

19 March 2021

Dear CEO/Principal,

Trust and Transparency

I hope that you and those close are, and continue to be, safe and well.

As we emerge from the shadow of the pandemic, we can all feel proud of the way our sector has worked together from the sudden close down right through to the current phased reopening. It is not over yet but if we keep working together locally, management and UCU representatives, as we have up until now then there is every reason to believe the on-site return will continue to be smooth.

I last wrote to you in advance of the national pay talks between the Association of Colleges (AoC) and the joint trade unions in November.

I made the point then, that among the many unique things about the further education sector was that trade union members who had lost almost a third of the value of their pay united with their employers to campaign, lobby and march together for increased funding for the sector.

The unique and unprecedented joint working over a number of years was always on the understanding that staff would be first in line when together we won extra funding. In November I warned that any failure to deliver on promises to increase pay when the funding has arrived will be seen by staff as a betrayal and will threaten the future of joint working

By working together and being united we succeeded in raising the political and public profile of FE to levels not previously seen in recent years. As a result, we secured £400 million of extra funding, including an increase to the 16-19 base rate from 1 August 2020. That increase in base rate funding of over £200 million can be spent by colleges as they see fit.

During the national pay talks in 2019, the AoC again recommended a 1% increase despite the increased funding having been announced. At that time, the AoC made the point that the money would not arrive until 2020 and promised they would be in a position to make a more significant pay recommendation for 2020/21.

As you know, once again the AoC made a recommendation of just 1% for 2020/21. This despite the arrival of the increased funding and previous promises of a more significant increase.

The AoC's recommendation was wrong and is a breach of faith. The recommendation is even more galling for staff who moved mountains for their students during the

pandemic and causes union members to seriously question if the AoC and college leaders can be trusted partners in any future joint working.

No one can doubt that trust needs to be rebuilt for future joint working and that starts with you at a college level.

A first step to rebuilding that trust will require a full disclosure to show UCU representatives the true state of your college finances to a level of detail and transparency like never before. UCU is providing its representatives with briefings on college accounts. They will expect not just to see retrospective accounts but also management accounts and projections going forward along with an understanding of underlying assumptions and the choices that have been made.

Put simply, college staff deserve an explanation. It is simply not good enough to apologise and say the extra money was absorbed into deficits or spent on COVID.

Staff pay should be prioritised. The AoC recommendation for 2021 stated that those colleges that can afford to pay more than 1% should do so.

For the avoidance of doubt, UCU supports the Joint Trade Unions' claim for a significant move towards the full restoration of pre-austerity pay and rejects the 1% recommendation as being derisory.

UCU understands that £400 million does not repair the damage done by more than a decade of austerity and will continue to vigorously fight for the funding to fully restore the sector to deliver for the nation's post COVID recovery. However, for the sector to simply absorb the first increase in funding in over a decade and not prioritise the pay of the staff that marched and campaigned alongside you to win it, is beyond the pale.

As a sector, we have seen that we can win the funding argument with government when we are united and work together. Such joint working is not possible until the trust deficit is repaired and that begins with you.

Best regards,

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

Andrew Harden
Head of Further Education
University and College Union