

National Bargaining News

May 2018

News from the national negotiations

Pay dispute — Management refuse further negotiations

As we reminded you in the last National Bargaining News, we have been in dispute with management for several months over a cost of living pay rise for the 2017/18 session.

Having submitted our original claim in December 2016, we have been negotiating on the basis of a three year deal (covering 2017/18, 18/19 and 19/20). At the last NJNC in April, management gave a consolidated pay offer of 2.5% over three years, with unconsolidated payments in 2017 and 2018 for some colleges.

The 2017 and 2018 payments would be linked to the harmonisation uplift and would not be paid to all colleges or all pay scale points—lecturers at NESCol, who had no uplift payment, would gain a £1 pay rise in 2019!

Our revised claim

The negotiators rejected this offer, and our decision was reiterated by the EIS FELA Executive on 4 May.

We rejected this offer because pay harmonisation should not be conflated with a cost of living pay increase. Those colleges who had the biggest pay harmonisation payments had been systematically underpaid for decades, often with the worst T&C

as well. Delivering equal pay does not reflect the rising cost of living, and many members—not only at NESCol but at West College Scotland, Ayrshire and other large colleges—gained little or nothing through pay harmonisation in any case.

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 are willing to negotiate with management and have already revised our claim, taking the unusual step of including an unconsolidated element to reflect the unique 'transitional' period in national pay scales to 2019. The FELA Executive earlier this month accepted a proposal to reduce our year 3, consolidated element from £6000 to £5500 flat rated.

Where next for management?

Management are now refusing to engage further in the negotiation process.

Whilst they have acknowledged receipt of the amended pay claim, they have stated that their offer issued on 19th April is final! They refuse to discuss our amended pay claim and have publicly called for us to take their 'final' offer to members,

regardless of the potential for industrial action in the sector. Rather than trying to resolve the dispute, they are recommending that employers engage directly with employees on this matter. Some employers have already acted on this advice, undermining the process of collective bargaining.

We are absolutely clear—we respect the negotiating process and we do not negotiate through the press. We have had lengthy discussions on NJNC communication protocols, only for management to ignore them when it suits.

We are also clear that we have a duty to our members and to our students to exhaust the negotiation process before we initiate a ballot for industrial action. We do not want to take industrial action. We want to teach our students and be properly and professionally remunerated for doing so!

Make no mistake—when we feel that the time has come to do this, we will go to members and if necessary, we will wholeheartedly pursue industrial action.

The Scottish Government has 'lifted the cap' on public sector pay. Our revised claim is 4.6% per year for three years (as a consolidated claim in year 3). This is not unreasonable — it is a cost of living pay claim for all.

Lecturer professionalism

We have had some discussion in recent months about the role of a 'professional lecturer', and how as a union we can effect change in the sector to support and recognise our members' professionalism.

One aspect of this is the Professional Standards which have been reviewed by a Steering Group co-ordinated by CDN.

Pam Currie, EIS FELA President, sits on the steering group for the review; many of you participated in questionnaires and focus groups and there will now be a further opportunity after the summer for discussion on draft standards.

We are keen that the standards become a document lecturers are actually able to use in their working lives, supported by meaningful CPD and opportunities for professional learning and reflection.

TOFE is another piece of this jigsaw, with many EIS members frustrated that they have had to wait years to gain a teaching qualification, often studying in their own time and even paying their own fees. This will change as the national agreement takes effect, and an NJNC Circular is currently being prepared on this issue.

Another aspect of this debate is professional registration. At present only around 10% of the sector has voluntarily registered with GTCS, mainly colleagues who started their

careers in schools.

The May 2017 NJNC Agreement commits us to registration similar to GTCS by April 2019. The EIS FELA Executive has been discussing this issue and how to proceed. We have met with GTCS to discuss some of our questions and concerns, with another meeting planned.

Earlier this year, the Government initiated consultation on the creation of an Education Workforce Council, which would register not only FE lecturers but a range of support staff as well. The EIS responded to the consultation process and opposes this move.

At our recent branch reps training session, we discussed our vision of a professional lecturer and how this influenced our practice!.

We also discussed the potential benefits, issues and concerns arising from professional registration and how we might promote this to the sector. From this, we came up with a lengthy list of benefits, and an even longer list of questions. While the benefits might include professional recognition, status (for us and our learners), CPD and self-regulation of standards, questions included - What would it cost; who would pay; what about those who do not have TOFE, or in some cases, have no formal qualifications? Would it take the square pegs of FE and jam us into school-teacher shaped round holes?

What do you think?

Terms & Conditions update

Last week's reps training session covered a number of important points relating to the implementation of T&C agreed through the May and November 2017 Agreements, and an update on other outstanding issues.

If you want to check what a NJNC Agreement covers, or how it should be interpreted by the college, your first point of call is the EIS website, where under 'FELA and ULA' you'll find copies of national bargaining Agreements and Circulars. The latter are particularly important—they are jointly agreed by management and the EIS, and should answer most of your questions.

We now have national agreements in place on salary conservation, annual leave and class contact time and transfer to permanence. Although there is an NJNC Agreement covering arrangements around TOFE and salary placement, guidance on implementation is being drafted and will follow on these issues.

We are continuing to negotiate on a wide range of other issues, ranging from family friendly policy (including maternity and paternity leave), travel time, discipline & grievance and sickness absence.

If you are in doubt—check with your local rep, who can contact your Area or National Officer.