

CAFAS Update No. 85

13 September 2016

Council for Academic Freedom & Academic Standards

Website: www.cafas.org.uk

AGM & Meeting:

Saturday 24 September 2016

1.30pm – 4.30pm

Study Room 1

YMCA Club

112 Great Russell Street

London WC1B 3NQ

Underground: Euston, Euston Square, Goodge Street, Tottenham Court Road, Holborn, Russell Square

‘Research recommendations must not lead to “rigid demarcation” between teaching and research roles’

The University and College Union is asking its members to respond to *The Independent Review of the Research Excellence Framework*, chaired by Lord Stern.

Below are the UCU’s press release on the Stern review and its member consultation.

[The Stern review] recommended that all research-active academics should be entered for the next research excellence framework,

the work of academics who have moved should be claimed by the institution where it was carried out, and that a government-commissioned review of the exercise be carried out.

UCU welcomed the move towards greater academic staff inclusion in the REF, but warned it mustn't lead to a rigid demarcation between research and teaching-focused careers. The union said it will be arguing for a more fundamental review of research funding as part of its submission to the government's consultation.

Commenting on the review, UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: 'We welcome Lord Stern's findings that we need a diverse higher education sector and that the REF must support excellence wherever it is found across our institutions.

'Any reforms that stop academics making choices based on the need to maximise REF outputs, rather than the contribution they can make to human knowledge, should be welcomed.

'We are pleased Lord Stern has recommended broadening out how impact is measured.

Following his call last week for teaching and research to support each other, we would like to see measurements extended to cover the

impact on higher education teaching and learning.'
ucu.org.uk. Last updated: 29 July 2016

UCU member consultation on the Stern review of the Research Excellence Framework

Introduction

In July, the independent review of the Research Excellence Framework – more commonly known as the Stern review - was published. The report proposes a series of changes to the next REF, planned for 2020/21. In our submission to the review, UCU called for a fundamental review of UK research policy and funding and for a renewed focus on staffing-related issues such as a reduction in the use of fixed-term contracts.

For many years we have pointed out that the REF and the RAE before it have had a largely detrimental impact on the higher education sector and on staff in particular: for example, increasing workload pressures, creating unreasonable performance expectations and exacerbating inequalities between different groups of staff. We have also highlighted the ways in which the RAE/REF have limited intellectual freedom and restricted the character, breadth and inter-disciplinarity of research. Judged on those terms, the Stern report is disappointing. For example, it argues that the 'HE sector would be poorer without it [the REF] and that largely the benefits far outweigh the costs' (p.9)

At the same time, the Stern report supports UCU's position on a number of technical policy issues. For example, it rules out the possibility of a metrics-*only* REF and proposes broadening out the notion of "research impact" to include its impact on teaching.

Moreover, some of the proposals in the report offer a firm basis for challenging the more damaging effects of the REF. For example, by proposing that all "research active" staff should be returned in the REF and introducing greater flexibility in the number of outputs per researcher, the report could lead to a more inclusive process for staff (and hopefully a

broader and fairer system of evaluating research outputs).

Next steps

But, as always, the devil will be in the detail. Over the next few months, governments and the funding councils will work on translating the principles of the Stern report into more detailed structures and procedures.

By the end of the year a formal consultation will be published, with decisions arising from the consultation published in the summer of 2017. This will then form the basis of the assessment criteria for the next REF in 2020/21.

In the meantime, the higher education sector has been busy discussing some of the implications of the Stern proposals. *We are keen to hear from UCU members on all these issues, in particular the new proposals for evaluating outputs in the REF (see recommendations 1-3 below).*

Recommendation 1: "All research active staff should be returned in the REF" (p.19)

This is the most far-reaching recommendation in the report.

Potentially, this change could lead to a less divisive and demoralising assessment process for academic staff – something that UCU has been demanding for many years.

But there's still plenty of scope for institutions and departments to play the game of who is, and isn't, "research active". Above all, we are concerned that universities will look to pressurise people to change job classification, i.e. an unintended consequence is that it could lead to an increased incentive to move people to 'teaching only' contracts.

Do you think that recommendation 1 is a step in the right direction? Will it lead to a less divisive and demoralising REF? Is it likely that your HEI (or department) will look to change contracts as a means to 'game' the new system?

Recommendation 2: "Outputs should be submitted at Unit of Assessment level with a set average number per FTE but with flexibility for some faculty members to submit more and others less than the average" (p.20)

For the 2014 REF there was a fixed number of four submissions per researcher (with reductions for early career staff and for 'individual staff circumstances'). The Stern report recommends reducing the average number of submissions to two, while allowing

flexibility of up to six outputs from some individuals.

One of the possible benefits is that it will reduce the pressure to publish and therefore the recommendation should be welcomed by many academic staff. However, it will be important to undertake an equality impact assessment of the proposal to end the 'individual staff circumstances' rule.

Do you think that recommendation 2 is a step in the right direction? Will it "reduce the current consequences for morale of non-submission" and encourage "cohesiveness and productivity in the submitting unit" (p.20)? What are the possible implications for equality of ending 'the individual staff circumstances' rule?

Recommendation 3: "Outputs should not be portable" (p.21)

Perhaps the most controversial part of the Stern report is the proposal to end the portability of research publications. For the next REF, Stern recommends that outputs should be submitted only by the institution where the output was generated. The purpose is to disincentivise "*short-term and narrowly-motivated movement*" across the sector. On the one hand, the REF and the RAE before it has been criticised by UCU and others for creating a 'transfer market' of research 'superstars', brought in by institutions to boost their REF scores, and leaving other academics in the particular schools/ departments feeling marginalised. Specific concerns have been expressed about the impact of the REF 'transfer market' on equal opportunities, salary differentials and jobs.

On the other hand, a number of academics have expressed concerns about the impact of the non-portability proposal on career access, academic mobility and the 'ownership' of research. Early career academics on fixed-term contracts, in particular, are concerned that this new proposal fails to take into account their unique employment situation and will make it even harder for them to get their first permanent post.

Do you think that recommendation 3 is a step in the right direction? For example, will it lead to research institutions investing more in research potential and "encourage greater collaboration across the system" (p.21)? Or is it mainly an attempt to shift power away from individual academics in favour of the institution?

What about the position of early career researchers on fixed-term contracts? Should there be specific exemptions for this group of

academic staff (e.g. publications produced by staff on temporary contracts should remain portable)? Or should there be portability of REF outputs for all academic staff (as occurred under the 2014 REF)?

Recommendations 4-10 (pp.21-25)

There are a number of other proposed changes to the structure of the REF, including the broadening of the research impact agenda (recommendation 7) and a new institutional level assessment of the research environment (recommendation 8).

We would also welcome comments on these and any other recommendations in the Stern report.

Please can you send in any comments to Rob Copeland rcopeland@ucu.org.uk by no later than 30 September?

The full Stern Report can be accessed at;

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541338/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf

Obituary

Dr Harold Hillman

16 August 1930 – 5

August 2016

Harold Hillman was a founding member of Cafas. It was noted in the Minutes of the Founding Meeting, 26 February 1994 that he 'agreed to prepare a list of other organisations with which the Council might form links.' He duly did so, including a sister organisation, Freedom to Care, of which he was also a founding member. Both organisations resulted from the battle over plagiarism, academic freedom and standards at the University of Swansea in the early 1990s.

Harold was active in Cafas until April 2010 when he retired from the Committee role of dealing with student complaints. He continued, nevertheless, to take an interest in the work of the Council.

Harold was a Reader in Physiology at the University of Surrey from 1965, focusing on neurobiology and resuscitation. More

controversial was his work on cell structure, which he discusses in 'What price intellectual honesty?' 1996. Threatened with loss of tenure, he took early retirement in 1989. Wikipedia notes his comment in the above article, 'I believe that I am the only academic in Britain who has lost his tenure because of his or her scientific views.'

Although without tenure, he remained as the Director of the Unity Laboratory of Applied Neurobiology and Reader in Physiology at Surrey University and Medical Adviser to the Institute of Biological Psychiatry, Bangor, Wales until he finally retired.

He will be well remembered by Cafas members as scrupulously intellectually honest, tireless in his assistance of others, always with generosity and kindness.

Harold died peacefully in his sleep at home. We send our condolences to his wife, Elizabeth, their four children and their families.

PB & GT

Further reading on Harold Hillman's life can be found in:

The Telegraph
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2016/09/07/harold-hillman-biological-scientist--obituary/>

Surrey Herald
http://www.bmdsonline.co.uk/surrey-herald-chertsey-addlestone-byfleet-&-woking/obituary/hillman-dr/47783972?s_source=tmsc_bmd_sca

Raeto West
<http://raetowest.org/harold-hillman-biology/index.html>
<http://www.big-lies.org/harold-hillman-biology/what-price-intellectual-honesty.htm>

Wikipedia.

CAFAS Update seeks to provide an open forum for opinion and discussion.

Items do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.

Notes from across the sea: Counting the Real Costs of Student Debt

Many Democrats in the USA are now promoting tuition-free higher education in state-financed colleges and universities. Although the primary concern in promoting this step up from the long-standing scholarship aid available for particularly needy and/or promising students to full free tuition for all students has arisen from the rapidly rising numbers in recent years of graduates whose education also brings crippling debt, as in the UK. But compilation of the numbers describing the extent of the current mounting indebtedness also reveals much about other and perhaps greater costs.

Time was when for the most post-graduate employment allowed relatively painless payback for four years of undergraduate teaching. In 1993, for instance, about half of graduates emerged with an average debt of about \$10,000. Now, however, about 70% of USA students graduate with debt that averages \$35,000. This substantial increase comes mostly from two factors. One is that tuition rates generally have risen by more than twice the rate of inflation, but the more important factor is that incomes of the less than wealthy have not kept pace with inflation but remained nearly static through the same period, making family investment in offspring education more difficult.

As has been described in both the UK and the US, the personal consequences of this debt burden are substantial and real in limiting career choices and in delaying launching into independent adult life. But the consequences to the social and economic well being of a nation that is built upon knowledge and ingenuity and is only beginning, it seems, to become a matter of public debate. Two different kinds of detail speak to these consequences. Student loans of all kinds now account for more than one trillion dollars or about 6% of the US GDP, accruing from the business of loans, and not probably doing much else for the economy. Of perhaps greater importance, however, is that new but indebted graduates cannot afford to make the

career choices they would without debt. These include taking on low paying public sector jobs like teaching at all levels.

These are serious social problems that are or may already be coming home to haunt both the UK and the US. But in the US, at least, the public debate has begun even if only one of many issues in the current election. May this, like Thatcher's enthusiasm for American pay-as-you-go education, also cross the Atlantic!

Janet Collett
September 2016

Further news from the UCU

National demonstration date set for 19 November

UCU and the National Union of Students (NUS) have confirmed a November national demonstration in central London. Set for Saturday 19 November, the demonstration - 'United For Education' - will represent a rallying call for free, accessible and quality further and higher education across the UK, and to demand an end to the marketisation of university and college education.

The **Independent** reports that there will be coordinated education demonstrations taking place in numerous countries around the world, including Canada, France and South Africa. The demonstration will also represent a call for international solidarity and opposition to all forms of racism and xenophobia. Students and lecturers in the UK in particular will be calling for government to ensure that universities and colleges remain open, international and diverse, following the Brexit vote. UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: 'Increased university fees and the green light for all sorts of profit-driven colleges to enter UK higher education do not represent a good deal for students or staff. Meanwhile, the government is pursuing a restructure in our further education colleges that risks narrowing choice for students and merging colleges around the country. 'At a time when we need to show the post-

Brexit world that Britain remains open and welcoming to international students, we are delighted our event is happening alongside events around the world. Staff and students are united in their defence of high-quality education and we will be taking our message to the streets in November.'

UCU 29 July 2016. www.ucu.org.uk

Digital Newsletter.

CAFAS needs to try and identify areas for reducing its expenditure as it is run by volunteers and on a shoestring budget. We can minimise costs by e-mailing you the newsletters thus making savings on postage. If you would like to receive a digital copy (exactly the same as the hard copy) please e-mail us your full name to cafasonly@gmail.com stating that you would be happy to receive digital copies rather than hard copies. The e-mail address you provide will only be used to send newsletters. Thanks.

Monitoring Children

<https://www.schoolsabc.net/>

Please have a look at this – it is getting crazy.

NOTICES

AGM

Please send nominations for all places on the Committee to the Chair, John Fernandes.

AGM & Meeting

Saturday 24 September 2016
Study Room 1,
YMCA Club
112 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3NQ

AGM 1.30-2.00
Reports and election of Committee

Meeting 2.30-4.30
Agenda

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 3 October 2015 Meeting
3. Academic Freedom
4. Casework
5. AOB

DO YOU BELIEVE

- That academic standards have been dumbed down throughout the higher and further education sector?
- That this decline has been accompanied by the escalating rhetoric of ‘excellence’ and ‘world-class’?
- That the number of contact hours between teachers and students, which the Dearing Report described as a proper measure of the quality of education, has been reduced across the board?
- That there are all sorts of pressures on examiners to pass candidates who would previously have failed?
- That it is far easier to obtain Firsts and Upper Seconds than it used to be?
- That practices which used to be treated as academically unacceptable, or even as cheating, are now widely regarded as normal and inevitable.

- That the effect of the RAE and other pressures on academics is to increase the quantity of research, not the quality, and to restrict innovative and critical thought?
- That there are pressures, often of a commercial nature, to avoid certain areas of research, or to falsify results or to distort their conclusions and significance?
- That, despite lip-service to the importance of teaching, universities and colleges take little account of this in career advancement?
- That academic values have been largely displaced by market values?
- That the stated ‘mission’ of universities to serve the community has been abandoned in favour of commercial priorities?
- That education in the UK no longer has the status of a right bringing social benefits, but is instead treated as a commodity to be bought and sold?
- That discrimination against women and ethnic minorities is still rife in the employment and promotion practices of tertiary education, despite the multicultural community it is supposed to serve?
- That the work of the union in fighting discrimination and victimisation can usefully be supplemented by specialised advice and support from an organization which focuses on issues of academic freedom and standards?

If you believe that many or most of these propositions are true, you ought to be a CAFAS member and your UCU branch ought to affiliate. Membership Secretary & Treasurer: Kirit Patel, Tel: 0208 427 9770, kiritone@live.co.uk
If you would like a speaker from CAFAS to address a branch meeting, contact: John Fernandes, 07551823361 johnfernandes500@gmail.com

CONSTITUTION

CAFAS’ aims are outlined on the membership form. The full constitution can be obtained from the Chair or www.cafas.org.uk. CAFAS was founded in February 1994. It depends on subscriptions and an active membership. It meets in March/April, June and September/October.

Have you paid your SUBSCRIPTION?

Please send your cheque or standing order to the Membership Secretary, Kirit Patel, 19 Greenhill Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1LD kiritone@live.co.uk, Tel: 0208 427 9770

Next deadline: 10 March 2017

Please send letters, news items and articles to:

Pat Brady

patrick.brady28@googlemail.com &

Geraldine Thorpe

thorpegm@googlemail.com

You can also send us items at any time for earlier publication on the website.

Next Meeting

Please check the website for venue and date.

Committee

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Colwyn Williamson

Defending-Academic-Freedom JISCMail List.

All members are encouraged to participate in the CAFAS discussion list.

It can be accessed through the Cafas Website:

www.cafas.org.uk

or directly through the JISCMail website.