

Dear First Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf of the EIS-Further Education Lecturers Association (EIS-FELA), who represent Scotland's college lecturer workforce and are currently engaged in national strike action for fair pay and job security. Audit Scotland recently published a report, on the same day that national EIS-FELA strike action began, that cited a real terms cut of 8.5% in college funding since 2021. This reduction seriously compounds the impact of the previous years of chronic underfunding, leaving the Further Education sector facing a deepening crisis. This crisis can no longer be ignored by the Scottish Government and its share of the responsibility can no longer be ignored or denied.

This crisis is captured crystal clearly in the current pay offer to Scotland's lecturers: less than £4000 per lecturer over two years, and by College Employers Scotland's own calculations, this would be funded with the loss of over 400 jobs.

This is totally unacceptable to EIS-FELA and to the EIS as a whole.

Compulsory redundancies are already a reality in Scotland's college sector, leading to sustained strike action at both City of Glasgow and Edinburgh Colleges. In both cases, the Principals of these institutions have cited a funded pay award not yet having been made as a reason for their actions.

As you will no doubt be aware, colleges are public sector institutions and the Scottish Government is responsible, to the Scottish Parliament, for their governance and operation. To continue to allow the abandonment of the Scottish Government's own 'no public sector redundancy' policy in the Further Education sector is nothing short of a betrayal of hard-working staff in colleges throughout the country and sets a concerning precedent for the rest of Scotland's public sector.

We believe it imperative that you as First Minister now intervene to ensure that public sector jobs are fully protected within the FE sector and that lecturers (and support staff colleagues) receive a satisfactory pay award- one that is now more than a year late. More than a year overdue in the midst of the worst cost of living crisis in 70 years.

Looking ahead to potential reform of the Further Education sector, aside from the serious blunder by James Withers in excluding the representative voice of education professionals from the review that he was commissioned to undertake by the Scottish Government- now a non-starter given the complete circumvention of basic Fair Work principles- any reform will require significant buy-in and goodwill from the lecturing workforce, the membership of EIS-FELA.

That goodwill will be difficult to achieve without action which demonstrates unequivocal commitment by the Scottish Government to Fair Work on job security, fair pay and a change to the so-far laissez-faire approach to the abandonment of the Scottish Government's own policy against public sector compulsory redundancies.

All of this requires definitive intervention, from the Scottish Government, without delay.

The lecturing workforce within the Further Education sector, alongside the students and communities that colleges serve, deserve so much better than the undervaluing and disrespect with which they are being treated now. The EIS, therefore, requests that you meet urgently with us with a view to addressing the crises of funding and governance that are blighting Scotland's colleges.

Yours sincerely,

Andrea Bradley

General Secretary, the Educational Institute of Scotland