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### Speaker's Corner

As a member-oriented organisation FACE would like to invite individual colleagues to have their say on any issue of concern in UK education policy and practice. This is a purely personal point of view and should not be thought to represent any institution, organisation, or official body. To have your say, email James. [Tate@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Tate@uwe.ac.uk)

Prior to a proposal to be discussed at the June meeting of the FACE Executive regarding the establishing a FACE Social Mobility Network, Tony Acland offers a personal view of the issue and invites us all to keep a Social Mobility Watch.

#### How Robust is the UK Coalition Government's Social Mobility Strategy?

The publication of the UK coalition government's White Paper, "Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility" <sup>1</sup>, promises a radical new approach to improving 'fairness' in society. In his foreword to the White Paper, the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, declared that "improving social mobility is the principal goal of the coalition government's social policy", emphasising that is "a long-term undertaking . . . (that) has to be addressed at every stage in the life cycle, from the Foundation Years through to the world of work". In this way, the author of the White Paper acknowledges that the success of the social mobility strategy will be dependent on a range of government reforms in fields as diverse as education, welfare and employment.

If successful, this Liberal Democrat-led strategy will be well-received and may even reverse the recent decline in the Party's popularity amongst the electorate. Key questions that need to be asked, include:

- How sincere are the proposals in a coalition from across the political spectrum?
- What are the strengths of the social mobility strategy?
- Is the social mobility strategy likely to achieve its ambitious objectives?

#### How sincere are the proposals in a coalition from across the political spectrum?

Despite Nick Clegg's well-publicised change of heart over student fees, it would be difficult to doubt the sincerity of his commitment to social mobility and, even the political satirist, David Mitchell, has recently observed that it would be unfair to call Nick Clegg "a hypocrite" just because of his own privileged upbringing. <sup>2</sup>

However, it is more difficult to gauge the extent to which Conservatives in the coalition will support the wide range of measures advocated. Early signs of solidarity within the coalition have not been encouraging, with the Prime Minister directly contradicting his Deputy's well publicised declaration that privileged connections should not be allowed to determine appointments, including internships.

As success requires passing a series of bills through both houses of parliament, it remains to be seen how many Tories will support the Deputy Prime Minister's social mobility plans. In this context, it is interesting that a key point made in the White Paper is that the success of the strategy depends on there being 'more room at the top' <sup>3</sup>, which the authors of the paper argue will be created by increased demands from industry for high level skills. No mention is made in the White Paper that promoting space for the talented might require downward mobility in a truly 'fair' society based on meritocracy. Privileged Tories and others may be reluctant to support measures which would force them to abandon traditional support networks for their children and grandchildren.

#### What are the strengths of the social mobility strategy?

The decision to draw upon cross-party expertise on child poverty, including the eminent socialist thinker, Frank Field, has to be applauded and this has led to, what could prove to be, some very positive features of the coalition government's social mobility strategy, notably:

- Recognition of the importance of interventions at each point of the life-cycle of deprivation in order to systematically reduce social inequality.
- A particular focus on the early stages of the life-cycle, including maintaining much of Sure Start and introducing innovative maternal and child care and well-being measures, supported by a substantial increase of health visitors and family nurses.
- Commitment to raising standards in schools and narrowing the achievement gap between the poorest and most affluent groups, including introduction of the Pupil Premium.
- Acknowledging the important role of Further Education for helping young people to develop the work skills and qualifications for successful transition to employment.
- Ambition to open up higher education to low waged groups as a route to professional careers, including introducing a National Scholarship Programme and the requirement for universities charging fees of over £6,000 to seek approval from the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) for, hopefully, ambitious widening participation strategies.
- New measures to support adults, including loan entitlement for part-time higher education study and for the workless an Enterprise Allowance, Work Placements and Work Together training for volunteering.
- Appreciation of the educational challenges for disabled students and children in care, as well as the difficulties Black and Minority Ethnic groups experience in gaining employment.

However, commitment to worthy objectives is one thing, careful construction of appropriate social mobility measures, properly funded, in a context of severe budget cutbacks, is quite another matter. The following section identifies key issues which 'social mobility watchers' will wish to examine closely in order to determine whether the strategy is likely to succeed.

#### Is the social mobility strategy likely to achieve its ambitious objectives?

The extent to which the social mobility strategy is likely to succeed is dependent on the full range of government measures and not just those contained in the White Paper. This can be illustrated by focusing on some of the changes suggested for the education sector.

The coalition place great hopes on their flagship Pupil Premium which has been billed as additional funding for poorer pupils with schools free to decide locally the most appropriate way of using this funding to raise achievement levels. Shortly after it was announced, the Education Secretary, Michael Gove, was forced to admit on the BBC Politics Show <sup>4</sup> that funding would have to be drawn from the welfare and other parts of the education budget. This has led to speculation that this might cause more damage to social equality and mobility than any positive impact of the Pupil Premium.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies <sup>5</sup> claimed that the Pupil Premium proposal would be disproportionately allocated to children in more affluent areas, with the poor in Wokingham, Berkshire receiving up to two and a half times as much as the poor in Tower Hamlets. The OECD, whilst considering the Pupil Premium was a step in the right direction, provided an important reservation:

"The premium is, however, relatively low in an international perspective and it is not clear that it will cover the extra costs of admitting disadvantaged students. The government needs to ensure incentives are sufficiently large to incentivise schools to admit disadvantaged students. To maximise transparency the government should consider increasing the pupil premium" (OECD Economic Surveys: United Kingdom, March 2011, para 25, page 11)

Despite proclaiming the importance of Further Education, government budgetary cuts threaten to adversely affect those adults who most deserve support. For example, Alan Tuckett <sup>6</sup> has argued that the government's decision to reduce funding for people who are "inactive" will adversely affect the career prospects of low waged families, such as those who will no longer be able to afford the fees for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. Previously, such low waged Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) adults were able to learn 'free of charge' and many successfully progressed to professional employment in the health, education and financial services.

Similarly, the government's replacement for EMAs to support young people wishing to study in Further Education appears to be under-funded. Although provision is made for specific disadvantaged groups, such as children in care, allocation of most of the funding is left to the discretion of senior teachers who, presumably, would be free to select students for support based on their own judgement or prejudices. Creating such a system brings with it the risk of recreating the 'deserving poor' approach from a previous century. Surely, 'entitlement' based on objective targeting criteria is the most effective way to eradicate disadvantage and to secure a 'fairer' society.

Improving provision for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) is a major platform for the government's strategy to raise aspirations and progression to higher level study and professional careers. Under these plans, universities, together with schools and colleges, will have an increasingly important role in providing a professional careers guidance. However, a key question is whether it will be possible for universities and colleges to provide an independent and institutional neutral IAG service in an increasingly competitive environment for student recruitment. It is hoped that in many areas of England, universities and colleges will draw on their positive experience of collaboration from the Aimhigher programme and that will continue to collaborate to provide effective outreach and IAG for schools within their region. However, none of this is guaranteed.

Overall, the social mobility strategy appears to be comprehensive, appropriately embracing both education and a range of welfare and other provisions. Ultimately, the success of the policy might depend on whether sufficient levels of funding are provided for each measure, especially those in education. Early indications suggest that the emerging plans may be 'over-targeted' and will benefit a rather small section of the low waged community. Hopefully, as the economic situation improves, a more ambitious approach to benefit a wider range of disadvantaged families will be developed.

#### Keep Watching

Whilst in opposition, fifty years ago, Harold Wilson suggested that we should put our grocery bill behind the clock on the mantelpiece and compare it in a year's time with an equivalent bill to see how the power of the pound had declined under the Tory government. Perhaps, we should do the same with the coalition government's Social Mobility Strategy. In a year's time or, perhaps, at the end of this parliament, will we be impressed or depressed with the success of the strategy? Will we be applauding or blaming the government for their lack of ambition and resolve in creating a genuinely fair and equal society? It is certainly important for all concerned with equality and widening participation to keep watching.

Tony Acland  
Director, Aimhigher Hampshire and Isle of Wight

#### Notes

1. Published by HM Government, April 2011.
2. Featured in 'Ten O'Clock Live' broadcast 21st April 2011.
3. Paragraph 1.34 of the White Paper
4. Broadcast 24th October 2011
5. Reported by the Education Editor of the Telegraph, Graeme Paton, 15th October 2010
6. Alan Tuckett is chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Education (Niace). His views were reported in the Education Guardian Further, 26th April 2011.

### Countdown to FACE 2011

"Lifelong Learning and Community Development"  
Wednesday 29th June – Friday 1st July 2011  
(CR&DALL) University of Glasgow

Fees paid for a FACE conference place!

FACE is delighted to announce that ESCalate, the Education Subject Centre, has kindly agreed to sponsor a full fees paid place at this year's FACE conference for someone working in access or widening participation who is "early" in their career. Sponsorship includes all conference fees and access to the social programme. Travel expenses and accommodation are not included.

So if you have been working in the areas of access or widening participation for less than two years, you are eligible to apply for this sponsored place at FACE 2011. Applicants should submit a title and abstract for a conference paper which will be reviewed by a special panel of the FACE Executive. The successful author will be invited to attend the full conference free of charge, to give a full conference presentation and submit a full paper for publication in the conference publication.

If you have already submitted a conference abstract, you can still apply for the place, just include a copy of your abstract. [Apply Now for a sponsored place!](#)

Download [Full details and registration form](#) (pdf) Registration for the conference can be paid for by cheque or credit card/debit card.

Check out [Glasgow: See Scotland in Style](#)

### Other Major Conferences

#### The 2011 PASCAL International Observatory Conference

"Regional Prosperity in a Global Era"

Scheduled for October 3rd - 5th 2011 in Illinois, USA.

Visit the conference website at [www.pascal2011.org](http://www.pascal2011.org) from where you can submit conference presentation proposals and register for the conference itself.

Deadline for Conference Proposal Submissions: June 17, 2011

Early-bird Registration: until August 15, 2011

If you have any questions or note any gaps in publication, please contact Paul Crawford Co-Director - PASCAL International (North American Center) - [pascal@niu.edu](mailto:pascal@niu.edu)

#### NADE Conference, February 2012

Deadline for submission of proposal June 3rd 2011

The Call for Papers for the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) 36th Annual Conference, "A Mosaic of Learning" will close on June 3rd.

NADE welcomes proposals from faculty, researchers, program administrators, materials and curriculum developers, and other professional educators with interest in the many areas of Developmental Education.

NADE supports educators in postsecondary education who are "helping underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, advanced students excel." NADE invites presentation proposals that share expertise and insight addressing student access, student support, and student retention.

For further details, go to [The NADE Website](#)

#### EAN 20th Anniversary Conference

"Student Diversity in Higher Education: Conflicting Realities" (Tensions affecting policy and action to widen access and participation)

Monday 20th – Wednesday 22nd June 2011, VU University Amsterdam, the Netherlands

The European Access Network (EAN) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year with a conference on student diversity in higher education and the tensions affecting policy and action to widen access and participation for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. In the current political and economic climate, what's the future for them, and for the institutions committed to access, equity, diversity and inclusion?

For higher education institutions the pathway toward greater student diversity can be hazardous and difficult. Those seeking and driving change in institutional policies and practices face pressures from both within and outside the institution that can hinder or stifle progress. Even in the best of times, fulfilling expectations can be difficult. Where achieving greater student diversity is seen as difficult and costly, or of lesser importance than other institutional goals, progress will falter. Both within and outside institutions, there remains an unresolved tension between issues of diversity and quality, and there are also funding tensions, especially when finances are tight. However, it should not be all doom and gloom. This is also an occasion for us to proudly celebrate our achievements and to start our planning for a world congress on access to close educational gaps worldwide. Your involvement in this is most welcome.

For more information about the conference objectives, programme and speakers please go to the EAN conference website: [EAN Amsterdam Conference](#)

### What else is in the News?

For the latest UK Education headlines and stories [go to the FACE News Feeds page](#) where you'll find the online news feeds of several of the sources listed below gathered together on one page for easy access.

The Department of Education news page <http://www.education.gov.uk/news>

The Guardian <http://education.guardian.co.uk>

The Independent <http://news.independent.co.uk/education>

The BBC [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/education/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/default.stm)

The Times Higher Education <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk>

This is the May 2011 eBulletin from FACE (the Forum for Access and Continuing Education), offered to practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and others with an interest in access, widening participation and lifelong learning. The eBulletin is sent to colleagues in the sector, members and non-members alike. If you would prefer not to receive it, please contact [James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk) and your details will be removed from the circulation list.

If you wish to respond to anything in this eBulletin or contribute to the June 2011 issue, please email [Jim at James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:Jim at James.Tate@uwe.ac.uk)