serving custodial sentences of over one year; of the 12,115 15-21 year olds locked up during the academic year 2007-08, only 439 were enrolled while inside on GCSE or A-level programmes; 373 of these began GCSEs, and 66 began A-levels; the average spent per year on

education per young offender is £7,628; from 2010, control of young offenders education will pass from the LSC to local authorities; their weekly entitlement to education will rise from 15 to 25 hours.

Carwyn Jones, Welsh Assembly member for Bridgend, is elected to succeed Rhodri Morgan as Labour Party leader there, and is expected to become First Minister next week. One of Jones' manifesto commitments was to end the incorporation of FE colleges throughout Wales.

The most recent UK skills audit, produced by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) for Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK - the sector skills council covering post compulsory education and training) predicts a sharp fall in apprenticeships and a sharp rise in classes sizes on other types of courses in colleges, suggesting a need for staff retraining to cope with larger groups.

UCU's HE Committee 'notes' the UCEA offer on HE pay, but makes no recommendation for further action to oppose it.

Week beginning 7/12/09

In a letter to HEFCE CEO Sir Alan Langlands, London Met's chair of governors, Peter Anwyl, claims that the report written by Sir David Melville and supposedly based on evidence in an unpublished report by the consultants Deloitte is in fact not based on evidence, and hence that Langlands' call for the governors, along with senior staff, to 'consider their positions' (ie resign) is not justified. Referring to Langlands' intervention as 'your precipitate remarks', he maintains that: 'There is a sector-wide issue here about what it is reasonable to expect of lay, staff or student governors' and says that under its incoming vice-chancellor the university will act on the Deloitte report.

Points in a *TES* update on the Brooklands College situation include: in correspondence with the NUS, LSC CEO Geoff Russell has said that the announcements of an intention to close the Ashford (Spelthorne) site and with it 'specific programmes' (ie presumably the A-levels run there) 'were not agreed by the LSC and will not be binding on the new leadership team and governing body'; the college is now being run by an 'interim leadership team' recruited on behalf of the governors by the consultants FE Associates; (acting principal Steve Hutchinson appears to be part of this team); Hutchinson maintains that the actual outstanding debt is now £3m (ie because the remainder of the £11m has been paid off from reserves); the decision to close Ashford has been suspended pending the result of a 3-4 month investigation; the Ofsted report which contributed to Colin Staff's resignation as principal said that: 'The college has ambitious and very well-founded plans for the future . . . A large building project to further these ambitions has, however, been put in jeopardy by a financial crisis brought about almost entirely by the inept management of others' (ie the LSC or Government) and also that the college had been 'thwarted by grave financial mismanagement beyond the college's own culpability or control'.

Points in *THE* coverage of the situation at the University of Gloucestershire include: while on a week's leave in November, deputy vice-chancellor and former investment bank Paul Bowler was told not to return to work, and on 7/12/09 he resigned; this was seven months after he was appointed with the brief of returning the university, which had the second worst debt to income ratio of any in the UK, to financial health; it was Bowler who proposed the closure of the institution's London and Cheltenham campuses and who maintained that the faculty of

education, humanities and sciences had overstated its income by £1.5m; the dean of this faculty, Keith Sharp, resigned and is now head of the UK HE International Unit; Bowler, who was backed up by an accountant paid for by HEFCE, is thought to have been sacked for being too openly critical of other senior staff.

In its latest performance report, BIS claims that targets are being met or exceeded as follows: two years 'early', 2.8 million adults have achieved literacy and numeracy qualifications for the first time; there were 126,000 'apprenticeship completions' in 2008-09; the HE participation rate in 2007-08 was '43 per cent'. Commenting, Peter Mandelson says that BIS is ' . . . committed to leading the fight against the recession . . . '

It emerges that the Independent Review of HE Funding and Student Finance, generally regarded as a way for Labour and the Tories to postpone the HE fees issue until after the election, is in fact likely to make a second call for evidence in March or April, thereby highlighting this issue in the election period after all.

Alistair Darling's pre-Budget report; provides an extra £200m for 16-19 education; provides for 16-19 funding to rise by 0.9 per cent annually; cuts a further £300m from Adult Skills funding; gives Manchester and Leeds powers over adult skills provision equivalent to those held by the Mayor of London.

Reward and Recognition of Teaching in Higher Education, a report produced jointly by the HE Academy and the University of Leicester's Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and based on an investigation of the promotion policies of 108 universities, finds that all the universities concerned included research in their promotion policies, but 31 did not include teaching as a criterion for promotion at any level.

Consultation under the aegis of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) begins on a document, produced by the guidance steering group, about spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMCS) education in FE. (This group includes reps from Ofsted, the Learning and Skills Network, the 157 Group and the British Humanist Association, and appears to be fronted by the Revd Dr John Breadon, Church of England national adviser on FE.)

The UCU branch at UCL votes to ballot for strike action if management proceeds with plans to sack ten staff in the Information Services Division there.

Management at The Manchester College reverses an earlier decision to raise by 1.5 per cent the pay of staff involved in prison education. (The college is the largest single provider of this, with contracts at over 70 custodial institutions across the country.)

Bicton (agricultural) College is to become a wholly owned subsidiary of Exeter College (of FE).

In his pre-Budget report, Alistair Darling announces a £600m cut to HE funding over two years (2011-2013) to be achieved by 'changes to student support within existing arrangements; efficiency savings and prioritisation across universities, science and research; some switching of modes of study in higher education; and reductions in budgets that do not support student participation'. An Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis of the report predicts an average 5.6 per cent cut to HE.

Week beginning 14/12/09

Publication of UCL's accounts for the year to 31/7/09 reveals that management there has run up a loss of £5.95m on the abortive plan, announced in 2007, to open an Institute for Cultural Heritage on

its Gordon Street site. Commenting on this against the background of management's parallel attempt to achieve 6 per cent 'savings', UCU branch secretary Sean Wallis says: 'When UCL is asking staff to count every penny, it is rather distressing to see it has spent £6m on moving gravel'.

Following the Government's decision in March 2009 to commit some extra money for FE college building schemes running up to 2013-14, the LSC now says that only £200m remains unallocated, with a total of £474m having been assigned to the 13 schemes approved in September, and other money paid to projects approved before the collapse of the Building Colleges for the Future scheme.

With the closure on 16/12/09 of HEFCE's consultation on the proposed Research Exercise Framework (for allocating £1.5m of research funding annually to universities), it emerges that: UUK maintained in its submission that the ratio for judging existing research should be 60 per cent for 'outputs', 20 per cent for 'environment' and 20 per cent for 'impact' (ie evidence of the supposed direct utility of research); the Russell Group (ie the vice chancellors of the 20 or so poshest universities) thinks the figure for impact should be no more than 15 per cent; within the Russell Group, Cambridge University thinks the figure for this should be no more than 10 per cent; the Million+ Group (ie the least posh universities), in contrast, argued for 15 per cent as a minimum. (HEFCE itself has advocated 25 per cent for 'impact'; a sizeable group of academics have signed an online petition against any weighting for impact.)

Commenting on the 'impact' debate, Cambridge University's pro vice chancellor for research says that: '. . . a high weighting [for impact. Ed.] will incentivise a shift to research with short-term - and therefore more easily traceable -

impact, turning first-rate universities into second-rate companies'.

Points in a *TES* article on unemployment amongst people under 25 include: 495,000 such people are currently claiming Jobseeker's Allowance; the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) estimates that fewer than 100,000 of these have been unemployed for more than 6 months; the Labour Force Survey puts the number of under 25s who are unemployed at 750,000; a DWP White Paper, *Building Britain's Recovery*, proposes that from April 2009, 18-24 year olds unemployed for six months should be compelled to accept a job or training place 'offered' by their Jobcentre under a scheme to be called the Young Person's Guarantee; the White Paper also promises 'up to' 100,000 training places, jobs and work placements and £300m of funding to support this.

Following the financial malfeasance investigation at Plymouth University in 2007-08, details come to light of more recent developments there surrounding faculty of Education Innovation and Enterprise Unit director Jon Nichol, which include a payment to his daughter and irregular payments running into tens of thousands of pounds made to a local authority. Nichol was suspended for a second time on 5/5/09 and has now left.

In her second annual report, Ofqual chief regulator Kathleen Tattersall says that: 'It is becoming clear that in the longer term there may need to be some simplification of the [14-16 Diploma's Ed.] structure if it is going to be taken by large numbers of students', and that there is 'some way to go before they [functional skills tests in Diplomas] can be regarded as fully satisfactory'. Asked by the *TES* to clarify the first of these statements, she says: 'What we as Ofqual will be doing . . . is asking whether we really do have the balance right between principle

learning, functional skills or indeed the extended project'.

Following a unanimous vote to ballot for industrial action, UCU gives management at the London College of Communication until 23rd December to lift the threat of closures and redundancies.

In the week before the formal deadline for 6th form colleges to apply for recognition as such under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act, points in a *TES* article include: according to Sixth Form Colleges' Forum CEO David Igoe, since the incorporation of these institutions along with FE colleges in 1993, their number has fallen from about 120 to 93, while the number of students attending them has risen to nearly 140,000; Igoe argues that one effect of their new independent status will be to make (undesired) mergers more difficult; other effects of having this status will be to remove them from the influence of the Skills Funding Agency and prevent local authorities setting up 6th form colleges to compete against them (as in Sheffield for example); after six years of no new SFCs being opened, 2010 will see one opening in Rochdale and moves towards one in Lowestoft.

Grimsby Institute of FHE wins the right to a judicial review examining the LSC's handling of the Building Colleges for the Future fiasco.

Schools Secretary Ed Balls announces that from 2010-11 Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) bonus payments are to be scrapped, supposedly in order to allow EMAs as such to be extended to a further 80,000 students.

There must be a better way: designing and refining post-14 provision

We print here Geoff Stanton's notes for a talk given at London University Institute of Education on 24/11/09 as part of the Lifelong Learning Seminar Series

Introduction

This note (a) identifies a number of features of the current approach to the development and implementation of post-14 provision in England, most of which either continue without serious examination, or continue because it is assumed that there is no alternative; (b) suggests that some ongoing problems with the provision may derive from these features; (c) offers alternatives to the identified features. At the seminar on November 24th the intention was to further debate these alternatives, and to consider the risks and advantages of using them.

The current position

The current approach to the development of post-14 provision has the following features or is based on the following assumptions. It is assumed that new or revised provision should result from a national-level initiative. It is assumed that change should be qualifications-led, or at the very least should lead to nationally recognised certification. The process to be used for qualifications development often goes unstated and when stated is often flawed. Considerable resource is devoted to the design and implementation of mechanisms for summative assessment - the assessment of learning - but very little is invested in diagnostic assessment - assessment for learning. Curriculum development is conceived as being the development of learning programmes that prepare for qualifications, rather than being the development of learning programmes that challenge and meet the needs of individual learners. It is asserted that provision can and should be allocated to one of a fixed number of levels, and that: learning in all areas of an individual's programme should be at the same level; targets for individuals and institutions can and should be defined in terms of these levels; even where learning is recognised as being of different types, it should be possible to link it to the

same system of levels, and thus compare its value. The reform of vocational provision requires breaking with past models and approaches - that is, a revolution. The reform of academic provision should be done with care, involve gradual change and refinement - that is evolution.

Further characteristics of post-14 provision are that: new assessment regimes do not usually work first time; proper pilots are not conducted; development proceeds without a cost-envelope being specified; considerable resource is required to design and then modify the summative assessment regime - assessment of learning.

The consequences of all this include: general education that is both narrow and unexciting; vocational provision that is subject to ongoing and unproductive turbulence; a failure to provide effectively for at least half of our citizens.

There are alternatives

1. Where new provision is required, a cyclical or iterative model of development, striking an appropriate balance between standards or content, assessment mechanisms, learning programmes and resource requirement, would avoid the first generation of users suffering from a faulty product.
2. However, in most cases it will be better and cheaper to adapt and improve existing systems and products.
3. There should be a recognition of the fact that provision has to be the best that can be done within a defined resource envelope. This envelope may not be the same for all learners and all subject areas, but any differences should be transparent and justified.
4. An optional system of national validation of local initiatives would utilise the creativity and energy of teachers while protecting the interests of the learners. It would also provide a 'nursery' for the testing and nurturing of provision before making it nationally available.

5. Curriculum-led or learner-led development would enable us to meet the needs of those alienated or disenfranchised by existing provision.
6. Rather than provision being designed (and judged in terms of its ability) to facilitate progression to the next stage it should be fit for purpose in its own right. Transition or bridging courses could enable efficient transfer to other provision as and when required.
7. It should be possible for a programme to have components that are at different levels.
8. It should be recognised that the current system of levels for post-14 qualifications has been asserted rather than proved to be valid. The consequence is that some areas of learning have been distorted to fit the prescribed levels, for example by adding requirements in order to ensure that the required level is matched, or deleting a level that was previously recognised.
9. If it is nevertheless decided that a common system is required, then a new system of levels should include intermediate stages between GCSE and A-level and A-level and undergraduate degree level.
10. Entry requirements for higher-level programmes should be expressed in terms of pre-requisite knowledge and skills, rather than grades.
11. New programmes should not be designed until it has been demonstrated that there is a need that cannot be met by the refinement or development of existing provision.
12. Where it is decided that a new programme is required, there should be an 'ethics committee' to check on the design and implementation plans, the level of risk involved, and on measures to protect the interests of those on whom the programme is to be tested.
13. An important method of developing new provision would be a facility for innovative teachers and institutions to put forward a scheme for national validation. The national validation would check that learning programmes, objectives and assessment regimes matched and were in balance. It would also confirm the existence of any necessary expertise and facilities.
14. After evaluation, the resulting programmes would be included in a national bank upon which others could draw for a second round of testing. Providers would have the choice of (a) designing a new programme, and submitting it and themselves for validation; (b) using a programme from the bank that had provisional approval; (c) using a nationally approved programme.
15. A programme would not receive national approval until its positive and negative effects on other provision - the educational ecology - had been examined.

The outcomes required

Provision for the 'other half' that is fit for purpose, and not just a progression stage to 'real' provision. An educational system that features ongoing innovation and development, within a controlled environment.

Some programmes that major on process and learning experience, and others that major on opportunities for progression.

Diagnostic testing at the start of each programme, so that programmes can be tailored to individual needs, and in order to construct bridging courses between programmes.

Provision that utilises and develops the creativity, resources and imagination of both teachers and learners.

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For further information, contact the Secretary:

**Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields,
DUNSTABLE, Beds LU6 3NS;
john.hewitt22@virgin.net**

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

Campus unions, students defy attack on H.E. in California

(Reprinted from Labor Notes)

An annual fees at the University of California in 1979 were \$685. Thirty years later, the University of California regents, who oversee ten campuses throughout the state, raised fees by 32 per cent - in the face of opposition by a growing coalition of students, faculty and campus workers. UC's appointed regents set undergraduate fees at \$10,302 for next fall.

Schools throughout the state's three-tiered public education system - including hundreds of state schools and junior colleges - are seeing fee hikes and program cuts. Technical, clerical and service workers, facing layoffs and cuts at the bargaining table, have entered the fray.

No state spends more on prisons than California, while nearly every state spends more per capita on education. It wasn't always this way. An unprecedented coalition of students and workers is responding to the attacks on affordable higher education with large-scale democratic organizing - including marches, teach-ins, strikes, and building occupations - to which police have responded fiercely.

There are no illusions about the size of the task at hand, but organizers on various campuses are linking up their organizing with an understanding that a long-term movement is needed - and has begun.

'There has never been a coalition like this on campus', says Claudette Begin, whose clerical workers union [] University Employees, called a two-day strike together with technical workers (UPTE) at UC Berkeley and UCLA.

At Berkeley, the seven days between the last class and the first exam is referred to as 'dead week'. It made a lively comeback this December when students, work-

ers, and community members 'liberated' Wheeler Hall, a major classroom, during a 24-7 open occupation that lasted four days.

Students reclaimed the space for meeting and study, holding lectures and teach-ins on the budget crisis, distributing literature on the fee hikes, and dancing. At the end of each night, students diligently mopped the lobby floor.

The takeover wasn't easily accomplished. Police videotaped protesters and threatened arrests of those who peaceably remained inside on the first night. On Friday, they made good on their threats with a pre-dawn raid. Sixty-six occupiers awoke to the sound of handcuffs, and were spirited away to a jail 40 miles outside the city.

Inclusive organizing

The tedium of democratic organizing has rolled on for months. Frequent two- or three-hour open meetings of the general assembly, student-worker action team, and graduate student organizing committee have drawn hundreds.

Students and workers voted for three days of action to coincide with the regents meeting in late November, where the tuition hike would be decided. Students called a three-day strike at Berkeley coinciding with the clerical and technical workers' walkouts.

On November 20, students barricaded themselves inside the second floor of Wheeler Hall, and communicated their demands by bullhorn to thousands of supporters gathered outside: rehire laid off service workers, make the budget transparent, and reverse fee hikes.

UPTE members set up pickets to protest what they call the university's 'illegal bargaining tactics', and called a rally.

UC called in several police departments, which were unable to break barricades for several hours as students held the doors and called, unsuccessfully, for negotiations. 'They kept yelling through the doors, 'prepare for the beat-down', said UC grad student Zach Levenson.

Police eventually arrested 40, but faculty and students negotiated their release. The cuffs came off and the students emerged after dusk before a cheering crowd.

Throughout the day, students linked arms in tussles with cops, while others sat down in the street to block police trucks entering campus.

Service workers with AFSCME Local 3299 have supported student organizing against fee hikes. They blocked a back entrance to the building, one of several actions aimed at reversing layoffs - 44 have lost their jobs at Berkeley. 'How do you have a 32 per cent fee hike and then cut services on campus?' asked President Lakesha Harrison.

The non-violent actions were returned with force - police shot one student with a rubber bullet, and another had her finger smashed by a police club, requiring reconstructive surgery.

Organizing everywhere

Students at UC Davis and Santa Cruz also led several occupations during the week of the regents meeting, which was held at UCLA. The administrators were greeted in Los Angeles by thousands of protesters. Students and campus workers established a tent city outside the meeting - which took place behind a police line. As at Berkeley, UPTE workers walked out.

Eric Gardner, a member of the Coalition of University Employees, spent the day running between an assembly outside the regents meeting and another that formed outside Campbell Hall, where dozens of students had locked themselves in. 'After they voted for the tuition hikes, the anger was palpable', he says. 'People more or less spontaneously blocked the regents from leaving'.

For three hours, activists sat down in front of a garage where a van full of fee-hikers was trying to escape. The police attacked with pepper spray.

Though their demands were not met, Gardner says the culture has already changed. 'Campus has been quiet for years' he said. 'We did this to show we can take over this place'.

Worse at Cal State

The California State University system of 23 schools relies more heavily on state funding than does the UC system, which draws only about 20 per cent of its budget from the state. Summertime budget cuts turned into department cuts, teacher layoffs and fee hikes at CSU.

San Francisco State University's sizable working-class population is dropping out in droves, unable to weather new fees or find classes they need.

Undergrad Ryan Sturges, an organizer with Student Unity & Power, says the hikes (he paid \$300 more this semester) are helping construct a multi-million-dollar recreation center aimed at attracting a wealthier 'clentele'.

Sturges and 300 students marched into the administration building in late November as part of an open occupation. Two weeks later, 20 students locked down the SFSU business building for a day. Police broke through student pickets outside and, guns drawn, arrested them.

The statewide resistance has brought questions of class, race and privilege to the fore as the

new fees will make public education unreachable for many students.

Huge public events don't mean that the movement has been a huge success, however. Protests have left some alienated and many on the sidelines. The fees hikes remain, as do the UC regents, an undemocratic, appointed body with little concern for the workers and students most affected.

Despite President Yudof's claims that financial aid will rise, there won't be enough to offset hikes, which will disproportionately affect working class students and students of color. Already, only 3.5 per cent of students at Berkeley are African American. But setbacks are crucial to movement building. They lay the groundwork for organizing that really works, even while the list of demands grows and the clock ticks.

Organizers are crafting a different list of priorities for the school. 'We don't want to just return to the way the university was in, say, 2007', says Berkeley's Levenson.

The list includes lower pay for the highest-salaried administrators, re-emphasize outreach to communities of color, halt construction projects funded by fee hikes, make school governance structures more democratic, and 'de-privatize', as Levenson says. With 80 per cent of UC funding not generated by the state, he says, the university is at the whim of private funders.

The fight against privatization of a public good - education - isn't happening only in California. It is tied to a series of strikes, rallies, walkouts, and occupations taking place in schools across the US and in Austria, Germany, and Greece. The highs and lows are shared in solidarity with a much larger movement.

Meanwhile, organizers are casting a wider net, fomenting an ambitious March 4 student and worker strike throughout the state's education system that will bring together K-12 and higher education activists.

Where we stand:

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

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

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

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

What future for UK higher education?

We print here an edited version of a lecture given by Roger Brown at Thames Valley University on 28/10/09

Last year UUK published the results of an exercise aimed at forecasting the size and shape of the sector in twenty years time. I want to supplement that analysis by working to a shorter timescale - five to ten years - and by tackling also the future shape of the sector.

My overall argument is: 1. 'Market-based' policies have made UK HE more efficient, responsive and internationally competitive; 2. But there are also structural weaknesses, chiefly a lack of equity in the distribution of resources, including prestige, which further marketisation will exacerbate; 3. Together, marketisation and these weaknesses, in an exceptionally difficult expenditure climate, could lead to a restructuring of the sector.

First, by 'market-based policies' I mean policies that attempt to organise HE on market lines, with the following features: 1. More open market entry for providers, including private and 'for profit' providers; 2. More funding of teaching going via the student in the form of fees, and less in the form of grants to institutions; 3. Competition on fees (and/or bursaries), which bear some relationship to teaching costs; 4. Students, or their families, having to meet all or some of the costs of tuition from their own pockets; 5. Students and others making choices between providers based on information about the quality, accessibility and value for money of the institutions, subjects and courses on offer. Second, I am assuming that it continues to be meaningful and desirable to speak of a system or sector. Third, I am also assuming that some inequality in resources and prestige is inevitable, but that too much is socially and economically dysfunctional. Finally, I am assuming that there will be no change in the emphasis which students and governments are placing on the economic role and purposes of HE, at the expense of the liberal notion of HE as the intellectual transformation of the individual.

Let us start with the current position. In recent years, UK universities have been enjoying a boom. Applications and enrolments are at record levels. The long decline in the unit of funding since the 1980s has been partially reversed, and institutions are now in the third year of the 'additional' revenue from variable fees.

Enrolments of overseas students continue to increase, with the UK holding its position as the second most attractive destination for internationally mobile students. Public research funding continues to increase at

a level above inflation. Income from industry and commerce continues to increase. Universities are beginning to reinvest. Staff have enjoyed significant pay increases..

Students are also enjoying one of the most benign of the market-oriented funding regimes. Although fees have increased, they are still below actual cost. No fees need be paid 'up front'. Loans for tuition and maintenance are subsidised. Grant support is available for households with a residual income of up to £50,778 and there are also institutional bursaries. Loans are only repayable when graduates reach the £15,000 threshold and repayments of 9 per cent above threshold are not scaled to income above that level. Finally, although graduates are entering a difficult labour market, they will continue to enjoy lifetime financial advantages, as well as more secure employment and better job quality, compared with non-graduates.

However, this boom will not last. To begin with, we know that after 2010-11 there will be a decline in the numbers of 18-to-21 year olds on which most universities depend for the bulk of their full-time students. The 18-20 year old population will not start to recover until 2020. There may in the meantime be compensatory increases in the numbers of part-time students, but these do not offer the same stability of income as full-timers; they also require a wider range of learning models.

Educational attainments at 18 appear to have levelled off: there has been no increase in the proportion of 17-year olds with two Level 3 qualifications since 2002. There is a pool of students with seven or more good (A* - C grade) GCSEs who fail to progress to Level 3. Raising the age at which young people are not required to receive education and training should absorb some of these. Even so, the class composition of the student body seems unlikely to change much. Widening participation has still to be seriously tackled; it will not improve if we are entering a period of consolidation. There may be an increase in the number of home postgraduate students although no one knows what the impact of variable fees for undergraduate courses, and the consequential levels of debt, will be on this market. On the one hand, increasing numbers may be attracted by the additional 'leverage' of a postgraduate qualification, especially in a recession. On the other, if they have spare cash they may prefer to use it to pay off their loans.

Overseas student numbers will continue to grow but at more modest rates. According to OECD figures, our share of the international student market is falling. Studying in the UK is expensive even with the softening of the pound and without the actions of the UK Border Agency. Competition is intensifying, especially at post-graduate level, with a number of European universities mounting courses taught in English. The majority of our overseas students come from a small number of countries. Some of these countries are becoming more self-sufficient. Malaysia is seeking to become a regional HE 'hub'. India is planning huge investment in its universities. China is now the fifth largest importer of students and aims to attract half a million by 2020. China has also displaced the UK as the second largest producer of research. The US has plans to increase its share of international student recruitment. Partnerships with overseas institutions will continue to grow without necessarily becoming more profitable.

All this depends on our maintaining our reputation for quality. I am not alone in worrying about the impact of two decades of marketisation on quality, with concerns about the readiness of many overseas students for degree level study here prominent amongst those that led to the grilling of the QAA CEO by the Commons Select Committee last summer. I see no sign that the sector, or the Government, has grasped what is happening here.

Vital

Overseas students are vital for our institutional finances: without them the sector would be bankrupt whilst many science and technology departments would have few or no postgraduate students. Whilst the financial position of most universities is better than it was, the annual net surplus is still below the 3 to 5 per cent of turnover seen as the necessary minimum. Moreover, revenue, performance and wealth, are unevenly spread, as is research income. Endowments will expand but are unlikely to approach the American scale, and again will be unevenly spread between institutions. The current administration is pushing employers to contribute more to the costs of teaching. There will be an increase in employer funded provision but experience suggests that it is unlikely to amount to a significant proportion of the total (it could also depress the unit of funding).

At the same time, the concentration of research funding (and the funding of research students) will continue, with Oxford, Cambridge, Imperial and UCL having about a third of the research funds from HEFCE and the Research Councils (and an even bigger proportion of the funding from non-EU sources and UK charities). Both research and teaching will be affected by the credit crunch. In his May letter to the Chairman of HEFCE, the then Secretary of State referred to the need for 'efficiency savings' of £400 million by 2010/11, most of them from universities. The letter said nothing about the position beyond 2011, but given the expected rate

of growth in public spending between 2011 and 2014 - 0.7 per cent - as well as the other claims on taxpayers it is hard to imagine that these will be the last or worst cuts, especially if (as we almost certainly will) we have an administration after 2010 that wishes to limit tax increases. In the meantime, HEFCE has cut back on the additional funded numbers of students; this is on top of the withdrawal of support for students on equivalent or lower level courses.

The Secretary of State's letter also spoke of using public spending to 'shape the sector more effectively . . . for example to ensure that universities are incentivised to maintain and grow the courses and programmes which are most in demand by employers and provide the best prospects for students'. He asked HEFCE to consider whether a greater proportion of funding should become 'contestable' to promote 'innovative developments'. Similar themes can be found in the Minister for HE's speech at the UUK Conference and in the First Secretary's TES article. At the same time the Conservatives are considering vouchers, whereby all of the public contribution to the cost of teaching comes through the student.

All this means there will be even greater institutional competition for income, within a more constrained resource envelope. But in contrast to the increasing concentration of research funds, funding for teaching will become more widely dispersed. As well as the new, new universities (formed in 2004), we now have four private institutions with degree awarding powers. There are also to be six new centres under the University Challenge scheme. We also have the prospect of at least one FE college gaining Foundation Degree awarding powers. Although the Shadow Secretary of State is reported to be lukewarm about degree awarding FE colleges, he is enthusiastic about increasing competition for universities generally. It is even possible that there will be price competition on fees within the present cap as universities struggle for income; there is already competition on bursaries.

Whilst the present funding regime may seem generous, students are leaving with debts upwards of £20,000. Estimates of the lifetime earnings advantage of graduates over A-level school leavers have been reduced from the £400,000 or so quoted by Ministers in 2003/04 to £160,000; there have been more recent estimates as low as £100,000. Moreover, these private returns vary by subject studied, institution attended, degree class obtained, and social background. The Guardian reported last year that a third of the students who graduated after 1998 had still to begin repaying their loans.

There have been press reports about the difficulties which recent graduates are or will be facing in gaining suitable employment, and about government responses, such as encouraging employers to offer internships. There is no sign yet that these difficulties have affected student demand or willingness to pay fees. What is clear, however, is that increasing numbers of students are beginning to take costs into account in deciding what and where to study, and will be studying at or closer to

home. This means that location will become an increasingly important competitive factor for institutions, which the increasing costs of travel will reinforce. A trend towards local study also has implications for those universities with large amounts of moderate quality residential accommodation that will not be needed.

Damaging

At the same time, it is hard to see what can be done to reduce costs or raise productivity, at least without damaging quality. Some costs, such as energy costs, are only partly in institutions' hands. Others, such as pension contributions, are politically difficult. Students are increasingly vocal about group size, access to tutors, quality of feedback, etc. and as paying customers can be expected to become more so. Our student/staff ratios are already amongst the highest in the OECD. An increasing proportion of the academic workforce is employed part-time and/or on fixed term contracts. Whilst a greater proportion of teaching, assessment and administration will be delivered electronically, there are unlikely to be significant cost savings. And even if there were to be a pedagogic revolution through advances in ICT, why would universities be better able to exploit it than commercial providers?

Institutions will continue to be subject to pressures from government and employers to be more efficient and 'relevant', and from students to provide a better learning and social experience for 'their' money. As a result, there is unlikely to be any abatement of regulation, indeed the Commons inquiry and the promised Framework Paper on HE are both expected to lead to a strengthening of the external quality regime.

Finally, there remains a backlog of investment in infrastructure, especially for teaching. This reflects the resourcing squeeze under Conservative governments in the 80s and 90s, which the incoming Labour administration did not immediately unwind. Institutions have begun to redress this but there is still a long way to go. So what, against this background, will be the future shape of the sector?

In his presentation to the Conference that accompanied the two UUK reports, the principal author, Nigel Brown, identified three principal drivers of change over the next 20 years: 1. Funding for individuals and institutions - economic conditions and competition for public and private (individual and employer) funds; 2. Increased competition from providers outside the UK HE sector - overseas universities, FE colleges, private providers with capital to invest; 3. Changing labour market demands as employment changes, brokered perhaps through increased employer engagement.

Of these, I should like to highlight what seems to me the central issue, namely, the degree of marketisation that takes place. We are already some way down the marketisation route. In my view, the future structure (and health) of the sector will depend largely on whether and how far we proceed further down this road. But before

we speculate about the future, let us recap on how far we have already come:

1981 Introduction of full cost fees for overseas students
1986 The first Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), introducing a 'quasi-market' for research

1989 The incorporation of the polytechnics, leading to the abolition of the binary line and a single funding and regulatory regime three years later

1990 Introduction of student loans. Increase in the level of tuition fees and reduction in the proportion of funding council grants to institutions (fees still fully covered by the Government)

1998 Introduction of 'top-up' fees

2004 Liberalisation of the criteria for university title

2006 Introduction of variable fees and partial reintroduction of maintenance grants

2007 Liberalisation of the criteria for Foundation Degree awarding powers.

(There has also over this period been a gradual introduction of performance indicators and expansion of information for students.)

The next stage will be the review of the present variable fee cap. I want to comment on the possible structural consequences of a decision to abolish the cap altogether or, what is almost certain at some point, an increase in the level for all or some institutions. I am assuming that the present student support regime will either continue or, more likely, become less generous. In the latter event the 'real' cost of tuition to the student increases by more than the increase in the level of the fee.

Now economic theory would tell you that in these circumstances institutions' charges will begin to vary significantly, and that this will represent the best use of the available resources, public and private. The best and/or most efficient institutions will be able to increase their prices up to £5,000 or even £7,000 (the Russell Group has been working on £8,000 though individual vice chancellors would like £11,000 or more). The weaker and/or less efficient will be able only to charge £3,000 or £4,000, at least until they have raised their quality and/or efficiency. Armed with comprehensive, reliable and impartial information about the quality of the programmes and awards available by subject at each institution, students will choose the best course and institution for them. At the same time, institutions will have the strongest possible incentives to increase their quality and/or efficiency. Students will enjoy the best possible educational experience. The resources - public and private - that society invests in HE will be used in the best possible way.

Now there are some people - some politicians, some ministerial advisers, possibly some civil servants, even possibly some Vice-Chancellors - who actually believe this. Unfortunately, it is complete nonsense. If we want evidence we need look no further than the US. Of course, there are differences between British and American HE. In particular, America has a significant private sector - by 'private' I mean here chiefly private 'not for profit' institutions - funded by a huge flow of private in-

come - from families, companies, foundations and private individuals - which has no parallel elsewhere. America is also a far more capitalistic society. Nonetheless there are sufficient points of resemblance to make the US experience instructive, and anyway it has been the aim of successive governments to move our system in the American direction.

Based mainly on what has happened in America, we can predict that the consequences of price competition between institutions will include: 1. greater stratification of institutions and social groups; 2. reduced institutional diversity; greater internal differentiation within institutions; poorer value for money.

There will also be greater risks to quality and the potential undermining of the relationship of trust that should exist between universities and society, which is essential if universities are to continue to discharge effectively their traditional core functions of advancing and disseminating knowledge in an effective and fair fashion, not to mention continuing to justify the subsidies they receive for teaching and research. I shall be dealing only with the first of these consequences. Before that, let me just say briefly why the economic theory of markets is wrong in relation to HE.

Accurate

The main difficulty in applying market theory to HE is that comprehensive, accurate and impartial information about the quality of programmes and awards at different institutions is impossible to obtain. To quote the American economist of HE Gordon Winston: 'People investing in human capital through a purchase of higher education don't know what they're buying - and wouldn't and can't know what they have bought until it is far too late to do anything about it'.

HE is sometimes called an 'experience good' - a good, the quality of which the consumer is only able to assess as he or she consumes it. Experience goods are usually contrasted with 'search goods', the quality of which can be assessed by the customer before it is purchased. In fact, HE is what Weimer and Vining some years ago called a 'post experience good', the effects of which may not appear for years, and may not even be traceable to a particular experience.

What happens therefore is that prestige - often supplemented by marketing and conspicuous expenditure on things like sports facilities and student residences - becomes a substitute for educational quality in the minds of consumers: students, parents, employers, other funders. This then meshes in with and reinforces the pressures for prestige already present within the academy.

Given the informational difficulties with student education, research performance becomes the key to institutional prestige. To quote another American commentator, Bill Massey: 'Research became the coin of the realm, the best way to get one's ticket punched for institutions and professors alike'.

Finally, there is the close association between prestige and wealth. Some years ago, David Watson and Rachel Bowden pointed to the high correlation (better than 0.9) between an institution's wealth (as denoted by gross income per FTE student) and its position in the Times League Table. This has continued. Huge disparities in institutional wealth remain.

Still another American commentator (Roger Geiger) argues that institutional wealth is the key to winning private resources: 'A crucial fact about the segmented, hierarchical American market is that it mobilises resources from special interests that would never be awarded collectively to the industry. Alumni, individuals, corporations and foundations contribute to colleges and universities principally to enhance their particular quality or effectiveness . . . these revenues, including the income from past gifts preserved as endowments, serve to create and accentuate the qualitative differences that distinguish differential products'. As a number of commentators have pointed out, it is the amount of income from endowments and gifts that is the real dividing line in US HE.

What has happened in America, and what will almost certainly happen in Britain if the cap is lifted or abolished, is that there is an increasing gulf between institutions. Since social class is closely associated with the institution attended, raising the cap will increase still further the gap between the best and least well resourced institutions and those who attend them.

The best summary of the position comes from another American commentator, David Dill: 'Because the new competitive market is characterised by inadequate and inappropriate information, an ambiguous conception - 'academic prestige' - comes to represent academic quality in the public mind, which can lead to a price-quality association that undermines productive efficiency. The distorting influence of prestige in both the US and UK markets means that the educational costs for elite universities provide a 'price umbrella' to the rest of the system and present spending targets of less elite institutions that wish to compete by raising their prices. Competitive markets thereby encourage an academic 'arms race' for prestige amongst all institutions, which rapidly increases the cost of higher education and devalues the improvement of student learning. As noted in both the US and UK, an unregulated academic market can lead to a situation in which no university constituency - students, faculty members or administrators - has a compelling incentive to assure academic standards. This is a recipe for a classic and significant market failure in which the rising social costs of higher education are not matched by equivalent social benefits'.

Roger Geiger has also drawn attention to the growing gulf between the selective and non-selective sectors of US HE. We can begin to see a parallel here in the growing divide between state and private schools in the subjects on offer in sixth forms and progression routes to the 'best' universities.

Whether or not the fee cap is raised as a result of the review, it will eventually be raised, perhaps only for certain, so-called 'world class' universities.. In any case, other aspects of marketisation - especially the combination of an increasing concentration of research funding and increasing competition for teaching funding - will take us in the same direction.

So what will all this mean for the future shape of the sector? The immediate response is likely to be an increase in inter-institutional collaboration to strengthen market position and/or make better use of resources. This will take a number of forms: 1. Local collaboration with other UK HE (and sometimes FE) institutions; 2. Collaboration with institutions overseas; 3. Collaboration with partners outside the sector.

The first is already starting to happen in research. However it isn't easy to achieve, especially in teaching. Older universities will be reluctant to collaborate with newer ones for fear of losing prestige. Newer universities may not want to collaborate with competitors. The second is also already happening: one estimate is that there are some 200,000 students studying outside the EU on courses leading to British qualifications. The third is also starting.

Whilst increased collaboration is clearly going to happen, I anticipate more radical changes. My prediction is that, if present policies continue, by 2015 or thereabouts the majority of HE institutions will belong to one of the following groups: 1. Brand name universities; 2. Convenience providers; 3. All purpose institutions; 4. High quality specialist providers. There will also be some restructuring of the curriculum.

The first group of institutions will consist of a small number of 'brand name' selecting universities able to charge premium fees for virtually any course, and capable of attracting the ablest students and staff through a reputation for teaching and research 'excellence'. Significant numbers of these will be from abroad. Most of the dwindling numbers of people who still favour an academic career will be educated here. Together with the hold that such institutions have on the Government and media, this means that our system will continue to be characterised by inappropriate, 'elite' values. These institutions will also be comparatively successful at raising funds from alumni, philanthropic foundations and business. Status and prestige is the key competitive driver for these institutions.

At the other end of the market, there will be significant numbers of 'convenience' providers offering 'no frills' courses, particularly to older students and students in work. Accessibility, flexibility, responsiveness and customer service are the key drivers here. The staff will be employed on a similar basis to FE lecturers, ie heavy teaching loads and no time allowances for research. These providers will mainly cover applied areas such as business and IT but could extend to professions like teaching and nursing. Staff have little say over the curriculum or methods of assessment. The nucleus of this group will be new private providers, possibly controlled from abroad, together with some larger FE colleges.

Between these groups, there will be a band of economically marginal 'all purpose', multi-campus institutions, mostly based in the conurbations, offering residential HE to those who still want and can afford it. They will have some part-time students. Staff will be conducting research but this will be mostly of an applied nature. This group will include a small number of new 'mixed economy' colleges spanning the current FE/HE boundary. For some courses these institutions will be 'selectors', but for most they will be 'recruiters'. They will be distinguished neither for excellence nor access. Finally, there will continue to be a small number of expensive specialist institutions.

Status

Which group will an existing university or college belong to? This will depend on a number of factors: 1. Its status and reputation, which correlates broadly with the length of time it has been offering its own awards; 2. Its location. Low prestige institutions located away from major population centres will be vulnerable, but so will institutions in urban areas where there are many competitors; 3. The proportion of its core activities which are or could be in 'buoyant' areas; 4. The diversity of its funding sources and especially the flow of private income it is able to attract; 5. Its attractiveness to overseas investors or funders; 6. The scope it has for reducing costs without reducing actual or perceived quality; 7. Its underlying wealth.

The majority of existing institutions will be in the third, 'all purpose' group. Except in specific 'niche' areas, they will be unable to compete on quality or reputation with the 'brand name' places. They will therefore be unable generally to charge premium prices. At the same time, they will be unable to compete on price or service with the second group of 'convenience' providers. These 'all purpose' institutions will be formed through mergers or other forms of rationalisation, especially in London and other areas where institutions are thick on the ground.

Whether these institutions will be covered by a single regulatory regime is a moot point. The RAE has already been redundant these past twelve years or more, with ever more marginal gains in quality and efficiency. By 2015 the QAA may have evolved into an agency which accredits separate self-regulatory associations for each of the groups. But just to be sure, the Government may have created its own quality inspectors, who will be giving most of their attention to the innovators / cost cutters in the convenience and all-purpose groups. The fact that most institutions, but especially the all-purpose institutions, will be working more closely with partners inside and outside the sector will only add to the complexity and cost.

I have proceeded so far on the basis that (a) the financial costs of institutional restructuring are tolerable and absorbable and (b) even if they aren't, they will be offset by financial and other savings and benefits in the long run. Neither is necessarily correct.

On the first, the former HEFCE CEO pointed out recently that the costs of restructuring could well exhaust the modest reserves of most institutions and require further borrowing, so increasing the sector's indebtedness. On the second, it is true that larger and more broadly based institutions are better able to spread risk than smaller and more narrowly focussed ones. However a UUK study some years ago suggested that there were economic benefits from rationalisation only where one partner was weak. Savings in support services were offset by the increased costs of managing a larger, more complex operation.

Curriculum

In parallel with this institutional reconfiguration, there will be a restructuring of the curriculum. Institutions with a wide range of course offerings that receive a significant level of stable revenue are able, through cross-subsidy, to balance programmes that are more or less attractive to students. But the more an institution is subject to student demand, the more it will be forced into 'popular' courses, and the less it is able to preserve provision 'for its own sake'. The market participation of private 'for profit' providers may exacerbate this. Comprehensive 'not for profit' institutions are then less able to protect their more economically vulnerable courses. The result is a reduction in the choices available to students. This has already happened in physics and modern languages. We can expect it to accelerate if entry barriers are lifted and/or competition becomes fiercer.

To offer a summing up: 1. UK HE is coming to the end of a long boom; 2. This boom will be brought to an end by a combination of demographic change, stagnating school achievement levels, increasing international competition, severe public (and private) expenditure constraints, and an unwillingness or inability on the part of institutions and staff to align costs with income; 3. This will reinforce existing tendencies to stratification and fragmentation. These will be exacerbated by greater competition for students and income as a result either of lower entry barriers for providers or an increase in the level of the fee cap, or both; 4. Unless I am wrong, the system will divide into groups much more sharply differentiated by resourcing, reputation and location; 5. This will have disastrous consequences, both domestically and internationally, for the health, cohesion and reputation of UK HE.



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