



School Teachers' Review Body Submission

UCU written evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body October 2025.

Executive summary

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, Adult Education, Prison Education and Higher Education.
2. UCU welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB). Our submission will directly address the request made in the Secretary of State's letters to the STRB Chair on 22 July 2025 regarding the academic year 2026/27 and 2027/28, as well as an indicative pay award for the 2028/29 academic year to be confirmed or reconsidered in a future remit. Our submission will also address the request for 'Evidence of the wider state of the labour market, including the impact of recommendations on the further education teaching workforce in England'.
3. The UCU submission is shaped by the union's campaign for a [New Deal for FE](#). The campaign is calling for a new national bargaining framework for Further Education (FE) in England, starting salaries for FE teachers to be on a par with teachers in schools and sixth form colleges, a national pay spine for FE teachers, closing the gap with schoolteachers pay, fully funded pay increases for all FE staff, increased funding for Adult Skills and national workload agreements.
4. Our submission sets out the case for correcting the absolute and relative decline in pay over the last decade and more, the need to close the gap with schools' pay over a three year pay review cycle indicated in the Secretary of State letter of 22 July 2025, and for agreements to address increasingly unmanageable workloads.
5. The UCU evidence establishes the basis for a comprehensive multi-year investment strategy in FE in England focused on driving up pay. The current sector bargaining framework has failed, and we need a new fully funded and binding process. According to the IFS, college teachers earn on average 15% less than schoolteachers - a gap of £5,500 in median salaries for 2023-24, projected to widen to 18% (£7,000) in 2024-25. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in 2024, places the pay disparity at 23%.

6. Around 25% of college teachers leave the profession after one year, compared with 15% of schoolteachers. After three years, 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.
7. Our submission highlights that pay is closely followed by workload as the second biggest reason why teachers leave FE. The UCU workload survey data 2022/23 shows that on average staff work 49 FTE hours per week. The equivalent of working two days for free is based on a 37-hour week contract. Tutors have the highest workloads (51.3 hours FTE), closely followed by Managers (50.2 hours FTE), Lecturers (50.1 hours FTE) and Course Leaders (49.4 hours FTE). A further third said their workloads were unmanageable most of the time. Staff in Adult Education are working on average 52.7 FTE hours per week.
8. The submission makes the case for significant and urgent strategic investment in adult education and to reverse the cuts to the Adult Skills Fund. Adult Education has a vital role to play in the decade of renewal. Adult Education enables the delivery of new skills, functional skills, employment pathways for those that want to work, opportunities for learners where English is not their first language and helps build communities and greater cohesion and understanding.
9. FE in England is now the outlier in further education within the UK. At a national level in England, the National Joint Forum (NJF) has failed on pay and the management of workloads. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the respective pay review mechanisms and their outcomes mean starting pay in FE in England for teachers is the lowest, and the gap between schoolteachers' pay and FE pay in England is the biggest.
10. The UCU submission supports the UK government's ambitions for the economy, for the development of skills and embedding growth. FE and Adult Education will be central to the delivery of those aims. However, without coherent skills, investment and workforce strategies, coupled with reform of the national bargaining framework in FE, colleges will continue to compete against each other, with schools and sixth form colleges, as with industry, for staff. FE staff will continue to leave teaching for better pay and terms and conditions.

1. UCU Recommendations:

In summary UCU is calling for:

- A multi-year investment and a workforce strategy in Further Education and Adult Education and a reversal of the cuts to the Adult Skills Fund.
- A new national bargaining framework for Further Education.

- National pay outcomes to be fully funded and fully implemented by colleges.
- Starting pay parity between FE teachers and schoolteachers in England.
- An agreed three-year investment strategy to close the pay gap with schoolteachers pay.
- Reform of the National Joint Forum in FE to include national workload agreements.
- A national pay spine in FE.
- As the devolution of funding to the combined authorities and mayors increases, UCU to be recognised as the voice of the profession in Adult Skills and Education consulted on regional skills and education plans, and a national agreement on teachers' pay and terms and conditions.

2. UCU thanks the Secretary of State and the STRB for the opportunity to once again this year make a submission to the STRB. As the largest union representing post-compulsory education staff in the UK, we welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the STRB's ongoing review of teachers' pay and conditions, especially as there is no statutory Teachers' Review Body for the further education sector, which includes adult education.

3. UCU shares the UK government's ambitions to invest in skills, grow the economy, and give a new deal for working people. A central part of achieving those ambitions rests on fundamental change in FE. Fundamental change means the creation of new national bargaining arrangements in FE England and an investment and workforce strategy in both FE and Adult Education and Skills.

4. At a sector level, FE bargaining in England does not function. It has failed to meet the aspirations and demands of staff and needs fundamental change. The national FE bargaining framework and agreement, the National Joint Forum (NJF), is specifically set up to result in recommendations that have no binding outcomes on pay. There is no commitment from the UK government to any pay recommendation being fully funded. The NJF has no remit on workloads or other terms and conditions, or to develop a national pay spine for FE.

5. FE college employers ultimately have the autonomy to do their own thing on pay. At sector level, the annual round of NJF talks do not deliver certainty and consistency on pay. The outcomes are not fully funded and the recommendation made by the Association of Colleges is not binding.

6. Despite welcome additional FE funding in recent years, little progress has been made on closing the pay gap with schoolteacher's pay or raising the overall level of FE pay to address the demonstrable recruitment and retention crisis in the sector.

7. There is no national minimum starting pay rate for a qualified teacher in FE England. There is no national pay spine in FE England. There is no weekly maximum teaching hours agreement nationally. There is no national agreement on the teaching year, nor on annual teaching hours, or what constitutes a teaching hour.

8. FE funding is complex and distributed via mechanisms covering 16-18, Adult Skills, apprenticeships, private providers, higher education, BTEC and T-Level. It needs to be simplified.

9. Since incorporation in England, the FE sector has become the most underfunded of the education sectors and with the biggest disparities between colleges' pay rates and conditions. In schools and sixth form in England, employers implement the national pay scales and pay uplift across the sector uniformly.

10. Since last year's review, the Education Select Committee has held its Inquiry into Further Education and Skills¹ and published its report.² The report reached a number of conclusions and made a number of recommendations,³ one of which was that the DfE must address the underlying and unresolved reasons for the recruitment and retention crisis amongst [school and] college teachers, which include pay disparities and excessive workloads.⁴

The recruitment and retention crisis

11. College teacher retention rates are significantly lower than in schools.⁵ The report, having received evidence from the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS),⁶ cited the following figures:

Percentage retention of college teachers compared to schoolteachers by number of years

	Schoolteachers	College teachers
After 1-year	15%	25%
After 5-years	25%	50%
After 10-years	60%	75%

12. Around 25% of college teachers leave the profession after one year, compared with 15% of schoolteachers. After three years, 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.

13. The report found that a key contributing factor for the disproportionately high turnover rate in colleges is the disparity in pay between college and staff pay.⁷

¹ [Further Education and Skills - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

² Education Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2024-26, [Further Education and Skills](#), HC 666

³ [Education Committee - Publications - Committees - UK Parliament](#), page 90

⁴ Para. 236

⁵ Para. 235

⁶ IFS, [What-has-happened-to-college-teacher-pay-in-England.pdf](#) March 2023, p 11, cited at para. 229 of the report

⁷ Para. 230

Pay disparity

14.The report found that there is a growing pay disparity between school and college teachers in England, with college staff earning significantly less than schoolteachers. According to the IFS, college teachers earn on average 15% less than schoolteachers - a gap of £5,500 in median salaries for 2023–24, projected to widen to 18% (£7,000) in 2024–25.⁸

Different independent research, by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) in 2024, places the pay disparity at 23%.⁹

15.The pay disparity devalues the profession and exacerbates staffing shortages, particularly in high-demand areas such as STEM and vocational education, where staff can obtain better paid jobs in industry.¹⁰

16.This two-tier, iniquitous pay divide between schools and colleges, has fostered a deep sense of injustice amongst FE staff: schoolteachers benefit from an STRB review and fully funded pay awards (such as the 5.5% increase for 2024–25, backed by £1.2 billion), while FE has no STRB equivalent and its national pay process is neither fully funded or fully implemented. As a result of FE Incorporation in 1992, pay has been fragmented and locally negotiated, and chronically underfunded, leading to inconsistent and often inadequate pay increases.

17.The report concluded¹¹ that although recent Government investments into the FE sector has been welcomed, it could be seen as temporary fixes rather than a structural solution to the long-standing pay issues.

18.The pay disparity evidently undermines recruitment and retention in the FE sector.¹² The report, therefore, recommends that a statutory pay review body for colleges to be established, comparable to the School Teachers' Review Body. Further, they recommend that the DfE must commit to closing the pay gap between college teachers and their school counterparts – and that within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period.¹³

19.Another recent, independent call for the urgent review of pay and conditions for FE college staff, can be found in the Oxford University led report, '*From Competition to Coordination: Rethinking Post-16 Education and Training in the UK*'.¹⁴ One of the report's recommendations is that the pay and conditions for FE college staff need to be urgently reviewed, due to the disparity between FE staff and school teachers, together with the poor comparison with industry salaries.

⁸ IFS, [State-of-college-finances-in-England.pdf](#), October 2024, cited in the report at para. 223

⁹ [Microsoft Word - FE teacher workforce report - final draft](#)

¹⁰ See, for instance, Education Committee, Second Report of Session 2023-24, [Teacher recruitment, training and retention](#), HC 119, p 14, cited in the Education Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2024-26, [Further Education and Skills](#), HC 666, at para 233, p 86

¹¹ Para. 227

¹² See, for instance, Para. 227

¹³ Para. 228

¹⁴ Robson, J. et al. (2025) [Post 16 Case study report Final](#)

20. In addition to low pay, the Education Select Committee found that there are other reasons driving further education professionals to leave the sector: high workloads.¹⁵

Workload

21. UCU members in FE are experiencing increasing and often unmanageable workloads, long hours and the intensification of work that is leading to an increase in ill-health and staff leaving the sector. The lack of national workload agreements in the sector, which would set floors and define expectations compounds matters. UCU has been campaigning for consistency on this matter and our research identifies the scale of the problems that need to be addressed:

<https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/UCU-workload-survey-2021-data-report/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf>

22. For too long too little action has been taken to address workload issues in colleges with 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.

23. We need functioning national bargaining that not only covers pay but also results in agreements that create better workload planning across the sector, with 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
- 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.

24. Since 2018, the number of 16-18-year-olds has grown 13%, or 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 in FE and worsen the already dire absolute and relative retention position between FE and schools.

Adult Education and Skills

25. In this submission we highlight the need for Adult Education staff working in FE to receive parity of pay and conditions with schoolteachers. For those staff

¹⁵ Para 230

working for employers delivering adult skills outside of FE, there should be an Adult Education national contract and national pay scales.

25. Staff delivering adult education have suffered some of the most sustained pressure on their terms and conditions over the last two decades or so. Investment in the Adult Education via the Adult Skills Fund has declined since its peak in the early 2000s, and especially since 2010, as documented by the IFS.¹⁶ As a result of the under-investment in the sectors, the sectors have been largely dependent on precarious contracts.

26. A UCU survey of Adult Education Tutors in 2023 found that of those who responded, 76% said they were on some sort of precarious employment contract. Of the Tutors on hourly paid contracts, the average pay was £20.83 per hour, with many colleges paying less than that – one as little as £11.68 per hour. The majority of respondents (86%) reported that their time for preparation and marking was ‘rolled up’ into the hourly rate of teaching, meaning that the actual pay of some was lower than the minimum wage.

27. Despite the attacks on Adult Education, the government, in the Spring of this year, announced that from 2025-26 academic year, it would further reduce the adult education and skills funding.

28. Our surveys and member feedback highlight a continuing decline in the number of Adult Education staff in recent years, either through redundancies or resignations due to poor pay and conditions. The further cuts to the Adult Skills Fund threaten the Department for Business and Trade’s Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Work and Pension’s strategy for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), because the strategies are, ultimately, contingent on the recruitment and retention of Further Education and Adult Education teachers for their delivery and success.

29. Anything less than parity of pay and conditions with schoolteachers for FE staff will mean that the further and adult education will continue to haemorrhage staff, the recruitment crisis will deepen, risking the delivery of skills and vocational training, including T Levels, apprenticeships and adult upskilling programmes. Achieving parity of pay and conditions through functioning national bargaining arrangements at sector level, are not just a matter of fairness - it is an investment in the educators who shape our future workforce.

30. In summary UCU is calling for:

- A multi-year investment and a workforce strategy in Further Education and Adult Education and a reversal of the cuts to the Adult Skills Fund.
- A new national bargaining framework for Further Education.
- National pay outcomes to be fully funded and fully implemented by colleges.
- Starting pay parity between FE teachers and schoolteachers in England.
- An agreed three-year investment strategy to close the pay gap with schoolteachers pay.

¹⁶ IFS, [Annual report on education spending in England: 2024–25](#), January 2025, p 64, cited in the Education Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2024-26, [Further Education and Skills](#), HC 666, p 87

- Reform of the National Joint Forum in FE to include national workload agreements.
- A national pay spine in FE.
- As the devolution of funding to the combined authorities and mayors increases, UCU to be recognised as the voice of the profession in Adult Skills and Education consulted on regional skills and education plans, and a national agreement on teachers' pay and terms and conditions.