

Thank you very much for inviting me to address the 2023 EIS-FELA conference.

It's an honour to be doing so.

This is another first for me in the role of General Secretary. There're many things that I've done over the course of this year for the very first time ever, and although attending and speaking at the legendary FELA conference is a first, I'm not new at all to the world of Further Education and the many challenges that lie within it, both on the professional and the industrial relations front.

When I was a teenager, my dad- an assembly-line worker and shop steward in the Hoover factory in Cambuslang- became a full-time student at Langside College here in Glasgow.

He returned to formal education after 25 years when he left school with two O-levels -Art and Geography- probably as a result of his dad dying just a few years before... a 'childhood trauma' decades before the term existed.

When he got his second chance at education he was well supported as an adult learner at Langside College, and he grasped that chance and the support and encouragement that went with it from the lecturers who taught him with both hands.

I was in first year at high school when my dad was at college, and I loved that we were both studying at the same time. We both had jotters and essays to write... His were longer than mine but I was only 12 or 13 at the time...

He achieved a very good set of Highers that got him into university to study English and Psychology and just a few years later, an Honours degree that took him to being a lecturer, then a senior lecturer and an EIS-CLA branch secretary at Cambuslang College.

He went straight to work in the sector that had given so much opportunity to him.

He loved working with students but never ceased to be appalled at the lack of wisdom and integrity of college management when it came to doing the best by students. In the early wake of Thatcher, neoliberal principles took precedence over educational imperatives when he was a lecturer as well.

My dad was a committed EIS-CLA Branch Secretary and as you can imagine, that won him no favour whatsoever with college management, to put it mildly.

That was twenty to thirty years ago but it seems that little has changed when it comes to the ethos fostered by college principals that still run college campuses like mini Fiefdoms and get away with it.

We have a separate ballot running in City of Glasgow College and just this morning authorised another for Edinburgh College, as we seek to challenge the unilateral decisions of college managements that are not in the interests of lecturers or students.

But to focus on the moral of this story about my dad and the transformative power of second chances for adult learners in Further Education- doubtless, my dad's experience as a student in an FE college changed the course of his life. It led to a university experience that he wouldn't have had otherwise, and a career in teaching that he wouldn't have had otherwise, and something of an escape-route from the poverty and the hard times that we experienced a lot as kids.

His experience as a student within Further Education was the catalyst for a different kind of life rooted in education, rooted in shaping lives rather than Hoover irons – though he was very good at that too- and still rooted in trade unionism.

And this was a major influence in the lives of my two sisters and I. All three of us know the value of Further Education and lifelong learning, all three of us work in Education, all three of us are committed to economic and social justice, and two out of the three of us work for trade unions. All of that can be traced back to that year that my dad spent at Langside College.

Our family is just one of the families that are living proof of the transformative power of Further Education and of the value that Further Education lecturers bring to the lives of students, their families and their communities. There are thousands and thousands more.

That's why your campaign- Fighting for the Future of Further Education- is so absolutely essential and why FELA should be congratulated on its launch.

- Establishing accountable and supportive college management
- Securing a commitment to fund the FE sector fairly
- Protecting quality learning and teaching for all FE students
- Embedding Fair Work practices for all
- Reducing the burden of unnecessary workload

- And of course- a fair pay rise for all lecturers.

All this makes complete sense if we're to have a Further Education sector in place that can provide opportunity for that lifelong learning that Scotland as a country says it's committed to. That can contribute to closing the poverty-related achievement and attainment gap that Scotland says it's committed to doing. And to eradicating poverty more generally, that Scotland also says it's committed to doing.

So the key demands of your campaign are absolutely right and reasonable given the political, economic and educational objectives that are actually shared across the Scottish Parliament.

And the demands are absolutely right and reasonable because they're the outcome of close consultation with FELA members- lecturers as a cohort of professionals who absolutely know what they're talking about and whose professional voices should be listened to and heard. You are the experts in the room when it comes to Further Education and how best to provide it well for the good of individual students, their families and communities and our whole society.

Great strides are being made in asserting the professional voice of FE lecturers through GTCS registration. As you know, full registration of college lecturers is a longstanding campaigning objective of the EIS and we have worked tirelessly over the years to achieve it. Over the past few years in particular, the work has intensified and this has borne fruit.

More than 3,000 college lecturers have registered following the launch of the national roll-out of registration in 2021. And just last month GTCS Council approved the new route of provisional registration for entry to the Register of Teachers, so that lecturers who don't yet have a GTC Scotland-recognised teaching qualification, can still meet their employment terms and conditions, while working towards meeting the requirements for Full Registration.

This is a decision that we very much welcomed, in large part because we crafted this route to registration ourselves. In strong collaboration with College Employers Scotland, which absolutely demonstrates that it can be done- a better way of working, a better industrial relations landscape is entirely possible when the will is there.

Like teachers, college lecturers work tirelessly to meet the needs of their students and all deserve to have their professionalism recognised through registration with GTC Scotland. Thank you to everyone in the lay membership who has supported the effort around GTC registration so far and thank you to the national negotiators who have worked so hard alongside Assistant Secretary Anne Keenan to get all of this over the line.

All we need now is the Scottish Government to properly invest in TQFE. We'll get there with that too as we push forward on the Fighting for the Future campaign.

Turning to the fair pay component of that. It'll feel like *déjà vu*, I'm sure, with yet another statutory ballot on pay opening this week. But no matter how many ballots FELA members have voted in before, it's crucial that they vote in this one.

It's imperative that we get the vote out in this statutory ballot and demonstrate once again to college employers that lecturers in Scotland will exercise their democratic right to take industrial action- first action short of strike and to strike if left with no other option.

And the derisory 2% offer is an early signal that industrial action may well be necessary yet again to leverage a decent settlement for Scotland's lecturing professionals. There's a strong sense of copycat tactics here when you consider that the Scottish Government / COSLA offer to teachers last May- weeks after a settlement should have been paid- was a paltry 2%.

I'm not quite sure who's copying whose anti-trade union, anti-worker tactics in a Scotland that's pledged to be a Fair work nation by 2025 but just as the Scottish Government and COSLA were forced to increase that insulting 2% offer to 7% for this financial year, by teachers taking at least 5 days' strike action, College employers and the Scottish Government may need to be similarly persuaded by a programme of industrial action by lecturers.

We hope not, of course. We hope that they will come to their senses. We hope they'll recognise and reward the value that college lecturers bring to the lives of their students, to their communities and to the whole of our society. We hope they'll finally just do the decent, Fair Work thing, and pay lecturers a fair cost of living uplift that reflects the current cost of living backdrop.

Just do the decent thing and pay **this** group of public sector workers on a par with others- the nurses, the firefighters, the school teachers. Just do the decent thing and pay lecturers a decent pay rise.

But knowing what we do about College employers, and how they need to be dragged to the negotiating table and their feet held to the fire before they will play fair and pay fair, a strong turnout and vote for YES and YES in the statutory ballot will be essential.

And we need to win this ballot to protect and build the power of the union. College employers would love nothing more than for us to lose a ballot or for it to return a weak result. They'd love nothing more than to see EIS-FELA with less industrial muscle to wield than in struggles past. We can't let that happen. We need to protect and build the power of the union if we're to be fit for this and the many more challenges that will lie ahead in this age of public sector budget cuts.

And we need to protect lecturers against the Cost of living crisis. Inflation still sits at 10.1% by the most modest measure. Food inflation's at 16.7% Fuel prices remain ridiculously high. Overall the Bank of England observes that living standards continue to fall and the total drop will amount to 5.7 per cent between 2022 and 2024- this will amount to the largest two-year fall since records began in 1956 nearly 70 years ago.

We need a pay uplift for college lecturers that will give you at least equal protection from all of that, just as for teachers, firefighters, nurses...

But this fight's not only about lecturers.

Just like the teachers' struggle, this is part of the wider trade union movement fightback that's been underway for months now against a Tory ideology that's founded on the belief that profit should be prioritised above people. An ideology whose toxicity seeps right into our public service provision here in Scotland- including into the Further Education sector. An ideology and an associated economy that sees ordinary people, ordinary workers, become the collateral damage in the race to amass billions in wealth for a privileged few who're already drowning in money that they can't even spend- and largely don't spend in our economy. They stack it up and stash it away, avoiding and evading tax as much as possible- tax that should be funding better public services, including further education, in the interests of the majority in our society rather than a privileged few.

EIS-FELA continues to be part of the wider fight-back against the pervasive Tory ideology that sees our economy structured in such a way as to feather the nests of a small few while the majority are left grasping at straws to maintain a decent standard of living.

As lecturers who work to support students from working class backgrounds, you know the havoc that the decade of Tory austerity before the pandemic wreaked on students, their families and communities.

Your fight for fair pay is an important part of the continuing fight-back against this anti-human ideology that aims to keep the majority poor and

to scapegoat the immigrants and foster hate against ethnic minorities, LGBT people and people who are disabled.

EIS-FELA has been an inspiration to the teachers and other groups of workers over the past decade. Your past victories have spurred others on and now you deserve the full solidarity of the whole of the EIS and I'm here to day to tell you today that you have it- unequivocally.

Solidarity with you all in your struggle for fair pay and in fighting for the Future of FE!