Government abandons higher education

2010 will go down in history as a crunch time for higher education. A series of funding announcements slashed funding across the UK and will leave students in England carrying huge debts for years to come.

In Scotland the budget for HE and FE is to be reduced from £1.7bn to £1.5bn, with institutions being asked to “manage without reducing overall learning opportunities”. Capital funding will plummet from £209m to £91m. Pressure is increasing in Scotland for the introduction of up-front tuition fees.

Wales will see cuts of around 9%. Student fees are to rise in line with proposals in England, but Welsh residents will receive large subsidies. At the time of writing, budget cuts in Northern Ireland were still being discussed.

In England the government plans will slash the HE budget by 40%, with additional cuts to NHS and teaching funding. Because the government is going to protect science and related subjects, the cuts will wipe out state funding for teaching and learning in arts and humanities. To make up for these missing funds the government is allowing HE institutions to raise student fees up to £9,000 a year. This vandalism will undermine HE and force students into massive debts.

A majority of the public has been hoodwinked into believing that the cuts are necessary yet we also know that the public don’t want to lose their local services. We need to talk to our community: our workmates, families, friends and neighbours and convince them that these cuts are going to damage the economy, public services and their children’s future.

UNISON is campaigning strongly against the proposed cuts and fee increases. We are now focused on the TUC demonstration on 26 March. This gives us plenty of time to build for a huge demonstration to show our opposition to the cuts that strike at the heart of the world class HE system that we have built.
Billions of pounds of cuts were announced in 2010. The impact of these on jobs and services will start to filter through in 2011 and could devastate whole communities.

The impact will be felt by small local traders, corner shops, pubs and cafes that rely on our members’ spending to keep their businesses going. No jobs means no income and no spending, which could send this country reeling back into recession. We need to persuade everyone of the need to change the direction of this coalition government before it is too late.

World-class higher and further education has had billions of pounds withdrawn from funding. Yet the coalition government claims this is a fairer way to fund education beyond the school gate. Withdrawing the Education Maintenance Allowance, removing the higher ambition programme and charging students up to £9,000 a year. Who are they trying to kid?

It is up to all of us to build alliances and campaign to challenge and change the views and direction of this government. The movement has started with the younger members of our society, who realise they could be a generation with no employment, no housing or access to a decent pension. I and many other UNISON members from across the education sector were proud to march in London and in our own cities alongside the next generation. I see the marches, rallies and campaigning starting to change the minds of this ConDern excuse for a government. We need to keep the pressure up and aim to have the largest TUC demonstration in history in London on 26 March. A demonstration that cannot be ignored and puts another nail in this government’s disastrous education policies.

**Mobilising a Million Voices for education**

UNISON has been involved in a series of protests against the cuts in education and fees increases

**October**

Thousands of UNISON members took the campaign to parliament, joining massed crowds at a colourful rally and lobby organised by the TUC against public service cuts. “We are here to stand up for our communities, for the elderly, for the vulnerable as well as for our members and their jobs and pensions,” UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis (above) told the rally at Westminster.

He said that in UNISON one million women are at the heart of our public services and the backbone of our community. They are under attack, not because of the economy but because of an ideology that sees public services as a problem. He added: “We will not let the government get away with taking a chainsaw to our services … We will speak up. We will form alliances. We will rise to the challenge. We will march in our thousands and we will vote in our millions. Strong, united, fierce in our defence of public services and those who provide them.”

**November**

UNISON members joined students and staff from across higher and further education in a lobby of parliament (left). “This is just the start,” UNISON head of higher education Jon Richards...
said. “We intend to mobilise a mass campaign in every community against the increase in fees, the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the near privatisation of our universities and colleges. More than 50,000 took to the streets of London: the message has gone out to the coalition, the campaign is on.”

Opposing the cuts
5 things you can do today

Help us build public support for an alternative to the cuts. The government and its friends in the media want us to feel powerless. But we are not. Nothing is inevitable. UNISON has more than 1.3 million members. Every one of us is part of our local communities providing vital services that people rely on. Our communities have the power to fight these cuts. Sometimes a campaign starts with small steps that we can all take – today.

1 Tell your family, friends and work colleagues about UNISON’s ‘alternative budget’. Explain that cuts to services will affect them. Download a copy: http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18887.pdf

2 Sign up to our million voices campaign and get regular updates on how we are opposing the cuts and how your voice can be heard: unison.org.uk/million

3 Keep up-to-date – sign up for the UNISON email campaign updates at http://www.unison.org.uk/news/mailinglist.asp

4 Ask your MP to speak out against cuts – you can email them from the UNISON website http://action.unison.org.uk/page/speakout/cuts

5 Recruit a colleague – the more people in the union the better chance we have of defending jobs and courses. They can join online at: unison.org.uk/join

The branch worked with the London Citizens to push for the LLW for contractors, to bring them in line with in-house wages. Sub-contractors will have to pay the LLW when their contracts with the university are renewed. The LLW is currently £7.85 per hour and is set annually by the Greater London Authority. It is paid on the basis that the cost of living in the capital is higher than the rest of the UK.

Susan Parkin, branch secretary at the University of East London said, “We are pleased that the vice-chancellor has recognised that it is the right thing to do and we will continue to fight for more organisations to take up the living wage – everyone deserves a fair rate of pay for a hard day’s work.”

At University College London all staff, including cleaners working for contract companies, have achieved the LLW after intense campaigning by UNISON and London Citizens. The high-profile campaign included coverage in the London Evening Standard newspaper and a supporting letter from philosopher and political activist Noam Chomsky.

The victory was achieved by working closely with the community organisation London Citizens, which played a key role in getting employers across London to implement the LLW. To find out more about working with London Citizens or other community groups please go to: citizensuk.org or email: d.bertuchi@unison.co.uk

There are now 10 London universities promising to pay the living wage.
News from Cymru/Wales
Simon Dunn, Wales region head of HE

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) announced its draft budget on 17 November 2010. While Welsh universities will have to wait for their individual settlements, it is clear that there will be cuts in the 2011/12 budget of approximately 9%. There will be further cuts in the following years.

The HE sector in Wales has been responding to the WAG’s policy of reducing the number of institutions, increasing collaboration and the use of shared services.

August 2010 saw the creation of University of Wales Trinity St David from the merger of Lampeter University and Trinity College Carmarthen. Swansea Metropolitan and other further education institutions will become part of this expanding enterprise, continuing the convergence between FE & HE in Wales.

The Cymru/Wales UNISON HE committee has concerns about the impact of mergers and shared services on members, but welcomed comments made by education minister Leighton Andrew: “Access to higher education should be on the basis of the individual’s potential to benefit, and not on the basis of what they can afford to pay … Equality of opportunity, strong community ties and a rich cultural and linguistic heritage cannot be left to the market”.

Our members will be rightly focusing on protecting their jobs and joining in the campaign to protect local services. UNISON will take part in a review of higher education governance and we will be pushing for the greater accountability of senior management to students, staff and the wider community.

News from Scotland
Emma Phillips, Scottish region head of HE

The Scottish Government announced deep cuts as part of their spending review on 17 November. The Scottish Government is claiming it plans to maintain student numbers in higher and further education, yet Scottish universities already get less funding per student than those in England and Wales. They are now further slashing the budget by over £200m. At the time of writing we await firm details about how this will impact on HE institutions. It is clear to UNISON that as things stand quality and student numbers are under threat and many universities have already started wielding the axe.

UNISON is meeting Michael Russell, the Scottish Government minister for education and lifelong learning to discuss the detail of the forthcoming paper about higher education funding. Currently in Scotland the government pays students tuition fees. It is not clear what the Scottish Government plans to do about the massive shortfall in funding, but it may be that the end of free university education in Scotland is in sight. It should be noted that the Scottish university principals are asking for a graduate tax to be introduced.

The Scottish parliament elections will take place in May 2011. UNISON is concerned that the SNP is putting off making unpalatable and unpopular decisions in the run up to election leaving higher education in Scotland financially decimated.

Equality and spending cuts

The Equality Act 2010 came into force on 1 October 2010, yet despite requirements for HE institutions to comply many are not conducting equality impact assessments when making proposals for changes, restructuring or cuts.
In other cases it is a tick-box exercise. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued urgent guidance, highlighting the need to ensure equality and fairness are central to the decision-making process about cuts. Guidance is available from UNISON at: unison.org.uk/education/higher/pages_view.asp?did=11988
To find out more contact d.bertuchi@unison.co.uk

Soup kitchen in Bath

UNISON’s University of Bath branch and students combined campaigning with raising money from a soup kitchen for a homeless charity in Bath. UNISON members Julie Samways and Angela Harrington (pictured) served the soup and Bernie Morley, pro-vice-chancellor for teaching and learning joined them. The money raised will go to Julian House, a homeless charity in Bath.
Sheena Grant

It is with great sadness that we report the recent death of Sheena Grant MBE

Sheena was a great asset to UNISON and contributed at all levels from local to national. She received her MBE for her work as a cleaner at Aberdeen University. She really understood the views and aspirations of the members and was willing to take up their cause at every opportunity. I always enjoyed meeting up with her. She had a great sense of fun while never forgetting the importance of the work in hand. She will be greatly missed by all who knew her.

Matt Smith, regional secretary, Scotland.

The Hidden Workforce

As many as one in four people working in public services – around 1.2 million – are employed by private contractors

These ‘hidden’ workers are often trapped in low-paid, insecure jobs where being badly treated is a normal part of working life. Many are migrant workers. They are vulnerable and can be easily exploited. Yet they are less likely than other groups of workers to be in unions. UNISON has been running a campaign to recruit and organise these workers. It is vital that we reach out to workers in the contracted-out workforce, not only to ensure they have support, but to encourage them to become active in the union.

To find out more about the hidden workforce go to: unison.org.uk/hiddenworkforce/index.asp

Keeping an eye on security

Chris Rippon, Nottingham University, explains the important work of a university security guard

We are often the first port of call in an emergency. If a student has an accident or is taken ill, you have to go and see if an ambulance is required. We also fulfil a pastoral role in dealing with suicidal students – talking to them and keeping them calm while we arrange for help.

As well as the routine security work we might be required to meet an air ambulance bringing an accident victim to the local hospital. If there is a traffic accident on the campus we have to take statements off witnesses, take photos of the scene, and attend to the injured person until the ambulance arrives. We have two security vehicles, so one attends the accident and the other meets the ambulance and escorts it to the scene.

Some of our more mundane but equally demanding work is dealing with fire alarms, responding to fights, apprehending criminals who are not students and subsequently having to attend court to give evidence. We also have to adapt to major events on campus: a visit of a VIP or a government minister. A major event is graduation day for the students when there could thousands of cars on campus. You can imagine the security headaches this causes.

When the government talks about frontline staff I’m not sure they think of us – but UNISON certainly does.
2. YOUR EMPLOYMENT DETAILS

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Please give a telephone number/voice/text/email address for UNISON to contact you – indicate if work or home

3. WHAT YOU WILL PAY – FROM 1 October 2003

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Please tick the appropriate box to indicate how often you are paid

- weekly
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- Four weekly
- monthly

Please tick this box if you are a student member in full-time education (including student nurses or modern apprentices). Your subscription is £10 per year.

4. POLITICAL FUND

If you have been a member of a trade union before, please state which one:

UNISON's Affiliated Political Fund (APF) is used to campaign for and promote UNISON policy and the need for quality public services within the Labour Party, locally and nationally, in Parliament and Europe. UNISON APF affiliates to the Labour Party.

UNISON's General Political Fund (GPF) is used to pay for campaigning at branch, regional and national levels of the union and for research and lobbying in Parliament and Europe. It is independent of support for any political party.

It is important that you indicate a choice of fund by ticking one of the boxes below. Your subscription shown above includes a political fund payment so you do not pay any more by being in one of the funds.

I wish to join UNISON and accept its rules and constitution.

I authorise deduction of the following Political Fund payment as part of my subscription: tick one box only.

- Affiliated Political Fund
- General Political Fund

Now please sign and date below

Signature

Date

DATA PROTECTION

Unison will process your membership information together with other information for administration, statistical analysis, conducting ballots and other statutory requirement purposes. We may also send you newsletters, journals and surveys and let you know about educational and campaigning matters. We will disclose your information to our service providers and agents for these purposes.

If you do not want any mailings from Unison besides those required by statute as shown in bold above, please tick this box.

We may share your information with organisations with whom we have a business relationship for your benefit. We, or they, may contact you by mail, telephone, SMS, fax or e-mail to let you know about goods, services or promotions which we think may be of interest to you.

If you do not wish to receive such information please tick this box.

Join Unison – your friend at work

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