

Anne Milton MP
Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills
Department for Education,
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith Street,
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear Ms Milton,

This Friday (13 July), trade unions representing staff in further education will meet with the Association of Colleges to negotiate on pay for 2018/19.

I am writing to you on behalf of the University and College Union (UCU) ahead of these talks because I believe we have reached a crisis point on pay in further education.

Staff in further education colleges have suffered a staggering real terms cut in pay of over 25% since 2009. That means experienced lecturers are now earning over £9,000 less than if their pay had kept pace with inflation.

Indeed, many staff are even worse off because the majority of colleges have opted not to implement even the modest pay rises recommended by the employers nationally in recent years.

This failure to properly reward staff means that teachers in further education are now earning around £7,000 per year less on average than teachers in schools.

Now that the 1% cap on public sector pay has been lifted, there is a real danger that pay in further education will fall further behind schools, with disastrous consequences for the recruitment and retention of staff. Pay is already cited by college leaders as a significant barrier to recruiting staff.

Further education is central to the government's ambitions for delivering a successful industrial strategy and ensuring that the UK economy remains globally competitive. If the sector is to thrive and continue to attract experienced and dedicated staff to work in it, we must ensure that the workforce is well paid and well supported.

For several years now, the employers have come to pay negotiations claiming that, because of cuts to further education funding, there is simply no money for a decent pay rise for staff.

I know that the department is currently looking at how further education is funded – this is welcome work which I hope will lead to long-term additional support to underpin a vibrant and resilient sector for the future. However, it is unlikely to bring about any major changes until at least next year.

The truth is that UCU members simply cannot afford to hear once again that there is no money for a proper pay rise.

I am therefore writing to urge you to provide urgent additional funding to colleges this year, ring-fenced for the purposes of improving staff pay, to ensure the sector does not fall further behind.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Sally Hunt