

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Just before Christmas, Peter Mandelson announced that HEFCE's budget will be cut by £135m. This is in addition to the £180 million in 'efficiency savings' announced in the 2009 budget, and prompting warnings of a £915m cut to the sector over the next three years. This amounts to £190 less in resources per student than in 2009. In addition to this, universities that over-recruited in 2009 would be fined £3,700 per student, despite the fact that thousands of students were denied places this year, and the UK's average for NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) is higher than the OECD average. For a government with a mandate for 50% of young people in education, this is ironic to say the least.

These cuts have taken place alongside the ongoing marketisation of education, so that university potentially becomes even less of a place to learn and ask questions and more about serving narrowly defined industry needs. Requirements to prove graduate employability (including future earnings), generate external income and demonstrate 'economic impact' (as in the REF proposals) worsen the experience for students and staff. This is compounded by the outsourcing of IT and student support, and the proliferation of PPPs in ESOL provision such as INTO and Navitas.

The cuts and marketisation imperatives coincide with the review of student fees. In connection with this we have seen some disturbing proposals, such as raising the interest rates for loan repayment as part of a 'national service scheme' or raising fees at prestigious universities such as Oxford to £10,000.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT GOLDSMITHS?

At Goldsmiths, we have been lucky so far, but it is unlikely we will be exempt from the cuts, and we will need to defend our jobs and conditions from any future challenge. With cuts of this magnitude, it is all but impossible to imagine how they would not have significant impact on jobs and conditions. We will also need to work together with students in case there are attempts to divide us.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

We need to send a loud, clear message to government that there will be serious consequences for their refusal to invest in education. We also need to put forth our ideas about what kind of education we want. Marketisation should not be the price to pay for accessible education, and skyrocketing fees should not be the price to pay for decent working conditions for staff.

We also have to remember that raising fees is not inevitable – not if we mobilise to stop it! According to a 2007 survey, Germany, France, Norway universities charge no fees, or very low ones (€1-500) – and also do not charge foreign students higher fees. There has been a wave of university occupations in Italy, Austria and the US in response to very similar issues, and we can draw inspiration from the spirit of these actions.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. JOIN US AT THE LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT BETWEEN 2:30 AND 4:30PM ON TUESDAY, THE 26TH OF JANUARY.

We need a big presence there to show that there is strong and active opposition to the cuts. A group of us from Goldsmiths will be going – join us! Email gucu-admin@gold.ac.uk

2. LOBBY YOUR MP. You can email your MP asking to meet them by visiting www.writetothem.com. You can also write your MP at the House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA or call your MP's House of Commons office via the switchboard on 020 7219 3000. Advice on how to lobby your MP here: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/3/7/ucu_lobbybriefing.pdf

3. USE THE PRESS. Write op-ed pieces, letters, blog posts, etc. As the situation for education funding is in part a battle of ideas, we need to provoke public debate about the future of education.

4. SIGN THE PETITION. It will be delivered to MP Joan Ruddock on the 26th. <http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/stop-planned-cuts-to-higher-education.html>

AN ANTI-CUTS COMMITTEE IS BEING PROPOSED – STAY TUNED!

SOURCES

'David Lammy's National Service Plans are an Insult to Every Student'. UCU, 6 December 2009. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4338&from=4321>

'Figures reveal shortfall of nearly 50,000 university places'. Guardian, 2 July 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jul/09/university-places-shortage-recession>

'HEFCE Budget to be Slashed by £915m Over Three Years'. Times Higher Education, 31 December 2009. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=409782&c=2>

'Nobel Laureates: Don't Put Money Before Science'. Independent, 7 January 2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/nobel-laureates-dont-put-money-before-science-1860138.html>

'Oxford Fees Could Treble Next Year, Academics Warn'. Guardian, 14 July 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jul/14/oxford-fees-to-rise>

'Tuition Fees in Europe 2007/2008'. CESifo Group, 2007. <http://www.cesifo-group.de/portal/page/portal/48A3033D74F32A8CE0440003BA988603>

UCU: List of cuts (8 October, 2009). <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4087>

'UK Lags Behind Competitor Countries on Education and Training, Says Report'. UCU, 8 September 2009. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4158>

'Universities Overhaul Could Make Them More Inclusive, Say Mandelson'. Guardian, 3 November 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/nov/03/peter-mandelson-university-review-modernisation>

HEFCE's budget cut by £135m in 2010 • £180 million in 'efficiency savings' announced in the 2009 budget • £915m cut to HE over the next three years • the 2010 cuts mean £190 less in resources per student than in 2009 • total jobs in HE already lost or under threat as of October 2009: 4797 • as of October 2009, 45 universities are cutting jobs, and 99 have announced they intend to cut jobs in the future • the cuts affect every type of institution, from Russell Group universities like Sheffield University (340 jobs) to widening participation universities like London Metropolitan (550) • London is one of the worst regions hit, with over 2,000 job losses • over 100,000 students could be affected by these cuts • staff to student ratios have doubled in the last 30 years, from 1:9 to 1:18. • 50,000 students denied university places as of July 2009 • universities that over-recruited in 2009 fined £3,700 per student • UK's average for NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) 5.6%, higher than OECD average of 4.7% (the average number of NEETs in France is 2.4%) • UK public spending on higher education is just 0.9 % of GDP compared to 1.1 % in France and 1.0% in the US

CUTS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT