

Industrial action by college lecturers, 24 April

Staff working at some 250 further education colleges across England will strike for one day on Thursday 24 April, 2008 over pay. The strike, called by the University and College Union, follows a ballot in which 65.5% supported strike action and 86.2% also supported other forms of industrial action short of a strike

Time to sort out the long-running pay scandal

- Colleges are the flagship in government plans for raising skills and improving social mobility and social cohesion. But whilst student satisfaction levels are very high staff satisfaction levels with their treatment are very low.
- A major independent study* released this week shows a college workforce uniquely committed to their students but totally frustrated by poor pay and poor work-life balance, with large number of experienced staff wanting to leave.
- College lecturers' pay is way out of line with that in the trades and industries many of their students are headed for and they still get lower pay than school teachers for the same work – 6% less on average.
- The government rightly takes pride in having increased FE spending by some 50% in the last decade. It's time that college lecturers saw some of it.
- If colleges won't pay lecturers fairly government should ring fence the cash for salaries.

The pay claim

In January, UCU, with six other trade unions (ACM, ATL, GMB, UCU, UNISON, UNITE) representing 250,000 further education staff, submitted a pay claim for the academic year of 2008/9 for 6% or £1,500, whichever is the greater.

Last year, FE lecturers were awarded a below inflation pay deal. That deal (for 2007/8) was 2.55% with a £500 underpinning made up of 2% on 1st August 2007 and a further 1% in February 2008. The 2007/8 pay dispute remains unresolved.

UCU says: FE staff deserve a pay deal which matches the rise in prices and the contribution members make to our colleges. No response had been received from the employers who have had the claim since the end of January but won't meet the unions until 1 May. No sense of urgency there.

The pay gap

In 2003/4 a two-year national agreement reached between UCU's predecessor union, NATFHE, and the Association of Colleges recommended that all colleges introduce an eight-point pay scale for qualified lecturers. Lecturers would progress by annual increments to the top of that scale. This was to be a major step in bringing FE pay in line with that of schoolteachers.

47% of FE colleges have failed to fully implement the recommended eight-point pay scale

Even where the eight point scale is in, lecturers still earn less than many school teachers.

- A lecturer can reach £33,513 in 2007/8. A school teacher at the top of their scale would get £34,281. And 50% of school teachers get extra Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payments ranging from £2,364 to £11,557 per year on top of their basic pay.
- Not all colleges allow automatic progression to the final point of the scale
- Many part-time and hourly-paid FE lecturers are given 'spot salaries' and prevented from progressing annually up the scale

Teaching hours concern

Growing workloads are also a major concern. As well as teaching, lecturers carry out course development, lesson preparation, marking, professional development and administration. A quarter of lecturers already teach more than 850 hours a year, jeopardising quality in UCU's view. Lecturers want negotiations on common conditions of service across all colleges.

Action on 24 April

The day of action coincides with separate dispute strikes being held by the National Union of Schoolteachers and the Public and Commercial Services Union. The two teaching unions plan to hold joint events at locations around the country on 24 April.

*The survey is available at www.ucu.org.uk

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