



# **EIS FELA Briefing on the National Pay Dispute (2021-22)**

**March 2022**

**EIS-FELA  
Parliamentary Briefing**

In June 2021, the EIS-FELA, via the lecturers' side table of the NJNC, submitted a pay claim of a £2000 uplift, across all salary points, for the year 2021-22. A copy of the claim is attached to this briefing. Had a pay award been made timeously, this would have come into effect from September 2021.

When submitting the claim, the EIS-FELA Executive expressed a desire for a swift resolution to negotiations, with the hope of providing stability to the FE sector, which has experienced significant levels of industrial action over the last few years. The EIS-FELA negotiators also warned of the prospect of rising inflation, which was already sitting at 4.8% RPI at the point the claim should have been settled in August 2021 and impressed upon the college management side negotiating team, that an early settlement would be in the best interests of all parties. However, frustratingly, the negotiations have been protracted, and with inflation continuing to rise, the cost-of-living crisis has only served to exasperate an already challenging context.

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, college lecturers, across Scotland, have stepped up and delivered for students, despite facing professional challenges, on top of the personal challenges that we all faced. A national EIS-FELA survey, in late 2021, of the entire EIS-FELA membership, returned a picture where over half of those who responded reported significantly higher workloads, higher levels of stress and uncertainty during the course of the pandemic. Additionally, over half responding stated that colleges had not checked up on their wellbeing as employees during the pandemic.

Despite this, college lecturers have demonstrated a commendable level of commitment and professionalism, continuing to deliver outcomes for students and adapt to new ways of teaching and learning that were brought on by the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. Put simply, lecturers have ensured that Further Education students in Scotland have continued to have access to the opportunities that the sector provides and have benefited from the quality teaching of college lecturers.

The EIS-FELA pay claim, submitted in June 2021, was made with this context in mind. The majority of college lecturers have delivered virtual learning to students, at home, despite additional personal costs, disruption to family life, isolation and other challenges. Against this backdrop, college lecturers continue to demonstrate the highest level of professionalism and commitment to the students they serve.

Additionally, the impact of economic factors is placing further challenges on college lecturers. At the time of the claim being submitted, economic forecasts made clear that inflation, which was already rising, was set to increase exponentially; a forecast that has proven to be true. Put simply, real terms pay cuts are not sustainable, nor fair.

Despite the stated willingness from EIS-FELA to conclude negotiations on pay swiftly, talks have been protracted, with college management side negotiators not engaging in meaningful negotiations. The Management Side position is set by the Colleges Scotland Employers Association.

In good faith, in an attempt to progress negotiations and despite rising inflation, EIS-FELA reduced their pay claim from its original £2000 pay claim figure to £1300 (i.e. rise across all salary points). The management side have responded with a small increase on their original offer, from an initial figure around £750 (presented initially as a percentage increase), to a final offer of an £850, along with a £150, one off (i.e. non-consolidated) 'thank you' payment for college lecturers' efforts over the course of the pandemic. The willingness of EIS-FELA to compromise and reduce their overall claim by £700 stands in stark contrast to the employers'

overall increase, on their initial offer, of £100 (with the additional £150 one off payment).

Put simply, this offer, the protracted nature of the negotiations and the markedly small level of increase made by College Scotland negotiators, is unacceptable. This offer, unsurprisingly, was emphatically rejected by the EIS-FELA membership, in a survey conducted in January 2022. Following no further improvement on the offer and the formal declaration of a dispute, EIS-FELA members demonstrated a clear willingness to take both strike action and action short of strike (ASOS), in a consultative ballot, in February 2022.

The result of the consultative ballot, and the prospect of yet further industrial unrest in the FE sector, failed to bring any further improvement in the pay offer, from the management side, over the course of two formal dispute meetings. Regrettably, on Thursday 10th March, a statutory ballot for strike action and ASOS opened, closing on Thursday 31st March. If there is an industrial action mandate, then sustained and escalating industrial action will begin around two weeks later.

It is worth noting that the sub-inflationary pay restraint which the Employers Association wishes to implement on lecturers, has not been reflected in the senior pay of the college sector. Unlike lecturers, the pay of principals is awarded by college boards and is not negotiated collectively. Over recent years, the substantial six figure salaries of many principals have continued to increase by thousands of pounds and in some cases exceeded the percentage increases of college lectures. Examples of this can be drawn from the year 2019-20, when lecturers received what equated to a 2% increase. In this year, one college principal saw their salary rise by 3%, or £4000, from £132,000 to £136,000. Another principal became the highest paid in the sector, on £164,000, with a £7000 salary increase that equates to nearly 4.5%.

In recent years, the management side have regularly forced lecturers to resort to taking industrial action in order to obtain a decent pay rise. The desired £1,300 pay rise, for a £42,000 pa lecturer post, is a reasonable request and well below the current rate of inflation. However, once again, Colleges Scotland seem to welcome industrial action as a means of getting more funding for the college sector from the Scottish Government. The EIS believes that this demonstrates strikingly poor leadership, and compounded by rising senior pay in the college sector, is a major reason for lecturer dissatisfaction amongst lecturing staff in the sector.

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Printed and published by  
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