

National Bargaining News

November 2017

News from the national negotiations

Further Education: what is it for?

No further negotiating meetings have taken place since our last national newsletter, although meetings are scheduled for 8 and 16 November to continue negotiations on outstanding elements of T&C from the May 2017 Agreement.

While the last meeting made progress on a number of key issues, in particular lecturer duties and the make up of the proposed '23+1' hours class contact, our dispute is ongoing and no agreement has yet been reached.

EIS FELA office bearers and representatives from our Education & Equality Sub-Committee will also take part in a half day workshop this Monday on the purpose of FE, with representatives from the Scottish Government, Employers Association, NUS, SOA and Education Scotland. We are clear on our future vision for FE in Scotland. A sector which delivers high quality, innovative learning across a hugely diverse curriculum and to a huge range of learners needs investment, not cuts.

We need trained, supported lecturers with time to prepare and the confidence to deliver—not zero hours contracts and a race to the bottom—and we cannot wait any longer.

Orkney declare dispute

Nearly all unpromoted lecturers in Scotland have now received the first pay harmonisation uplift, with West Highland, Argyll, SMO, Newbattle Abbey and Shetland all agreeing to shadow—Shetland have also reiterated their request to sign the nRPA.

Promoted staff matching processes are also well underway locally, with the first national referrals expected in the coming weeks.

Only one college—Orkney—now remains outside the national agreement. Like Shetland, Orkney is run by the local authority, although funding comes from the SFC. Lecturers in Orkney deliver the same courses as other FE lecturers throughout the country, and as UHI partners, actually teach students based in Perth, Inverness and across the Highlands and Islands.

With no shadowing or sign up in place, lecturers in Orkney now earn around £5,000 a year less than their peers. They have 55 days annual leave, with unpromoted lecturers on up to 26 hours per week class contact.

The EIS FELA Orkney branch have been patient. They first asked to join national bargaining three years ago. Two years ago they were told that the Council required clarification on salaries, T&C and the 'workforce for the future'. A meeting in February 2017 asked for yet more clarification... and agreed to report by March 2018!

Lecturers at Orkney College are not prepared to accept second class status, and they can wait no longer.

A well-attended branch meeting on 2 November voted unanimously to enter into dispute with immediate effect. This was reported to the Principal and HR director of Orkney Council ahead of the College Management Committee (the equivalent of the Board) that afternoon. This committee will give an opinion—decided in secret and without staff representation—to a key council committee ahead of the December's full Council meeting.

Orkney Council are pleading poverty, claiming that there could be a knock-on effect on other services if they were to sign up to national bargaining. But the funding for Orkney College doesn't come out of the Council's budget—funding is allocated by the Government via the SFC to the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). Orkney would gain access to the additional SFC funding from UHI. The Council simply administer these funds.

Ironically, the SFC have advised that money is available to pay for the harmonisation uplift. If Orkney drag their heels into a new financial year, there is no guarantee that this money will still be available.

This dispute is about equality for all—every college, every lecturer. Second class status for Orkney College doesn't just undermine their professionalism—it undermines the entire national bargaining process.