

PUT THE PAY CAMPAIGN BACK ON TRACK

Reinstate a strategy to win

Pay is a major issue for our members. Workers in Britain are suffering the longest sustained pay cut in living memory.

Our members have lost about 15%, in spending power since 2009 – an average of £5,000.

But it is also true that attacks on pay go hand in hand with job cuts, course closures and the ratcheting up of workloads and stress.

Faced with this onslaught it is the job of a leadership to develop a strategy to address the crisis our members are experiencing and to convince members of the truth – that our pay claim is winnable.

We need a national strategy

A college-by-college approach, which is what some of the motions at the conference seem to be advocating, is not sufficient.

It is true that particular disputes are beacons for the whole union, such as the current Lambeth College dispute, and we must make Lambeth a cause celebre for solidarity as they plan an indefinite strike against imposed new contracts.

But we cannot win a *national* claim through *localised* action. Nor can we win it by 'clever negotiation' alone.

While regional action may have a role to play, if we are to win on pay it has to be done through a national framework of campaigning and action.

We cannot afford to retreat on this. Principals and the AoC will go on the offensive against us if we look like we are on the retreat.

The local battles and worsening of conditions will only intensify if we abandon the national field on pay.

The AoC has twice come to the table seeking more power to leverage worse local pay and conditions with attacks on incremental pay and sickness. This is the route to PRP that will sow division in every staff room.

There is no other way of putting

it. If you are struggling to defend local conditions, you need national campaigns.

We have to stop counterposing local with national action. We need both.

Pay is one of the few issues the union says we can strike on nationally. Every time we take to the picket lines and the streets to defend our pay we have raised the impact of funding cuts on colleges and the communities we serve.

This puts FE on the map and it is a source of strength for our members when we act together en masse to stand up for our just demands.

Some in the union say we can only take action at the speed of the slowest, ie the least well-organised branches.

This is reflected in some of the motions at the conference and is a disastrous recipe for inertia and for levelling down to the least active members of the union.

We missed a golden opportunity to strike alongside the NUT on 26 March. We should have used that to draw strength through united action to recharge our batteries in own pay dispute. Such opportunities enable the weakest sections of our union to draw strength from the wider movement.

Well placed

The truth is that we are going into this FE sector conference quite well placed. We have a live ballot and we are about to enter negotiations next week. The employers will take us much more seriously if we walk in armed with the promise of action.

Our best pay settlement in recent years was in 2008/09 when we struck with the NUT in April and then FE in London struck again. We won over 3%, more than our current claim. That was worth around £1,000 for each member per year.

But if we do not call further action we know exactly what to expect. Our employers will take advantage of the fear and frustration of austerity to drive



GET BEHIND LAMBETH COLLEGE

Lambeth College UCU members voted 95 percent on a 70 percent turnout in our ballot for strikes over management's attempts to introduce new contracts.

These would mean teaching staff would lose two weeks holiday, work longer weekly hours and additional contact time, sick pay would be drastically cut, redundancy notice time reduced and staff required to take on unlimited additional duties without pay.

Unison members at the College are also balloting for strikes and have won their indicative ballot with a resounding 85 percent in favour.

Our first well-supported strike day was 1 April, the day the contracts were due to be imposed.

We will name a date for the start of indefinite strike action after Easter.

These new conditions would adversely impact the education we provide and would also set a dangerous precedent for the rest of FE.

That is why UCU has designated the strike 'a local dispute of national significance'.

Support the strike

Indefinite strikes will be costly, so we need your solidarity.

Please send hardship donations and messages of support to Mandy Brown, branch secretary at mandybrowncow@yahoo.com

**For a fighting democratic union:
Defend post-16 education,
stop cuts and privatisation**

**Thursday 29 May, 7pm
The Mechanics Institute
103 Princess Street,
Manchester M1 6DD**

home further marketization and attacks on our conditions.

The back story

The Further Education Sector conference in May 2013 supported a motion calling for a serious pay campaign in 2013. The vote was unanimous with no speeches against.

It is worth recalling that for the second year the AoC's below inflation offer came with strings. Their offer of 0.5% was conditional on the unions accepting 'open and positive discussion regarding approaches to incremental pay, flexibility and working practices.' When we rejected this the AoC withdrew the 0.5%. Later they made a final offer of 0.7% or £282 for those below £14,000, conditional on unions recommending it to members.

In late June 2013, despite the clear position adopted by the annual FESC, the right wing majority on the FEC (the Independent Broad Left) launched a further survey to determine whether there was support for rejecting this measly offer and launching a pay campaign.

In a letter to members in July 2013 the then Head of UCU FE, Barry Lovejoy, urged members to attend branch meetings and have their say by 9 October.

Two important points were made at the time:

- 1) The letter noted the launch of the pay campaign in the school teachers union and said that if the UCU vote was positive we would coordinate with those unions.
- 2) FEC was very clear that to achieve any chance of an improved offer would require a very significant level of industrial action.

The responses to the survey came back in favour of action and the FEC agreed to ballot but the timing of the eventual pay ballot meant we missed action with the NUT in November.

The ballot delivered a clear positive response. 70.9% voted yes to action.

We struck on 3 December alongside

our colleagues in HE. Despite the prevarication and dithering, the strike was well supported by members who welcomed a chance to remind their own local employers that UCU was alive and kicking.

Union democracy

Subsequently, and disgracefully, the FEC majority ignored the democratic mandate and declined to join the NUT strike on 26 March or to call any further action.

This climb down was only achieved by the acting Chair several times using a second vote to reject action and overturn the status quo position as determined by the ballot last year.

They also refused to convene a Further Education Sector Conference in time to give members a chance to support action with the NUT or to take stock of the state of the pay campaign.

A number of branches were then forced to call for a requisitioned FESC to discuss the issue.

Unfortunately, a deliberate decision was taken to hold this on 5 April when a large number of colleges were on holiday.

It would have been possible under Rule to hold it on the 29 March at a time when a greater number of reps would have been able to attend and join the debate.

A motion to the FEC was tabled to call on the General Secretary to reconsider and hold the FESC at a time to maximise participation on the 29th but the FEC majority (IBL supporters) would not agree to make this recommendation.

This accumulated failure to act on democratic mandates is one reason why we should support the motion from Westminster Kingsway branch (Motion 8) at the conference.

How to win on pay

Our choice is straightforward – vote for the Barnsley motion (Motion 2) which sets out a campaign which can deliver on pay, or vote for the pessimism embodied in the Kendal motion (Motion 1) which naively puts its faith in the potential to negotiate a good deal without having any action to back it up.

This is not trade unionism, it is wishful thinking while whistling in the dark.

The Barnsley motion has the critical element of action this side of the summer as we go into negotiations.

Part of this has to be a 'catch up' element for members in colleges where managements have not implemented previous awards, otherwise the notion of national negotiations becomes increasingly illusory.

For the reasons above we should also not support Motion 3 from Hull College unless it is amended.

Unfortunately Motions 5, 6 and 7 in various ways reflect the pessimism of some of the union's leadership and would mean a retreat in our current dispute, and we should oppose them.

We are not alone in our resistance to pay cuts. The NUT may strike in June providing further opportunities for coordination. Other unions such as Unison and Unite in Health and local government are gearing up for action in response to the attacks on pay levels and annual increments announced in the recent Budget.

We must decide how we arm our negotiators in the coming negotiations, how we build the momentum for a campaign into next term, and how to prepare for further action to put sufficient pressure on the AoC.

We have a responsibility to determine a serious and credible strategy at the conference that can mobilise members in the coming weeks after the Easter break.

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Fill in the form below and send it
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