

Update on National Bargaining in the College Sector

Key Facts

- UNISON has announced its intention to hold a strike on **Tuesday 6 September 2016**.
- Our priority is to ensure that students' studies are affected as little as possible by the UNISON strike, but significant disruption will be unavoidable.
- 20 colleges across Scotland will be affected by the strike action. Where possible, colleges will seek to remain open to minimise impact on students.
- Most colleges will remain open during the period of the strike action, though this will be continually assessed to ensure that health and safety and student welfare can be maintained to the highest standards. A small number of colleges, including New College Lanarkshire and West College Scotland have announced that they will be closed to students.
- UNISON has rejected a generous offer, which exceeds Public Sector Pay Policy.
- Support staff have been offered the same percentage increase as lecturers which equates to 2.5% over two years.
- The overall costs of UNISON's demands would add an estimated additional £3.3m to staff costs in the sector.

Background

Following a decision by UNISON to reject a revised offer for 2016/17, the trade union balloted its members on industrial action. While the result was a vote in favour of industrial action, we believe that the overall number of UNISON members who responded to the ballot was very low. Less than 20% of all support staff across the sector participated in this vote.

We do not believe that the UNISON case for additional pay stands and while we are keen to engage with the union, we believe that their demands are inflated and do not bear comparison with reality. The overall costs of their demands would add an estimated additional £3.3m to the staff costs for Scottish colleges. This is not financially sustainable going forward.

Earlier this year, a deal was agreed with all Support Staff Trade Unions (GMB, UNISON and Unite) representing members in the college sector. Separately, a two-year deal was agreed with the EIS, which represents college lecturers. UNISON's case for strike action is based on factually confused comparisons between the deal agreed with lecturers in March 2016 and the agreement that we reached with support staff in January 2016.

It is important to understand that the settlement for lecturers was a two-year deal (based on the equivalent of an average 2.5% increase over two years, with the second year paid as a flat cash amount calculated using the average lecturing salary), while the support staff settlement was only for 2015/16 and negotiations are ongoing for 2016/17.

UNISON claims that the flat cash settlement received by support staff amounts to £230 compared to a £450 flat cash pay uplift for lecturers – this is a misrepresentation of the facts. Put simply:

For a college support staff member earning less than £30,000 in 2015:

The combination of last year's settlement with the current offer will equate to an increase of £630 for the two years.

For a college support staff member earning £22,000 or less:

The combination of last year's settlement with the current offer will equate to an increase of £800 for the two years (equivalent of at least 3.5% for this group of support staff employees).

In either case, these increases exceed public sector pay policy and we simply do not have the finances to continue to meet these ever-increasing demands by trade unions. Additionally, in 2015 support staff were granted two additional days of leave and many saw a reduction in their working hours with no loss of pay.

What has been offered?

- An interim payment of £100 pro rata (this has already been paid).
- A further payment of £230 has been offered to those earning over £22k and £400 to those earning under £22k.

The £230 flat cash pay uplift offered for 2016/17 has been calculated using the same principle and methodology as has been applied to lecturing staff.

The current offer is a generous one, and includes offering more than a 3.5% increase across the two year period (2015/16 – 2016/17) which would apply to approximately 50% of support staff across the sector. Higher earners would receive less of a percentage increase.

In addition, a minimum total annual leave package of 36 days pro rata for all support staff has been offered. This will guarantee 27 days leave plus nine additional days.

How will students be affected?

Staff at the following colleges have announced their intention to go on strike:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ayrshire College• Borders College• City of Glasgow College• Dumfries and Galloway College• Dundee and Angus College• Edinburgh College• Fife College• Forth Valley College• Glasgow Clyde College• Glasgow Kelvin College	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inverness College UHI• Lews Castle College UHI• Moray College UHI• New College Lanarkshire• North East Scotland College• North Highland College UHI• Perth College UHI• South Lanarkshire College• West College Scotland• West Lothian College.
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Affected colleges will seek to minimise impact on students. Most colleges have confirmed that they will be open and all courses will run as normal. However, a small number of colleges have indicated their intention to close for the day, including New College Lanarkshire College and West College Scotland.

There can be little doubt that strike action will have a direct impact on students at a time when many will be looking forward to starting new courses or continuing their studies at the next level.

Next Steps

The Employers' Association will continue to work with all trade unions through the NJNC and remain open to dialogue.

We urge UNISON to call off the strike and reconsider their position on the current pay offer.