

Unions slam college employers over 1 per cent pay offer



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Five unions representing staff in English further education colleges have today condemned the decision by the Association of Colleges (AoC) to submit another 1% pay recommendation for staff, the thirteenth below inflation offer in a row.

In a joint pay claim submitted in October this year, the unions (UCU, UNISON, NEU, Unite and GMB) called for an increase in pay that moves to restore the 35% cut in pay staff have suffered since 2009. The claim would also close the £9,000 pay gap between schoolteachers and further education lecturers.



In addition, the unions called for the foundation living wage (currently £9.90 or £11.05 in London) to be the minimum for all staff across the sector, and for colleges to become accredited living wage employers.

The five unions also demanded a review of the 2009 National Agreement on Regulating Working Hours in Further Education Colleges with a view to establishing a national workload agreement for all staff. The agreement would take into account the impact of changes in working practices since 2009 and during the pandemic.



However, employers represented by AoC, recommended just a 1% pay rise for all staff, despite unions campaigning with employers to win additional government funding for the sector and when inflation is at a ten year high. Unions say trust must be restored now it's become clear that the jointly won funding increase of 2020 is not being passed on to staff.

The unions say that now is not the time for yet more employer excuses on pay. Instead, what is needed is proper and fair investment in staff so that further education can provide the skills for a post-Covid recovery.

While the unions welcomed the AoC's commitment to work with them to develop an agreement on workload, wellbeing and mental health, they say this won't resolve the underlying issue of low pay. This is a major cause of distress and anxiety for college staff trying to make ends meet.

Colleges in Scotland and Wales are already accredited living wage employers. But in England many staff only earn the minimum wage.

The AoC needs to do more than simply encourage college employers to pay the real living wage, it needs to instruct them to do so, say unions. College staff are key in ensuring future generations have



the skills they need for their own careers and the greater economic good, and shouldn't be on poverty pay, say unions.



Avril Chambers, GMB National Officer, said:

"Inflation is running at its highest level in more than ten years and expected to rise further in the coming months.

"For college employers to offer just one per cent is frankly insulting; it's a slap in the face to our members who work tirelessly every day to ensure the next generation learn the skills to drive our economy and country forward.

"We ask that college employers wake up, listen and revisit this derisory offer and avoid inflicting yet another real term pay cut on our members who are a vital, integral part of the further education system."

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