

University and College Union public evidence to the parliamentary education committee inquiry into: '*Teacher recruitment, training and retention*'

What are the main factors leading to difficulties recruiting and retaining college teachers and what action should be taken to address the challenges?

1. University and College Union (UCU) represents over 120,000 staff employed in the post-16 education sector, including teachers, lecturers and related staff in Further Education (FE), Adult and Community Education (ACE) and Higher Education (HE).
2. This submission will address the main factors leading to the difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers in the further education sector, before addressing the 'actions' to be taken to resolve any issues or challenges within Teacher recruitment, training and retention.

UCU summary and recommendations

3. The main issues in teacher recruitment and retention in the further education sector relate to staff pay, staff turnover, recruitment, casualised/precarious employment contracts and workload. The key solutions are to improve pay and reduce workload through binding collective agreements.

Staff pay

4. Our analysis points to the main issue being that staff pay is too low. College leaders in England have autonomy to set the pay level of their staff, unlike the schools sector¹ (and the Higher Education sector); however, the college leaders' decisions are based on annual pay recommendations made by the Association of Colleges (AoC).

¹ The pay of schoolteachers is set nationally by the government based on recommendations by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB).

5. The FE pay scales for colleges in England, as recommended by the AoC, can be found here: www.ucu.org.uk/fescales_england. The starting salary for 2022/23 on the AoC pay scale is £26,090.
6. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) analysis, the starting salary for a new schoolteacher today is around £28,000.
7. One of the figures that the IFS use for the starting salary of a new college teacher is £29,000, although we believe this figure is an overestimation of college teachers' starting salaries. The figure is based on data from the Teachers' Pension Scheme, which has some coverage gaps (i.e. groups of staff on casual contracts). The figure that the IFS use as the starting salary also includes salaries of sixth-form college teachers, which are more akin to schoolteachers (i.e. higher than further education teachers).
8. According to the IFS study, college teacher pay has fallen by 18% between 2010 and 2022. If the AoC starting salary of £26,090 is used, the real terms pay decrease is 22%.
9. The IFS study found (p.2 and 9) that the gap between the salary of school and college teachers has grown significantly since 2010. In 2010-11, the median salary (in today's prices) for a college teacher was £42,500 and for a schoolteacher, around £48,000. Today, the median pay for a college teacher is £34,500, whereas for a schoolteacher, it is around £41,500.
10. UCU made a Freedom of Information (FoI) request to all FE colleges in England, asking about staff terms and conditions in the 2020-21 academic year. Based on the 164 responses, 40% of colleges awarded their staff the pay award recommended by the AoC in each year; almost half of colleges made the recommended pay award in 2020-21; some colleges awarded pay deals above the recommended pay level, but it was more common for colleges not to award any pay increase at all, with almost a third of colleges awarding no staff pay increase that year (the same in the previous 2018-19 year).

Staff turnover

11. Our analysis show that there is a high rate of staff turnover in colleges. The IFS research (p.3) found that:
 - around 25% of college teachers leave the profession after one year, compared with 15% of schoolteachers
 - three years in, almost half of college teachers have left, compared with around a quarter of schoolteachers
 - ten years after beginning teaching, less than a quarter of college teachers remain in the profession, compared with over 60% of schoolteachers.

Recruitment

12. There is a real difficulty in recruiting staff in further education colleges. The AoC annual Workforce Survey 2020/21 found (p. 9) that 96% of colleges had recruitment difficulties (up from 90% in the 2019/20 survey). The survey found that there was an average of 25 vacant posts per college at the start of the academic year (on 1 September 2021). The reasons given for the recruitment difficulties across all college staff included no applicants and applicants looking for more pay than the college could offer (this is no change from the previous year's survey). **The posts most difficult to fill were teaching construction and teaching engineering.**

Casualised/Precarious employment contracts

13. Casualised/precarious employment contracts are widely used in further education and adult and community education (ACE) sectors. The AoC annual Workforce Survey 2020/21 found (p. 13) that 98% of the colleges that responded to their survey use 'flexible employment contracts', typically fixed-term, zero-hours and variable hours contracts (excluding agency workers).

Workload

14. Overwork is a major issue in the FE/ACE sectors. The UCU '*Workload Survey 2021: Data Report*' (p.5) found that college staff are working the equivalent of two extra days per week, unpaid, due to excessive workloads.

The overall impact on further education college teachers

15. UCU's survey report, '*On the Breadline*' found (p. 22) that due to low pay, high workloads and insecure employment, 70% of respondents said they would probably or definitely not be working in the sector in five years' time, unless these issues are fixed.
16. It appears that more teaching staff are set to retire from the sector than are entering the sector, which places remaining teachers and classroom sizes at risk of increased pressures. The AoC Workforce Survey 2020/21 found (p. 13) that:
- 25% of the respondents who teach are age 40-49
 - 30% of the respondents who teach are age 50-59
 - 8% of the respondents who teach are age 20-29.
17. The IFS found (p. 9 and 23) that the number of 16 to 18-year-olds will rise by 18% between 2021-2030, which would make for 200,000 extra students by 2030. With this sort of FE student increase against a falling number of FE teachers, the sector is at risk of seeing a significant increase to the student to teacher ratio (without further investment).

Examples of emerging issues in further education colleges

18. It has been brought to UCU's attention that a further education college has withdrawn its apprenticeship tuition provision, due to difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. It has also been brought to our attention that another further education college is only able to deliver a limited level of T Levels, due to difficulty recruiting staff.

Actions for solutions

19. A summary of the actions required to address the challenges in recruiting and retaining further education colleges is contained in UCU's '**Respect FE: a Charter for Professional Respect in Further Education**': www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf. In summary, it requires:
 - i. fair pay to be restored, through binding collective agreements. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reclassification of the FE sector, from the private to the public sector, is an opportunity for colleges to agree a national binding collective agreement that levels up the sector.
 - ii. reduced workload, achieved through a nationally binding collective agreement.
20. Receiving parliamentary/government support to achieve binding collective agreements in the further education sector, would be a significant step towards addressing the current recruitment and retention challenges in the sector.

Sources

The Association of Colleges' annual workforce survey, the '**AoC College Workforce Survey 2020/21**', (November 2022):

<https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/AoC-Workforce-Survey-2020-21-Final-document.pdf>

The Institute of Fiscal Studies' (IFS) paper, '**What has happened to college teacher pay in England**', (30 March 2023): <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/what-has-happened-college-teacher-pay-england>

UCU's survey report, '**On the Breadline: the cost of living crisis for England's college workers**' (July 2022) www.ucu.org.uk/media/12939/FE_-_On_the_breadline/pdf/FE_-_On_the_breadline.pdf

UCU's '**Workload survey 2021: Data Report**' (June 2022): www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/WorkloadReportJune22/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf

UCU's '**Respect FE: A Charter for Professional Respect in Further Education**': https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf

[Further education and skills | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\):
www.irf.org.uk/education-spending/further-education-and-skills](https://www.irf.org.uk/education-spending/further-education-and-skills)