

The Policy Connect - Skills 2030 Inquiry (Autumn 2023)
University and College Union (UCU) evidence
The voice of the skills-training workforce

This paper addresses one of the policy priorities that is required to improve the current skills system to grow the UK economy, and that is the pay and conditions of the FE teaching workforce, together with the Adult Education workforce, who are central to the delivery of the vocational skills system.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The University and College Union (UCU) represents over 120,000 university, further and adult education lecturers, together with related staff. UCU welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Policy Connect Skills 2030 Inquiry.
- 1.2 This paper will consider a number of matters, including:
- i) The role of the Further Education (FE) sector in the delivery of skills training, which fuels the UK economy;
 - ii) The teaching vacancy rate in the general FE college sector;
 - iii) The causes of the high vacancy rate in the FE college sector, being:
 - a) Low pay;
 - b) High workload; and
 - c) Casualised/precarious employment contracts;
 - d) The absence of a binding sector wide negotiating agreement and the impact of individual college discretion in staff pay awards (unlike in the schools, sixth form colleges and Higher Education sectors), resulting in disproportionately low pay for staff and disproportionately high pay for college principals;
 - iv) The impact of poor pay and conditions on recruitment and retention in the sector, particularly resulting in the low rate of new entrants into the sector;¹
 - v) The role of the Adult Community Education sector in the delivery of skills training, together with the impact of poor pay and conditions in the sector on the delivery of skills training;
 - vi) The general, overarching lack of professional respect for both FE teaching staff and Adult Education teaching staff, which finds expression in the absence of a binding sector wide agreement (unlike in the sixth form college sector, the schools sector and the higher education sector), low pay, high workloads and precarious employment contracts.
- 1.3 UCU's submission in summary is that the way to secure the delivery of good quality skills for the UK economy is through greater respect for the FE sector and also, the Adult Community Education sector. This goal is encapsulated in two UCU documents: *Respect FE: Charter for Professional Respect in*

¹ This concern is shared by the House of Commons Education Committee, who in 2023 held an Inquiry into the recruitment and retention of teachers: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7357/teacher-recruitment-training-and-retention/>

*Further Education*² and *Adult Community Education Manifesto*.³ The specific actions needed to achieve greater respect for the FE sector are expressed in the *Respect FE Charter* and are:

- i) Reduce workload;
- ii) Increase pay;
- iii) Value the professional judgement of teachers;
- iv) Agree a meaningful national bargaining framework; and
- v) Recognise trade unions as partners, actions that warrant being extended to the Adult and Community Education workforce.

1.4 The FE sector has seen increased investments in 2022/23;⁴ however, despite the FE sector being in better financial health than it has been in years, and the Association of Colleges making a non-binding recommendation of 6.5% pay rise for FE college teachers, the sector, including the teachers, need to see sustained investment to avert the deepening of the recruitment and retention crisis. Significantly, the recent investments in the FE sector do not extend to the Adult Community Education sector.

1.5 Skills education is the backbone of a healthy economy. The health of the skills education sector has a direct bearing on the economy it serves. It is our belief that the UK economy will continue to be compromised without the following action relating to the FE college sector and Adult Education sector:

- The adoption of the *Respect FE: Charter for Professional Respect in Further Education*⁵
- Extend comparable levels of FE investments to the Adult and Community Education sector.

2 The role of the FE sector in the delivery of skills training in UK economy

2.1 In August 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published its first annual Further Education Workforce Data Collection (FEWDC) in England, encompassing the period 2021/22.⁶ From that Workforce Data Collection, we are able to see that 46,061 teachers teach across 187 general FE colleges, 22,473 of whom teach vocational⁷ courses; this equates to just short of 50% of the teaching staff in general FE colleges (48.8%).⁸ The contribution of the FE sector to the teaching and delivery of the vocational skills training to the UK economy is therefore significant and indisputable. There are, however, several issues within the FE teaching sector which have resulted in high levels of vacancies. The causes of such high levels of vacancies include low pay and high workload, which have resulted in a low number of teachers entering the sector – issues which are addressed below.

²https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf

³ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13225/Adult-and-community-education-manifesto-2023/pdf/UCU_ACE_Manifesto_Feb_23.pdf

⁴ [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20\(%20FE%20\)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20(%20FE%20)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023) and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2023-to-2024#:~:text=2020%20to%202021.-,National%20Funding%20Rate%20for%202023%20to%202024,extra%2040%20hours%20per%20student>

⁵ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf

⁶ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-workforce> [Further education workforce, Methodology – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#). The DfE recognize that there are gaps with their first Workforce Survey: not all providers in scope were able to return data for the collection. The figures from their Survey are therefore estimates based on known data. The FE Workforce Data Collection is a mandatory collection, therefore it is expected that in future years, coverage will improve beyond that presented in the first annual publication, which will improve the quality and accuracy of findings. More information on the data coverage is available in the “About these statistics” section of the Data Collection and information on the scaling method used to account for missing data is provided in the [methodology](#). As FE providers become more familiar with the requirements of the collection, the coverage should increase and therefore improve the data quality and accuracy of any estimates.

⁷ A list of vocational courses taught in general FE colleges are grouped into 22 categories of vocational courses and are listed in **Appendix 1**

⁸ When we look at the number of teachers teaching vocational subject across all the FE institutions, this percentage increases to 51%: [Further education workforce, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

3 Teaching vacancy rate in the general FE colleges sector

- 3.1 The FE Workforce Data Collection found that the teaching vacancy rate in general FE colleges was 5.7% (a sum total of 2, 373 vacancies).⁹
- 3.2 The AoC annual Workforce Survey 2020/21 found¹⁰ 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 posts most difficult to fill were teaching construction and teaching engineering.

4 Causes of the teaching vacancy rate in the general FE colleges sector

- 4.1 The reasons given in the AoC annual Workforce Survey 2020/21 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).
- 4.2 UCU published the results of two members' survey in 2022, which paint a picture of the workforce issues in the FE sector: '*Workforce survey 2021: Data Report*'¹¹ (June 2022) and '*On the Breadline: the cost of living crisis for England's college workers*'¹² (July 2022). In summary, the surveys found that the main issues in teacher recruitment and retention in the further education sector relate to staff pay, workload and casualised/precarious employment contracts, leading to staff turnover and recruitment and retention problems.
- 4.3 Despite increased government investment into 16-19 education in 2022/3,¹³ and announced in 2023 for 2024/5,¹⁴ obstacles remain to the recruitment and retention of FE teachers. These obstacles include the facts that:
- i) FE salaries continue to be lower than salaries of schoolteachers and sixth form colleges;
 - ii) Workload is too high;
 - iii) Casualised / precarious employment contracts are prevalent within the FE sector, with the DfE FE Workforce Data Collection suggesting that close to a quarter (23%) of the general FE workforce are on precarious employment contracts (made up of fixed term contracts, zero-hours contracts and variable hours contracts).
- Each of these issues will be discussed in turn below.

5 FE pay

- 5.1 Our research¹⁵ into the FE workforce points to the main issue being that staff pay is too low.

⁹ The rate is 5.4% across all the FE sectors [Further education workforce, Academic year 2021/22 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/further-education-workforce-academic-year-2021-22)

¹⁰ Page 9 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>, page 9.

¹¹ <https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/WorkloadReportJune22/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf>

¹² https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12939/FE_-_On_the_breadline/pdf/FE_-_On_the_breadline.pdf

¹³ The funding includes funding for capital projects (expenditure on fixed assets such as buildings and equipment): [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20\(%20FE%20\)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20(%20FE%20)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023); and also national funding rate for students: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2023-to-2024#:~:text=2020%20to%202021.-,National%20Funding%20Rate%20for%202023%20to%202024,extra%2040%20hours%20per%20student>

¹⁴ £285m in 2024/25 (announced in July 2023)

¹⁵ For example two UCU members' survey: '*Workload survey 2021: Data Report*' (June 2022): www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/WorkloadReportJune22/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf and '*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

- 5.2 Due to the absence of a binding national level agreement covering pay, college leaders in England have autonomy to set the pay level of their staff, unlike the schools' sector,¹⁶ the sixth form college sector and the Higher Education sector); however, the college leaders' decisions are based on annual pay recommendations made by the Association of Colleges (AoC). 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 a lecturer on the AoC pay scale in 2022/23 was £26,090. Taking AoC's starting salary of £26,090, college teacher pay has fallen by 22% in real terms between 2010 and 2022.¹⁷
- 5.3 According to research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS),¹⁸ the starting salary for a new schoolteacher for the same 2022/23 period was around £28,000.¹⁹ For the period 2023/24, the starting salary for schoolteachers in England is £30,000.²⁰
- 5.4 The IFS study found²¹ 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. In early 2023, the median pay for a college teacher was £34,500, whereas for a schoolteacher, it was around £41,500.
- 5.5 UCU made a Freedom of Information (Fol) 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).
- 5.6 The table below shows the Association of Colleges pay recommendations, compared to the School Pay Review Body recommendations over the last 6-years:

Year	Association of Colleges Pay Recommendation	School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) recommendations
2018	1%	3.5%
2019	1%	2.75%
2020	1%	5.5% on some grades and 2.75% on other grades
2021	1%	The Body's remit for this year related to unqualified teachers only.
2022	2.5%	5% (with higher % increases for some grades)

¹⁶ The pay of schoolteachers is set nationally by the government based on recommendations by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB).

¹⁷ If we use the IFS figure of £29,000, which includes salaries of sixth form college teachers, which is more akin to school teachers' salaries and higher than the salaries of further education teachers, the fall in pay between 2010 and 2022 is 18%.

¹⁸ <https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/What-has-happened-to-college-teacher-pay-in-England.pdf> (pages 2 and 10)

¹⁹ 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).

²⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1170121/STRB_33rd_Report_2023_Web_Accessible_v02_1_.pdf

²¹ Pages 2 and 9

2023	After initially being reluctant to make a recommendation, the AoC followed the STRB recommendation of 6.5%	6.5%
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5.7 The table below shows the Association of Colleges pay recommendations, compared to the average pay settlements in the wider economy, going back to 2018.

Year	AoC Pay Recommendation	Average pay settlements in the wider economy
2018	1%	2.5%
2019	1%	2.5%
2020	1%	2.3%
2021	1%	2.0%
2022	2.5%	4.0%

5.8 The table below shows the fall in living standards suffered by FE staff over the last few years:

Year	AoC Pay Recommendation	Cost of Living Increase (as measured by RPI²²)
2018	1%	3.3%
2019	1%	2.6%
2020	1%	1.5%
2021	1%	4.1%
2022	2.5%	11.6%
2023	6.5%	13.4%

5.9 Given the absence of a sector wide implementable agreement on pay, one of the problems with FE pay is that they have fallen behind average pay rates.²³

5.10 Another problem with FE pay is that the increases have not kept pace with the cost-of- living increases (as measured by RPI²⁴), which has resulted in a fall in the living standards of FE staff.²⁵

5.11 The FE sector has received increased funding over the last year or so, especially since the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reclassification of the sector in 2022 from the Non-Profit Institutions Serving Households (NPISH) sector (also sometimes referred to as the private sector), to the public sector. This increased government money has included funding for capital projects (expenditure on fixed assets such as buildings and equipment),²⁶ together with increases to the national funding rate per

²² Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables, December 2022

²³ An informative table relating to average pay rates can be viewed on page 3 of the joint FE unions' 2023/24 pay claim:

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13643/FE-England-pay-claim-2023-24/pdf/FE_England_pay_claim_23_24Final.pdf

²⁴ Office for National Statistics, Consumer Price Inflation Reference Tables:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/datasets/consumerpriceinflation>

²⁵ An informative table relating to the falling value of pay can be seen on page 2 of the joint FE unions' 2023/24 pay claim:

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13643/FE-England-pay-claim-2023-24/pdf/FE_England_pay_claim_23_24Final.pdf

²⁶ [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20\(%20FE%20\)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20(%20FE%20)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023)

student.²⁷ This increased income into the sector has resulted in more money being available for staff pay; however the fundamental flaw in the FE pay arrangements has not been addressed, which is that the ONS reclassification, on its own, has not resulted in collective bargaining and national pay agreements for the sector, in the same way that exists in the higher education sector, the sixth form colleges sector and in the schools sector.

- 5.12 In 2023, government announced a 6.5% pay increase for schoolteachers, under the schoolteachers' collective pay bargaining agreement.²⁸
- 5.13 The Association of Colleges, despite an initial reluctance to make a pay recommendation in relation to college teachers for 2023/24, eventually followed the schoolteachers' collective pay increase and recommended a 6.5% pay increase for FE college teachers/lecturers.
- 5.14 There are, however, problems with the 6.5% increase recommended for FE college lecturers:
- i) The 6.5% pay increase recommendation is precisely that – a recommendation for FE colleges, which they may or may not award. UCU Freedom of Information (FoI) requests to all FE colleges in England in 2020 found that 40% of colleges awarded their staff the pay award recommended by the AoC in each year, that almost half of colleges made the recommended pay award in 2020-21, that some colleges awarded pay deals above the recommended pay level, but that 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); and
 - ii) If FE colleges award their lecturers/teachers the recommended 6.5% pay increase, the FE teachers/lecturers are starting from a lower pay base than schoolteachers, therefore the pay of FE college teachers/lecturers remain lower than the salaries of schoolteachers, despite receiving the same percentage increase.
- 5.15 Whilst the salaries of FE college teachers remain lower than that of schoolteachers, there will be a continued risk to the delivery of vocational/skills education.

Example of evidence obtained by UCU from members of risks to the delivery of skills education in England

- 5.16 In 2023, it was brought to our attention that a college in the Midlands could not successfully continue to deliver apprenticeships, in part because of difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. The matter resulted in a Westminster Hall debate.
- 5.17 In 2023 it was also brought to our attention that one college had challenges to deliver T Levels, in part due to the difficulties associated with recruiting and retaining relevant teachers/lecturers.

Recommended solutions

- 5.18 One way of reducing that risk to the UK economy is to start by giving FE college lecturers parity of pay with schoolteachers, which can more reliably be achieved through introducing collective pay bargaining agreements into the FE sector, in line with both the schools and higher education sectors.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2023-to-2024#:~:text=2020%20to%202021.-,National%20Funding%20Rate%20for%202023%20to%202024,extra%2040%20hours%20per%20student>

²⁸ <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/workforce-and-hr-support/education-and-young-people/school-teachers/school-teachers-12>

6. High workload: problem and solution

- 6.1 Overwork is a major issue in the FE / ACE sectors. The UCU *'Workload Survey 2021: Data Report'*²⁹ found that college staff are working the equivalent of two extra days per week, unpaid, due to excessive workloads.
- 6.2 The key solution is to reduce the workload through a national framework of binding collective agreements.³⁰

7. Casualised / precarious employment contracts: problem and solution

- 7.1 Casualised/precarious employment contracts are widely used in the further education sector. The Association of Colleges annual Workforce Survey 2020/21³¹ found 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).
- 7.2 The DfE's FE Workforce Data Collection suggests that close to a quarter (23%) of general FE college teachers are on some form of precarious employment contract. The equivalent data for the Sixth Form College sector shows significantly fewer (11%) teachers on precarious contracts.
- 7.3 Employment contracts need to be secure contracts for staff, which could be achieved through a national framework of binding collective bargaining agreements.

8. FE funding and the pay of college principals: problem and solution

- 8.1 In a sector which has had control over its own budget for nearly 30-years between 1993 and 2022, the FE sector saw sustained government underinvestment, especially in the last decade or so during the government's policies of 'austerity'. These policies led to teacher wage suppression, which resulted in a recruitment crisis. However, the salaries of college principals were not suppressed in the same way as teachers' salaries. As the Association of Colleges recommended pay increases of 1% to FE college teachers repeatedly over a number of years,³² and Freedom of Information requests show that it was not uncommon for colleges not to award pay increases at all, the salary of college principals increased by over 4% in 2021/22 to an average of £185,000 (from £177,000). In a number of FE colleges, the salaries of principals increased by 10% or more. Some had annual salaries of just under £300,000.³³ Therefore, the evidence is that in a sector which had discretion over its own budget, including pay awards, it was choosing to prioritise the pay of principals over the pay of teachers.
- 8.2 As a result of the government's cash injection into the FE sector in 2022 and 2023,³⁴ following its reclassification to the public sector, the sector is starting to recover financially. More colleges

²⁹ UCU's *'Workload survey 2021: Data Report'* (June 2022): www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/WorkloadReportJune22/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf, page 5

³⁰ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf

³¹ The Association of Colleges' annual workforce survey, the *'AoC College Workforce Survey 2020/21'*, (November 2022): <https://d4hflztwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/AoC-Workforce-Survey-2020-21-Final-document.pdf>, page 13.

³² https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13643/FE-England-pay-claim-2023-24/pdf/FE_England_pay_claim_23_24Final.pdf

³³ A full list of principal salaries can be seen here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13153/English-FE-finances-to-2022> and <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/13156/How-much-funding-is-your-college-getting?>

³⁴ [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20\(%20FE%20\)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20(%20FE%20)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023) and

now are in surplus after years of debt. However, the sector remains in control of pay awards (unlike the schools and Higher Education sectors) and it is therefore essential for the sector to show itself as a responsible employer by increasing the pay of its staff to recruit and retain the teachers needed to teach the skills required within the economy.

- 8.3 Despite the early signs of recovery in the FE sector, we are of the opinion that the only way to secure reliable equitable pay for teachers, and therefore skills into the economy, is through the adoption of a national framework of collective agreement.

9. Low number of teachers entering the FE sector

- 9.1 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 pressure. In turn, it places increased risks on skills training, in terms of quality due to large class sizes. The DfE's 2021/22 FE Workforce Data Collection found the following in relation to teachers in general FE colleges:

- Fewer than 2% (1.8%) are under 25
- 7% of those who teach in general FE colleges are age 25 – 29
- 22% are age 30-39
- 24% are age 40-49
- 29% are age 50-59
- 16% are age 60+

- 9.2 The AoC Workforce Survey 2020/21 found almost identical results³⁵ to the DfE's 2021/22 FE Workforce Data Collection results.

- 9.3 UCU's members' survey report, '*On the Breadline*' found³⁶ 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.

- 9.4 The IFS found³⁷ 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 sustained investment), resulting in an increased risk to the delivery of skills teaching.

- 9.5 The House of Commons Education Committee is aware of the problems in teacher recruitment and retention. It held an Inquiry into teacher recruitment and retention in 2023,³⁸ which is yet to report.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2023-to-2024#:~:text=2020%20to%202021.-,National%20Funding%20Rate%20for%202023%20to%202024,extra%2040%20hours%20per%20student>

³⁵ 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>, page 13

³⁶ UCU's survey report, '*On the Breadline: the cost of living crisis for England's college workers*' (July 2022) (page 22)

³⁷ The Institute of Fiscal Studies' (IFS) paper, '*What has happened to college teacher pay in England*', (30 March 2023):

³⁸ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7357/teacher-recruitment-training-and-retention/>

10 Adult and Community Education (ACE)

10.1 In the context of this Inquiry, there are two important points to note in relation to Adult and Community Education:

- i) **The Adult Education course provision:** the character of Adult and Community Education has changed over the years. By now, Adult Education is a prescribed list of courses linked to skills shortage in each geographical area, predominantly at Level 3, and with a narrow eligibility criteria.³⁹
- ii) **ACE Funding:** it is important to understand that the funding of Adult and Community Education is separate from general FE college funding. As such, none of the recent investments⁴⁰ into FE college education had an impact on the funding of Adult and Community Education, including the pay and conditions of the ACE teachers.

10.2 **Adult Education course provision:** there is a diminished range of courses available via the Adult and Community Education route. Most of the courses are skill-based at Level 3. There are fewer options at Level 2. This means that for some skills, learners will not be able to bridge the gap to reach Level 3, which limits the options of learners and has a detrimental impact on their own economic development and contribution to the economy.

10.3 The range of courses available is not the only obstacles for learners. It can also be difficult for those eligible for free courses to know what opportunities are available, for two reasons:

- i) The terminology used is confusing and inappropriate e.g. ‘*Skills Bootcamp*’; and
- ii) The information is buried online e.g. www.gov.uk/guidance/find-a-skills-bootcamp.

10.4 There is one other comment to make about current Adult and Community Education provision and that is that the provision is economy-centric rather than learner-centric. The reality is that both learners and the economy thrive better when learners are matched with the skills and knowledge they wish to develop and at the appropriate level. The Centre for Social Justice, in their report, ‘*Playing the ACE – A plan to unleash the potential of adult community education and bolster economic growth*’ (2022),⁴¹ concludes that “without a stronger foundation of education for all... our economy will continue to be hostage to low growth rates”. It points out⁴² that the focus on consumption rather than investment in capital and skills has left our productivity rate stagnant and generated almost no growth in average earnings. The report goes on to say: “If we want to create a more resilient economy, we must examine our adult education system and focus on building a strong foundation of Adult Community Education”.⁴³ Over the last decade or so, however, the Adult and Community Education funding has been severely eroded.

³⁹ See for instance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/free-courses-for-jobs#courses-available>

⁴⁰ [https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20\(%20FE%20\)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/fe-capital-funding#:~:text=Eligible%20further%20education%20(%20FE%20)%20colleges,efficiency%20in%202022%20to%202023) and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2023-to-2024#:~:text=2020%20to%202021.-,National%20Funding%20Rate%20for%202023%20to%202024,extra%2040%20hours%20per%20student>

⁴¹ <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CSJJ9940-Playing-The-Ace-221125.pdf>

⁴² Page 6

⁴³ Page 7

- 10.5 **Funding:** even though the 2022/2023 government investments in the FE college sector did not apply to the Adult and Community Education sector, the government had, in the 2021 Spending Review,⁴⁴ announced an additional £900m in extra spending on adult education by 2024-25, as part of the efforts to level up poorer areas of the country.⁴⁵ The problem, however, is that spending on classroom-based adult education (excluding higher education), fell by about 50% in real-terms between 2010-11 and 2020-21, from just over £2.9 billion in 2010-11 to just below £1.5 billion in 2020-21.⁴⁶ Therefore due to significant cuts to Adult Education funding over the past decade or so, government spending will be 25% lower in 2024-25 than it was in 2010-11.⁴⁷
- 10.6 Due to the cuts in Adult Education funding and therefore course provision, adult participation between 2011-2021 fell by:
- 50% in Level 2 education; and
 - 33% in Level 3 education.⁴⁸
- 10.7 The solutions to the crisis in Adult and Community Education include:
- i) Increase ACE funding to a minimum of what it was in 2010;
 - ii) Implement the recommendations in the House of Commons Education Committee report, 'A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution' e.g. to establish a community learning centre in every town and to have an ambitious long-term adult education strategy;⁴⁹
 - iii) For that 'ambitious long-term adult education strategy' to include Applied General Qualifications in addition to skills education, up to and including Level 3, for people to have second and subsequent chances at all types of education and skills, to contribute to the economy in a way that is right for the individuals.

11 Conclusion

- 11.1 In conclusion, UCU's evidence shows that the way to secure the delivery of good quality skills for the UK economy is through greater respect for the FE sector and also, for the Adult and Community Education sector. This goal is encapsulated in two UCU documents: *Respect FE: Charter for Professional Respect in Further Education*⁵⁰ and *Adult Community Education Manifesto*.⁵¹ The specific actions needed to achieve greater respect for the FE sector are expressed in the *Respect FE Charter* and are:
- i) Reduce the workload;
 - ii) Increase the pay;
 - iii) Value the professional judgement of teachers;
 - iv) Agree a meaningful national bargaining framework; and

⁴⁴ [BUDGET 2021: Protecting the jobs and livelihoods of the British people \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1169158/Budget_2021_Protecting_the_jobs_and_livelihoods_of_the_British_people.pdf)

⁴⁵ Note that the single Skills Fund will come into force 2024/25. The trajectory is for increased devolution of the adult skills budget, which Labour supports: [Starmer pledges to 'push power closer to people' as he launches 'boldest devolution project for a generation' - The Labour Party](https://www.labour.gov.uk/2023/07/20/starmer-pledges-to-push-power-closer-to-people-as-he-launches-boldest-devolution-project-for-a-generation/). Currently, around 60% of provision funded by the AEB is devolved to local authorities, with 40% allocated directly to providers from ESFA:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1169158/Skills_for_jobs_implementing_a_new_further_education_funding_and_accountability_system.pdf, p. 16/17

⁴⁶ https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/BN344-Adult-education-past-present-and-future.pdf

⁴⁷ https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/BN344-Adult-education-past-present-and-future.pdf

⁴⁸ https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/output_url_files/BN344-Adult-education-past-present-and-future.pdf

⁴⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5065/documents/50199/default/>

⁵⁰ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12495/A-charter-for-professional-respect-in-further-education/pdf/UCU_Respect_FE_charter2.pdf

⁵¹ https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/13225/Adult-and-community-education-manifesto-2023/pdf/UCU_ACE_Manifesto_Feb_23.pdf

- v) Recognise trade unions as partners, actions that warrant being extended to the Adult and Community Education workforce.

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Contacts

Rhianwen Roberts, Policy Officer: rroberts@UCU.org.uk

Jenny Sherrard, Head of Equalities and Policy: jsherrard@UCU.org.uk

Appendix 1

Vocational courses taught in general FE colleges are grouped into 22 categories of vocational courses, consisting of:

- Accounting and Finance
- Agriculture and Horticulture
- Animal Care
- Business Management and Administration
- Catering and Hospitality
- Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
- Crafts, Creative Arts and Design
- Design, Engineering and Manufacturing
- Digital / ICT
- Education and Childcare
- Education and Training
- Environmental
- Hair, Beauty and Aesthetics
- Health, Public Services and Care
- Law and Legal Services
- Media, Broadcast and Production
- Performing Arts
- Retail and Commercial Enterprise
- Science
- Sport, Leisure and Recreation
- Transport and Logistics
- Travel and Tourism.