

National Bargaining News

September 2018

News from the national negotiations

Consultative Ballot: Vote REJECT

Welcome back—it seems like a long time since the summer break, and it's been a busy year already for your national negotiators, with an indicative ballot for industrial action opening on 11 September.

Why are we balloting?

We are balloting because we believe Management's 'final offer' on a cost of living pay rise is unacceptable. The offer covers three years—2017, 18 and 19 and is a consolidated raise of 2.5% from April 2019.

Some lecturers would get one-off, unconsolidated payments in 2017 and 18, but not all.

Management have linked the cost of living to the equal pay uplift, so that only those who got less than £600 through harmonisation in 2017, and less than £1000 in 2018, would get anything for those years.

The pay offer amounts to a consolidated pay increase that is well below inflation—effectively a pay cut—at a time when the Scottish Government is lifting the cap for the rest of the public sector.

Just to insult us further, NESCoI—who gained zero through pay harmonisation—now face two years of unconsolidated 'rises' followed by a derisory £1 rise in 2019.

Remember, no lecturer has had a cost of living rise since 2016—

but the same can't be said for senior management. The reports of significant pay rises for principals and senior staff would see them gaining far more than our lowest paid temps., despite a recorded sector surplus of £300,000 in 2016/17 and £3 million being invested in arms' length foundations.

It's more than pay

We know that further industrial action is a huge ask, and we all know the impact on our learners. No one wants further strike action, but this is not just about ensuring that your pay keeps up with the cost of living—there's a lot more at stake than that.

What we have won

When national bargaining was reinstated in 2015, Management were openly laughing at our demands for equal pay and T&C across the country. They stopped laughing in March 2016, when the sector ground to a halt for a day as colleges across the country took strike action together for the first time in over 20 years. And in 2016, a day was enough—a meeting was quickly arranged and at 3am, a deal struck. We had won equal pay. In 2017, Management tried to renege on that deal, and sought to impose cuts to our preparation time and annual leave. We were forced to take strike action again—this time for six days.

Again, Management told us that we were wasting our time, they weren't going to cave in, the government wasn't interested and we wouldn't bring out smaller colleges. Again, they were wrong.

Having won the May 2017 Agreement, covering not only the implementation of Equal Pay but also key T&C, Management tried to back out again just a few weeks later, claiming that colleges couldn't afford to pay the deal they had signed just days earlier. We threatened to restart the strike on our return from the summer break, and the government stepped in with additional funding.

What's still to win

We have won important battles on pay and T&C that make a real difference to our working lives. But it's not over yet. We are still negotiating on a range of outstanding T&C, and a number of branches have raised concerns about the way in which the agreed T&C, particularly the 23+1, are being implemented. We also need to agree the detail of the transfer to permanence arrangement from April 2019, which will have a huge impact on temporary and fixed term teaching staff.

We need to deliver a strong mandate to reject the pay offer and move toward industrial action.

Accepting a derisory cost of living pay offer puts us in a much weaker position in subsequent negotiations, both on T&C and on future pay awards.

What has the Government said?

The Government has said remarkably little about Further Education in recent months. Many of you will have noted the departure of Shirley Ann Somerville in June in the Cabinet reshuffle, and the chaotic 'non-appointment' of Gillian Martin which ensued.

This was hugely frustrating to the negotiators as we had only just been promised a long-

awaited meeting with the now-departed Shirley Anne. John Swinney was "covering" the post in his capacity as Cabinet Secretary for Education, but failed even to mention the sector when he apparently abandoned his Education Bill—despite the fact that the proposed Education Workforce Council would have had far reaching implications for FE.

We now—finally—have a new Further and Higher Education Minister, Richard Lochhead, who arrives to an overflowing in-tray. We have been advised that the government intend to meet us and details of this meeting are currently being finalised.

We will keep you advised of developments on this front.

What do I need to do?

This is an indicative ballot, but we need a big turnout and an even bigger vote to reject in order to move to the statutory ballot. The Trade Union Act makes it more difficult than ever for us to take strike action, with legal 'thresholds' for turnout in statutory ballots that must be met.

Every single vote matters. If you don't vote, it counts against the threshold and would have the same effect as a vote to accept the offer. Use your vote, and talk to your colleagues—have they had their ballot? Have they voted to REJECT?

What can I do?

- Make sure your details are up to date—log in at www.eis.org.uk or email membership@eis.org.uk if you have moved house or don't get emails from HO
- Use your vote—the indicative ballot is an electronic ballot that was sent out on 11 September. Check work and personal emails and your junk mail folders if you don't have it, then contact membership@eis.org.uk immediately.
- Vote to **reject** the management pay offer
- Talk to your colleagues—talk to everyone, but especially temporary and part time staff who are less likely to get to branch meetings. Are they in the union? Have they had their ballot? Have they voted? If they're not in the union, get them to join at www.eis.org.uk, the first three months are free!
- Write to your local MSP or contact them on twitter—further details on this to follow!
- Use social media to spread the word—follow us on twitter @eisfela, and www.facebook.com/honourthedeal
- Know your new T&C and stick to them—if you're not sure or you're being pressed to breach them, speak to a rep asap! You can find full details of all Agreements on <https://www.eis.org.uk/FELA/Nationalbargaining>