

EIS FELA Update

April 2020 Coronavirus Shutdown

WHAT you can WHEN you can IF you can

In a Time of Crisis FE Needs Clarity and Consistency

FELA is calling on both the Scottish government and the SOA to provide some much needed clarity and consistency around the assessing of qualifications during the current health crisis.

SOA

After meetings between themselves and Colleges Scotland the SOA issued advice to the sector on assessment and the collection of evidence. Unsurprisingly, as this was done without any consultation with lecturers representatives, this advice was confusing and seemingly contradictory. Eventually, 24 hours before the start of the Easter Break, a meeting was arranged with FELA lay officials and a follow up was held on 15/04/20. At the first meeting, FELA officials argued that failure to involve representatives of those who actually taught in FE would lead to confusing and impractical decisions being made. We also pointed out that the probability of inconsistent instructions to teaching staff, not only between different colleges but also within individual institutions, was very high. Unfortunately, those prophetic views have come to fruition.

At the second meeting, an invitation to Colleges Scotland (the employers federation) to attend was amazingly snubbed. Apparently, Shona Struthers, CS CEO felt that if FELA had any points to make they could be addressed through national bargaining!

The idea that assessment procedures are somehow a matter for national bargaining stunned everyone, including we believe, the SOA and simply serves to demonstrate just how out of touch this organization is with what actually goes on in colleges.

At the 15/04/20 meeting, attended only by FELA and SOA, your representatives discussed a number of the issues you have brought to our attention surrounding assessment procedures. In particular, we repeatedly stressed the need for clear guidance around a date for ending the collection of evidence for assessment. Something we feel is vital, if there is to be anything approaching a level playing field for our learners at this time.

In what we consider a major breakthrough, SOA have agreed to look at how such advice might be issued.

We hope to continue meeting with SOA in these difficult times, to try and ensure the voice of the professionals is heard as decisions are being made and will keep you posted.

Scottish Government

Since the crisis began, FELA has been keen to meet with the Scottish Government and in particular with HE/FE Minister, Richard Lochhead. A letter has been sent asking that this happen as soon as possible.

Whilst the EIS nationally is represented on the Ministerial Group covering colleges and universities along with UNISON and UCU, there is simply no substitute for the experience and insight of the professionals who actually carry out teaching, learning and assessment on a daily basis.

We fear that without the input of the professionals, in the shape of FE Lecturers, any strategies adopted to deal with the multitude of issues cropping up in our sector, due to the current crisis, are doomed to failure.

We will continue to pursue the Minister to engage in meaningful dialogue with your representatives.

Online learning—widening the attainment gap

EIS FELA have been conducting a survey to establish the issues facing learners during the COVID-19 shutdown. Many of you may have asked your students to complete this survey. However, some college managers are challenging the survey on the basis that it breaches GDPR by using student email addresses. As a result of initial legal advice and to protect the interests of the Institute and FELA, we are now advising members **not** to ask students to complete the survey, at this stage. Further advice will be issued later. We are clear from the interim feedback, however, that the learners struggling the most are those who were already vulnerable—those living in poverty, those who

work in low-paid, precarious front-line roles, those with children and other caring responsibilities. If we do not have an assessment cut-off it will allow some learners to continue submitting assessment work, improving their end of year grade and boosting their chances of a university place or employment over others who do not have the equipment, internet access or time to study from home. This simply cements the educational inequalities that the Scottish Government claims it is committed to overcoming. Your EIS FELA lay reps are seeking to engage with Scottish Government as soon as possible and will continue to engage with SOA on the issues surrounding assessment.

We strongly believe that in order to avert a major problem after this crisis, we need to be speaking to both parties, making them aware of the issues you and your students are facing.

During **COVID-19** councillors prepare to decide the future of further education in Shetland behind closed doors.

Tell Shetland Islands Council to keep tertiary education in public hands

Join us on social media on **Tuesday 21st April at 12pm**

#KeepShetlandCollegePublic eis

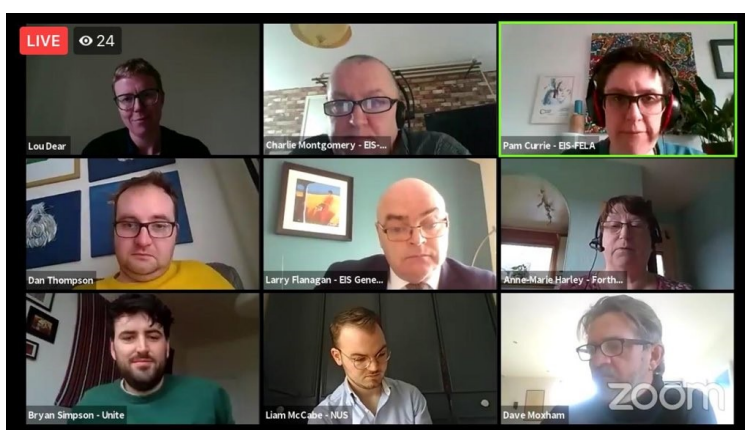
No redundancies, protect lecturer jobs—Forth Valley and beyond!

Winning the prize for the most delusional attempt at “business as usual” in recent weeks is Forth Valley College—pushing ahead with ‘transformational change’ in the shape of lecturer redundancies and offering one to one “consultation” meetings via video call.

EIS FELA responded in kind, harnessing technology to organise our very first online rally with speakers from Forth Valley branch, EIS, STUC, NUS and Unite the Union. Attendees were asked to tweet pictures of themselves with the

demo placard and to send emails to college managers and the Further and Higher Education Minister Richard

Lochhead. At the last count nearly 2,000 had been sent and further information on the campaign can be found at <https://www.eis.org.uk/FELA/ForthValley>.



A meeting is being arranged for reps from FVC, Fife, West Lothian and North Highland Colleges as well as FELA office bearers to take this campaign forward at a national level.