



UCU

Congress 2012

A supplement produced by



June 2012



This supplement was produced for UCU by FE Week

FE Week is a new newspaper dedicated to reporting on news, analysis, jobs and fun in the FE sector.

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Managing Editor: Nick Linford
Deputy Editor: Nick Summers
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Operations: Shane Mann
Financials: Nahed Chowdhury
Analyst: Tashanna Egbochue
Sales: Chardelle Mason

Contributors: Barry Lovejoy
Stephen Court
Michael MacNeil
Toni Pearce

If you are interested in placing a product or job advert contact

E: chardelle.mason@feweek.co.uk
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M: 07903 421171

Welcome to UCU congress 2012

Welcome to this *FE Week* supplement for the annual University and College Union congress. Over three days in Manchester around 500 delegates from further and higher education will debate a wide range of motions and set the union's agenda for the coming 12 months.

With so much happening in both sectors there, understandably, will be a lot of discussion about where the union heads in the future. Defending pay and pensions and combating increasing workloads and privatisation will feature highly, as will more sector-specific issues such as the prospect of loans in further education and the impact of the government's funding reforms in higher education.

You can find out exactly what's happening when on page 3 and check out the fringe guide on page 4 for events during lunch breaks and after official congress business is concluded each day.

This special edition of *FE Week* takes an in-depth look at many of the challenges facing further education staff both in the UK and abroad. UCU's head of FE, Barry Lovejoy, kicks off proceedings on page 5 with a damning critique of government plans to introduce loans for college learners over the age of 24.

As well as providing compelling evidence of how it will destabilise the sector, he argues that FE loans will make a mockery of Nick Clegg's recent pledge to improve social mobility in this country.

On page 6 we explore the issue of staff workloads. With congress set to discuss campaigning against punitive workloads, bullying and stress, we look at the damage currently being done to morale in the sector.

Incoming UCU vice-president, John McCormack, who has taught in further education for over 20 years, gives a frontline perspective on how staff professionalism is being eroded on page 7. As well as looking at the increasing trend of downgrading staff and cutting pay, John calls for an end to punitive lesson observations.

One of the key debates at UCU's congress this year will focus on the direction the union takes to meet the many challenges it faces. Earlier this year the union's general secretary, Sally Hunt, was re-elected with a increased majority, standing on a platform of reforming the union and putting far more resources into front-line services for members.

On pages 8 and 9 Sally is quizzed about what exactly her proposals, which include



reducing the size of UCU's national executive committee, would mean for the union and members and why her reforms have the backing of the vast majority of the union's membership.

On page 10 *FE Week* pays a special numerical tribute to the work done by staff in colleges, adult education and offender learning, showcasing the amazing contribution they make to society and why further education is needed now more than ever.

The stringent efforts of private firms to gain greater access to UK higher education is something UCU has campaigned long and successfully against.

The government was recently forced to abandon a white paper that would have given for-profit companies, embroiled in scandals in the US, greater access to UK taxpayers' money.

However, earlier this year it was reported that the principal of Barnfield College was considering using new powers from the 2011 Education Act to convert the college in to a private limited company.

On page 11 UCU's head of higher education, Michael MacNeil, talks about the lessons learnt from for-profit companies' involvement in higher education and the new dangers facing further education.

The beleaguered welfare-to-work company A4e has been in the news a lot recently.

Despite being at the centre of several fraud investigations it remains the preferred bidder to secure prison education

contracts worth £30 m. On page 12 we look at the huge problems caused by privatisation and re-tendering in offender learning. On page 13 we have a special feature on the dangers facing Colombian academics and trade unionists. Last year UCU invited Dr Miguel Angel Beltran to address congress.

Dr Beltran, an academic and trade unionist, was unable to attend because he was incarcerated in a high security prison.

His crime had been to speak out against human rights abuses in Colombia; the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

Recently re-elected vice-president of the National Union of Students, Toni Pearce, writes on page 14 about the chaos and upheaval colleges and students will face under the government's controversial changes to the international student regulations.

She warns that as the government continues to talk tough to a domestic audience on immigration, it ignores the very real damage its proposals are doing to the economy and, particularly, further and higher education.

UCU congress sees a change in the union's president. As one president steps down another begins their 12 months in office.

On page 15 the outgoing president, Terry Hoad (Oxford University), and the incoming president, Kathy Taylor (Newcastle College), discuss the challenges the union faces.

Congress Agenda

Friday 8 June, 09:30-17:00: Higher Education Sector Conference

- 9:30 - 10:00** Opening business, including:
Appointment of tellers
Adoption of the report of the Congress Business Committee
Adoption of minutes of HE sector conference 28 May 2011
Report from Michael MacNeil, National Head of Higher Education
- 10:00 - 12:30** Debate of motions
- 12:30 - 14:00** Lunch (from 12:30) and fringe meetings (13:00-14:00)
- 14:00 - 14:45** Timed business: Private session:
motions HE25-HE27, on USS dispute
- 14:45 - 17:00** Debate of motions to continue in open session
- 17:00** Close of business (followed by Congress session on TPS)

Friday 8 June, 09:30-17:00: Further Education Sector Conference

- 9:30 - 10:00** Opening business, including:
Appointment of tellers
Adoption of the report of the Congress Business Committee
Adoption of minutes of FE sector conference 28 May 2011
Report from Barry Lovejoy, National Head of Further Education
- 10:00 - 12:30** Debate of motions
- 12:30 - 14:00** Lunch (from 12:30) and fringe meetings (13:00-14:00)
- 14:00 - 17:00** Debate of motions (continued)
- 17:00** Close of business (followed by congress session on TPS)

Friday 8 June, 17:00-18:00 Congress business section 1: TPS dispute

Private session

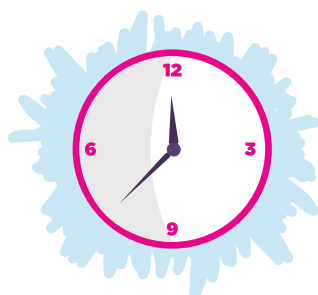
- 17:00** Appointment of tellers
Adoption of the report of the Congress Business Committee in respect of TPS motions and amendments only
Report on negotiations
Debate of TPS motions and amendments (motion 1)
- 18:00** Close of business

Saturday 9 June: Congress

- 9:30 - 10:00** Opening business, including:
Address by Terry Hoad, President
Appointment of tellers
Adoption of the report of the Congress Business Committee
Adoption of minutes of congress 29-30 May 2011
- 10:00 - 12:00** Section 2: Business of the Education Committee (motions 2-15)
- 12:00 - 12:30** Address by Dr. Miguel Angel Beltrán, Colombian trade unionist
- 12:30 - 14:00** Lunch (from 12:30) and fringe meetings (13:00-14:00)
- 14:00 - 15:40** Section 3: Business of the Equality Committee (motions 16-33)
- 15:40 - 16:00** Address by Sally Hunt, General Secretary
- 16:00 - 18:00** Section 4: Business of the Strategy and Finance Committee to be taken in open session (motions 34-50)
- 18:00** Close of first day of Congress business

Sunday 10: Congress

- 9:30 - 11:45** *Private session* Section 5: Business of the Strategy and Finance Committee to be taken in private session (motions 51-69)
- 11:45 - 12:30** Private session Section 6: Rule changes (motions 70-76)
- 12:30 - 14:00** Lunch (from 12:30) and fringe meetings (13:00-14:00)
- 14:00 - 15:45** Section 7: Business of the Recruitment, Organising and Campaigning Committee (motions 77-91)
- 15:45 - 16:45** Section 8: Other employment-related business (92-99)
- 16:45 - 17:00** Closing business, including:
Election results
Introduction of new president
- 17:00** 17:00 Close of Congress 2012



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Fringe Guide

During lunch breaks and immediately after congress closes there will be fringe meetings exploring a variety of issues. Fringe meetings take place on the upper floor in Exchange rooms 4-11, and in Charter 4, which is situated on the ground floor next to the Exchange Hall.

Friday 8 June, 13:00-14:00

A UCU response to casual employment and the crisis in education

Charter 4

Members on all kinds of contracts face redundancy, being rehired on worse terms and an administrative burden focused on income, not education. Those on casualised contracts are suffering most and we will discuss how we can move towards decent contracts and working lives.

Health and safety deregulation: our response

Exchange 11

The prime minister has described health and safety as "an albatross around the neck of British business." Health and safety legislation prevents many workplace deaths, injury and ill-health. We will discuss how we can organise to defend and improve working conditions.

Political communication and media training

Exchange 10

Getting your message across to the press, politicians and policy makers is key in delivering your campaign goals. Join us for an interactive workshop that will help you to present your arguments in an accessible and effective way to get maximum impact.

Race in education

Exchange 4 and 5

This fringe will focus on the position of black staff in further and higher education and ask if any progress has been made towards equality and combating racism. It will also discuss the impact of the cuts on black communities' access to education.

Ethical investment in pension schemes

Exchange 6 and 7

FairPensions campaigns for socially responsible corporate behaviour using the shareholder power of major investors. USS, the pension scheme for pre-92 universities, is one such powerful investor. Find out what UCU members are doing to push USS on its responsible investment record.

Friday 8 June, 18:00-19:00

DAN (Developing Activists Network) Reception: Union Cities

Exchange 11

This year's DAN fringe showcases UCU's new Union Cities project currently being

piloted in Southampton. Union Cities concentrates resources in one city at a time and gets UCU branches working together. As always, refreshments will be on offer, as will our ever-popular congress t-shirts, and this year, two short films will be shown at the reception. One will showcase the work of Union Cities in Southampton, the other is a surprise.

Saturday 9 June, 13:00-14:00

The impact of the media on equality

Charter 4

The government's cuts agenda is an overt attack on equality and is hitting many in our communities hard.

Some parts of the media are complicit with this agenda calling disabled people 'scroungers' for accessing support to manage their impairments or blaming 'immigrants' for the rise in unemployment.

Tackling stress and bullying at your workplace in 2012

Exchange 11

UCU is serious about tackling stress and bullying at your workplace in 2012. Our survey in April of stress in post-16 education was sent to all members, to produce league tables of the best and worst employers. Find out at the fringe about plans for local campaigns.

The future of the HE workforce

Exchange 10

Management frequently promote notions of greater flexibility, performance management and the need to improve academic productivity. What is the background to these debates? What are the implications for our collective agreements and how we bargain?

Cuba, Venezuela & the 'New Latin America': showing there is an alternative

Exchange 6 and 7

2012 marks the 50th anniversary of the illegal US blockade of Cuba and the 10th anniversary of the U.S.-backed coup in Venezuela. Come to our fringe and find out how Cuban-Venezuelan projects are bringing education and health to thousands in Latin America and discover what trade unionists can do to offer solidarity.

The restoration movement: the fight for the NHS continues

Exchange 4 and 5

The campaign to save the NHS did not end when the Health and Social Care

Act 2012 received royal assent but has been transformed into a campaign for a restoration bill to keep building public awareness. Our NHS should be run by Parliament, the professions and the people, not by market economists, procurement bureaucrats and commercial lawyers.

Saturday 9 June, 18:00-19:00

Moving further, reaching higher: securing better professional development

Exchange 10

UCU has secured funding from the TUC Union Learning Fund for a two-year project in the North-West, which will be launched at this fringe.

The project will be looking at women's development in the post-16 education sector, and aims to campaign for, bargain on and secure better access to personal and professional development opportunities for.

Justice for Colombia

Exchange 11

Colombia continues to be the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist, with 29 of our colleagues assassinated in 2011. Dr. Beltran, Colombian academic and trade unionist, highlighted the abuses and was detained for more than two years in a high security prison. He was released in June 2011 following an international campaign led by UCU and Justice for Colombia and is here to speak to us today.

Sunday 10 June 13:00-14:00

Higher education in further education: opportunities and challenges

Charter 4

The expansion of the delivery of higher education in further education colleges raises important issues for UCU. How do we ensure that it is not just about cost-cutting? What are the implications for the relationship between the sectors? How do we deal with the implications for rates of pay, conditions of service and professional development for members delivering HE in FE?

Union solidarity in the Middle East and North Africa

Exchange 11

In 2011 workers and students played a key role in the struggle for democracy and social justice in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Bahrain. Come to our fringe to hear what has been happening since then. Topics will include the 'Revolution on Campus' in Egypt and the campaign to release the leaders of the Bahraini Teachers' Association.

The climate and jobs crisis: making the connection

Exchange 10

The move to a low carbon economy is a legal requirement and will fundamentally change course provision in the UK. Come along to this fringe to discuss what UCU should be doing to integrate this into the work of its organising and campaigning strategy.



We need more than words on FE loans

Nick Clegg's recent comments on the lack of social mobility in this country, which he described as an "absolute scandal", suggest that he is passionate about opening up a society he said was too closed and too static.

The deputy prime minister has spoken out on a number of occasions during his time in government about the need to improve social mobility. Unfortunately, each time he is quickly confronted with a list of policies the government has introduced that have actually set social mobility back.

The Association of Colleges, students and staff unions (UCU and Unison) have been united in their call for a delay in the implementation of the plans

The Liberal Democrats' high-profile u-turn on university fees is understandably a stick that many continue to beat with them with, but other measures will prove perhaps more damaging when it comes to trying to get people from the poorest backgrounds into education – surely the best method we have for improving social mobility.

Suzanne Moore, writing in the Guardian, dismissed Nick Clegg's latest efforts to talk about social mobility as "middle-class guilt" and said he was "another public schoolboy brandishing his mea culpe."

She went on to say that further education was her route to becoming socially mobile and harshly criticise the government for "silently decimating" the sector in the name of vocational training.

Considering the criticism levelled at Mr Clegg for offering warm words on social mobility, but at the same time helping deliver policies that hamper people's chances of getting on, it was unfortunate that he recently used free school meals

to demonstrate the inequalities in the education system.

He pointed out that while one in five children is on free school meals, just one in a hundred Oxbridge students had free school meals when at school. The Children's Society warned last month that changes to eligibility for school meals could see 350,000 school-age children no longer entitled to free school meals and other subsidies such as free uniforms and council discount cards.

There are other unfortunate examples of government policies likely to damage social mobility; Michael Gove axing the education maintenance allowance (without visiting a further education college and using evidence later dismissed by the author himself) springs to mind.

The latest potential for a NHS-style PR disaster are plans to make learners over the age of 24, who wish to study for qualifications at A-level equivalent or above, pay the full cost of their tuition by taking out a loan like students do in higher education.

The new system, which is scheduled to be introduced from 2013/14, has already succeeded in uniting the sector against it. The Association of Colleges, students and staff unions (the University and College Union and Unison) have been united in their call for a delay in the implementation of the plans.

A survey conducted by *FE Week* last month revealed that over two-thirds of students, college leaders and staff think ministers should urgently pause or look at abandoning the scheme altogether.

There are also serious concerns over whether the Student Loans Company has been given sufficient time to develop the administration of the loans system. Furthermore, the company's record of delivering loans on time for university students has been less than impressive in recent years.

While the government appears to have a habit of not listening to expert advice in key policy areas, it would be well-advised to listen to a united further education sector on this issue, as well as studying its own research in the area.

Last month it was revealed that just one in 10 people aged 24 and over would definitely undertake a further education course at college if the controversial plans to charge loans were brought in. Furthermore, according to the research



Barry Lovejoy,

head of further education, UCU

Two in five potential adult learners said they would be unlikely to take up a loan for a further education course

commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, more than two in five potential adult learners

said they would be unlikely to take up a loan for a further education course.

Nick Clegg's commitment to talk regularly about social mobility ensures that it will remain in the public eye, but each time he brings it up he will continue to be met with a chargesheet of policies that are doing so much to hold back the very people who need access to education the most.

The criticism and cynicism that follows his warm words are understandable. If the deputy prime minister really wants to make a difference, he needs to offer more than mere words and a good way to start would be to listen to the further education sector on the issue of FE loans.

No excuses for cheap further education



John McCormack, UCU,
vice-president elect, further education

As someone who has worked in further education for over 20 years I think that our sector is one of this country's great, and largely ignored, success stories.

Further education is a vital gateway to university and life in general that drives economic growth and benefits all of society as well as fulfilling the aspirations and needs of the individual by offering them opportunities for personal development, enriching their own life and the communities in which they live.

I have stayed in the job because I love seeing at first hand the transformative power further education can have on people's lives.

However, in order to ensure that the next generation of college lecturers feels the same way about the profession, it is essential that we make the further education sector a good and rewarding place to work.

That means offering decent terms and

conditions to staff; something that is at real risk under the current funding environment.

The 25 per cent cut to further education budgets over the spending review period can only lead to course closures and fewer opportunities for students.

It is particularly devastating that they come at a time when youth and adult unemployment is at record levels.

Colleges around the country are continuing to issue redundancy notices, and my fear is that it will only get worse over the course of the next year as even more cuts start to bite.

As well as having a devastating impact on jobs, the current funding crisis is also providing colleges with an excuse to cut staff pay.

I know of several institutions that, in addition to making staff redundant, are currently imposing contracts that will see lecturer salaries reduced by thousands, increased working hours and less annual leave.

There is no excuse for seeking to deliver teaching on the cheap. What kind of message does that send out to prospective further education teachers?

Further education professionals already earn less than their colleagues in schools and when you see institutions abusing nationally recognised pay scales you really fear where the next generation of staff will come from.

Colleges around the country are continuing to issue redundancy notices

The current level of cuts to jobs and pay is simply unsustainable and it is in the employers' interest to recognise this.

Instead of offering us derisory pay offers and inferior contracts they should be seeking to improve the conditions of service for staff, who have seen their pensions attacked by the government and their pay cut in real terms for the last three years.

Employers should be joining with us in

lobbying the government for more money and fighting further education's corner.

The alternative is fewer students and increased competition from private companies eager to undercut existing colleges for contracts. You only need to look at the example of A4e to see where that leads.

Funding is by no means the only issue, however, where common ground needs to be found.

There is no excuse for seeking to deliver teaching on the cheap

Further education will not be able to deliver the quality of education and teaching this country needs if we allow the current trend of de-professionalism to continue.

Colleges perform best when their workforces feel valued, respected and above all trusted. I know this from personal experience.

While employers may argue that lesson observations are a way of monitoring teaching standards, in many cases they are an excuse for management to begin disciplinary procedures and get rid of staff, rather than a genuine means of supporting staff, improving quality and offering relevant professional development.

Judging by the number of congress motions complaining about their draconian use I am by no means alone in thinking this.

Unless we get rid of punitive systems of performance management, and improve conditions in further education, the sector will be unable to recruit and retain the brightest minds.

Further education deserves to be put up in lights, rather than engaged in a destructive race to the bottom.

These are the challenges facing UCU in the coming year and I am confident that our members will respond to them and continue to campaign to defend professionalism, jobs and education.

Concerns over crippling workloads

Holly Welham

@HollyWelham

Concerns about a heavy workload are often brought up by staff in the further education sector, particularly at the moment with funding cuts, and the issue has been the focus of a number of motions put forward by UCU members.

Staff at three colleges and five universities have raised concerns about the level of work people are facing, with one college describing it as “crippling”.

Members at the New College Nottingham described the environment of teaching staff as “increasingly hostile”. Their motion asked for an investigation into the possibility of taking industrial action. They want to put an end to teaching staff carrying out administrative duties that could be performed by someone in the administrative team and a reduction in teaching hours to 16 hours per week.

The college’s motion said that heavy workloads were “a direct result of excessive

teaching hours, coursework marking and administration”.

The motion from members at Strode College said that cuts in FE funding have led to a significant increase in workloads and called for “an urgent” campaign on the issue.

One lecturer told the UCU: “From the minute I arrive at work to the minute I leave, I do not feel able to leave my desk or classroom for a break, even lunch.

“I start early and leave late and feel guilty when I go home. I also work at weekends. The huge amounts of paperwork lead to lack of time to spend with students.”

Another lecturer echoed this frustration: “More and more out-of-work duties have been added to the workload without consultation, so we are tired and irritable most of the time.”

In a study into stress and bullying in further education, 65 per cent of those questioned said that unreasonable expectations from colleagues, students and managers had increased anxiety levels. The research by the UCU also found that

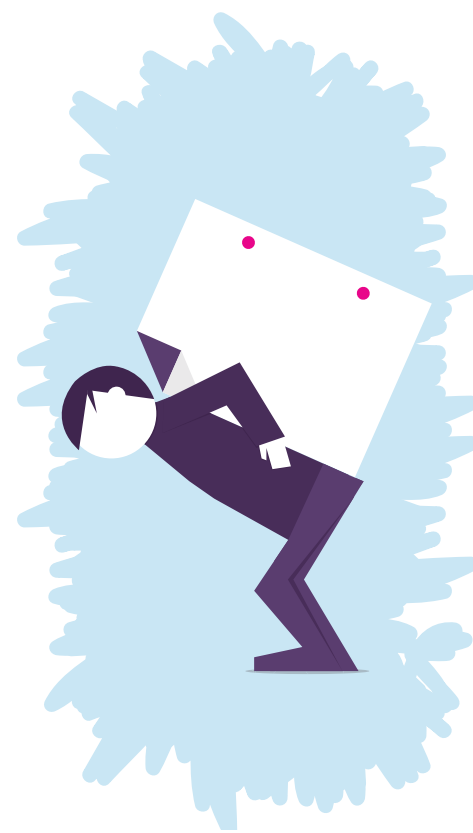
73 per cent of respondents saw excessive workloads as the biggest contributor to stress. Fewer than one in ten said they were never pressed to work long hours.

UCU’s senior research officer, Stephen Court, said that funding cuts exacerbate the problem: “With lecturers being made redundant, or posts being frozen when people change job or retire, those still in work have a heavier workload in terms of teaching and administration.”

Mr Court highlighted 2010 research that showed a five per cent increase in the number of full-time lecturing staff working more than 40 hours a week from 2008, and a seven per cent increase in those working more than 50 hours a week.

He said: “One reason for that increase in workload may be that, two years after the start of the financial crisis in 2008, FE colleges had made a number of staff redundant, [causing] a heavier [workload]”.

Rising stress levels are a danger of a heavy workload and a survey in 2010 found that 45 per cent of members found their job stressful.



A #FurtherEd Guide To twitter



The concept of Twitter sounds ridiculous. Millions of people, businesses and organisations who choose to document their daily lives through short messages of 140 characters or less. To many it looks like another social networking site similar to MySpace - and let's be honest, keeping on top of your e-mails is bad enough, right? Wrong. This particular social networking site has exploded in the last few years, revolutionising the way millions of people discuss, organise and market themselves. If you're a college, Sixth Form or any other kind of FE professional, now is the perfect time to jump in and take advantage of the service. Or if you're already an active user, it's always worth picking up a few extra tips to see where you could improve.

Twitter is a great way to boost the influence of your marketing strategy. The messages you 'tweet' are immediate and reach the potential to reach more than 200 million people at any one time. It provides an opportunity for other users to give you instant feedback on what they think of your ideas, projects and offers. With such a small character limit it's a quick and simple tool to keep on top of, attracting the prying eyes of potential readers with a simple scan. No long press releases, no group e-mails and no long-winded phone calls to worry about.

Creating an online debate has never been easier thanks to Twitter. Are you considering whether or not to scrap a particular subject? Or do you want to know what everyone else thinks of the latest fee policy? A quick tweet and you could have a large selection of people telling you what they think. With the right use of hashtags, it's the perfect way to take a quick reading of public opinion, or even join in with the latest discussions trending worldwide.

It's also personal. Anyone can 'mention' you with a quick question or comment, allowing instant communication and rapport with your audience. For students and professionals alike, it breaks down the first wall of contact to make conversations quick and simple. Networking with important figures and organisations has never been easier.

Best of all, it's free. The only resource it uses is time - and even that, it argues, is a small price to pay considering the business and public service opportunities that it offers.

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This step-by-step guide includes:

- How to create a new account and start tweeting
- How to use hashtags, direct messages and lists
- Play our FE Twitter 'Top Trumps' game
- Find out about the FE Week principal challenge



Get involved with UCU congress on twitter by using the hashtag:

#UCUC12

If you're not a twitter user, now is your opportunity to get involved.

Check out our handy guide at:
www.feweek.co.uk/twitterguide
for all our tips and tricks on how to tweet and use the hashtag to keep with news and views from the event

Putting members at the centre of UCU

Last year UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, unveiled proposals for reforming the structure of the union. As congress prepares to vote on the reforms *FE Week* caught up with her to ask what difference the changes would make to UCU members.

What exactly are the reforms you are proposing?

“There are three main reforms. First, I propose to reduce the size of our national executive committee (NEC). Our NEC is currently bigger than that of Unison, which has 10 times as many members. What we need, in my view, is to create a more effective, representative body comparable in size to those of other unions. 89 per cent of members who voted in the recent ballot supported this proposal.

I think our union should be independent rather than led by the nose by one faction or another

“Second, I propose to give members a vote on any employer offer; that the majority of our negotiators believe to be final, before the union takes big decisions about whether to accept or reject and take action.

“This can be done quickly and cheaply using modern technology, and it puts our members in the driving seat when it comes to key decisions that affect them. 85 per cent of members who voted in the recent ballot supported this proposal.

“Third, I propose that we elect our lay national negotiators through a ballot of all members, not from the annual conference floor. It is already the case that I and the chairs of the further and higher education committees, who lead our negotiating teams, are elected by the members rather than conference so this change would make our practice consistent. Again this can be done quickly and cheaply. 82 per cent of members who voted in the recent ballot supported this proposal.”

But shouldn't UCU be concentrating on fighting cuts to education rather than on a set of navel gazing internal reforms?

“There is never a good time to make changes, but I believe the challenges we face from government and employers

demand we make positive changes now rather than wait for a quieter time that may never come. Our members want us to prioritise improving support for them and their local officers. I think that is quite right.

“Reducing the NEC will save the union money which can be reinvested in frontline member services. In addition, it will allow our brilliant staff to spend far more of their time directly supporting members, rather than engaged in internalised tasks to support what is by any standards a very large executive committee and related structures.”

Will your proposals really save any money?

“Yes. Reducing the size of the NEC will save around £600,000 over my term of office. This money will be used to provide direct support for members and their representatives at the coalface. Some people have said this is a trifling amount. I don't think it is.”

So how would this £600,000 be spent?

“I would like to target the money solely at improving support for our branch officers – whether by providing more speedy advice on legal or employment matters, greater support on the ground for negotiating or by improving services for members themselves.

“Considering the huge challenges we currently face, I think members quite rightly expect us to prioritise our resources to support them rather than on a structure which needs change.”

And you really think these reforms will allow you to prioritise members' needs?

“Yes. As well as freeing up £600,000, these reforms will free up huge amounts of staff time that is currently spent servicing committees. Nearly 1,000 internal committee papers were drafted last year. That is hours and hours of work that could have been better spent on the external challenges facing the union and members.”

But if you reduce the size of the NEC, how can you continue to ensure that all members are properly represented?

“Most unions that are around UCU's size have NECs that are substantially smaller yet seem to be able to represent members just as effectively. Our sister education

union, the NUT, has an NEC of 40, but has more than double our membership.

“Indeed one of the problems we have had in recent years is that we have so many NEC seats and it has been hard to get people to stand for them. As a result we've had lots of uncontested elections and I don't see how this is good for our democracy.”

Critics say that your changes will be bad news for under-represented groups like black, disabled, LGBT and women members?

“If we reduce the size of the committee, there will of course be changes in how we represent our members but I remain personally committed to ensuring that all groups within the union continue to have representation on our NEC.”

So how would places for further and higher education be allocated?

“If congress votes to endorse members' overwhelming call for a smaller NEC, detailed work will begin on its composition. I strongly believe we need to retain the current broad balance of FE and HE membership on the NEC.”

Over eight in ten of our members support all the proposals

The NEC is currently elected by a combination of national and regional seats. What would change?

“That is something that will need to be looked at once congress endorses members' vote for a smaller NEC. My preference is that those elected to the committee should have a clearly identifiable constituency.”

But how will you ensure strong accountability of the NEC?

“I think one reason why the current system needs to change is that there is not enough direct accountability. A smaller NEC representing clear constituencies will

give members more say and a direct link to their representatives.”

Regarding your other proposals, what exactly is wrong with congress choosing the negotiators?

“Nothing. I just think that it is more democratic that members themselves choose who they want to represent them. As things stand, I and the chairs of FE and HE committee probably do more negotiation than anyone at national level and we are elected by the whole membership not just congress.”

Do you really need to ballot the membership on 'final' offers?

“I think this is basic common sense. My proposal is that when a majority of negotiators think there is a genuine final offer it goes to ballot. I think those who have been in the room doing the negotiation are always the best placed to know when a so-called final offer from an employer really is one.

“Any recommendation as to whether to accept or reject would be for the relevant sector committee to make. This way, the union can make sure that we are always taking our members with us rather than assuming we know what their priorities are.”

But won't that lead to you balloting members all the time?

“No. To use the TPS dispute as an example, the negotiators were clear that although government made a number of offers they described as 'final', the one that came in December last year really was.

What we mean by 'final' is that an offer will not be improved upon without some escalation of the dispute. In those situations I think it's common sense to ask members what they want to do.”

What mandate do you have for making these changes?

“Well, I first set out my proposals at last year's congress. Then I made them a central part of my election manifesto early this year.

“Then, as soon as I was elected, I kept my promise to ballot members on them. The result was that over eight in ten of our members across the union supported all the proposals.”

But turnout was very low in those elections?

“Yes, turnout in UCU and indeed all trade union elections is far too low. The ballot on the changes, however, had a much higher turnout than any internal election in UCU’s history, and produced a big majority in favour of the changes.

“More generally my proposals are part of an approach which seeks to put members at the centre of the union and I hope this greater involvement in our decisions will itself increase participation.”

Reducing the size of the NEC will save around £600,000 over my term of office

What is your problem with so-called factions within UCU?

“I have friends across UCU but I think our union should be independent rather than led by the nose by one faction or another. The reality of factional politics is that sometimes, often unwittingly, members’ interests are forgotten in favour of a supposed big picture.

“I promised myself when I was re-elected that I would stand up for our branch officers and members and ensure their interests were placed at the heart of the union.

“That is why I have spoken out against some UCU factions who have their own policies, rules and membership fees – such an approach is divisive at a time when we need to be united.”

What are your expectations of how congress will vote on the changes?

“I am sure delegates will look closely at how their own branch voted and seek to reflect that mandate so I am hopeful that the changes members voted for in such large numbers will be ratified this week, not least because we want to get on with increasing support for branches and we can’t do that until the decision is made in principle.

“Win or lose, I will continue to argue strongly in favour of UCU listening to our members and placing them at the heart of the union.”



Sally Hunt,
general secretary, UCU

Further Education by numbers

Further education has long been referred to as the 'Cinderella' sector. Here we pay a numerical tribute to the huge difference college, adult and prison educators make to our society, as well as highlighting some of the huge challenges the sector faces.

THE GOOD

861,000

is how many 16-18 year-olds choose to study in colleges each year compared with 434,000 in maintained schools, academies and city technology colleges

3.3 million

the number of people educated and trained by colleges every year

over 1 million

courses in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects are undertaken by students at colleges

Offenders who take prison education courses are

three times

less likely to re-offend than those who don't

40%

of prison inmates have the reading age of 11-year-olds

Further education students generate an additional

£75 billion

for the economy over their lifetimes

27 countries have higher rates of 20-29-year-olds in post-16 education

Adult education has been shown to increase life expectancy by as much as

5 years

25 countries have a higher percentage of 15-19-year-olds in post-16 education than the UK

£30 million

the amount the beleaguered welfare-to-work company, A4e, stands to be given to run new prison education contracts

56,000

16-18-year-olds study an apprenticeship through their local college

£390 million

the amount cut from college grants for poorer students, following the axing of the education maintenance allowance (EMA)

50%

of all foundation degree students are taught in colleges

£4.5 billion

the projected cost of youth joblessness in forgone tax revenues and unemployment benefit each year

24

the age at which the government's controversial new FE loans system will kick in. (Anyone aged over 24 wanting to study A-Level equivalent qualifications and above will have to take out a loan to cover the full cost of their studies)

THE BAD

Battling the profit-seekers in education

In March, the principal of Barnfield College, Pete Birkett, was reported to be in discussions with a private equity firm over plans to create a for-profit company as part of the Barnfield group. According to reports, Birkett is considering using new powers from the 2011 Education Act to convert the college to a private limited company.

This would allow him to set up a subsidiary company with a private investor in which both companies would have shares. The second company would be run for profit, most likely by developing college property or expanding new course provision.

A US senator recently described for-profit colleges' methods as a 'deeply disturbing model from an educational and ethical point of view'

Birkett claims, this offers the college the prospect of new developments and expansion at a time when funding is short. For the private investor, it offers the opportunity to make a profit using public assets and public funding.

This is only part of a wider story of de-regulatory changes to the further education sector being promoted by government and considered by colleges.

However, in the University and College Union's view it is a form of privatisation and a dangerous experiment which could have serious consequences for learners, staff and the future of further education in the UK.

So why are we so concerned about this? UCU has campaigned for a long time now against attempts to turn our education sector into a privatised, profit-seeking enterprise.

Private companies, including private training providers and private equity investors, have been lobbying the government, as well as colleges and universities, to be allowed to invest in the education sector, providing they can be

allowed to extract a profit from it.

We are often called ideological. Yet, in addition to our principled objections to the extraction of 'value' from public services, we would point to the US example. This is important as the US is effectively a vast laboratory for an experiment in the promotion of for-profit education.

For-profit colleges in the US have developed an unenviable public reputation. A US senator recently described for-profit colleges' methods as a 'deeply disturbing model from an educational and ethical point of view'. A leading investor described them as 'marketing machines masquerading as universities.' And when you look at the evidence, you can see why.

Reports by the US Senate, the Education Trust and Harvard academics have all exposed for-profits' drive to generate a profit through seeking out public subsidies and using their financial firepower to aggressively market their courses in a relentless pursuit of enrolments.

This results in them driving down teaching costs, often through using online learning, and there are examples where marketing and legal (dealing with student litigation for false advertising) budgets are higher than teaching ones.

As a result of all this, students at for-profit colleges in the US pay higher fees, end up loaded with higher debts, are more likely to default on their loans and are more likely to be unemployed at the end of their courses. More than three-quarters (a staggering 78 per cent) of students at for-profit colleges never even complete their four-year courses.

If you ever had a doubt that the search for profit is incompatible with the provision of high quality education as a public good, watch the quite stunning PBS documentary College Inc; it's all there.

There's a further problem with the Barnfield proposals and another reason why this case sets such a precedent: the involvement of private equity funds.

As the government goes ever further out of its way to encourage for-profit providers into the system, private equity funds are becoming increasingly interested in post-secondary education.

In March this year, around the same time that the Barnfield discussions were announced, it was confirmed that the College of Law, which has degree-awarding powers, had agreed to sell



Michael MacNeil,

head of higher education, UCU

itself to Montagu Private Equity for £200 million.

Private equity funds are not like other companies. They are funded by investors who are looking for higher returns than they can get elsewhere on the stock market, usually over a very short period.

One way they generate these returns is by loading their companies with debt to fund rapid growth and pay high dividends. Another is by cracking down on the pay, and terms and conditions, of their staff and cutting jobs. This is why private equity firms have built up a reputation as asset strippers.

Now they are increasingly interested in public services. In the UK care homes sector, Southern Cross went bust after a private equity firm, Blackstone, left it

with an unsustainable business model, but pocketed a massive £500 million from the sale shortly before it collapsed.

In the education world, a US education company owned by Goldman Sachs' private equity fund is currently being sued by the government for \$11 billion after it was accused of defrauding the taxpayer, while a second owned by private equity fund Warburg Pincus, was recently described by a US senator as a 'absolute scam'.

Obviously, we understand that colleges face challenges in the new funding and policy environment and we are not automatically opposed to colleges wanting to change and innovate. But we are opposed to, and will continue to campaign against, attempts to turn education into a profit-seeking enterprise.

Offender learning suffering from privatisation

Nick Summers

@SummersNicholas

Offender learning is a crucial yet often overlooked part of the education system. By offering prisoners the chance to learn new skills, they are discouraged from returning to a life of crime and better placed for finding work once they are released.

However, a number of professionals in the further education sector are worried about the quality of training being delivered in the UK.

Private companies such as A4e, who have been under intense scrutiny following multiple allegations of fraud, are muscling in to try and secure prison education contracts from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

This growing trend has led to members of the Manchester College Prisons Branch submitting a motion to UCU congress 2012, which proposes a reference to offender learning in the union's anti privatisation campaign.

The motion reads: "Members employed to deliver education, learning and skills to offenders in prisons are facing a change of employer as a result of the latest round of re-tendering.

"Congress reiterates its objection to this constant change, which brings uncertainty and instability for staff not just in terms of a change in employer, but also to the work we do."

A source close to the sector has told *FE Week* that while private companies offer the SFA good value for money, the quality of training is lacklustre.

"We're looking at some of the most disaffected people in society, and what the private sector tends to do is drop wages and drop standards for terms and conditions," the source said.

"So you perhaps don't get the same standards of professionalism and that traditional ethos to teaching and learning."

The SFA issued a statement last month confirming they have found "no evidence of fraud" at A4e - the government's preferred bidder for a multi-million pound prison

education contract. The announcement follows allegations of fraud relating to the company's work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Speaking to *FE Week*, a source close to the sector said the SFA should be cautious about using private providers such as A4e.

"We're talking about government money here and when we say government money, of course we're talking about our money," the source said.

"Significant public money (is) going into these private providers which have a dodgy history financially, so we do need to be wary of that because I don't think it does the profession any good."

The SFA has defended its re-tendering process, emphasising that prison education contracts are "open to the whole FE sector" and awarded on merit.

A spokesperson for the SFA told *FE Week*: "If an independent training organisation wins a tender it is accountable for public funding in the same way as an FE college.

"We apply robust contract management processes that are agreed, including

quarterly performance reviews, working with the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and lead governors to provide continued assurance that public funding is being used and protected appropriately."

When we say government money, of course we're talking about our money

The SFA say they appreciate that re-tendering can lead to uncertainty among staff, and will continue to ensure public funds are protected.

"We will be vigilant and use all of our oversight and audit processes to maintain assurance that public funds and learners' interests are safeguarded," the spokesperson added.

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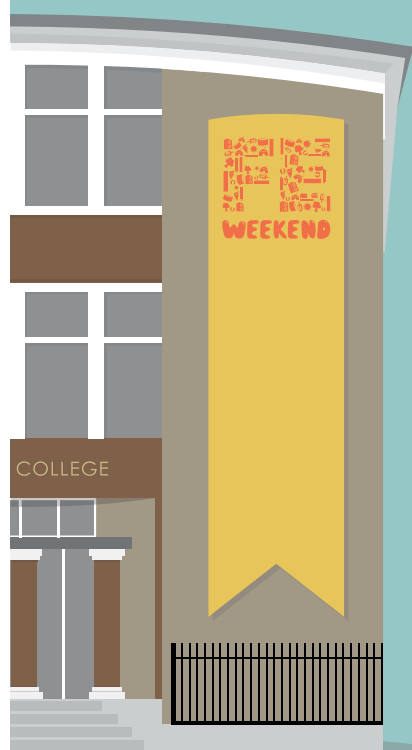
Friday Speakers:

Karl Bentley - Lead Funding Auditor, RSM Tenon
Matthew Coffey - National Director of Learning and Skills, Ofsted
David Hughes - Chief Executive, NIACE
Nick Linford - Author of *The hands-on guide to post-16 funding*
Victoria Taylor - Education Solicitor, Eversheds
Karen Woodward - Divisional Director of Apprenticeships, NAS

Saturday Speakers (live internet broadcast):

Adrian Bailey MP - Chair of BIS Select Committee
Barry Brooks - Group Strategy Director, Tribal

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Fighting for freedom: Dr Beltran's story

Dr Miguel Angel Beltran will never forget the events of the 23 May 2009. Life had been going well up to that point. His job as a post-doctoral researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico was rewarding and he felt settled and happy. He had no idea of what was about to happen.

After presenting himself to the Mexican immigration service, for what he thought was a routine visa appointment, he was ordered to sign a document by officials.

Within moments two guards burst into the room, handcuffed him and covered his face. When he asked where they were taking him they refused to answer and he was later subjected to physical abuse.

Before he knew it he was on a flight to Colombia, his home country, to face charges of 'rebellion'.

His crime had been to criticise the Colombian government and in Colombia dissent is simply not tolerated.

3,000 trade unionists have been killed since 1986 along with social activists, members of the political opposition and those protesting against human rights abuses

Miguel's price for speaking out against state-sponsored human rights abuses was two years in a high security prison, where he was denied full access to lawyers, family and friends.

He believes he would still be there today were it not for the efforts of University and College Union members who, along with Justice for Colombia, helped lead a sustained campaign for his release.

Over 4,000 international academics signed a petition that was delivered to the Colombian embassy, along with hundreds of letters to the British and Colombian government.

"UCU's support was a crucial factor in strengthening the international observation of what was happening to me and in finally

helping me to demonstrate my innocence, as was made clear by the judge who absolved me of guilt," said Miguel.

Although Miguel is now free, life is far from normal. He has been forced to flee Colombia for his own safety and he asked that we not reveal his current place of residence.

As perverse as it sounds he feels he is one of the lucky ones. He is still alive. Colombia remains the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

Nearly 3,000 trade unionists have been killed since 1986, along with social activists, members of the political opposition and those protesting against human rights abuses.

Paramilitary groups and state forces are responsible for most of the killings. Under the previous president, Alvaro Uribe, the man who branded Miguel a terrorist and member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group, the repression was particularly severe, with at least 573 trade unionists assassinated.

Despite hopes of a fresh start following the election of President Juan Manuel Santos, the murders have continued; 54 trade unionists have been killed since he took power in August 2010, with eight losing their lives so far this year.

Faced with such intimidation and violence Miguel could be forgiven for wanting to forget about Colombia, but he insists the fight for human rights and democracy must go on: "There are thousands of political prisoners in the country's prisons living in inhumane conditions. They are the result of a social and armed conflict which the country is living through, and which demands a politically negotiated solution."

His message to the UK government is simple and urgent: it must speak out against the abuses and work with Colombian unions and human rights groups to achieve peace in the country.

"The British government persists in denying the existence of political prisoners in my country. If it was to recognise publicly that in Colombia the political and social opposition is persecuted, imprisoned and, in many cases, assassinated this would contribute enormously to putting an end to the continuous violations of human rights," said Miguel.

So can Miguel ever see himself returning to live in Colombia?

"Since I recovered my freedom, my aim has



Dr Beltran speaks to the media after his release last year



Graffiti at the National University in Bogotá, the caption below it reads: "Constructing education for a country in peace with social justice"

been no other than to return to Colombia and to resume teaching at university. However, the threats against my life and the lives of my loved ones have prevented me from doing so." He explained.

"I am the son of the public university tradition and want to pass on my knowledge and experience to the next generation of academics. I also feel a great commitment to ensuring that the painful reality of the Colombian conflict, and, in particular, of the thousands of political prisoners deprived of their freedom in Colombian prisons is known."

Miguel will address members of the University and College Union at its annual

congress in Manchester on Saturday. It is an event he is very much looking forward to after being unable to attend last year:

"The support from UCU members, expressed through moral backing, public letters, denouncements and words of solidarity gave me much strength and dynamism to continue on with the task of demonstrating my innocence and in withstanding the difficult conditions of incarceration that I had to live through for two long years. I am looking forward to being able to say thank you in person."

To find out more on Miguel's story and what is happening in Colombia please visit www.justiceforcolombia.org

The rules have changed for international students



Toni Pearce,
vice president for further education, NUS

There has been much debate and comment here and elsewhere about the damaging introduction of fees for FE students aged over 24.

Our opposition to this is clear and the 'Keep FE Free' campaign will be NUS' priority in the coming months but it's important that we don't lose sight of another careless reform being made by this government that is massively undermining the further education sector.

A change that will cost the sector tens, or possibly hundreds, of millions of pounds; a change that is already leaving students scrambling to find a new college in the midst of exam season; a change that could see some students marked out as untrustworthy and their movements

closely monitored; a change that risks a public perception of colleges as amateurish and unreliable.

I am of course talking about the controversial changes to the international student regulations, draconian conditions for students wishing to study in the UK and the restriction of the right to sponsor students only to those colleges with a Highly Trusted Status (HTS).

The government knew when they made a promise to reduce immigration to the tens of thousands that European law prevented them from having any impact on economic immigration from the Continent and that businesses would not accept any stem to the flow of skilled-labour from around the world into their UK operations, so

it appears the education sector was identified as a soft target.

This set up an interdepartmental duel as the better angels (this time at least) David Willetts and Vince Cable fought to save the integrity of further and higher education in the UK and to protect one of the few industries that successfully brings money into UK.

They were battling the devil's advocates in the Home Office in the form of Theresa May and Damian Green who are focussed solely on getting the headline number down, ignoring whatever comes crashing down around them. May and Green, backed by the Prime Minister, won out and students, colleges, education and the UK lost out.

A year on the changes are starting to be felt by students on the ground. In Scotland at least six colleges failed the new tougher tests and lost HTS. This left their international students suddenly having to find a new institution or face deportation.

The government have just extended the guillotine for those institutions who have not had their applications processed yet, giving everyone a little breathing room, but the assumption is that storm will gradually spread south bringing chaos and upheaval for colleges and students across the UK.

In Scotland at least six colleges failed the new tougher tests and lost HTS. This left their international students to find a new institution or face deportation

Worryingly, for those of us who believe fully that FE is not just HE's poorer sibling should be the potential shift in the perception of international students and our colleges.

As we move towards months of hearing about students whose colleges have lost their HTS, thus making them visa-less and more likely to disappear from the bumbling hands of UKBA, international students will be viewed with suspicion, as

infiltrators exploiting the UK's education system as cover for entry to the UK.

International students will be viewed with suspicion, as infiltrators exploiting the UK's education system as cover for entry to the UK

Similarly, as stories abound of colleges being denied Highly Trusted Status the obvious assumption will be that those colleges are untrustworthy and administered by fools.

It won't matter that idiotic rules about ratios of failed students will mean that a college with only a few international students will lose its HTS if a couple don't complete their course, the damage will be done.

There is still time to avoid irreversible damage to UK further education as a destination for international students.

As we put pressure on decision-makers about other things it is vital that we don't let calls for a rethink on student visas fall silent.

Michael Gove has been depressingly silent on this issue so far, allowing the battle to rage between the Home Office and BIS but he and his department must be persuaded to get involved.

NUS has been calling for students to be removed from net migration figures so that this important part of the further education landscape cannot be used as a political football.

It's crucial too that a better balance is found between ensuring that the reputation of the sector and the welfare of students is not compromised by bogus or incompetent colleges and creating instability and suspicion within the sector.

I'll be campaigning for these things this year and I hope that others in the sector will join with those in higher education to raise their voices as well.

Different strokes

Terry Hoad and Kathy Taylor come from very different parts of the education profession.

One is an Oxford don and leading medieval language and literature expert and the other has spent years teaching at colleges in her native north-east, encouraging thousands of working-class students to reach for the stars.

"I think it is great that UCU has presidents from diverse backgrounds," says Kathy.

"The fact that we alternate each year between further and higher education and serve two years as vice-president is really good for members.

As well as fighting the cuts to jobs and pensions we have had to remain ever vigilant to the threat of privatisation

"Before I became vice-president, I don't think I really appreciated just how important researchers and academic-related staff, for example, are in higher education because those posts don't really exist in FE.

"The last couple of years have given me the chance to learn more about the day-to-day challenges that staff in universities face and will help me represent them better when I become president."

It is a point not lost on Terry. "I think that one of the great successes of the merger is that UCU is a broad church. I am constantly astonished and inspired by the breadth of the work our members do.

"We have members leading pioneering research, members who help train offenders in prison, members who dedicate their working lives to helping people of all ages. We may all come from different backgrounds but we all value education as a public good."

The last year has been a testing one for UCU members in further and higher education. UCU's congress in Manchester this week, where 500 delegates will discuss the issues of the day, promises to be a lively one.

"I am expecting a very busy congress", says



Kathy Taylor, vice president and
Terry Hoad, president, UCU

Kathy, "If I just look in my sector we are getting almost weekly rounds of job cuts. The north-east, where I come from, is being really badly hit.

"As well as slashing jobs some institutions are also looking to cut individual staff pay by thousands every year and to deliver teaching on the cheap. There is also the matter of unannounced lesson observations and, of course, pensions."

Terry Hoad agrees that the past 12 months have left the union facing huge challenges on a number of fronts: "It has been a very turbulent period for our members. As well fighting the cuts to jobs and pensions we have had to remain ever vigilant to the threat of privatisation.

"UCU did a great job in raising public awareness about for-profit universities and in getting the higher education bill scrapped but that danger hasn't gone away.

"The College of Law has just been sold off to a private equity firm and, in further education, Barnfield College is also threatening to use a private equity fund to turn itself into a for-profit company."

So what advice will Terry be passing on to

his successor?

"I think Kathy will be a great president and, as she says, she has already learnt a great deal serving as a vice-president.

"My advice to any UCU president would be to get out and see as many branches as possible and to take on board our members' diverse experiences and views.

I don't think I really appreciated just how important researchers and academic-related staff, for example, are in higher education

"Kathy, like me, will take over at a time of great change for both sectors and I am sure she will play a very valuable role in consulting on behalf our members with students, politicians, mission groups and other unions."

The challenge of taking over from Terry is one that excites rather than daunts Kathy: "I am really looking forward to representing members in both sectors.

I agree with Terry that education is a public good but we are going to have to fight hard to protect this, especially if the government carries on in its current vein.

They seem determined to bring in the market where they can and we need to present the alternative.

"I also want UCU to step up its campaign against de-professionalisation and excessive workloads. Our own research shows that both sectors are some of the most stressful professions to work in. This is just not acceptable."

So how does Kathy plan on helping the union meet these challenges? "I want to influence the way the union is organised and structured so that it can best deliver what members see as their main needs and aspirations. We need to satisfy them because they are the people we exist for."

Her remarks draw a strong nod of appreciation from Terry. Perhaps they are not so different after all.



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