

National Bargaining News

April 2018

News from the national negotiations

Management refuse further pay talks

As reported, we have been in dispute with management for several months over a cost of living pay rise for 2017/18 and 2018/19 sessions.

We submitted our original pay claim in December 2016, and we are running out of patience.

Pay negotiations to date

Previously, we indicated to management that we would consider a multi-year deal and had entered into negotiations on a three year deal (covering 2017/18, 18/19 and 19/20). Progress had been slow but there had been movement on both sides, and we arrived at last week's NJNC confident that further progress would be made.

The meeting opened with management presenting a revised consolidated pay offer of 2.5% over three years, with unconsolidated payments in 2017 and 2018 for some colleges, nothing for others, and a derogatory £1 (no, not 1%, ONE POUND) pay rise for NESCol in 2019.

We rejected this offer on several grounds.

Firstly, we do not accept that pay harmonisation and pay increases are the same—or that they should be tied together. Members gaining through pay harmonisation have been

systematically underpaid for decades. We all do the same job, and pay harmonisation simply takes us to the same rate.

We have never accepted that equal pay means a pay freeze at the top. Members at NESCol have had NO rise since 2016, and now face two years of unconsolidated “rises” followed by a derisory £1 rise in 2019.

Our pay claim

We are seeking an offer which will apply to all teaching staff and which will deliver a real terms cost of living rise at a time when inflation is running at 3.3%.

We have already revised our claim, which is now £1000 unconsolidated in 2017/18, £2000 unconsolidated in 2018/19 and £6000 consolidated in 2019/20. We would not normally include an unconsolidated element in our pay claim; doing so this time, in the unique situation of the return to national bargaining, means that we maintain equal pay in 2019.

The 2019 payment therefore ‘consolidates’ cash payments in the preceding two years, while also delivering a pay rise for 2019/20.

So where now?

During last week's meeting, we indicated to management our

willingness to negotiate on cost of living figures, if they dropped the link to pay harmonisation. We adjourned to allow management to consider this—only for them to abruptly declare that this was their ‘full and final offer’ and that negotiations were at an end.

We will take this back to our next FELA Executive on 5 May for discussion on our next move.

Can the sector afford a deal?

We believe the sector can afford a meaningful cost of living pay rise. We had agreed previously that the Scottish Funding Council should be involved in validating data for national bargaining.

Instead, at the most recent meeting, they gave a commentary on the “affordability” of our claim. We have questioned the figures (specifically whether they include the cost of local increments which would have occurred from 2017-19) and have raised concerns about the SFC's role and remit in this process.

Yes, the sector must make choices in terms of its budgets. Colleges must choose to invest in well-paid, professional teaching staff instead of frittering thousands intended for learning and teaching on “media advice”, “branding” or salting it into unaccountable Arms Length Foundations.