

National Bargaining News

January 2019

News from the national negotiators

#NegotiateNow—before we escalate

After our first day of solid strike action, Management finally returned to the negotiating table last Thursday with a belated response to the revised pay claim we submitted in December 2018.

Important progress was made at this meeting—Management's offer acknowledges that equal pay and a cost of living pay rise are separate and distinct. This is what the EIS has long said. It's the principle that has been applied to support staff and it's the principle that has been applied in other sectors, including the £500m equal pay settlement at Glasgow City Council.

Management made a fresh offer last week—their first since April. While this offer breaks the link between equal pay and cost of living, it is a worse offer for virtually everyone in the sector.

The offer remains unconsolidated in years 1 and 2, and even this element is drastically reduced—to £425 in Year 1 and just £200, less than 0.5%, in Year 2. The consolidated part of the offer—the only part that actually gives a meaningful pay rise—is 3% for those earning less than £36,500 and 2% for those earning more.

However, the transition to the new pay scales means that NO ONE currently in the sector will be on scale points 1 or 2 come 1 April 2019 and the overwhelming majority of lecturers are on scale points 4 and 5, or in pro-

moted posts.

For these members, the consolidated offer drops from 2.5% to just 2% to cover a three year period, and this is clearly unacceptable.

Management's justification for this paltry offer consists of one word—AFFORDABILITY.

So just how much would it cost to give lecturers a cost of living pay rise?

Management claimed that the recent support staff deal cost £14m, a deal upon which we based our most recent claim. The revised pay claim from the EIS, submitted in December, was costed by Colleges Scotland and validated by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) at £31.4m.

Cue much wailing and gnashing of teeth—how could this possibly be affordable? Surely lecturers would bankrupt not just colleges but the whole education sector!

But wait—there's an approximately 50:50 split of support and teaching staff in the sector, and we were asking for a broadly similar deal. Salary and pension differentials would lead to some gap, but over twice as much?

A closer inspection of the spreadsheets identified the problem. Management had chosen to submit the figures to

the SFC for the support staff deal on a year by year basis (ignoring the cumulative effect of consolidation) while applying an entirely different methodology to the teaching staff claim—a method which maximises the cost.

This would be bad enough—but the SFC, charged with the independent validation of national bargaining costs, failed to highlight this discrepancy—a failure which gave succour to Colleges Scotland's position that our claim was unaffordable.

When the EIS challenged the SFC's "validation", they did their sums again... and found that the REAL cost of the support staff deal was £31.2m, just £300,000 less than our claim.

This destroys the argument around affordability. Colleges Scotland heralded the support staff settlement as 'affordable' and 'a £14 million investment in support staff', 'providing long-term stability' for the sector. Now that we know that the costings are so similar, why are Colleges Scotland not prepared to invest to the same extent in its lecturers? Why has it applied different standards in its calculations of our claim?

It's time for management to stop playing games—make a meaningful offer, or face escalation of our action. We meet management again on Thursday, 31 January—look out for the update!