



1 October 2020

Further Education England Joint Trade Unions 2020/21 Claim

Further education at the heart of national recovery – full restoration

Dear Gerry,

Further Education is unique, the space it provides for its students to learn, discover and realise their full potential is the reason why we all care about it as we do.

We are all rightly proud of what our sector achieved at very short notice, pulling together to move successfully to online and remote learning under lock down as required. Then followed by the enormous efforts by all staff to make sites safe and clean in readiness for the return of larger numbers of learners back on sites. This effort and achievement has been recognised and celebrated by government ministers and the DfE. As we face an uncertain autumn further demands will be placed on colleges and their staff to deliver for our students.

FE staff have proved their commitment, not just in recent months or by those who worked through the lock down to support the children of key workers and students in need of additional support. But also by working through more than a decade of austerity that has affected FE worse than any other part of the public sector. Pay in FE has been cut in real terms by 30% since 2009, insecure contracts offering little job security abound and many staff have seen themselves subjected to inferior terms and conditions through contracting out of services.

In times of recession, further education has always been called upon to step up to address the needs of those left behind, to open new doors to a new future of work and life. It is clear that further education will be called upon again to deliver like never before for the nation at its moment of need in post-Covid recovery.

The recession we face now is like no other we have experienced. The Covid-19 crisis will likely change the nature of work and the workplace more deeply than any recession we have known. There will be a larger under deployed workforce, both young and older, in need of different skills. As before, further education is the answer.

The national recovery effort will not just be on the skills front. Recovery from the damaging effects of “social distancing” will require investment in the social and mental health of the nation. This means investment in a broad based curriculum and adult education alongside skills. Again, further education is the answer.

The Covid-19 pandemic has given society a moment to pause and reflect on what really matters and changed what is valued. The failures in under invested public services, particularly in health and social care, have been brought into sharp reveal. If we are to build back better for society and the environment then the only route to that better world is education

FE provides not just the route to new skills for young and older workers who need to adapt to the changed demands of a post-Covid economy and society. FE provides the space for a real discussion of ideas about what a re-designed, changed and better world looks like. A space for those most impacted by Covid, young and old, to become inspired by seeing that a better world is possible and that they have a real stake and role in designing it!

Over recent years there has been no disagreement nationally between the unions and the AoC that pay in FE is a major problem. Not just for retention and recruitment but in terms of equity, justice and morale. At a time when an historic responsibility falls at the feet of FE it is simply unacceptable that college staff fall yet further behind their colleagues in schools and sixth forms.

The Joint trade unions believe that nothing short of full restoration of college pay levels to where they would be had college pay kept pace with inflation since 2009 is required. Without this it will be impossible for colleges to attract and retain the experienced staff that they will need to play their historic role in the national recovery effort. Colleges simply cannot continue to be outbid for staff by the rest of the education sector when their role is so central to the national recovery effort.

Poverty pay in colleges must end, if there is one important lesson to take from this pandemic it is surely that all can see who really matters when it comes to keeping the country up and running. No member of staff working in a college should be paid less than the Real Living Wage.

Colleges are being asked to do the most important job for the nation in many decades. Failing to deliver at this time is not an option for colleges and not an option for the nation.

Colleges have lost 24,000 teaching roles in the last decade. The numbers of staff supporting the teaching, whether in the classroom, in the offices or in the wider college site have been cut to the bone. After a decade of under investment in FE, which even the government has conceded, many colleges have crumbling infrastructure not just in terms of buildings and equipment but in terms of people. If colleges are to deliver for the nation at this time then full restoration of pay for staff and funding for infrastructure is required.

There has never been a better time to make the case for the importance of pay for FE staff. Now is the time, for the sake of the nation, that we make the case that FE colleges are fully re-equipped and that FE pay is fully restored.

We, the joint trade unions, commit to continue to work together with the AoC to campaign for funding. We believe that a once in a generation investment in further education is required for it to deliver on its historic recovery mission. We expect the same commitment from the AoC.

Staff in FE have not forgotten the joint campaigning work that we have done together as a sector in recent years. Staff haven't forgotten the increase in funding for the sector of £400 million that was announced last year and that 2020/21 is the year the money arrives in college coffers.

When college staff marched and campaigned alongside college leaders it was always on the understanding that, after more than 10 years of real terms pay cuts, staff were first in line when increased funding arrived. The extra money has now arrived; any failure to deliver on staff pay will quite rightly be regarded as a betrayal.

Warm words will not cut it this year – you told us last year that the money arrives in 2020/2021. Now on your own terms, there is no avoiding it - it is time to deliver on staff pay! Improving pay is not just an accounting issue to be seen in terms of the price of staff, it is about showing respect to those who do vital jobs in our colleges.

The joint unions claim for 2020/21 is:

- For a significant move towards the full restoration of college pay levels to where they would be had college pay kept pace with inflation since 2009
- For the living wage, calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, to be the minimum wage in the sector, with all further education colleges in England becoming accredited living wage employers with the Foundation
- For all contracted-out services to be brought back in-house with improvements in terms and conditions equal to those already directly employed by the college

All elements of this claim are backdated to 1 August 2020 in line with the normal anniversary date.

In the face of much adversity, there is also much opportunity to be excited about for the role that FE can play in the nation's recovery and building back better. This is a moment to be seized, a moment when the case can be made and FE's value can be better understood by the nation and that starts with recognising and rewarding the value of the people who work in FE.

Yours sincerely



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