

# A warning from the FE sector - hands off our education!

The academies project was started by Tony Blair's New Labour government, but now the Con-Dems are 'fast tracking' it. Schools rated as 'outstanding' as well as 'failing' schools are pushed to become academies.

Academies are schools that, while still funded by the state, are run independently of local authorities, often by business consortiums.

A Socialist Party and NUT member looks at how the 'independence' of Further Education since 1992 should be a warning on academies.

The Con-Dems are turning hundreds of schools into academies through a system of bribery. Head teachers, who may traditionally have been supporters of comprehensive education, are lured by the 'offer' of thousands of pounds if they do the government's bidding, against funding cuts if they stay with the local authority.

Apologists will claim that pay and conditions will not be affected, that staff and students will hardly see the difference. However, anyone wondering what conditions and pay for staff working in academies will look like in a few years time should look no further than the Further Education (FE) sector. Conditions in FE and sixth form colleges show the massive dangers of privatisation in education.

Before 1992, colleges, like schools, were funded directly by the Local Education Authority. However, as part of a Tory government attack on local government, based on privatisation, competition and business interference into education, colleges were sliced off and turned into 'independent corporations'.

The Further and Higher Education Act meant colleges were still under the financial direction of the state, currently in the guise of the Learning and Skills Council, however, they had an unparalleled amount of independence.

After 1992, colleges could set pay on a local basis. Collective, national bargaining had gone, with union branches forced to negotiate pay locally. This has meant pay has been held back compared to teachers in the state sector.

However, teachers' pay, as the NUT teachers' union has pointed out, has been falling in real terms for years; the fact that FE pay is even below this, shows how crippling the Further and Higher Education Act was. Teachers in primary, secondary and FE should get the

same, nationally negotiated, pay. However, this should be at a rate which recognises the demands of the job. There should be no race to the bottom.

Other disastrous consequences of FE college incorporation after 1992 include:

- Draconian new contracts that caused a six-year national dispute and focused on massively increased workloads with the tearing up of national conditions of service
- Savage financial restraints and cuts, ultimately causing an estimated equivalent of 20,000 lecturing job losses nationally
- A dramatic increase in the bullying and victimisation of staff and union activists
- Financial chaos with college governors often not knowing what they were doing, with local Tory business interests dominating - and even a few college principals and related staff being investigated by the Fraud Squad!

Teachers have recently seen reforms which clarify their roles, protecting them from time-consuming tasks which take time away from planning, teaching and assessment. These tasks include exam invigilation, cover, displays, collecting money, etc.

While these benefits are certainly limited and hardly touch the real issue of workload - 25 hours of teaching a week, plus planning, marking and tutoring, will often result in a 50 hour week - they do nevertheless give some protection to teachers.

In FE, teaching staff are expected to do all of these tasks and are often expected to do paperwork for student enrolment, financial arrangements and exam entries. Put simply, by getting lecturers to do the admin and support work, as well as teach, colleges save money.

Penny pinching academies



photo Martin Powell-Davies

and colleges can and will ignore national pay and conditions. While protection of employment rules (TUPE) may defend these in the first instance, staff will soon see that their conditions will not improve, with the possibility of new staff being employed on worse conditions. This is exactly what has happened in FE.

The situation in colleges is untenable for many staff. But it is not just the big issues of pay and workload that contribute to stress and depression. Colleges will often employ staff on zero hour contracts and pay them by the hour, making them insecure and easy to sack.

Lecturers in some colleges do not have a teaching qualification, meaning that they are exploited, being used as cheap labour, while students get a raw end deal on teaching and learning. Money for text books, equipment and educational trips is even harder to come by than in primary or secondary education.

Special educational needs (SEN) provision, except for students with a SEN statement, is in the hands of the college, meaning this will often be cut to save money. Colleges can pay their management what they like, meaning that principals could receive £200,000 a year while the starting salary for a lecturer could

## The Socialist demands:

- Free, publicly run and funded, good quality education, available to all from nursery to university
- Give schools the resources to meet every student's needs. Bring class sizes down to a maximum of 20
- Big business out of education. No to PFI. No to the commercialisation and privatisation of education
- No to academies and trust schools. For democratic local education authorities (including representatives elected from staff, parents and students) to control and plan the running of all schools
- No to selection. For all schools to follow common comprehensive admissions procedures

be as little as £17,000. The absence of democracy or accountability often leads to a bullying management, obsessed with results and unforgiving of 'disloyalty'.

All of this is made worse by the lecturers' union UCU being hamstrung by the destruction of collective, national bargaining in FE. In many areas the UCU has remained strong, through the hard work of its reps and loyalty of its membership.

But in other colleges principals and management, smelling blood, have destroyed the union. Some

college principals deny union facility time and can even refuse union recognition.

Tory education secretary Michael Gove's 'academisation' of state schools, if not fought, will bring the same results. Privatisation of schools means staff, students and the community have to rely on the good will of an unelected board of trustees and a pressurised head.

One glance at the FE sector will show you what this means in reality for teachers, their pay and their conditions.

## 6,500 Swansea children in poverty

Ronnie Job and Sharif Bhagat  
Swansea Socialist Party

In 2010, a report commissioned by Swansea council's Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny board estimated that 6,500 children live in poverty in the city.

Babies born to 'under-privileged' families can be underweight and low birth weight is closely associated with infant death and chronic diseases later in life.

At the age of two, a child from a poor family is more likely to show a lower level of attainment than a child from a more affluent background.

As the child develops, there

are fewer opportunities available through lack of education and life experience. This can result in a lack of confidence and self worth, and can impact on mental health.

Child obesity is high in deprived areas and children in poverty are more likely to leave school at 16. With poor numeracy and literary skills finding long-term employment is often an uphill struggle.

For a minority, these problems can culminate in substance abuse and criminal activities. The South Wales Evening Post has labelled this as "a cocktail of drugs, booze, obesity and ill health".

A Centre for Cities report (Cities Outlook 2010), identified Swansea as one of the most vulnerable UK

cities in the effect cuts will have on the public sector. Nearly 40% of the workforce is employed in the public sector.

Swansea's current Liberal Democrat-led council intends to carry through government cuts and can offer no solutions to underlying social problems.

Should Labour defeat the ruling Lib Dems, Tories and Independent coalition next May, then experience of Labour-led councils shows that they too will carry through the Tory cuts.

The best thing we can do for our children is to build united trade union action to defeat the cuts and to prepare to stand anti-cuts candidates in next year's council elections.



## Socialism Today

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