



4 April 2025

Further Education England Joint Trade Unions Claim 2025/26

Dear Gerry,

Once again, we approach pay negotiations with the disparity between pay in schools and colleges, particularly teachers' pay, having grown and with low-paid support staff having to rely on the government to increase the minimum wage and subsidise their earnings through Universal Credit. The crucial question that needs to be addressed is why current strategies are not working and what needs to change. FE is at a crossroads. We keenly await the outcomes of the UK Government's Spending Review. Skills and education are central to the renewal and growth agenda. FE and Adult and Community Education must be properly funded to achieve those goals.

The claim is based on the following key points:

- The loss in the value of staff pay in recent years has not been addressed by the NJF non-binding recommendations.
- Pay in the sector has fallen in real terms by more than 40% since 2009/10. FE pay increases need to be implemented in all colleges to keep up with inflation and start to close the pay gap with schools in particular;
- There should be minimum guaranteed starting salaries for teachers in FE.
- There should be agreed national pay spines with progression and headroom;
- There should be joint work on recognising and monitoring the scale of, and movement to close, the gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps in FE;
- Appropriate action is needed on the unsustainable increases in workload and stress placed on staff.
- In the next 3 years there will be 60,000 more students entering FE; 50 % of lecturing staff leave within the first three years¹
- There should be standard annual and weekly maximums for FE teachers.
- All additional sector funding must be ring-fenced for staff pay to address the retention and recruitment crisis.
- Nobody should be paid less than the nationally recognised Living Wage rate, which has become a benchmark for the minimum level of decent pay across the UK and is now paid by large sections of the public services and many major private companies;
- Meaningful national bargaining with binding outcomes and a new national agreement is necessary to make effective use of sector resources.

Doing what we have always done is no longer an option. This pay claim recognises that and calls for:

1) Pay - Full restoration of the significant cut to real pay in FE over the past 15 years

¹ IFS 2024

Achieved by:

- **A 10% or £3000 increase in pay**, whichever is greater. This is a first step to restore the significant cuts to pay over the past 15 years.
- All colleges to become **Foundation Living Wage** employers.
- Action to **close the pay gap** between FE and schoolteachers' pay within three years.
- The **minimum starting pay** for an FE lecturer to be the same as schoolteachers starting pay.
- The AoC agree to time limited talks on the introduction of **standardized increments and pay scales**.
- Joint work with a commitment to close **gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps**.

2) A joint position to bring fully funded national bargaining, with binding outcomes to the FE sector.

Achieved by:

- Agreement on a new **national pay agreement** in FE that has binding outcomes.

3) Meaningful Action on Workload

Achieved by:

- **Setting a maximum** of weekly and annual teaching hours and evening and weekend work.
- Agreement on the **definition of a 'teaching hour'**.
- The resourcing of **more support staff**.
- Nationally agreed **class size** recommendations.
- Agreed national policy on the delivery of **guided learning hours**.
- A set of agreed **boundaries for contacting staff** by email or phone.

A set of agreed **workload and wellbeing protocols**.

Pay - Full restoration of the significant cut to real pay in FE over the past 15 years

Over the past 15 years, the real pay of staff in Further Education has been significantly reduced². To begin to address this, a 10% pay increase (or £3,000, whichever is greater) is urgently needed. This initial pay rise must exceed the 2025/26 pay increase for teachers in schools. Closing the yawning pay gap between schools and colleges is the crucial first step in tackling the current recruitment and retention crisis. This pay disparity is the key factor driving the challenges colleges face in attracting and retaining high-quality teachers and

² IFS, March 2023

support staff³. Once this first step is achieved, we need a jointly agreed strategy to eradicate the gap entirely within three years.

The £300m additional funding for FE announced in the Budget last October must be ringfenced for staff pay as a first top to both close the pay gap and addressing the staff retention issues in FE, particularly early career teachers.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) found that FE teachers earn nearly 25% less than schoolteachers.

The minimum rate of pay in colleges is too low and for this reason it is imperative that colleges become accredited Foundation Living Wage employers. By committing to the Living Wage colleges can improve staff morale, retain experienced staff and attract high quality applications to vacancies⁴. We now find ourselves in a situation where some colleges have much of their support staff earning the same wage⁵, the national minimum wage, no matter what skills, knowledge or experience they bring. This is simply not acceptable.

For these reasons, we need to begin time-limited talks on introducing a standardized pay scale, with the minimum point for support staff being the Foundation Living Wage and the minimum point for teachers being set at the same level as the minimum for schoolteachers. This pay scale should include standardized increments, ensuring that never again do we allow the compression of pay, particularly for staff at the lower end of the pay scale, which has led to plummeting staff morale.

It is important that colleges lead the way in championing diversity and inclusion in the current climate. We know that women in FE are paid less than their male counterparts and that there are too few Black leaders⁶. In addition, we need far more information on the disability pay gap in the FE sector to enable us to work towards meaningful change. This is an area where unions and employers could and should be working together to make a real impact.

FE staff delivering adult education have suffered some of the most sustained pressure on terms and conditions. IFS research found that total spending on adult skills and apprenticeships is, in real terms, around 23% below 2009-10 levels, with classroom-based adult education funding over 40% lower than it was in 2009-10. The recent swingeing cuts to the Adult Skills Fund must be reversed.

A joint position to bring fully funded national bargaining, with binding outcomes to the FE sector.

The FE sector can no longer ignore the need for proper national bargaining. Only through fully funded, binding national agreements can we:

³ NFER & Gatsby Foundation, Building a Stronger FE College Workforce, Sept 2024

⁴ <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/good-for-business>

⁵ UNISON FOI 2024/25

⁶ FE Week FOI 2024/25

- Close the pay gap between schools and colleges.
- Align support staff pay
- Ensure college teachers' starting salaries are comparable to those of schoolteachers.
- Provide starting salaries that enable staff to live with dignity.
- Ensure salaries reflect the skills and experience that staff bring to colleges.

Meaningful national bargaining and implementable outcomes means that FE staff will re-establish professional respect and parity of esteem with other educational professionals. By raising the level of pay and improving terms and conditions for all in the sector an even playing field is established.

We need functioning national pay bargaining at sector level with fully funded outcomes. That is why we ask that the AoC joins the trade unions in their calls to the government for this better system to be introduced. That is why it is important that we start now by driving forward the work of the working group last year by going to government with a joint voice for addressing pay, recruitment and retention in Further Education colleges.

Meaningful action on workload

For too long too little action has been taken to address workload issues in colleges with teachers and support staff expected to manage impossibly demanding workloads. This has led to increased stress, poor wellbeing and further contributes to recruitment and retention issues in the sector. We are therefore calling for better workload planning across the sector, supported at national level by agreed workload and wellbeing protocols, policy on the delivery of guided learning hours, maximum weekly and annual teaching hours (including evening and weekend work), a definition of a 'teaching hour' and class size recommendations, for example:

- A 35-hour working week for all FTE staff
- Annual teaching hours
 - Maximum of 800 teaching hours in any one academic year
- Weekly teaching hours
 - Maximum of 22 teaching hours in any teaching week
 - A maximum of 5 evenings or weekend days in the teaching year
- Agreement on the definition of a 'teaching hour',
- Remission from teaching for teaching staff with additional responsibilities
- Targeting reduction in class sizes & teaching hours
- For support staff, any additional hours worked should be paid rather than TOIL offered

Since 2018, the number of 16-18-year-olds has grown 13%, by 230,000. A further 5% increase is anticipated by 2028, meaning an extra 60,000 students in colleges and sixth form colleges by 2028. The increase in student numbers will inevitably lead to an increase in workload pressures for staff.

The lack of effective national agreements on working hours and planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time are the root cause of excessive and unhealthy workloads. Equivalent post-16 teachers subject to School Teachers Pay & Conditions have the protection of such agreements.

To allow all staff to work more effectively and sustainably, we need to increase the level of support staff to ensure that teachers can concentrate on teaching and support staff can concentrate on ensuring the smooth and effective running of the college.

Staff wellbeing needs to be a clear priority, and the measures outlined above will promote a healthy work-life balance for all staff in colleges.

The FE sector is at a crossroads. With the new government's renewed focus on skills development through Skills England, this is the ideal moment to make lasting changes⁷. It is critical that we use this time to change FE for the better for staff and learners alike. The call for a 10%/£3000 pay rise, a functioning national bargaining mechanism and concrete action on workload are essential if we are to make colleges vibrant and attractive places to work.

We are keen to work with you to find solutions that will address the underlying issues that leave colleges struggling to recruit and retain the staff they need and look forward to your prompt response to this claim.

With regards,



Paul Bridge

Head of Further Education

UCU

Joint Trade Union Side Secretary



Leigh Powell

National Officer

UNISON

Joint Trade Union Side Secretary

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/skills-england-to-transform-opportunities-and-drive-growth>