

Monday, 14 January 2019

Comment on EIS-FELA Strike Action

Colleges and the Educational Institute of Scotland Further Education Lecturers' Association (EIS-FELA) are in a pay dispute regarding an additional cost of living pay offer covering the 2017-20 three-year period, with the first of EIS-FELA's four strike days scheduled for Wednesday, 16 January 2019.

A salary harmonisation deal from National Bargaining negotiations – from here on referred to as 'same pay' deal – to rectify pay disparities across the country over this three-year period was agreed in May 2017 which increases lecturers' pay by a national average of 9% and safeguards or improves lecturers' terms and conditions. Colleges have offered a further cost of living pay rise which takes the average pay increase to 12.2% – or an average cash increase of over £4,000 – but the EIS-FELA has rejected this generous offer.

Some lecturers are seeing huge pay increases of over 55%, and for those who have benefitted from being the highest paid in the sector for many years and aren't receiving rises from the 'same pay' deal, the colleges' offer ensures that they will receive a minimum cash payment of £1,600 in the first two years followed by a consolidated 2.5% salary increase in the third year, bringing the minimum cash increase to £2,600.

Commenting on the strike action, Shona Struthers, Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

"It is extremely disappointing that the EIS-FELA is taking disruptive strike action for the third time in four years, especially when the colleges' pay offer, combined with salary rises from the 'same pay' settlement, would see lecturers' national average pay increase over three years by 12.2%, which is a cash increase of over £4,000. This offer on the table is the best overall pay rise for public sector workers anywhere in the UK, but the EIS-FELA want even more.

"At the heart of this dispute is the EIS-FELA's refusal to recognise the substantial pay increases awarded to most lecturers from the previously agreed 'same pay' deal represent a pay rise. They also want more pay for cost of living, but a pay rise is a pay rise, irrespective of whether it comes from the 'same pay' agreement or the additional cost of living offer.

"As well as most lecturers receiving hefty pay rises from the 'same pay' settlement, all lecturers have benefitted from receiving a minimum of 62 days' annual holiday, a reduction in weekly contact with students to 23 hours, excellent career average pensions, and have all their terms and conditions either safeguarded or enhanced.

"Lecturers in Scotland are already the best paid across the UK and this offer brings the average salary up from £36,125 in April 2016 to £40,522 in April 2019. The combined pay rises are already much better than the Public Sector Pay Policy in Scotland and lecturers are already paid significantly better than their counterparts in the rest of the UK. Average pay for lecturers in England is circa £31,000.

"Finances are extremely tight for colleges and all of the modest £18.3 million revenue increase in the Scottish Government's 2019-20 Draft Budget is ringfenced to pay for the 'same pay' rises already agreed, so colleges must make cuts elsewhere to pay for an additional cost of living offer.

"The EIS-FELA is demanding lecturers' pay increases by 16.2%, which would cost colleges an additional £31.5 million on top of the £23.4 million 'same pay' deal costs. This is unaffordable and unsustainable for the sector and the EIS-FELA should suspend its strike action and recognise the instability their unwarranted strike action is causing to college students, who lose out the most from strikes."

Notes to Editor:

Colleges' pay offer to lecturing staff:

Year 1: 1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018

All lecturers who received less than £600 during the first 25% of National Bargaining harmonisation will receive an additional unconsolidated payment to ensure that every employee will receive a minimum of £600.

Year 2: 1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019

All lecturers who received less than £1,000 during the second 25% of National Bargaining harmonisation will receive an additional unconsolidated payment to ensure that every employee will receive a minimum of £1,000.

Year 3: 1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020

Immediately following the final 50% National Bargaining harmonisation payment, a consolidated award of 2.5% for all lecturers.

Outline of improved terms and conditions agreed for lecturing staff through National Bargaining:

On top of the 9% national average pay increase from harmonisation over the same three-year period, lecturers are also receiving annual leave increases to 62 days' holiday, a reduction in teaching hours to 23 hours weekly contact with students, salary conservation ensuring the retention for four years where a member of staff is currently in receipt of existing local salary conservation arrangements, paid provision of 150 hours remission time within existing paid hours for approximately 1,500 lecturers who don't have formal teaching qualifications to gain a TQFE, plus other terms and conditions either safeguarded or enhanced.

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For further information, please contact:

Will McLeish, Head of Communications and Public Affairs:

Tel: 01786 892063

Mobile: 07712 404 397

Email: will.mcleish@collegesscotland.ac.uk

Joanne Buchan, Communications and Public Affairs Officer:

Tel: 01786 892012

Mobile: 07590 229 707

Email: joanne.buchan@collegesscotland.ac.uk