

Defend lifelong learning against savage cuts: Fight for the future of FE

As a consequence of the changes to funding for Further Education in academic year 2015/16 UCU's Further Education Sector Committee (FESC) decided at its special meeting on Saturday 11th April that it should organise a nationally aggregated dispute to challenge the cuts being made in pay and conditions as a consequence of the cut in funding allocations:

Bridgend College	16,467,956	15,109,716	-1,358,240	-8.25%
Coleg Sir Gar	15,703,876	14,879,585	-824,290	-5.25%
Coleg Ceredigion	3,862,066	3,754,651	-107,415	-2.78%
Coleg Cambria	37,775,398	34,973,779	-2,801,619	-7.42%
Cardiff & Vale College	27,703,856	26,808,597	-895,259	-3.23%
Coleg Gwent	40,083,535	37,925,382	-2,158,153	-5.38%
Merthyr Tydfil College	8,787,600	8,332,001	-455,599	-5.18%
Pembrokeshire College	10,320,160	9,513,667	-806,493	-7.81%
Coleg y Cymoedd	29,903,403	27,445,282	-2,458,121	-8.22%
St David's Catholic College	5,175,922	5,041,348	-134,574	-2.60%
Gower College Swansea	23,907,206	22,432,845	-1,474,361	-6.17%
YMCA	913,222	889,478	-23,744	-2.60%
Grwp NPTC Group	25,809,514	23,637,272	-2,172,242	-8.42%
WEA Cymru	4,534,488	4,416,591	-117,897	-2.60%
Grwp Llandrillo Menai	41,630,096	39,439,803	-2,190,293	-5.26%
Total	292,578,297	274,599,998	-17,978,299	-6.14%

As you can see from the figures above the average cut is 6.14% across the sector in Wales with three colleges facing 8% cuts.

We know from the reports given at FESC by branch officers that colleges are planning cuts in three main areas: compulsory redundancies; changes to nationally negotiated agreements and reductions in remission hours.

Gate Protest

Plaid Cymru are tabling a motion on the cuts to FE in Plenary discussion in the Senedd on the 22nd April 2015. FESC agreed to call on all branches to organise a 'GATE PROTEST' from 12-2pm on that day and invite local press to cover the story.

Margaret Phelan, the Wales official has written to all FE trade unions encouraging them to join us and she has also contact NUS Wales to ask for their support. She also contacted each Principal and CEO asking for their support in two ways:

1. Allow staff not engaged in teaching or providing service for students to attend the gate protest without loss of pay.
2. Consider issuing a press release supporting the actions of your staff and students in trying to secure the future of FE in Wales.

Lobby of the Senedd

UCU has invited other trades unions and NUS to lobby their Assembly Members (AMs) on Wednesday 29th April in the run up to the general election between the hours of 12-2pm. Your Assembly Members will have voted on the 22nd April on the motion on cuts to FE budget tabled by Plaid Cymru and your branch officers will be provided with a template letter to send to the AMs asking them to meet representatives of your branch on the steps of the Senedd and explain why they voted in the debate in the way that they did.

Declaring a National Dispute

The Wales official is seeking advice on the wording used to express the trade dispute with the employers and once received failure to agree letters will be sent to all principals and CEOs registering the dispute.

At this stage in the process we are unable to provide detailed information about the ballot timetable, but we will keep you informed via email as the decisions are made. It is essential that we get the timing right to ensure that every college is able to take industrial action should they need to respond to decisions made by their principal or CEO.

Why is all this necessary?

Each year the government tells colleges in the document 'Priorities for the Further Education Sector' what they expect from colleges for the allocation of funds they receive. The table above shows the funding allocation for 2015/6 and this link will take you to the full document on the DfES web site:

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/post-16-planning-and-funding/planning-and-funding-arrangements-2015-2016/?lang=en>

You are strongly encouraged to read this document in its entirety, here are a few of the requirements contained within the document.

- Despite acknowledging that young people from deprived backgrounds are less likely to do well in school, the cuts to FE are in the area of Adult education and second chance learning, 50% of the budget in 2015/6 and further cuts expected. (clause 1.3)
- Monitor literacy and numeracy and from Sept 2016 full time study should be more than 450 guided hours (2.2).
- Need to focus on improving learner's spelling, punctuation and grammar (2.3)
- Universal adoption of new Welsh Bac by Sept 2018 (3.3)
- Institutions to timetable more start dates throughout the year, including weekend learning (3.7)
- Funding principles for post 19 learning to be supported by employer funding (4.2)
- Focus should be on employability skills and work related experiences i.e. placements (4.3)