

ESOL after 2000: *Skills for Life*

Melanie Cooke

Background

In the late 1990s, several reports highlighted concerns about the patchy quality of ESOL provision, the lack of training amongst the workforce and the problem of short-term, inadequate and poorly-targeted funding in the sector. However, this changed in 2000 when ESOL became part of a government strategy known as *Skills for Life* which provided an important injection of extra funding and a commitment to the development of teacher training for ESOL, a national curriculum and curriculum materials. *Skills for Life* had come into being as a result of the Moser Report, *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start* (DfEE 1999), which recommended a national strategy in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (provision in Scotland is organised separately) to reduce the number of adults with low levels of basic skills. The language needs of speakers of languages other than English did not receive much attention in the Moser report, and ESOL was not originally included as a 'Skill for Life'; ESOL was only included in the strategy after fierce lobbying on the part of the ESOL community.

The incorporation of ESOL into *Skills for Life* brought many changes for the sector. Perhaps the most significant of these was the 2001 *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum* (DfES 2001), the first time there had been such a curriculum developed centrally for ESOL. *Skills for Life* also saw a new teacher training framework and new standards for teachers, a national qualification framework and national targets. Another significant initiative was the setting up of the National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC), which was created to provide a research base with which to inform this new policy.

Funding since 2007

In 2007, after six years of *Skills for Life*, the Government announced that ESOL was taking up too much

of the budget and fees were introduced for ESOL students who were not in receipt of benefits - one of the reasons for this, they claimed, was the growth in numbers of people coming to the UK from the expanded EU. Despite some temporary concessions made by ministers in response to the Defend ESOL campaign in 2007, the introduction of fees led to the erosion of the principle that all adult basic education - including ESOL - should be free to those who need it. 2011, of course, has seen a drastic continuation of the changes brought in by New Labour in 2007: unless there is a considerable 'U-turn' - or a temporary stay of execution - only those on 'active benefits' (Jobseekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance) will be eligible for free ESOL classes this September. This may affect up to 70 per cent of learners in some areas and will hit women particularly severely.

The upsides of *Skills for Life*

So, what were the advantages of the *Skills for Life* strategy? Although there were many critiques of this strategy (see next section) I present some possible upsides of *Skills for Life* - although several are followed by a question mark to signal the fact that these are the subject of considerable ongoing debate:

- **Funding:** *Skills for Life* brought a renewed commitment to fund ESOL centrally and funded teacher training and the development of the curriculum for the first time - but the level of funding was never enough to meet the demand, especially in areas of London where the populations of linguistic minority people are very high.
- **The Core Curriculum:** a helpful, unifying framework? Or a standardising, narrow set of competences?
- **Accreditation:** students gained access to a marketable qualification with national currency? But exams were also a straitjacket for many teachers who found themselves 'teaching to the test'.

- **Teacher training:** new standards produced a stronger focus on theoretical knowledge, socio-cultural contexts of ESOL and ESOL pedagogy?
- **The NRDC:** this marked the beginnings of a badly needed ESOL research base for the UK. Research on ESOL underscored what many teachers already knew but provided 'evidence' which was helpful for resisting the excesses of managerialism in FE and discriminatory public and political discourses? Some projects brought practitioners and academics closer together?

The downsides of *Skills for Life*

Many teachers welcomed aspects of *Skills for Life* - and who would have turned down the extra funding that came with the new strategy in 2000? But there were several downsides, some of them very serious, a few of which I outline here:

- **Funding:** *Skills for Life* funding was welcome, but as we now know it has not been sustained. This is because it is not a statutory entitlement as it is in Australia, for example, and is therefore vulnerable to policy changes and turnarounds.
- **Policy changes:** under New Labour there was a dizzying set of rapid and frequent policy changes which left teachers, teacher trainers and managers confused and exhausted as they tried to keep up.
- **Paperwork:** *Skills for Life* brought a huge increase in managerialism, audit culture, quality control and bureaucracy, some of which was so onerous that it became one of the main reasons for teachers leaving the profession.
- **Targets:** national achievement targets led to a focus on exams and achievement to the detriment of lower level learners. The obsession with exams also stifled teacher creativity and lessened the likelihood of properly learner-responsive teaching.
- **Other government agendas and discourses:** centralisation led to tighter government control of ESOL and made it vulnerable to other agendas, such as:
 - the skills agenda: ESOL is seen as being in service to other subjects, not as a bona fide subject in its own right
 - the employability/work agenda. ESOL, along with the rest of FE and adult education was, in the minds of politicians, entirely at the service of employers, as John Denham, then Minister for Lifelong Learning and Skills, said in 2007: '*I want a [further education] system . . . which helps employers of all shapes and sizes achieve their business goals.*'
 - the social cohesion and citizenship agenda: English language competence became tied into policy and discourses on immigration, security, a supposed breakdown in cohesion and the failure of multiculturalism.

Issues facing the ESOL sector in 2011

Clearly the main challenge facing ESOL is the drastic limitations placed on those who will be eligible for free classes. Funding is one of the perennial problems for ESOL and has never been sufficient to meet demand nor sustained over periods of time. This, then, is the main backdrop to other issues in the sector which I outline here:

- **Employment conditions:** in ESOL there are few career pathways. 50 per cent of the workforce is employed on an hourly paid basis and many others are part time. The workforce is mainly female, middle-aged and white, although it is reported to be changing - and there is some evidence to show that black and minority ethnic teachers are the most casualised in further and adult education. We need to organise locally and nationally to strengthen ourselves as a collective.
- **Vulnerability:** we need to be able to resist being co-opted by political agendas such as 'social cohesion' and the 'Big Society'. We cannot be seen as 'the wastepaper basket of social policy' (Halsey 1972)
- **The curriculum:** this is narrow, skills-focused, exam-obsessed. We need to consider how we can broaden it out and be responsive to students' real-life concerns.
- **Provision:** ESOL classes can still be hard to reach for some members of some communities: after September this is set to worsen, as provision gets patchier and less 'joined up'.
- **Class, race and gender:** cuts to ESOL disproportionately affect working class minority ethnic communities. As a sector we might consider how to build better relationships with community organisations, trade unions and anti-cuts groups. We also might engage in some self-reflection in our sector about how our practices and discourses contribute to/reproduce inequality and power relations in the world outside the classroom.

References:

Department for Education and Employment (1999) *A Fresh Start - Improving literacy and numeracy* (The Moser report). London: Basic Skills Agency.

Depart for Education and Skills (2001) *Adult ESOL Core Curriculum*. London Basic Skills Agency/DFES. Online version available at http://www.dfes.gov.uk/curriculum_esol/

Halsey, A. . (1972) 'Political ends and educational means' In A. H. Halsey (ed.) (1972) *Educational priority 1*. London: HMSO.

A Freirean pedagogy for the ESOL classroom

Alice Robson

'This is a great discovery, education is politics! When a teacher discovers that he or she is a politician, too, the teacher has to ask, What kind of politics am I doing in the classroom? That is, in favour of whom am I being a teacher? The teacher works in favour of something and against something.'

Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation*

Paulo Freire and the pedagogy of the oppressed

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian educator, initially working in secondary education teaching Portuguese, then going on to work with adults, with whom he developed a pedagogy which fused literacy development with the building of critical consciousness.

The post-colonial period saw the oppression of the Brazilian people by an elite who reflected the dominant values of a non-Brazilian culture, producing what Freire termed 'the culture of silence of the dispossessed'. Many of 'the dispossessed' were not considered literate (a category whose boundaries are determined by the elite). In mid-century Brazil, as now, literacy was a political issue. Only those who were deemed literate could vote in presidential elections.

Freire developed a particular methodology for the teaching of literacy. But this methodology was not, and indeed could not be, limited to the development of a set of technical skills. For Freire, education is never a neutral process. It is either designed to facilitate freedom or it is 'education for domestication', that is, an essentially conservative process designed to facilitate the continuation of the status quo. The latter means that people are prevented from seeing

the world as something which can be changed.

Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' aims to develop consciousness and lead to action to create change, through a process of dialogue and reflection. It is a pedagogy which must be forged with, and not for, the oppressed. People do not go through the process of developing consciousness ('conscientization') by having things explained to them, but rather by engaging in dialogue about their lives and the lives of others. Learners are not receptacles to be filled, nor is knowledge a gift from those who have lots to those who have none. Liberatory education consists in acts of cognition, rather than transference of information. In this process, the teacher-student relationship needs to be reconceptualised. As Freire wrote, 'I cannot proclaim my liberating dream and in the next day be authoritarian in my relationship with students'.

Drawing on Freire in ESOL teaching

In many cases the very existence of educational provision for certain groups is itself contested. This was the case with Freire's work in developing literacy in Brazil as it is in the UK today with English for Speakers of Other Languages. - that is English language classes for migrants ESOL is under threat as the result of severe government cuts, while existing provision is ever-increasingly affected by the demand that students pass exams. However, whilst we are so often hemmed in by institutional constraints, as ESOL teachers we still have scope to make choices about what is taught in our classrooms, how it is taught and who decides what is taught. These are political choices, and need to be recognised as such. Yet the idea that ESOL teaching is not political, that it can be neutral, is prevalent, and

re-enforced by many teacher-training programmes.

Freire's work was very much a product of the particular historical circumstances in which he was teaching and writing, and his methods for literacy development were based on the particular linguistic features of Portuguese. Freire's work has to be reinvented rather than transposed for different contexts. Here is one way in which this has been done for working with adult ESOL learners:

1. Listening. It is really important to allow sufficient time for the group to get to know each other. This is essential in order to build the familiarity and trust necessary for a sense of a 'class community', and to allow themes to arise from the group. This could take days, weeks or months. Activities in class should provide opportunities for students to share their experiences, ideas and opinions alongside developing their language skills. But listening is not restricted to class time itself, but is something that can happen before and after class, and in the break.

2. Exploring the issue, developing language and literacy. An issue that has come up during the listening stage is selected for further work in the classroom. In small groups, students discuss the issue, and work collectively towards producing a visual representation of it. Visual tools, developed through the Reflect project, can be used to explore issues in different ways:

- The Iceberg - what is visible about a problem and what is less visible (or hidden)
- The River - collective timelines, showing key events and feelings
- The Tree - causes and effects, and possible solutions.

This visual representation is a form of what Freire terms a 'code', defined by Nina Wallerstein as 'a concrete physical representation of a particular critical issue that has come up in the listening stage'. Other possible codes include a role play scene, an image, an object or a text. The code is used to prompt deeper analysis of the issue, whilst also being the starting point for language and literacy development. The language and literacy development is focused on the language that the students need to express their ideas and opinions on the issue, or to take action on the issue.

3. Action. Action on the issue is taken individually or by the group as a whole. This may be inside or outside the classroom. The action might be something that is trying to effect change in society, for example organising a demonstration against cuts or rewriting a doctor's surgery notice so it is more accessible to people who don't have English as a first language. However, it might also be more personal changes, the students and/or teacher shifting ideas about an issue, or changes occurring in the way that people interact, for example, students asking questions of each other

more, rather than seeing the teacher as the one with all the knowledge. This action is then evaluated by the group.

Reflections on using the technique

I have been using these techniques in my classes over the past two years. Over the last few months I have been part of a practitioner-research group set up as part of the Reflect ESOL project. I have worked with a number of different groups in different institutions throughout this period, with considerable diversity between and within the groups.

Over the past two terms, the issue of the Government's cuts to ESOL provision has been a dominant one for ESOL teachers. Students were, and continue to be, incredibly worried about the uncertain future of their classes, and this was an obvious issue to use a Freirean approach to explore. With other colleagues, I shared the conviction that for students to play a key role in the struggle against the cuts, time in the classroom needed to be set aside. The issue was one that covered several lessons, and re-arose at various other points throughout the term, but some key events are described and reflected upon here.

Once we had shared information about the cuts and discussed them as a whole group, students used a visual tool as a way of sharing their ideas and experiences about ESOL and the cuts. In one class the tree was used as a way in to exploring the causes and effects of cuts to ESOL provision. In another the iceberg was used as part of an examination of the obvious and less obvious reasons why ESOL is important. In both cases the tools allowed for a very thorough discussion of the issue, and acted as a space for learners to articulate their opinions, and in one group in particular, to debate the reasons behind the cuts.

At this stage, language development focused on the language which learners had been trying to use in expressing their ideas. Discussion on action was the logical next step, and we shared ideas on what we could do against the cuts, with petitions, letters to MPs, protests and marches all being raised by the students. In the classroom, students worked on letters to local MPs, a process which involved developing personal testimonies of the importance of ESOL. This was also an opportunity for further language and literacy work, and a discussion on the use of formal language when writing texts such as these. In one class, learners chose to write a collaborative text. I suggested that as everyone fed in their ideas, one of the more confident writers should scribe the text. After a few minutes, however, it became clear that this was not working effectively: she felt she could not share her ideas, the process was slow as she couldn't write as quickly as they were speaking, and she had to keep re-reading what she had written in order to

recap. At this point, the student scribing asked me 'Could you help us?', and they asked if I (who had until now stepped back) could scribe on the board so they could do it quicker and see what they had written and change things as they wished. This was an important moment in the process, as instead of being the teacher, I was being used by the learners as a tool in their own self-directed writing process.

Without a doubt, the lessons on ESOL cuts were very engaging for the learners, and at times during the process the classroom was really an exciting place to be. However, despite the letter writing, the petitions and the learners' active participation in a local ESOL protest, I felt there to be distance between the learners' actions and the wider ESOL campaign in which I was active. Or rather, the learners' actions fitted neatly into the teacher-led campaign: the students had been involved in 'action', but this was piecemeal rather than strategic. When I use the techniques, I consistently find the 'action' stage the most challenging. The first two phases flow into one another, but I have not found that action arises very smoothly from the process. On reflecting, it is important for me to remember that Freirean pedagogy is not a blueprint, not a set of instructions that can be

followed with guaranteed success in every context. In the process of remaking a Freirean pedagogy for our particular context, we cannot escape the need to remain in dialogue with students and colleagues, and the necessity of genuine ongoing critical reflection on our pedagogical practice.

Further reading:

Elsa Auerbach, *Making Meaning, Making Change* (1997)

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)

Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (1987)

Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987)

Rebecca Galbraith, 'Act now for ESOL!' *Post-16 Educator* 62 (March-April 2011)

Nina Wallerstein, 'Problem-Posing Education: Freire's Method for Transformation', in Ira Shor (ed), *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching* (1987)

Reflect ESOL: www.reflect-action.org/reflectesol

What is the future for ESOL?

Jennie Turner

Is there a future for ESOL?

When I think of the immediate future, I think of ESOL learners who come to college to learn English finding themselves following a baffling array of courses. They are studying Literacy, Numeracy, PSD, Certificates in Personal Progress, Employability - in fact anything that isn't directly what they want and need (though of course, thanks to the blood, sweat and tears of their teachers they will also be learning English).

Ironically, I see some ESOL courses surviving but at £3.00 an hour waiting lists will be a thing of the past and learners who are entitled to ESOL but who really want English to travel round the world or help them get a job back home will be learning about how to register with their GP or how to write notes to their children's teachers.

I also see eight week Job Centre Plus courses full of learners who are terrified of losing benefits and unable to gain qualifications that do much more than reflect their starting point on the course in the limited time available.

How did this happen?

As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review, of course, which brought in the following cuts: a 4.3 per cent cut in funding for adults in 2011-12; the removal of the 1.2 programme weighting for Literacy and ESOL; a removal of all funding for ESOL in the workplace; the expected fee contribution from learners of 50 per cent; the removal of eligibility for fee remission for learners on 'inactive' benefits; and

the removal of the discretionary ESOL Learner Support Fund. According to Nick Linford, a funding expert, funding for ESOL will have halved in two years.

Although John Hayes frequently states in letters and parliamentary responses that colleges can choose to remit fees for the most vulnerable learners, the funding guidance also warns that where they do, core funding will be reduced in future years.

A couple of months ago the SFA announced a 'transition' fund for the colleges with the highest percentage of adult learners, which means they will only claw back 50 per cent of funding if colleges fail to hit their adult targets because of the eligibility changes. At my college this fund could be large enough to make swathes of lecturers redundant if courses fail to recruit in September.

So it's not surprising that colleges are thrashing about trying to come up with plans that will save their provision, jobs and learners.

What are colleges doing?

Some are doing Literacy. But are literacy qualifications always appropriate? Can our learners achieve whole qualifications in a year? (Speaking and Listening isn't a separate qualification in Literacy.) Furthermore, how will the funding agency react to a massive increase in literacy learners next year? Will the unintended consequence be that literacy learners will start to have to pay for their courses in the medium term or, in the short term, get squeezed out of the courses that were designed for them in the first place? Will there be two streams of Adult Literacy - one for displaced ESOL learners, and one for more traditional literacy learners (those with dyslexia, diagnosed or undiagnosed special needs etc) - and, if not, what will the effect be on the self-esteem of monolingual literacy learners? I realise there is already a lot of crossover between the two areas and that for many ESOL learners literacy is appropriate, but I don't think these questions should be ignored.

Many colleges are building in numeracy for ESOL learners. There is no denying the usefulness of numeracy, but not all students will either need it or want it, or indeed understand why they are doing it, if it's English they asked for.

Colleges are offering a range of other courses next year as well: Certificates in Personal Progress (but are these aimed at those with special needs?), Functional Skills, QCF Awards, Certificates and Diplomas. All of these courses have the merit of being free next year and can doubtlessly be of great use to learners, but all are listed and therefore end up being light on hours but heavy on assessment. The more time teachers have to spend pushing students through assessments, the less time there will be for language development.

Finally, some colleges are offering reduced fees. At my college our principal has agreed a fee of 50p an hour for those on inactive benefits next year. So a part time course in the daytime will cost £153 and an evening class £68. Whilst I welcome this approach, I question how sustainable it is into the future, as we don't really know how affordable it will turn out to be.

So what is the Government thinking?

A few weeks ago a delegation of staff and students from my college went to see Richard Barnes, Deputy Mayor of London. He was well briefed and made points that echoed what David Cameron and John Hayes have said on the subject of ESOL. He questioned whether colleges were the best place to learn ESOL, saying community settings might be more appropriate. He went on to say that there were concerns about the quality of provision and the outcomes for learners, quoting a class he'd visited where there were two learners present. Finally, and linked to the previous points, he said that ESOL did not provide value for money, costing £150m in London last year.

All this left us wondering if the Adult Safeguarded Learning budget will be raided to fund Family Learning or Community ESOL. Of course this would be robbing Peter to pay Paul, as it would deprive others of the opportunity to learn, it would be of no help to ESOL in most colleges and would cut off progression routes for many learners. No doubt the Coalition would also like to look to volunteers to provide ESOL in community settings and, while there doubtlessly can be a role for volunteers in supporting teaching and learning, it is colleges that can offer graded, diverse provision, good facilities, qualified teachers, teacher training, progression routes, and support for learners with specific difficulties like dyslexia, and are subject to internal and external quality checks. According to Ofsted ESOL provision has improved in recent years and, anecdotally, I know of many London colleges that have ESOL departments graded as good or outstanding in the last couple of years.

So it seems to me that colleges are providing value for money, and it would be possible to make savings by not double funding students on college courses to do courses for the job centre at the same time.

So, next year, will we have ESOL/ATIESOL (ESOL for Learners of Anything That Isn't ESOL)? We probably will, in many colleges.

But into the future, can we survive?

We have to. For our unique professional identity, for our jobs, but most of all for our learners, who so clearly need to learn English language to improve almost all aspects of their lives in the UK.

News update: May - June 2011

Week beginning 2/5/11

In *Private Providers in UK Higher Education: Some Policy Options*, a report produced for the HE Policy Institute (HEPI), Kingston University HE professor Robin Middlehurst and the consultant John Fielden, who last year jointly wrote a report on private sector HE for Universities UK (UUK - ie the vice-chancellors), urge that the Government take a range of legal and financial measures that would create a more 'equitable' relation between private HE providers and publicly-funded ones. These measures include exempting them from charging VAT on fees, giving them access to public funds for both teaching and research and to libraries, sports facilities and social centres operated by mainstream institutions, and encouraging them to take over failing public universities.

Following moves by Hackney Community College, Aston University and Walsall College (plus the original JCB Academy in Staffordshire) to set up University Technical Colleges (UTCs - ie 14-19 institutions as proposed by former Tory education secretary Kenneth - now Lord - Baker), Middlesbrough College principal

(and former NATFHE and Association for Liberal Education activist) Mike Hopkins announces via a *Times Educational Supplement (TES)* 'report', that he too has submitted a UTC bid, adding that 'we need to manage people out of poverty'.

Reading University is negotiating with the University Partnerships Programme (UPP) company about the latter taking over the day-to-day running of 2,630 student rooms in the academic year 2011-12, as well as managing 900 new rooms being built for 2012-13 and itself developing a further 650 new rooms plus 'catering hubs' in Reading's White-Knights campus project. This £200m deal would be the first time a UK university has outsourced its entire on-campus student accommodation.

The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) appoints to succeed Alan Tuckett as its CEO the former London region Learning and Skills Council (LSC) director and current Skills Funding Agency (SFA) national director David Hughes.

At London Metropolitan University, which is dropping 70 per

cent of the degree courses it currently offers, including history, philosophy, performing arts and Caribbean studies, there is doubt, expressed for example by students' union president elect Claire Locke, as to whether those at present on those courses will be able to complete them. At the same time the institution appears not to have contacted people who had previously applied for places on those courses, even though the UCAS deadline for students to reply to offers is 5th May.

Following the retirement of Sixth Form Colleges Forum (SFCF) head of secretariat Sue Whitham in the previous week, the three unions involved in negotiating the pay of lecturers in sixth form colleges (ie the NUT, NASUWT and ATL) jointly accept the SFCF offer of 0.75 per cent backdated to September 2010. (This compares with 2.3 per cent awarded to school teachers, 0.2 per cent offered to lecturers in mainstream FE colleges and a Retail Price Index [RPI] inflation rate of 5.3 per cent).

Following HE minister David Willetts's statement that: '. . . if FE colleges can offer good-quality degrees at a more competitive price than a validating

university does at its home campus, then I'm all in favour', it emerges that the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) has told its 23 'partner' FE colleges, which include the second biggest FE in HE provider in England, Blackburn College, that it would 'prefer' them to charge £9,000 in fees for full-time undergraduate courses. (Blackburn wants to charge £7,000. 17 of the 123 FE colleges funded directly by the HE Funding Council for England [HEFCE] have applied to charge over £6,000.)

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) withdraws its support for the Training Quality Standard (TQS) scheme introduced by the LSC in 2007 as a benchmark to which training providers, including colleges, were encouraged to aspire.

HE Statistics Agency (HESA) figures for 2009-10 show that: the total income of UK HE institutions was £26.8bn, of which £22.2bn went to institutions in England, and of this £5.5bn to institutions in London.

A Department for Education (DFE) report claims that the decision to try and force everyone to continue in education to 19 is 'a major investment in the most disadvantaged'.

Questioned in the Commons, FE minister John Hayes says the deadline for publication of the impact assessment arising from the decision to end free ESOL provision for people on benefits other than those actively seeking work is 'certainly before the summer recess'. (The Commons summer recess begins in early July, and the policy is set to be implemented in August.)

Following a decision by South East Essex Sixth Form College

(SEEVIC) to pull out of its joint involvement with Essex County Council in the £7.5m Canvey Skills Campus Castle point project, the project appears to have been rescued by the intervention of a private provider, Prospects College / Prospects Learning Foundation.

Cambridge University releases figures for its 2010 undergraduate intake which show that applicants from state sector schools or colleges made up 59.3 per cent of home student intake, up 0.8 per cent from 2009, whilst amongst UK applicants there were 151 people who characterised themselves as black, of whom 16 were given places.

Week beginning 9/5/11

Unite national education officer Mike Robinson describes as 'creeping privatisation' an arrangement announced by Warwick University in which they have joined with five other HE institutions to outsource 'a number of university administrative services and IT infrastructures' to the contractor Tribal, starting this summer with student record systems and registry services.

The National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) annual survey of participation in adult education, based on responses to a survey asking people if they have participated in the last three years, finds an overall decrease from 43 per cent participation as registered in the 2010 survey to 39 per cent this, and amongst workers classed as low-skilled, a drop from 30 per cent in 2010 to 23 per cent now, the lowest figure for this group since the survey began 20 years ago.

In a *Guardian* profile, Carl Lygo, CEO of the London-based, US-owned BPP private 'university', claims that BPP spends 'upwards of half a million a year' helping disadvantaged students with bursaries, and refuses to comment on the investigation into alleged malpractice currently being conducted by the US government into BPP's parent company there.

Interviewed for the *TES*, Sir Peter Lampl, chairperson of the Sutton Trust, which the Government has chosen to administer its Education Endowment Fund, describes the abolition of EMAs as 'ridiculous' and the increases in HE tuition fees as 'outrageous'.

A Parthenon Group consultancy study of 50 'general teaching' universities claims to find that five subject areas - business, IT, design, teacher training and nursing - generate income which is then used to support what would otherwise be loss-making departments because 'budget-based accounting' (favouring the wishes of academics) prevails over commercial thinking. The study also claims that there is 'a group of smaller research-based universities' which try to sustain a broad curriculum but do not generate enough income from research to do so'.

It emerges that in December 2010, on the grounds of alleged financial 'irregularities', Sparsholt College (in Hampshire) cancelled its £4.2m contract, involving the placement of 1,189 football 'apprentices' with clubs that include Sheffield Wednesday, with Luis Michael Training, a company set up in July 2009 by former Welsh international Mark Aizlewood. Barnet College and South Thames College have also cancelled contracts with this trainer.

UCAS CEO Mary Curnock Cook tells the Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee that the advertising campaign aimed at persuading potential HE students that fee increases are not damaging, which involves the Government giving the Rainey Kelly Campbell Roalfe Y&R agency £1.5m, has missed out a 'key message' about repayments, while Office for Fair Access (OFFA) director Sir Martin Harris tells the committee that he has no legal power to force universities to lower fees.

The AQA exam board, technically a charity, has bought the 'online teacher resources community' (ie private company selling study aids etc) Teachit.

Press reports suggest the forthcoming HE White Paper is likely to include the following proposals: that universities should be allowed to offer UK students from wealthy backgrounds places at fee levels similar to those currently charged to non-EU students, without their recruitment quotas being affected; that a scheme run by accountants KPMG, due to begin this autumn with 400 undergraduates at Exeter and Durham Universities, and to be extended to Birmingham in 2012, by which this company outsources parts of its training to these institutions, with the latter also providing 'subsidiary subjects such as geography' (*Guardian*) be extended more widely; and that charities sponsor students from poor backgrounds in exchange for these students giving up their right to state support.

Following widespread protests by prominent figures in HE (but also critical support from others, including HE Policy Institute [HEPI] director Bahram Bekhradnia), David Willetts clarifies that the 'off-quota'

proposal (see previous item) would apply only to students sponsored by companies or charities.

The Commons votes down an attempt by shadow ministers to write into the Education Bill a clause making it obligatory for schools and colleges to provide 'high quality face to face careers advice'.

As management at London Metropolitan University uses security guards to break up an occupation at its Holloway Road site by students seeking to resist the decision to axe the majority of its arts and humanities courses, Roddy Gallacher, dean of the school of Humanities, Arts, Languages and Education (HALE) retires with immediate effect. (This is despite evidence that HALE contributes £12m a year in central payments to the institution.)

A joint UCU and NUS survey of 'about 350' postgraduate students who have experience of being employed by universities to carry out teaching finds that 63 per cent had received no advice on professional development or training.

At a meeting of the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) joint negotiating committee, 'independent' chairperson Sir Andre Cubie supports the employers' scheme for axing the final salaries scheme in favour of a career average revalued earnings (CARE) scheme, with the result that this is adopted over union opposition.

In the Government's official response to Alison Wolf's report on 14-19 vocational education, Michael Gove accepts all her findings; announces a maths continuing professional development support programme, in

which the Government will fund level 2 courses in maths for anyone up to 25 who has not achieved this; implies that the DFE would give companies cash incentives to take on apprentices; announces an intention to consult 'employers, schools, colleges and universities' so as to be able to 'define the criteria that the best vocational qualifications must meet'; and reaffirms government backing for University Technical Colleges (UTCs).

Following a three-week suspension, the UK Border Agency [UKBA] reinstates Glasgow Caledonian University's licence to sponsor students under Tier 4 of the points-based visa system. However it is expected to investigate the institution's international recruitment partner, ISA 4U Ltd, after accusations that students from the Philippines enrolled on a nursing degree at Glasgow Caledonian were in fact working full time in the UK.

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) send a joint letter to colleges confirming that, as from 2011-12, the former will be the funding channel for mainstream FE colleges and the latter for sixth form colleges.

Week beginning 16/5/11

In a move described by UCU general secretary Sally Hunt as a further 'flattening out' of diversity in HE, the council of the University of London's School of Pharmacy votes to support a plan by the dean, Anthony Smith, to merge with University College London (UCL). Several surveys of staff and alumni have revealed a majority against this.

Points in a *TES* article on FE college mergers include: instead of merging as planned,

Carshalton College (in south London) and Kingston-upon-Thames College are to form a 'hard federation', with one principal and two governing bodies; as predicted the merger between Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark Colleges (also in south London) now looks unlikely; a proposed merger between Newcastle College and Northumberland College went out to consultation on 13/5/11.

Following the USS meeting last week, Sally Hunt emails UCU members in pre-1992 universities about a ballot for 'sustained industrial action during 2011-12 starting with admissions and asking everyone including external examiners to take part in a rolling programme', while UCU head of HE Michael MacNeil says in an email to branches that: 'we are now at the point where only sustained and seriously disruptive industrial action will achieve a fair settlement'.

BIS and the Ministry of Justice jointly announce plans to pilot an arrangement by which part of the funding for organisations (eg colleges) providing prisoner education would become dependent on inmates' getting jobs on release and not re-offending.

UK Border Agency (UKBA) temporary migration director Jerry Oppenheim tells a HE Futures Forum conference, held in London, that on 20/4/11 11,000 non-EU students submitted documents confirming that they had been accepted onto HE courses in the UK (ie as compared with 300 four days later), in his view indicating that universities cut fee levels in a bid to fill places in advance of implementation of more stringent entry criteria with effect from 21/4/11.

Following the issue of redundancy notices to 200 staff at

South Tyneside College, as part of management's attempt to cut 62.5 full-time equivalent jobs, UCU members there vote for strike action.

British Medical Journal editor-in-chief Fiona Godlee tells a hearing of the Commons Science and Technology Committee that 'to a large extent' (supposedly peer-reviewed academic) 'journals are the marketing arm of the pharmaceutical industry'.

In partnership with local employers, Walsall College (of FE) launches its own awarding body (called ASFI - Accredited Skills for Industry).

An emergency UCU branch meeting at Newcastle College votes to escalate to strike action their struggle against moves by Newcastle College Group CEO Jackie Fisher and principal Bev Robinson to make 185 lecturers there apply for 172 jobs, as either 'Lecturers A' (on £22,500 a year, or as 'instructors' on an unqualified pay scale), measures supposedly necessitated by cuts in external funding. (In August 2010 Fisher awarded herself a £72,000 incentive and performance bonus on top of her £186,000 annual salary; Newcastle is trying to take over Northumberland College in order to rescue it from 'financial weakness'.)

Gateshead College, City College Norwich and North Hertfordshire College jointly launch the Enterprising Colleges initiative, which aims to 'integrate enterprise education into the mainstream curriculum'. North Herts principal Fintan Donohue advocates a 48 week year for students, an end to timetabling of classes, the downgrading of traditional qualifications and the celebration of profit as life-changing for students.

Week beginning 23/5/11

Writing in *Blue Skies: New thinking about the future of higher education*, a publication produced by the Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning (ie by an arm of the publishing conglomerate that owns Edexcel), which includes also an article by HEFCE CEO Sir Alan Langlands, David Willetts announces the Government's intention to 'end the fixed, yet illogical link between degree-awarding powers and teaching'.

London Met. University UCU branch claims that the decision to close courses there has led to 900 applicants being turned away, and this will cost the institution £6m in lost income in 2011-12 alone.

A *Guardian* feature on internships cites details of the increasing trend for these to be auctioned on-line, usually under the guise of charity, with graduates who can afford it vying with one another to pay, in some cases, thousands of pounds for the chance to do unpaid work.

Hereford College of Arts is appealing against a decision by Ofsted to rate its provision as 'inadequate'.

Oxford University economics professor Neil Shephard is in talks with the Student Loans Company about whether he could have access to their data about repayments going back to 1990. It is thought that an analysis of this data might allow the Government to bring back the idea proposed in the Browne Review of a levy being charged on universities which set high tuition fees. (The talks relate to how the data could be anonymised.)

Shadow FE minister Gordon Marsden alleges the DFE has no

intention of funding the 'all ages' careers service announced by John Hayes in April.

The average annual fee charged by UK universities to overseas students in 2011 was £11,435.

An NUS survey of just under 1,000 FE students identified as black on the basis of their being from African, Arab, Asian or Caribbean backgrounds finds that one in six had experienced racism in college.

Imperial College London, which in 2009-10 received £96m in research council funding and another £93m in research funding from HEFCE, confirms its decision, announced initially in autumn 2010, to cancel its subscription, thought to be about £3,000 annually, to the Campaign for Science and Engineering lobbying organisation, thereby becoming the only Russell Group institution other than the London School of Economics (LSE) not to belong to this.

Minutes of the executive board of De Montfort University reveal that it has approved a proposal to use the institution's wi-fi network to monitor student attendance via chips in their ID cards.

Points in a *THE* report on plans by management at University College London (UCL) to outsource cleaning and security services there include: management is consulting on plans to transfer 94 estates and facilities staff to private firms, with a further 14 being made redundant, and at the same to create 20 new posts; this would mean that the 30 per cent of existing cleaning and waste services and the 50 per cent of existing security currently provided in-house would be outsourced; of the 65 cleaning staff affected by this, 93 per cent are from black and minority-

ethnic backgrounds; UCL Unison says management has not conducted a proper equality impact assessment, that the plan would result in a pay cut through the loss of pension rights, and that the procedure proposed is 'potentially illegal'.

In her address to UCU annual conference, held in Harrogate, general secretary Sally Hunt tries to position herself as the champion of 'our members' as against the SWP/UCUleft, and announces her plans to cut UCU annual admin. spending by £150,000, and reduce the membership of the National Executive (NEC) - currently 68.

At UCU conference, HE delegates vote: to re-ballot members in pre-1992 universities on action over pensions starting in August; within this, however, to support the position taken by national negotiators (ie to accept the employers' desire to base pensions on the consumer price index [CPI] rather than the retail price index [RPI] and to introduce career average pensions for new entrants); to consider the most effective way for members to withdraw from participation in the research excellence framework (REF - ie the device by which HEFCE research funding is allocated to universities); and to ballot members on the Universities and College Employers' Association (UCEA) £100 pay offer.

On the FE side, UCU conference delegates vote to continue the boycott of the Institute for Learning (IFL). In debate on observations it emerges that at Harrow College a system of performance-related pay linked to observations has been scrapped because, following redundancies, there are not enough managers to administer it.

Week beginning 30/5/11

An analysis of FE college accounts carried out for the *TES* by the W3 Advisory consultancy finds that, although the average college currently has a surplus of £300,000, the sector as a whole faces a deficit of £114m in 2011-12, 'requiring' them to reduce costs by 3 per cent in that year, which will be followed by several further years of cuts.

It emerges that in March the Apollo Group, ie the US organisation which owns the UK-based BPP private 'university', filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) figures which show a drop of £134m in the value of BPP, due to pessimism about its prospects.

An Ofqual report on the qualifications and credit framework (QCF) introduced by the Labour government in 2008, which has involved awarding bodies in expenditure of up to £900,000 (in the case of the Association of Accounting Technicians [AAT]) on adapting curricula to fit QCF requirements, finds that there is 'no significant demand' for the flexible transfer of credits which it was intended to facilitate.

The Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund has given £40,000 to Project Article 26, an organisation trying to counter the effects of the asylum rule change, effective from February 2011, by which people who came to the UK as lone children and were given discretionary leave to remain will now be charged overseas fees if they attempt to enter HE. (Out of 2,700 asylum applications by 17 year olds in this category over the last year, 765 have been denied even discretionary leave to remain.)

Points in a *Guardian* article on prison education include: in

Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation, published earlier in May, skills minister John Hayes maintains that 'the system [of prison education] is not performing well' and announces that the contracts of providers that were due to run till 2014 will be re-tendered in 2012; Independent Monitoring Boards (IMBs) have made critical reports on provision by The Manchester College (TMC) at several prisons, including HMP Downview in Sutton (Surrey) and HMP High Down; a report on TMC provision at Reading Young Offender Institution, ordered by Hayes in January after allegations made by a whistleblower to Reading East MP Bob Wilson, is pending; Wilson has also received from a whistleblower accusations about TMC provision at Wetherby YO1 in Yorkshire; he has sent these to the Commons public accounts committee, one of whose members, Norfolk South Tory MP Richard Bacon, has in turn passed them to Amyas Morse, comptroller and auditor general of the National Audit Office.

Detailed allegations come to light about irregularities in the conduct of decision-making at the London University School of Pharmacy in the lead-up to the decision to merge with UCL.

The OCR exam board acknowledges its responsibility for a printing error in its Decision Mathematics 1 AS-level paper, sat by 6,790 candidates in 335 schools and colleges on 26/5/11, by which 8 of the overall 72 marks were rendered unavailable.

Ofqual figures for the last fiscal year show that the percentage of the A-level 'market' held by the three main awarding bodies were as follows: AQA 43 (up from 40 a year); OCR 25 (as in 2010); Edexcel 22 (from 21).

Board of Deputies of British Jews president Vivian Wineman writes to vice-chancellors asking them to consider de-recognising UCU, on the grounds that a motion passed at its annual conference makes the union potentially 'institutionally racist'. (The motion rejected a definition of anti-Semitism produced by the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, on the grounds that it fails to distinguish between 'genuine anti-Semitism' and 'criticism of Israeli government policy and actions'.)

UCAS figures show that by 23/5/11 647,008 people had applied for undergraduate places at UK universities, up from 637,773 on 23/5/10.

Week beginning 6/6/11

A report on HE funding by the Commons Public Accounts Committee claims that the

balance of outstanding student loans, currently £24bn, is likely to rise by 2015-16 to £70bn, requiring either cuts in provision or support from public funds. This problem arises because the Government underestimated the number of universities that would set fee levels at £9,000.

Guardian figures indicate that, as of 6/6/11, 105 universities had declared the tuition fees they intend to charge, the overall average being £8,765 (as against the Government's prediction of £7,500).

An investigation initiated by Frances Wadsworth, appointed as principal of Croydon College in January 2011, reveals that the previous principal, Marianne Cavalli, now principal of Warwickshire College, presided over large scale and sustained manipulation of Functional Skills success rates there, the effect of which was to inflate these rates by up to 10 per cent, despite

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

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

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

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

threats by the SFA of a crack-down.

Points in press coverage of the announcement by the former Birkbeck College philosophy professor A.C. Grayling that he is setting up an institution to be called the New College of the Humanities (NCH) include: Grayling claims that several academics who have become well known through TV programmes are involved in the project; these academics may include Richard Dawkins, Stephen Pinker and Niall Ferguson; NCH will charge fees of £18,000 per year; it intends eventually to have 375 students, but expects to start shortly with 200; its website claims students will be able to achieve University of London International Programme (ULIP) degrees, and that they will be able to use the Senate House library; NCH is a private company, with shareholders who include both academics and a manager at a Swiss private equity firm; this company has raised £10m in private equity funding, thought to be enough to cover NCH's first two years of running; NCH was initially to be called Grayling Hall; it claims it will give students 12-13 contact hours a week, one-to-one tutorials with famous academics, and an overall student/teacher ratio better than 10/1; its website features course descriptions plagiarised from London University provision.

The *TES* publishes an article titled 'Unions reach deal over IFL fees', which in fact reports merely that negotiations, brokered by John Hayes, between the Institute for Learning (IFL - the body FE lecturers are forced to 'join' on pain of losing their right to teach) and UCU and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) have reached a point where the IFL has offered to cap

membership fees at £38 a year for the next two years. UCU head of FE Barry Lovejoy is quoted as saying that 'our negotiators have worked hard to reach a settlement. Although not perfect, significant progress has been made'. However, whereas according to the *TES* the ATL 'will not need to ballot its members' on this deal, UCU must.

It emerges that £125,000 of the £600,000 raised through appeal by Durham University to fund postgraduate students from Afghanistan is a donation British American Tobacco (BAT), and also that last year the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS) invested £214m in BAT.

There is evidence of a sharp increase in the number of women enrolling on FE courses in building and mechanical services crafts.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOI) request by the *THE* causes HEFCE to release figures showing that it has already paid the Employers Pension Forum (EPF - ie the lobby group of university managers that is pushing the USS to scrap final salary pensions) £627,000 to fund its operation, and that EPF has now bid for a further £100,000 to allow it to 'examine' how support staff pension arrangement could be drawn into the proposed USS scheme. This figures take total public funds spent backing EPF to at least £1.3m.

A Home Office report on efforts by universities and FE colleges to counter 'extremism' (ie the activities of political Islamists) on campus criticises FE (including the Champion Principals Group, set up in 2008 with College of Haringey, Enfield and North East London principal Paul Head as chairperson, and disbanded by

BIS in 2010) for not doing enough of this.

Interviewed in the *THES*, London Met. University vice-chancellor Malcolm Gillies says that: 'Any sneering at things being vocational, I think [comes] from the elitist section of society' and 'We are not about being a museum of educational curricula'.

Ofsted has so far spent £917,000 on a new website to be activated 'in the next few months', and in the meantime is to scrap a new online search facility for inspection reports which was launched in June 2010 but does not work.

The UK and Indian governments jointly announce the second phase of the UK-India Education and Research Initiative, which was set up following a visit to India by David Cameron, David Willetts and some UK vice-chancellors in July 2010, is supported by £5m annually shared between the two governments, and aims, among other things, to 'develop skills capacity' in Indian vocational education.

Week beginning 13/6/11

The former NUT official and Blairite hatchet-person Michael Barber is now chief education adviser to Pearson, the publisher which owns Edexcel.

From September 2012, the Government is to require universities to publish for each undergraduate course a Key Information Set (KIS), ie 17 pieces of information, including contact time with lecturers and statistics about the job prospects of people completing that degree. A report published jointly by HEFCE, Universities UK (UUK) and the GuildHE group of (mainly) former teacher training colleges that are now universities, reveals that as

of now universities are in a position to do this with respect to only one in seven full time courses and one in 50 part time ones.

Alison Wolf distances herself from moves by a working group convened by the Baker Dearing Educational Trust and chaired by

Sir Mike Tomlinson, the former HMI whose diploma proposal Tony Blair rejected, to design a 'TechBac', ie a course comprising both academic and vocational subjects that would be done by students in Baker's UTCs, but not by students on vocational courses in mainstream FE.

The annual report of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), ie the body intended to deal with complaints by students against universities other than those settled internally, reveals that last year there was an unprecedented 33 per cent rise (to a record 1,341) in the number of complaints reaching OIA.

Fighting the Cuts!

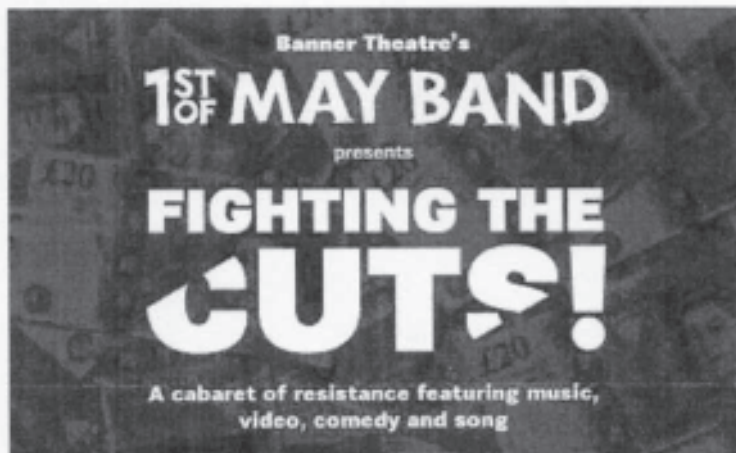
The Con-Dem government have launched a major attack on Britain's welfare state, threatening the jobs and living standards of millions of working people.

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

Unison officials welcome IFL 'guidance' which indicates that IFL will not try to force FE staff who teach less than 28 hours a year (ie including Unison members such as technicians employed as assessors) to 'belong' to it.

There is a rumour that the forthcoming HE White Paper will include a proposal that universities which recruit students with A-level grades of AAB or above be exempted from a cap on recruitment with respect to those students. (This would increase competition amongst posh institutions.

Launching Mathematical Needs: Mathematics in the Workplace and in Higher Education, a report compiled by the Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME), chairperson, Dame Julia Higgins says: 'Few students now study the requisite level of mathematics to prepare them properly for higher education . . .' (The report cites evidence suggesting that, due to 'the drive for public accountability', more and more jobs now require 'people who can handle data properly'.)

In HEFCE's annual report, CEO Sir Alan Langlands, whose salary was in 2010 frozen at £230,000 a year, expresses concern that Government pressure on HEFCE to save money may impede its ability to 'attract suitably talented staff to business-critical posts' (The report also reveals that the pay differential between male and female staff within HEFCE is 44 per cent (as against 19 per cent in the public sector as a whole.)

Management at North West Regional College in Derry, Northern Ireland, is taking disciplinary action against five UCU members there who last week held a protest during the

opening of a new building by NI assembly minister Stephen Farry. (The protest was directed against plans for 13 redundancies, including the branch chairperson and secretary.)

A UCU survey of senior academics, to which 506 professors responded, finds that 80 per cent think for-profit HE institutions should be denied access to state subsidies, including student loans.

Week beginning 20/6/11

In a *Guardian* article journalist Mary O'Hara cites figures released by Oxford University claiming that 'just under 10% of undergraduates [at Oxford] come from families with an annual income less than £16,290, the level for free school meals'.

A group of seven HE institutions - the Universities of Birmingham, Nottingham, Sheffield, Warwick and York, plus UCL and LSE - are considering piloting the US grade-point average (GPA) system of degree classification, in UCL's case from 2012-13, as a potential replacement for the existing system of 1sts, 2.1s etc.

There are claims that the Government's £180m 'bursary' scheme, said by them to be a replacement for EMAs, will not be able to meet Gove's claim that every 'child' eligible for free school means who wants to stay in education will be supported, because the formula on which it is based underestimates the proportion of FE college students on one-year courses, thereby discriminating against the very institutions where the least well-off are concentrated.

The DFE makes it known that schools and colleges will be allowed to spend up to 5 per cent

of the money they receive through the bursary scheme 'to meet the costs of administering the scheme'. This means that £9m of the £180m for the scheme (which replaced the £575m being spent on EMAs) could be spent on administering the bursaries, spun by the Government as being less bureaucratic than EMAs.

A report by the HE Quality Assurance Agency finds that the marks of some students at the London College of Communication (part of the University of the Arts) have been artificially raised to conceal the fact that a decision by management to close 16 courses and make 26 full-time equivalent redundancies has disrupted study there.

A QAA report on the University of Wales uncovers a number of 'weaknesses' in links with overseas providers. In one case there had been a lack of 'due diligence' in vetting the Fazley International College in Kuala Lumpur, which was being run by Fazley Yaakob, a Malaysian pop star with a fake doctorate, while in another (the Turning Point Business School in Singapore) the owners disappeared.

Features of the situation at the National Extension College (NEC) (ie the Cambridge-based correspondence institution set up in 1963 by the late Lord Young) include: in 2010 it was taken over by the Learning and Skills Network (LSN); at that time the LSN's CEO was John Stone, formerly principal of Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge; at the take-over Stone promised to invest in IT systems etc for NEC, with a view to doubling its student numbers (currently 20,000); Stone retired earlier this year, with no such investment having been made; the LSN's most recent accounts show that

Stone spent £8.8m on acquiring companies such as FE Associates and Learning Resources International; however the LSN's revenue for 2009-10 was £12m under budget and its pension deficit rose in the same period to £7.9m; the LSN's acting CEO Yvonne Smithers now wants to sell the NEC's site in Cambridge, from which she expects to generate £6.5m towards LSN's shortfall; a group of NEC supporters are campaigning against this, calling for the NEC to become once again an independent charity.

In *A Better Approach to Higher Education/Exam Board Interaction for Post-16 Qualifications*, the Cambridge Assessment organisation (ie the parent body, owned by Cambridge University, of the OCR exam board) suggests that academics be paid to devise A-level courses. (The general argument of the document is that the Government should stand back from A-levels and allow them to become more like the university entrance exams.)

Points in an Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) survey, based on responses from 340 Connexions staff, include: just under 25 per cent of those responding had either received a redundancy notice or actually been made redundant; nearly a sixth reported the entire careers service in their area either has been or would shortly be closed; over 80 per cent said their employer had made or was scheduled shortly to make cuts. (Unison says at least 8,000 Connexions staff have already been made redundant. Entitlement funding for schools and colleges, often used by them to provide or support careers advice, has been cut by 75 per cent across all institutions.)

Features of the situation at Barnsley College include: 38 lecturers have accepted voluntary redundancy; principal Colin Booth is attempting to save £10m in spending on salaries; according to the UCU branch, this would entail a reduction of up to 25 per cent in the number of lecturers there, and would involve some taking salary cuts of up to £10,000, as well as increased class sizes; in opposition to this, a further four one-day strikes are planned this term.

At Leeds College of Building, which holds reserves worth over £10m, management wants to cut 39 jobs, one result of which could be a 20 per cent increase in working hours.

John Hayes authorises the merger of Orpington and Bromley Colleges, under the title Bromley College of FHE, with effect from 1/8/11.

At the annual conference of the Association of Learning Providers (ALP), chairperson Martin Dunford announces that this body is now to be renamed the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, to reflect the fact that the 600 private training providers which compose it make up 70 per cent of the prime contractors in the Government's welfare-to-work programme.

The HE Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) writes to all 10 HE institutions there and the four FE colleges which provide some HE, to tell them that their plans to improve access to HE in advance of the increase of tuition fees are inadequate.

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.

EMA: a Welsh perspective

Amanda Thomas

The education maintenance allowance was introduced in 2004 to encourage poorer students to stay in school or college.

Those who qualified received between £10 and £30 a week, depending on their parents' income. However it has now been scrapped in England from this September 2011 but is being kept in Wales at the moment, but without the bonuses of £100 paid twice a year.

EMA is based on student attendance and without doubt has increased the numbers staying on in post-16 education. So far so good for Welsh students then, but not so good for their English counterparts, with predictions of six out of ten of England's poorer students dropping out without their college allowances, according to the National Union of Students.

So if that is the predicted situation for English colleges this September, what would happen if the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) followed suit and abolished EMA?

Would Welsh colleges be in an even worse situation than English colleges, with more of the Welsh population already perceived as being poorer than in England? If six out of ten English students couldn't afford to study without EMA what would the impact of abolishing EMA in Wales be?

With this in mind I decided to

conduct a small scale survey of the students I teach in an FE college in South East Wales. I wanted to find out if Wales did abolish EMA what would be the effect on student numbers? I also wanted to know if those students receiving EMA felt they received enough? Did students think EMA should be based on parental income or should all students receive EMA regardless? What did Welsh students think of bonuses being removed for next academic year and what would the students do if they could no longer afford to come to college?

As an aside I also asked colleagues for their views on EMA as it has been felt amongst staff that there has been an increase in worsening behaviour amongst students since numbers have increased due to the payment of EMA.

So is EMA a double-edged sword, good for increasing student numbers but not so good for the staff having to undertake 'crowd control' as well as teach? Were some students attending college simply for the money and not because they really wanted to study?

To set the context for this research, the students in the study attend an FE college in an area that is classed as both socially and economically deprived and as a result the majority of students receive EMA, with most getting the full £30 a week.

The information was gathered using anonymous questionnaires and students didn't have to take part if they didn't want to.

40 students were sampled on a range of courses and out of these eight students didn't receive any EMA, so 80 per cent (32) of the students questioned were in receipt of some sort of EMA.

So my first question was if the 32 students in receipt of EMA felt they received enough? 14 learners (43.7 per cent) felt they did receive enough EMA - all of these were receiving the full maximum amount of £30.00. 18 learners (56.3 per cent) felt they didn't receive enough EMA - these learners received EMA ranging from £10 upwards. One of these learners stated 'people on the dole have more money than me for sitting around doing nothing'.

The second question asked was whether EMA should be based on parental income? Out of 40 students asked, 32 (80 per cent) of responses stated that EMA shouldn't be based on parental income as in today's economic climate parents couldn't, regardless of income, afford to give their children money to come to college. Or to put it in the words of one student, 'some parents are tight'.

Other students made the point that working parents were being penalised because they worked

and they (the students) would be better off if their parents didn't work.

Out of the eight (20 per cent) of the students that did think EMA should be based on parental income, reasons given ranged from: 'Single parents can't afford to give their children money for college, whereas if both parents work they can' to 'My parents both work and can afford to give extra money for petrol and stuff whereas some of my friends' parents can't work so they don't have money to give them'.

On asking the students what they thought about the government stopping the bonuses from September 2011, not surprisingly all students receiving EMA disagreed with it. Comments ranged from 'it's appalling' to 'stupid', 'sad', 'awful' and 'rub-bish'. However, on the other hand the eight students who didn't receive any EMA felt that it was fair that bonuses were stopping as they didn't feel it was fair that they didn't get EMA in the first place.

The next question which was of interest to me was: could students still afford to come to college if, as in England, EMA was stopped altogether? This question wasn't applicable to the eight students not in receipt of EMA so the results were based on the 32 students receiving EMA. 11 students (34.4 per cent) stated they wouldn't be able to afford to come to college without EMA. This meant 21 students (65.6 per cent) would still attend college. This was interesting as the predictions in England are that student numbers are going to fall drastically in September without EMA. However, the above results seem to suggest this would not be the case in Wales. It must be remembered though that this was based on a small sample of students so a bigger survey could yield different results.

This led into the question of what students were using their EMA for, if the majority would still come to college without it. On looking over the responses I received, 24 students (75 per cent) stated that they did use their EMA for college equipment, travel and food in college. It was not applicable for the eight students not receiving EMA and only eight students (25 per cent) used their EMA for things such as shopping, 'baby stuff' and 'things I need' (though when questioned further this student didn't want to go into detail about what the 'things needed' were).

So EMA does seem to be used for the students' studies, which leads to the question, if most students would still come to college even without EMA, how would they buy the resources needed for college? Would it be a case of colleges having to use their own budgets to supply students with paper, pens and files? Is this what will happen in English colleges from September?

The next area I wanted to look at was a hypothetical one. If students couldn't afford to come to college, what would they be doing instead? 16 learners (40 per cent) said they would look for a job, 4 learners (10 per cent) stated they 'didn't know', and 20 learners (50 per cent) stated they would be on the 'dole' and 'do nothing'. These statistics speak for themselves, with half of the learners surveyed already consigning themselves to the dole queue. The 16 learners who would look for a job stated that they didn't hold out much hope of getting one as latest figures have shown that the unemployment rate in Wales over the three months before February rose to 9.2 per cent, higher than any other nation within the United Kingdom (www.learningobservatory.com/south-east-wales).

Finally I wanted to ask staff their perceptions of EMA. It was interesting to find that although staff thought students from poorer families should receive monetary help and learners should be encouraged to stay on in education, there was a downside to this. Staff felt an increase in student numbers had meant an increase in poor behaviour as it was felt that some learners were made to come to college by parents just to claim EMA. This in turn led to some learners not truly engaging with their studies and as a result ending up being disruptive and spoiling the learning experience for students who really wanted to learn. These poorly behaved learners were always in attendance too, as EMA is based on attendance. Of course a positive to an increase in student numbers is job security for staff which in today's climate is more important than ever.

So what can we in Wales conclude from these findings? EMA certainly has its positives as well as negatives. For students EMA is certainly seen as a good thing and it does seem to be being used correctly to buy resources for college, although there is some debate over whether it is allocated fairly, being based solely on parental income. Most students don't agree with this and feel it should be available to all. A real positive seems to be that in theory most students would still try to attend college even without EMA. Whether in practice this would be the case remains to be seen and it will be interesting to see what happens to student numbers in England from this September.

The most worrying thing from the learners' responses seems to be the fact that 50 per cent would be claiming benefits if they couldn't afford to come to college. Even those who stated they would look for work believed they would find it difficult to find any

sort of job. So would the loss of EMA lead to a generation of youngsters consigned to the employment scrap heap with no prospects or qualifications? Or would the government put some other sort of training in place?

From a staff perspective there has definitely been a decline in student behaviour with the increase in student numbers arising from the introduction of EMA. So should EMA be based on attendance only, or should positive behaviour also be a factor in receiving EMA? Then there is the undeniable fact that the increase in student numbers has protected jobs, more students generate more income, which means more courses being run and, therefore, more job security. So would the loss of EMA not only lower student numbers but cost staff jobs too?

Of course all this is academic at the moment as only the EMA bonuses in Wales have been scrapped. Nevertheless can Wales realistically continue to pay learners EMA in the long term? Nobody knows but I am sure the Welsh Assembly Government will be keeping a close eye on what happens to FE provision in England over the next academic year.

To conclude, the last word needs to go to the students: 'We come to college to try to get an education to get a better job at the end of it. If we weren't in college we would be on the dole or hanging around the streets getting into trouble so why are they trying to make it really difficult for us to afford to come?' 'I hope they don't stop our EMA as I really like college and I want to go to university but if I can't afford to come here I'll end up sitting at home all day.' 'Young people have it really hard today, there are no jobs out there for us and we get blamed for causing trouble, college keeps us off the streets.'

IFL: 'an obstacle to the development of a rational system'

We print here the text of a motion passed overwhelmingly by a well attended UCU branch meeting at the College of North West London on 15/6/11 and by the FE Sector Committee of London Region on 18/6/11. The editors welcome readers' views on this issue.

'This Branch believes that:

- the onus should be on the management of colleges to ensure that all lecturers have access to valid programmes of initial and continuing teacher education and staff development;
- such programmes cannot be valid unless practitioners have a say in their design;
- this means there must be a forum in which UCU representatives could participate, along with other interested parties, in deciding how these programmes are organised;
- these representatives could be fully effective only if UCU were to provide channels for members to discuss education issues independently of management

We note that:

- the IFL CEO has no background in FE teaching;
- 'membership' is compulsory;
- lecturers are required to pay for this 'membership';
- the IFL demands that lecturers 'declare' their 'continuing professional development';
- it is authorised to pass judgement on lecturers' conduct and impose penalties upon them for this;
- the draft agreement negotiated with the IFL, AOC and Government by the UCU general secretary and head of FE leaves all of these factors in place.

This Branch believes that so long as this is the case the IFL will remain an obstacle to the development of a rational system, and therefore:

- condemns any attempt to present the draft agreement as a settlement;
- urges members to vote no in the forthcoming ballot;
- calls on the FEC to continue the dispute until members decide democratically to end it;
- requests that the NEC consult members on how discussion of educational issues should be organised within the union.'

Two-brains not so daft after all?

Patrick Ainley *looks at a recent collection of articles about H.E.*

Louise Coiffait ed., *Blue Skies: New thinking about the future of higher education - a collection of short articles by leading commentators* (Pearson Centre for Policy and Learning), <http://blueskies.pearson.com>

A sorry collection

Under New Labour 'Blue Skies thinking' or 'Thinking the Unthinkable' was code for floating outrageous free-market ideas to simultaneously frighten people and draw out the opposition to Blair's 'public sector reforms'. So, crazy notions like running primary schools with just one qualified teacher supported only by teaching assistants first crawled out from under their stones.

Under the Coalition, the tradition continues, only more so, since, as David Willetts - whose first chapter heads this collection - makes clear, today's fearless Tory leaders regard New Labour as hopeless fudgers. Willetts makes clear he intends 'to end the fixed, yet illogical, link between degree-awarding powers and teaching' by reinventing what he mistakenly thinks the National Council for Academic Awards did, examine degrees taught by the polytechnics. 'This means students at new institutions can obtain degrees or other qualifications from prestigious and well understood institutions. Employers in particular, are likely to value such clear signals. This is behind my support of initiatives like Pearson's exciting new BTEC degree [the immediate occasion for the 23/5/11 conference launching the publication] which will enable people to prove they have higher-level vocational skills.'

Willetts was supported - and sometimes mildly criticised - by various academics and others, who doubtless vied for the opportunity to be considered

'leading commentators'. These even included some, like James Ladyman, professor of philosophy at Bristol University, who have opposed 'the impact agenda' for research - though not fees, on this occasion at least.

Digging a hole for himself or for the vice-chancellors?

Vice-chancellors had been congratulating themselves on their own cleverness at their near universal move to raise undergraduate fees to (in most cases) very near the new maximum permitted £9,000 cap in 2012. (This has the added advantage that no one 'looks cheap' and maintains the fiction that all degrees are still equal in quality, as arguably they once were.) VCs did this before to stimey Charles Clarke's 2003 'basically free-market reform' - as he had hoped it would be but it wasn't because there was no market since nearly all charged the maximum £3,000 then allowed. This time government would have to fork out even more immediate funding in loans for more students on higher fees and have accepted they won't get it all back. The long-promised White Paper was repeatedly delayed to dig Willetts out of this hole. However, perhaps it was a hole that Willetts had dug for the VCs, predicting exactly what they would do!

Like schools minister Michael Gove, who has been cutting funding for the pseudo-vocational qualifications criticised by Alison Wolf in school sixth forms and sixth form and FE colleges (as reported by Philippe Harari in PSE 63), leaving only academic subjects and science in line with a similarly traditional E-Bacc at 16, Willetts proposes diverting all those working-class students who he and Gove plainly believe should not be in 'real' HE,

into 'Apprenticeship-Degrees' at 18-plus (the new school-leaving age in 2015), delivered in FE through the good offices of Pearsons/Edexcel/Longmans.

While the Association of Colleges may have backed away from this particular commercial tie-in, the idea of a 'standard qualification' for FE that was once held out for two-year Foundation 'degrees' plainly appeals to FE bosses. Especially as it promises 'degree' awarding powers for FE colleges independent of franchising HE-approved HE in FE, which equals around one in ten of all undergraduate students, including those on Foundation degrees.

More importantly for Willetts, he can do the two things he needs to dig himself out of his hole: reduce HE student numbers and reduce fees. We may call the likes of the new BTEC qualification 'Apprenticeship-Degrees' (because they may top up 'apprenticeships' that begin for what Chris Woodhead called 'the naughty boys sent to college' at 14 or 16 and even be topped up in turn by those few who complete them by one-year conversion courses in 'real HE'). 'Apprentices' might even be sponsored and possibly paid to do this by employers - or, more likely, by state subsidies for their cheap labour, replaying 1980s *Training Without Jobs*.

No more 'fudging'!

At around £2,000 per year such a 'degree' would certainly attract applicants from the Million+ former-polytechnics and the 94Group of mainly campus universities, perhaps forcing them to reduce their exorbitant fees for the same old academic modules mixed with varieties of Business Study that HE proposes to continue to offer alongside the Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine which universities will still be funded for. And/or go into the business of selling their own two-year degrees, as other contributors suggest, by teaching over four terms instead of the current 100 days in three terms a year undergraduate average.

VCs had hoped their just-below-the-Russell Group maximum would attract students who may prefer to stay local and play safe, instead of chancing their arms on getting the 1st or 2.1 needed to have any hope of secure employment. (The Russells meanwhile can charge what they like and only await their chance to do so in a completely free market, as recommended by Browne but reportedly vetoed by the Lib Dems - more 'fudging', as far as Willetts-Gove are concerned!) Competition with 'FE degrees' would also force HE institutions to renegotiate their relations with their 'partner colleges' to

give them more of a share in remaining HE in FE fees.

Certainly undergraduates are not going to go on paying through the nose for what one of the conference papers describes as 'a middle class shibboleth . . . leave home and explore yourself through study, extra-curricular activities and revelry; meet a circle of friends with whom you'll make the transition into stable, well-rewarded and connected professional careers; get drunk with those university friends and possibly marry one of them' (Matt Grist and Julia Margo of the 'Think-Tank' Demos, another of the main movers behind the conference, as they were behind much of Bliar's 'Blue Skies Thinking'). One, there are very few 'stable, well-rewarded and connected professional careers' and two, like many other young victims subsumed by the alcohol and mass entertainment industries, school-leavers can go out from home to binge - if they can afford it!

Meanwhile, the other grouping of 'Alliance' universities also touted their brand at the conference by claiming to be 'the UK's leading business-engaged universities'. Presumably, they think their 'links with industry' will attract students wanting to earn as they learn - or at least volunteer for unpaid work placements and internships as part of their courses to escape the qualified-but-inexperienced graduate Catch 22. (Just as University Technical Colleges re-run Kenneth Baker's 1980s City Technology Colleges with little more chance of success but at least promising a route for school science sixth-formers to progress to STEM subjects in their sponsoring universities.)

For True Believers like Willetts and Gove, all this opens up possibilities of a real market in HE in which 'diverse quality' is reflected directly in price. Private providers can also come in, including mass-market publishers like Pearson/Edexcel/Longmans providing standardised e-texts and tests to the unqualified instructors who pass them on to their students - the Open University (as was) this is not! Thus, studentless *Marie Celeste* colleges and universities (public or private and all points between) will offer distance-learning from franchised virtual hubs to on-line students working part-time and hoping to secure para-professional employment at best.

Just as with the proposed health service reforms, government promises a service 'free at the point of delivery' - you pay later if you can afford it so that the fee is a *de facto* voucher and not so different either from the graduate tax that Labour and the NUS favour. Meanwhile Gove's talk of 'fair funding' for schools will soon see a voucher for 'bog-standard' provision that parents who can afford it can add to, and so buy into competing and increas-

ingly privatised provision - as they do now through private schools, tutors and still more cramming. (Even Keith Joseph could see this would end up with the state subsidising the private schools, but the ideologues driving Coalition policy don't care any more!)

Supposedly, all this competition will restart social mobility - so that we are being sold academic selection of 'bright working-class children' and a return to grammar schooling as progressive policies. Society will then revert to Gove's good old days when everyone knew their place and education kept them there, before Robbins disowned the eugenics inherent in the 11-plus and started the expansion of HE, while comprehensive schools and progressive primaries also tried to change society through education.

A few flies in the ointment

Only there hasn't been any real upward social mobility since the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s and the proffered professionalisation of the proletariat through widening participation to higher education is now seen to be illusory as - in the wake of the Credit Crunch - the dream that home ownership could secure middle-class status for all. Employers who are busily outsourcing, downsizing and deskilling don't want apprenticeships, and the youth labour market has 'imploded', as Wolf says three times in her report. So, in a world that is oiling its way to self-destruction, the old social democratic nostrums - 'expand GDP and become better educated, trained and qualified' - no longer apply, even as Ed Miliband seeks to revive them in his pledge to the nation of a better future for successive generations.

That this is not going to happen has been grasped by the more radical of the student resistance, infused with the tactics as well as the ideology of the alter-globalisation movement and climate camps. They recognise that the only future is in no-growth and they have begun to think for themselves with those of their teachers who will join them of an alternative to the more of the same represented by the 'Blue Skies Thinking' of the free-marketeters.



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