

A new 'landscape' in Greek public education

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One of the consequences of the latest austerity measures in Greece is the announcement, by the Ministry of Education, of the suspension of recruitment in the public educational sector for the school year 2010-2011. This suspension will affect pre-school as well as primary and secondary education.

According to the deal signed by the Greek government and the 'Holy Trinity' (the I.M.F., the European Commission and the European Central Bank), the current spending on higher education will be reduced by 10 per cent, while the capital expenditure will be gravely affected by the corresponding cut of almost 2 billion Euros in the Greek State Budget for the current financial year. The Ministry of Education announced that in June it will launch a debate on the new legal framework, something that literally means closing down academic departments and/or whole universities!

We should not forget that in the last few years tremendous changes have taken place in the Greek Higher Education sector. New legislation was introduced in 2005 and in 2007 which challenges the traditionally high autonomy of universities and other institutions of HE in matters of administrative regulations, study structures, assessment of students and teachers, financial provisions etc. The Greek state, after a period of relatively low degree of involvement in issues of 'academic quality', is becoming surprisingly 'interventionist'. The most important feature of this legislation is that its provisions link - for the first time in Greek history - the outcomes of the (planned) assessment of the HE Institutes to their future funding.

According to a 2005 Act (No 3374/2005, on 'Quality Assurance in Higher Education and other provisions'), each HE Institute (university or lower-prestige Technological Education Institute / TEI) carries out its own self-evaluation and then undergoes an external evaluation, which is made by a team comprised of various field experts. Self- and external evaluation will be produced at departmental and institutional levels (articles 4-9). The latter report will be published at national level (article 9).

The 2007 Act (No. 3549/2007, on the 'Reform of the Legal Framework of the Structure and Functioning of HE Institutes') establishes provisions for a *new system of funding HE*, which includes a compulsory *four-year economic contract* (of 'academic development', as it is titled), agreed between each HE Institute and the Greek government (ie the Ministries of Education, of National Economy and of the Interior). The actual funding will be based on a formula that, apart from the traditional indicators used so far (ie aggregate numbers of registered students and teaching and administrative staff), will include more detailed and specified indicators of 'quality', such as the number of graduates per year and students who are within the time limits for their course programmes, the amount of external research money acquired etc. Additionally, each HE Institute is required to draft a new *institutional Charter*, in which there will have to be in place - among other things - a forecast about 'other funding sources', apart from the State budget, that might be included in the respective four-year financial planning.

The most important provisions of the new Acts deal with the consequences that follow the HE Institutes' non-compliance with the assessment process and/or the drafting and implementation of a new institutional Charter.

- As far as the former is concerned, in the 2007 Act it is clearly stated that, if the HE Institutes do not comply with the procedures concerning assessment laid down in the new legal framework (especially the four-year economic contract), public (ie State) funding will be *withheld* - except for the staff's salaries (article 5).
- On the other hand, the obligatory character of the adoption of a new institutional Charter raised concerns about the imminent erosion of the HE establishments' autonomy, safeguarded by the Greek Constitution (article 16). Non-compliance with the above requirements will result in the 'suspension of every administrative decision' of the 'clandestine' HE Institute (article 4).

The secession of power by the liberal *New Democracy* government to the social-democratic party (*PASOK*) not only has not brought any change of policy but accelerated the pace of 'reforms'. We should not forget that it was *PASOK*'s leadership that in October 2006 promised to join *New Democracy* (the then governing party) in voting in favour of an amendment to allow 'privatisation' of HE.(1). *PASOK*'s votes were crucial because constitutional amendments require support from 180 out of the 300 MPs. Finally, due to political manoeuvring, *PASOK* withdrew its support for the amendment, but when it came into power continued the cuts in public spending on education (as well as on a number of other 'public goods', such as health, labour-market regulations, social security, environment and public investment in infrastructure), with the latest austerity plan being the epitome of the neo-liberal attack on education.

This attack comprises a number of dimensions: considerable cuts in teachers' salaries (more than 8 per cent); deteriorating standards in higher studies (eg increasing number of student intake matched by decreasing rates of financing by the State authorities); an increasingly salient 'privatisation rhetoric' in government statements (2); continuous and fierce attacks on academic freedom in recent years on the basis of 'social accountability' and 'transparency' in a system supported by 'the taxpayer's money'; a repeated stress on the 'reorganisation' and 'restructuring' of the curricula, which will eventually result in a restriction of the academically oriented courses and a preservation of those courses with more or less direct relevance to employment 'needs'.

As far as academia is concerned, the respective representative body (the *Hellenic Federation of University Teachers' Association*) is now governed by a majority leaning towards or sympathetic to the governing party. Contrary to the past, when attempts to undermine academic autonomy were met with calls for strikes (bringing to a halt teaching and marking) and a range of sit-ins at campuses around the country, now the dominant position in the Federation is, at best, tolerance for the austerity measures, and sometimes outright support. A quick look at the Federation's statements and proposals reveals a defence of the 'emergency' nature of the 'stabilisation' programme, while simultaneously clarifying its leaders' intention for a new 'national plan' for HE development.

On the other side, the Greek universities' Rectors Conference requested changes to the structure and function of Higher Education, seeking a 'reorganisation' of the existing establishments on a completely 'new basis'. The Rectors also offered their unanimous support for the 'stabilisation'

programme and stated that they were ready to respond to the new 'National Call' for action!

The struggles, however, are not easy to fight, nor to predict. Even in a centralised system such as the Greek one there is always room for individual initiative and resistance to top-down decision-making models. A lot of the duties of each individual inside the given structures, as well as a certain amount of demands and orders coming from the central state bureaucracy, are rarely carried out as expected, or never implemented at all. This is due not to an open defiance of the organisational hierarchy - apart from some sporadic attempts made by certain unionised members of the teaching profession - but to two reasons: a) there is a considerable degree of bureaucratic inertia that keeps resisting radical changes concerning teaching, learning and administration of schools; b) the definitions of duties of certain education policy 'players' (university authorities, academics, students and administrative personnel) in the new legal framework (see quality assurance in HE etc) are intentionally left unclear, since the negotiation mechanisms inherent in the system of educational policy-making will eventually define the 'outcomes' of the proposed reforms.

However, one thing is clear: the Greek State seems to be responding - not without resistance, contradictions and even regression - to the global needs of capitalist production, which has been in a tremendous transformation in recent decades. By using its dominant position in the political sphere of the Greek social formation, capital set the agenda for wider changes in educational restructuring, which is actually an 'alignment' of the functioning of educational institutions to the rapidly changing and fluid economic 'necessities', not only at national but also at international level. This will be resisted!

1. Article 16 of the Greek Constitution specifies that universities must be owned and financed by the State, not by private firms or individuals.

2. A controversial decision by the European Court of Justice (24. 10. 2008) is likely to have far-reaching effects on higher education in Greece. The court's decision, based on the 89/48 EC directive, held that the Greek rules on recognition of diplomas are contrary to community legislation. Moreover, the court ruled that only member states where a diploma was awarded may verify its basis, thereby denying any form of control, academic or administrative, to the host member states. In that sense any obstacles derived from the Greek Constitution and the articles 126 and 127 of the 'Maastricht Treaty' (which respects the member states' 'responsibility' on educational matters) might be bypassed on the basis of the 'need' for mutual recognition of vocational rights.

News update: May - June 2010

Week beginning 3/5/10

[Previous week] It emerges via a consultation exercise carried out by management at King's College London (KCL) that they have dropped their plans to make 22 staff in the School of Arts and Humanities there redundant.

Middlesex University announces an intention to close its philosophy courses. The institution has 12 undergraduates on single-honours philosophy courses and a total of 45 who receive some philosophy teaching. Middlesex is currently ranked 13th out of 45 universities in the country which provide philosophy, and includes the prestigious Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy. Six academic staff work in philosophy at Middlesex. The reason for the planned closure is thought to be pressure from the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to concentrate on more highly funded science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects.

In an interview with the *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* conducted before a session led by her at the Association of Colleges (AOC) human re-

sources conference, held in Birmingham, Lucy McLynn, employment specialist with the Bates Wells and Braithwaite law firm, says that: '... there is a rocky road ahead for FE. It is not just a question of trimming figures, but of making radical change in terms of how colleges operate. This is the new norm and the sector has to be ready to deal with that... The issue in many colleges is that people want to do things the way they have always been done. Obviously FE is a strongly unionised sector and there is understandable resistance to compulsory redundancy. A strong union is a challenge'.

UCU members in eleven London colleges in take a day of strike action against cuts and redundancies.

Time to Decide: The Ambivalence of the World of Science towards Education, a report published by Nature Education and based on a survey of 450 university scientists from over 45 countries, finds that, while 77 per cent say teaching and research are equally important, 48 per cent would, if appointing a new member of staff, opt for a high profile researcher with no teaching experience.

Findings of *The Levels of Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy of 13- to 19-year-olds in England, 1948-2009*, a study led by Sheffield University professor Greg Brooks and funded by the Government's Skills for Life Strategy Unit, include: 22 per cent of 16-19 year olds are functionally innumerate; 17 per cent of 16-19 year olds are functionally illiterate; these percentages appear to have been roughly the same for about twenty years.

The crisis at the University of Cumbria deepens. Debts accumulated in the three years since the institution was formed by merger have reached £30m. Management is attempting to 'save' £10m by the end of July. Two thirds of the Ambleside campus has been closed and plans for a £70m campus in Carlisle have been abandoned.

Worcester College of Technology principal Chris Morecroft is elected to succeed St Helens principal Pat Bacon as AOC president. Morecroft's background includes periods as a council education officer in both Rotherham and Sheffield.

In an effort to make £750,000 of cuts in the adult education

budget of Greenwich Community College, its principal, Geoff Pine, has circulated a document titled 'Securing Our Future' in which 91 job cuts are announced. GCSE and A-level courses in modern languages are also at risk.

UCU is opposing an attempt by the employers' side in the joint negotiating committee (JNC) for the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) by which final-salary schemes would be closed to new entrants, the normal pension age would rise to 68, and members' present and future contributions would rise.

The London Citizens' Campaign, a coalition of unions, community organisations and faith-based groups, is to launch during May a campaign aimed at persuading HE institutions in London to pay staff, including contract cleaners, at least £7.60 an hour rather than the statutory minimum of £5.80.

Gloucestershire University has finally sold (for £9.7m to LHA London Limited) its London Campus, on the market since September 2009.

Week beginning 10/5/10

Documents leaked to the *THE* indicate that in 2009-10 De Montfort University, in Leicester, recruited 1,113 students beyond the numbers authorised by HEFCE, and therefore faces a £4m plus reduction in its grant for 2010-11.

Based on responses from 5,000 people, the survey issued annually by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Educa-

tion (NIACE) as part of the publicity for its 'Adult Learning Week', finds big increases in those claiming they intend to undertake some form of study.

Points in a *THE* feature about MPs following the general election include: 231 new MPs were elected; details gathered by communications consultants Madano Partnership indicate that 13 of these have worked in HE while another five have PhDs; Sutton Trust figures indicate 69 percent of these new MPs graduated from research intensive universities, including 28 of them from Oxford or Cambridge; 90 per cent of all MPs are now graduates, up from 72 per cent in 2005; the Commons now includes 150 MPs who, as a result of an NUS campaign, signed a pledge to oppose any rise in tuition fees recommended by Lord Browne's review.

UCU general secretary Sally Hunt tells the *TES* that: 'We hope the new government will bring education back into one department so we can have some joined-up thinking and genuine attempts at lifelong learning policies'.

Aspects of the situation at the University of the Arts London include: the UCU branch is balloting members on strike action and action short of a strike; at one constituent institution, the London College of Communication, Media Faculty dean Julian Rodriguez, said to be an 'upright, committed, enterprising and efficient' manager, has been suspended following allegations of gross misconduct; this institution is being restructured, which

appears to involve a clampdown on payments to associate lecturers and the closure of 16 courses to new entrants; the University as a whole cut costs by £7m in the current year and plans to 'save' a further £4m next; this has involved the threat of redundancy for 163 staff, of whom 33 have been served with compulsory redundancy notices.

A study by the Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning maintains that the total annual investment by private employers in training is £16.2bn, in contrast to the £39bn normally reported, whereas total government spending on training (ie including the funding of FE, the training of public sector employees and £3.7bn of tax relief granted to private sector employers to support training) comes to £25.5bn.

Following a meeting with unions on 5/5/10, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) increases from 0.25 to 0.4 per cent its pay offer for next year.

An Ofsted re-inspection of Doncaster College after less than a year under interim principal John Taylor awards a grade of 3 for achievement and standards, such that these are now judged 'satisfactory' rather than 'inadequate'.

Senior managers and governors at Greenwich Community College have postponed to 17th May a decision on the closure of A-level and GCSE language courses.

In a speech to the Universities Human Resources conference, held in Leicester, Heriot-Watt

University principal Steve Chapman maintains that the UCU claim for a 4 per cent increase is 'just an irrelevance', predicts a possible withdrawal of universities from the UCEA (ie a move to local bargaining) and says that the HE pensions situation 'has got to change and the change has got to be radical'. Nicola Dandridge, CEO of Universities UK (UUK - ie the vice-chancellors) tells the same event that there is 'a feeling' that Lord Browne (ie the former BP CEO conducting the government's HE fees review) 'is very open to increased marketisation and . . . increasing the fees cap'.

160 jobs are at risk at City of Wolverhampton College.

UCU agrees to ballot HE members on plans by the USS to reduce its £3bn deficit by scrapping its final salaries scheme and raising the pension age to 68.

At Regent House, the 'parliament' that nominally governs the running of Cambridge University, academics vote by 1,119 to 419 and by 988 to 625 to reject plans by management to make it easier for them to be sacked.

Week beginning 17/5/10

In submissions to the Browne review: the Russell Group (the 20 or so poshest universities) calls for universities to be allowed to set their own fees ('up to £9,000 a year if necessary') and for student loans to be subject to a 'real' rate of interest; the University Alliance (one group of former polys) argues that student loan bonds

could be sold to private buyers, thus releasing money for the expansion of student numbers; the Million+ Group (the main group of former polys) advocates a maximum 2 per cent rate of interest on student loans provided by the state and an extension of the graduate contribution period from 25 to 35 years; in a joint submission, the UCU and Compass, the Labour Party pressure group around John Cruddas described in *THE* as 'the left-wing think-tank', advocate more funding from business, abolition of tuition fees and an increase in corporation tax to the G7 average.

Points in a *Guardian* round-up of struggles in FE include: at The Manchester College (TMC) UCU claims that 440 lecturers face being forced onto contracts that would increase class contact and cut holidays, with only 156 able to stay on existing conditions; also at TMC, there is an attempt to cut five weeks holiday and increase by up to 260 teaching hours a year the 'caseload' (management's term) of 203 'trainers', leaving only 182 such trainers on existing contracts; Rachel Davies, principal of Somerset College (in Taunton) is trying to force lecturers onto a new contract while also putting 44 full-time equivalent posts at risk; management at both Barnsley College and Doncaster College has pulled back from schemes to introduce associate lecturers; 90 posts are at risk at a college in Petroc (North Devon); UCU has revised from 3,083 to 4,300 its prediction about the number of posts at risk; UCU head of FE Barry Lovejoy explains that this figure, however, relates to only

63 colleges, and notes that there are at present 20 live disputes.

What More Can Be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities?, a report published by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), finds that the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people are still seven times more likely to attend an elite university than the most disadvantaged 40 per cent, and in the case of some institutions 15 per cent more likely.

The 157 Group (of large FE colleges with favourable inspection results) publishes two policy papers. One of these, *Strong Colleges Build Strong Communities*, argues for college governors to be freed from excessive government regulation. In the other, *Learning and Skills Need Local Leadership*, policy adviser Mick Fletcher expresses 157 Group support for the Tories' plan to scrap the Skills Funding Agency and reintroduce the FE Funding Council, which between 1993 and 2000 presided over unprecedented levels of corruption across much of the FE service.

In a *THE* interview, universities and skills minister David Willetts describes as 'a piece of fiscal magic' Alistair Darling's £270m University Modernisation Fund, announced in March as a way of funding an additional 20,000 HE places mainly in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subject areas.

In a document for members in which merger with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) is advocated, Association for College Management (ACM)

CEO Peter Pendle says that: 'To put it bluntly, the stark reality is that ACM's survival cannot be guaranteed without the transfer'. (ACM claims to have at present about 4,000 members. Merger would involve forming an Association for Management in Education [AMIE] section within ATL.)

Under pressure from legal action by the university, 50 students and lecturers at Middlesex University end after eleven days a sit-in at the Trent Park site aimed at preventing closure of philosophy courses there.

In a *TES* opinion article, AOC senior skills policy manager Teresa Frith expresses concern at the too-rapid transition, due in August 2010, from the national Qualification Framework (NQF) to the Qualifications and Credit Framework, claiming that 'up to half a million 16-18 year olds will have no full time study programme this September if NQF qualifications are withdrawn before QCF replacements are available'.

Based on a survey of 694 employers, a CBI study, *Ready to Grow: Business Priorities for Education and Skills*, claims that 51 per cent of those polled believe they will soon be unable to fill graduate posts. 43 per cent of respondents said they were 'satisfied' with FE colleges' 'responsiveness' to their training requirements, as against 65 per cent satisfied with private providers and 48 per cent with universities.

Tim Oates, head of research at Cambridge Assessment (ie the parent company controlling the OCR awarding body) comes out

against the tendency of Ofqual increasingly to require what he sees as an over-reliance on students' prior exam performance when grade boundaries disputes in GCSEs and A-levels are being resolved.

As the National Joint Forum on FE pay holds its first meeting to discuss the claim for 2010-11, the AOC makes public 'research' showing that a majority of principals favour a pay freeze (softened by a 0.2 per cent non-consolidated payment said to be worth £5.00 a month for a typical lecturer during that year only).

UCU members at University College London (UCL) suspend their action after management announce that compulsory redundancies are unlikely.

Greenwich Community College finally decides to axe A-level and GCSE courses in modern languages.

Cambridge-based correspondence study provider the National Extension College (NEC), founded in 1963 by, amongst others, leftwing education sociologist Michael Young, is set to merge with the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) with effect from mid-July.

In a presentation to an open session of the Browne review of HE fees, held at Bristol University, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt says that: 'There is a suspicion that this is not going to be about whether we should have additional fees, but how much'. Interviewed after the session, NUS president-elect Aaron Porter offers his opinion that: 'What we have seen today is very strong evidence of the

difficulties of bringing a fees market into higher education because of the lack of quality information. It's basic economics - the market cannot operate effectively if the information is not there'.

At Sussex University, a disciplinary panel drops charges of 'riotous behaviour' against six students involved in the March anti-job cuts occupation there, but fines them for 'injurious conduct' and requires them to write letters of apology.

Speaking to an audience of academics at the final conference of the Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) initiative (ie the £315m scheme launched in 2003 and aimed at improving teaching in HE), held in Sheffield, Bradford University lecturer Sean Walton argues that there is 'a pedagogic crisis in higher education' and that CETLs are needed more now than ever. (A THE survey indicates that only 11 of the 54 universities in England with CETLs are able to give details of income which could be used to sustain them.)

Features of the situation at Cumbria University include: on 17th May a new 2010-2020 business plan recognises that the original plan submitted in July 2008 is 'simply not achievable'; one reason for this appears to be that the university failed to apply for a £25m capital investment grant from the LSC, with the result that the Newton Rigg site became 'unsustainable'; on 19th May, it is announced that Peter McCaffery, appointed as vice chancellor in July 2009, has left, apparently because he had accepted the job on the basis

that the likely deficit would be £3m, as opposed to the £30m now thought likely by the end of this financial year.

Week beginning 24/5/10

Middlesex University management suspend two professors and a senior lecturer at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (Peter Osborne, Peter Hallward and Christian Kerslake - ie three out of six staff) pending investigation into their involvement in sit-ins aimed at preventing the closure of philosophy courses at Middlesex. Four students involved in these sit-ins are to undergo a disciplinary hearing scheduled for 28/5/10.

Commenting on an Ofqual study of the 2009 A-level results, which suggests that the percentage of candidates achieving A* grades is likely to be very much higher in traditional subjects than in areas such as media studies, Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference chairperson (ie poshest schools' spokesperson) Andrew Grant admits: 'Our own modelling suggests a higher proportion of A*s will be secured by independent-sector students'.

Cuts to the overall HE budget announced since the start of 2010 now total £1.1bn. It looks likely that cuts to teaching budgets will be the main method used by university managers to meet a government requirement, announced on 14th May, for a further £82m in 'efficiency savings'.

McDonalds, which has been accredited as an awarding

body, claims that 1,200 of its shift managers have now qualified via its level 3 management programme, while nearly 6,000 have signed up for its level 2 apprenticeship in hospitality since this was launched in January 2009, and over 550 have applied to study for McDonalds' BTEC certificate in work skills, launched in March 2010.

Publication of the Ross-CASE [= Council for Advancement and Support of Education] report on fund raising by universities, covering 2008-09, reveals that: in that year the total actually obtained rose to £511m, from £430m the year before, with £530m pledged; 48 per cent of new pledges and 51 per cent of actual cash income from such sources went to either Oxford or Cambridge; excluding these two institutions, 24 per cent of the money received went to other Russell Group universities, 7 per cent to 1994 Group (smaller, research-intensive) universities, and 2 per cent each to Million+ and University Alliance members.

Via the Queen's Speech, ministers announce plans to divert £200m from the Train to Gain budget, with £150m of this to be used to create 50,000 new 'apprenticeship' places and £50m to be spent on funding capital projects.

Following a campaign of opposition conducted via Facebook, Leeds University removes from its website a social-networking code warning students that they must not use such avenues to criticise the institution.

UCU members at The Manchester College ballot for

strike action over management plans to introduce different contracts for those teaching people up to age 19 and those teaching people over 19. Commenting on this move, UCU national official Christiane Ohsan says: 'The disarray that will be created by this unworkable two-tier system will leave the college creaking at the seams with potential discrimination and dismissal claims, and consequently unable to defend itself in the face of likely government funding cuts'.

In a submission to the Browne review of HE fees, the AOC maintains that: '... there may be an opportunity for the HEFCE to secure cost-effective expansion of higher education participation by directing funding towards [FE] colleges'. (It also opposes raising fees unless more scholarships and loans can be provided without increasing costs to the Government.)

Points made in a *TES* opinion piece, titled 'Corporate muscle can help reshape the sector', by KPMG Audit plc partner Andy Argyle include: 'We need an open debate to consider ways to overcome these barriers' [ie the barriers caused by 'current pension and tax arrangements' to private finance involvement in FE colleges]; 'The aim should be to create a competitive environment in which the most efficient institutions in the public and private sectors can play a role in reshaping FE'.

At a meeting with unions over HE pay, the UCEA (employers' side) refuses to discuss a national job security deal or an increase in its 0.4 per cent offer for 2010-11.

Review of the Cost of Administering the Education System in Wales, a report prepared for the Welsh Assembly by the consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) finds that 52 per cent of university funding in Wales is spent on support and back-office services, and that less than 50 per cent of HE staff there are involved in either teaching or research.

Week beginning 31/5/10

UCU annual conference, held in Manchester: agrees to greylist (ie encourage members to boycott) universities which withdraw from national bargaining over pay and conditions (the institutions currently moving towards this include London South Bank and Staffordshire); agrees to ballot for a national strike in the autumn term if employers refuse to negotiate on avoiding redundancies; hears that a UCU email survey of 35,078 members who are also members of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) produced 21,214 responses, 92.6 per cent of which supported UCU's proposals for pension changes rather than those of the Employers Pension Forum; is informed that about 2,300 compulsory redundancies are currently planned across HE; agrees to begin ballot preparations for action over FE pay early in the academic year 2010-11; hears calls for UCU to survey branches on whether the Institute for Learning (IFL) should be abolished; votes to oppose any new plans by FE colleges to sponsor academies; on the basis of reports from, in particular, Westminster Kingsway College, calls on the

leadership to agree with the AOC guidelines on observations which would outlaw unannounced visits; criticises college governors for being an undemocratic and incestuous clique.

In a paper written for the HE Policy Institute (HEPI), former vice-chancellor Roger Brown argues that the (HE) Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and HE Academy (HEA) should help to create sector-wide networks of staff who would compare the quality of student work and marks awarded - ie as a step towards tackling the problem of the currency and equivalency across institutions of degree classifications such as 2.1, 2.2 etc.

In his first interview since taking office, FE, skills and lifelong learning minister (and Conservative) John Hayes confirms that 'Train to Gain in the form that we've endured it in recent years is over'.

Figures released by the HE Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal that: 72.6 per cent of academic staff who are under 30 are on fixed-term contracts, as compared to 22.8 per cent of those over 40; overall, 64.8 per cent of academic staff are on permanent contracts (67.4 per cent of males and 61.4 per cent of females); between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the proportion of teaching-only academic staff on permanent contracts rose from 38.3 to 52 per cent; over the same period, the percentage of research-only staff on permanent contracts rose from 11.1 per cent to 26.1 per cent.

Points in *Delivering Value for Money through Infrastructural Change*, a report commissioned

from the consultants KPMG by the LSC in July 2009, include: 'The financial health of the FE sector is in general deteriorating rapidly and requires urgent action'; financial pressures could lead to the loss of 50 out of the remaining 270 general FE colleges; private and voluntary training providers are actively interested in taking over colleges' entire delivery; 'For true competitive neutrality [ie between such providers and existing FE set-ups] it will be essential to address the issue of pensions which are a huge deterrent to the entry of private sector providers into the market'.

UCU members at Sussex University are balloting on whether to call for an academic boycott of the institution over redundancies.

In a letter to Christopher Trinick, chairperson of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA - ie the quango launched on 1/4/10), education secretary Michael Gove confirms that legislation to abolish the QCDA will be introduced in the autumn, and meanwhile development of 14-19 diplomas is to be restricted to awarding bodies, to the exclusion of the QCDA.

Via the UK Council for Graduate Education's conference on meeting the needs of international students, evidence comes to light that the requirement placed by the UK Borders Agency (UKBA) on universities to monitor such students is leading some institutions to require people registered for PhDs to clock in using swipe cards, sign in with school secretaries, and/or undertake

'skills' courses that would previously have been optional.

Four Lib Dem MPs, including Cambridge MP Julian Huppert and Eastbourne MP Stephen Lloyd, table a Commons motion aimed at relaxing the requirement, introduced by the previous government, by which foreign students wishing to improve their English language skills on feeder courses prior to entering a UK university will be allowed to enter the UK only if they already possess the equivalent of a high grade GCSE in English.

A judge at Birmingham Crown Court sentences former Shropshire LSC adult learning director Paul Kent to four and a half years' imprisonment for obtaining pecuniary advantage by deception and on eleven counts of receiving corrupt payments. Three of Kent's accomplices are also given jail sentences (one suspended) and his fourth accomplice, his wife, awaits sentence. Kent, originally employed (and sacked) by Prudential Assurance, used a false CV to get a job at Kidderminster College, then another at Sutton Coldfield College and finally with the LSC from June 2003. While there he married his internal funding manager and together they stole £37,000 to spend on a honeymoon cruise to Thailand, Singapore and the Maldives, plus £15,000 for designer watches, the cost of an Audi TT as a wedding present for her, and £300,000 for a house. Additionally, he corruptly channelled £94,000 in adult learning funding to a former school-friend (who then paid £29,000 back to him) and £266,000 for consultancy work to a former

LSC marketing coordinator (who paid £80,000 back to him), and £920,000 to a corrupt private training provider (who passed a further £190,000 back to him). The total stolen through contract-rigging was £1.3m, of which Kent himself pocketed £270,000.

Week beginning 7/6/10

In a vote conducted amongst UCU, Unite and Unison members at Writtle College (of agriculture) in Essex, for which the turnout is 81 per cent, 91 per cent support a motion of no confidence in management over its decision to make 16 compulsory redundancies on top of 13 voluntary ones.

UCU head of FE Barry Lovejoy welcomes the appointment by Welsh Assembly children, schools and lifelong learning minister Leighton Andrews of a review group to investigate proposals for new governance systems for FE colleges there, part of whose brief is to end incorporation. At the same time, Colleges Wales (ie AOC equivalent) communications director Sylvia Davies tells the *TES* that Andrews has assured her that a return to local authority control is ruled out. (When standing for the leadership of Welsh Labour, the new first minister Carwyn Jones included amongst his manifesto promises: 'Ending incorporation of FE colleges, with reforms to governance structures to give proper representation to staff, students and communities and an all-Wales contract for FE lecturers'.

On David Willetts' instructions, HEFCE is to write to universi-

ties requiring them to supply by the end of August 'Graduate Employability Statements' of up to 3,000 words which are to be displayed on the Government's Unistats website, so that people making UCAS applications for 2011-12 can look at them. (The statements would explain how each university supports students in such areas as careers guidance and work placements.)

There is an attempt by several vice-chancellors to claim that Vince Cable is using publicity about their big salary increases as a pretext for cutting overall HE funding.

Michael Gove announces his intention to 'save' between £21m (*TES*) and £22.7m (*Guardian*) by axing the previous government's scheme for 'academic' 14-19 diplomas and scaling back on government promotion of diplomas generally.

Participants in a seminar held at Leeds University under the auspices of the Social Policy Association and the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee report unfavourably on a HEFCE pilot of the proposed research excellence framework (REF) methodology in the areas of social policy and social work. Conducted at 11 universities, this pilot has reportedly revealed big practical difficulties in measuring the 'impact' of research activity.

According to *Who Listens? Bullying in Further and Higher Education*, report of a UCU survey carried out in November 2008, 41 per cent of the 324 FE employees who responded

claimed to have been bullied at work in the previous six months, as against 34 per cent of HE respondents.

Edinburgh University is to hold its annual council meeting, which all graduates are in theory entitled to attend, from 11th to 13th June in Hongkong.

Futuretrack: Part-time students, a study conducted by Birkbeck College and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) for the HE Careers Service Unit (HECSU), in which nearly 4,000 part-time undergraduate students across the UK are tracked, reportedly finds that: '... the assumption underpinning government policy [ie regarding financial support for such students] is flawed. Relying on business contributions for part-time study puts its 'fairness' in jeopardy. It means that course selection is driven by the potentially short-term views of the employer rather than the more personal long-term view of the student'.

In a speech at Oxford Brookes University, David Willetts says that Labour had left HE 'on shaky foundations' and that 'It's very hard asking students to pay higher fees to prop up final-salary pensions [for HE staff]', and among other things floats the idea that universities might be allowed to outsource exams to external providers. Interviewed in the press, he says that the cost of degrees is 'a burden on the taxpayer'.

Union members at the VT Group (ie the training arm of the defence contractor Vosper Thornycroft) lobby a meeting of shareholders during which the

latter vote in favour of VT's acquisition by Babcock International Group plc. (VT, which claims to be 'the UK's largest learning provider', as well as 'a major player in very different hi-tech and service industries including engineering, automotive, hospitality and retail', announced a group-wide pay freeze in March 2010.)

Week beginning 14/6/10

In the Queen's Birthday Honours List, Newcastle College 'Group' union-bashing chief executive Jackie Fisher becomes a Dame Commander of the British Empire, while former Tottenham College NATFHE chairperson and more recently Newham College principal Martin Tolhurst becomes a CBE.

Figures published by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA - the body that deals with student complaints against universities in England and Wales) reveal that: between 2008 and 2009 there was a 12 per cent increase in complaints; over the last two years, the increase has been 37 per cent; last year, 1,007 students made such complaints; the proportion of complaints upheld at all by OIA fell from 23 per cent in 2008 to 18 per cent in 2009; the proportion upheld fully fell from 6.5 per cent to 5 per cent; in 2009, 75 per cent of complaints were found not to be justified, up from 71 per cent in 2008; in 2009, 11 per cent of complaints related to accusations of cheating; in the same year, over 20 per cent of complaints were made by students from outside the EU; in 2009 the OIA awarded £163,343 in compen-

sation to complainants, with £45,000 (to a PhD student who was suspended from teaching) the biggest single payout.

In partnership with Basildon, Colchester and Harlow Colleges, Essex County Council has set itself up as an apprentice training agency in the field of mechanical engineering, using £600,000 of European Social Fund match funding. In the last six months, 45 companies in the county have each taken on at least one apprentice under this scheme.

UCU members at Sussex University have voted to strike on 18 and 21/6/10 over redundancies. A dispute at King's College London has been suspended after management agreed to review plans to cut 205 jobs. A dispute at London University Institute of Education has ended after management dropped plans for compulsory redundancies. UCU members at Glasgow University are balloting for action against 50 threatened job cuts.

By a majority of 23, MPs on the Commons select committee on education elect as its chairperson (and successor to Labour's Barry Sheerman) the rightwing Tory MP for Beverley and Holderness, Graham Stuart. (Stuart attended a boarding school in Scotland which now charges over £25,000 a term in fees, followed by Selwyn College, Cambridge. He says that: '... you will probably have to focus more on showing those people who are not up to the job [of teaching] that they might find more productive work elsewhere'.) MPs on the business, innovation and skills select committee elect as its

chairperson Labour MP for West Bromwich West, Adrian Bailey.

Former Lib Dem leader and St Andrews University chancellor Menzies Campbell tells the *THE* that he will vote in the Commons against any increase in HE tuition fees proposed by the coalition government following the Browne review (ie he will stick by Lib Dem policy as stated prior to the election).

In a letter to Skills Funding Agency (SFA) CEO Geoff Russell, business secretary Vince Cable sets out aspects of the Government's spending plans for 2010-11. These include £3.5bn to support training places, and a further £1bn to fund other areas of FE spending, including £550m for apprenticeships and £757m for other work-based learning.

A survey conducted jointly by the Women's Leadership Network and the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) of 470 women, 'mainly managers' (*TES*) working in FE, finds that 42 per cent of white respondents claimed to have experienced actual barriers to career progression, as against 75 per cent of black respondents. (The report of this research, produced by WLN, is funded by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service.)

The judicial review hearing into the refusal by the LSC to reimburse Grimsby College of FHE for £3.7m which the latter spent in developing a rebuilding project starts at Leeds administrative court. Lawyers for the LSC claim that when the Treasury and former Department for Innovation, Universi-

ties and Skills (DIUS) gave the LSC an extra £350m to help with the Building Colleges for the Future fiasco, they stipulated that this could only be spent on new projects (ie could not be used to compensate colleges for costs already incurred).

In a speech at City and Islington College (the principal of which - Frank McLoughlin - was formerly a lecturer in General Studies, and is now chairperson of the 157 Group of colleges), skills minister John Hayes announces measures aimed at freeing such colleges from financial constraints. These include allowing them to vire money between budget heads, an end to Ofsted inspections for them and an end to the requirement that principals everywhere complete the Principals' Qualifying Programme. Arguing that the line between FE and HE should be 'a permeable membrane, not an iron curtain', Hayes claims that the coalition government will usher in 'a renaissance of vocational study' (*THE*), such that now '[FE] is no longer the poor relation. Cinderella is not just going to the ball, she's met her prince'.

UCU members at City College Birmingham and Wolverhampton College have voted to strike on 21/6/10 in opposition to job cuts. Members at Birmingham Metropolitan College have voted to take action short of a strike over this issues. (The number of jobs threatened at each of these institutions is, respectively, 78, 160 and about 100.)

Speaking at a conference organised by the Chartered Institute for Securities & Invest-

ment and sponsored by BPP, the only UK-based private provider with degree awarding powers, David Willetts says that: 'It is very important that we have a properly diverse [HE] sector and that involves recognising the role of new external providers like BPP . . .' (It emerges that BPP has commissioned from the law firm Eversheds a study listing suggestions for how the Government could remove barriers to private companies' entry into the HE 'market'.)

Week beginning 21/6/10

The *TES* publishes a letter from 14 people prominently involved with the National Extension College (NEC) in the past. In the letter, mainly extracted from a letter sent by the same group in March to the current NEC trustees, they argue against the merger with the Learning and Skills Network (LSN) and that: 'an independent NEC, controlling its own destiny and, therefore, free and able to abide by its original principles, can and should continue'.

The BP Foundation has given Cambridge University over £4m, which the latter will use to set up a professorship in earth sciences. This comes on top of the endowment provided by BP which in 2000 allowed Cambridge to set up its BP Institute.

It emerges that union-bashing former Wirral Metropolitan College principal Jenny Shackleton is now working as head of skills development at UKSkills, the organisation which manages the UK entry for WorldSkills, the international 'skills Olympics'.

In *Financial Sustainability and Efficiency in Full Economic Costing of Research in UK Higher Education Institutions*, report of a review commissioned by the previous government in November 2009, former Southampton University vice-chancellor Sir Bill Wakeham recommends that institutions make annual efficiency savings of 5 per cent by cutting the indirect costs of research (eg libraries and admin staff) for the next three years.

Points in *TES* coverage of George's Osborne's emergency budget and its likely effects on FE include: Osborne has axed the Young Person's Guarantee (of work or training) in order to 'save' £450m a year; the AOC has calculated that Osborne's decision to raise VAT to 20 per cent from January 2011 could cost colleges an extra £45m a year; a survey by outsourcing contractor Capita FHE reveals that 25 per cent of colleges intend to deal with the financial situation by focusing solely on reducing staffing and resources costs (ie as opposed to also trying to maximise income); 157 Group executive director Lynne Sedgmore says that 'The size of the cuts facing the sector will leave colleges little scope for pay awards over the next two years'; there is general agreement amongst FE management spokespersons that Osborne's 25 per cent public sector spending cuts will affect colleges even though they are nominally independent corporations.

There are suggestions that the VAT increase could add between £70m and £100m a year to universities' running costs. Commenting on the situation

HE is likely to face after the Comprehensive Spending Review announcement on 20/10/10 (ie the anticipated 25 per cent spending cut), Million+ group chairperson Les Ebdon says: 'The net effect [ie of the emergency budget] is that there will be less opportunity for people to go to university. The only way to square the circle is a huge increase in fees'.

From this summer, the shop Harrods is to offer employees the chance to undertake a two year course leading to an honours degree in sales delivered jointly with Anglia Ruskin University.

The Government announces that development of the extended 14-19 diploma is to end, and removes from schools the obligation to offer students access to all 14 diplomas.

A survey of 2,700 young people, conducted by Ipsos MORI for the Sutton Trust charity, finds that: if HE fees were to be raised to £5,000 a year, 66 per cent say they would still be likely to go on to university; if fees were to be raised to £7,000, only 45 per cent say they would go; and if fees were to be raised to £10,000, only 26 per cent say they would go.

The five unions involved in pay and conditions talks with the UCEA (HE employers) support a proposal from Unite that the agenda for these talks should include the idea of universities agreeing to remit fees for the children of their own employees.

Where we stand:

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

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

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

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

Report on NUT National Conference 2010

Philippe Harari

The annual Conference of the National Union of Teachers has always been a very lively affair. Unlike the conferences of the main political parties, it does not consist of a stage-managed PR exercise but a genuinely democratic decision making process. The reason it is lively is that delegates hold a wide range of different opinions and the debate is always of a very high quality. Voting can be quite a dramatic business and you always leave the conference emotionally exhausted, but having felt that you contributed properly to the formation of Union policy.

This year's Conference, in Liverpool, felt quite different as almost every single vote was unanimous or nearly unanimous. There were still many excellent speeches to listen to and there have been no changes to Conference procedure, so why have things changed?

This is partly because Conference debates between a relatively moderate Executive and more radical delegates over 'political' issues such as affiliating to 'Stop the War' and the setting up of a political fund figured much less this year, as many of these issues have now been agreed upon. Most of the debates were on clearly educational topics, like SATs, academies, supply teaching and early years' provision, where there is widespread agreement that NUT policy on these matters has a lot more to offer than the plethora of government initiatives and creeping privatisation.

It was also a result of the recognition by almost everyone at Conference that, whichever party forms the next government, teachers' pay, pensions and working conditions will face some of the worst attacks ever; and that the only way we can defend both our own interests and sanity and the quality of educational provision is by being united in opposition to the cuts and increases in workload planned.

Of course this does not mean that the Conference has now become a rubber-stamping process. There were two card votes (called for when a show of hands fails to provide a clear 'for' or 'against') and lots of excellent and thought-provoking speeches having a real impact on delegates' voting intentions, while the voting process is just as open and democratic as it has always been. It is true though that the Union has shifted politically towards the left, and many of us consider this to be an excellent thing.

So what were the policies debated and agreed by this year's Conference?

Workload

Delegates unanimously passed a motion calling on the Government to directly negotiate with unions over workload, a moratorium on new initiatives and an end to excessive assessments such as APP. It was agreed to publicise our campaign in preparation for a national ballot on action enabling members to work to contract.

Teacher mental health

Concern was raised about the National College for Leadership of Schools' and Children's Services and the training they offer for headteachers. It was agreed that headteacher members, who are under pressure from external sources to adopt inappropriate management styles that threaten the mental health of staff, need support from the Union. It was also agreed to call for training for health and safety advisors on the setting up of school-based health and safety committees as a way of supporting Union safety representatives in tackling bullying and stress in their schools.

SATs

Conference was addressed by Mick Brookes, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), who spoke on the joint NUT/NAHT campaign on assessment. NUT members on the leadership scale in primary schools have since been successfully balloted to boycott SATs. He also reiterated both Unions' opposition to any new assessment that allows league tables to be formed. Children's authors Michael Rosen and Alan Gibbons both spoke passionately in their support of the campaign and about encouraging reading for pleasure and the reading of whole texts. They both criticised the fact that some new schools are now built

without a library, even though it is still a statutory requirement when building a new prison.

Academies

Speaker after speaker attacked the privatisation of education and particularly the proposed 'Swedish Model Free Schools'. One delegate called on us to respond with the 'Greek Model' of industrial action.

In her closing speech at the end of Conference, General Secretary Christine Blower highlighted a book that she described as essential reading: *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* by Dianne Ravitch. Ravitch was an advisor in George Bush's education team, but has since seen the error of her ways and tells the story of what she calls the 'wrenching transformation in my perspective on school reform'. The educational ideas she had long been enthusiastic about - testing, accountability, choice and markets - have been 'hijacked', she writes, by the privatisers, particularly the charter school movement.

Early years

Conference called for members to say no to increased working hours, for a EYFS survey to monitor implementation of the extended provision, and the setting up of EY teacher and LA forums to negotiate on assessment, workload and how to effectively introduce new initiatives. There was a call to coordinate action, including strike action, across schools, associations and regions where contact hours were increased. Delegates called for a high profile campaign about issues affecting members, and to ensure pedagogic practice was not being weakened. Conference called for work with other unions and organisations which successfully encouraged the Government to delay the introduction of the SFF, and formulate a workable alternative. There was a call against the 'educate' model in favour of all schools and settings led by qualified teachers with QTS.

Supply teaching

Delegates called for supply teachers to be brought back under the control and employment of local authorities. In the meantime, there was a call for all agencies to be required to join the teachers' pension scheme. There was a call for reps in schools, when supply teachers are not paid according to School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, to approach their heads or governors and demand that supply teachers are paid properly.

OFSTED

OFSTED was described as 'the school bully'. Speakers called for an exploration of legal routes to enable members to be balloted on boycotting OFSTED and for a campaign against the effects of single subject inspections in primary schools. Several teachers criticised inspectors and suggested that they get a proper job like teaching. The proposed 'School Report Card' was unanimously rejected by Conference.

Proposed cuts in public services

Conference called for a defence of current education funding and public services, and a retention of the teacher pension arrangements secured in 2005. Speakers pointed out that, because millions of people in the private sector have been robbed of their pensions, to make it fair we should be robbed of ours. It was pointed out that our pensions are money that we have paid to the Government in the past and we demand that it is paid back in full when the time comes.

Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) addressed Conference. He argued that public servants should not be expected to pay for the economic crisis and that the deficit could be paid for by the Government putting more effort into collecting the £130 billion in uncollected tax each year. That, along with scrapping Trident and ID cards, would pay for the deficit. Conference agreed to call on the TUC to coordinate industrial action in opposition to any programme of public spending cuts. It also congratulated the RMT and UNITE for their determination to protect their members and called on the Union to lobby the TUC to campaign in repealing anti Trade Union laws.

Conference was to have been addressed by a speaker taking part in the British Airways dispute. However, she felt too threatened to appear in person and a written statement was read out instead. The UNITE Union had found savings of £62 million (very close to the BA target) but BA rejected this and so members were forced to ballot for action. Staff have been intimidated and threatened and have had travel concessions removed. Press has been very one-sided, with quotes of grossly inflated salaries compared to low cost airlines. BA cabin staff provide a different service and are trained to deliver babies and fire fight, not just serve tea and coffee. The dispute is not about cost saving, it is about destroying conditions of service. When BA boss Willy Walsh worked for Aer Lingus, he was quoted as saying: 'A reasonable man gets nowhere in negotiations'.

Jim Fyrth

Richard Clarke

Jim Fyrth, who died in Torbay on May 24, aged 92, was a distinguished historian and adult educator with a special interest in trade union and labour history. Before the Second World War he worked as a political organiser for the Communist Party and was prominent in the anti-fascist movement. During the war, he joined the army and like other 'college trained' volunteers was allocated to the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), established to educate and motivate British troops. Assigned to an Indian Tank Brigade he made links with local CP branches in India and Malaya and like other socialists in the ABCA his educational activities went some way beyond what was envisaged by the military command, effectively forming a second 'people's front' in the armed forces and preparing the way for the Labour landslide victory in the 1945 election.

Most of Jim's working life after the War was as Staff Tutor in History in London University's (then) Extra-mural Department where he became a hugely popular teacher to WEA classes and to what was then a significant educational programme for trades unionists run in collaboration with the TUC. Jim's writings indicate the breadth of his interests; his books include *An Indian Landscape 1944-1946* (SHS 2001), *The Foundry Workers: A Trade Union History* (with Henry Collins, AUFW 1959), *Men and Masters* (Ginn, 1972), *Science, History and Technology* (with Maurice Goldsmith, Cassel, 1965), *British Fascism and the Popular Front* (ed, Lawrence & Wishart 1985), *Labour's High Noon: Government and Economy, 1945-1951* (ed, Lawrence & Wishart 1993), and *Labour's Promised Land? Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945-1951* (ed, Lawrence & Wishart 1995). The Spanish Civil War was a particular interest, with *The Signal Was Spain: The Spanish Aid Movement in Britain, 1936-1939* (ed, Lawrence & Wishart 1985), and *Women's Voices of the Spanish Civil War* (with Sally Alexander, eds 1991).

Jim touched the lives of everyone he met. In my case, as a very green lecturer (in ecology) in the 1970s, he taught me how to teach, bringing me in for 'environment' sessions with London Transport shop stewards where I quickly learnt that 'education' was so much more than just 'lecturing'. Jim was a freethinker, challenging dogma and orthodoxy of left and right and believed in engagement

and practice. His classes in trade union history and law featured 'hands-on' sessions - media writing, negotiating, campaigning. Jim was a 'mixer'; he was active in the London History Workshop, in the Socialist History Society, the Society for the Study of Labour History. Jim was a fixture at social events, he always had a sketch to contribute and the 'events' for other students hosted by his TU groups at Extra-Mural Summer Schools were highlights of the week.

Jim's first wife, Gladys, died in 1980. He is survived by their daughter, Debbie, and by his second wife, Geraldine, and stepson David and his family.

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

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

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Grown-up bullying

Philippe Harari

The Office of Children and Young People's Services' Anti-Bullying Strategy defines bullying as a persistent, deliberate attempt to hurt or humiliate someone.

There are various types of bullying, but most have three things in common:

1. It is deliberately hurtful behaviour.
2. It is repeated over time.
3. There is an imbalance of power, which makes it hard for those being bullied to defend themselves.

I suspect that most young people who are victims of bullying believe that this is something that young people do to each other and that it does not exist in the adult world. Indeed, some adults argue that 'bullying' is not a useful word to describe what happens in the workplace due to its playground connotations. However, going simply by the definition given above, bullying clearly does take place in the workplace.

The questionnaire on p19 was used to stimulate discussion with a group of young people being educated in a unit for young people who were refusing to attend mainstream education as a result of being victims of bullying, but it could be used in a range of institutions as bullying is prevalent. This does raise the question of whether it is helpful to imply to bullied young people that bullying may carry on even after they leave education and get a job. It could be that the realisation that there is not an automatic end to their negative experiences at some stage in their life is demoralising to young people who are victims of bullying. On the other hand, young people may find it empowering to think that even adults can get bullied and that it isn't happening to them simply because they are young. If this is something that can happen to adults, then there must be ways to deal with it.

Grown-up bullying:

1. How would you define the word 'bullying'?

2. Do adults ever bully each other?

All the time A lot Sometimes Hardly ever Never

If you ticked 'Never' answer question 3; otherwise answer question 4

3. (a) Roughly at what age do people stop being bullies?

(b) Why do people stop being bullies at a certain age?

4. List some examples of adults bullying each other (these could come from personal experience, what other people have told you, or even things you have read about or seen on TV or in films):

5. Take one example from your list and say what you think the 'victim' should have done about the bullying.

Can we build a social movement for education?

Colin Waugh

Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley, *Lost Generation? New Strategies for Youth and Education* (Continuum, 2010), 186pp

This book is in a different league from the authors' previous collaboration (*Education Make You Fick, Innit?*, 2007). The basic problem with that earlier book was that it tended to become a catalogue of developments in official education policy as described by journalists and other commentators, cited successively in such a way as to create the impression of an inevitable slide towards an unspecified catastrophe. The authors seemed reluctant to engage with causal factors underlying policy, such as economic change or class struggle - and in particular with the operation of those factors through time. The effect of this was to make the possibility of action from below seem remote. Here, however, they break out of this vicious circle.

The first 100 pages or so of *Lost Generation?* paint a convincing, well-documented picture of a public education 'system' which, at every stage from secondary schooling through FE to HE, is tearing itself apart, as the people and institutions within it struggle to satisfy the conflicting demands which the capitalist class, sometimes in the form of the government, sometimes in that of the media, and sometimes more directly in that of private employers, keeps placing upon it. Much of the 'system' either is - or looks set shortly to become - dysfunctional, not only for working-class people but also for the ruling class itself.

A key reason why the authors get this situation across convincingly in the present book where they failed to do so in *Fick*, is because this time, instead of staying within the confines of education policy, they include in their analysis areas like

employment and housing which are both affected by and themselves affect what goes on in schools, colleges and universities. The decision to step outside education, then, sharply increases the possibility of elucidating what happens within it. This in turn enables Ainley and Allen to move beyond the piecemeal suggestions for action attached to *Fick*, and to put on the agenda a bolder, more strategic orientation, which activists should take seriously.

There are a few mistakes. On p22 the writers say that: 'The Industrial Training Boards with their levy-grant system were wound up from 1972 . . .'. This is rather misleading. For example, one of the key changes to apprenticeships was the Engineering Industry Training Board document *Information Paper 49*, published in 1977. Again, one of the most important influences on FE curricula in the late 1970s was Morris Kaufmann, education officer for the Rubber and Plastics Industry Training Board. Other boards that were important then and continued much later to be so were the Construction Industry Training Board, the Road Transport Industry Training Board and the Hotel and Catering Industry Training Board. This indicates that the authors have not as yet had a chance fully to research the competing forces which shaped FE curricula in the crucial period between the public sector cuts instigated by Callaghan in 1976 (in effect, the beginnings of state 'Thatcherism') and the decision to launch YTS taken by the Thatcher government itself in 1981.

Secondly, on p36 they say that New Labour, after initiating the General Teaching Council for Schools and HE Academy 'didn't bother with an FE one'. It is questionable whether the HEA is the same sort of thing as the GTC. But in any

case, this is to overlook the Institute for Learning (IFL). It is important to try and understand the process by which the expertise of FE lecturers came to be devalued to the point where such a body could be imposed upon us.

Thirdly, on p144, 'Paolo [sic] Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*' is cited as an example of 'studies that looked at the world from a working-class perspective'. Despite its merits and the growing need for activists in FHE to take account of what it advocates, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* does not do that. It looks at the world, rather, from the perspective of a section of the Brazilian intelligentsia in the late 1950s, which, influenced by liberation theology, attempted to pilot, mainly with a layer of poor peasants, a method of literacy teaching in which skills acquisition and political discussion were synthesised. In other words, a 'pedagogy of the exploited', in the sense of a theory and practice of teaching and learning by and for people exclusively and permanently dependent on waged labour, still needs to be written.

Fourthly, on p148, in a discussion of post-1993 universities, the 'polys' are described as 'originating in the FE sector'. It would be more correct, though a little over-simplified, to say that FE (at least on its technical rather than on its day continuation side) originated in the polytechnic sector. It is not possible to make sense of the development that began with liberal education and moved through liberal studies, general studies, communication skills, common skills, core skills, key skills, skills for life and now functional skills - in short, the development of non-academic general education within FHE - without being aware of this.

Fifth, it seems rather odd, as the authors do on p155, to cite without qualification the elite private school Summerhill alongside Countesthorpe College in Leicestershire as a 'radical example of extending school democracy'.

Let us move on now to appraise the authors' ideas about what should be done.

Their starting point (p133) is that: 'schools, colleges and universities need to be reclaimed as a community resource', such that they could then 'serve as a means of emancipation rather than an instrument of social control'.

They are right to begin their account of how this might be achieved by focusing on the question of (especially youth) unemployment, reaching - again reasonably - the conclusion (p136) that: '... there is no real alternative except for

reflating a greened economy that is more labour - and learning - intensive than the part-time, insecure, low skill, low wage, service sector McJobs that for many are virtually all that are currently available'. (It would be good to see this placed explicitly in a global context.) From this they go on to argue that: 'Using education to promote economic reconstruction and democracy would empower people to take an active part in a broader democratic discussion about the best policies for sustainability, economy and employment' (p138)

Next, (p140) they cite an argument by another writer, Jonathan Ward. Noting how, over the last 25 years or so, business studies-type courses facilitated by computer-centred learning methods and accompanied by Thatcherite values have tended to displace both technical and 'academic' study, Ward reportedly argues that teachers who want to offer alternatives to these values will have to redevelop 'learning as a group and for a group'. Ainley and Allen synthesise this with their own argument to maintain that: 'The curricular reform and reversal of current methods that this implies can be linked to developing democratic control over educational institutions which are recognised as communities of learners and teachers'. So what, then, must we do to bring this about? Their answer, as they express it on p160 when citing with approval the approach adopted by the Rethinking Schools organisation in the US, is to bring into being 'a social movement for education', in which unions organising teachers 'work closely with parents as well as with students'.

In setting out how this might be done, Ainley and Allen deepen and extend an argument which they made in *Fick*. They claim that an approach focused purely on 'radical pedagogy' - student-centred and/or dialogic methods adopted at the point of interaction between teachers and pupils/students ('in the classroom'), without accompanying moves in such fields as curriculum design, assessment, qualifications etc - must in the end prove inadequate to produce broader change. They show convincingly that both leftwing critiques of post-modernist relativism and rightwing arguments about dumbing down contain criticisms of student-centred teaching which its proponents can answer only if they address these other areas explicitly.

When they discuss the role that the NUT might play in the proposed 'social movement', Ainley and Allen initially make a claim which they have

made frequently before, namely that the NUT, as well as doing what a union normally does in terms of pay and conditions etc, is 'different from other English 'sectionalist' classroom teacher unions in continuing to focus on high quality non-selective state education'. But then they say: 'This is still a long way from adopting the profile that we consider necessary if the new alliances that are required for a new education system are to be constructed' and 'NUT rarely considers anything resembling new forms of teacher-student relationships or any alternative conception of democracy and accountability in education beyond bringing back Local Authorities as they once were . . .' In other words, they now think there needs to be a drive within the NUT to get members collectively to address these two issues. (Although they do not say so, this would presumably require new 'radical education' groupings to be built within both the NUT and UCU, the possible relations of which to each other and to existing leftwing organisations in each union need to be explored.)

The other essential element in the proposed social movement is that section of young people ('young' here being understood, rightly, to include people up to at least their mid twenties) who, on the one hand, are not socially privileged, at private schools etc, and, on the other, are not part of a permanent lumpenproletariat. In short, the people Ainley and Allen look to are those genuinely trying to better themselves, get reasonable jobs etc, through study (plus the parents who support them in this). The authors prefer to call this 'the working middle' of society - but in any case they clearly mean the main section of working-class people up to about 25.

Their idea is that 'young people' thus defined could 'drive their own learning' (p149), and teachers and lecturers, organised via, respectively, the NUT and UCU could help them to do this - if there is 'a renegotiation of the relationship between teachers and taught . . . in new forms of democracy and participation' (pp148-149). This act of renegotiation and/or the new relationship to which it would give rise could become the core of the proposed 'social movement for education'.

One reason which the authors give for thinking that this has now become possible is 'the interactive nature of digital technology' (p150), which has made possible, for example, the 'extraordinary creativity' (p150) by which, according to a *Guardian* ICM poll which they cite, a third of 14-21 year olds with internet access had launched

their own blog or website and published their own material. (This is to revive an argument put forward in 1970 by the then worthwhile socialist commentator Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, when he claimed that: 'Electronic techniques recognise no distinction in principle between transmitter and receiver. Every transistor radio is, by the nature of its construction, at the same time a potential transmitter; it can interact with other receivers by circuit reversal.') More importantly, the policies which have forced a large proportion of the young adult population into dependence on 'education', have arguably given them a stake in how it is conducted, producing the possibility that people other than professionals might take part in such a 'social movement'.

Among things which the authors believe that this movement should demand are 'a multi-level 'general diploma for everyone' (p147, an argument spelt out by them more fully in a number of earlier writings), free higher, further and adult education (p153), and a 'new kind of education politics' (p159) 'in which young people can be properly involved in shaping the world' (p159). It should also include 'an independent, self-sustaining campaign for youth employment and the restoration of benefits' (p161) which would be - or at least make possible - something not achieved by the NUS up to now, namely 'some permanence as a forum for on-going discussion and debate in alliance with teacher trade unions and progressive academics' (p161). (The idea that the NUS could play this role may strike some people as over-optimistic.)

Lost Generation? revives and develops some of the ideas put forward by its authors in conjunction with the present writer and other people involved in *PSE* and its predecessor *General Educator*, including the late Caroline Benn, in the period just before and just after Labour came to power in 1997. Such a revival is fully justified now, when the coalition government is trying to make working-class people pay for the capitalist crisis, and when a movement claiming to oppose this is bound to develop. The idea of a 'social movement for education' is a reasonable - though not the only possible - development from what we advocated then. Taking this idea seriously entails asking ourselves what obstacles it will meet, so that collectively we can work out ways of surmounting them.

Westminster UCU: urgent

From Sean Wallis (UCU London Region HE Secretary):

Dear UCU member

We are writing to alert you to the threat currently faced by colleagues at the University of Westminster. Having made a large investment in buildings over the last two years, the management at the University are attempting to cut hundreds of academic and support posts and compel some of those made 'redundant' to accept alternative jobs on substantially inferior terms and conditions.

There is a rolling programme of restructurings, and staff in Computer Science are currently in the front line. As one member put it: 'ECS (School of Electronics and computer Science) staff would not wish our worst enemy to go through the agony of waiting to receive an email for an interview that does not arrive, or the wait for some months now to find out whether we have a job after July. It goes without saying, therefore, that ECS staff sincerely hope that no other school will have to experience our predicament.'

Following a vote for industrial action and a one-day strike, members are now taking Action Short of a Strike and refusing to hand in student examinations marks.

As a result the University is now threatening to cut the pay for staff who are participating in this (perfectly lawful) industrial action by 50 per cent, starting with their June salary, and continuing until the dispute is over. The figure of 50 per cent has been plucked from nowhere. We believe that this is extremely punitive, disproportionate and will make reaching a settlement much more difficult. It appears to be an attempt to crudely browbeat colleagues into surrender.

We would therefore ask members to come to the aid of their fellow union members at Westminster. We cannot allow colleagues in need to stand alone. We must all be concerned about the precedent being made of 50 per cent pay docking.

What you can do:

- Write to Westminster vice-chancellor Geoff Petts (g.petts@westminster.ac.uk) urging him to remove the threat of pay docking and enter into serious negotiations with UCU to resolve the dispute (copies to r.morgan-tamosunas@westminster.ac.uk)
- Send messages of support to Westminster UCU at ucu@wmin.ac.uk (copies to Peter McLoughlin on mclougp@wmin.ac.uk and Derek Wright on d.wright@wmin.ac.uk).

More information is available from <http://westminsterucu.wordpress.com>

To PSE readers:

PSE editorial board members are likely to be involved in a number of initiatives in the coming months including:

- *moves to rebuild a tradition of liberal education in post-compulsory education, including in sixth form colleges;*
- *developing a network of ESOL lecturers interested in the ideas of Paulo Freire;*
- *further activities stemming from our 2009 occasional publication ‘Plebs’: the Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education; the broad aim is to develop IWCE through day-schools and meetings for TU members;*
- *publishing a second occasional publication (provisional title: Gramsci on Workers’ Education).*

If you would like to be involved in, or just kept up to date about these and/or any other PSE-related initiatives, please contact us on: post16educator@runbox.com



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