



# **THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION**

**THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL POLICY STATEMENT**

**EDUCATION REVIEW**

***ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2004***

## **Introduction**

It was reported to Annual Conference 2002, that the General Secretary, with the Executive Council's support, had commissioned a review of the Union's education policy. The review was to be carried out by Professor Bob Fryer, who was then head of Trade Union Studies at Southampton University. However, due to a number of factors Professor Fryer was unable to conclude his review, and in his place the Executive Council decided to engage the services of Professor Mary Davis, Head of Trade Union Studies at London Metropolitan University.

Professor Davis completed her strategic review and presented her findings to the Union early in February 2004, a copy of which has been sent to Brigade Secretaries.

In her strategic review, Professor Davis outlined the methods to be used, including:

- consulting, by means of a questionnaire and meeting ,with regional education officers, representatives from the six national sections ;
- examining current procedures;
- analysing current Union policy which was adopted in 1998
- by interviewing the National Officer responsible for education.

In considering the overall aim and purpose of trade union education and training and the specific role of the Union in delivering this to FBU members, Professor Davis analysed current practice across all regions and sections and compared this to the union's aims and objectives.

Professor Davis makes the following comments and recommendations:

## **Summary of 1998 policy**

The Education Review of 1998 recommended that the union ought to provide regionally based education and training in four key areas; Branch Official Training; Health and Safety Rep Training; Fairness at Work Training and general education within Regions and Brigades. The Review also suggested that additional regional education and training should be encouraged with the aim of "increasing the knowledge of students on the wider aspects of trade unionism, current affairs, politics and the FBU."

It was further recommended and accepted that nationally organised regional schools would be provided centrally and that 'National School' would remain the flagship of FBU education. The 1998 review recommended maintaining a two-year approach to National School. Marking a staged approach to FBU

education in order to ensure uniformity of student's knowledge and expectations.

The 1998 review also recommended a central database of student records be kept and this has now been implemented so that the education and training of officials can be properly monitored.

Professor Davis's review found that "the letter and the spirit" of the 1998 recommendations had been implemented somewhat 'patchily', although this did not 'mean that there has been a lack of educational activity in the Union'. However, Professor Davis recognised that the pay dispute inevitably disrupted much of the planned education and training activity for 2002 and 2003.

In terms of National School, Professor Davis noted the cancellations in 2001 and 2002. In particular, she noted that the intended feeder courses had not got off the ground since the 1998 review (although a number were planned for 2002 but were subsequently severely disrupted because of the national pay campaign) and that this fact therefore had implications for the Union's 'flagship' education and training event.

2003 however saw a one off national school attended by 56 students with an aim of analysing the dispute.

Feedback suggests that this school achieved in the main its aims.

Professor Davis found that Regions were concerned that they did not always have enough information about students attending nationally organised schools. However, a method of informing regions has now been developed and implemented to ensure regions have this information.

Professor Davis also noted that despite the 1998 review recommendation for a greater use of accreditation for schools there was little evidence of accreditation being achieved. In fact only 2 regions had developed any recognised accreditation.

Additionally, Professor Davis found that in spite of the 1998 recommendation, there was little evidence to show any improvement in the standardisation of course materials.

### **Purpose of T.U Education**

Professor Davis's review found that Union officials believed that the primary purpose of Trade Union education could be broken into 2 sets of functions:

- An educative/awareness raising role,
- A training and skills development role.

Professor Davis concluded that in order for the FBU to fulfil both these functions and provide courses of a high standard encompassing both of the above functions the Union's commitment to education would have to be significantly increased in terms of finance and official's time. Professor Davis's view is that the FBU should not attempt both. She felt that the FBU was already engaged in a unique (in relation to other British Trade Unions) education function: which was:

- Raising the political awareness of members,
- Developing an understanding of the politics of change
- Deepening an understanding of the equality agenda and the practical implications of its application.

Professor Davis concluded that the Union should concentrate its resources and improve the way it delivers its education programme based on the above themes and that in addition:

- it should ensure that it institutes a system whereby specific specialist issues relating to changes in managerial techniques, collective bargaining, representative functions are speedily addressed. (This will be expanded below)
- it should build on the strength of the educational work already under way by the equality sections and some regions
- it should have an integrated national education programme which preserves and strengthens regional and sectional initiatives
- it should ensure that it has a staged programme of education with clearly demarcated but interlocking regional, sectional and national roles
- it should build a pool of its own trained tutors, seeking actively to ensure that this includes women, gay and lesbian and BME members (including women BME members)
- it should create a programme which, to quote one regional education official, 'sees education as a journey not a destination'

It is therefore recommended that the recommendations contained in Professor Davis's Strategic Review are implemented as outlined below;

### ***1.) Training –TUC/STUC/WTUC/ICTU***

In order to ensure that the FBU carries out the educational functions above, it should divest itself of its training role. It is not necessary for the FBU to be involved in the basic training and skills development of its elected representatives where these are generic skills required of all lay trade union reps and shop stewards for example, meeting procedure, handling members' problems, representing members, grievance & discipline procedure, involving members. (This applies to TUC Health & Safety courses, of which there is currently some take up by FBU H&S reps). Indeed there are clear advantages for the FBU if it encourages its members to attend regional TUC shop

stewards courses and Health & Safety courses. These are offered on a day release basis over 20 days for stages 1 (10 days) & 2 (10 days): The advantages are as follows:

- i) the union will save money, courses offered by the TUC are free to affiliates
- ii) this will overcome the problem of the patchy and non-standardised provision for FBU branch officials currently on offer
- iii) FBU branch officials and health and safety reps will be entitled to more education. Most branch officials' courses offered by the FBU are only 2 days duration, this is far less than the legal rights to paid time and consequently far less than the entitlement gained by shop steward/representatives in other unions.
- iv) The objection frequently made that the particularities of the fire service make it essential for the FBU to have separate provision for its members are no more valid than that for other industries. Most other unions have seen definite advantages in having a mix of industries and unions on skills/training courses on the grounds that there is much to be learnt from different experiences in tackling the generic issues of creating effective workplace organisation, representing members and dealing with management.
- v) All TUC 10 days courses are taught by trained TUC tutors, usually in publicly funded colleges and use regularly updated courses materials provided by the TUC  
All TUC courses are accredited. This is line with FBU aspiration for accreditation expressed in the 1998 review

## ***2) Skills and training: the FBU***

We need now to examine what groups of FBU officials are not covered by TUC provision and whether there is specific/specialist subject matter, relevant to the FBU alone, related to training and skills, not covered by TUC provision. It should be noted that all schools should deal with the concerns of all FBU members (Officers, Control and Retained) and **MUST** as a matter course deal with equality and fairness at work issues. (Notwithstanding the fact that Fairness at Work should continue as a separate course.)

### **Brigade officials and others**

Thus far the suggestion is that branch officials and health and safety officials should pursue the training and skills programme provided by the TUC. What of other elected officials not covered by this and currently not explicitly catered for in the existing FBU programme, notably brigade officials, regional officials and section officials?

### **Brigade officials**

As has been noted above, some regions already provide courses for brigade officials. Whilst it is true that brigade officials require all of the skills and knowledge of branch officials, it is nonetheless the case that they need to develop this at a deeper level in order to carry out an extended range of functions including negotiating skills, dealing with latest management techniques (e.g. integrated risk management), conference motions and procedure, campaigning skills etc. It would be sensible for regions to provide this kind of education since much of it will be of a specialist nature and will need to respond to changing local and national circumstances.

### **Regional officials**

It is presumed that regional officials will be experienced FBU members and will, as a consequence have undergone some trade union education and/or training. Nonetheless, Regional Officials and members of Regional Committees may also need regular updates on new policies and initiatives. Regional officials will be responsible for a range of duties developing strategy, initiating and conducting campaigning work, advising members on Employment Tribunals for which training should be provided. This can be accommodated by means of seminars provided regionally or nationally. The courses run at the TUC National Education Centre are a resource that can be utilised.

Some Regional Officials teach on FBU courses. This is to be encouraged, but such officials should have access to training in educational methods in order to ensure a high and consistent standard of delivery.

### **Section officials**

Some section officials have experienced little or no trade union education/training have expressed a desire for some skills training, in order to carry out their new functions effectively. This should be provided by the FBU as part of its national programme.

Some Section Officials teach on their sectional equality courses. This is to be encouraged, but such officials should have access to training in educational methods in order to ensure a high and consistent standard of delivery.

### ***3) Specialist FBU subject matter***

The survey of Regional education officials indicated a wide range of subjects currently covered on FBU courses, some of which will not be covered by the more generic TUC courses. For example:

- Best value
- Body mapping
- Specific fire service health & safety issues
- Fire cover review

Seminars on these and other issues should be provided by regions individually or jointly, in response to local demand

### **Updates and skills development**

TUC provision for generic skills and training for all branch and H&S officials will not cover everything. There remain specialist areas for which FBU members will need to provide information and updates for its key activists at national and regional level. This can take the form of seminars or longer courses and may involve the use of outside specialists.

### ***4) Education: the FBU***

All courses provided by the FBU at regional or national level, not defined as skills/training should ensure that they have the following 3 educational aims in mind:

- raising the political awareness of members,
- developing an understanding of the politics of change,
- deepening an understanding and the practical implications of the equality agenda

The level and manner into which these aims are incorporated into course syllabi will be a matter for further discussion among those most centrally involved in the education programme of the union. What follows below is a proposal on the structure and organisation of courses to be provided by the FBU in order to meet the objectives described above.

### **Regional provision**

Regions must continue to play an important part in FBU educational provision. It is proposed that regions should have responsibility for:

- Induction for new members
- Brigade official courses stage 1
- Fairness at Work courses stage 1
- Politics of change stage 1
- Seminars for key regional activists

### **National provision**

The following courses should be organised nationally. They fall into 4 categories:-

#### **Nationally organised regional training**

- Brigade officials stage 2

- Fairness at Work courses stage 2
- Politics of change stage 2

### **National schools**

The following schools should be held on an annual basis:

- Education methods
- Equality section officials training
- **National (Political) school.**

This school should, without doubt, remain the 'jewel in the crown' of FBU education and should continue to be 'the forum in which students and tutors debate the social economic and political environment (nationally internationally) and their relationship to the fire service and FBU' (1998 Review). Some have argued that it should be shorter; however, if properly planned and organised a week might not be long enough! Nonetheless serious attention must be paid to the issues of childcare and other dependents commitments, not all of which can be resolved by crèche facilities (although this latter is, of course, a 'must').

The tutor, in close consultation with the national education committee should draw up the syllabus for both years of the national school. However, it should be clear that the national schools should build upon, and not re-iterate, that which has been learned in previous schools. It should develop a more advanced understanding of the nature of the relationship between capital, labour and the state. Consideration should be given to the involvement of other unions in part of the school. The second year of the school should look at the theoretical and practical implications of the new imperialism ('globalisation') and should be internationalist in character perhaps involving trade unionists from countries with which the FBU has a close connection and/or inviting the participation of fire fighters/control staff from other countries as well as representatives of the PSI (Public Services International).

### **National seminars**

- For particular groups of staff e.g. control , officers and retained
- For specific issues (e.g. legal updates, industrial tribunal work, political fund) and campaigning work

## **Equality sections**

- Each section should continue to run its own annual school, with facilities to hold a year 2 school for those who have completed year 1
- Joint schools between sections should be held on a regional or joint regional basis
- Education methods courses to be provided for tutors and facilitators on equality section schools

## ***5) Tutors***

The survey of existing provision indicated that very few regions use trained tutors, TUC or otherwise. The proposals in this report will, if implemented, have several important consequences:

- The TUC education service will be used systematically to ensure the training of all Health & Safety reps and all branch officials. Trained TUC tutors teach all these courses.
- Specialist skills and updating courses/seminars will use specialist trade union tutors
- FBU internal regional courses will be taught and facilitated by FBU tutors who have completed a TUC education methods course and have themselves undergone a requisite amount of FBU education. (Usually they should have completed year 2 of the National School)
- Tutors teaching on the equality section courses should also have completed an education methods course
- None of the above will exclude the union at regional or national level from using the services of outside tutors and specialist with whom it has developed a relationship of trust. It is intended, however, by these means to create a wider pool of tutors and in addition to empower officers of the union to develop their own skills as educators and organisers. The National Official responsible for education should ensure that women and BME members are actively encouraged to become tutors.
- Tutors for the national school should be agreed by the National Education Committee

## ***6) Course materials/syllabi***

Syllabi and course material for all courses (as opposed to seminars) outlined above will have to be written and regularly updated. This task can be contracted out to an approved institution or accomplished in-house. It is essential that the new courses e.g. brigade officials 1 & 2, FAW 2 use course

materials provided nationally. FAW 1 course should be revised to ensure that it covers sexuality in addition to sexism and racism. It will be important to assess the effectiveness of new courses and course materials. This can be done in 2 ways:

- New courses should be piloted in a selected region before they are generally used. This will involve a tutor assessment as well as a student evaluation process
- Course evaluation in general should be more systematic. A new evaluation form should be designed and used on all courses. Completed forms should be analysed by the appropriate officer/official in conjunction with the course tutor and a report made to the national education committee.

## ***7) Organisational matters***

### **National Education Committee**

The FBU's National Education Committee should be re-constituted, meeting **at least** twice a year in order to have an overview and regular input into the conduct and progress of FBU education. This committee will report to the Executive Council. It should consist of:

- 4 Executive Council members
- 4 regional education officers (to be elected by the annual meeting of regional education officers)
- 3 representative from the equality sections (1 elected from each of the equality committees)
- the education committee should be chaired by the Vice-president
- the annual meeting of regional education officers should continue

### **Data base**

The national officer responsible for education should ensure as a matter of priority that the FBU membership database includes details of courses each member has attended. This will entail greater liaison between regional education officers and the national official and vice versa. The process of progression through the education programme will be impossible without a tracking procedure.

## ***8) Accreditation***

It has already been agreed that accreditation is desirable. Steps should be taken to ensure that, if desired, FBU courses can be accredited through a similar process to the TUC system (i.e. via the Open College network). Students will then have the choice of gaining credits which can then be used

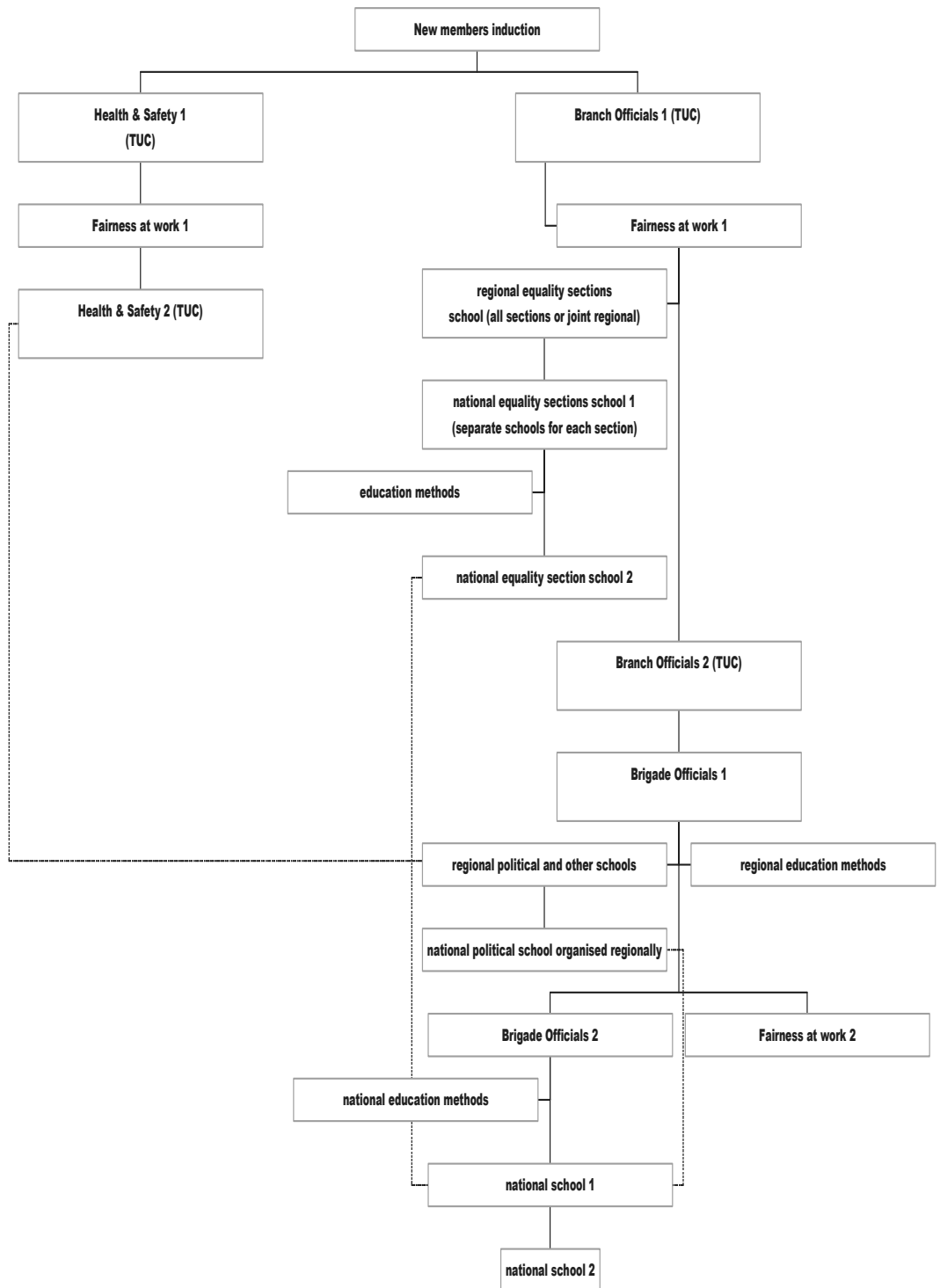
in Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS) system. However, there should be no obligation on the part of students to participate in such a system if they do not wish.

### ***9) Lifelong learning***

The FBU should investigate the possibilities for FBU members to continue their educational journey by progressing to higher education courses at undergraduate or postgraduate level. Members will be able to gain credits for prior knowledge and experience gained through trade union courses and trade union responsibilities. The union should investigate the possibility of entering into a Higher Education partnership agreement with a named University (ies) with experience in such matters. This will be cost effective for the union and will simplify the transition for members who would wish to extend their studies.

### ***10) Structure and Progression routes***

The chart below indicates the proposed structure of FBU educational provision.



The following two recommendations made by Professor Davis should be noted and after consideration if it is felt necessary the Executive Council will bring, to a future Annual Conference, appropriate rule changes to allow alteration of the Unions structure.

### **Regional education officials**

Given the importance of regions within the FBU's education provision, consideration should be given to upgrading the status of those responsible for regional education from officer to official.

### **National education official**

The FBU is unusual among trade unions in that it employs so few national officials. This means that the portfolio of each official is enormous. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this report to consider this, it must be noted that the education brief (which will be expanded if this report is adopted), cannot be undertaken with any degree of success by an official with numerous other important tasks to perform. It is therefore suggested that the union elects a new official or appoints a new member of staff to deal with nothing other than trade union education.

## **11) Conclusion**

Finally, the executive council would endorse the conclusion to Professor Davis's review i.e.

"The proposals contained in this report seek to preserve and develop the best traditions of FBU education by freeing its providers from some of the tasks that can be better accomplished by other bodies, notably the TUC. In addition it attempts to provide a genuinely national system of provision while still retaining and respecting the role of the regions. It is imperative that branch officers and brigade officials can expect the syllabus of their courses to be the same throughout the UK. Progression to higher levels of FBU education is meaningless unless the pre-requisites for progression are the same.

Trade union education in its broadest sense is a lifelong journey. It is part of a wider struggle for social change which can only be successful if we strive to understand not only our own unions, not only our own labour movement, not only the international labour movement; but also the forces which shape the context in which we negotiate, campaign and struggle. In other words our notion of lifelong learning is to enable us to better understand the forces of labour, capital and the state- that is the aim of this programme.

Knowledge is power!"

**Moved by the EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**