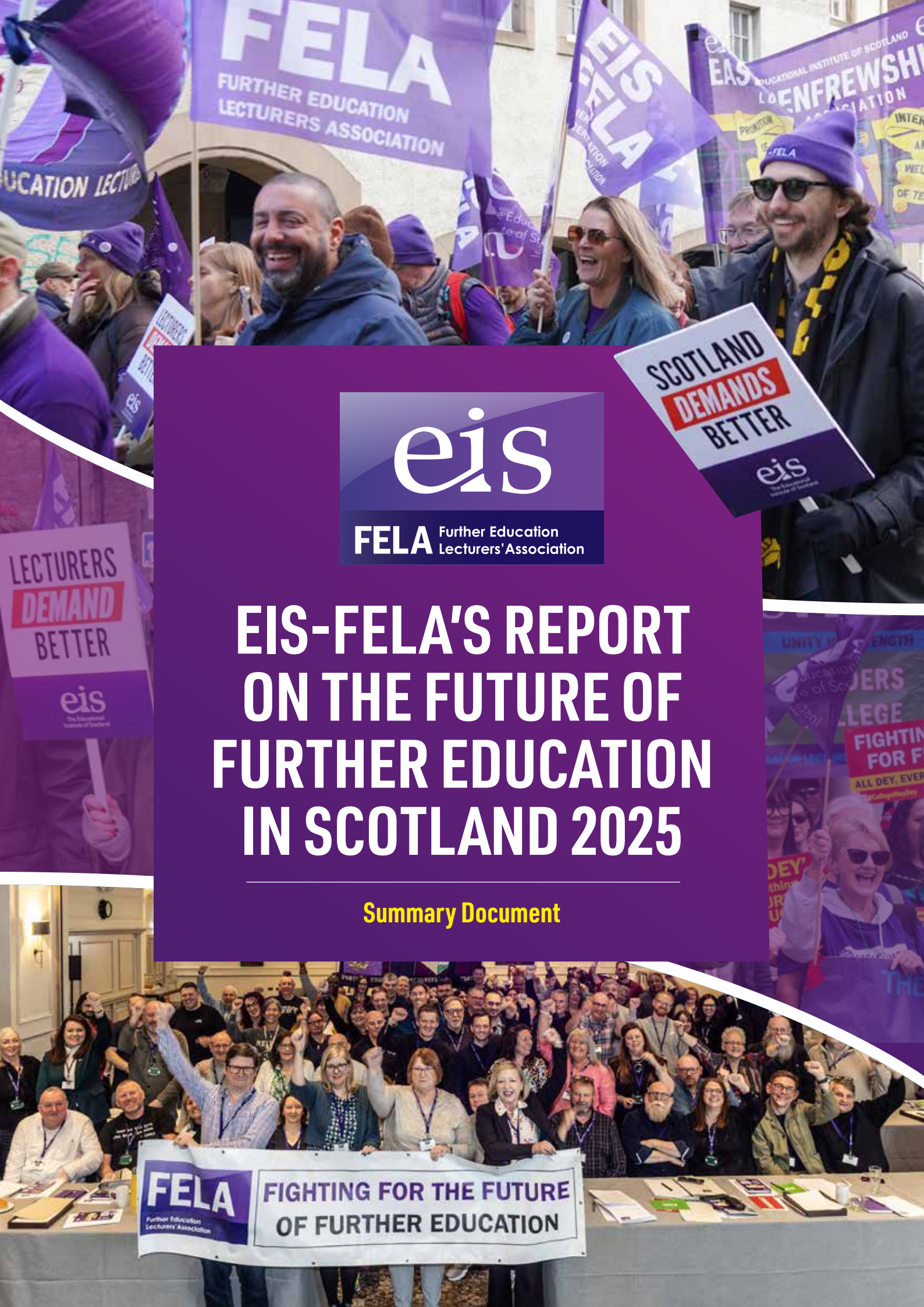




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FELA Further Education
Lecturers' Association

EIS-FELA'S REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF FURTHER EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND 2025

Summary Document

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**FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE
OF FURTHER EDUCATION**

EIS-FELA'S REPORT ON SCOTLAND'S FURTHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA) envisions a Further Education (FE) sector which is fully publicly funded, democratically governed, and deeply embedded within local communities. Colleges, EIS-FELA stresses, are not just institutions for skills training or career advancement — they are the social, cultural, and educational heart of their communities.

FE colleges should provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds to grow, learn, and participate meaningfully in society. They must help build economic resilience, promote social mobility, and support lifelong learning. This means delivering high-quality, inclusive education which equips individuals with skills for work and life while nurturing critical thinking, civic engagement, and personal development.

To achieve this, colleges must be safe, stable, and supportive places — with smaller class sizes, well-resourced lecturers, and curricula that reflect Scotland's diverse population. Governance should be transparent and accountable, ensuring that leadership serves students, staff, and communities rather than private interests. EIS-FELA argues that a well-funded, community-anchored college sector is essential for fairness in education, fairness in work, and fairness in society.

THE STATE OF SCOTLAND'S FE SECTOR: A SYSTEM IN CRISIS

According to EIS-FELA, Scotland's FE sector faces a deep financial, structural, and governance crisis. After years of underfunding, real-terms cuts, and increasing marketisation, colleges are struggling to fulfil their public mission.

According to the SFC and Audit Scotland, by 2027–28, most colleges are expected to be unsustainable. Staff numbers have already declined by 7%, while student enrolment has dropped by 12%.

These cuts have forced colleges to narrow their course offerings and close campuses, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas. Access, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), Additional Support Needs (ASN), and community learning programmes have been disproportionately affected — limiting opportunities for those most in need of education and support.

EIS-FELA warns that this erosion of provision threatens to undermine FE's civic and social role, weakening its ability to tackle inequality, promote inclusion, and strengthen democratic participation.

MARKETISATION AND PRIVATISATION

The report is sharply critical of the “marketisation” of FE — the growing trend of treating education as a commercial product rather than recognising its intrinsic value. Increasingly, policy has focused on meeting “employers' needs” rather than students' aspirations or community wellbeing.

This market approach encourages competition between colleges, privatisation of services, and outsourcing of teaching and support roles. Millions of pounds in public funds now flow into private contracts, subsidiaries, and commercial ventures, often with limited transparency or accountability.

Examples cited by EIS-FELA include:

- Ayrshire College estimating a deficit of £4.625million for 2024-27, whilst the college paid over £4.7million to “C3 Investments in Ayrshire College Education Ltd” in 2024-25, the principal activity of which is for “the financing, operation and maintenance of a college on a single site campus under a Scottish Futures Trust Non Profit Distributing (NPD) program for the benefit of The Board of Management of Ayrshire College.”
- City of Glasgow College, which awarded 31 private training contracts and operates a commercial arm whose finances are not transparent.
- Fife College, which lost the national prison education contract to a private provider offering lower terms and weaker pensions.

The union argues that these practices divert public money away from teaching and undermine fair work and quality of education.

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY FAILURES

EIS-FELA's analysis highlights weak governance structures and a lack of democratic accountability within the FE system. Power is often concentrated among senior management and boards, while staff and students have limited influence over decision-making.

Although reforms have introduced trade union representation on college boards, EIS-FELA maintains that decision-making remains opaque, financial oversight inconsistent, and public scrutiny weak. The union calls for Principals' pay to be brought under public sector pay controls, mandatory training for board members to be 'critical friends', and full transparency over financial dealings and outsourcing contracts.

EIS-FELA also warns that the proposed Tertiary Education (Funding and Governance) Bill could make things worse by centralising powers within the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), without sanctions or addressing the underlying problems of inequity and accountability.

FAIR WORK, STAFF CONDITIONS, AND NATIONAL BARGAINING

EIS-FELA acknowledges that the national bargaining system has delivered significant progress in pay harmonisation and working conditions across the FE sector. However, it warns that these gains are being undermined by outsourcing, casualisation, and the replacement of qualified lecturers with lower-paid, insecure staff.

The union stresses that “investment in staff is investment in students.” Maintaining fair work principles and professional autonomy is vital for quality education. A sustainable FE workforce requires secure employment for qualified lecturers, professional career pathways, and protection from casualisation.

SOCIAL AND CIVIC ROLE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Beyond skills delivery, the EIS-FELA report reaffirms FE's broader social mission. Colleges are vital for promoting inclusion, democratic literacy, and community resilience. They help combat alienation, misinformation, and extremism by creating spaces for dialogue, critical thinking, and civic participation.

Courses like ESOL, community education, and ASN support help people build confidence, integrate into society, and access further opportunities. When such programmes are cut, the consequences reach far beyond the classroom — affecting local economies, social cohesion, and Scotland's democratic culture.

EIS-FELA insists that education must not be reduced to a “just-in-time” delivery model dictated by short-term labour market needs. Instead, FE should remain a transformative public service which empowers individuals and communities for the long term.

A NEW DIRECTION: EIS-FELA'S PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

EIS-FELA outlines a comprehensive set of proposals to restore and strengthen the FE sector's public purpose.

1. Invest in education, not marketisation

Restore real-terms funding and protect budgets for teaching, ASN, and ESOL. Reject reliance on commercial or defence contracts, ensuring that education serves the public interest.

2. Reform governance and strengthen democracy

Bring college leadership under public pay controls, mandate trade union representation at all levels including on the SFC Board, and require full transparency of accounts, including subsidiaries and outsourcing deals.

3. Protect the distinct role of FE

Colleges are the heart of their communities, providing opportunities for people of all backgrounds to grow, develop, and contribute meaningfully to society. Colleges' identity as separate from both universities and private training markets must be safeguarded. Oppose tuition fees, student debt, and "just-in-time" qualifications which undermine educational breadth.

4. Ensure fair funding through progressive taxation

Finance education through fair taxation rather than shifting costs to students or staff. Explore wealth taxes to secure sustainable public investment.

5. Support a sustainable and valued workforce

Guarantee secure employment for lecturers, end casualisation, and uphold professional autonomy and academic freedom.

6. Promote inclusion, social cohesion, and lifelong learning

Invest in inclusive education that tackles alienation and promotes social wellbeing. Expand ESOL, adult learning, and citizenship education as cornerstones of a cohesive society.

CONCLUSION: RECLAIMING FE AS A PUBLIC GOOD

The EIS-FELA warns that Scotland's Further Education system is at a tipping point. Years of underfunding, market-driven reforms, and weak governance have pushed the sector to the brink of crisis. Without urgent action, FE risks becoming a fragmented, privatised system focused on short-term economic goals rather than lifelong learning, inclusion, and community benefit.

Reversing this trend will require bold political will and sustained investment. The union calls for a renewed commitment to education as a public good — not a commodity to be bought and sold.

By rebuilding FE as a democratically governed, community-anchored, and publicly funded system, Scotland can ensure fair access to learning, fair work for staff, and a fair future for all.

