



March 2024

Further Education England Joint Trade Unions Claim 2024/25

Dear Gerry

Further education in England changes lives. It should be a success story and should be celebrated, however for too long FE staff and the invaluable contribution they make to their students' lives, to employer's businesses and to enriching our communities and wider society has been undervalued and under-rewarded. In recent years, staff in FE England have seen their pay, working conditions and professionalism undermined. For the first time in many years, the pay recommendation made by the AoC at the NJF in September matched the offer made to Schools and Sixth Form in England. We must now build on this and start to close the pay and terms and conditions gap with sixth forms and schools.

This year, the joint trade unions claim repeats the need for change. We want the outcomes of these negotiations to result in an above inflation pay rise, pay equality and related issues, a sector-wide national bargaining agreement and action to address excessive workloads.

The claim recognises the following key points:

- Substantial increases in the cost of living over recent years have significantly reduced the value of staff wages and the rise in prices facing workers is now at a 40-year high;
- Pay recommendations should be binding. The sector has fallen behind inflation by more than 40% since 2009/10. FE pay increases need to be implemented in all colleges to keep up with inflation and start to close the pay gap;
- There should be minimum guaranteed starting salaries for teachers in FE. There should be agreed national pay spines with progression and headroom;
- There should be joint work on recognising and monitoring the scale of, and movement to close, the gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps in FE;
- Appropriate reward is needed to sustain the morale and productivity of staff in their crucial role of delivering high quality education;
- Appropriate action is needed on the unsustainable increases in workload and stress placed on staff;
- Average earnings and pay settlements must be a factor in this year's FE pay talk as they add to the problem of rates running ahead of those received by staff in FE over recent years and increasing the likelihood of recruitment and retention problems in the long term;
- Nobody should be paid less than the nationally recognised Living Wage rate, which has become a benchmark for the minimum level of decent pay across the UK and is now paid by large sections of the public services and many major private companies;
- Meaningful national bargaining and a new national agreement is necessary to make effective use of sector resources.

- The FE sector has an important role in addressing current and future environmental challenges and the joint work on a Just Transition and Green New Deal for FE should continue to be supported and resourced.

HEADS OF CLAIM

We are seeking:

Pay

- A 10% or £3000 increase in pay, whichever is greater. This is a first step to restore more than the 40% cut in real pay for FE staff over a decade.
- All colleges to become Foundation Living Wage employers.
- A demand to close the pay gap between FE and schoolteachers' pay within three years.
- The minimum starting salary for an FE lecturer to be £30,000.
- The AoC agree to time limited talks on the introduction of standardized increments and pay scales.
- A commitment to close gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps.

Workload

- Agreed national policy on the delivery of guided learning hours.
- The resourcing of more administration staff
- Nationally agreed class size recommendations for 16-18 and 19 +
- A set of agreed workload and wellbeing protocols
- A set of agreed boundaries for contacting staff by email or phone

Binding national bargaining

- Agree a new national pay agreement in FE that has binding outcomes.

Wellbeing

- Staff to have access to two mental health days per year.

Pay

A 10% increase in pay. This is a first step to restore more than the 40% cut in real pay for FE staff over a decade.

The sector has entered a period of financial stability and relative prosperity, and the indicators suggest this will last for at least another 2 years. Several factors have contributed to this:

- Demographic change means that colleges in most areas have an increasing pool of young people to recruit from, and this will continue to be the case throughout the current decade.
- The government provided the sector with an additional £470 million for 2022/23 and 2024/25 for pay.

Government funding for 16-19 education has increased more than funding for other income streams (e.g., adult education, apprenticeships, HE). Government funding for capital investment has also increased. The reclassification of FE colleges as part of the public sector by the Office for National Statistics has forced the government to further increase capital grant funding, at least on a temporary basis. Another consequence of reclassification is that colleges will be unable to take on new external debt. With less borrowing and lower interest costs colleges will have more cash to invest directly in staffing and other needs.

FE pay needs to be understood in the context of its relative decline when compared to the cost-of-living increases each year, and settlements that do not keep pace with inflation. The last two years have seen the steepest rises in the cost of living facing workers in over 40 years - 11.6% in 2022 and 9.7% in 2023. This has accelerated the decline in the value of wages as earnings have generally failed to keep pace. According to the ONS (Office for National Statistics, UK Consumer Price Inflation: December 2023) the average RPI increase in 2023 was 9.7% and CPI was 7.3%.

See table at Appendix 1 to demonstrate the fall in the value of FE pay compared to inflation.

Forecast inflation rates.

The Treasury average of independent forecasts states that RPI inflation will average 4.4% over 2024. Over the last year there are some significant factors impacting of staff's ability to cope financially given years of pay restraint. Mortgage interest payments have increased by 44.1% over the past year. The Resolution Foundation¹ estimates that annual repayments for those re-mortgaging in 2024 are set to rise by £2,900 on average. Ofgem has also raised the energy price cap, meaning that increases in energy bills are expected to reassert themselves, rising by 5% from January 2024 to an average of £1,928. The price of housing remains one of the biggest issues facing employees and their families and though the rate of increase in house prices has slowed, private rental prices have seen average monthly rent for new tenancies in the UK push up by 8% to £1,2683 in December 2023. The cost of childcare was revealed by the annual Coram Family and Childcare Survey published in March 2023, which found that the average cost of a part time (25 hours a week) childcare place for a child under two in a nursery in Britain has risen 5.6% to £7,134 per year, while for a two-year-old that cost has jumped 6.1% to £6,912 per year.

Falling behind average pay rates

¹ <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/press-releases/mortgage-crunch-deepens-with-15-7-billion-repayments-rise-now-on-track-to-bite-by-2026/>

The ability of the FE sector to attract and retain staff is well documented and understood. The sector will only continue to decline in the long term if pay falls behind the going rate in the labour market.

Pay settlements in the private sector have been running ahead of the public sector for most of the last decade.

The CIPD quarterly survey of employers' expectations found that private sector employers are forecasting an average 5% pay settlement over the next 12 months (the highest figure since the series began in 2012), which was just below the 5.2% predicted by the latest Bank of England Survey.

Foundation Living Wage Accreditation

The AoC's position on FLW accreditation does not meet the needs to low -paid staff working in colleges. Amid a cost-of-living crisis, merely leaving the decision to the discretion of individual colleges is simply not good enough. The sector must work towards ensuring the lowest paid can afford a decent standard of living with urgency, and this should be achieved by requiring that all colleges become accredited Foundation Living Wage Employers.

A demand to close the pay gap between FE and schoolteachers' pay within three years.

FE needs sustained investment to tackle the recruitment and retention challenges. The starting salary for a teacher in FE 2023/24 on the AoC pay scale is £27,789. Following the implementation of the School Teacher's PRB this year, the starting salary for a new schoolteacher in England is £30,000.

Our demand is for a minimum starting salary for an FE lecturer to be £30,000.

The gap between FE and schoolteachers pay continues to grow – See table at Appendix 2.

The gap between the salary of school and college teachers has grown significantly since 2010. In 2010-11, the median salary (based on 2022/23 data) for a college teacher was £42,500 and for a schoolteacher, around £48,000. Today, the median pay for a college teacher is £34,500, whereas for a schoolteacher, it is around £41,500.

See the table at Appendix 3 which shows the comparative difference in the NJF recommendations and the STPRB.

The sector has received £470million extra additional funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25. This should be used in part to close the gap between school and FE pay.

The AoC agree to time limited talks on the introduction of standardized increments and pay scales.

It has been some time since the NJF has considered the notional pay scales used by the AoC to reflect the outcomes of the annual NJF talks. Recruitment and retention problems

throughout the sector have meant colleges and the local trade unions have negotiated agreements that produce a range of different pay scales. These have a direct bearing on the notional scale. Increments, pay scale headroom, market supplements and discretionary payments are features of the reality at college level, as is the discrepancy in pay scales and their minimum and maximum pay points. This year, the joint unions wish to enter talks based on gathering data on the range of pay scales in the sector and how the notional pay scale stands up against the reality. Our demand is a new standardised pay scale for FE.

A commitment to close gender, ethnic and disability pay gaps.

In 2017, UCU reported on the finding of our gender pay gap report based on data from 173 colleges covering 47,000 staff. Overall, the report highlighted gaps of varying degrees (7%-4%), often related to the role women carried out in the college. The summary of the report commented:

Despite women being the majority of staff, there is a substantial gender imbalance across the lecturers' pay scale. Women are overrepresented at all four points in the lower half of the pay scale and underrepresented at all of four points at the top of the scale. More than a third (36%) of female lecturers are paid in the bottom half of the 8-point spine, compared to 32% of male lecturers. At the top end of the spine, half of all male lecturers are employed on the top four points of the scale compared to 42% of female lecturers. Female managers are over-represented at every point up to salary point up to £36,000, and underrepresented at every point above, whereas male managers are over-represented at every point above £36,000 and under-represented at every point below. Male managers are particularly over-represented among managers who are paid above £41,000. 58% of male managers are paid above £41,000 compared to 48% of female managers.

In 2022, FE Week analysed available data for 112 colleges between 2018 and 2021. Across these colleges, the difference in the hourly rate between women and men (median) in 2018/19 was 15.7 per cent. The overall gender pay gap in the UK is around 15%.

ONS data on the FE workforce 2021/22, showed 18.9 per cent of the further education workforce identified as belonging to a racialised or minoritised group. But racialised groups are not equally represented at leadership positions. In general FE colleges, just 8.4 per cent of leaders are non-white, compared to 7.9 per cent in sixth form colleges and 6.2 per cent in private training providers.

Our demand is that joint work takes place to analyse the current FE gender pay gap and that this work should also include ethnic and disability data.

Workload

The workload of staff in FE is untenable and we believe action from the employers is necessary. Our 2021 workload survey of UCU members shows that:

- 41% of respondents believe their workload is mostly or entirely unmanageable.
- 81% believe that the pace and intensity of work has increased significantly.
- 47% believe their working hours have increased significantly in the past 12 months.

In annual surveys of support staff workload has consistently been one of the top three concerns, alongside pay and funding in colleges. While there may be a suggestion that these pressures have been made worse by the pandemic, concerns regarding workload

stress have been continuously raised before this. We believe they suggest an endemic problem within the sector which the past 48 months have simply made starker.

Surveys carried out by individual UCU FE branches and UNISON indicate the following are common in FE colleges:

- Working beyond contracted hours
- College management not taking workload seriously
- A lack of a healthy work-life balance
- High levels of stress caused by workload.

Excessive workloads leading to less time for 1-2-1 student support and less time to produce learning resources, research in line with professional development and subject specific research.

The AoC's own report "College Staffing Challenges in 2022" noted that 96% of respondents reported that the current record level of vacancies (exacerbated by lack of pay parity with other sectors, especially schools) is creating increased pressure on existing staff. The 2021 Teacher Wellbeing Index concluded that organisational culture has a significant impact on staff wellbeing. Where a college's organisation culture is at odds with the professional needs of staff and where college management are unwilling or unable to respond positively to trade union representation on workload, the impact on wellbeing is clear.

The lack of effective national agreements on working hours and planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time are the root cause of excessive and unhealthy workloads. Equivalent post-16 teachers subject to School Teachers Pay & Conditions have the protection of such agreements.

An important aspect of excessive workload and low pay is a perception by FE college staff that they do not receive the professional esteem and regard they deserve. Effective national action on pay and workload would begin to address this. In addition, we would seek meaningful national agreement on valuing the professional judgement of practitioners including:

Establishing college forums to agree professional development programmes.

Recognition of the positive role that union learning representatives play and the provision of facilities time.

Recommendation that colleges negotiate local learning agreements with recognised unions.

The joint trade unions note that the AoC trade union workload workgroup established in 2022/23 negotiations has not concluded its work or made any recommendations.

The joint trade union's demands are:

- *Agreed national policy on the delivery of guided learning hours*
- *The resourcing of more administration staff*
- *Nationally agreed class size recommendations for 16-18 and 19 +*
- *A set of agreed workload and wellbeing protocols such as working from home agreements*
- *A set of agreed boundaries for contacting staff by email or phone*

Binding national bargaining

A demand for a new national pay agreement in FE that has binding outcomes.

The outcomes of the FE England national negotiations at the National Joint Forum are a source of frustration for the trade unions. Not only is the final offer made by the AoC a recommendation, but it is also often the case that colleges ignore the recommendation. This is particularly unsatisfactory as the joint unions invest a collective effort in producing an evidence-based claim in support of our pay demands.

Staff in FE have suffered some of the worst pay cuts when compared to the other educational workers. FE pay is some way behind school staff and other FE staff within the UK. The joint trade unions maintain their demand for meaningful and therefore binding national bargaining and negotiations.

We consider that the reclassification of FE offers the sector an opportunity to move to a more coherent and meaningful basis for national level NJF negotiations. The joint unions also consider the examples of national level negotiations in Wales and Scotland as good reference points for the change that is needed in England.

The 'Red Book' in Sixth Form Colleges is a reasonable starting point for the AoC and trade unions to start to scope what a potential new bargaining framework could look like for FE England.

Meaningful national bargaining and implementable outcomes means that FE staff will re-establish professional respect and parity of esteem with other educational professionals. By raising the level of pay and improving terms and conditions for all in the sector an even playing field is established.

For too long FE staff have been ignored and now is the time to work together to establish and new settlement for FE. We want the AoC to agree to meaningful and binding sector level negotiations. This will ultimately mean a new national agreement for the sector. As such, we call on the AoC to publicly state a commitment to meaningful, binding recommendations and to work with us to make them a reality.

Two mental health days:

Despite a range of initiatives in colleges, stress and anxiety amongst staff continues to be a problem. A survey conducted by the HSE in 2021/22 found that 1.8 million working people were suffering from a work-related illness, of which 914,000 workers were suffering work-related stress, depression or anxiety, with 17.0 million working days lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety. The survey found work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 51% of all work-related ill health and 55% of all days lost.

Some colleges already offer 'wellbeing days', but there is a myriad of ways this is interpreted across the sector. We call for staff to have access to two mental health days per year. A mental health day is where staff can take a day from work to manage their mental wellbeing. Staff who take the opportunity of a mental health day may appear physically well enough to work, but they know that their mental health is suffering and are at risk of becoming ill unless they take some time out. The purpose is to allow staff to take a proactive approach to minimising the risk of physical illness that can be caused by rising stress levels and ongoing

mental struggles. These days should not be counted towards any sickness absence triggers used in a college. Offering mental health days, a way that employers can support their staff.

Appendix 1

The table below demonstrates the major fall in living standards suffered by FE staff over recent years:

Year	AoC Pay Recommendation	Cost of Living Increase (as measured by RPI)
2018	1%	3.3%
2019	1%	2.6%
2020	1%	1.5%
2021	1%	4.1%
2022	2.5%	11.6%
2023	6.5%	9.7%

Appendix 2

The table below shows the comparative difference in the growth of the gap between FE and schoolteachers pay over recent years.

Year	Association of Colleges recommended starting pay for qualified FE lecturers	School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) recommendations for schoolteachers' pay Basic pay, excluding London and excluding allowance for 'Teaching and Learning Responsibility'
2019/20	£24,373	£24,952
2020/21	£25,202	£25,714
2021/22	£25,454	Recommendations related to unqualified teachers only
2022/23	£26,090	£28,000
2023/24	£27,786	£30,000

Appendix 3

Year	Association of Colleges Pay Recommendation	School Teachers' Review Body (STPRB) recommendations
2018	1%	3.5%
2019	1%	2.75%
2020	1%	5.5% on some grades and 2.75% on other grades
2021	1%	The Body's remit for this year related to unqualified teachers only.
2022	2.5%	5% (with higher % increases for some grades)
2023	After initially being reluctant to make a recommendation, the AoC followed the STRB recommendation of 6.5%	6.5%

Appendix 4

"We've had vacancies for engineering staff for 10-years now, as an engineer earns so much more in industry"

2. *"I'm an engineering graduate with a 1st class honours degree and a PGCE teaching certificate. I can no longer stay in my current job, as I can no longer afford to work as a full-time teacher. I cannot afford to buy a house as the salary isn't enough. I haven't seen a dentist in 3-years due to lack of funds. I've resigned and moved to a different area where my salary is higher and the cost of living lower. Teachers don't get paid enough to live on. I cannot afford to do the job I love. Why are we treated like this? If I can't manage to support myself on an FE teachers' salary, I don't know how countless hardworking colleagues with families to feed and keep a warm home for, manage."*

3. *"My salary doesn't meet the costs of living, so I work for Amazon delivering parcels to make ends meet. I cannot believe that having gone to university for 5-years that my 'professional' job rewards me in a such a way that I cannot even support my family."*

NOTE: several members reported to be working 2nd and even 3rd non-skilled jobs such as, as cleaners and in supermarkets in the evenings/weekends, to make ends meet.

4. *"I reduced my contracted house due to the workload and have now taken a 2nd and 3rd job to pay bills and support a sub-average lifestyle. I'm actively looking to get out of FE teaching, which is a shame, as I enjoy the job".*

5. *"I'm a SEN teacher which I love, but I've had to take a 2nd job on a Saturday morning to top up my salary. I'm exhausted, but at least it's better than staying in a cold home. I don't put my heating on and I limit hot water. I eat small meals but according to my doctor, I'm malnourished. He's prescribed vitamins, but it's another expense. I'm applying for other jobs."*

6. *I'm having to rely on handouts from family members, which snatches something from my dignity every time I have to ask."*

7. *"Rent and housing costs are crippling me. I cannot afford to buy food or pay my energy bills. I have to drive to work – fuel costs are through the roof. I'm in debt constantly. I'm so depressed I think about death every day as it's a way out of all this constant worry".*

NOTE: other members mentioned suicidal thoughts in their feedback.

8. *Until recently, I hadn't had a pay rise since 2008. My salary was exactly the same as it was 14-years ago. I used to be able to afford the mortgage, the odd luxury, a few days out over the years and a holiday; but now, all of that's gone and I'm living day to day, hand to mouth. During the same time, the college has gone to having millions in the bank, which has come from squeezing staff out of every last penny and working them to the bone."*

9. *"I've been stuck in a rent trap for almost 15-years due to austerity and pay freezes. I have had to relocate 100 miles away from family and friends to reduce my rent and bills. As such I can afford to exist and work but not to have a life outside work."*

10. *"I would earn more working for a supermarket and [work] less hours over the year."*