

Latest on England pay negotiations

We reported in the last FE News that the pay talks for this year had an ominous start. At the first negotiating meeting employers representatives refused to make any offer on pay unless trade unions signed up to further flexibilities on working hours and conditions, and accepting the end of automatic incremental progression on pay scales. In addition they also refused to entertain most of the non-pay elements of our claim.

Unfortunately at the second meeting of the National Joint Forum (NJF) held on 1 June things went from bad to worse. The employers opened the meeting by offering a 0.2% pay increase for next year on the condition that trade unions accept:

- The cost of incremental progression is a significant issue for many Colleges which hinders their ability to pay cost of living increases and in some instances lead to redundancies.
- Greater flexibility on working hours.
- More efficient ways of working.

There followed a lengthy and robust discussion where all trade unions made it very clear that apart from the paltry nature of the offer, such conditions were totally unacceptable.

Following an adjournment the employers then made the following statement which they believed clarified their position and "would assist the trade unions in accepting their revised recommendation."

"In this period of austerity, Colleges are often unable to afford a general increase in pay for all staff as whatever limited funds might be available are often utilised as a prior charge to fund automatic incremental progression."

The benefit of incremental progression is disproportionately distributed amongst employees and often the College is left unable to pay a salary increase to the most deserving individuals and groups."

AoC considered this issue in the light of feedback from our members and in determining our ability to make an offer in response to the pay claim. We consider automatic incremental increases as an obstacle to operating a fair and balanced pay policy, an anachronism in the development of flexible and responsive pay policies and a major barrier to making a pay recommendation which might go some way towards recognising the contribution of all staff to the success of our Colleges. We recognise that progression up a pay scale will remain an important feature of remuneration policies but that additional rigor and objective criteria should be introduced to account for the additional costs thereby incurred."

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In considering a response to the trade unions pay claim, AoC is notifying the National Joint Forum that it will recommend to its members that they replace automatic pay progression with pay policies which link movement to objective criteria. As a consequence, we feel that we might be able to make a general offer of 0.5% on pay."

The trade unions have rejected this revised offer. We recognise that while the employers may have pulled back on demands for greater flexibility and efficiency they are effectively indicating a withdrawal from the nationally recommended agreement on pay scales which makes no mention of criteria for incremental progression.

In practice the so called objective criteria they are advocating mean either performance based pay progression (linked to lesson observation grades, student retention and success etc) or bars on scale points based on extra tasks and responsibilities. We are not talking about fairer or objective policies here - the offer is explicitly predicated on savings made on ending automatic incremental progression. Far from providing salary increases to the "most deserving individuals and groups", these proposals would hit younger lower paid staff, who rely on such incremental increases, the hardest.

Next steps

Negotiations will continue on the 28 June and UCU negotiators will report to the Further Education committee (FEC) of the national executive the following day. The annual national FE Sector conference which met last weekend agreed a policy that in the light of a derisory pay offer that UCU members should be balloted for industrial action and to seek to coordinate action with other teaching unions who are planning an autumn campaign.

Further information will follow the FEC meeting on 29 June.

Lobby of Pay Talks 28 June

UCU will be lobbying the third meeting of this year's FE England pay negotiations being held at the 28 June meeting of the NJF.

Join the Lobby on 28 June to:

- Defend the national pay scales
- Demand a decent pay increase with no conditions
- Demand fair lesson observations

All members who are free on the morning are urged to attend the Lobby outside the venue for the pay talks to give the Association of College representatives the strongest possible message. For more details see:

www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland

When:

Assemble 10 am

Where:

Institute of Arbitrators, 12 Bloomsbury Square, London, WC1A 2LP

Our Claim

- 5% increase on pay and allowances with a £750 underpinning
- Action to stop use of zero hours contracts
- Action to promote adoption of the joint agreement on excessive working hours
- Negotiations on a national agreement on lesson observation procedures

Full details of the joint unions' claim can be found at www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland