

A Charter for Professional Respect in Further Education



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The professionalism of our members is under attack within further education (FE).

We have witnessed the role of the FE practitioner change in recent years. We have seen an erosion of pay and conditions which has resulted in a workforce that is overburdened and stressed.

If the erosion of pay and conditions wasn't enough, we have seen a rise of management intrusion. A model that involves the assessment of teaching practice by 'open classrooms' and 'learning walks'. All done in a way that normalises a managerialism that focuses on and isolates individual teachers and seeks to break a collegiate team approach.

Management demanding that student attendance figures rise, the inputting of data that could be done by other staff or is otherwise meaningless, and the setting of unachievable deadlines is a common experience of those who teach in FE.

Management in FE ask staff to comply with frequent data and attendance requests without the sufficient support or number of administration staff to do it. A fear of disciplinary action being taken means some FE staff work in a constant state of fear and worry leading to work place stress and ill health.

This is all done in the name of improving the learners' educational experience. The reverse is true. FE students are increasingly taught by practitioners afraid to be creative and who feel unsupported and exhausted by demands that don't improve the learners' education.

FE employers' offer 'well-being courses', 'mindfulness workshops' and other palliatives. But these do not address the causes of the rise of physical and mental health issues leading to burn-out amongst FE practitioners. Recruitment and retention problems in FE are accepted and are a result of the problems this charter seeks to address.

FE practitioners have had enough and demand professional respect.

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We call on the AoC and colleges to sign up to our five-point charter for professional respect in further education:

1) WORKLOAD

- An agreed national policy on the delivery of guided learning hours
- The resourcing of more administration staff
- Nationally agreed class size recommendations for 16-18 and 19 +
- A set of agreed workload and wellbeing protocols such as working from home agreements
- A set of agreed boundaries for contacting staff by email or phone

2) PAY

- A 10% increase in pay. This is a first step to restore more than the 35% cut in real pay for FE staff over a decade. After two significant increases in base rate funding and inflation running above 7% this claim is reasonable
- A commitment to close gender and ethnic pay gaps
- To reduce the use of precarious employment

3) VALUING THE PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT OF PRACTITIONERS

- Colleges establish forums where practitioners and trade union representatives are consulted about ongoing professional development support to avoid imposed target driven training.

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- Place the departmental team at the centre of staff development in each area to allow collegiate practices to determine the support needs of the practitioner.
- Colleges to recognise the positive role that union learning representatives play, their statutory rights and to provide facility time to support their role.

4) A MEANINGFUL NATIONAL BARGAINING FRAMEWORK

- Colleges to agree a national bargaining framework that levels up the sector and is binding. An equal sector is a more productive one.

5) TRADE UNIONS TREATED AS PARTNERS

- Recognised Trade Unions to have representation on bodies/committees throughout colleges including, governing bodies, curriculum and health and safety committees.