
The end of the public university in England

James Vernon, who is at the University of California, Berkeley, assesses the likely impact of the Browne review

I graduated from the University of Manchester in 1987 with no debt. I paid no fees and received a maintenance grant to earn a degree in Politics and Modern History. If my seventeen year old son were to follow in my footsteps he would graduate with debts of at least £50,000 and were he to study in London that could rise to £90,000. In the space of a generation we have witnessed the destruction of the public university.

The Browne Report, released last week, and effectively rubber stamped in the savage public sector cuts announced yesterday, was simply the final nail in the coffin. Under the beguiling but misleading title *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education* it effectively announced that university degrees are no longer considered a public good but a private investment. Tuition fees will rise from £3,225 to a minimum of £6,000, rising to a potential ceiling of £12,000. State funding will fall from £3.5bn to just £700m - a total cut of 80 per cent but a 100 per cent cut in areas like the arts, humanities and social sciences that apparently have no public utility.

The cost of a university education may be charged to the individual student but they will be forced to pay for it through the sort of debt-financing that governments across the world now consider so inappropriate for themselves. The scale of national debt is so ruinous we are told it requires emergency austerity measures (like all state intervention these days couched in the inevitable military metaphor of Osborne's 'war of welfare and waste'). Students, meanwhile, will be encouraged to take on loans based upon an imagined future income. They will effectively gamble that the loan will eventually pay-off by enhancing their future job prospects and earning power. It will be a hedge against their future

security. What are effectively sub-prime loans are guaranteed by the state. Higher education is now modelled on the type of financial speculation that has helped get us into this mess.

It is thankfully still just about inconceivable that primary and secondary education could be treated in this way - indeed, Osborne claimed he would be investing more in these areas. There at least it seems education remains something that serves a public and social function. Clearly something magical occurs when one turns eighteen and your education becomes a matter of personal not public gain.

When education becomes a private investment not a public good the principle of universal provision necessarily falls by the way. It used to be a central pillar of the British higher education system that all institutions offered a similar range of degrees at the same price (if not with the same prestige). A degree in biochemistry at Cambridge cost the same as one in cultural studies at Liverpool John Moores. In making students customers of educational services Browne opens up the English and Welsh university sector (Scotland has its own more sanely run system) to the vagaries of student demand. Different universities will compete with each other charging variable rates for different degrees depending on the quality of their service and the branding of their product. Everyone recognises that departments and programmes will be cut, many will be reduced to teaching factories where the link between teaching and research is severed, and some campuses will close altogether or be sold off in pieces.

As so often in Britain when business is the model we are told this is how things are done in America. Indeed, it is. Last week the State University of New

York cut its programmes in Classics, French, Italian, Russian and Theatre. In the last two years the University of California has raised its tuition by 32 per cent, introduced furloughs for its workers that represented an effective 8 per cent pay cut and is now seeking to restructure the pension packages of its employees.

There are, however, real differences between the American system and the model being developed in Britain. The now ailing public universities in America existed in a diverse sector with privates (ranging from the small liberal arts colleges to the Ivy League campuses with their enormous endowments), community colleges and the rapidly expanding for-profits like the online degree factory, the University of Phoenix. Private endowments and federal programmes like the Pell grant scheme enable both public and private universities to at least be seen to maintain 'access' to a diverse student body. Yet even they seem unable to prevent the fortification of privilege amongst those social and ethnic groups most able to take the loans to gamble on their futures. The rest are likely to be driven in increasing numbers to for-profits which offer a faster, cheaper, denigrated, on-line education.

The lessons to be learnt from the American experience are that fees will continue to rise, unequal access between rich and poor will become structural to the system, and the for-profit sector will grow. Buckingham University, once the only for-profit private in the entire UK, may well become the model. In July, the minister responsible for higher education, David Willetts, made BPP (now owned by the University of Phoenix, the largest online for-profit in the US) the second for-profit capable of granting degrees in the UK. With Obama's administration accusing Phoenix and co for using public funds and federally guaranteed student loans to leverage more private debt from students, the for-profits are turning their attentions to the UK. Encouraged by David Willetts the for-profit sector waits in the wings, hungry to buy up or 'rescue' the publics that will surely fail in the years ahead.

Many politicians and university administrators present the Browne report as a reasonable response to the expansion of student numbers at a time of austerity and shrinking public budgets. Quite apart from the falsity of the choice between rising student fees or reduced numbers of students it is an argument that belies the length, depth and scale of the present crisis.

Firstly, it is not unique to England. Across Europe and the Americas students and their teachers have been protesting against the same processes: the public disinvestment of higher education, rising fees and levels of student debt, the expansion of man-

agement and administrative systems for measuring efficiency or 'excellence' of services, the quest for new fee-paying consumers online or overseas, the casualisation of academic labour, the restructuring of pensions. Yet, the destruction of the public university in England is widely seen as a test case where these processes are unravelling faster and further than anywhere else.

Secondly, the storm has been brewing for decades. There should be no wistful nostalgia for a once pure public university. In the nineteenth century the great 'redbrick' provincial universities were founded on the alliance between industry and ivy. In the post-war period a good deal of academic research served a decolonising state uneasily placed in the cold war arms race, as the student protests of the late 1960s recognised. It was hardly news then when in 1970 Edward Thompson railed against the erosion of intellectual life and academic governance by the captains of local industry that ran Warwick University Ltd. And, of course, despite the faux radicalism of the new universities that enabled the system to expand after the Robins Report of 1964, universities remained the preserve of a privileged elite charged with running the welfare state, with just less than 457,000 students in 1971 - 14 per cent of the age group.

Faustian

If the public university had always been a Faustian bargain with industry and the state, the rules certainly began to change decisively during the 1980s when I was a student. First came the effective freeze on hiring following the Lawson budget cuts of 1981. In 1983 when I was appointed to teach at the Department that had taught me it was the first permanent appointment in over a decade. Next came the stripping of the student maintenance grants I had marched unsuccessfully to protect in the mid-1980s. And then there were the infamous administrative systems for auditing the efficient use of public funds at universities by measuring the productivity of academic labour: research outputs by the Research Assessment Exercise from 1989, teaching by the Quality Assurance Agency in 1993, renamed the Teaching Quality Assessment in 1997. One consequence of this, consistent with the merging of the former polytechnic sector in 1992, were the growing incentives on a frequently dwindling and increasingly casualised labour force to admit more students and teach ever larger classes. Inevitably these auditing systems not only greatly increased the amount of time academics spent talking or writing about the research or teaching they would do if they only had time to do it. They

also catalysed the staggering growth of management personnel.

New Labour only made things worse. Faced with the systematic under-funding of the universities, the expansion of student numbers (funding per student fell 40 per cent from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s), and the decline in real terms of academic salaries, they answered the call of the last official review of higher education funding handed from one government to the other - the Dearing Report. If Dearing enabled the introduction of a £1,000 fee for tuition (and the final abolition of the maintenance grant in 1999), by 2006 it had increased to a variable rate up to £3,000. The final indignity came with the RAE measurement of academics' research productivity - which, in the name of generating 'output' had arguably produced a great deal of increasingly specialised and unexciting publications - to a concern with its utility or 'impact' under the absurdly named Research Excellence Framework from 2008. Unsurprisingly, as universities now answered to the Department of Business, Skills and Innovation, impact was measured in increasingly narrow and economic terms.

Before rushing to join the denunciations of our short-sighted and philistine politicians we have to accept that no-one within the English university sector emerges from the process with much dignity. Administrators have grown fat, plumping up their personnel, enlarging their office and buildings, as well as inflating their salaries. Most damagingly they meekly accepted the economic logics that drove the auditing of productivity and were naive enough to believe that the introduction of fees would supplement, not replace, state funding. They have turned away from the public they are supposed to serve in the quest for new 'markets': professional schools, overseas students, and creation of empires with institutions that franchise their degrees.

The Last Professors of the public university have hardly fared better. They have been only too content to learn and internalise the new rules of the game in the name of self-advancement. I was one of the new breed of entrepreneurial academics who had only ever worked in this system. I quickly learnt that research grants came to those who spoke whatever language the research councils were speaking in, that one had to recruit postgraduates to generate income, that quantity not quality of publications was the measure of one's productivity. Those who went on research leave or won big grants for research projects were happy to hire replacements and assistants on short-term contracts. At the opposite end others seemed content to become stars, to play musical chairs as institutions competed for prestige through big names with long CVs of publications, and to see their profes-

sor salaries climb into the stratosphere in the name of their new market value.

The past twelve months has seen many wake up from this bad dream. As respected individuals, programmes and departments - all festooned in the baubles of research excellence and prestige indicators - have been cut, students and teachers have been mobilised. There have been marches, protests, online petitions, teach-ins and occupations. These struggles have been very local - at Sussex, Middlesex, King's College, etc - but those involved were in conversation with or at least virtually connected to protests elsewhere, in Berlin, Berkeley and Buenos Aires. It has been on these front-lines that the defence of the public university has begun to be articulated. And it has been the targeting of the arts and humanities in the cuts that has made it possible.

The humanities, along with the arts and even the interpretative social sciences, have become the true test of the public value of higher education. As the recession grips, market models of utility and efficiency have surely been exposed as a dangerous fallacy, so this is a good moment to re-articulate the purpose and role of humanities and social sciences in ways that justify renewed public investment in them. We could have expected more from those like the British Academy of Arts and Humanities Research Board that institutionally represent the humanities in the UK. Instead, they have effectively caught themselves in arguments about economic impact and the capacity to aid national economic recovery that they are doomed to lose (see the Arts and Humanities Research Council's *Leading the World* and the British Academy's *The Public Value of the Humanities*). We should not be surprised, then, that the Browne Report recommends the complete withdrawal of public funding for the teaching of the arts, humanities and social sciences in contrast to the STEM subjects that will continue to be supported.

The defence of public universities is intricately tied to arguments that can establish the public value of the humanities. We need to get beyond the hand-wringing of those who believe only philistines require the humanities to be justified just as much as the meek reproduction of the Government's own vocabularies of impact and value. We can and should remind the world that it is our classes that students want to take. Despite a decade of the rhetorical marginalisation of our disciplines in the UK as not relevant there are more studying in the arts, humanities and social sciences (1,073,465 in 2008-09) than in the STEM subjects (829,115) and they are growing at a faster rate (a 28 per cent increase since 2001-02 as opposed to 20 per cent increase for STEM), subsidising the more expen-

sive STEM fields that teach fewer students in more resource-heavy infrastructures and laboratories.

Why then do we face increased demand from students for the arts, humanities and social sciences? There is no one reason why students take these classes and we do not need a one-size-fits-all justification of their public value. There are for sure those that rightly view these subject areas as helping them prepare for the world of work without necessarily providing a clear career trajectory in the social field or the knowledge and culture industries. Students recognise that even vocational training cannot ensure life-long careers any longer. Instead they require a set of skills - of critical thought and analysis, of reading and digesting materials quickly, of making presentations and convincing arguments across a range of media - that equip them for a flexible labour market in which they may work across multiple sectors.

We need, however, not stop at these instrumental ends. We should be gratified to recognise that students are no less concerned with becoming citizens of the world. They realise that the humanities provide them with not just an education in the issues and problems that face our global society but the forms of analysis that allow us to connect our particular local experiences to sometimes global processes. They also provide the language training necessary for us to understand the perspectives of other cultures. No less importantly, given the democratic deficit and seemingly growing disenchantment with our political system, the humanities teach our students the critical skills they require to become active and valued citizens of our democratic life. Often it teaches them that it is possible to think of themselves in new ways, to discover a new identity and to forge around it a politics they share with others that challenges and enriches our democracy.

Finally, the humanities, like the arts and social sciences, offer us the opportunity to think otherwise. In an age in which the financialisation of everyday life appears to demand that an economic value is attached to everything, we need to be reminded that this was not always the case. The humanities speak to different systems of value, different orders of pleasure and enjoyment, that we can all enjoy - of imagination, beauty, laughter and wonder. It is these qualities after all that make us fully human, that enable us to appreciate what is unique about our own culture as well as what it is we hold in common with the rest of humanity.

A good deal is at stake. We must defend the vision of a publicly funded university able to support classes in subjects that do not generate economic benefits. This is not the measure of who we are or who we want to become.

Ted Breen

We print here the eulogy given by Keith Frost at the funeral of the former Tottenham College NATFHE branch secretary, who died in September, aged 69

My recollections of Ted Breen begin before I knew him. He was proud of his life achievements and even failures. He spoke with equal passion of his family's involvement in Irish independence and of his service with the British Army. He recalled service in Aden on attachment with the SAS, his family and Pat [Ted's wife] in a way that made you feel you had known him longer than you had.

Ted was an extremely clever man, an excellent teacher. I am one of his NVQ Level 3 success stories. His civilian life, however, was a parallel of the army saying 'lions led by donkeys'. Ted was continually having to deal with superiors who lacked his ability, his enthusiasm, his knowledge and his commitment. While he had to bear being undervalued, Ted was a spirited and fearless opponent to all that was corrupt or was letting the students down.

Ted was an enigma. I would not venture to say I knew Ted's position on any one issue, and when confronted with a problem or situation Ted was always capable of a response that even his best friend could not predict. Brother Ted to his union colleagues was a thorn in the side of management but was also quite capable of giving his union friends his own unique point of view.

Ted was dogged by ill health. Despite this he maintained his ambitions and was still planning this year to rejoin his professional body and start electrical testing and lecturing work. After each period of ill health he came back to present the resilience that he had shown all through his life. He had plans for future work, no thought of retiring. He was a free-hearted and loyal man to his friends and family. Nevertheless, he would amuse all by the pained procedure he made whenever he was required to open his wallet.

Ted Breen was a man worth knowing, a man who will leave strong memories, and his passing is a great loss to his family and friends.

News update: August - October 2010

Week beginning 30/8/10

The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education has appointed Lord Boswell of Aynho, who until the general election was the Tory MP Tim Boswell, and who, under Major, was from 1992 to 1995 a junior minister for FHE, to chair an inquiry into adult literacy which will make an interim report in the spring and a final one a year from now. Boswell wants to have union representation on this.

Management at Swansea University is proposing to replace existing modern language provision with a single degree, such that the existing 22 staff members would have to compete for the 12 remaining posts, two of which are to be reserved for lecturers in Welsh. An existing MA in translation may be delivered through distance learning.

Points in a *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) article on FE college finances include: Barclays is responsible for about half the lending to colleges; Barclays head of education Chris Hearn says some colleges are taking out 3-5 year loans to finance restructuring (ie redundancy payments); UCU head of colleges Barry Lovejoy suggests that some colleges are using supposed financial problems as a

cover for restructuring (ie sackings) entered upon for other reasons, in the process creating a 'time-bomb' of loans that will have to be repaid.

John Chorley, in charge of FE teacher training at Wolverhampton University, and also for over 20 years UCU branch secretary there, wins the first election for president of the Institute for Learning (IFL, the body which FE lecturers are required to 'join'), an office he will hold for one year.

The judge who presided over the judicial review, held in Leeds in July, arising from Grimsby Institute of FHE's attempt to claim that the LSC in effect misled it over funding for new buildings rules that the college's case is 'fatally flawed'. (If Grimsby's £3.75m claim against the LSC had been successful, nearly 80 other colleges caught up in the LSC's Building Colleges for the Future fiasco would potentially have made their own claims.) The college is considering whether to appeal.

The Independent Schools Council releases figures indicating that nearly 20 per cent of 2010 A-level entrants from private schools achieved A* grades, as against ten per cent of entrants overall.

The Scottish government approves plans to merge three colleges in Glasgow - Central, Metropolitan and Nautical Studies - thereby creating a new City of Glasgow College with 50,000 students, and putting up to 160 staff at risk of redundancy.

Mark Dawe, principal of Oaklands College, the main site of which is in St Albans, is to become chief executive of the OCR awarding body with effect from November. (Dawe, with a background in financial administration, both in the former Department for Education and Canterbury College, rather than teaching, and himself the son of the high-ranking civil servant Roger Dawe, was responsible for a large number of redundancies in his attempts to break the unions at Oaklands.)

Week beginning 6/9/10

Information gathered by the *THE* reveals that just under 25 per cent of the British universities which feature in the top 400 institutions worldwide as assessed in a *THE* survey provide students with 24 hours a day, 7 days a week access to their libraries, as against 8.5 per cent of the whole sample.

Strategic Options, Operational Challenges, report of a survey by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), based on responses from over 800 HE students in FE colleges, reveals that: only 5 per cent had previously applied for and failed to get a university place; only 14 per cent of the work surveyed was in traditional BA or BSC degrees; most respondents were doing professional qualifications, especially foundation degrees, especially in business and/or IT.

Education at a Glance, annual report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), covering 32 nations, reveals that between 2007 and 2008 the pool of international students grew 10.7 per cent, reaching 3.3 million, 50 per cent of whom in 2008 were at universities in five countries: Australia, France, Germany, the UK and US. 17 per cent of all such students come from China.

Education Secretary Michael Gove announces that King's College London (KCL) professor Alison Wolf is to head an 'independent' review of vocational education for 14-19 year olds which will report in 2011.

University of the West of England vice-chancellor Steve West writes to over 100 senior academics there, informing them that a majority of their jobs will 'cease in their current form' after July 2011 and they will be matched to a smaller pool of posts, thereby allowing management to cut 50 posts.

A TUC report, *Apprenticeships - a Gendered Picture*, reveals that 1 per cent of 'electro-technical' and 81 per cent of business admin apprentices are women, with the former earning an average £210 a week and the latter 20 per cent less. Four times

as many female as male apprentices are paid below the statutory minimum of £80 a week.

After being split 50-50, UCU's HE committee agrees on the chairperson's casting vote to suspend for the moment the ballot for industrial action over pay, which was due to be held in September.

Following the Grimsby College ruling, officials announce that £50m is to be shared in grants of up to £225,000 (or £1m in exceptional cases) amongst 149 colleges which have not previously received more than £5m of public funds for new buildings and which have projects that could be completed by September 2011.

At the Universities UK (UUK - ie the vice-chancellors) conference, there is widespread condemnation of a speech by Vince Cable on cuts to the science budget in which he proposed to 'ration research funding by excellence' and 'screen out mediocrity', mainly on the grounds that such statements damage the ability of UK universities to compete for international students.

Commenting on a finding in a survey conducted for the Local Government Association (LGA) by the National Youth Agency (NYA), according to which young people in the London and South West regions thought youth workers were the best people to give careers advice, Institute of Career Guidance president Deirdre Hughes warns that youth workers should not double up as careers specialists in the wake of budget cuts to the Connexions service.

Immigration minister Damien Green makes a speech in which, having said that '... Britain's universities ... need to be

competing for the world's best students', he goes on to say that the education system also 'includes the publicly funded further education sector, private vocational colleges, language schools and many partnerships between higher and further educational institutions. The foreign students attending these various establishments may, or frankly may not be, the brightest and the best'.

Week beginning 13/9/10

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) confirms that the sum of about £200m held back from the £2.7bn Building Colleges for the Future budget by the LSC in case a compensation claim were to succeed is 'subject to the comprehensive spending review decisions' (ie will be chopped in October).

A *THE* interview with the newly appointed vice chancellor of Manchester University, Dame Nancy Rothwell, discovers that she does not 'have a problem' with the decision by the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to reward research excellence wherever it is found, 'but not if that results in some outstanding institutions such as Imperial College or the London School of Economics losing money'. (In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, this policy of HEFCE's resulted in a few institutions outside the so-called 'golden triangle' of elite universities receiving slightly more research funding than previously.) The interview also reveals that Rothwell has taken a lower salary than she was offered, 'preferring to be paid no more than 20 times the salary of the university's lowest-paid employee'.

The founder and chief executive officer (CEO) for 30 years of ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network), Roger White, is to retire at the end of September. Profiled in the *Guardian*, White predicts that: 'we are going to see polarisation again between the academic and less academic ...'.

At a Quality Matters for Students conference, held in London, the NUS launches a new charter for (HE) students that includes calls for improved feedback on their work, including greater use of formative assessment, a minimum level of face-to-face feedback, help with understanding marking criteria and support with critiquing their own work.

An Ofsted review of provision for 16 to 24 year olds with special educational needs and/or disabilities finds that it is rare for colleges to offer provision equivalent to 25 hours over a five day weeks (said to be the norm in schools) and notes the failure of work-based training to provide in such areas as speech and language therapy.

In his section of *Reinventing Schools, Reforming Teaching: From Political Visions to Classroom Reality*, a book on Labour education policy edited by, among others, former NUT official John Bangs, the ex-director (till 2008) of the defunct Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Mick Waters says that the exams 'system is diseased, almost corrupt', referring especially to the increasingly commercial practices engaged in by the three main exam boards, and the trend for chief examiners to write textbooks.

Addressing the Further Education Mergers, Confederations and

Shared Partnerships conference, SFA (and former LSC) CEO Geoff Russell says that: 'Under most of our scenario planning, if colleges do not take action [ie merge or federate in response to government cuts], a very significant proportion will become financially unsatisfactory'; 'I am not persuaded that all of them [ie colleges] are responding as quickly as they need to'; and 'I believe we are spending too much on factories [ie college buildings] and not enough on production'.

At Harlow College, construction begins of a £9m university centre partly funded by HEFCE, where it is hoped students will undertake courses accredited by Anglia Ruskin University.

A settlement is reached between UCU and The Manchester College (TMC) in the dispute over the contracts of prison education staff. TMC agrees to supplement its original offer of one year's salary protection to 394 such staff with a further salary protection equivalent to one year's pay and spread over three financial years. (TMC is now the largest of a total of six prison education contractors, the others being Action 4 Employment [A4E], Kensington and Chelsea College, Lincoln College, Milton Keynes College and Strode College.)

Week beginning 20/9/10

A press release following a meeting of the Association of Colleges (AOC - ie the principals) notes that the highest level of cuts modelled for FE by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) would mean annual cuts of between £300m and £400m for four years, implying 15,000-20,000 job losses a year ie 80,000 alto-

gether (from a current total of 263,000 staff), and the loss of 400,000 student places (from 2 million). Unions expect the loss of at least 33,000 jobs. UCU's submission to the spending review says cuts of 25 per cent over four years would raise student-teacher ratios from one to 19.9 to one to 27.6, and calls on the Government to maintain FE spending at 0.6 of GDP and keep Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs), as promised by Michael Gove before the election. Commenting on the cuts, Barry Lovejoy for UCU maintains that: 'We have seen numerous local disputes emerging over the past year; unfortunately [sic], there is likely to be a similar response.'

The 1994 Group (of small, 'research-intensive' universities) advertises for graduates to work for them as 'volunteer' interns (ie unpaid staff) for two days a week over three to five months. The TUC has set up a website encouraging such workers to demand payment. Commenting on this, however, Tanya De Grunwald, author of the guide *Dude, Where's My Career?* comments: 'a few are fearful that making all employers pay their interns would reduce the number of internships available. Can you think of any other workers who would be scared to ask for money in case their unpaid job was taken off them?'

John Graystone, CEO of ColegauCymru (the Welsh equivalent of the AOC) says the 2.3 per cent pay increase for lecturers which came into force in August is likely to lead to job losses. (The 21 colleges in Wales employ about 14,000 staff, more than half of whom are lecturers.)

At the Lib Dem conference, Vince Cable tells a fringe meeting that a

solution to the problem of HE finance based purely on a graduate tax cannot work. Meanwhile, deputy leader Simon Hughes tells another fringe meeting that Cable has been doing 'sterling work' convincing civil servants that HE fees should be abolished, adding that he [Hughes] 'think[s] we will win the argument to get rid of tuition fees'. The conference itself passes a motion committing the party to look into replacing tuition fees and loans with 'a graduate tax system'.

Labour MP John Mann tables a Commons motion aimed at persuading ministers to outline a timetable for implementing the clause in last year's Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act requiring schools to give students careers information about apprenticeships.

Features of the situation at the University of Gloucestershire include: its deficit in 2008-09 was £6.3m; internal figures for 2009-10 show it is heading for a shortfall of around £3.5m for that year; £5m is to be spent mothballing the Pittville site (in Cheltenham); the actual deficit for 2009-10 is likely to be higher because HEFCE is thought likely to claw back money claimed for students not completing courses; £9.7m was realised from selling a site in London, and £4m of the 2008-09 debt of £31.6m has been paid off; however, some of the £9.7m is earmarked for 'restructuring'; the constitution is being reviewed (by February) because of HEFCE's concerns about, among other things, undue influence by a Church of England foundation; an employment tribunal involving management whistleblower and former deputy vice chancellor Paul Bowler starts next week in Bristol.

On the basis of a survey of 88 single parents on its Horizons scheme, run jointly with Barclaycard, the Family Action charity argues that welfare cuts are likely to shut single parents out of college courses and hence also out of the labour market.

On its website, the UCULEft organisation calls the union's current stance on HE pay (ie following the September HE committee decision to suspend a ballot for action) a 'debacle' (thus implicitly criticising general secretary Sally Hunt) and demands a special conference during October.

Speaking at the launch of Oxford University's Blavatnik school of government, which has been financed by a £75m donation from the US industrialist Leonard Blavatnik plus a £26m investment by the university itself, vice-chancellor Andrew Hamilton says that 'without generous charitable donations' he anticipates that 'Oxford's ability to stay in its exalted position [ie in world rankings] would be under threat' from government cuts to HE.

An analysis of millions of HE applications carried out for the Office of Fair Access (OFFA) indicates that the provision by posh universities of large bursaries for poorer students has no effect in getting such students to apply to these institutions. OFFA director Sir Martin Harris suggests that offering to waive fees for the first year would be more effective. HE Policy Institute (HEPI) director Bahram Bekhradnia criticises this, on the grounds that: 'It is all exactly the same money going to exactly the same people and will have exactly the same effect'. (This autumn, Oxford is offering bursaries of up to £4,100, Cambridge up to £3,400 and Imperial College £3,500. The

sector-wide average bursary for 2008-09 was £980.)

In its report, *The Future for Union Learning*, the TUC body Unionlearn calls for individuals to receive tax relief for money spent on course fees, and for companies to be required to publish details of their training programmes.

Week beginning 27/9/10

Points in a *Guardian* feature on the class background of HE students, based on HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for young full-time first degree entrants in 2008-09 include: the figures use a definition of working-class as those with whichever of their parents is in the 'more senior position' in a 'routine and manual occupation'; this 'class' is said to constitute 37 per cent of the UK population; students whose parents are long-term unemployed are not counted (because data are unavailable); on this basis, the most inclusive institution is London Metropolitan University, with 57.2 per cent of its students from this background, and the least inclusive is Oxford, with 11.5 per cent; the average 'working-class' intake across the whole UK is 32.3 per cent; only two of the ten least inclusive institutions are in the Russell Group, and these two - Durham and Bath - are in the 1994 Group; the most inclusive degree subject is 'education', the least inclusive medicine/dentistry/veterinary science.

Newly elected Labour Party leader Ed Miliband supports a graduate tax as the preferred solution to the 'problem' of student finance.

Commenting on the review of FE fees set up under Brown, its chairperson, former LSC chair

Chris Banks, emphasises what he sees as the need to crack down on an estimated £1bn of uncollected fees, and on the recommendation that a £50m investment by government in subsidised loans for FE students (ie to pay fees) could release a total investment in FE estimated at £800m.

The Supply of Part-Time Higher Education in the UK, a report written for UUK by Birkbeck College researchers Claire Callender and Anne Jamieson and National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) fellow Geoff Mason, warns that introducing a system of loans for tuition fees parallel to that for full-timers could reduce enrolments and hence lead to cutbacks in part-time provision.

Following David Cameron's judgement on the Connexions service as 'not being very good value for money', Unison says it faces 'eye-watering' cuts. Examples cited by the union include: 65 full-time equivalent posts to go in Norfolk following a 50 per cent cut in funding; all 175 staff in Northamptonshire at risk of redundancy in the light of an expected 40 per cent cut for the second half of 2010-11; 45 jobs at risk in Brighton; a 50 per cent cut in the careers budget for schools in Surrey.

Ofqual CEO Isabel Nisbet announces she will leave in March. (This follows the resignation in July of Ofqual chairperson and chief regulator Kathleen Tattersall.)

Points in figures issued by HESA include: in 2008-09 29 HE institutions were running deficits, the largest being at the University of Cumbria; between 2004-05 and 2008-09, the number of staff employed in UK HE rose by 11 per cent, with the biggest rise per

category being managerial, professional and technical staff - at 17 per cent; in the same period the total number of students grew by 7 per cent, from 2.2m to 2.4m; the number of non-UK students, including both from the EU and elsewhere rose by 22 per cent for undergraduates and 27 per cent for postgraduates, a 24 per cent increase overall.

The specialist adult education colleges, including the City Lit, Workingmen's and Morley College and the Mary Ward Centre in London, plus the adult residential colleges - Fircroft in Birmingham, Hillcroft in Surbiton, Northern in Barnsley and Ruskin in Oxford - and the WEA are campaigning against an anticipated government attack on the adult safeguarded budget, and also against the effects of cuts to the Department of Communities and Local Government which could threaten outreach work.

Leaked government papers relating to the impending 'bonfire of quangos' reveal that the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) is still at risk but HEFCE is not.

Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) CEO Jane Scott Paul announces that the AAT is not planning to include its highest qualifications - those in chartered accountancy - within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), remarking that: 'It cost us £900,000 over two or three years to meet the requirements of the framework [ie rejigging their lower qualifications in order to not to lose government funding]. That was money spent and no return for our members. I think it's simply a waste of money; it's wholesale change for change's sake'.

In the light of its international review of vocational education,

the OECD urges the UK government to consider levies on companies to compel them to pay for training.

Speaking at the launch of the Government's on-line version of the adult careers guidance service formerly called nextstep and now renamed Next Step, which is funded through the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and reportedly involves 3,000 careers advisers at 400 locations in England, FE minister John Hayes intimates that the Tories' manifesto commitment to creating a single careers service covering teenagers (at present still notionally catered for by Connexions) and adults is likely to be postponed till resources are available.

Week beginning 4/10/10

Following remarks made by Vince Cable at a debate organised by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN), the TES claims that Cable has told Lib Dems that public funding for adults to do Level 3 courses may be withdrawn, and raised the possibility either of an improved system of loans to replace this and/or a system of levies on companies as urged by the OECD.

The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) announces that consultation on its plan to axe the final salary scheme will start on 20th October and run till 22nd December. (Those to be consulted, via a website, include the 135,000 academics and senior administrators in pre-1992 universities who are 'active' members of the scheme, plus another group of 'prospective' members, ie people eligible for but not actually in the scheme, making an overall total of about 162,000.

Both Angela O'Donoghue, City of Sunderland College principal and international spokesperson for the 157 Group (of large, flourishing FE colleges) and John Mountford, AOC international director, express outrage at Damien Green's remarks about international students on FE courses. O'Donoghue claims that the annual financial contribution made by such students to FE is 'around £130m'.

A *THE* investigation into figures for the growth in HE 'managers, professional staff and technicians' between 2004-05 and 2008-09 recently released by HESA discovers that the increase specifically in 'managers' was 30 per cent (from 12,275 to 15,965) as distinct from the 17 per cent rise for the broader category. (This compares with a 7 per cent increase in students and an 11 per cent increase in academics over the same period.)

Following a recent article alleging that the head of the International Baccalaureate (IB) organisation used plagiarised material in a speech made in the US, the *TES* features as its front page article an allegation that the IB's marking guide for an American history exam sat by 20,000 candidates for the IB's high diploma in May 2010 contains material downloaded from Wikipedia.

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK - the sector skills council covering FE and training) launches a review of FE teacher training qualifications. This follows allegations, including by Institute for Learning deputy CEO Lee Davies, that training provided at university level, as distinct from that provided within colleges themselves, involves too much duplication. The allegation is basically that when, three years ago, universities were required to

replace their PGCE (FE) provision with the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS), they failed to design the latter in such a way as to avoid duplicating the Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS) and Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS) courses normally run in-house by colleges. The review will run till March.

80 to 90 HE institutions (and eight in particular) are thought likely to suffer financial ill-effects from the failure of - or decision by - health secretary Andrew Lansley to omit from his White Paper, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*, any consideration of how training of NHS personnel would be handled when strategic health authorities (SHAs) are abolished. (At present, SHAs contract with universities to make such provision.)

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

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

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

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

In a speech to the Conservative Party conference, held in Birmingham, BIS minister David Willetts attacks Labour's record on apprenticeships and claims the Coalition will provide 50,000 extra ones, many in engineering and manufacturing, with 3,000 of these in green technology and related areas. He also predicts shorter, part-time and more work-related courses at degree level.

The report of an Ofsted investigation into good practice in involving employers in work-related training notes that: 'None of the working relationships seen in this survey had been initiated by external organisations such as the brokerage service [ie as under Train to Gain]'.

The UCU branch at Richmond-upon-Thames [tertiary] College, in Vince Cable's constituency, votes 179 to 1 to support a no confidence motion in principal

David Ansell, who has proposed to cut about 50 jobs there, and will now proceed to ballot for action.

The board of the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) endorses a report recommending that it should take no action over the disparity between Qualified Teacher Status (QTS, required to teach in schools) and Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS, supposedly required to teach in FE). (The GTC is to be abolished. The IFL has been trying to get the GTC to allow those with QTLS to teach in schools.)

The UCU branch at London Met. University expresses concern about the depth of an investigation carried out by law firm Eversheds which has concluded that, having 'seen no evidence' of 'any attempt or collusion to manipulate' the records system there (ie during the period when student completions were over-claimed, leading to massive funding clawbacks by HEFCE, redundancies and high level resignations including vice-chancellor Brian Roper, there is no case for disciplinary action.

Week beginning 11/10/10

Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education, Lord Browne's review of HE funding, fees etc, formally titled the Independent Review of HE Funding and Student Finance, rejects the idea of a graduate tax as unworkable and recommends that: the cap on fees, currently set at £3,290 per year, should be abolished; the government should provide upfront funding for fees up to £6,000 through loans to be repaid by graduates; such funding should still be provided for fees above £6,000 but universities charging these higher levels

would have to pay a levy that would rise with the level of the fees, starting with 40 per cent of the first £1,000 above the £6,000 threshold; however, even a university charging fees of £12,000 would keep 73 per cent of the revenue thus generated; the threshold earning level at which graduates would have to start repaying their loans should be raised from the current £15,000 to £21,000; repayment would be at 9 per cent of the graduate's income above £21,000; the current subsidised interest rate for repayment should be abolished; a non-means-tested cost of living loan of £3,750 should be open to all; students from households with incomes under £25,000 should also be able to apply for an additional grant of £3,250, and those from households with incomes under £60,000 should be able to apply for a proportion of this; the point at which outstanding loan repayments would be written off should rise to 30 years from the current 25; the system by which all HE currently receives funding via HEFCE should be scrapped and replaced by targeted investment in a limited range of specific areas, mainly medicine and STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths); teaching grants for all other areas should be abolished; private providers and their students should be embraced within this new system; HEFCE, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), OFFA and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA - the body which handles legal disputes between students and universities) should all be scrapped and replaced by a single HE Council; all new academics would be required to undergo teacher education; total student numbers should be increased by 10 per cent over three years; there should be no restrictions on how many stu-

dents an institution can recruit; nevertheless all should be subject to a 'minimum tariff entry standard' based on the present UCAS tariff - ie the government should have the power to determine each year a minimum level of qualifications below which the person concerned could not be admitted to any university; the proposed HE Council should be able to 'make recommendations to the governing body of an institution where it views management [as] ineffective' (ie the state could intervene to remove a vice-chancellor).

About 32 per cent of the academics employed at Russell Group universities now come from outside the EU.

Peter Pendle, CEO of the Association of Managers in Education, ie the 'union' which includes the former (and TUC-affiliated) Association for College Management (ACM), tells the TES that: 'We would oppose all cuts'.

Commenting on the UK Border Agency's proposals for restricting further the allocation of visas to workers from outside the EU, a spokesperson for Cambridge University says: 'The government's current visa quota proposals threaten our ability to recruit both the academic leaders of today and the exceptional young talent from which will grow the Nobel prizewinners of tomorrow'.

A report compiled for the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC - ie the body speaking for the poshest private schools) - and based on a series of six seminars involving heads, deputies and directors of studies, concludes that, although many schools are 'dabbling' (TES) in alternative qualifications such as the IGCSE, Pre-U and IB, most

are 'not considering abandoning GCSEs and A-levels', and that 'It appeared that anti-modular sentiment was more widespread than anti-modular action'.

Points in a *TES* article on apprenticeships include: TUC figures show that although companies with 500 or more employees provide 16 per cent of total UK employment, they offer only 5 per cent of the available apprenticeship places; BT has received 26,000 applications for the 236 apprenticeship places it offers.

Merger between The Manchester College (TMC) and Salford University moves closer as they sign a memorandum of understanding allowing a federated board of governors. TMC claims its annual turnover is about £180m as against Salford's £160m. Salford has also drawn up a partnership agreement with Salford City [FE] College.

Blackpool South MP Gordon Marsden, formerly an OU lecturer, editor of the journal *History Today*, and supporter of the Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning (CALL), is appointed shadow minister for skills and FE.

Week beginning 18/10/10

In a *Guardian* feature where prominent figures comment on the Browne and Comprehensive Spending Reviews, former vice-chancellor Roger Brown, arguing that HE here will become more like in the US, says of the latter: 'The US system is bifurcating into a well-resourced upper tier of selective institutions, catering mainly for better-prepared white students from affluent backgrounds, and a lower tier catering mainly for students from minority and/or poor backgrounds'. In the

same feature, Sheffield University professor Danny Dorling writes: 'The other thing is: which universities will close? Those that close will be ones where a vast proportion of the students aren't white and are the first generation of their family to go to university, and those least likely to close will have students that are the 30th generation in their family to go to university.'

In a separate *Guardian* article, Exeter university vice-chancellor and UUK president Steve Smith concludes: '... be in no doubt at all that it is not Browne's review that is behind these changes [to HE], it is the decision of this government to remove the vast majority of public funding from higher education. Where is their mandate for such a decision?'

A HEPI report on the Browne Review, written by John Thompson and Bahram Bekhradnia, says: 'The government appears largely to be withdrawing from investment in higher education teaching, and the [Browne Review] appears to endorse this as a matter of principle...'. As regards the proposal that the Government should each year set a tariff determining the minimum level of qualifications required for university entry, HEPI comments: 'universities will be told by the government who they may and whom they may not admit - a major new intrusion into university autonomy' which is 'probably unworkable'.

In the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), it is announced that adult education and skills will lose £1.1bn over the next four years. As expected, the Train to Gain programme, costing £1bn a year, is abolished, and 25 per cent of that funding transferred to supporting the cost of an extra 75,000 'apprenticeships' within 4 years (including the 50,000

already announced). All funding for people over 24 wishing to take a level 3 qualification is scrapped. The entitlement for people over 25 to take a first level 2 qualification without charge is scrapped. Funding for ESOL with migrants 'not in settled communities' is to be abolished. The £210 budget for adult learning outside government priorities (as for example in specialist adult colleges, the WEA etc) is to be retained. Child benefit for 16-18 year olds is also to be retained, at a cost of £1.8bn. The £500m 'saved' by abolishing EMAs is to be put into 'targeted support' which will supposedly enable the Government to carry through the Blairites' scheme to force everyone to stay in education to 18. Commenting on the axing of EMAs, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt says: 'The simple message here seems to be: 'Don't be poor'. ' (69 per cent of those currently in receipt of EMAs are FE college students.)

Both OIA CEO/independent adjudicator Rob Behrens and a spokesperson for HEPI come out against Browne's idea that the OIA could be incorporated in an HE Council and still be or appear impartial.

In a *TES* feature on schools' response to the CSR, columnist Richard Vaughan concludes an article titled 'From cuts crisis to calm' by saying: 'School spending is protected for pupils up to 16, but after that spending per student will go down as the Government tries to extend the pupil participation age to 18 on the same amount of money. This, coupled with cuts to the educational maintenance allowance, means sixth forms and further education colleges are likely to be hit hardest.' Another article quotes Association of School and College Leaders general secre-

tary Brian Lightman as saying: 'The financial outlook for post-16 is much more worrying and decisions made over the next few weeks will be important to protecting the education of young people in colleges'.

Points in a *Guardian* feature on medical education include: this year, for the first time since the scheme was set up in 2005, the combination of a rise in the number of UK medical graduates and a threefold increase in overseas applications is likely to mean that not all those completing the six year degree programme in medicine will be able to find a place on the UK foundation programme (ie the 2-year paid NHS training placement needed to become a fully qualified doctor); the shortfall for this could be between 464 and around 700; commenting on the Browne Review in the context of this other problem, medical School Council executive director Katie Petty-Saphon says: 'Removal of the fee cap is likely to have an adverse impact on longer degrees such as medicine and dentistry. The lack of a secure F1 [first foundation year] post would compound this problem'.

The Office for National Statistics has reclassified FE colleges as part of central government for accounting purposes, on the grounds that their borrowing has to be approved by the SFA. This means debts incurred by colleges, for example for building work or to finance redundancies, will now count as part of the public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR), which the Government is attempting to cut.

Information in a *THE* article on criticisms of the Browne review includes: the review was housed in BIS and seven BIS officials were seconded to it; Browne is

also the government's 'lead non-executive director'; the Review panel had no representation from HE staff, HE students or post-1992 universities; it did include the McKinsey management consultants' 'expert partner' (and former NUT official) Sir Michael Barber.

Nottingham University launches the latest of its collaborations with the private sector - a new module for third year chemistry students designed by its chemistry department in collaboration with Glaxo-SmithKline.

At HEFCE's annual conference, CEO Sir Alan Langlands tells vice-chancellors that, although the impact of the CSR is supposed to be mainly in 2014-15, they should expect 'an extremely tough year' in 2011-12, on top of cuts this year.

UCAS figures for HE applicants and entrants in September 2010 show that: 688,310 people applied (up from 633,592 in 2009); of these, 479,057 (69.6 per cent) secured a place (up from 477,277 [75.3 per cent] in 2009); the number not securing a place in 2010 was therefore 209,253.

SFA CEO Geoff Russell tells the employment and skills summit that: 'It's likely that funding for adult FE will become more of a 'payment by results' system'. Russell also announces that the SFA is to axe over 260 jobs. (Staff pay scales published by the SFA show that Russell took a £50,000 a year pay cut on moving from the LSC, where he used to receive over £200,000..

Dundee University announces plans to scrap up to 195 jobs as part of an attempt to 'save' £8m a year.

Week beginning 25/10/10

Commenting on the Browne review, Carl Lygo, CEO of BPP, the US-owned company which in the summer became the first for-profit organisation granted degree awarding powers in the UK, says: 'The Browne report has signalled that the private sector should be treated the same as the public sector. It's a level playing field, if what it says goes ahead'.

Kaplan, a company owned by the Washington Post, is currently providing HE to 2,000 students in the UK via 'partner institutions' which include both the University of Essex and London University, for which it delivers external degrees.

Points in a *TES* feature on implications for FE of the Comprehensive Spending Review, based mainly on the views of AOC assistant CEO Julian Gravatt, include: colleges have been told that the proposed HE-style loans for adult students will be implemented from 2013; only £200m of the £3bn cut to BIS-funded provision in general will be taken in the first year (ie the real cuts to FHE will start about a year from now); Gravatt estimates there are about 80,000 19 and 20 year olds currently doing second chance A-levels and other level 3 courses in FE colleges.

Commenting on the Browne Review, Aston University vice-chancellor and Browne panel member Julia King says that, as a result of the Review: 'I think that students from low-income backgrounds have the opportunity to come to university with more money in their pockets from a combination of the maintenance grant and maintenance loan'.

The *TES* and *THE* both give prominence to an initiative supported both by Michael Gove and David Willetts, in which Denise Walker, head teacher both of a primary school in Thetford and of Methwold High School there, intends to run from September 2011 University of London external degrees (now part of London's 'International Programmes') in law and business admin, charging students £7,000 for a part-time degree completed over four to five years.

Responses to questions from the Commons BIS select committee by David Willetts include: he hopes the cuts to HE teaching budgets will be 'backloaded' to the end of the CSR period (ie 2014-15); he hopes HEFCE will be informed by Christmas about cuts in 2011-12; on the abolition of funding for HE teaching other than STEM subjects he says 'We think this is a reform that empowers students. Money will still flow into university departments - provided there are students that still want to study these [ie arts, humanities and social science] subjects'; on the CSR announcement that ESOL funding will be restricted to people living in 'settled communities', Willetts says: 'This work is under way. So far, as far as we have got is for this to be settled communities. There was concern that people were coming to the country with no intention of settling and accessing ESOL classes'.

Current students will receive the EMA till the end of this academic year; the allowance will close to new applicants in January 2011.

In a debate at the Inside Out festival, held in London, London University vice-chancellor Geoffrey Crossick says that, if funding does not flow into HE, 'we could see the destruction of this system'.

In a *TES* article, consultant Mark Corney says: 'Ironically the Government has announced its intention to raise the school leaving age, even though the Liberal Democrats opposed it during the previous government and the Conservatives were lukewarm. It seems the intention to raise the participation age is a cover for the argument that because participation is compulsory there is no need to pay EMAs. If the leaving age is raised, there will be no NEETs (not in employment, education or training). Financial hardship will simply increase truancy.'

Broke and Broken: Taught Postgraduate Students or Funding and Finance, an NUS report based on a survey of just under 2,500 such students, reveals that finance is a major factor for 70 per cent of full time students in this category.

Simon Lebus, CEO of Cambridge Assessment (CA), the body which controls the OCR exam board, tells a CA conference that if the Government's scheme for 'an English baccalaureate' composed of five A-C grade GCSEs including English, maths, science, a language and a humanities subject is to succeed, students will have to be given a financial incentive, for example discounts on interest rates for HE tuition fee loans

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.

The Solidarity section of Post-16 Educator is available for branch officers and other activists to draw readers' attention to disputes, issues etc. Please send articles and/or factsheets to the editorial address on page 2. Deadline for January issue: 31/12/10.

Boycott of lesson observations sustained into a second year

We print here an updated version of the document by branch officer Pete Green circulated at UCU annual conference in May 2010. (Readers can email Pete on: peteg54@blueyonder.co.uk)

UCU branches have been in official dispute with Westminster-Kingsway college management over lesson observations since a ballot in April 2008. *We have been boycotting all graded observations since the beginning of the summer term of 2009. That followed a second ballot in which 89 per cent voted for action short of a strike (ie the boycott) and 70 per cent for strike action on a 62 per cent turnout (one of the best turnouts of any local ballot in London, we were told).*

Members are being deducted half a day's pay for partial performance on each occasion of a 'refused observation' but are still teaching the classes. Re-observations are now being imposed once every three teaching weeks but UCU members in almost all areas have remained steadfast and we are fast approaching exam periods and summer holidays. Management are not shifting either, but there's a gaping absence of data for 2009-10 in their grade tallies and Ofsted might be on the doorstep any time in 2010-11.

There are not many disputes in education which have lasted this long with discontinuous action, and such a sustained boycott of observations is unprecedented as far as we know.

Yet the core demand from the local UCU branch is simply that the college implement in full the recommendations of its own quality review group led by an external consultant, Clive Bolton. The proposal, agreed on all sides, was for a more supportive and an inclusive approach to observations. When the Principal waited two months before talking to us again, and tore up the report he himself had commissioned, we balloted again.

The specific demands were:

- *Notification of the lesson to be observed* (not a week's window in which one could be observed at any time) to enable a supportive pre-discussion of the group.
- *The same incidence of observations for all* (instead of proposals which would give extra observations to individuals or areas with grade 3s - satisfactory had somehow become unsatisfactory - as well as those with grade 4s who were already in that position).

This is a dispute with a long history. Long before the official ballot UCU officers had repeatedly raised objections to:

- *The failure of the observation process to be developmental or in any way supportive*
- *The inconsistencies in the practice of different observers* (eg some staff would be told when they were to be observed, others not!)
- *The workloads and stress* which arose because lecturers were given a whole week in which they could be observed at any time and were expected to produce ridiculous amounts of paperwork for each class.

We were told no change until after an Ofsted inspection. We waited patiently. The college passed its inspection in early 2008. Observations were resumed under the same old scheme. UCU balloted for the first time that April, won the ballot and then suspended the action, on advice from the regional official, as further observations were also suspended and a new Quality Review group was set up. The college employed one of its former quality managers, now a consultant, Clive Bolton, to

'lead' the group. It reported in November 2008 and UCU accepted the recommendations, although we did not get all we would have wanted (grading as such was never allowed onto the agenda!). We don't know how much Mr Bolton got paid but he did a thorough investigation of different schemes in various colleges. He was then not even invited to the reconvened meeting of the Review Group in January 2009 where his report was discarded (electronic copies of the relevant section or the whole report are available on request).

It was our own management who couldn't recognise what was at stake and seemed to think it was all got up by a small minority of malcontents and lazy lecturers. The Principal wrote on the Intranet that the ballot vote did not 'reflect those of the majority I have talked with'. A new round of observations was pushed through in some areas in the spring whilst we were still seeking to organise another ballot! Fortuitously, because of a move to the new building in Kings Cross on the Grays Inn Road in February 2009, observations for all staff moving into that site had been delayed to the summer. UCU members across the Kings Cross spanking new £35m building initiated the boycott in May 2009, and the extent of support was astonishing, even to branch officers. Members not taking action in other areas of the college raised a bit over £2,000 to support those who were deducted pay at the Kings Cross site.

Deadlock

In September [2009] there was a further pause as the dispute was referred to ACAS with the active participation of the UCU regional official Chris Powell. There were small shifts on both sides but in the end deadlock. Members voted overwhelmingly to reject the revised offer at site meetings but in November the graded observations were resumed. So, as we'd warned, did the boycott, first with 18 members (90 per cent of permanent staff) in the general education division, and then, after a further delay, by other curriculum areas staggered across the year.

Some in UCU thought the boycott would be difficult for us to monitor. We rely on the honesty of members but also on the fact that many observers are also members and support the boycott. In truth this action has won the officers more respect and popularity than any other action we've taken. At Westminster Kingsway College UCU members always come out for national strikes over pay and we were on strike with other London colleges over the threat of redundancies on 5th May. But the

lesson observation boycott is all our own and nobody is saying let's stop now.

The boycott involves the lecturer due to be observed handing over an official UCU letter asking the observer to withdraw to avoid disruption of classes. In exchange a management letter is received and the observer withdraws. The classes continue to be taught so lecturers are in effect working for half a day without pay. There has been a threat of deducting a day's pay. That would legally, we think, be tantamount to a lockout, so we could walk out for the day, closing classes, which so far both UCU and management have sought to avoid.

Overwhelming

The boycott has had overwhelming support from UCU members in all areas of teaching (and UCU in turn has over 90 per cent membership in many of those areas) apart from one. The exception is the school of catering and hospitality which is the college's one centre of vocational excellence (COVE), and most of the chefs deservedly get grade ones. This was never their issue.

Observations have been staggered over the academic year for different areas, so some have had more 'boycotted' observations than others. One area has now boycotted six times, others only two or three. But the strain on management resources is beginning to show. Observations due to begin in the summer of 2010 in Adult Pathway areas were postponed until the autumn because of a major restructuring of the management layer (cutting in half the number of those in a position to be observers!) which is ongoing.

UCU members will vote again in September whether to continue the action. We have had no further offer from the Principal, whose strategy seems to be to wait for the action to crack. But not having an observation at all for two years running is a victory in itself for all of those involved so far.

(The joint branch meeting at Westminster Kingsway College in September 2010 voted overwhelmingly to continue with the dispute. Management have so far this term not attempted to resume observations and we are now expecting yet another new offer from their side. Whether that proves acceptable remains to be seen.)

New activism or old politics?

Patrick Ainley reports from the Society for Research into HE event 'New Activism or Old Politics? Sounding Student Reaction to HE's Crisis, held at Aston University, Birmingham on 30th September

Patrick Ainley opened the event by explaining that it had originally been called to consider reaction to the election, since, according to surveys, many students had voted Lib Dem but not for a coalition. However, it also aimed to develop discussion within the Network about the contradiction for (higher) education of study for a future threatened by climate catastrophe. The contradictions of preparing for an uncertain future were already evident in what Patrick and Martin Allen had called, in their book *Lost Generation?*, 'education's credibility crunch', with more students attending local universities on part-time and/or vocational courses, as well as in universally decried instrumental attitudes to learning. But how would the mass of students react when fees rose and departments, colleges and universities merged or closed? Would they follow the old politics that had so far been offered to them of defending their lecturers' jobs, or embark upon new activism? He then handed over to Sarah Amsler, who had thought up this title for the meeting that she had hosted at Aston and now chaired.

Ben Little from Middlesex University asked 'What is generational politics?', putting student and wider youth reactions into the wider context reflected in his edited free e-book *Radical Future - Politics for the Next Generation* (<http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html>). He outlined the importation of generational politics from the USA, where young people had been mobilised by the Obama campaign, leading to hopes that 'Facebook can change the world', on the one hand, and, on the other, a counter-narrative presented by, for example, David Willetts' *The Pinch*, blaming the '60s generation for impoverishing their children and seeking to 'redress the social contract between the

generations by cutting back the state with low taxes and less debt as a solution for young people', but simultaneously reassuring their parents whose votes politicians needed. Radical Future contributed a range of voices to this debate, not a linking argument but presenting a micro-economic as much as a (party) political one perhaps distorted by Ed Miliband's appeal for 'a new generation'. In discussion, it was suggested that students no longer expected to be radical in HE and were too busy working anyway, while HE had been de-radicalised as it had been vocationalised.

Jonathan Ward contributed from Studentforce for Sustainable Development, a charity that focuses on young people, employability, sustainability and learning through work, volunteering and careers advice. His main message was that education has been a tool, whether used consciously or unconsciously, to create a marketised economy with market traits geared towards the elevated 'needs' of employers . . . even if this approach is dysfunctional. The impact is strong norms on short-term goals, targets being prized over understanding and application of knowledge, a lack of critique of dominant knowledge bases, power structures, and general critical autonomy, and competition not collaboration between peers. All these things are undesirable in relation to a sustainable society. So what happens next? With 80 per cent expecting to go to HE (according to the Sutton Trust) but facing competitive entry and rising fees - though only half would apply if fees were raised to £7,000 (Sutton Trust again), he said that 'filtered and failed' young people were feeling 'frustrated and betrayed'. Underemployed and overqualified, many deferred employment through doing Masters degrees, volunteering and exploitative internships. Together

with a loss of holistic vision through commodification and utilitarianism, this was creating 'an ideological crisis' over the purpose of education: universus or universitas? For example, he recalled teaching MA students at a Russell Group university who could not remember what they had studied the year before, despite getting good grades! Related to sustainability, young people sought to translate increasing ecological awareness into the necessary individual and social action, but there was too much reactivism instead of activism, let alone pro-activism. Environmental knowledge was taught within a science framework based on an exploitative view of nature, with sustainability co-opted by business, rather than the sustainable development of society to overcome Marx's 'metabolic rift'. Consumer society and intensification of the market was leading to 'fighting over scraps', but 'an unequal society is not sustainable'. There was widespread student desire to contribute, despite acceptance of an uncertain future. It was ironic that so many talked of university as 'a bubble' despite its supposed vocational relevance. Sarah added that there had also been a subversion of critical pedagogy, which was seeking to establish space for discussion about the fundamental purposes of education in a sustainable society.

Alternatives

After lunch, this contextualisation of HE's identity crisis as well as its economic crisis led into a presentation of alternatives by Guy Mitchell, Rhiannon Colvin and Leon Sealy-Huggins from the Really Open University (ROU). They said: 'Everybody goes on about the student experience but nobody knows what it is'. They saw a space to reconceptualise and re-imagine the university rather than defend existing structure or seek a return to an idealised past. They explained how the opportunity to do this arose when in 2009 Leeds announced £35m of cuts and 400 plus job losses. UCU threatened strikes, which the student union campaigned against - effectively supporting the cuts. But many students were unmoved by the uninspired 'old politics' of Leeds University Against the Cuts, which focused on supporting UCU but did not present a radical critique connected to wider issues of economy and environment. So the ROU had taken the alter-globalisation slogan 'another world is possible' and claimed that 'another university is possible', with 'strike, occupy, transform' motifs from student actions around the world to open space and time in which to build alternative

relations between students, lecturers and other staff, putting forward something positive instead of just negatively reacting by striking until compulsory redundancies were called off and everybody went home even though cuts were still being made. Instead, the ROU presented 'a prefigurative wedge of the transformation of everyday life' as its newsletter, *The Sausage Factory*, put it. So the ROU aimed to 'reclaim education' with eight visionary statements on its website, reallyopenuniversity.org (spoofing the LUU website), created in a participatory process that asked students and staff to think, not just telling them, and appealing to science as well as humanities students. Future experiments would continue to explore the relationship between critique and re-imagination, and between demands, reforms and provocations, eg Capture the Flag, Leeds Urban Action, 'a living wage for everyone at uni' and a mobile brain representing 'the general intellect'. A long discussion and many questions followed. Find out more at reallyopenuniversity.org.

With apologies from Shane Chown, NUS vice-president FE, who was ill, instead Stamatis Kapousis, a postgraduate at Aston, talked about the student movement in Greece, where there was popular solidarity with students dating from the resistance to the military dictatorship, pioneered at Athens Polytechnic. This had secured the independence of HE with right to asylum in universities and the unionisation of all staff in general assemblies to make policy and annually elect directors. It also politicised students, who were now divided into anarchists not linked to any party, plus socialists, communists and right-wingers supporting their respective political parties. Attempted privatisation of universities by the government using police still brutalised by dictatorship had led to anger and insecurity amongst the '600 Euros generation' (named after the Greek minimum wage). There were clearly contrasted histories, with Greek universities as free spaces within a society constrained by neo-liberalism, as compared with the UK, where HE is largely neo-liberalised - or again, sometimes violent resistance in Greece compared to subversion in the UK. But the question is, how to bring these together, despite differences such as (in Greece) very few overseas students and most students living at home. Also, although free, Greek HE was difficult to get into but, once you were in it was difficult to get thrown out of the very academically traditional classrooms. On the other hand, a mass HE had also been created as an alternative to unemployment. There were many paradoxes!

The meeting closed with more discussions, and thanks again to Sarah.

How much of an economic liberal are you?

Philippe Harari *presents a questionnaire designed for use with A-level politics students (background and scoring on next page)*

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------|----------------|
| 1. Postive discrimination is necessary to ensure fairness. | | | | |
| 2. The right to own property is essential for a stable society. | | | | |
| 3. People should do what the government tells them to do. | | | | |
| 4. People are motivated purely by the desire to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. | | | | |
| 5. The state should not bail out failing businesses. | | | | |
| 6. The profit motive is a good basis for running public services. | | | | |
| 7. Welfare provision is demotivating for individuals. | | | | |
| 8. Competition is a good way of making businesses more efficient. | | | | |
| 9. Government should set rules about minimum wages, working conditions etc. | | | | |
| 10. The drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be. | | | | |

As I write this, the 2010 Conservative Party Conference is taking place in Birmingham and I am trying to work out what Cameron actually believes in. He himself says that he is not an ideologue but a pragmatist, and it is indeed difficult to find a consistent commitment to any particular ideology in his speeches. On the one hand, he sounds very much like a classical liberal with his talk of small government and the obvious relish with which he is aiming to cut public spending. However, he is also supporting government policies that do seem to 'make windows into men's souls', something the early classical liberals would never have approved of. An example of this is the suggestion that married couples should get additional tax allowances. So does that mean he is a Thatcherite neo-liberal, combining economic liberalism (in which any excesses are, theoretically, controlled by the 'invisible hand' of the market) with social authoritarianism (in which individuals cannot be trusted to know what is best for them)? Cameron is not as socially authoritarian as

Thatcher was and could not be described as a 'neo-conservative'; at the same time, he does not have utter faith in the free market, arguing that society should look after the poor and needy by taking more tax from the better off. So is there such a thing as 'Cameronism' or is he simply a neo-liberal who does not have the guts to really stick to what he believes in?

One of the key elements of neo-liberalism is 'economic liberalism', a kind of market fundamentalism that believes that the free market is not just the most efficient way of planning (because it responds directly to demand) but a way of promoting social justice (because the weak and useless are allowed to fail, as they deserve to do). I am sure that in a publication such as this one I do not need to present readers with the flaws in these arguments but, having taught these concepts to my Politics class, I thought it would be interesting to design a brief questionnaire that measures to what extent you believe in economic liberalism (see below).

(Each question is scored from 1 - 4, but sometimes strongly agree is 1 and sometimes it is 4.)

1. Neo-liberals believe in a meritocracy based on the notion of 'negative freedom' (ie freedom = absence of constraints). They would oppose all forms of positive discrimination and therefore, for this question, 'strongly agree' scores 1.
2. This is a key principle for liberals (and conservatives) - Locke argued that 'life, liberty and property' represented the three key human rights - so 'strongly agree' = 4.
3. Not if you believe in individual freedom, they shouldn't, so 'strongly agree' = 1.
4. This utilitarian view denies that human beings have 'higher' motives such as desire for justice, fairness, knowledge, love etc, but the individualist free-market meritocracy is based on the assumption that all human beings are like this, so 'strongly agree' = 4.
5. Hayek, a neo-liberal economist, describes government economic intervention as the single most serious threat to individual liberty, leading to totalitarianism, so 'strongly agree' = 4.
6. According to economic liberals, the profit motive is pure and natural, so 'strongly agree' = 4.
7. Welfarism demotivates people according to the neo-liberal; without the threat of penury and starvation we wouldn't bother to work, so 'strongly agree' = 4.
8. You are probably getting the hang of this by now; 'strongly agree' = 4.
9. Obviously not in a free market, so 'strongly agree' = 1.
10. The caring message in William Sumner's quote sums up the economic liberal attitude towards poverty, so 'strongly agree' = 4.

Scoring:

35-40 OMG your ideological beliefs make Ronald Reagan look like Clement Attlee.

31-35 Through years of over-exposure to a culture of naked greed you have become brutalised into internalising a set of cynical and life-destroying views about human nature.

21-30 There is still hope, but you probably voted for the Lib Dems in the last election.

10-20 Nice one, comrade!

Developing the Diploma curriculum

Ian Duckett

Diplomas have been designed to be delivered by consortia (secondary schools; sixth form centres; sixth form colleges; FE colleges and, in some cases, work-based learning providers). Although Diplomas offer a complex curriculum mix to manage, they also provide delivery teams with the opportunity to create a locally distinctive programme and, at the same time, one that encourages the 'personalisation' of each learner's response.

There are three main 'components' of the Diploma. At its heart is the Principal Learning. Whilst much of this is of an academic/theoretical nature, and *apparently* could be delivered 'traditionally' in a classroom, there is a requirement that a *minimum* of 50 per cent of the Principal Learning must be experienced as applied learning in, or contextualised to, a 'real world' work environment. Employer engagement is key to this.

The delivery of the Generic Learning component, which embraces the Project, the Work Experience, the Functional Skills and the Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PLTS), should be closely linked to the Principal Learning, to the extent practicable.

The third component of the Diploma is the Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL), and a key aspect of this is the potential it offers for personalising learners' programmes. The range of ASL that can be made available to learners is a crucial consideration for the team, and in practice is likely to be determined, at least initially, by what can be offered across the consortium.

Further crucial considerations for the team are the need for a customised local Diploma marketing strategy, to learners and to parents, and the importance of establishing robust relationships with employers and higher education.

All of this represents a radical change from the way most 14-19 programmes have been delivered previously. In recent years the closest schools and colleges have come to experiencing anything similar has been through the management and delivery of the Increased Flexibility Programme. However, the scale and complexity of what is expected for the Diplomas is dramatically different. The mode of Diploma delivery needs to be agreed regionally, against national standards, having been through an application or 'Gateway' process.

The distinctive characteristics of the Diploma have various implications for delivering the qualification through a partnership of providers. The potential challenges of working in a team with members drawn from different backgrounds, and aiming to provide a learner-personalised curriculum, are not to be underestimated and deserve serious consideration by all concerned. In the early stages of Diploma development, teams can experience tensions and possible misunderstanding, as members from different backgrounds (school, college and local authority) grapple with the challenging complexity of the Diploma framework and the implications of introducing and arranging shared delivery, common timetabling, quality assurance, and learner attendance and achievement at more than one institution. The possible emergence of a 'cultural divide', in terms of perceptions about one another's strengths and weaknesses, and the similarities and differences between schools and colleges, must be recognised and addressed. For example, in some cases members of Diploma teams may have little recent experience of an FE college's operational management or its priorities and values. Similarly, college staff will probably have little first-hand knowledge of the Key Stage four curriculum, or of the constraints of the secondary school timetable or academic year. Secondary school teachers may not appreciate the business-orientated culture of a college, nor the way it has to wrestle with the timetabling and resource implications of delivering a wide range of vocational programmes.

Decisions made about Additional and/or Specialist Learning and, in particular, the use made of vocationally specific qualifications (Specialist Learning), and of GCSE and GCE A/AS-level subjects (Additional Learning), will have a significant impact on the programmes offered to learners. Whereas some learners may want a more vocationally focused programme leading immediately to employment or to an apprenticeship in the Diploma area, some may want to explore further vocational areas, and a third group may wish to keep a general education pathway open and to opt for Additional Learning opportunities offered by GCSE and GCE subjects. Consortia must take their own decisions about the mix of Additional and Specialist Learning appropriate for a cohort of learners. A key factor will be the extent to which

choice can be offered at each of the three Diploma levels. The more options that are made available to them, the greater will be the opportunities for personalising each learner's programme. However, practical considerations, such as timetabling and cost effectiveness, may mean that, in the first instance at least, the range of Additional and Specialist Learning is necessarily limited.

The previous government has invested in a major publicity/marketing campaign to introduce learners, their parents and their teachers, as well as employers and others to the distinctive characteristics and strengths of the Diplomas. The impact of this appears to have been inconclusive, and experience, nationally, suggests that regional marketing of the Diplomas may be more effective. Each Consortium and its constituent Diploma teams will need to develop their own local marketing/publicity strategy, working closely with Connexions colleagues and with other Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) professionals. Clear messages about the opportunities for learner progression from Foundation, Higher and Advanced Diplomas need to be well rehearsed and clearly articulated. Connexions and IAG practitioners' current knowledge and understanding of each Diploma programme, the progression opportunities, and the level of achievement required to enable a learner to join and succeed on a programme may vary considerably. The Diploma team, working within their Consortium's parameters for IAG, may need to prepare Diploma-specific briefing notes for targeted individuals.

Identification of what employers and others can contribute to the development and delivery of a particular Diploma is crucial. A Diploma Employer Engagement Group, or something similar, may already exist, or will need to be established. The relationship between the Employers Group and the delivery team, at both the development stage and at the subsequent delivery stage, needs to be clear. The achievement of significant numbers of learners progressing into Higher Education from the Advanced Diploma is an important target outcome for each Diploma programme. Establishing a special relationship with one or more HE institutions is essential and could include the sharing of learning facilities or the direct involvement of HE staff in Diploma programme delivery.



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