

Shock FE funding cuts will damage provision in Wales

At its meeting of 31 Jan 2009 Wales UCU FE Committee passed the following motion:

Further Education Sector Committee notes the extremely disappointing funding settlement for the FE Sector (2009/2010) which amounts to an overall cut of 1.6%, over £3m, with some colleges facing cuts of up to 7.5%.

FESC believes that this will inevitably lead to pressure for cuts in educational provision and staff redundancies.

FESC further believes that such cuts will make it even harder for the sector to deliver high quality education at a time when the recession and consequent rising unemployment is inevitably increasing the demand for retraining among the Welsh workforce.

FESC calls on UCU Wales to oppose any compulsory redundancies, attempts to renege on the pay parity agreement or any attacks on lecturers' working conditions as a result of these proposed cuts.

FESC resolves to start a vigorous campaign aimed at forcing the Welsh Assembly Government to reverse these cuts and ensure that F.E is given

sufficient funding to provide quality education for the people of Wales.

All FE branches are asked to meet before Annual Wales Conference on 7 March to discuss this motion. You are urged to endorse it. Representatives at FESC were clear that UCU should start a major political campaign backed by appropriate industrial action if necessary to restore FE funding. In the first instance it was agreed that we should:

- Request an urgent meeting with the minister, John Griffiths, and insist that pay parity and the national pay agreement are maintained.
- Prepare written questions on funding to be put to Jane Hutt Wales UCU conference on March 7
- Prepare political campaigning materials for branches to lobby local AMs
- Prepare an immediate press release condemning the funding cuts
- Send a motion to Wales TUC conference condemning the cuts
- Build a Rally/Lobby of Welsh Assembly Government following conference

FESC urges all branches to think of other appropriate actions we can take and send amendments to the motion. Try to get these to the Regional Office by the

deadline for amendments on 18 Feb 2009. However if you cannot meet to discuss the motion in time, amendments will be taken on the floor of Sector Conference. Branches would need to have their amendments written and bring at least 50 copies of them to Conference.

All branches have been sent detailed figures of the cuts and how they affect individual colleges. The cuts are in money terms; when inflation is taken into consideration the real effect on colleges is much greater. Fforwm is already conducting a benchmarking exercise in preparation for a major attack on our conditions of service with a view to driving up workloads and saving money (see article on national conditions). Colleges will claim they cannot maintain pay parity or the national pay scale next year. On top of this large-scale redundancies will be inevitable in some colleges.

Such potential devastation would make a sick joke of the Assembly's commitment to a world class FE system in Wales. The loss of committed teachers and the increased workloads will significantly damage quality in the sector. That is why our campaign is so important. We are not just campaigning to protect pay and conditions we are campaigning to ensure that students and communities in Wales get the post 16 provision they deserve.

It is absolutely vital that branches are not drawn into beggar thy neighbour campaigns by college managements. The issue is not primarily about how the money has been distributed between colleges. It is about getting more money

into the sector. Branches are urged not to campaign locally with college managements seeking more money at another institution's expense. This is a recipe for division. For our voice to be heard by the politicians we need a united campaign in every Welsh FE college.

If government can find trillions of pounds to bail out wealthy and arrogant bankers it can find a few million to protect a service that is vital to the future of the Welsh economy and the well-being of the people of Wales.

- **Restore the cuts**
- **Defend pay parity**
- **No to compulsory redundancies**
- **Resist any attacks on working conditions**
- **Pass the motion and make sure your branch sends its full quota of delegates to Wales UCU Conference on 7 March.**

MAKE SURE YOUR BRANCH IS REPRESENTED

Wales Annual Conference 7 March, Angel Hotel Cardiff :

- The deadline for delegate registration is **February 16** – send forms to Regional Office
- Deadline for amendments is **February 18** – send copies to Regional Office

UCU Annual National Conference in Bournemouth, 27-29 May 2009

- Delegates from Branches should register on-line at www.ucu.org.uk/congress
- Branch Secretaries have password details etc. You must register by 27 April. UCU nationally will ensure delegates from the same region are booked into the same hotel.
- Deadline for Annual Congress motions is 12 noon on **Wed 18 March 2009**. Again Branch Secretaries have details of the process for sending motions.

Defend Quality; Build the Fight for Common National Conditions!

On Jan 8 the joint FE unions met fforwm and agreed to accept the employers' offer of 2.45%. This is a shoddy deal which is yet again below the rate of inflation. However negotiators felt there was no option but to accept given the economic situation and the fact that no serious fight-back has developed in the public sector generally over pay. Reports to FESC from Welsh branches indicated that members were not in favour of the level of industrial action that would be needed to shift the employers' position. However UCU made it clear to the employers that we expected them to address the rest of our claim for 2008/09 and that the pay award alone did not settle matters for this year.

As part of the 2006/07 settlement fforwm and UCU jointly agreed to discuss **"any implications arising from the recommendations of the FE Review (WEBB) following its publication."**

When UCU sought, in good faith, to begin this process with Fforwm they flagrantly reneged on their commitment. In a display of breath-taking arrogance they simply stated that they were not prepared to discuss conditions of service. They reiterated this position on Jan 8. At the same time they confirmed that they have commissioned consultants to conduct a benchmarking exercise on the different conditions of service that exist in Welsh colleges. They refused to disclose the cost of this exercise or who the consultants were. Previously fforwm had indicated that they **"may wish to discuss (not negotiate) the content of the workwith the joint trade unions."**

However at the meeting they even refused to do this!

It is patently obvious that the employers intend to mount a co-ordinated attack on lecturers' conditions of service on a college by college basis, using the consultant's report to drive down conditions to the lowest common denominator. They will be looking to increase contact hours, cram more classes into the working week, reduce holidays and generally employ any wheeze they come up with to force up lecturer workloads. They will no doubt take the opportunity of mergers and partnerships to drive home these attacks.

Seize the Initiative

Since incorporation all Welsh colleges have had different class contact hours, different holidays, different working weeks and different requirements to work evenings, weekends and to cover absent colleagues. WAG wants to reduce the number of colleges through mergers and to encourage formalised collaborative working between colleges and other providers of post-16 education, most notably schools. UCU has welcomed this move away from the traditional free market approach to FE delivery. There is a real opportunity to put education and quality above narrow institutional self interest. However staff commitment and morale is central to delivering quality provision. That will be massively undermined if lecturers and teachers from different institutions are expected to work side by side teaching the same courses and the same students but with widely different workloads, hours and holidays. It is simply not fair. But it is also unprofessional and will militate against effective collaboration.

UCU should not allow the employers to put us on the back foot. Given their intransigence and the fact that we want to see the Assembly's FE reforms work, UCU Wales FE committee is asking all members to support a major campaign for a return to common conditions of service in all Welsh colleges. The campaign will be finalised following the fullest discussion in branches, at FESC and at Annual Wales Conference on March 7. Initially all branches are asked to meet before

Conference and discuss the following motion:

FESC notes the refusal by fforwm to meet the UCU salary claim for 2008/2009. UCU has, reluctantly, accepted a substandard pay settlement of 2.45%.

However FESC notes the unilateral refusal by employers to enter into meaningful discussions on working conditions in Welsh FE colleges despite a previous agreement that such discussions would take place following the publication of the Webb Review.

FESC finds fforwm's position completely unacceptable and refuses to settle this claim whilst fforwm maintains this position which directly contradicts the aspirations of the Webb Review and, we believe, of the National Assembly for Wales.

FESC resolves to initiate a campaign to force the employers to act reasonably on this issue. FESC believes there is scope for significant improvement in the norms established by employers across Wales on key issues including:

- ***The length of the working week***
- ***Weekly and annual contact hours***
- ***Holidays***
- ***Continuous professional development***

- ***The employment of part-time staff***

FESC resolves to initiate a campaign around these issues involving:

- ***Effective political lobbying of the Welsh Assembly Government***
- ***A campaign of industrial action, the details of which will be decided through the democratic procedures of this union***

Branches can add to or amend this motion. Make sure your branch voice is heard at Conference on March 7 and elect delegates. Send amendments to this and other conference motions to the Wales office by 18 February 2009. Later amendments may be permitted on the conference floor but branches would need to bring at least 50 copies with them.

UCU Wales waged an extremely effective campaign to win common pay scales in all colleges and parity with teachers. This was a major victory. No other section of the union has managed this. The campaign involved political lobbying, awareness raising among members and industrial action when necessary to support negotiations. We can do the same over conditions.

Lecturers deserve professional conditions of service wherever they work. Our health and sanity depend on it. More importantly the deal we offer our students depends on it. Moreover the Assembly's reform

agenda depends on it. In any case we have no real option but to mount a campaign for national conditions. The employers have signalled their intention to go on the offensive to drive up workloads and tear up contracts locally. That's why they have brought in the consultants. It is also why they are refusing to talk nationally to the unions.

- **Support the FESC motion**
- **Come to Conference on March 7 in Cardiff**
- **Help build a campaign for common professional conditions of service in every Welsh College**