

17 May 2017

Dear Principal,

I write to draw your attention to the Joint Trade Unions' Pay and Conditions Claim 2017/18 for Further Education in England (attached) which will be the subject of national talks between the trade unions and representatives of the Association of Colleges (AoC) today, Wednesday 17 May 2017.

I believe that no one in our sector can be pleased at the plight of pay for college staff over recent years. Pay for college staff is now 21.5% lower in real terms than it was in 2009. For an experienced lecturer on point 8 of the scale this equates to a loss of £7,850 per annum.

You won't need me to tell you that recruitment and retention in FE is becoming an increasing problem as schools continue to pay teachers on average 6% more than colleges. A recent AoC report cited "inability to pay enough" as being one of the key reasons reported for recruitment difficulties.

In the joint claim the unions say:

"While the joint trade unions will always support campaigns for increased funding of FE, the responsibility for delivering better paid, better jobs in FE rests ultimately with the sector's leadership. More money is on its way to the sector however if FE continues to decline as an attractive place to work then it will fail to deliver the quality of provision on which its funding depends. Any further decline in real pay for FE staff is an existential threat for colleges."

For the vast majority of those who teach in FE, the first thing that attracted them was the difference they can make for their students. Pay in FE is a problem when staff who love teaching in FE are leaving not because they want to, but because they can't afford to stay. No one can believe it to be right that the passion and commitment of staff like these be rewarded with further reductions, in real terms, to their pay. This year's claim reflects the legitimate expectation of staff that they fall no further behind and get back a little of what they have lost.

The importance of FE being an attractive place to work is underlined by the essential role it will play in the UK's ability to thrive post-BREXIT. The aspiration that vocational pathways carry the same esteem as academic ones also demands raised esteem, and all that goes with it, for those who work in FE.

While UCU welcomes the AoC's decision to continue to conduct national talks on pay and conditions we believe that, in order that they are meaningful, any agreed outcome of such talks must be implemented by all colleges. UCU notes that the AoC's position is that the outcome of national talks become a recommendation to its members. Therefore UCU branches are being encouraged to approach Principals to both discuss the national claim together with other matters that are of relevance locally.

It is clear to me that if we are to protect the future of FE, then things cannot continue as they have been. Only by working constructively together, at national and local level, will we build the FE sector its learners deserve and the country needs. I urge you to work with your UCU branch to both implement national agreements and also to address issues of local relevance with a view to continuing to make your college an attractive place to work.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Harden', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Harden
Head of Further Education
University and College Union