

Sixth form colleges under attack

Philippe Harari

Teachers in sixth form colleges are facing attacks on three fronts: pensions, pay and funding.

The attack on pensions is one we face in common with all other teachers and other public sector workers; the Government is trying to make us pay more, work longer and get less. The NUT website has an excellent pensions loss calculator that works out how much money government changes to teachers' pensions will cost you. I stand to lose a total of over £56,000, which is a relatively modest amount compared to younger teachers who could end up losing over a quarter of a million pounds in total. The NUT Conference in Harrogate over Easter was unanimous in agreeing to ballot members for discontinuous action, starting with a national one-day strike on 30th June, to oppose unnecessary and unjustifiable changes to public sector pensions. The UCU is also supporting strike action in defence of pensions and the ATL, a much more moderate union than either the NUT or UCU, also voted at its Easter Conference to ballot its members for strike action on pensions. Our mission now is to make sure that we get a really clear 'yes' vote in the ballot and that we prepare our members for what may be a long fight, but one that we can win.

The second attack on sixth form college teachers is on pay. Through our national bargaining structure, our employers offered us a paltry 0.75 per cent this year, which would mean that the pay of teachers in SFCs would fall even further behind that of schoolteachers, who were offered 2.3 per cent (we are all, of course, facing a possible two year pay freeze from next year). NUT members in SFCs were indicatively balloted on this offer; 80 per cent rejected it and 60 per cent said they would be prepared to take strike action in opposition.

Rather than move to a formal strike ballot, the NUT Executive decided to send out another indicative ballot to members in SFCs asking whether they would rather take action simply on pay, or would prefer to make this part of a wider campaign including cuts to pensions and funding. This was very confusing for members and, in the end, the turnout on this second indicative ballot was very low. Despite the fact that a grassroots del-

egates meeting attended by representatives from 30 colleges (almost one third of all SFCs in the country) agreed unanimously that they wished to be balloted for action on pay and funding this academic year, the NUT Executive decided to focus on the pensions campaign this term, accept the 0.75 per cent offer and look at balloting for strike action against funding cuts next year. This decision upset many in SFCs who felt that we had already clearly indicated that we wished to take action on pay.

The third attack is on funding. The Government has slashed 'entitlement' funding for sixth form students by 80 per cent. What this means for SFCs is that they will have their overall funding cut by 12 per cent over four years in cash terms. When inflation is taken into account, this could mean an overall cut of 30 per cent in real terms. This cut, if it goes ahead, will destroy sixth form college education as we know it. It is impossible to see how this amount of money could be cut without fundamental changes to what goes on in SFCs.

The first year of this cut is 2011/12 and the effect varies widely between SFCs. Because of the funding mechanism, some colleges may not feel the effects too badly in the first year, but others are facing enormous problems. The kinds of measures that colleges are having to take include: increasing class sizes; increasing contact time for teachers; reducing the amount of time allocated to each subject; cutting courses with low numbers and thereby restricting the curriculum offer; making teachers invigilate exams; cutting allowances; cutting support staff or management (thereby increasing workload for teachers).

These kinds of cuts are moderate compared to what we can expect next year. This is an unprecedented attack on post-16 education, and comes at a time when the Government is slashing EMA funding and has allowed universities to increase tuition fees. It feels as if the Government really does not want to see 16 to 19 year olds properly educated.

The NUT must lead a fight against these horrendous cuts. At a fringe meeting for delegates from SFCs held at the NUT Conference in Harrogate over Easter it was agreed that we had probably missed the boat on action on pay for this year but

that action on funding was likely to be more popular anyway and that there would be strong support for this amongst members in SFCs. The Union officers present in the meeting agreed to look at a timetable for sending out a ballot for discontinuous action this term. This would allow us to hold a half day demonstrative strike before the end of the summer term with further days of action next year.

NUT members in SFCs are getting themselves organised; there are about 4,000 of us in a Union of

over 300,000 members, so we are a tiny sector. However, the largest individual institution memberships are in SFCs. We have set up a grassroots email network and the meeting we called was really helpful, allowing us to share our experiences and discuss action. The cuts we are facing in SFCs are unprecedented and will destroy the service we provide to students. We must resist these cuts and, with good grassroots organisation and support from our Union, we can fight back successfully.

Fighting the Cuts!

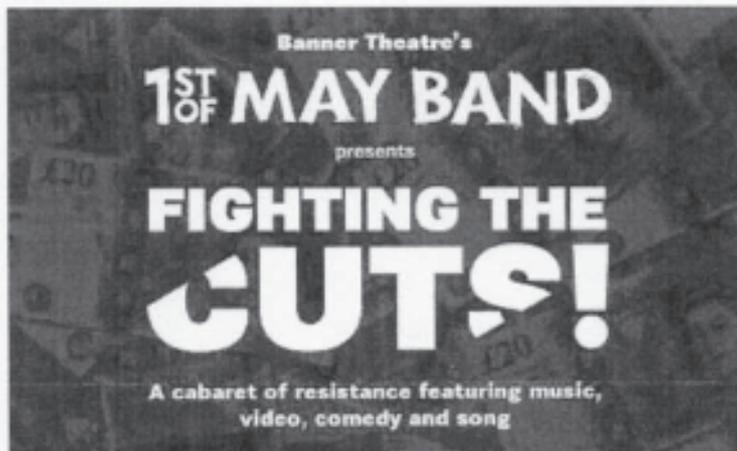
The Con-Dem government have launched a major attack on Britain's welfare state, threatening the jobs and living standards of millions of working people.

Whose crisis?

They claim that the national deficit demands massive cuts in our public services. The truth is neo-liberal governments throughout the world created the crisis, allowing the global banking system to career out of control in its unfettered pursuit of profit.

Who will pay?

Not the fat cats. As usual, they expect ordinary working people to pay with the most savage cuts that this country has seen since the 1930s.



Our answer? Resistance!

Banner Theatre's 1st of May Band is touring **Fighting the Cuts!**, a multimedia cabaret of songs, music, comedy and video. The Band delivers a punchy soundscape of reggae, rap, flamenco, folk and blues to lay bare the real story behind the crisis, and support the campaign to defend our welfare state.

The 1st of May Band is touring to venues and communities across the country. See our website at www.1stofmayband.com for more details.

To book the Band, phone 0845 458 1909, or email info@bannertheatre.co.uk

News update: February - April 2011

Week beginning 28/2/11

[Previous week] Points in a speech by universities minister David Willetts to a Universities UK (UUK - ie vice-chancellors') conference include: the Government will encourage companies like Pearson, which owns the BTEC exam board, to offer degrees; this may allow some FE colleges to provide degrees at an annual fee 'less than £6,000'; the Government will cut HE teaching grants still further if too many universities set fees at or near the £9,000 maximum; the expected HE White Paper is to be delayed.

In a speech at the British Academy, David Willetts claims to be clear that: 'the humanities and social sciences are essential to a civilised country'.

Following a 1,700-signature petition from Bradford College students and staff, the City Council there drops plans to abolish the FreeCityBus service on which many students rely.

The HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) announces the rules under which in 2013 the Research Excellence Framework (REF) will be used to allocate research funding to universities. After long controversy, the weight-

ing for 'impact' (ie the direct practical utility of research) is set at 20 per cent. Arguing that this means the Government ignored the views of the 18,000 academics who in 2009 signed a petition opposing this criterion altogether, UCU general secretary Sally Hunt says: 'The funding councils will now roll out essentially the same untested proposals that were decisively rejected last year'.

Points in the report of the review of vocational education conducted for the Government by Alison Wolf, now director of public services policy and management at King's College London, include: league tables are encouraging schools to put pupils on vocational courses which lack labour market value; FE funding should be rearranged to remove the incentive for placing students on vocational courses which are too easy; 16-19 year olds without A-C grades in English and maths should be pushed into achieving them; employers should be subsidised to take on more 'apprentices'; Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) should be recognised in schools, allowing vocational staff from FE to transfer there; qualifications should be exempt from the requirements of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF); schools' obligation to provide pre-16 work

experience should be scrapped. Michael Gove calls Wolf's report 'brilliant, and groundbreaking'.

A *Guardian* round-up of the effects of the Government's £650m cut to entitlement programmes, passed on to colleges via the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), include estimated cuts of £1.7m at Barking College, £1.3m at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, and £1.8m at York.

Information released under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act to the *Times Higher Education* (*THE*) reveals that the only piece of research commissioned by the Browne review into HE funding, a June 2010 survey of school and first year HE students and parents, found that £6,000 was the maximum HE fee level regarded by respondents as feasible.

14,617 students applied for Educational Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) in the month to 31 December 2010 (ie the last date on which applications could be made), as compared with 7,339 in the equivalent period in 2009.

UCU immediate past president Alastair Hunter expresses concern at 'the extent to which the UCU has come to be dominated by the political aims and objectives, and

the practical tactics, of the Socialist Workers Party which, through its wholly owned subsidiary UCU Left [sic], dominates the national executive and drives through policies which are primarily those of the SWP'. UCU left presidential candidate Jim Wolfreys calls this 'nonsense'.

Association of Learning Providers (ALP - ie private training organisations) delivery director Paul Warner says of the Government's payment by results funding arrangement for its welfare to work programme: 'The performance levels that they are asking for, tied to the upfront investment and the structure of payments over five years, could be just too much. We could be approaching that tipping point'. (The implication is that providers could be bankrupted, thus putting sub-contractors, including voluntary and community organisations, in financial jeopardy too.)

In the last quarter of 2010, 18.8 per cent of 19-24 year olds were recorded as having neither a job nor a place in education.

London School of Economics (LSE) director Sir Howard Davies resigns after it emerges that on his advice the institution's council in 2009 accepted £1.5m in funding from the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation, of which £300,000 has so far been received. LSE also accepted £30,700 in 2007 as a fee for Davies to advise Libya's sovereign wealth fund, and has entered into a £2.2m contract to train Libyan civil servants. Gaddafi's son Saif was a student at LSE between 2003 and 2008; his thesis is said to contain more than a dozen instances of plagiarism; his external examiner has co-written and co-edited two books with one of his supervisors.)

Stephen Marston, who as director general for lifelong learning and skills at the Department for Education and Skills supposedly

invented Train to Gain, and whose subsequent job as director general for universities and skills has been abolished, is appointed vice-chancellor of Gloucestershire University, which has recently undergone high profile money troubles.

UCU negotiators withdraw from a meeting of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) in an attempt to stop its 'independent' chairperson, Sir Andrew Cubie, Using his casting vote to pass measures aimed at attacking members' final salaries pensions scheme. (65 per cent of UCU members in the relevant - ie pre-1992 - universities have voted for strike action over the issue, and 82 per cent for action short of a strike.)

Points in National Audit Office (NAO) report *Regulating Financial Sustainability in Higher Education* include: the seven institutions judged by HEFCE last year to be 'at risk' had spent an average of 4.3 years each in that category; one, Thames Valley University (now the University of West London) had been in it for 12 years; the number of institutions with 'areas of concern' rose to 43 from 10 in 2007.

Week beginning 7/3/11

London Metropolitan University vice-chancellor Malcolm Gillies, who in 2009 left the same post at City University after quarrelling with its council, appoints as deputy CEO the former investment banker and Gloucestershire University deputy vice-chancellor Paul Bowler, and as deputy vice-chancellor Peter McCaffery, currently vice-chancellor of the University of Cumbria - like Gloucestershire in financial turmoil. Bowler, who was 'managing director of Brunel under Steven Schwartz and was given a job by him at Macquarie University in Australia, describes himself as 'a straightforward business person',

while McCaffery is the author of *The Higher Education Manager's Handbook: Effective Leadership and Management in Universities and Colleges*. London Met. is expected to make big cuts from 2012-13.

Financial returns filed by the Institute for Learning (IFL - the organisation which FE lecturers are forced by the state to 'join' on pain of losing their jobs) reveal that it 'made' (ie received from the Government) a surplus of £500,000 last year, bringing its reserves to £2m after an expenditure of £5.6m. (The IFL is currently trying to force lecturers to pay a £68 'membership' fee.)

Universities other than LSE now found to have links with the Libyan regime include Sheffield, Exeter, Manchester Metropolitan, Queen Margaret, Teesside, Glamorgan and Liverpool John Moores.

Edexcel, the exam board owned by Pearsons, and which includes the former BTEC awarding body, announces that it will hold a 'national results day' in July 2011, aimed at countering claims, for example in Alison Wolf's report on vocational education, that its BTEC first awards and diplomas in areas like IT, applied science and health and social care are too easy and have been used, along with similar qualifications offered by OCR, in schools and colleges to inflate their results for league table and funding purposes.

Pathway to Prosperity: Making Student Immigration Work for Universities and the Economy, a report by the Centre for think-tank, claims that the Government's plans to clampdown on student visas would 'harm higher education and the whole economy by blocking genuine students from the UK'.

Government departments are fighting one another over moves by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to

exclude from state funding those providers of apprenticeships to 16-19 year olds whose annual turnover is less than £500,000. The Department for Education (DFE) argues this would turn many such providers into sub-contractors to those with bigger turnovers, making the former pay management fees to the latter and creating opportunities for corruption. (On 2010 allocations, 60 per cent of providers are above the £500,000 threshold and receive about 60 per cent of the £3.8bn annual funding for this, while the remaining 644 providers shared just £132m of funding.)

An audit of FE finances carried out jointly by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) finds that in 2009/10 a total of £2.6m was over-claimed due to incorrect data submissions (equating to £29,000 per college).

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) issues a guidance, titled *How to Produce an Access Agreement for 2012-13*, in which it explains to universities expecting to charge fees over £6,000 the access measures, bursaries for students from less well-off backgrounds etc that they will have to bring in to avoid triggering OFFA sanctions. The effect is said to be that the poshest institutions will have to raise their spending on each such student from about £400 now to about £900 then.

Students at the Plumstead Centre of Greenwich Community College hold a protest against ESOL cuts.

Addressing an audience of 'international higher education leaders' at a conference in Hong Kong titled 'Going Global', David Willetts says: 'We expect [UK] universities to get the same amount of cash, if not more than they have received up to now', while Exeter University vice-chancellor and UUK president Steve Smith says that the real situation for UK universities will be

'rather different to the headlines', adding: 'Sometimes we are very good in Britain at saying things are really bad and not realising the international impact of what we say'.

Exeter University becomes the first non-Russell Group institution to announce that it will charge the full £9,000 annual tuition fee.

After UCU reps on the USS absent themselves from a second meeting, USS CEO Tom Merchant writes to universities to tell them that plans to axe the final salary scheme cannot now be implemented on 1/4/11 as intended.

Week beginning 14/3/11

Points in coverage of HEFCE funding allocations for 2011-12 include: overall £6.5bn is to be paid out to 130 universities and 124 FE colleges doing directly-funded (ie as opposed to franchised) HE work; of this, £4.34bn is for teaching, and £1.56bn for research, most of the remainder being for capital items; the overall figure represents a reduction of £685m or 9.5 per cent over 2010-2011; this breaks down into an 8.2 per cent reduction in funding for teaching, 2.8 per cent for research, and 58.1 per cent for capital projects; if one-off payments for 2011-12 are disregarded, the overall cut is £940m, or 12.6 per cent; the allocations also include a further concentration of research funding, with the effect that, although Russell Group (ie large, research-intensive) institutions will collectively lose £14.6m of research funding from HEFCE, this represents for them a 1.5 per cent reduction, whereas the reduction for Million+ institutions (ie former polys) is 10.5 per cent, and for GuildHE institutions (former teacher training colleges) 17.5 per cent.

In the financial year 2009-10, (Dame) Jackie Fisher, union-bashing CEO of the Newcastle

College Group, paid herself £72,788 on top of her regular salary of £186,984. Of this additional £72,788, £54,091 was a 'retention payment', which chair of governors Jamie Martin explains by saying that 'The risk of not having a talented management capacity was unacceptable'. The Newcastle College UCU branch is balloting for action over management's announcement in February that 171 jobs there, including 120 lecturing posts, are to be axed.

Workers' Education Association (WEA) general secretary Richard Bolsin tells staff that the requirement for them to 'join' the IFL is 'suspended till further notice'. Commenting, both the SFA and Ofsted say that they would not be able to over-rule this.

In a speech at the weekend, Nick Clegg says: 'I cannot think of anything more absurd than a university saying, to prove that they can offer a good education, they can whack up the price to £9,000. They are not Harrods.'

About 50 of the 419 FE and 6th form colleges in the UK now have one or more full-time sabbatical student union officers, although there are signs that this number is increasing because of activity over EMAs, cuts etc.

In his final report to the Government on fair pay in the public sector, Work Foundation executive vice-chairperson Will Hutton drops his interim proposal that the pay of vice-chancellors should not be more than twenty times that of a university's lowest-paid employee, proposing instead that the multiple should be made public each year, and that in 'underperforming' institutions up to 10 per cent could be deducted from the vice-chancellor's salary by a committee including staff reps.

A *TES* article about rumoured plans by ministers to introduce an 'advanced Bac' (ie a version of the

Government's 'EBac' but including more GCSE subjects and/or higher grades) and an 'accelerated Bac' (ie where some pupils go straight to AS-levels without doing GCSEs) quotes 'a source close to . . . Michael Gove' as saying: 'We are considering much greater freedom for schools to accelerate bright kids past GCSE to do either A-levels of pre-Us and introducing league tables that capture that and reward schools for it, not penalise them'.

Minutes of a meeting of the executive board of Westminster University held on 25/1/11 reveal that a plan to charge fees above £6,000 is under consideration. (Westminster has already announced plans to cut 285 jobs by the end of July 2011.) Minutes of a Newcastle University council meeting on 7/2/11 reveal that a 15 per cent reduction in undergraduate recruitment as a result of fee rises is thought possible.

UCU members in the Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) have voted overwhelmingly for strike action on 24/3/11 over plans by management in both the HE and FE sectors to abolish final salary schemes.

Oxford University announces that, as well as charging £9,000 in fees from 2012 for most students, it will introduce a sliding scale for the less well-off, starting at £3,500.

Following hearings in which it emerged that since 2009 there has been effectively no check on the operation of bogus 'colleges', the Commons home affairs select committee issues a report recommending that there should be a single, new accrediting body in this area.

Week beginning 21/3/11

Points in a *THE* feature about vice-chancellors in 2009-10 include: the average spent by universities on

their vice-chancellors' pay and benefits, excluding pensions in that year was £213,813; Oxford University spent £433,000, of which £308,000 went to the current vice-chancellor in salary etc, while £47,000 went to his predecessor for two months salary, and a further £78,000 to cover the cost of moving his property from New Zealand when he started in 2004, and to the US in September 2009 when he left; the University of Gloucestershire, in severe financial difficulty, paid its departing vice-chancellor Patricia Broadfoot her standard £196,000 salary plus a further £198,000 'in lieu of notice'; Liverpool Hope University, now aiming to cut up to 110 jobs, gave its vice-chancellor, Gerald Pillay, a 20.6 per cent increase, taking his 'earnings' to £199,077.

In a *Guardian* article, Tom Wilson, director of unionlearn, the TUC's training arm, points out that in 2010 the exchequer gave over £5bn in tax relief to companies which provide or claim to provide training. There are just over 900,000 such companies, employing 8.3 million staff. Having argued that this money should be targeted more than now on training that is accredited, he adds: 'We at unionlearn want to work with ministers to make this money work'.

Home Secretary Teresa May announces the Government's final decision on student visas, which they hope to cut by 80,000 per year. Measures involved include: tighter inspection and accreditation of private colleges; requiring a higher standard of English than now for non-EU students wishing to enrol on degree courses here; a cut in the number of students who are allowed to bring dependents; the abolition of work rights for those on courses at institutions not in receipt of public funds; a five year limit on student visas for most HE students.

Michael Gove accepts Alison Wolf's recommendation that FE lecturers with QTLS should be allowed to teach in schools.

In 2010-11, just under 4,000 students at 60 private HE providers, some of which do not have degree-awarding powers, received loans from the Student Loans Company.

In his budget speech, George Osborne announces that over the next four years the Government will spend £180m on 40,000 'apprenticeships' for unemployed young people and 10,000 higher 'apprenticeships' leading to level 4 qualifications. He also announces £150m of capital funding to support technical and vocational education, including the expansion by 2014 to at least 24 of the number of 'university technical colleges' (UTCs - ie Kenneth Baker's semi-privatised 14-19 schools).

A *THE* interview with Student Loans Company (SLC) head Ed Lester points out that from 2012 'under the new funding regime, the vast bulk of universities' teaching income will also flow via the SLC . . .'

It emerges via a protest by Unison general secretary Dave Prentis that the IFL is demanding that FE college support staff who do some work as NVQ assessors, some of whom earn as little as £13,000 a year, 'belong' to the IFL and pay its £68.00 'membership' fee. (17,000 people have now signed UCU's online petition against the IFL's fee increase and in April members are to be balloted for action if employers do not agree to pay this themselves.)

As part of a drive to 'save' £6.5m from staff costs over two years, Keele University management announces plans to close the philosophy department there (which has about 200 undergraduate students) and the Centre for Professional Ethics (with a similar

number of postgraduates). But within a few days and following widespread protests management announces at a senate meeting a plan to make the same saving across several schools rather than mainly within philosophy.

Following a Unison campaign, London Met. University vice-chancellor Malcolm Gillies tells staff in an email that from 1/8/11 all directly employed workers there will receive the London Living Wage of £7.85 an hour as set by the Greater London Authority.

UCU members across both pre- and post-1992 universities and FE colleges take strike action over pensions and pay. On 24/3/11 these actions are combined with a day of action against cuts to ESOL provision. Commenting on the HE actions, UCU treasurer Alan Carr says: 'Hopefully it will bring the employers back to the negotiating table. If it doesn't, we will be taking further more serious industrial action'. He clarifies that this would be 'designed to have the maximum impact on examination and assessment processes'.

A *THES* analysis of the HEFCE funding allocations announced last week reveals that almost 20 institutions will in 2011-12 lose more than 10 per cent of their total teaching funding. One of these, Teesside University, will lose 17.3 per cent, due partly to under-recruitment.

Points in the annual Ross-Case survey of charitable income received by HE institutions, this time covering 2009-10, include: overall philanthropic income fell to £506m from £526m in 2008-09; new pledges (ie money to be paid over a longer period) totalled £600m; 50 per cent of the money from these new pledges is to go to Oxford and Cambridge (up from 46 per cent the year before); 48 per cent of money actually received also went to Oxford and Cambridge, and a further 23 per cent to other Russell Group universities.

A joint UCU/Unison survey of the effect of the Government's abolition of EMAs suggests that 93 per cent of FE colleges will lose students as a result, with the single biggest loss likely to be at Knowsley Community College, where 94 per cent of all students receive EMAs.

Week beginning 28/3/11

Achievement and Accountability, report of an independent review of HE in Wales commissioned by Welsh Assembly education minister Leighton Andrews, recommends that the HE Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) be replaced by a new, 12-member funding and regulatory body, Universities Wales, that would be directly accountable to the Assembly. Meanwhile the HEFCW release funding allocations for 2011-12 which represent an overall cut of 5.1 per cent, and a 6.5 per cent in funding for teaching, with reductions targeted disproportionately on post-1992 institutions.

It emerges that several of the 27 FE colleges now in the 157 Group, which in 2008-09 adopted rules limiting membership to colleges with a turnover exceeding £30m and inspection grades of 2 or above for leadership, no longer have such grades. Specifically: the Sheffield College, St Helens College and the College of Haringey, Enfield and NE London (CHENEL) have all received grades below 2 for leadership and management in their most recent inspections, while Ealing, Hammersmith and West London received a lower overall grade.

Points in an announcement by Michael Gove about the bursaries to be introduced following the abolition of EMAs include: they will be worth a total of £180m per year; in 2011-12 there will also be an additional £194m to continue payments for students who started

courses before the decision to scrap EMAs was made public; the poorest 12,000 students will be eligible to receive up to £1,200 a year; the remaining £165m is said to be enough to allow payments of £800 per year to students whose annual family income is below £16,000. The DFE opens a two-month consultation on these proposals.

Following an attempt by London College of Communication head of journalism, Paul Charman, to suppress a story about cuts there which was due to be published in the 17/3/11 issue of the student paper *Arts London News*, and the closure of 16 courses with 26 staff redundancies, the HE Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) is to investigate the impact of these cuts under its new whistleblowing procedure.

In a speech to college governors attending a conference organised by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), SFA CEO Geoff Russell says that, in the absence of 'some quite innovative changes in operating models for many of you . . . the number of colleges in outstanding financial health will drop by 50 per cent and the number in financial trouble will increase by 100 per cent, and sooner than you may think'. (The most recent SFA figures show 86 colleges in the former category and 15 in the latter.)

In an HE Policy Institute (HEPI) report *University Governance: Questions for a New Era*, London Met. vice-chancellor Malcolm Gillies argues that governors should increasingly be drawn from amongst alumni 'as they now become the chief funding agent . . . through their decades-long repayment of state-provided loans . . .'

In a *Guardian* article about the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) requirement for an 'apprenticeship'

to include 280 hours per year of 'guided learning', due to come into force in April 2011, Pimlico Plumbers director Charlie Mullins comments: 'On paper it's a positive move back to the way things used to be; the way they should be if we're going to tackle the UK's skills shortage. The problem we face, of course, is that it's great to fund all these 'new apprenticeships', but each and every one of them requires a job so the apprentice can put in their hours while they're training and that's where things come unstuck'.

The NUS publishes its new charter on the provision of personal tutors, which includes the stipulation that: 'All students should meet their tutor at least once a term'.

The QAA announces changes - effective from September 2011 - to the inspection regime for universities.

About one in six universities have now announced the fees they will charge starting in September 2012, and the majority of these say they will charge £9,000. (The Government has supposedly budgeted for an average of £7,500. Even this will require the contribution to student loans on the part of 'the taxpayer' to rise from £3bn in 2011 to £7bn in 2014-15.)

Leeds Metropolitan University, in 2009 the only institution in England to offer a large discount on the current fee level, announces that from 2012 it will charge £8,500.

UCU head of HE Michael MacNeil writes to branches in pre-1992 universities to consult them about the possibility of two days of strike action over pensions during May.

HE Statistics Agency figures for 2009-10 show that in that year expenditure on interest and other finance costs rose by 17.6 per cent, reaching £453m.

The DFE grant letter to the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) announces a cut in 50,000 places for young people in FE colleges and with private training providers in 2011-12. (This results from under-recruitment of 18,000 for the current year by these two sectors, which contrasts with the situation in school 6th forms, which recruited 12,000 more students than predicted.)

Speaking at an AOC conference on *HE in FE: New Landscape, New Opportunities?*, held in London, David Willetts says that any university that tries to revise its validation and franchising arrangements in order to take back in house provision currently outsourced to FE colleges would be guilty of 'anti-competitive behaviour', while AOC HE policy director Nick Davy predicts that most colleges providing HE will have to charge fees of around £7,500.

Following the Government's withdrawal of its licence, the FE and HE sector skills council Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), along with its Standards Verification UK subsidiary, closes down. Its role in setting standards for FE teacher training is passed to the IFL.

In the IFL dispute, John Hayes holds meetings with the unions, the AOC and the IFL itself.

Week beginning 4/4/11

Points in a *THE* analysis of HE finances, based on figures for 2009-10 (end of July) presented in *The Financial Health of the Higher Education Sector*, to be published shortly by the accountants Grant Thornton, include: in that year the HE sector as a whole 'produced' a surplus of £810.7m, representing 3.1 per cent of its total income and up by nearly 250 per cent over 2008-09; the number of institutions in deficit fell to 26 from 33 in the

previous year; of the overall surplus, £324.3m was 'produced' by Russell Group institutions; in 2009-10 UK universities allocated £157m to 'reorganisations' (ie largely to redundancy payments); 43 per cent of this £157m (ie £67.7m) was allocated by Russell Group universities; between 2008-09 and 2009-10, 'staff costs' (ie pay and pensions) rose by 4 per cent, but as a proportion of income fell (from 55.8 per cent to 54.7 per cent); on 31/7/10, total borrowing stood at just under £5bn, and had given rise over the year to £446.4m in interest payments; at 12 institutions these interest payments were above the HEFCE benchmark of 4 per cent of income; 12 institutions were 'geared' at over 100 per cent - ie their payments on debt funding exceeded their internal reserves; whereas Russell Group and 1994 Group (smaller 'research-intensive' universities) derived, respectively, 27 and 31 per cent of their income from funding council grants, for the institutions in the other three 'mission groups' (ie the less posh pre-1992 institutions plus the former polys and teacher training colleges in University Alliance, Million+ and GuildHE) income from these sources everywhere exceeded 40 per cent - hence they will now be much more vulnerable to government cutbacks than the first two groups; other vulnerabilities (eg with regard to cuts in NHS funding of nurse training, cuts to teacher training and the squeeze on students from outside the EU) are also identified.

Points in a joint UCU/Unison survey of FE, to which 146 colleges responded, include: 93 per cent have made staff redundant since June 2009; overall, 45 per cent of these redundancies were of support staff, 42 per cent were of lecturers, and 12 per cent were of managers; 80 per cent of colleges have since cut courses and/or other student provision; 53 per cent plan further lay-offs; 41 per cent plan to axe more courses/provision in the next 12 months as

a result of projected funding cuts; 23 per cent have already turned away would-be students because of cuts.

UCU's annual financial returns reveal that: in 2009-10 the general secretary's salary was £98,238, and her overall pay and benefits package was £126,502; in October 2010 there were 121,539 members, and by February 2011 this had risen to 122,216; in 2009-10 the union showed a surplus of £535,748; in 2009-10 it paid £145,862 in interest on a bridging loan relating to the head office move from Britannia Street to Carlow Street; its loan liabilities stood at £12.3m.

FE minister John Hayes calls unions, college employers and the IFL to 'crisis talks' over the IFL £68 'fee' demand, and as result UCU suspends its threat to ballot for a boycott of IFL.

HEFCE figures reveal that over the last four months of the current academic year (ie April-July 2011) HEFCE is to claw back a total of £8.1m from 19 HE institutions, plus a total of £500,000 from 33 FE colleges doing HE work. These clawbacks result from institutions recruiting more students than HEFCE had authorised. Examples include £1.4m from Middlesex University, £1.2m from Greenwich, £1.1m from Manchester Metropolitan and £900,000 from Teesside (which also faces a £4.6m cut for other reasons).

Newcastle College Group HE director John Rowe claims this organisation has more than 50,000 students taking foundation degrees via partnerships with Newcastle, Leeds and Kingston Universities. He says it cannot afford to charge less than £4,000 in fees, and that: 'In spite of the economic downturn, I believe the austerity measures offer us significant opportunities'.

UCU members at Newcastle College are to take strike action on

12/4/11 after 82 per cent voted for this in opposition to sackings.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for the UK as a whole show that from 2008-09 to 2009-10 the proportion of young full time undergraduate entrants to universities from state schools rose from 89 per cent to 89.4 per cent.

Ministers are reported by the *THE* to be 'looking closely' at *Universities Challenged*, a document by LSE economic history reader Tim Leunig, in which he proposes a system by which universities would enter an 'auction' of student place allocations conducted by the Government in such a way as to encourage them to charge fees below £9,000.

Moorlands, a 300-pupil prep school in Luton, is to join the Barnfield Federation - ie the organisation dominated by Barnfield College of FE, which currently includes two academy schools and a studio school, and which expects shortly to include a 'university technical college' (UTC) as well.

At UCU's Scottish annual conference, held in Dundee, Stirling branch president Ralph Catts describes Scottish university management as 'a farce' beset by 'cronism', while Strathclyde University branch vice-president Bill Johnston says 'we need to raise the consciousness that Scottish higher education is effectively in crisis'.

Following the dispute between the DFE and BIS about the latter's 'minimum contract level' (MCL) bar on SFA funding being disbursed to FE and training providers with turnovers below £500,000 per year, BIS decides to go ahead with this, but with exemptions which will allegedly cancel out many of the intended savings on admin.

Review of External Examining Arrangements in Universities and Colleges in the UK, a report

produced by the External Examining Review Group, proposes that all students should be allowed full access to external examiners' reports.

An analysis by Ofqual of six A-level exams used for the first time in 2010 as part of moves to make A-level more demanding concludes that several papers involved, including two Edexcel physics papers, one AQA English literature paper and one AQA A2 in geography, were insufficiently rigorous.

Former British museum planning and projects director and current Oaklands College deputy principal Zoe Hancock is appointed to succeed union-basher Mark Dawe as principal there, following the latter's appointment as CEO of OCR.

A BIS spokesperson acknowledges that an announcement made by David Willetts at the AOC HE in FE conference last week that 'we have achieved our ambition of 50,000 additional ['apprenticeship'] starts with a month to spare' was untrue.

The Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) threatens to take High Court action against the five UCU reps on the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) with the aim of forcing them to attend it and thus allow its 'independent' chairperson, Sir Andrew Cubie, to use his casting vote to push through the employers' plans to degrade the pensions of staff in pre-1992 universities.

In a speech to HEFCE's annual conference, business secretary Vince Cable says a decision by universities to charge the full £9,000 fee would be 'economically irrational' and would 'magnify risk'. Meanwhile several more universities - Keele, Southampton, University College Falmouth and University of the Arts London - announce £9,000 fees.

The IFL has cut its staff from 52 to 38.

Week beginning 11/4/11

The GuildHE mission group expresses concern about a proposal by HEFCE, in consultation ending this week, to alter the distribution of its HE Innovation Fund (HEIF) money in a manner which would exclude many small HE providers from receiving it, thereby causing GuildHE institutions to lose a further £5.5m in annual funding.

The *TES* publicises a letter sent by IFL CEO Toni Fazaali to all FE principals, in which she announces that the IFL's 'professional practice committee' has decided to 'impose' an 18 month ban on any college employing suspended Wiltshire College lecturer Mark Mullis. (Mullis last week pleaded guilty at Swindon Crown Court to a third charge of engaging in sexual activity with a woman who was below the age of 18 and in relation to whom he was in a position of trust - ie a student at the college.)

The USS announces that the next meeting of the HE pensions JNC is to be postponed from 14 April to 10 May to allow UCU to discuss directly with employers. Meanwhile, UCU HE official Michael MacNeil announces plans for further industrial action over the issue (ie one-day strikes in late May and again in June).

UCU members at Newcastle College take a day of strike action over planned sackings.

There is evidence of universities planning to recruit sharply increased numbers of non-EU students between now and 2014-15. By then, for example, Durham plans a 97 per cent increase in such students, raising them from 9 to 16 per cent of all undergraduates, while Exeter plans to raise their numbers to 4,000, apparently

representing a 73 per cent rise. (Neither the numbers of nor the fees paid by non-EU students are at present controlled by the Government. The highest annual fee charged to them this year is £26,250 at Imperial College.)

According to Westminster Adult Education Service (WAES) head Barbara Holm, the council there plans to evict them from their premises to make room for a 'free school run by the education 'charity' Ark, and charge them a market rent for any alternative premises provided by the council. The council itself claims that the eviction is temporary (ie after two years WAES could move back in alongside Ark) and that during the two years WAES might move to Brent). The council is also considering ending its links with WAES altogether and 'spinning it off as an independent company' (TES). WAES's main provision is ESOL.

Despite admitting that no damage was caused, University College London (UCL) management has told a group of 13 people (11 current students, one students' union officer and one UCU branch officer) who took part in an occupation of admin offices there in late March, that they must choose between undertaking 'community service' or being pursued for legal costs. UCL students' union education and campaigns officer Michael Chessum maintains this is primarily an attempt to victimise people with a longer term record of activism.

It emerges that the AOC's response to consultation by BIS and the DWP on their planned 'skills conditionality' policy (ie the plan by which unemployed people will be forced by Jobcentre Plus staff to attend training, including vocational and/or basic skills in colleges on pain of losing benefit, included the following: 'Individuals who have been 'forced' to attend training are rarely as motivated as those who have actively sought it

out. Pressures on delivery budgets could well see mandated claimants training alongside individuals who have paid for their training. This could prove to be disruptive.'

The SFA announces that for one year colleges which lose more than a fifth of their adult provision as a result of the Government's decision to restrict free courses to those on jobseekers' allowance and employment support allowance, thereby excluding those on income support, will be allowed to keep up to half of the funding they would otherwise have received, so long as they use it to 'reshape their business to better focus on the new priorities'. (The AOC claims that about 100,000 students will be lost, 75 per cent of them women who would have taken ESOL courses)

The Government announces that in 2012-13 some students doing degrees at private institutions will be able to borrow up to £6,000 in taxpayer-funded fee loans, and the numbers that such providers can recruit will remain uncapped. (HESA's first survey of such private provision indicates that in 2009-10 just under 38,000 people were on private HE courses, mainly in law, management or business, of whom about 20,000 were at for-profit institutions.)

In voting for officerships at the NUS conference, held in Gateshead, current NUS Scotland president, Labour Party member and graduate tax supporter Liam Burns becomes overall president, and Usman Ali is re-elected as vice-president, beating UCL activist and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) co-founder Michael Chessum. Motions to affiliate to the NCAFC and to hold a national demonstration in November over fees are lost.

The 'public sector consultancy' Tribal is selling off its other business interests, from which it hopes to make £12m, in order to

'invest in education', its profits from which in 2010 exceeded £14m.

Week beginning 18/4/11

UCAS figures issued to universities reveal a 12 per cent drop as compared with the same point in 2010 in the number of applicants for HE places who by 15th April had accepted unconditional offers, the deadline for such acceptances being 5/5/11.

London Met. University, which is to set some fees below £6,000, announces plans to cut the number of courses it offers from 577 to 160. This will involve dropping history (with about 30 students a year), philosophy, performing arts (with 50-60 students a year) and Caribbean studies. Vice-chancellor Malcolm Gillies claims that students currently on these course will either be allowed to complete them at London Met. or 'we shall mutually agree on suitable transfers'. The University of East London (UEL) is planning to close its School of Humanities and Social Sciences, with the result that English and history, for example, will be relocated in a school of Creative and Digital Industries. Greenwich University is to close its philosophy department.

The five HE unions submit a joint claim for 2011-12 which calls for a national pay increase in line with inflation, currently running at 5.3 per cent.

Asked by the *THE* to comment on supposed moves by HE employers towards local pay bargaining, Alison Wolf, who in a 2010 pamphlet argued for this, offers her opinion that in the long term national bargaining is 'unsustainable', but City University vice-chancellor and Universities and Colleges Employers Association board member Paul Curran says: 'Vice-chancellors have enough to

deal with without the upset that would be caused by moving out of the national scheme'.

Points in a *Guardian* article about university fees published on the morning of the 19/4/11 deadline for institutions which want to charge over £6,000 to submit their plans to OFFA include: 60 institutions have declared what fees they will charge (ie about 70 have still to do so); of the 60, 41 say they will charge £9,000 for all their courses; this includes Oxford and Cambridge and every other Russell Group university except Bristol and the LSE, neither of which has yet announced its figure, but also UEL; a further four say they will charge £9,000 for at least one of their courses; universities charging a range of fees include London Met. (from £4,500 to £9,000) and Coventry (from £4,600 to £9,000); Portsmouth and Leeds Metropolitan are to cap their fees at £8,500, while Derby will cap at £7,995; the overall average fee announced so far is £8,679.20.

An article in the *I* newspaper on 20/4/11 reveals that: six HE institutions - Bristol University, Bradford University, Hull University, Lincoln University, Edge Hill University and Harper Adams agricultural college all announced during 19/4/11 that they intend to charge £9,000; Salford University and Manchester Metropolitan both intend to charge fees between £8,000 and £9,000; Worcester will charge £8,100 and Leeds Trinity £8,000.

House of Commons Library analysis of the HE fees so far announced suggests that by 2014/15 the Government will have to intervene to withdraw 36,000 HE student places. (This is because the Government has said that if the overall average fee is higher than £7,500 it will act to hold down the total of student loans, which on these figures would over-run by £450m, equating to 36,000 'excess' places.)

OFFA reveals that 122 out of the 123 public HE institutions in England have now submitted draft access agreements which indicate that they intend to charge tuition fees above £6,000 a year. OFFA further announces that by the 20/4/11 deadline: 66 FE colleges doing HE work submitted access agreements for 2011-12 implying that they plan to charge above the basic level of £1,345 in fees; 17 such colleges also submitted agreements for 2012-13 in which they signalled fees above £6,000.

Week beginning 25/4/11

Following up its report in March about students at private HE institutions receiving loans from the Student Loans Company (ie in effect a subsidy from taxpayers) the *THE* publishes the results of a Freedom of Information (FOI) request revealing that in 2009-10 loans taken out by such students to pay tuition fees amounted to about £9m, up £2m from 2008-09, the largest sums going to students at the Academy of Contemporary Music in Guildford (£2m), the Brighton Institute of Modern Music (£1.6m) and the Greenwich School of Management (£823,000), while loans for maintenance totalled £13.1m, up from £10.8m in 2008-09. (This was in advance of the arrangement announced earlier in April by David Willetts, by which the maximum such students can borrow for tuition fees is raised from the £3,290 applying hitherto to £6,000. The private Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, based in London, responds to this by saying it will raise its 2012-13 fees to £5,750.)

The *THE* claims a rumour is circulating amongst 'senior figures' that the postponed White Paper on HE will raise the cap on what students at private institutions can borrow from the Student Loans Company from £6,000 to £9,000.

We print here two extracts from *PSE 42 News Update*, followed by material by UCU members forced out of their jobs at Harlow College in 2007, who have chosen to remain anonymous

The Guardian and Harlow College

Week beginning 23/4/07

Features of the situation at Harlow (tertiary) College include: the day before the Easter holidays, the principal, Colin Hindmarch, issued a circular to all 205 lecturing staff there; according to this, all must re-apply for jobs under a new contract; this would abolish the existing normal working week of 35 hours altogether, substituting for it a requirement to teach for a minimum of 37 hours a week, between 8am and 10pm on weekdays and 8am and 2pm on Saturdays; UCU calculates this would entail a working week of at least 56 hours; staff are to be reorganised into three grades - principal tutors (numbering 26), senior tutors and tutors; tutors, constituting 35 per cent of the jobs, will be on salaries ranging between £19,500 and £23,000 (as compared with £24,000-£33,000 for a main grade lecturer now); fixed holiday periods are scrapped; the holiday allowance will be cut by three

weeks; a 90-day consultation period started on 17/4/07; on 19/4/07, a meeting of 95 UCU members voted unanimously to ballot for strike action; the college, in Bill Rammell's [ie the FE minister's] constituency, has 2,070 16-18 year-old students and 4,750 adults.

Week beginning 7/5/07

New features of the continuing crisis at Harlow College include: the principal, Colin Hindmarch, has appointed as head of sixth form the former massage lecturer Sally-Ann Abdelmoula, who is said to have 'no A-levels and a degree in work-based learning'; Hindmarch has also introduced an appraisal system which includes assessment of support for his new 'teaching and learning strategy' - only those judged as prepared to 'live the vision' receive top grades; in a ballot, 76 per cent of UCU members who voted support strike action.

It is a hard working teacher's worst nightmare. Having committed years of your life to helping students achieve their very best and being warmly commended by students, parents, the retiring principal and even by Ofsted, a new regime takes over and denounces you and belittles your achievements. They then contrive to have you sacked because you are not a 'team player' and you don't share the new principal's 'vision'. You protest that you do share these ideals but the management insist that you don't.

Amid unannounced inspections from managers, and false testimonies being concocted against you, and threats of disciplinary constantly hanging over every conscientious teacher's head, you are subtly denounced as a liar and cannot be trusted. You see friends and colleagues humiliated, marched off the college premises because an over-ambitious bureaucrat or a single vindictive student bore false witness against them. In truth it is because you stand loyally by a trade union with which the college no longer wishes to consult that you are to be purged.

To add insult to injury, the Union protests it cannot take everyone's case to tribunal so they urge you to take the paltry offerings within the voluntary redun-

dancy package - which naturally includes a gagging clause because the college has hired a top legal firm at the tax payers' expense. You spend years trying to put this miserable experience behind you when the *Guardian* newspaper - the newspaper you read every day - heralds this principal as the 'College Saviour Who Defied his Critics'.

Aside from grovelling to the principal in a truly nauseating way, the article contains copious libels about you and your friends. You cannot afford to sue but you have faith that they will ultimately show some balance and give you an equal opportunity, as the principal enjoyed, to air your views. But they refuse to allow a critical word to be said about the principal. You protest, and they simply ignore you.

This is the *Guardian* newspaper - now the guardian of Harlow College. They protested that the *TES* ran a similar article, but we expect that sort of bias from the Times. And besides, they did not accuse teachers of shouting and swearing at the principal, along with a host of other outrages. Our *Guardian* turned against us. But why? Perhaps it is because the principal hires Phil Hall, PR consultant and former editor of the News of the World, who himself attended Harlow College - as did Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian*.

It may not be presuming too much to say that the newspaper of choice for many PSE readers is the *Guardian*. But any serious teacher who genuinely cares for his/her students may wish to cancel his/her subscription and write a letter of complaint to this supposedly liberal organ. They will try to ignore you, just as they try to ignore us, but you would be strongly encouraged to do so because a certain article published on 25 January 2011 threatens all your jobs and may see the transformation of further education in the state sector to little more than a brain re-assembling plant.

The article, on Colin Hindmarch, infamous principal of Harlow College, can be found at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jan/college-leader-succeeds-against-odds?INTCMP=SRCH>

It demonstrates how appalling, ignorant and one-sided the paper has become, and why it can no longer be trusted on education issues. In this grovelling 'feature' none of the horrific realities of the Hindmarch regime was exposed, merely a ceaseless propaganda diatribe from a man who has hired Phil Hall, former editor of the *News of the World*, as a PR consultant at enormous cost to the public purse. Rather than investigate that particular outrage, which is a genuine news story of public interest, 'journalist' Janet Murray passively regurgitated every dictated line from Mr Hindmarch without question. This demonstrates that the conflict between the *Guardian* and the Murdoch empire is mere jousting with breadsticks in Mayfair brasseries. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that Phil Hall as well as Alan Rusbridger (editor of the *Guardian*) and Chris Elliott (readers' editor) all went to the same institution to train to be journalists: Harlow College. At all costs they want to protect an institution with which they are associated from being afflicted by a poor reputation. If you need any further proof, notice how the *Guardian* provides subtle free advertising for Harlow College while ignoring local competing colleges such as Herts Regional or Epping Forest in its articles over the last couple of years. Harlow College may be constructed of steel and glass but it has the scent of a timber 'lodge' for its alumni (or should that be 'aluminatum'?).

While wading through the pointless, sycophantic drivel about Mr Hindmarch's exotic Indian adventures and E. M. Forsterish romance, there are regular attacks on the victims of his purge four years ago: the forty teachers who were sacked because they were loyal to the union, and another forty who quit because the terms of the new contracts were horrifying and because they found the culture of bullying toxic. After being humiliated in employment tribunals, where he had to settle or

face public humiliation, Colin Hindmarch simply cannot let matters go. In what can only be described as a series of libels, he accused the teachers he sacked of 'shouting and swearing' at him and of dismissing students as stupid 'because they are from Harlow'. These are vicious and untrue attacks: he would have sacked anyone who swore or shouted at him on the spot, and it is he who has a lofty contempt for the people and town of Harlow, preferring to commute there from the leafy suburbs of Bishop's Stortford.

Colin Hindmarch even had the effrontery to deny that the deliberately punitive new contract that he introduced in 2007 contained a 56-hour working week for teachers. He had every opportunity to deny this same charge at tribunal but, as many witnesses in the college assert, he desperately sought to settle with the claimants instead. In one incident, a psychology teacher returned to the college after maternity leave and was appalled to find that she was being asked to sign a new contract. She used to teach 23.5 hours a week as a full-time position and wanted to change to a half-time contract so that she could spend more time with her child. She was reportedly but understandably in floods of tears and total despair when informed that a half-time contract would oblige her to teach 28 hours a week - even more than her old full-time contract but for barely half the money! Why did neither the principal nor the deputy principal deny the 56-hour week then so that she would not feel forced to accept voluntary redundancy? The timing of Hindmarch's denial is also deeply suspicious. It occurred within days after this same issue was presented to another employment tribunal. It seemed that it could have been a deliberate attempt to undermine the witness's testimony and influence the outcome of the tribunal where Harlow College was featuring prominently.

However, the *Guardian* surely presented alternative views to Mr Hindmarch's propaganda? Tucked away in one corner, more than a week later, a very patient eye might have noticed two extremely short letters that were published, but edited so heavily that they were almost meaningless. From one of the letters 77 per cent of the content was removed, and from the other 73 per cent. In one circulated email, Alice Woolley wrote apologising for the offence caused by the article and promising to publish letters, but she added: 'Your letter would need to respond to the article without attacking Mr Hindmarch, or anyone else, personally. We will be publishing other letters about that interview.' Apart from only a quarter each from two letters being published (in all, around 200 heavily edited words versus 1,300 words and a photo which the *Guardian* considers 'balanced'), the hypocrisy is breath-

taking. Throughout their published article, there are ceaseless personal attacks on the judgement of a former minister and MP, Bill Rammell, but Mr Hindmarch - a public official with a six-figure salary - must be protected!

Mr Hindmarch and his politically motivated managers and governors declared an unprovoked war against the union back in 2007. Mr Hindmarch said they were 'redundant' but appeared not to understand the word when questioned in public tribunal. The college had just one history teacher before the changes came into place. He was coincidentally vice-chair of the union branch and lost his job. His work was then taken over by two people even though they had fewer students. Some teachers got to keep their jobs because they quickly distanced themselves from UCU, but around 40 took redundancy, not just because of the outrageous 56-hour week and 30 per cent reduction in holiday entitlement but because they also could not stand what the chair of the tribunal referred to in open court as the college's 'reign of terror'.

This is perhaps the most serious point, and one which has never had proper public exposure outside the confines of the public tribunal. Union officers, apart from having to fight for their own jobs, were having to represent teachers at disciplinary hearings on an almost constant basis in the early months of 2007. The moment the union branch chair stood down from her position and was no longer entitled to the protection of a regional official, she was suspended and marched off the premises. Other teachers were victims of management hyenas desperate to endear themselves to the principal by providing scalps. Another teacher, who had taught at the college for thirty years, was similarly humiliated and denied the proper procedures (agreed with by the union, of course). He too was active in the union. Another teacher was placed on disciplinary for the price of a second class stamp when she put a personal letter in the college mail. They must have opened it to find out, and it didn't matter to them that it was to an oncologist - she was active in the union and therefore targeted. Yet another teacher was placed on disciplinary and denied the rights laid down in the procedure simply because he was denounced by one student shortly after he became a staffroom shop steward - and that student was known by the management to be an activist for the BNP. It is very interesting whose sides they take in such conflicts (and perhaps why this particular disciplinary was quietly dropped . . . but without an apology). We know these people were targeted because of a leaked document from a sympathetic manager who was leaving the college. This person had a very real stab of conscience when a 'hit list' was discovered

detailing all the teachers that the principalship was determined to remove, prior to appraisals and interviews. This was also extensively discussed in tribunal, providing great catharsis to the victims present.

But what was it all for? Apart from the political motivation, it was to terminate the provision of A-levels at the college. Most of the academic staff were forthright in their trade union membership and understood their rights very well. They also understood education much better than managers and principals who have a contempt for their 'customers' (students) and simply like to fiddle with benchmarks on a daily basis. They know that teachers can make a very forceful argument for why students should be given opportunities to study A-levels at college because it prepares them more for universities and helps nurture responsibility far better than micro-managing schools, in which vocational students would ironically fare much better. But the reason is more mundane. Vocational qualifications are internally assessed and far more easily manipulated than external exams. This is why Hindmarch triumphantly declares his remarkable 'success rates'. This is the greatest deception of all. Few people are aware that 'success rates' are nothing more than glorified retention rates that do not distinguish between A grades and E grades. No self-respecting institution for FE cares for them, and neither do parents and students who matter most. They can all detect the bizarre orally discharged faecal odours that pass by when a college exalts exceptional 'success rates' but the students are getting E and D grades and failing to move on to university. Mr Hindmarch talks of achieving excellence for all - not with a strategy that looks at 'success rates' rather than achievement rates he won't. The truth is that when one takes out A-level photography and sociology (Mr Hindmarch likes photography - it's all coursework so the outcomes can be controlled), Harlow College's A-level 'excellence' rates are depressingly low - less than 20 per cent achieving A* - B grades.

Anyway, Mr Hindmarch has a neat little trick of keeping success rates artificially high. Whenever a student looks like they will not even pass a closely managed vocational course, they are not allowed to 'drop out' but are instead transferred to a short, meaningless course, which may take as little as a day to complete. As long as they receive a certificate at the end then, statistically speaking, they have 'succeeded'. College managers think this is very neat, but how exactly do students benefit from this sleight of hand? Besides, A-level teachers are the only link between the university lecturers and the vocational teachers that comprise the membership of UCU. They would have to break up if the

academic FE staff membership shrank any further.

Ofsted of course finds it all very impressive, but then they have to. Ofsted have been in situ, desperately rescuing the chaotic college ever since Hindmarch's unilaterally declared civil war led to a recruitment calamity. Ofsted wasn't the only set of stabilisers on this errant principal's bicycle: other publicly funded bureaucracies such as the LSC and QAA were heavily involved in rescuing him too. Ofsted's first report after Hindmarch's purges found that he had sacked and terrified too many people; they exposed the fact that an ICT class of a hundred students was being taught by one teacher via a public address system! Since then reports have been occurring thick and fast as they do not trust Mr Hindmarch to run the college himself.

Since the purge, Mr Hindmarch attempted to force A-level provision onto the local schools but they refused. His whole plan for 'subject days' was designed solely for this purpose. Having schools distributed all over the town would make it impossible for students to study one A-level in a particular school and then go to a different school to study the next by a conventional timetable. Subject days allow students to go to different schools each day. Problem solved. The fact that the scheme had appalling consequences for students to study one whole day a week on a single subject did not seem to matter. Decent A-level grades collapsed by 20 per cent but the college responded by arguing that this is the very reason why schools should take them over! The *Guardian* article actually praised the initiative of subject days but never bothered to investigate the truth behind the story. But then the *Guardian* reported many things that were not true.

Aside from the creepy article penned by Janet Murray, how the readers' editor Chris Elliott dealt with the complaints and letters was beneath contempt. For every question put to him, Mr Elliott acted as if he was a spokesperson for the college and betrayed the fact that key figures on the college board have very close ties with the college. When asked why they did not investigate the state of the college's finances, where corporation board minutes have been curiously absent from the college's websites for months on end, he replied: 'The college is happy to release details of its accounts to prove there [sic] accounts are not a mess'. No more details were given and no reply to a request that they should share this information, given that the newspaper has easy access to these accounts on such cosy terms. When asked about the appalling drop in A-level grades the year after the purge, the *Guardian* replied: 'It is true that A level results at the college dipped in the first year Hindmarch was at the college. This wasn't mentioned in the article, simply due to word count, but there is nothing in the

article to suggest otherwise'. So they have room for Hindmarch's unsubstantiated attacks on his victims, his denial of a 56-hour week and huge paragraphs on his love life, but nothing on important 'dips' in quality - and it was a pretty huge 'dip' as 'dips' go.

The *Guardian* also sulked that the *TES* ran a similarly sycophantic article on Hindmarch, but we expect that from the Times. And besides, they did not publish Hindmarch's attacks on teachers, and nor did they challenge the 56-hour working week. We asked that the *Guardian* do a 'feature' on Hindmarch's victims for balance, and interview us, but they just ignore us now. It seems that journalists who study at Harlow College are more adept at denying people a voice than providing one. The *Guardian* pompously claims that in their paper 'comment is free'. No it isn't. To express yourself properly in that newspaper, one requires a powerful PR firm and a team of very expensive lawyers. Professional newspapers encourage free and fair discussion - they do not represent one side and contrive to suppress the other. One does not suppress the truth simply because it does not conform to one's prejudices.

These are the stakes: if Hindmarch is allowed to be spun into some kind of hero by his propaganda machine and even has the *Guardian* grovelling in tow, then a model will be set for other colleges to follow. You can expect full blown war against the union from politically motivated managers and principals, who themselves failed as teachers because of the endemic misanthropic tendencies that reside within so many of them. They have a Fordian concept of education that negates the individual learner's needs and see teachers purely as leftwing brainwashers.

You can expect dramatic increases in your teaching hours, a proportionate decline in your holiday entitlement, unannounced class inspections by management who do not know what they are talking about, and you will be graded after you have signed the paperwork. You can expect weak but ambitious teachers to be promoted to management for spying on independent-minded but highly effective teachers, and even wayward students to be recruited for the same purpose. You can expect disciplinary action, suspensions and bullying on a breathtaking scale. You can expect a reign of terror - but the *Guardian* will simply praise the 'innovative' principal because he or she can manipulate statistics while the reality of the damage to the local community is clear for all to see: huge declines in students recruited, extremely poor levels of high achievement, hardly any students progressing to their university of choice, and extremely high unemployment among those who have received a qualification from the college.

What now for adult education? Lessons from Derbyshire's miners

Harry Barnes*

Under Bert Wynn who was Secretary of the Derbyshire Miners, a programme of Day Release Classes was established in 1952. These continued in operation for the next four decades, but finally ended as a consequence of the closure of the local pits. Miners attending studied subjects such as industrial relations, economics and politics.

A new class of 20 miners was established each year. They came to span a three year period and involved a total attendance of 120 days. The tutors on the courses came from the Sheffield University Extramural Department, the Derbyshire Miners having an agreement with the National Coal Board (NCB) to release their members from work to attend the classes.

Those attending required no prior educational qualifications; nor were there any exams, tests nor marks ever provided. However, because the supply of places on the courses was always outstripped by the demand, selection conferences were held in the Miners Offices on Saltergate by the tutors where the applicants met together in discussion groups and participated in a note-taking exercise. A Saturday morning class also came to be run for those who it was felt would benefit from a preparatory development of their student skills; many of these miners moved onto the full Day Release Courses and made highly effective use of the abilities they had developed.

The miners on the courses also engaged in private study and produced a steady stream of written work. After their time on the courses, the participants went on to make a variety of uses of their studies. Some became more deeply involved in the work of the National Union of Mineworkers, others progressed through the NCB, numbers became involved in the work of the wider labour movement including those who became local councillors, whilst the late Eric Varley and Denis Skinner became local MPs, others

moved into full-time studies at Adult Education Colleges and then went on to obtain degrees at University before taking up posts such as social workers, educationalists and full-time trade union officials. Others remained in their established roles in their communities, taking their newly developed interests with them and also influencing communal developments.

I was lucky to be a tutor on the course for 21 years from 1966, before becoming a local MP for a further 18 years. I have always claimed that the standard and seriousness of the investigations in the classes was more substantial than was the general run of my experiences in parliament. This is because serious adult education is about making well thought out judgements on complex issues, whilst parliamentary politics is too often about point scoring.

The pattern which was established in Derbyshire was pursued elsewhere. The Extramural Department were involved with similar courses in areas such as the South Yorkshire Coalfield, the Steel Industry, the railways, engineering and with Shop Stewards Courses which drew people together from differing firms.

It was not, however, just because of the decline of large industries, mainly concentrated in the public sector, that such courses were ended. Another pattern of adult education (which had always had its own separate existence) took over but was manipulated under Margaret Thatcher. Unfortunately, it became a growing trend that was then pushed under New Labour. What remained of day-release work was often placed under the influence of employers, whose interests were to see their workers being trained to undertake tasks strictly relevant to their employment duties. More emphasis was placed upon adults attending courses in their own time, which would be carefully accredited to meet specific and limited purposes. Certification became the order of the day. The way for adults to progress via education came to

be seen as requiring studies to be broken up into specific and limited modules and tested at each stage, so they could act as stepping stones (or some would say stumbling blocks) to higher qualifications. The scope for investigating key issues about life and society were restricted and were seen as secondary. The old form of equality and socialising between tutors and students, in which each learnt from the other, was seen as being unnecessary. Increasingly course fees were expected to cover the bulk of the provision of adult education.

It is not that there should be no room for some forms of today's dominant trend in adult education, but it should never have happened at the expense of the invaluable approach which the Derbyshire Miners had participated in and developed.

Nothing in life is, however, ever too late. Some of us have always attempted to replicate something of what used to be called the liberal education tradition by running and attending a variety of discussion groups. But it is now time to campaign for what was taken away from us. We are not alone in this.

Why not join us at the meeting advertised below? Former participants in the Derbyshire Miners' Day Release Classes will be present. But we know that we can't somehow just try to re-cycle the past. It is a matter for all of us to seek new ways in which what was once achieved in a period from the 1950s can be refashioned to meet the challenging conditions of the 21st Century. We owe many debts to Coal Mining in Derbyshire; serious adult education is one of them.

****This article is reprinted from the Chesterfield May Day brochure published by Chesterfield and District TUC. The meeting referred to was held, under the same title as the article, following the march and rally in Chesterfield on 2/5/11. For a slightly longer version of this article, a report of the meeting, and other relevant material, please go to: <http://dronfieldblather.blogspot.com/>. See also Harry's own blog: <http://threescoreyearsandten.blogspot.com/>***

Sheffield IWCE meeting discusses Tressell

Colin Waugh reports

In Sheffield on 22nd January, as a follow-up to an earlier meeting on Independent Working-Class Education (IWCE), Dave Harker, author of *Tressell: the real story of the Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (Zed Books, 2003), gave a brilliant session on this book which has meant so much to activists and on its in some ways enigmatic author, who died of tuberculosis in February 2011, before any version of it had been published.

Dave began with a talk in which he appeared to be criticising both Tressell and the book itself. He showed, for example, how 'Robert Tressell' was in fact Robert Croker, the illegitimate son (born 1870) of a well-to-do Dublin police magistrate, how while in South Africa, as well as sending his daughter Kathleen to an expensive convent school and employing a black servant who he called 'Sixpence', Croker, then going under his mother's name of Noonan, led a 'successful' protest against the employment of black skilled labour, and how, while working as a painter and decorator in East Sussex (from 1902) he seems not to have joined a union, and even offered an airship design to the War Office. Again, on the book itself, Dave pointed out that in it Irish building workers appear not to exist, that the central character and socialist Frank Owen, who makes no effort to organise a union, looks upon the other painters as 'the people who were really responsible for the continuation of the present system', that the socialist speeches

he makes are no more than abstract propaganda, that the speech near the end by the middle class socialist Barrington presents electoral politics as a panacea, and that even the title itself can be read as elitist.

This introduction was followed by a discussion in which people said what the book meant to them. Some talked about how they couldn't get on with it, while others stressed how, for building workers at least, it speaks the truth in a way which no other book has done. The point was also made that the discussions which the painters have in their tea-breaks off and on throughout the book can be read as truthful case studies of IWCE in action.

Summing up, Dave then gave us a radically different and more complete picture. Going through the story of how the book was first published almost by chance in a drastically shortened and depoliticised version (1914), he detailed its massive and continuing worldwide success (a first edition now can cost £12,000). He argued convincingly that the book's 'elitist' passages can validly be understood as 'class struggle in the head', emphasised how Tressell was 'close to the cutting edge of British socialist thought in 1910', and stressed how the dilemmas portrayed by Tressell in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* are basically the same ones that union and socialist activists face today.

Rebuilding IWCE:

2. James Connolly

Colin Waugh

As part of the process of trying to rebuild the tradition of independent working-class education (IWCE) we print here an excerpt from James Connolly's Socialism Made Easy, written in the USA in 1908, in which he puts forward a conception of the stages through which, in his view, working-class political consciousness passes. This is followed by some suggestions about how such an excerpt might be used in a political education context today.

. . . let me place briefly before you my reading of the history of the past struggles against social subjugation, my reading of the mental development undergone by each revolting class in the different stages of their struggle . . . As I view it, such struggles had three well-marked mental stages, corresponding to inception, development and decay of the oppressing powers . . . My reading, then, briefly is this: that in the first period of bondage the eyes of the subject class are always turned towards the past, and all efforts in revolt are directed to the end of destroying the social system in order that it might march backwards and re-establish the social order of ancient times - 'the good old days'. That the goodness of those days was largely hypothetical seldom enters the imagination of men on whose limbs the fetters of oppression still sit awkwardly.

In the second period the subject class tends more and more to lose sight and recollection of any pre-existent state of society, to believe that the social order in which it finds itself always did exist, and to bend all its energies to obtaining such amelioration of its lot within existent society as will make that lot more bearable. At this stage of society the subject class, as far as its own aspirations are concerned, may be reckoned as a conservative force.

In the third period the subject class becomes revolutionary, reckons little of the past for inspiration, but, building itself upon the achievements of the present, confidently addresses itself to the conquest of the future. It does so because the development of the framework of society has revealed to it its relative importance, revealed to it the fact that within its grasp has grown, unconsciously to itself, a power which, if intelligently applied, is sufficient to overcome and master society at large . . .

Now, let me apply this reading of history to the development of the working class under capitalism

and find out what lessons it teaches us, of value in our present struggle. . . taking up working-class history from the point marked by the introduction of machinery to supplant hand labour . . . we find in the then attitude of the workers an exemplification of the historical fidelity of our conception. Suffering from the miseries attendant on machine labour, the displacement of those supplanted and the scandalous overworking of those retained, the workers rioted and rebelled in a mad effort to abolish machinery and restore the era of hand labour. In a word, they strove to revert to past conditions, and their most popular orators and leaders were they who pictured in most glowing terms the conditions prevalent in the days of their fathers . . .

. . . the inevitable failure of the attempt to reconstruct the past was followed in another generation by movements which accepted the social order of their day as permanent, and looked upon their social status as wage slaves as fixed and immutable in the eternal order of things. To this category belongs the trade union movement in all its history. . . in capitalist society, the trade unionist, despite strikes, lock-outs, and black lists, accepted the employing class as part and parcel of a system which was to last through all eternity.

The rise of Industrial Unionism is the first sign that the second stage of the mental evolution of our class is rapidly passing away. And the fact that it had its inception amongst men actually engaged in the work of trade union organization, and found its inspiration in a recognition of the necessities born of the struggles of the workers, and not in the theories of any political party - this fact is the most cheering sign of the legitimacy of its birth and the most hopeful augury of its future. For we must not forget that it is not the theorist who makes history; it is history in its evolution that makes the theorists. And the roots of history are to be found in the workshops, fields and factories.

Connolly was at this stage an organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the US. In the section of *Socialism Made Easy* from which this extract is taken he is mainly arguing for industrial as opposed to craft unions, and also that industrial unions, properly organised, would both need and be able to generate political organisation as well, including in the field of electoral politics.

One aim of a political education programme for shop stewards and branch reps here and now might be to make them more capable than they otherwise would be of avoiding mistakes made by activists in the past. Another might be to increase their ability to resist being manipulated by the arguments of traditionally educated politicians, academics, media commentators and the like. A third might be to help them equip themselves with that capacity for thinking out all the implications of an idea which at present tends to be monopolised by academics.

The first of these aims requires that the course should deepen the students' acquaintance with history, and especially with history from which socialists, working-class people and, above all, working-class socialists, have not been left out. The second aim requires that the students be familiarised with ways in which traditional logic is used, both by open demagogues and by more subtle manipulators, to trap people in conceptual contradictions and thereby make any challenge to authority appear out of the question. The third aim requires that students develop their capacity for dialectical thought - that is, for a way of reasoning that incorporates traditional logic and at the same time allows people to move beyond it.

A programme with these aims could use texts like this extract from *Socialism Made Easy* or like the one by William Morris in *PSE 62* - that is, pieces of writing by, on the one hand, working-class activists who developed themselves as socialist thinkers, and by, on the other, traditionally educated people who involved themselves in a principled way in working-class struggle. It would be necessary to build up, and to keep on extending, a collection of such texts, to prepare for each one an introductory lead-off about the historical context, what other ideas the writer was seeking to contest etc, and to design a set of questions that could be used to conduct a discussion on it.

These questions would need to be genuinely open-ended, but at the same time to introduce students to dialectical ways of reasoning and 'reading between the lines'. With the present passage such questions might include:

- Is Connolly broadly right when he says that the consciousness of a subject class tends to go through these three phases?
- If so, is this inevitable?
- Is the reason he gives for the emergence of the third phase ('that the framework of society has revealed to it . . . that within its grasp has grown . . . a power

which, if intelligently applied . . .' etc) right, and is it the whole story?

- Is it true that 'it is not the theorist who makes history; it is history in its evolution that makes the theorists'?
- If so, why? If not, why not?
- If it is true, where does this leave Connolly's own (theoretical) ideas as set out in this passage?

It would be a good idea to relate the texts chosen to a theme and/or to a historical period. Thus the text by Connolly could be part of a short course about the period from the Great Unrest to the General Strike, focusing on the collective self-activity of workers via industrial unionism, amalgamationism, syndicalism and the shop stewards movement.

Lastly, although the text used in the actual discussion would need to be brief and laid out in a readable form, it would be crucial also to give students access to the full text to read for themselves outside the class, and especially to tell them if (as in this example) you have cut anything out from the extract as discussed

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For further information, contact the Secretary:

**Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields,
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john.hewitt22@virgin.net**

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***Knowledge, Skills and Competence in the European Labour Market: What's in a Vocational Qualification?* book published by Routledge, June 2011, £29.99**

This timely and important new book by Michaela Brockmann, Linda Clarke and Christopher Winch with George Hanf, Philippe Mehaut and Anneke Westerhuis (see <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415556910>) examines how qualifications, knowledge, skills and competences are understood in different national contexts and transnationally and reveals a complex picture of differences and similarities both within and between countries. Against the background of European Union policy initiatives, and in particular the European Qualifications Framework, a central focus is on the prospects and difficulties of establishing cross-national recognition, transparency and comparability of qualifications across member states, so vital for the free movement of labour. Drawing on case studies of particular sectors and occupations in England, France, Germany and the Netherlands, the book will be a vital resource for those involved with VET. It is to be launched on June 10th 2011 at the Nuffield Foundation in London (when it can be purchased with a 20% discount), following a seminar on *Mobility and transparency of qualifications across Europe*. For further information, contact brockmm@wmin.ac.uk.

10TH ANNUAL POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Friday 17th June 2011

From 9.30am at Canterbury Christ Church University

Free for all; coffee and lunch provided

An opportunity for research students to share and discuss their ideas with an academic audience

For details and/or to submit a paper, contact:

Laura Doherty and Robert McPherson

on pgra-conference@canterbury.ac.uk

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.

Two-brains speak with forked tongue

Patrick Ainley *looks at developments in higher education*

'Two-brains' Willetts, the Tory HE minister, is schizophrenic. One brain acknowledges that from 2012 an undergraduate borrowing £9,000 a year plus maintenance loans ranging from £3,575 to £5,288 (depending on his/her family's income) could end up, once he/she earns over £21,000, indebted up to £83,000 at current rates of interest on his/her fees and loans for those earning above average incomes. This is by any other name a graduate tax, which the new NUS leadership has again joined Labour in supporting. It will wipe out most of the purely speculative £100,000 lifetime earnings 'graduate premium' over non-graduates that new entrants to HE mortgage their futures in hopes of obtaining. But Willetts's other brain declares that this is 'by and large a good deal!' (*BBC News* 17/3/11).

Meanwhile, as in 2003, vice chancellors again congratulate themselves on their cleverness in raising fees to the max so there is no market and government will have to fork out even more immediate funding for HE. The long-promised White Paper has been repeatedly delayed to dig Willetts out of this hole. Will all prospective students pay though? Or only those who are rich enough not to need loans and for whose parents £9,000 a year is cheap compared with private school fees?

The latest *High Fliers'* research report (April 2011), covering only what *The Times* listing calls the 'good universities', records over half of the 12,658 final-year English undergraduates surveyed as saying 'they would not have come to university if their tuition fees had been £9,000 per annum' and 'a third would have been put off doing a degree by fees of £6,000 per annum'.

The (by implication) 'not good' universities may hope these students will attend locally at them instead - but not on fees of near £9,000 they won't! Perhaps they will go part-time so more staff work evenings and weekends on short-term contracts in case the courses don't recruit. Continuing professional development by increasingly virtual distance

learning could also be part of this race to the bottom, as may two-year degree courses taught over four terms annually - if students will pay more for less! Or they could be attracted by 'FE degrees', whether as two-year Foundations for access to para-professional occupations such as teaching assistants, carers and policepersons, or if FE and other providers are given degree awarding powers instead of franchising from their HE partners.

Or, instead of 'uni', school-leavers (at 18 in 2015! 17 in 2013!) might do the apprenticeships that all the political parties - and Alison Wolf's March 2011 report on vocational education - talk so much about. These will predictably be offered in FE in competition with private training agencies since most employers - especially private sector ones - don't need apprenticeships, even if subsidised by the state to run them. In 'a youth labour market that has imploded', as Wolf says (three times in her report!), it will soon be clear that these are 'Apprenticeships Without Jobs', replaying the *Training Without Jobs* of the 1970s and '80s. Similarly, their graduate equivalents - internships, offered by the Coalition's new attention to 'the squeezed middle' (rather than New Labour's previous focus on the NEETs - those Not in Education, Employment or Training), also do not guarantee employment.

Perhaps this is where Willetts's madness has method as Nina Power reports on *Facebook* (24/4) that behind its new pay-wall *The Times on-line* reports private companies ready to run failing universities and colleges as the HEFCE will no longer be allowed to bail them out. Unprofitable courses will then be scrapped and running costs drastically reduced as vice-chancellors and principals pay private providers to take control 'under contracts lasting ten years or more'.

These developments will redraw the binary line, only higher up the system since - in a drastic resolution of the arts-science divide - funding from 2012 will be increasingly restricted over four years only to the STEM subjects of Science, Technology,

Engineering and Medicine, leaving Arts and Humanities to wealthy overseas students and others seriously rich enough to pay for them at surviving campus universities and reduced Russells. As the Campaign for a Public University said in its submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills, 'a new divide in education will emerge, with universities increasingly responsible for creating a division within the middle class by distinguishing an upper layer from other, lower middle-class positions'.

Despite the inevitable impending closures and mergers, at most universities an air of unreality clings to the so-called community of scholars. Many academics in the 'good universities' seem to believe they can carry on regardless, while most in the 'bad' are so ground down they can't afford to look far ahead. All therefore continue with 'discourse as usual' - writing papers, attending conferences and meetings, marking and teaching while applying for research funding there is no chance of getting, without noticing the pointlessness of so much continued frenetic activity as inordinate hopes are invested in the assurances of vice-chancellors that all will be well if we all 'keep calm and carry on'. It won't be!

Clearly, the Tories have the view that too many working-class kids have got into higher education. So, as I have written before, 'The government's reception of the Browne Review in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review, soon to be codified in the White Paper, marks the end, not only of higher education as it has developed since the war but - more broadly - of the whole effort [from the official introduction of comprehensive schools in 1965 on] to reform society through education'. Now education from primary to post-graduate schools is returned to its post-war purpose of keeping society as it is, not trying to change it.

The worst case is if parents and young people buy into this fantasy - paying more for the empty qualifications that a privatised system will sell them. However, what else are school leavers expected to do? The answer to this question remains the strongest argument against raising fees, scrapping EMAs and for returning to free post-compulsory education for all.



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