

In this issue:

#loveFE campaign

National pay claim submitted

Sick pay success

#loveFE

#loveFE campaign

As reported in the last FE News, UCU is leading a joint campaign of more than 20 FE sector organisations to oppose the government's announced 24% cut to adult skills funding.

Highlights of the campaign so far include:

- Launch of online petition against the cuts which now has over 27,500 signatures
- London region organised lobby of parliament with over 500 attending
- TUC led delegation to lobby Vince Cable, minister for Business, Innovation and Skills
- Campaign website launched www.fefunding.org.uk
- London region March to Downing Street
- 16 North East college principals joined forces with union leaders to lobby against the cuts
- #LoveFE day massive social media response with photos and stories about FE

What you can do

A national demonstration has been called for Saturday 25 April, keep any eye out for details which will be announced soon.

A link to the petition and tools for lobbying MP's and parliamentary candidates can all be found on the campaign website.

Go to www.fefunding.org.uk and:

- sign the petition if you haven't done so already
- lobby your current MP to urge them to speak out against the cuts
- e-mail your parliamentary election candidates asking them to pledge to oppose the cuts
- keep sending your stories and pictures to #loveFE

Please encourage everyone that you know who cares about FE to do the same.

UCU will maintain this campaign with partner organisations through to the general election and beyond to oppose the cuts and fight for better funding for FE.

National pay claim submitted

The joint further education trade unions have submitted a national pay and conditions claim for England for 2015/16 to the Association of Colleges.

The pay element is for an increase of £1 per hour for all staff. This claim reflects the need for a catch up award after the 17% cut in real pay suffered by FE staff since 2009 and the need to close the pay gap between school teachers and FE lecturers. The joint trade unions also call on colleges to implement the Living Wage.

Other elements included in the claim:

- Call for a code of practice for managing workloads
- Call for a review of the settlement date (currently 1 August)

The claim will be formally presented to the employers' representatives at the first meeting of the National Joint Forum for 2015 on 13 May. The full text of the claim can be found at: www.ucu.org.uk/fepayengland

Sick pay success

Branches won't take cuts to sick pay lying down.

In December 2012 the Association of Colleges (AoC) unilaterally withdrew from the national Joint agreement on guidelines on sickness leave in further education colleges. Talks to reinstate the agreement broke down in January 2014.

Sadly, it is no surprise that some colleges have used poor funding

settlements as an opportunity to review their sickness absence management policies. They argue that they need to impose cuts to sick and change the procedure because their current policy is too expensive and allows a small number of staff to exploit it. Yet they provide no evidence that these draconian and unnecessary changes will generate any significant savings or deal with any perceived problems. UCU argues that all these cuts will do is penalise a small number of staff who are seriously ill.

There seems to be a pattern to the attacks and the two main themes are:

1. A reduction in overall sick pay. The national agreement stated 6 months full salary and 6 months half salary. Colleges are usually trying to cut this to 3 months full and 3 months half.
2. Restricting sick pay to statutory sick pay (SSP) for anyone under disciplinary or capability procedures if they are off sick.

Despite these attacks, Regional Officials from around the country are reporting significant success in fighting these cuts. Branches have rightly argued that:

- little or no savings will be made by the college by slashing the overall sick pay entitlement.
- such cuts will only serve to punish staff during their most vulnerable moments.
- only allowing statutory sick pay for those in disciplinary or capability process is a punishment in itself
- it undermines the neutrality of disciplinary and capability processes

Success stories

At City College Plymouth management wanted to reduce sick pay to 3 months full and 3 months half pay. A sustained and joint campaign by Unison and UCU lead to the college withdrawing their proposals.

Similar proposals had been put forward by Cornwall College. They also wanted to cut sick pay to 3 months each and only pay SSP during any disciplinary procedures. The branch successfully defended the 6 months entitlement and significantly improved the proposals in relation to disciplinary procedures.

Likewise at Redcar and Cleveland College the employer was seeking to only pay SSP to any staff member facing a disciplinary or capability procedure. The branch overwhelmingly rejected these proposals and the college have taken

those proposals off the table. Furthermore, they have agreed to continue within the existing framework in co-operation with the trade unions.

These, and other success stories show that branches can succeed in fighting these vicious attacks on members at a point in their lives when they might most need the support of their college.

If your branch is facing cuts to sick pay or is involved in a review of your sickness absence policy speak to your Regional Office straight away. They can provide support and advice in your negotiations and campaigns.

For further information and advice see UCU's new sick pay and absence management bargaining guidance:

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/j/p/Sick_of_it_FE_Neg_pack_Aug14.pdf