

Kirsty Williams
Minister for Education
Welsh Government
Ty Hywell
Cardiff Bay

Email only

15th October 2019

Dear Kirsty

Re Funding to make changes to the National Workload Agreement for FE

UCU are writing to you to ask that you consider lobbying the cabinet to use the Barnett consequential funding from the additional funding for FE announced by the Westminster Government, which we understand from HMT, is £23.5m.

We believe that more effort must be made by Welsh Government to address the concerns of academic staff in relation to the workload pressures currently faced in terms of the departmental duties expected of them on top of the teaching and preparation and marking time allowed within the national contract currently. A reasonable comparator would be Northern Ireland, who currently have 30 minutes preparation and marking time for FE work, whilst the Welsh contract provides for 20 minutes, and 45 minutes preparation and marking time for HE work to reflect the marking associated with HE essays and dissertations. Government policies which still impact on FE in relation to 'The Age of Achievement and Effort' (Prof Hargreaves) and the planned changes in the form of the ALN Act and revised Code of Practice are going to place even more pressures on lecturers.

If the professionals operating in the FE sector in Wales are going to be able to deliver on the Government's post 16 agenda, they really do need some room in their timetable to undertake the developmental and supportive work needed to ensure learners are properly supported to achieve their full potential.

You will be aware that there has been a dispute within the FE sector over workload since 2017 and we think it important to provide you with a chronology of events to date, as follows: In May 2017 the Joint Trade Unions (JTUs) presented a paper to the Principals' meeting offering to make the implementation of changes to the workload agreement conditional on receipt of funding from the Welsh Government.

On the 14th December 2017 UCU declared a dispute with FE employers for their "failure to address the issue of increasing workloads and its detrimental impact on members' health and wellbeing."

In January 2018 the Principals were of the view that “they do not wish to enter into negotiation on either the Common Contract or the National Workload agreement.”

In February 2018 the Principals agreed to meet with the “purpose of the meeting being to commence a process by which we can reach a mutual agreement on the management of workloads across Wales.” On the 7th February 2018 UCU agreed to call off the dispute if CC engaged through the national negotiating forum to deliver agreements on the following:

1. Include wording in the National Workload Agreement which recognises the delivery of HE in FE and reflects the HE contract. The narrative will allow flexibility to deliver the principles at a local level, depending on individual workloads of staff delivering HE in FE.
2. Establish a sub-group of the national negotiating body to look at the issue of data collection and its impact on workload.
3. Include wording in the National Workload Agreement which recognises the additional workload created by significant administrative tasks associated with course tutorship and quality, again to be agreed locally within band of tariffs.

UCU received no response to the request and again issued a dispute over “refusal to engage in workload negotiations” in August 2018. On 5th March 2019 Principals responded to the Joint Trade Unions with a written paper outlining that it was prepared to negotiate. At that time the Principals stated that they “do not and cannot at this time accept the proposal for a general reduction of teaching time to 22 hours per week.” But agreement was reached to allow the drafting group to look at the issues of time for course leadership, HE in FE and remission time to prepare for the delivery of HE provision new to a member of staff.

The drafting group was unable to agree any form of wording acceptable to all around the table. This resulted in making only one substantive proposal, which is to capture the 20 minutes for preparation and marking associated with every teaching hour in the National Workload Agreement. It currently only sits within the Part Time version of the National Contract.

The dispute over the refusal to engage is now at an end, and the original dispute will be withdrawn today, in order to run a new dispute with all the academic unions involved.

The key issue is the number of teaching hours which the contract requires the lecturer to teach per week. The current maximum is 24, with 8 hours preparation and marking time, leaving only 5 hours in which to do all the departmental duties associated with those 24 hours of teaching. The cost of reducing the weekly maximum teaching hours is £6m per hour, according to figures provided by ColegauCymru. Five hours is not sufficient to support learners to achieve their potential, which is why staff end up working excessive hours to ensure their learners succeed. The majority of learners in FE are succeeding and workload is excessive, as evidenced by the governments own workload survey.

We have outlined the chronology of the dispute above in an attempt to demonstrate that it is extremely likely that the sector could face significant disruption if we cannot find the funding to start to make the changes needed within the National Workload Agreement for lecturing staff. Indeed we share the view that we will face another round of industrial action by all academic unions, not just UCU, if this matter is not addressed.

We look forward to a constructive response to the shared problem of funding to deliver government's policy agenda. We know you understand the key role the FE sector will be required to play post Brexit.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Phelan', written in a cursive style.

Margaret Phelan
Wales Official