

Update on National Bargaining in the College Sector

Key Facts

- The EIS ballot will close today (Friday 4 March 2016), with the threat of industrial action a real possibility.
- The EIS-FELA Executive has rejected a 1% consolidated pay offer, which is in line with public sector pay policy.
- The three support staff trade unions have accepted the same pay offer.
- The 1% pay offer was recommended for implementation in March 2016 to ensure lecturers don't lose out on a pay rise this year and to avoid money being lost to the sector due to the financial year end.
- National Bargaining continues and will be critical to the success of implementing changes to create a modern, dynamic workforce for the future that can meet the needs of students and the economy.

Background

Following the decision by the EIS-FELA Executive to reject the 1% pay offer, the EIS is balloting its members on strike action across most of Scotland's colleges (Seven out of the 26 colleges are not being balloted). A separate ballot is taking place in the three Glasgow colleges, which the EIS is using to compel the colleges to sign up to the National Bargaining process and thereby involve them in wider strike action against the 1% pay offer. We remain committed to averting strike action due to the impact that this would have on students at a critical time in their courses.

What has been offered?

In October 2015, colleges made a 1% consolidated pay offer or £300 for employees earning less than £30,000 and the Living Wage. For some, this offer exceeds public sector pay policy and the three support staff trade unions have confirmed their acceptance of this offer (UNISON, UNITE and GMB). The EIS is the only trade union to reject this reasonable pay offer – they believe it is not enough. Unfortunately the EIS has conflated the 2015/16 pay offer with their claim for harmonisation which amounts to an average increase of 13% across the sector. A pay rise for teaching staff above 1% is simply unaffordable in the current financial situation.

Implementing the 1% Pay Rise

The Management Side took the decision to recommend that the 1% pay offer is made to all college staff to ensure that everyone benefits from a pay award this financial year. Due to the EIS rejection of the pay offer there was a real risk that lecturing staff were going to lose out on this 1% pay increase.

Addressing EIS Concerns

Colleges Scotland agrees with the EIS that harmonisation needs to be addressed, however the EIS is not prepared to discuss conditions of service at the same time as pay which means that discussion about harmonisation across Scotland has not meaningfully progressed.

Colleges Scotland is keen to work with the EIS to discuss a roadmap for harmonisation of pay and conditions of service, though there are clear difficulties in achieving this given the current tight public finances.

The college sector recognises that differentials in pay and conditions continue to exist as a consequence of the local pay and conditions bargaining that formerly took place over a period of 20 years and we are committed to addressing these. However, this is not something that can be achieved quickly. Our desire is to continue to work with the trade unions to reduce differentials in pay and conditions of service across the sector and to develop a modern workforce that is fit for the future.

How will students be affected?

Colleges Scotland remains committed to averting strike action and will continue discussions with the EIS. Should a strike be called, colleges will do everything they can to ensure that the level of disruption to students is minimised. There can be little doubt however that any strike action would have a direct impact on students.

Next Steps

The EIS ballot results will be announced today (Friday 4 March 2016). Colleges Scotland will continue to work with all trade unions through the National Joint Negotiation Committee (NJNC) and remain open to dialogue whenever desired. Meaningful discussions, through the NJNC, took place yesterday (Thursday 3 March 2016) and we have agreed to meet again on Thursday 24 March 2016.

Colleges Scotland
March 2016