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FELA Further Education Lecturers' Association

FOLLOW THE MONEY: EIS-FELA'S REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF FURTHER EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND


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EIS-FELA VISION OF FURTHER EDUCATION

We envisage a Further Education sector that is fully publicly funded, sustainably managed, and deeply embedded at local level.

Colleges are not just places of learning they are the heart of their communities, providing opportunities for people of all backgrounds to grow, develop, and contribute meaningfully to society.

Colleges must serve their communities, fostering economic resilience, social mobility, and lifelong learning.

Colleges must offer high-quality education and training that equips individuals with the skills needed for work, life, and to participate in and give back to their communities.

Colleges should be places of safety and stability, where smaller class sizes, well-supported lecturers, and a broad, inclusive curriculum ensure that every learner is valued, regardless of where they live and whether they pursue university, employment, or other paths in the future.

Governance should be democratic and transparent, with leadership accountable to staff and students, industry collaboration is important, but education must remain independent of private interests.

A well-funded, community-anchored college sector ensures fair access to education, fair work for staff, and a commitment to a fair future for all.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report from EIS-FELA offers a powerful critique of the direction of Scotland's Further Education (FE) sector. Warning of deep structural, financial, and governance issues rooted in sustained underfunding and a stealthy shift in the role of FE colleges to being focused on meeting the needs of business, as opposed to students and local communities, and the market implications of such a move. The report calls for a decisive shift toward democratic governance, fair public investment, and education as a public good.

KEY ISSUES

FUNDING CRISIS: FE has endured a 20% real-terms funding cut (2021–26), with most colleges projected to run deficits by 2027–28. Staff numbers have fallen by 7%, student enrolment by 12%, and provision has been drastically reduced and narrowed.

MARKETISATION & INEQUALITY: Education policy increasingly prioritises the employers' prerogative, driving privatisation, outsourcing, and competition which deepens inequities and erodes the intrinsic value of education. In other words, colleges are increasingly focused on prioritising employers' needs above all else.

CUTS & CONSEQUENCES: Colleges are closing campuses, eliminating Access, ASN, and community courses, and cutting staff – potentially disproportionately harming vulnerable learners and rural communities.

PRIVATISATION & OUTSOURCING: Millions of pounds of public funds flow out of college bank accounts into commercial contracts, outsourcing, to subsidiary companies of colleges and private training providers with limited transparency, while senior staff pay increases and frontline teaching posts disappear.

GOVERNANCE FAILURES: Weak scrutiny, concentrated power among senior management, and opaque decision-making highlight a governance system lacking accountability.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS: While national bargaining has improved pay bargaining and harmonisation, casualisation and outsourcing continue to undermine Fair Work principles.

Beyond skills delivery, FE is crucial for social cohesion, inclusion, and democratic literacy, helping counter misinformation, inequality, and alienation. Cuts to ESOL, ASN, and community learning jeopardise these civic functions. The proposed Tertiary Education (Funding and Governance) Bill risks further centralising power in the Scottish Funding Council without resolving systemic inequities. EIS-FELA urges a new strategic direction for Scotland's FE sector. Instead of prioritising financial efficiencies, it must be grounded in wellbeing, human rights, and environmental justice rather than market performance.

EIS-FELA PROPOSALS

INVEST IN EDUCATION, NOT MARKETISATION: Restore real-terms funding and ring-fence resources for teaching, ASN and ESOL, without relying on commercial or defence income streams.

GOVERNANCE REFORM: Bring senior management and Principals under public pay controls, strengthen transparency, and ensure trade union representation at various levels of governance, including on the SFC Board.

PROTECT FE'S IDENTITY & REMIT: Maintain FE's distinct role within the tertiary landscape; oppose privatisation and outsourcing; oppose 'just in time' qualifications as the norm rather than as an additionality.

FAIR FUNDING: Finance education through fair taxation, not student debt, tuition fees or defence spending.

SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE & VALUED WORKFORCE: Academic freedom and professional autonomy, no casualisation of employment, secure employment for qualified lecturers with a clear career pathway.

SOCIAL COHESION: Support inclusive education which tackles alienation and promotes critical thinking.


FURTHER
LECTURERS

INTRODUCTION

EIS-FELA is particularly concerned about the overt neoliberal approach being taken towards further education in Scotland, all under the guise of funding cuts and the employers' prerogative of ensuring society's skills meet their current needs.

From the Cumberford-Little report published in 2020[1] to the Withers report published in 2023,[2] the trajectory (begun decades ago and exacerbated by the 2008 financial crash and regionalisation) is that education for education's sake is an outdated concept in Scotland. It is very difficult to find any report or political perspective arguing that employers' needs should be only one aspect of a comprehensive and inclusive education system.

Education, skills and training is now comprised of a cluttered field of self-proclaimed sector leaders, whereby the intrinsic value of education is overlooked and, instead, there are numerous partnerships, collaborations, and innovations showcased. Despite all these apparently 'outstanding' initiatives and individuals, EIS-FELA notes the rhetoric remains that employers' needs are not being met.

This prolonged, cascading series of interconnected crises within the sector lead to multiple costly reviews with increasing calls for public cash injections. All the while, the reality on the ground is increasing privatisation, outsourcing, and money spent in the sector with little to no scrutiny or accountability. Indeed, the rhetoric and instructions from the Scottish Government and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is to increase 'commercial activity' across Scotland's colleges in a bid to 'build financial resilience', in keeping with the Scottish Government's public sector reform agenda.[3]

Nonetheless, whilst there are undoubtedly challenges within the sector, staff deliver on an impressive scale. Students consistently commend their lecturers and the teaching and support that they receive in college, most recently noted in the SFC student satisfaction survey which saw a 95% satisfaction rate in FE.[4] Research by the Fraser of Allender Institute highlighted that the Scottish economy is £52 billion better off over the 40-year working life of college graduates,[5] therefore, the sector's contribution is impressive which is why we strive to maintain, and improve it – not reform it beyond recognition.

The Colleges Scotland report 'A Budget to Save Scotland's Colleges: Investing in Skills, Communities and Opportunities for All in 2026/27' describes colleges as sitting at a fork in the road. EIS-FELA believes the path forward must prioritise funding and governance that sustains the core social mission of further education: widening access, tackling poverty and social exclusion, supporting individual and community development, and contributing to a fairer and more just society. Scotland's colleges can continue to be a force for good – but they must remain rooted within their local communities, primarily serving the learners and local people who benefit most from accessible education and training.

EIS-FELA agree with Colleges Scotland's budget submission in so far as it calls for more investment in colleges and highlights ways in which they have been under-funded and de-funded. In our report, EIS-FELA will highlight the issues on the ground for staff, students and communities, as Scotland's colleges "consolidat(e) parts of the curriculum, reduc(e) student numbers, reduc(e) staff headcount, clos(e) buildings… find efficiencies, reduc(e) community opportunities to use college spaces, and leverag(e) private sector investment."[6] EIS-FELA go further, however, in highlighting how that very model has allowed a problematic layer to form, with private providers benefiting from the networking opportunities within the sector which creates an illusion of rejuvenation.

For educators and trade unionists we believe this is an important moment whereby the increasingly hegemonic market-driven model of education is exposed as a fallacy, because education should not be for profit, individual or commercial gain, but for the good of society and therefore should be adequately funded and governed by democratic means. In that vein, we would agree again with Colleges Scotland, that "the Scottish Government can, however, choose to make a clear commitment in the 2026/27 Budget to halt the ongoing decline in real-term investment, and to begin a recovery programme for colleges with above inflation investment in both resource and capital budgets. Increased investment in colleges will help the Scottish Government deliver on its four outlined priorities: eradicating child poverty; growing the economy; tackling the climate emergency; and delivering high quality and sustainable public services."[7]

The Jimmy Reid Foundation concluded in their 2024 report on Further Education in Scotland[8] that "the sector must recognise the need for and the benefits to be gained from collegiate working. Again, this will require a culture shift in the day-to-day operations of colleges. The employee voice provides many valuable messages; these voices must be heard and used in developing an entirely new culture in FE." It is in that spirit that EIS-FELA shares this report via members' findings on the ground, through Freedom of Information requests, searching college and company accounts and contracts, and piecing information together. Any factual inaccuracies are entirely the fault of the author, but, we hope, the thrust of the report will help focus minds on the need for more public funding and a consequent decrease in commercial activity, outsourcing and privatisation. We recognise this is not the hegemonic narrative of Scotland in 2025. However, EIS-FELA believes the clamour for public funds will subside only to be replaced by one for scrutiny, accountability, governance and sanctions otherwise. We have highlighted a snapshot of issues and examples, but these are not exhaustive. We have used up to date information where possible, whilst noting 2024-25 accounts are not yet published.

EIS-FELA rep: *"Lecturers often come into the College sector to pass on industry skills. But before long you see beyond the impact on individuals; you see the community impact and wider social impact of colleges too. It's easy to fall in love with the college sector for the work it does but we are well beyond the time for warm words. Now really is the moment for the government to invest and act."*


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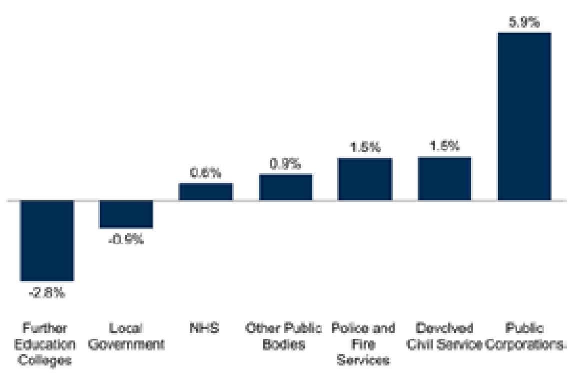
Funding: real terms

A key goal of regionalisation of Scotland's colleges was stated to create "colleges of scale" to secure "coherent, relevant provision on a sustainable basis, including access-level and advanced and specialist provision."[9] (The EIS stated at the time that mergers were being driven for cost cutting reasons).[10] However, a decade later, the report, 'Financial Sustainabilty of Colleges in Scotland 2020-21 to 2025-26',[11] published by the SFC in October 2025 is bleak. In fact, it states that most of Scotland's colleges are unsustainable. The report highlights how years of real-terms cash cuts for the sector are beginning to seriously bite with up to 18 colleges facing net cash outflows by 2027-28 i.e. deficits.

According to SFC's 2023-24 College Statistics,[12] since 2014/15 FTE places have decreased by 11%, with a sharper decrease in more recent years. Audit Scotland's report, Scotland's Colleges 2025,[13] states "College enrolments, student headcount and FTE student numbers all decreased in 2023/24; 30,762 fewer students attended college in 2023/24 than in 2022/23, a decrease of 12.4%." Whilst there may be a variety of reasons for this, including that student numbers in universities have increased, EIS-FELA believe that the period of regionalisation has rationalised (reduced) the student numbers in colleges, underpinned by a more competitive funding environment across further education in Scotland.

The SFC's 2023-24 College Staffing Statistics[14] also show lecturers' numbers have decreased by 7.7% since 2014-15, dropping sharply 7.6% in the last year. Whilst all colleges have reduced their headcount, this has been acutely felt across UHI colleges with three different mergers between 2021 and 2024. There is also a constant drain of experience with those leaving through VS, instead of providing CPD or upskilling to the existing workforce, whilst the claim from employers is that colleges are not flexible enough to their needs.[15] We know that FE workforce was down 7% across 2023/24 and based on current forecasts from the SFC, staff reductions of 667 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) are projected over the period from 2024-25 to 2027-28, equating to the potential removal of 6.6% of FTE staff employed in the sector. A reduction in headcount has recently been announced at Dundee & Angus, Edinburgh and Forth Valley Colleges. Staff reductions are expected to be achieved through a combination of vacancy management, voluntary severance schemes and compulsory redundancy.[16]



Source: Public Sector Employment in Scotland, Quarter 2 2025

Further education colleges saw the largest reduction in headcount across the public sector between June 2024 and June 2025, whilst most other areas of the public sector increased headcount.[17]

According to Audit Scotland's report, Scotland's Colleges 2025[18], there has been a 20% real-terms reduction in funding for colleges between 2021/22 and 2025/26. Two targeted funding packages for colleges in 2023/24 were also withdrawn. A 2024 Audit Scotland report[19] showed the Scottish Government reduced funding to colleges by £32.7m in 2024-25 alone. EIS-FELA notes another 0.33% cut for the 2025-26 FE budget in real terms.[20]

However, EIS-FELA also note a discrepancy between the SFC's 2025 report on financial sustainability and the Audit Scotland's 2025 report. Although published within days of each other, the SFC report states at page 4 "the sector reported an adjusted operating deficit of £1.4m in 2023-24. This represents an improvement against the 2022-23 result (£14.7m deficit) due to reductions in staff costs reflecting voluntary severance activity" whilst the Audit Scotland report states at page 3 "the sector reported a small surplus of £0.4m in 2023/24, although there was significant variation between colleges. While the surplus is an improvement on the £14.5m deficit reported in 2022/23, the finances of some colleges remain challenging and further deficits are anticipated." This is important because between the changing figures lies £2m as well as a bigger question on financial scrutiny.

Funding: credits model and allocations

Flaws within funding allocations means each further and higher education institution is being publicly funded almost regardless of what is delivered, or mode of delivery. EIS-FELA believes that fundable activity should reflect the nature of teaching with the preferred mode of delivery being lecturer-led and the cost of that delivery should be accurately adopted by the Scottish Government; not frozen, at best, and drastically cut in real-terms, at worst. Capping student numbers or activities rations education.

The limited credit environment has meant that courses which are the most financially viable are selected. This can lead to a lack of opportunities for students who wish to study less popular or more resource intensive courses which may no longer be considered financially viable. This pressure to run courses on financial grounds can lead to a disjointed curriculum with a lack of follow-on courses, particularly for those entering at level 4, to move on to.

EIS-FELA members in multiple colleges have reported the reduction of credits for teaching has meant, overall, an increase in self-study options, squeezing one hour's teaching time into less than 60 minutes and 'utilising' the cumulative additional minutes to fit more courses on lecturers' timetables. This intensification of workload circumvents the nationally agreed maximum teaching commitment and leads to stress amongst staff and students who are robbed of teaching time. There are a variety of ways colleges are attempting to utilise the maximum global number of teaching hours available within lecturers' nationally agreed terms and conditions to cover cuts and gaps created by redundancies. A report from EIS-FELA's City of Glasgow College branch in 2024 highlights the specific impacts this has on staff and students.[21]

The most recent announcement on the recalculated allocation of SFC funding credits across Scotland's colleges has led to what some College Principals are describing as a "game of winners and losers" which belies a market-driven mentality. Indeed, the language of the SFC is all about finance – "purchase power", "pricing", "high price activity" and "premiums" – with very little on education.

The SFC have told EIS-FELA the funding model is an 'evolution' of the past few years, seeking to redistribute (limited, decreased) funds amongst colleges that have been doing 'higher priced' activities away from colleges that have been claiming for higher priced work but not undertaking it.

Where all colleges used to receive a credits threshold and single funding with credit price associated, that model came from an allocation based on credits based across five price groups i.e. core funding with additional premium to cover pay harmonisation, rurality, access, areas of multiple deprivation etc. Those premia were then subsumed into core allocation, but the model was not updated until this year when changes were made by creating a price for each college based on their activity in high price areas, outlining that there was still a premium element and an additional one. This in effect means that the additional money which was provided to enable smaller classes and specialist equipment for ASN classes can be used for other courses and bigger ASN classes including those for students with complex needs. The SFC have also restricted the maximum credits which can be claimed for a course. In New College Lanarkshire this has resulted in ASN classes being three days in one semester and two in the second semester.

The SFC monitors each year the pattern of delivery but cannot disclose the commercial data belying how the colleges are using their "purchasing power" within this credit system. Whilst EIS-FELA agree that Colleges should not be paid for work not carried out, including in sectors they do not operate, and that the money should be distributed fairly, there requires to be a new funding mechanism which doesn't put competition at the core.

> *"The credit volume model doesn't really speak to the effort that people go to; the kind of journey people have. It's just about bums on seats. It's a kind of numbers game but it also means that some students are not being taught who want to be – because their course is too 'high price'."*
> - EIS FELA Rep

The current funding model has resulted in the phrase "over trading" being used by management to actively discourage colleges from delivering qualifications / courses to local communities as the college is not receiving credits for this, resulting in local learning needs not being met.

> *"I work with students who are the most vulnerable with ASNs. They have high expectations. We are going in every day with students asking if they will still have a place here next year. Our students don't know elsewhere, some couldn't go to Stirling or Falkirk. We need politicians to be*

speaking to us. We need more courses - I can only offer my current students one year but they deserve more. This is heart breaking. Students are being penalised because we aren't being funded for the places that we could offer - we aren't short on students."
- EIS-FELA branch secretary at Forth Valley College

EIS-FELA believe that all core business should be publicly funded to a level which gives quality education without relying on commercialisation to prop up the sector. If there are students to be taught, they should be funded. The block grant should be paid based foremost on the statutory provision which is required by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 and 2005 i.e. "preparation for an SQA-accredited (or English, Welsh or Norther Irish equivalent) or vocational qualification, providing for those with ASNs, preparing a person for access to higher education, ESOL provision, social, cultural and recreative activities and physical education and training, and the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas."

EIS-FELA also highlight section 20 of the 2005 Act which sets out what the Scottish Funding Council should have regard to when funding a fundable body i.e. skills needs, social and cultural activities, the economy of Scotland and the desirability of achieving sustainable development with the educational and support needs of students and prospective students being accounted for.

First and foremost, colleges' statutory duties are based on educating people and not, as EIS-FELA believe some would prefer, training centres for employers' whims. Whilst it may be useful to align some courses with the economic needs of Scotland's growth areas, and areas of need, this should not undermine funding for the statutory duties. If there's a local or regional need i.e. more housing to be built locally, or a shortage of healthcare workers, or more lab technicians required across the country or skills transition then these areas should receive additional funding which follows the student in order to encourage people to study in these areas, wherever they live. EIS-FELA believe funding should continue to follow the student in terms of support offered around alleviating poverty, digital inclusion and health needs. Funding also requires to be multi-year with projections linked to the economic, social and cultural needs of the country as well as balancing academic freedoms and student choice which isn't based on postcode lottery.

Consequences: redundancies, cuts and campus closures

Colleges have reacted to the cuts to public funding so far by use of VS (voluntary severance) schemes and attempted compulsory redundancies. This year, some colleges are submitting deficit budgets, proposing campus closures, cutting staff through more VS schemes and by reducing core FE provision whilst we know further measures are on the horizon.

- Fife College has had funding reduced by £342,420; representing a 0.9% decrease compared to the previous year and has therefore announced a **£2.918m** in staff savings and **£1.419m** in non-staff savings as part of a wider cost-cutting initiative through VS, restructuring of departments, and a reduction in staffing levels in areas deemed 'overstaffed', including Core Skills. Courses are being reduced to 12 credits where possible and Group awards have been replaced with unit accreditation in some cases.

- Dundee & Angus College had a VS scheme open early 2025 but are now proposing **£2.5m** worth of cuts including reduction or removal of School-College Partnership (SCP) courses, National Qualifications (Highers and National 5), January-start programmes, specific courses in Art & Design, Business, Hair & Beauty, Health & Social Care, Hospitality, Performing Arts, and Sports & Fitness, discontinuation of Project SEARCH, closure of the Saltire Centre and Helping Hands Nursery, and removal of up to 35FTE staff.[22] The college is seeking private sector investment estimated at **£265m** for campus redevelopment,[23] due, in part, to RAAC issues, with **£5m** coming from UK Government 'levelling up' monies.[24] This comes after the College cuts last year of Level 1 makeup and artistry, Level 3 makeup and artistry, Level 3 Beauty, Level 3 hairdressing, Level 4 Introduction to Social Sciences, NPA painting and decorating, HNC networking, HND networking, HNC healthcare practices, HNC Social services, Aspire for access, Level 4 vocational for DPG 18. The college is predicting over **£6m** deficit in each of the following two years.

- Whilst UHI is a fundable body, it is also a regional strategic body which allocates funding to partner colleges for FE work. This creates potential for a conflict of interest in terms of monies retained by UHI for its coordination of

FE provision, known as the 'top-slice'. UHI is currently undertaking a 'transformation' process which proposes a third, and more radical, college merger within five years across UHI partner colleges. EIS-FELA's position on the merger – which is one of takeover by UHI as a university – is outlined in detail in EIS-FELA briefings.[25] EIS-FELA is opposed to any shrinking of FE provision, a move away from nationally bargained terms and conditions, and privatisation in the sector.

- At Borders College, a course for visually impaired learners was cut. This course had won awards, and the average age of the learner was 76 – tackling social isolation and loneliness for members of the local community whilst a VS scheme has been open since March 2024 (and will remain open until 31st July 2026) with eight staff taking VS to date.

- Around 30 HNC Courses have been cut at South Lanarkshire College with a VS scheme and restructure resulting in the loss of at least 35 staff. In 20/21 the college had 838 full time HE students, the following year lost around 300 HE FT places and the same the year after. One lecturer said, *"the college is saying this is due to the changing learners that are coming through, and this is part of it, however there is a push on courses making financial sense to run. There are worries within the branch that this overlooks the impact this has on students who are unable to study at a higher level without travelling to do so, and we are losing a portfolio of courses that used to be really broad, and is now much narrower. It limits learners career options, particularly for those who are unable to travel a distance to study."*

- Forth Valley College are facing possible redundancies and closure of the Alloa campus. The college is in talks with 'external stakeholders' in an attempt to financially shore up the campus. Relying on other public sector organisations and private or third sector companies is not a sustainable solution.

- At Glasgow Kelvin College, cuts in 2023/24 includes courses facilitating older adults returning to education or students who didn't receive a full package to attend a FT course. School groups had their offer reduced from eight to five. There are overall less places for students with no access for Adult ASN learners.

- At Dumfries & Galloway College the Full-Time Access level (L4) courses in most curriculum areas have been cut. These courses usually have no formal entry requirements therefore cutting these courses completely cuts off pathways for many. Short Access courses are offered, but these do not have a particular curriculum area focus and places are very limited. Full time L4 courses often had lower rates of completion and success, due to a number of issues related to the student cohort, and as such were often deemed inefficient, but cutting such important Access courses should not be predicated simply on financial-based Performance Indicators because the economic, social and cultural impact on society will be felt elsewhere.

- In New College Lanarkshire, Schools Partnership courses which were normally staffed by Construction Lecturers were instead allocated to Tiger's UK, a private Training Agency. Schools Partnership working in the sector is considered a commercial contract in colleges and is often used to fill in gaps in school staffing rather than a properly managed opportunity for pupils to transition from schools to college and to be aware of the opportunities Further Education provides. School partnerships have to be well managed in terms of education, health and safety, and child protection to ensure an effective transition scheme.

- UHI Shetland[26] has had several VS schemes since merger in 2021, reducing staff by close to 30% and closing several learning centres. ESOL provision has been stopped for face to face teaching. The only ESOL option now is online provision with other colleges, which has resulted in greater marginalisation of ethnic minorities. Local industries such as hospitality, social care work, NHS workers, fish processing and aquaculture have been impacted because of this limited and not local ESOL provision. The EIS-FELA branch secretary at UHI Shetland said "For fish processing we are no longer able to provide bespoke ESOL courses – this has been done in the past. We have been told by those who work in hospitality and social care the lack of local ESOL provision has meant their workers have not been able to improve their English and this makes it more difficult for them and the customers, and more difficult to settle in because they are having less social contact with folk outwith work." A report from the Shetland Partnership in April 2025 notes that people have faced racial discrimination within Shetland.[27] Three other HNCs, all courses in the International Certification of Digital Literacy, 1 NC course and N5 Maths (core to many pathways) have also been cut. ASN provision has reduced in relation to Support for Learning as the only lecturer involved left in 2024. The responsibility for completion of Personal Learning Support Plans has been given to Guidance support staff, but they did not have the relevant skills, experience or understanding of ASN students to provide the required support. Academic support for students with identified ASN has reduced drastically resulting in students either simply not getting the support required or lecturing staff, on an ad hoc basis, providing what support they can to students. This has increased the workload for lecturing staff. Whilst ASN class provision itself has not reduced in the past two years, this is solely due to the council now paying the college £40,000 per annum for the classes provided to the council's Social Care Adult services. If the council reduces / stops paying this money the classes will reduce / stop. ICT core skills provision has been reduced and SVQ Management awards and Contemporary Textiles degree no longer offered. Support for Learning has seen the ending of essay writing support for such courses as PGDE due to reductions in lecturing staff.

- ASL has been cut dramatically over the years. In part, this is due to the way in which FE funding is calculated, but also what courses entail for the cost. Although most colleges have reported no decrease (sometimes an increase) in the number of ASN courses offered, EIS-FELA posits that the number of courses offered under price group five funding are now usually employability based only and there have been an increase in class sizes, in some cases doubling up of classes that previously had lower numbers, which is not beneficial for the students. These courses do not take account of the needs for personal and social skills development to ensure employment can be sustained, that vulnerable adults obtain fair work opportunities or that they are safe within their communities. There is also duplication of learning opportunities with the same or similar courses being offered by different providers and very few Supported Employment opportunities that they can access when they leave further education. EIS-FELA reps highlight that, whilst Support for Learning Lecturers were previously on NJNC terms and conditions, these roles have been eroded. It appears that very few colleges now have Support for Learning lecturers left in post and some outsourced to private provision. City of Glasgow College is outsourced and there are other aspects outsourced which Ayrshire and Dumfries & Galloway college, at least, have stated. We believe potentially only one college has stated they require a lecturer teaching ASN classes, or classes with +50% of students with ASNs, to hold a Diploma in Special Education (or equivalent).

Case Study: *In 2023- 24 City of Glasgow College Learning Support Lecturers faced redundancy or doing the same job but as a Learning Support Advisor on support staff terms and conditions. This was, in effect, the same job but for lesser pay, preparation time and annual leave. The same college also outsourced part of their ASL provision to private companies which now assess students' needs instead of in-house provision. Cuts to the learning support provision means subject lecturers are being asked to provide specialist support to students with complex learning support needs such as class materials translated into braille, with no specialist training provided. In addition, high numbers of ASN students mean increased pressure on learning support provision within the college, with more duties assigned to subject lecturers and academic advisors.*

- At Ayrshire college, there are 10 Employment Engagement Officers, who work with young people with social and emotional difficulties, and Community Learning Facilitators. Charities such as Better Lives offer training, which may be diverting people from undertaking potential college courses, yet are based within a college campus building.

- UHI Argyll have cut the Communications evening class meaning students who require the equivalent SCQF for their pathway are enrolling in Higher English without being equipped to do so. This leads to drop-out rates and low morale for students. A few years ago UHI Argyll reduced campus provision and cut construction courses, including in Rothesay where there was a successful construction course for women only. Most students were Syrian refugees. Art courses were also cut with the provision going to a private organisation instead. The college no longer offer any ASN courses, after being cut in 2023-24, on the premise of no applicants. It is difficult to understand why that would be the case unless the courses were not sufficiently marketed when the majority of other colleges appear to have kept a relatively steady number of courses and applicants, despite the increase cost of “price group five” per the SFC’s calculations, and colleges such as Ayrshire have seen an increase in the numbers of courses, and participants.[28]

Case Study: *In City of Glasgow College’s Supported Education department, a very successful outdoor education gardening project was started with ASN students in 2005. The project was ended by management a month after COP26, despite promoting the project as a vision of sustainability. A lecturer from the course said “the original project in the Gorbals involved reclaiming disused flower beds, and growing veg. We maintained that and then at the same time, we had an allotment space in Oatlands. After that we helped set up the community gardens at Townhead Village Hall (we then passed that over to the local community). Then, when we moved into the campus on Cathedral Street, we maintained four spaces, on the fourth floor, seventh floor, first floor and the landscaping on the second floor, as well as an allotment space at Riverside. On the seventh floor we maintained a heritage fruit orchard which included frog ponds. An NPA in Horticulture was delivered. The gardening work was done by a member of staff on a classroom assistant wage (although a contract for a “gardening adviser” had been promised but never materialised). Supported Ed also successfully received grant funding of over £40,000 for an industrial composter (which the classroom assistant was trained to run in order to train students). This member of staff was also trained in beekeeping. The industrial composter was turned off a month after COP26. Over the summer period, the entire project was ended after all the outgoing money was spent on it.”*

- City of Glasgow College has awarded a contract worth £720,000 to Clear Links Support Ltd, a company registered in Sheffield, for two years to cover Mentors (Mental Health, Autism); Proof Readers; Note Takers; Personal Assistance; Exam/Assessment Support; Mobility Support; Study Skills Support (ASD, ADD, ADHD); Scribes; Prompts.[29]

- Inverness College has adopted a 30 to 1 ratio whereby each class must have 30 students per lecturer, although most classrooms do not fit 20 students far less 30. Some lectures have been asked to teach to a group in one room while VCing to a group in a different room. There is also a move to increase the number of students in practical workrooms but there are health and safety concerns around this. By increasing the number of students required on courses to make them “viable” this creates the notion of scarcity in that there are not enough students to make the course worthwhile. In turn, this creates the conditions for ‘reform’ which we now see playing out via UHI’s Transformation agenda.

- At City of Glasgow College, HNC and HND Administration and IT courses have been cut over the past couple of years, with global teaching hours being reduced by 33% for each year group. Despite these cuts, the SQA continues to recommend the same notional 40 hours per unit, and no adjustments have been made to reflect the reduced delivery time. One lecturer said “as a result, I now have significantly less time to prepare, teach, and mark, while also being responsible for a greater number of units. This has led to increased workload and compressed teaching schedules. Students are struggling to complete the course within the available time, and we’ve seen a decline in performance indicators as a result. To support students, I often give up my preparation time or any available free time to help them keep up.” (The software development department had the NQ Software course cut completely in August 2024 which means losing a vital access route for students to articulate to HNC courses). In 2024 the HND Computer Science course was also cut. NC Social Science courses have been reduced in AY 25-26 despite NC Social Science being oversubscribed and there is adequate staffing so no viable reason to cut. For the 2023-24 financial year, City of Glasgow College reported an operating deficit of £0.8m although accounts also showed an underlying operating surplus of £130,000.

Case Study: *“Our Principal is pursuing a big commercial push which he says is the English model and includes links with external organisations. He is trying to link with mechanical engineering companies and health care – private care homes and nurseries.”*

There is much inter-college inconsistency and inequity, with some colleges allocating 36 hours of contact per credit at HN whilst others offering the same course based on only 30 hours per credit. Teaching hours per credit are not different by the SQA’s recommendation but colleges will typically offer fewer hours for an FE Credit. Further inequity between colleges can be evidenced where some Colleges offer HN students' Academic Guidance as contact with Lecturers (for example 1 hour per week), while other Colleges, delivering the same course do not offer any specific contact set aside for 'Guidance'.

Courses which have seen the biggest cuts across the country are Skills for Learning and Work, courses linked with social work and community development, and life skills courses. NQ classes have been cut including in Communications, which is mandatory for many pathways. It is often unclear if the college even attempts to recruit for the courses before telling lecturers there is no uptake.

EIS-FELA do not believe that the cuts generally make sense strategically in terms of growth areas, needs of society or the economy.

> **The software development department had the NQ Software course cut completely in August 2024 which means losing a vital access route for students to articulate to HNC courses**


FUND
FAIR PAY
PROTECT
JOBS

Follow the money: privatisation and outsourcing

The cuts to funding have also meant that the Scottish Government has encouraged colleges to grow alternative income streams through increased expansion in commercial and international activities. These were also the recommendations of the Cumberford-Little Report and the Withers Report. Commercial revenue streams often require substantial financial investment but generate a relatively low return, and in some cases have led to losses. There is very little cost-benefit analysis of these ventures. EIS-FELA questions whether there is adequate scrutiny over where some of the money is spent, via which mechanism, and for what return. Below, we have mapped some data gathered through college accounts and Freedom of Information responses which we believe highlight this point.

- Whilst Ayrshire College is estimating a deficit of £4.625m for 2024-27, the college paid over £4m to its special purpose vehicle (SPV), "C3 Investments in Ayrshire College Education Ltd" (ref31) 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." The 'operating costs and interest and other financial costs' outlined in Ayrshire College's accounts (ref32) mean the total annual cost of the PFI and NPD deals is more than £11m in 2023-24. Full transparency on the costs associated with NPD and PFI is required to ensure there is no maligning of staffing costs whilst money seems to vanish into these finance deals.

- The construction of City of Glasgow College Riverside and City Campuses were financed though the NPD model which has led to the college paying high amounts of annual interest and finance costs ranging between £13.3m in 2021 to £11.5m in 2024. This was through a period where the college reported an increasing financial deficit and moved to course cuts and closures, outsourcing learning support services and redundancies. During this time the annual accounts show that the college held high cash reserves of £14.9m in 2021-22, £10.5m in 2022-23 and £12.3m in 2023-24.[33] In the 2021-22 Auditors Report the significantly high cash position was noted as an area of concern and the college was advised to review its cash management controls and ensure funds are only drawn down when they are needed.[34]

- EIS-FELA would be concerned if monies earmarked for capital investment through the SFC's Capital Infrastructure Strategy went to any of the colleges still paying huge amounts of interest for the NPD contracts on their new build estate. Colleges have almost been incentivised to sell estate now as SFC's guidance enables them to retain the proceeds from sales under £1m and keep 70% of any surplus from selling assets over £1m).

- Many colleges are and have been tendering for 'Associate Trainers' which is a step further than recruiting teaching staff on instructor/assessor contracts (which precipitated the national dispute resulting in NJNC Circular 02/21). This calls into question whether staff are being employed via an agency or directly on a contract for services.[35] West College Scotland have tendered for six contracts worth £360,000 for Associate Trainers over the same period. City of Glasgow College awarded 31 contracts to private providers to supply associate trainers since January 2022 , at a cost of £400k (exclusive of VAT) for 683 courses, primarily in areas of health and safety, management and coaching, and procurement and supply chains which EIS-FELA believe should be lecturers' work.[36] The latest iteration has been the proposed redundancy (resulting in redeployment) of first aid lecturers, employed directly by the College, whilst tendering for first aid 'associate trainer' services. The brief is "design, produce and adapt to learner needs: a range of effective, engaging learning and teaching and assessment activities that builds on existing practice, motivates learners and also takes account of supportive technologies." UHI Perth has awarded contracts worth £128,000 for Associate Trainers for five years[37] £872,000 has been spent by Glasgow Kelvin for a three-year contract for Associate Trainers.[38] Fife College also has a £1.6m contract for Associate Trainers over two years.[39]

- NESCol has an outsourced contract of £9m over five years for facilities management and spent over £1.8m on a recruitment agency, Protocol Excellence in FE, in 2024-25.[40] They currently have an associate trainer framework contract worth £60,000 and a three-year contract for temporary lecturing services for £5.6m.[41] EIS-FELA has no detail on how many lecturers this contract employed but the cost is equivalent to roughly 22 full-time permanent lecturers' total remuneration at the top of the salary band for three years.

- NESCol spent over £1m on outsourced catering provision for a year, whilst City of Glasgow College has an outsourced contract worth £12m over six years for catering.

- For 2024/25 Glasgow Kelvin College was given specific approval from SFC for a barbering training course which is presumably the MADE with MTA Barbering Academy.[42] This partnership began in 2023 with Kelvin College hosting, and paying, MADE to undertake the barbering qualifications for the college. EIS-FELA believe there should be a more collegiate approach to ensuring sustainable and equitable provision. It does not make sense that, whilst Kelvin have effectively paid to outsource their barbering courses to a private provider, City of Glasgow College is currently deciding whether to increase the number of hours for barbering lecturers or not – citing 'no need' for why hours have not yet been increased permanently.

- West College Scotland have paid over £400,000 to a private training provider based in Selby in 2024-25 seemingly just to appear on their search engine. NESCol have paid the same company £140,000.

Follow the money: subsidiary companies

Colleges are also setting up private subsidiary companies which operate outside the boundaries of public sector regulations. Of the 19 incorporated colleges, there are three official subsidiary companies (over and above any registered Arms-Length Foundations) with City of Glasgow International Ltd, NESCol's ASET and Ayrshire College's SAI Aerospace Training Ltd. UHI (as a university but also as a regional strategic body for partner colleges) has UHI Research and Enterprise Ltd. UHI have a guide as to why subsidiary companies are beneficial i.e. for 'tax efficiency' and in order to undertake non-charitable purposes.[43] NESCol also has a direct link with ETZ Ltd, Borders College wound up their subsidiary company in 2021, Fife College Ltd is listed as a dormant company, and Perth UHI's subsidiary, Air Service Training (Engineering) Ltd, went into administration in April 2025.

These companies exist as distinct commercial entities, technically run for profit - but they share a financial relationship to the college which should hold responsibility for governance and oversight – and this comes with risk - as we have seen recently with the mismanagement of Perth College's private company which has been placed in administration, jeopardising the futures of staff and students.

City of Glasgow International Ltd[44] is a "subsidiary training company (which) has been created to offer a range of services to "complement the college's maritime and commercial activity" with the motto "Let Business Flourish". These services apparently include consultancy work, provision of PPE , research and training, although no students are enrolled with the company. Costs for starting the company were borne by City of Glasgow College, and the company manager was employed by the College to carry out work on behalf of the company, thereby blurring the lines between a public and private sector employee. The given objective of the subsidiary is to demonstrate long-term financial sustainability for the college but "money generated by the company is not consolidated into the accounts of City of Glasgow College." Moreover, the company has not generated any profit since its inception, and the latest accounts show a loss of over £106,000.[46] It should also be noted that, whilst most colleges have drawn down the monies in their ALFs, for the year ending March 2024 City of Glasgow College Foundation held £1,726,357 in reserves, all being unrestricted funds.[47]

Ayrshire College owns SAI Aerospace Training Ltd which is a company focused on delivering degree-level aerospace training, operating as a distinct trading entity from Ayrshire College. This structure "allows for flexible commercial operations, including aircraft acquisition and financial planning."

NESCol has a subsidiary company named Aberdeen Enterprise Skills and Training Ltd (ASET)[48] with net assets of over £160,000, 28 employees known for working with the company in the year 2023-24 and £30,000 share capital paid.[49] EIS-FELA understands the courses are taught by instructors (not lecturers) and employees have a separate handbook of terms and conditions to normal NESCol employees (who are under national bargaining) for the Construction, Energy, Engineering, Environmental, Health & Safety, Marine and Renewable Sectors. EIS-

FELA also understand there are issues regarding use of resources and space at the Altens campus because ASET is equipped with state-of-the art machinery and equipment which NESCol students are not particularly welcome to use, which would be a prioritisation of ASET students over NESCol ones – or a two-tier system.

NESCol also now has control of the Energy Transition Skills hub which was financed via a public-private partnership[50] with Energy Transition Zone Ltd[51], the Scottish Government, Shell UK and the college. It is unclear exactly what the governance arrangements are as the original plan was for the company (ETZ Ltd) to train 1,000 people for jobs in the emerging green energy sector over its first five years but it appears the hub has now been 'handed over' to the college. The STUC has been critical of ETZ Ltd for gathering public sector grants when it is unclear their purpose.[52]

Dundee & Angus College run a skills academy[53] for the Michelin-Scot Innovation Parc[54] which is a public-private partnership between Dundee City Council, Scottish Enterprise and a private textile manufacturing company, Wilkie. The college currently has awarded a contract for £4m, over 5 years, for "the provision of Robotic Arms and Controllers supporting the establishment of a Skills Academy within the Michelin-Scotland Innovation Parc. The Skills Academy shall consist of classrooms, workshops, and large, versatile spaces for hosting learning and demonstrations of new and emerging technologies."[55] They also have awarded a contract for £6m for establishing the Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence at Arbroath Campus[56] which was part-funded by a public-private partnership as part of the Tay City Deal in 2022; yet the Arbroath campus is now earmarked for further renovation as part of further capital investment plans. Dundee & Angus Foundation (the college's ALF) also continues to hold large sums – over £1.2m reported for end of 2024.[57]

Audit Scotland's report, Colleges Scotland 2025, notes "Our recent statutory reporting on Forth Valley College, Lews Castle College (now part of the merged UHI North, West and Hebrides) and UHI Perth provides some examples of colleges that have faced issues related to subsidiaries or commercial initiatives." If these activities are encouraged then risk must be managed. However, EIS-FELA strongly cautions against this approach. Diversification in the sector is likely to lead to confusion and over-reach, two (or more) tiered workforces with associated equal pay issues, a greater potential for financial negligence or fraud, and the strong possibility that the public purse will need to socialise any debt incurred whilst not seeing a return in profit. This has happened numerous times with privatisation agendas (Sodexho sub-contracting in the NHS, railways, water, energy, housing, prison security etc).[58]

Follow the money: partnerships and contracts

EIS-FELA agrees with the overall thrust of the publication Colleges – Anchor Institutions Fuelling Scotland's Economic Success[59] in that there is also already enshrined a legislative duty of colleges to "exercise its functions with a view to securing the coherent provision of a high quality of fundable further education and fundable higher education in the locality of the regional college" per section 23A of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005. As such, this makes colleges anchor institutions in their localities. However, EIS-FELA fail to see how "promot(ing) Scotland's colleges internationally, strengthening our global reputation for excellence and fostering connections, particularly with the global Scottish community" furthers colleges' intentions of being anchor institutions within their local communities or regions.

Alongside courses delivered by their subsidiary company, City of Glasgow College boasts 120 international partners[60] and, between the training etc carried out with international partners and via City of Glasgow International Ltd, the College notes a surplus of £5.3m projected for 2024-25 although a deficit for the company is over £106,000[61] and over £6m was spent in 2024-25. A snapshot of the expenses related to the international partnership work, incurred by SMT and ELT show that between March 2024 and June 2025 there were visits to, UAE, China, Singapore, Nigeria, Italy, Qatar, Turkey, USA, and Japan totalling nearly £35,000 in expenses for "business development opportunities and meetings". It does not appear to EIS-FELA that other colleges are incurring the same expenditure, and it is unclear if this is sanctioned by SFC politically or in audit.

A breach of the Finance Memorandum occurred in contracting with an 'agent' for securing one of these international partnerships in 2023[62] where £546,000[63] was paid by the college to a Qatari company, Qobolak, to broker a partnership with an institution in Saudi Arabia. There have been serious questions raised over the veracity of other such partnerships, including the possibility of partnering with shell companies i.e. an Indian hospitality institution.[64] It is extremely difficult to obtain information on how exactly these partnerships generate income due to the absence of transparent cost-benefit analysis data. Although it is clear that that millions of pounds of public funding is spent by the college subsidiary on the work 'behind the curtain' in countries such as Angola, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Uzbekistan and Uganda which have limited political and social freedoms and documented human rights abuses.

A breach also occurred at Forth Valley College where the Auditor General stated "Forth Valley College did not oversee and manage the finances of the Fuel Change project properly, and this led to significant failings".[65] This highlights that colleges are handling huge sums of public money and there requires to be adequate scrutiny and safeguards in place.

City of Glasgow College also spent over £700,000 for a three-year contract on external marketing companies and public affairs (despite there being an in-house marketing department and, arguably, the membership fee for Colleges Scotland aids public affairs). A contract worth over £680,000 was awarded for manned guard security services in July 2025, despite the College also having in-house security,[66] and £320,000 was re-awarded to Thornton's law firm for another three year contract for legal services.[67] Thornton's went on to sponsor the college's gala dinner in 2025[68] as did the Glasgow Herald who often run sponsored new stories from the college.[69] Again, City of Glasgow College has the largest expenses for purchases, which EIS-FELA would question are not for core business and/or seem particularly large.

Follow the money: private training providers

EIS-FELA opposes privatisation of education in all its forms – including an increasing reliance on independent training providers who also receive public money but are not subject to the same scrutiny or the same collective bargaining structures driving professionalism and terms and conditions.

- Until recently, Fife College delivered prison education across the country. Employing 104 members of staff, including 5 lecturers (and other trainers/assessors who were previously lecturers), the College lost the Scottish Prison Service tender to a private provider, based in England but owned by a hedge fund in Texas, People Plus. This provider undercut the college sector by changing pension providers, moving away from SPPA to private defined contribution pension with lower employer contributions. The SPS, overseen by Scottish Ministers, granted the contract on this basis. This is a stark warning for granting public sector contracts to private providers.

- New College Lanarkshire Hospitality and Hair & Beauty courses, have been impacted by the widened market in private Training Schools within salons and by the operation of private training agencies in Construction, Care and ICT courses. The subsequent reduction in credit targets and lack of investment in suitable premises makes it difficult to compete with what is a largely inferior and restricted educational provision which does not fully meet employers' needs.

- The Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers Federation gave evidence to the Education, Children and Young People's Committee on 14th May 2025 that their business retains 40% of public sector funding they receive for, essentially, matching employers with apprentices. One MSP queried that all the funding should go direct to the colleges.[70]

Funding private training providers means money will be syphoned to run a separate business which could otherwise be simply used to fund educational provision as the job-employee-employer matching process is already funded via student support, employability workers, and SDS. Providing further monies to employer federations and private providers can be double dipping public funds.

Follow the money: pay, remuneration and expenses

EIS-FELA are disappointed by the framing from the SFC's 2025 report[71] on the financial sustainability of colleges in terms of staff inflationary (and, at times, sub-inflationary) pay awards as an overall driver of the apparent unsustainability of the sector. Living wage or nationally bargained pay awards have mainly followed Scottish Government pay policy and have been separately funded by the Scottish Government at the outset.


FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE
OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Furthermore, the same criticism is not levelled at other inflationary costs which have increased, for example energy prices.

We believe it is important to invest in the sector, including in estates, staff, and resources for students to properly upskill and reskill Scotland's workforce. Investing in staff is investing in students. We believe the report should be counter-balanced with the fact that less investment in staff pay and terms and conditions means driving down the quality of education on offer as well as impacting tax revenue and spending power in the foundational economy.

Furthermore, we note the reports make no mention of the pay awards which are not within the remit of national bargaining or, indeed, of the Scottish Government's pay policy or pay remuneration group i.e. executive leadership teams. Unlike national bargaining structures for schools, where Headteachers' pay is determined by SNCT and local authorities' management pay is bargained via SJC pay scales, with chief officer pay collectively bargained via SJNCO, Principals' and senior management salaries are set by each college Board.

For example, at City of Glasgow College they have created seven promoted posts out with the national bargaining framework which lie between Curriculum Head level 1 (there are no nationally bargained levels 2 and 3) and Vice Principal, Depute Principal, and Principal. These are Heads of Service, Non-SMT – intermediate, Associate Deans/ Directors, Non-SMT Directors, SMT Deans & Directors but their exact areas of responsibility and remit are unclear.[72] EIS-FELA believes there needs to be an efficiency study carried out by the SFC into roles, responsibilities and pay of senior management.

Pay rises of more than lecturers' pay awards (following industrial action) and, at times inflation busting, worth noting are:

- Inverness College Principal's salary increased from £109,786 (2021-22) to £146, 713 (2023-24), an increase of 33% in that period, with accounts noting this was due to a backdated pay award

- 2022-23 to 2023-24: Dumfries and Galloway 5.4%, City of Glasgow College 5.4%, Glasgow Clyde 5%

- 2021-22 to 2022-23: UHI Argyll 6%

- 2020-21 to 2021-22: Newbattle Abbey 11%, Dundee and Angus 8%, UHI Perth 7%

- 2019-20 to 2020-21: NESCOL 12%, West Lothian 9%

Other fluctuations are accounted for by a change of Principal or a Principal being paid in lieu of pension contributions if they have 'maxed out' their lifetime allowance (for example at Fife and Forth Valley Colleges 2020-22 period).

It is worth noting the average salary of a college Principal is now £122,357.28 but there is a lot of discrepancy and not just attributed to size of college or number of students. This is in the context that the First Minister of Scotland takes a salary of £135,605 for year 2023-24. One third of Principals are paid more than that. The UK Prime Minister was entitled to an annual salary of £172,153 for 2023-24, although he took £166,786. One Principal took a basic salary higher than the UK PM at £175,000. This is before remuneration packages, expenses or business trips are considered.

Given this is only a snapshot of Principals' salaries, not all senior management team, and not always indicative of total remuneration packages, EIS-FELA believe it is at least worth the SFC and Audit Scotland making mention of these pay awards outwith collective bargaining. In this context, and although current inflation rates are forecasted to fall for 2026-28, a pay award of 2.67% for those years is unlikely to satisfy EIS-FELA members, especially as Colleges Scotland budget estimates for a 4% inflationary increase for capital expenditure, for example.[73]

College	Principal basic Salary (£pa) 2019-20	Principal Basic Salary (£pa) 2020-21	Principal Basic Salary (£pa) 2021-22	Principal Basic Salary (£pa) 22-23	Principal Basic Salary (£pa) 23-24
UHI Orkney	£66,240.00	£66,902.00	£70,247.00	£74,497.00	£77,179.00
Newbattle Abbey College	£70,112.00	£71,883.00	£79,658.00	£75,000.00	£78,375.00
Sabhal Mor Ostaig	£76,405.00	£76,405.00	£78,687.00	£79,884.00	£80,384.00
UHI Argyll College	£70,944.00	£74,338.00	£77,308.00	£82,000.00	£83,500.00
UHI Shetland			£84,284.00	£85,084.00	£85,084.00
UHI Moray College	£102,000.00	£104,000.00	£104,000.00	£105,159.00	£107,159.00
South Lanarkshire College	£135,000.00	£120,000.00	£120,000.00	£110,000.00	£110,000.00
Dumfries & Galloway College	£102,910.00	£107,649.00	£104,223.00	£109,070.00	£114,961.00
UHI North West and Hebrides				£90,086.75	£115,000.00
Borders College	£109,855.00	£111,761.00	£112,860.00	£117,000.00	£118,500.00
UHI Perth College	£108,000.00	£111,000.00	£119,000.00	£120,000.00	£120,000.00
West Lothian College	£107,000.00	£117,000.00	£117,000.00	£119,000.00	£121,375.00
Forth Valley College	£164,000.00	£167,000.00	£168,000.00	£142,465.00	£133,965.00
Dundee & Angus College	£136,000.00	£120,000.00	£130,000.00	£133,500.00	£135,000.00
West College Scotland	£127,000.00	£129,000.00	£131,000.00	£133,588.67	£135,088.67
Glasgow Kelvin College	£124,000.00	£127,000.00	£127,000.00	£131,238.00	£135,175.00
New College Lanarkshire	£95,000.00	£132,000.00	£133,000.00	£135,000.00	£138,757.00
Fife College	£133,867.00	£165,000.00	£165,000.00	£140,000.00	£140,000.00
North East Scotland College	£123,000.00	£138,000.00	£137,000.00	£141,000.00	£141,000.00
Glasgow Clyde College	£131,000.00	£134,000.00	£134,000.00	£135,503.00	£142,359.00
Ayrshire College	£136,000.00	£140,000.00	£144,000.00	£140,000.00	£145,000.00
UHI Inverness College	£109,786.00	£109,786.00	£109,786.00	£121,550.00	£146,713.00
Edinburgh College	£150,000.00	£152,000.00	£151,000.00	£154,000.00	£157,000.00
City of Glasgow College	£163,000.00	£166,000.00	£166,000.00	£166,000.00	£175,000.00
Principal's Average Salary (£pa)	**£115,505.41**	**£120,032.91**	**£120,132.74**	**£118,359.39**	**£122,357.28**

The future of FE in the tertiary landscape

EIS-FELA fully support NUS Scotland's claim that "the marketisation of education has resulted in an increasingly unstable sector."[74] The model of commodified education is short-term and unsustainable. Whilst there may be a place for micro-credentials, online-only learning, MOOCs, and 'just in time' qualifications, these should be additional to core lifelong learning opportunities which offer in-depth, life-changing, knowledge and understanding with space to engage critically with the subject.

The model of a further education college is different to that of a university. Whilst FE colleges provide higher education in the form of certain qualifications and provide a pathway to higher education institutions as well as vocational qualifications, they are distinct entities in a tertiary landscape with their own role, history and culture. FE colleges, and the staff within them, are attuned to the demographics and unique needs of their learners and their local communities. Factoring in local socio-economic concerns, ensuring provision to assist those whose first language is not English to achieve any level of competence in the English language and providing support for those with additional support needs when accessing education are all statutory functions of further education colleges.

The insidious reshaping of the tertiary education landscape, currently exemplified by proposals to "transform" UHI provision by potentially removing colleges from the public sector and merging them into the private university would have clear impacts on lecturers who would effectively be removed from the public sector and national FE collective bargaining, but it also has far reaching and devastating impacts on access to FE in the Highlands and Islands when there is already a great divide across Scotland in terms of jobs, housing and childcare opportunities.[75] That is why properly conducted island community impact assessments are so vital.

Despite the current issues around HE (Dundee University requiring to be bailed out),[76] college management teams are still looking towards the HE market as it is better funded and out with public accountability – with more overseas students a source of income to be tapped.

City of Glasgow College is being rebranded, by the Principal, as a "next-generation 21st century polytechnic" flexing its "polytechnic currency" for sector leadership. The Principal said in a briefing to staff on 10th October 2025, "the visit (by the UK Minister for Intergovernmental Relations) provided an excellent opportunity to explain what a next generation Polytechnic actually delivers. We therefore showcased the College's global impact, our comprehensive higher education curriculum, our System leadership with leading UK employers, our deep and enduring engagement with industry, and our unique innovation capacity." It is unclear what this means in reality – educationally, financially and for staff terms and conditions. There is, however, a clear direction of travel to prioritise delivery of HE over FE which appears to be an attempt, similar to UHI, to capture and dominate more of the HE 'market', including globally.

This is in the context of this precise model falling apart in the university sector; falling numbers of international students attending universities in Scotland according to the IFS[77] and should not be counted as a fundamental source of income for further and higher education providers, especially with continuing UK political pressures on immigration.

Furthermore, despite education, training and skills being a devolved matter, it seems the UK government are using the defence sector (a reserved matter) to directly fund some aspects of education and training.[78] They also do this via City Growth Deals. This funding may adversely affect the work of some Scottish Colleges and complicate accountability and scrutiny. EIS-FELA believe in the intrinsic value of education, if there's political will to invest then it should not be predicated on the arms industries but in transferring these skills to a Just Transition and allowing academic freedoms and the ability of colleges to genuinely meet their local and regional needs.

National bargaining, industrial relations and fair work

There has been significant industrial action in the period after college regionalisation, but the period has also delivered a harmonised pay and grading structure for all lecturing staff as well as national conditions of service – all agreed at the NJNC.[79]

College Employers Scotland and EIS-FELA agreed a four year pay deal (2022/23-2025/26) in September 2024 which has allowed outstanding work at NJNC to progress. For example, a revised NRPA, Circulars on COVID and respiratory illness, and a disciplinary policy and procedures, as well as a national referrals process have been agreed. Work has been re-started on achieving Fair Work across the sector and hybrid working policies, and a Circular on grievance policy and procedures is nearing completion.

Outstanding implementation issues around transfer to permanent contracts, the use of instructor/assessors or agency staff instead of lecturers within the national bargaining framework, a reduction in class contact hours with an increased number of classes to teach and less preparation time and outsourcing of ASL all contribute to a continued sense of precarity in the sector. Nonetheless, meaningful negotiations are ongoing in relation to these areas.

The ongoing challenge is in ensuring the employers within the sector utilise the national bargaining forum in an effective and meaningful manner.


PROMOTION
OF
SOUND
Institute

Governance: management and boards

It is apparent that, across the sector, college principals can and do exercise a disproportionate level of decision-making power, without, we believe, adequate levels of scrutiny or accountability from the boards of management in their college.

Whilst Glasgow Regional Board has been dissolved and each college designated a regional college, with a Chair appointed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education, the Principals of each of the Glasgow colleges have established the "Glasgow Leaders Group" which allows them to communicate and strategise opaquely without student or trade union scrutiny.

The Colleges of Further Education and Regional Strategic Bodies (Membership of Boards) (Scotland) Order 2023 ensures colleges have reserved seats for trade union representatives on their Boards, which is a positive step. However, asking questions of accountability and scrutiny cannot only be the preserve of trade union representatives otherwise they find that they are often doing so in a hostile environment. Members of Boards should not be appointed for their experience, expertise and added value to the leadership of the college only to stay silent on matters of strategic importance.

"At UHI Shetland there are two designated fisheries Directors on the Board, and the college is very keen to have them, but it skews the Board to the fisheries industries. *Whilst these are important industries, there are other important ones too – why have designated posts on the Board for these industries and not others? It takes away accountability to the local community.*

"At NESCol the Board is not diverse. Many people work in the oil and gas industry and NESCOL has big interests in these industries through the Energy Transition Skills hub (ETZ Ltd subsidiary). Most of the people on the Board on NESCOL have been CEOs but we aren't a corporate business and shouldn't be run like that."

"Edinburgh College Chair of the Board as been reappointed as Chair of East Midlands Freeport.[80] *EIS-FELA members are concerned about the influence and direction of travel this might highlight.*[81] *Edinburgh has huge areas of multiple deprivation (e.g. Pilton, Wester Hailes, Niddrie) and also serves Midlothian- one of the fastest growing council areas in the country and also with multiple areas of deprivation; therefore, Edinburgh College perpetuating a culture of tax avoidance is concerning."*[82]

Board members' role is not about general scrutiny and strategising but supporting management through expertise provision. The SFC's Gillies report[83] showed Dundee University's Court failed to adequately challenge financial documentation before disclosing a £35m deficit. A similar thing happened at UHI Perth, but with less dire consequences (so far). Not only did the Board not act in a timely manner; it took a change of Chair and some new Board members to see a change in leadership was required, but also the regional strategic body (UHI) failed in its oversight. This is particularly concerning given UHI's proposals to effectively take-over the colleges.

EIS-FELA believes there should be training for all Board members, not only on the principles they are there to uphold, but on how to effectively carry out their responsibilities including interrogating Board papers and company accounts, and asking challenging questions, as this could normalise the environment as one of critical friends.

EIS-FELA calls for governance reform which clarifies who Board members serve and ensures effective oversight. The current crisis isn't just financial. It's a governance failure borne from adopting corporate structures without the same level of accountability.

Governance: Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

In 2025/26 the SFC administrative cost is £8.7m, a 14% increase from 2024/25, whilst colleges see funding cuts of 20% over 5 years.[84] The significant increase is explained in part by 'SFC Transformation', which may be linked to the SFC playing a greater role in Quality Assurance, advising on UHI transformation and/or in preparation for the outcome of forthcoming legislation. EIS-FELA is not opposed to the SFC's operational costs rising if they do so in tandem with effective governance and scrutiny powers and sanctions.

The Tertiary Education (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill which is currently at Stage 2 in Holyrood includes the proposal to grant more, concentrated, powers to the SFC as the sole funding body for post-16 education. EIS-FELA believe this could further embed the disproportionate power Principals and Chairs of Boards have unless membership is diversified.

For example, EIS-FELA would like to see more involvement of trade union reps in terms of decision-making processes around capital investment strategies, further regionalisation, and scrutiny over income generation and are disappointed there is no mandated Trade Union seat/s on the SFC Board per the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill. EIS-FELA also believes a public service ethos needs to be re-established, with strict management salaries, expense rules, and an openness to scrutiny.

We believe the Tertiary Education (Funding and Governance) Scotland Bill, which passed stage 1 debate in Parliament recently and is looking likely to cost well over £21million, is a distraction on reorganisation of public bodies when a more serious look under the bonnet of the sector is required.

Giving the SFC more powers to investigate how finances of fundable bodies are used, as outlined in the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill, may help alleviate this tension – if the powers are adequately utilised in tandem with sanctions and EIS-FELA has submitted amendments to stage 2 in this regard.

Governance: ministerial

We recognise the contribution from Scotland's colleges,[85] and in order to grow that contribution, the provision of sustainable investment is required. For example, the Government agreed to and set up the College Lecturers Registration Working Group to facilitate GTCS registration but have since refused to provide any additional funding for the qualification or to even meet with the group since March 2024.

The 2025 SFC report on financial sustainability of colleges is a continuation of themes from previous years but marks a significant escalation in both the scale of the challenge and the urgency of the response required. The Scottish Government have left it to individual colleges and the market to come up with a solution when these are, mostly, public sector institutions.

"In the south of Scotland renewables get favourable treatment from government, but they rarely provide for the Scottish economy due to manufacture abroad. They hold community funds which they can distribute to communities (usually to offset some negative, for example noise or flicker from wind turbines) which is great because some local towns and villages get some improvements, but all the power lies with these big private companies and the public sector doesn't have the same level of expertise, money or resources to hold them to account. So when we're relying on these companies for investment in the education system we become beholden to them in a one-way street."
- Quote from EIS FELA Rep in South Scotland

We acknowledge the strategic direction given in the SFC's letter of direction, but EIS-FELA agrees with Colleges Scotland and Audit Scotland in their call for the Scottish Government to provide clear strategic direction to colleges in so far as saying that FE offer should be in line with national priorities including the wellbeing agenda, human rights and environmental justice; not just leave the sector to the vagaries of the employers' market.

EIS-FELA vision of further education in scotland: apprenticeships, additional support for learning, tackling alienation, academic freedoms and adaptation

The Scottish Government's report on Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education[86] highlights that migration, technology and AI, public health concerns, combating reliance on SMEs (often sole traders), a demand in wholesale and retail trade, car mechanics and human health and social work are all the target areas for the future of post-school education and a clear industrial strategy around these areas requires to be facilitated.

For example, there is a care crisis in Scotland. The Scottish Trades Union Congress has highlighted this in numerous pieces of work including Profiting from Care.[87] Development of a national workforce plan is necessary to overcome this crisis. Colleges are in a unique position to provide enhanced training and career progression opportunities for social care workers, and they could be provided with targeted funding to do so. That is why, in particular, cuts to growth areas like health and social care are nonsensical when they are purely based on how much money can be made or saved. The same can be said for environmental jobs, technology and AI, or wholesale.

The UK Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper,[88] published in October 2025, states their priority sectors are advanced manufacturing, clean energy industries, creative industries, defence, digital and technologies, financial services, life sciences, and professional and business services; plus, housebuilding and health and adult social care. There is a choice to be made in which of these areas we prioritise as 'necessary' over 'growth'. Nonetheless, education, qualifications, apprenticeships and additional training needs are best met at college – not by a 'just in time' model but by proper investment in different pathways.

Colleges are also in a unique position to tackle some of society's growing alienation and social disconnect, including increased reports of misogyny, racism, and misinformation. Further education helps to close the Poverty Related Attainment Gap and increase Digital Literacy which encompasses not only technical skills but also critical thinking, ethical considerations, and effective communication in digital environments. These have knock-on consequences to alleviating other issues in society, like growing numbers of knife crime in young people. EIS-FELA believe this would be a better use of society's collective efforts than putting defence and arms companies (counterproductive to clean energy industries) at the heart of our economy and educational provision. Academic freedoms must be allowed to flourish with educational provision which marries the need for an industrial and workforce strategy to the overall needs of social and environmental justice.

The spread of far-right narratives which scapegoat asylum seekers, migrants, black and minority ethnic communities, and LGBT+ communities for the problems we face in society is an issue for us all to tackle.[89] Many areas targeted for anti-refugee protests have been victims of deindustrialisation, for example, the running down of Alexanders and Grangemouth in Falkirk has led to increased insecurity, lower wages and less of a connection between trade unions & working-class communities. In this context, the far-right capitalises on the dissatisfaction of those who feel they have been left behind. Far-right politicos cultivate people's social anxieties around geopolitical changes by disseminating nationalist, unorthodox messages which seek to blame migrants or "the other". It is much easier to do this in the context of public sector cuts to ESOL, integration services and community development work.

As educators, EIS-FELA members deliver and facilitate education for people to acquire the skills and knowledge to be adaptable, responsible citizens who have a respect for others and participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life. Colleges are anchor institutions in their communities, often bringing together some of the most marginalised in society and offering an educational lifeline. For many people, it is a route out of poverty, or a space for social and cultural exchange.

Colleges offer genuine integration between communities, and this work is vital in stopping the spread of far-right propaganda. That is why it is so important to ensure the further education sector is sustainably funded in a way which meets not only business needs but the needs of local and regional communities beyond the vocational. The removal of 'Citizenship' units from FE courses and replaced with Enterprise is indicative of college priorities.

As such, lifelong learning has to be about creating and increasing social connections and life experiences, for those currently living and working in local communities, which means that a university pathway model, or education based on employers' prerogative only, is not going to deliver all that is required. There needs to be grounding in personal development, research skills, writing fundamentals, and, overall, critical thinking and the ability to communicate those critiques. As such, staff in focus groups also noted that colleges can be a more suitable learning environment for some students and can sometimes be an easier adjustment for those coming straight from secondary school.

The EIS-FELA opposes any policy that students should be required to contribute to teaching costs, whether by tuition fees or other forms of graduate contribution. Servicing this debt has an administrative cost and in other countries, for example England, where tuition fees have been introduced there is still a clamour to increase these fees as the fundamental issue of affordability continues in a society where income and wealth inequality continues to increase.[90] Ultimately, EIS-FELA agrees with Philip Augar's proposition[91] in the Financial Times:

> *"the financial crisis facing English universities is the result of a failed free marker experiment...unintended consequences of government policy, a lacuna in regulation and weak corporate governance have combined to undermine a radical shift in higher education dating back a quarter of a century."*

As such, simply following suit by introducing tuition fees or a graduate tax is going to do little to change direction for Scotland's further and higher education sectors.

EIS-FELA believes in the use of general taxation to fund education, acknowledging there may be the requirement to utilise tax raising powers which the Scottish Government has. Further changes to income tax bands and property taxes as outlined by the STUC,[92] and the introduction of a wealth tax, could generate more funding for the Scottish Government to invest. The STUC's latest report states "While existing wealth taxes should be strengthened, for illustrative purposes, if a new annual wealth tax of 2% was applied to all those with assets worth more than £10m, it could raise up to an estimated £492 million extra per year from Scotland's 10 richest families alone."[93]

> *"Local Amazon delivery depots get tax relief to bring employment to the area – precarious work that often targets the most vulnerable. West Lothian a bit of a hub for filming but tax reliefs are not benefitting the local economy. Why isn't taxation used to actually benefit the area and redistribute some wealth?"*
> - EIS FELA Rep in West-Lothian

EIS-FELA believes that colleges are far more than training grounds for the needs of business and other employers; they are autonomous seats of learning and should not be purely vocational training grounds. Where colleges do work with businesses on a skills offer, that work should complement students' priorities and national priorities around wellbeing or environmental justice. A democratic national industrial strategy may be required to bolster key sections of the economy for the present and future but that should not preclude colleges making decisions locally and an emphasis should be placed on having a near-universal educational offer regardless of where a prospective student lives in Scotland.

Scotland's Further Education sector stands at a crossroads. Continued underfunding and marketisation threaten its public ethos, community role, and sustainability. EIS-FELA calls for a radical reorientation—toward democratic accountability, fair investment, and recognition of education as a collective public good.

Colleges are crucial in tackling poverty, ensuring inclusion, offering opportunities to those most vulnerable, disadvantaged – all of which increase Scotland's wealth and ensure more stable and cohesive communities and providing employers and industries with skills/ knowledge required. It is vital to ensure a prosperous, confident and diverse Scotland that does not move towards being relatively uneducated, insular and more prejudiced

Questions from EIS-FELA to the sector:

- Are the correct governance arrangements in place for colleges to "diversify income" and manage associated risks? If not, what measures need to be taken, and can we clearly outline exactly what the risks are?
- Has due diligence always been done by every college to reveal true ownership or controlling interests behind any third party transactions, grants or contracts; and have colleges reported any suspicious transactions involving any unclear third party beneficial ownerships?
- How should concerns over the decision-making around spending be highlighted above Board level?
- Would more powers and sanctions from the SFC be beneficial in ensuring accountability in the sector?
- Should there be a commitment to a fair funding model and transparency over how it is implemented?
- Will the Scottish Government issue clear guidance on educational expectations for colleges?
- Should there be an efficiency study carried out by the SFC into roles, responsibilities and pay of senior management?

> **Scotland's Further Education sector stands at a crossroads. Continued underfunding and marketisation threaten its public ethos, community role, and sustainability.**

EIS-FELA PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE

INVEST IN EDUCATION, NOT MARKETISATION: Restore real-terms funding and ring-fence resources for teaching, ASN and ESOL, without relying on commercial or defence income streams. Invest in the sector with a restorative settlement, through multi-year funding which is inflation proofed.

Scottish Government to decide on the key industrial areas to invest in. EIS-FELA would suggest these are in a Just Transition, Health and Social Care, Childcare and Education, Construction and Creative Industries. Further education should target 'necessary' areas, not just 'growth' areas.

Do not spend £21m on reorganisation of non-departmental government bodies; instead, fund ESOL, language classes and cultural exchange classes, to tackle social disconnect and misinformation. Increase student support, don't decrease amount of time to study. There should not be a reliance on 'just in time' methods of delivery of education as the norm.

No outsourcing to private companies and focus on local and regional needs rather than international markets.

Explore the Scottish Government's current tax raising and varying powers, including implementation of a wealth tax.

FAIR FUNDING: Finance education through fair taxation, not student debt, tuition fees or defence spending. Further education colleges require distinct, and increased, funding to fulfil their legislative and democratic role in Scotland and should not be in competition with other post-16 fundable bodies. Funding should follow learning and teaching.

The funding mechanism should be changed – not temporary funds but integrated funding for digital skills, rural delivery which has a hugely disproportionate impact from cuts, multiple areas of deprivation, mental health and wellbeing, college transition and student experience.

Individual Learning Accounts promote access to Lifelong Learning for those furthest from employment, therefore eligibility should be widened to include college courses for useful learning which is not directly related to work skills.

Stop using the Mutual Investment Model as it bears the same risks as PFI and potentially more so than NPD. It is used simply to keep capital expenditure "off the books" through various "public private partnerships"[94] but there remain huge servicing fees. Instead, the Scottish National Investment Bank should be more widely used as a sustainable finance models for capital projects.

GOVERNANCE REFORM: Bring senior management and Principals under public pay controls, strengthen transparency on spending and expenses, contracts and projects; and ensure trade union representation at various levels of governance, including on the SFC Board.

Improved oversight and governance on spending within each college including stopping outsourcing, the use of subsidiary companies and privatisation.

Training for all Board members on being a 'critical friend'. The SFC's 'efficiency studies' should include Fair Work aspects and cost/benefit analysis from an educational perspective.

PROTECT FE'S IDENTITY & REMIT: Maintain FE's distinct role within the tertiary landscape. Further and higher education should not be rolled into one tertiary institution.

Work with the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy but do not align further education and skills provision so closely to that portfolio that colleges are removed from Education portfolio

SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE & VALUED WORKFORCE: Academic freedom and professional autonomy, no casualisation of employment, secure employment for qualified lecturers with a clear career pathway.

Principals should be subject to the Scottish Government's remuneration group on public sector appointments and other promoted posts should be included within national bargaining framework

The importance of students being taught by qualified subject specialists to be highlighted and protect quality learning and teaching for all FE students by investing in TQFE to allow GTCS registrations to progress.

SOCIAL COHESION: Support inclusive education which tackles alienation and promotes critical thinking, challenging misinformation. This provides adaptability for the learner, the local and regional community, and the national industrial demands rather than 'just in time' delivery. Investing in FE meets strategic priorities including social and cultural ones, not just economic. Ensure excellent additional support for learning, academic freedoms and uphold the intrinsic value of education.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