

Friday, 5 February 2021

Comment on the EIS-FELA Ballot

Commenting on the EIS-FELA ballot for industrial action which opened today (Friday, 5 February 2021), a spokesperson for Colleges Scotland, said:

“It is extremely disappointing that the EIS-FELA is choosing to ballot its members and encourage industrial action in the midst of a global pandemic that is having a significant impact on the college sector, and individuals’ lives and livelihoods across the country. Staff and students have already had a very difficult and challenging year and it seems a great pity that further unnecessary disruption will be caused by the proposed EIS-FELA action.

“We have made it clear to the EIS-FELA that there is no national plan to replace lecturers with tutor/assessor/instructor roles nor any other support staff roles.

“Tutor/assessor/instructor roles are not new to the college sector; they have been in place within colleges across Scotland for a considerable number of years, and it is acknowledged by all parties in this dispute that colleges use a variety of different learning and teaching methods designed to deliver a diverse curriculum which best suits the needs of the learner and the subject matter being taught.

“The college sector is not unique in using a variety of different roles to deliver their services. Different sectors and professionals also have a range of support staff roles which are required such as teachers and teaching assistants, solicitors and para-legals, nurses and nursing assistants.

“All roles, whether they be lecturing or support staff, are equally valuable and necessary to deliver the best learner experience and for the effective running of colleges. Each role is distinct and plays its own part in the successful operation of colleges.

“We are continuing to engage in meaningful dialogue, and believe we are close to reaching a resolution – a view which we understood was shared by the EIS-FELA national negotiators at our last meeting – which makes today’s ballot announcement even more disheartening.

“We have agreed to meet again on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 to continue talks.”

ENDS

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Notes to Editor:

- Discussions are ongoing with the EIS-FELA on this matter and the employers’ representatives have held five formal dispute meetings, along with a number of informal meetings and discussions. At the meeting held on Thursday, 14 January 2021, the employers issued a position statement which made it clear to the EIS-FELA that the employers have NO national

plan to replace lecturers with tutor/assessor/instructor roles, nor any other support staff roles. At the third formal dispute meeting on Thursday, 21 January 2021, the discussions had reached a stage whereby a draft joint statement had been prepared and both parties felt that they were close to reaching a resolution. The draft joint statement acknowledged the employers' position that there is no national plan to replace lecturers with support staff roles. At the fifth dispute meeting held on Monday, 1 February 2021, a position was reached which both sides felt could resolve the dispute, subject to further technical discussions which took place on Thursday, 4 February 2021. Unfortunately an agreed position was not reached and it was agreed to continue discussions on Wednesday 10 February 2021. It had been hoped that the EIS-FELA would have committed to withdrawing their ballot notifications – they were unable to commit to this request.

- The employers' representatives are clear that there has been no evidence of any breach of any National Agreement regarding this issue and that any matters of dispute are specific to a very small number of colleges to resolve at a local level.