

Report from the Further Education Committee 7/3/14

This report contains information on:

- FE Pay Campaign
- Funding cuts
- Lesson Observations
- Local disputes

FE Pay Campaign

The FEC discussed the next steps in the pay campaign. The first part of the discussion was on the results from the recent branch survey sent to branch officers. Many FEC members were angered that another survey was sent to branches (which had not been voted on by the previous FEC) rather than the FEC providing leadership by setting out a strategy for the campaign. Instead branches were sent a menu of disconnected options.

Predictably, therefore, the survey rejected the option to take strike action alongside the teachers on the 26th March. Interestingly the option that got the biggest support (lobby of parliament) was also the only option that branch officers were informed that the FEC had proposed. ie the FEC gave a lead.

A motion calling for the sector to take strike action on the 26th March was put to the FEC but was narrowly voted down (14 against 11 for).

The FEC did support the following next steps:

As part of the TUC themed week of action 'Britain needs a pay rise', which starts on the 24th March, the FEC is calling all branches to:

- *Organise a lunchtime protest on the 26th March in solidarity with the teachers and to promote our pay campaign.*
- *Organise a lunchtime protest on April 1st in support of Lambeth College (see below) and/or to protest against your particular local cuts/campaign issues.*
- *National Lobby of Parliament over F/A/H Education funding. It was agreed to ask the GS to send a letter to every Principal to allow staff time off to attend the lobby.*
- *To lobby the second date of pay talks with the AoC in May if no satisfactory offer has been made. It was agreed to ask the Recruitment, Organisation and Campaigns Committee to fund members' travel expenses to allow them to attend the lobby.*

Principals' pay

A report on principals' pay looking at the trajectory of their pay compared to lecturers was presented revealing that principals' average pay rises have been more than double that of their staff and much higher than all of the most commonly-used government measures of inflation. A summary of the report's findings will be sent out to branches and will also be used to produce new campaigning literature.

Requisitioned Further Education Sector Conference on pay.

Under UCU rules twenty branches can call a special sector conference to debate a particular issue.

The Secretariat have now received formal notice from twenty branches calling a sector conference to discuss the pay campaign.

The Secretariat reported that the conference would be held in Manchester on the 5th April.

Members of the FEC pointed out the 5th April is at the start of the Easter holidays for many colleges (probably the majority).

Unfortunately the FEC voted down a proposal calling on the GS to change the date to the 29th March to ensure maximum democratic participation of members. However, FEC's concerns will be reported back to the GS. It now seems to have been confirmed that the date of the special sector conference will be 5th April.

Funding Cuts

We should brace ourselves for an avalanche of funding cuts announcements in the coming weeks. Colleges within the next two weeks should be getting their funding allocations. The SFA has already given headline announcements of cuts; 9% in Adult Education and 17.5% in 18 + entitlement.

Some college managements have already announced that they will be making cuts. These are likely to take the form of substantial redundancies as well as an increases in class sizes and reductions in remission hours.

Alongside these cuts managements are launching a new offensive to reshape Further and Adult Education. We all will be familiar with the move towards tailoring all college courses towards 'employability' however this round of cuts sees a far greater push towards restructuring F/A Education around the government mantra of 'employability'.

Of course UCU wants to see real apprenticeships leading to real jobs. The fact that there are one million 16 -24 year olds without work, training or education is a national scandal. But the cause of such high levels of youth unemployment is not down to lecturers' inadequate teaching or college courses not providing young people with the necessary skills. The failure

of Government policy to create jobs is at the heart of the continuing growth of youth unemployment.

Alongside launching campaigns to protect jobs and members' conditions of service UCU will be launching a campaign around 'Employability' by raising a debate about 'what is FE for?'

Lesson Observations

Dr Matt O'Leary has produced a report arising from a piece of research that was commissioned by UCU. It presents a powerful argument about the failing of college observation policies and was universally welcomed by FEC members.

The FEC agreed to send a copy to all branch officers with a brief summary of the main findings and recommendations. The FEC also agreed to launch an e-petition calling for an end to graded observations. There are a growing number of colleges that have introduced ungraded observation policies. The e-petition is part of a campaign to build up pressure to try and increase the number of colleges introducing such policies.

Local disputes

- **Lambeth College: This is now a local dispute of national significance.** Management are attempting to implement a new contract on new starters from April 1st with the aim to introduce to all staff later on. The new contract includes; cut in holiday entitlement, increase in contact hours and more unpaid duties. The branch has voted to take indefinite all out strike action and their ballot starts next week.
- **Richmond Upon Thames:** Are set to ballot for strike action over Compulsory Redundancies and new contracts which include an increase in contact hours and to reduce the teaching pay scale from 36 to 35 points.

Laura Miles, LGBT FE Rep on NEC, Bradford College