

Scotland's Colleges agree to dock pay for boycotting staff

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College leaders have agreed on a plan to deduct pay for staff taking part in a national union boycott.

The strategy is in response to a recent announcement from the college lecturers' union EIS-FELA that it will be launching a resulting boycott – in which staff continue to mark student work but refuse to enter grades into the official system – beginning next week.

Following **news** on Friday that UHI Perth would dock full pay for staff who take part in the resulting boycott, it can now be revealed that college leaders met earlier this week and agreed on a joint strategy of deducting pay.

Despite the general agreement to dock pay, individual colleges are not bound to one course of action.

Each can make their own decisions on whether to withhold pay and how much.

It is understood, however, that as many as 90% of colleges have agreed to this strategy. Some colleges have **already announced that they will be deducting full pay from staff**.

Following news of the pay deductions, EIS-FELA hit out at college employers for what they call an "assault on trade union members' right to take industrial action short of strike action".

Several colleges alerted staff of the strategy late on Friday afternoon, and the union expects more announcements to follow.

EIS General Secretary, Andrea Bradley said: "Withholding wages or even threatening to do so when lecturers are carrying out almost all of their work and when they are almost a year and a half overdue a pay rise in the midst of the worst cost of living crisis in living memory is simply outrageous and demonstrates a callous disregard for lecturers as workers and as human beings.

"This way of seeking to facilitate work for free from members taking industrial action to protect their pay is shocking. These colleges are treating their workers as serfs."

Ms Bradley added: "Aggressive, vindictive anti-trade union tactics like this have no place in a progressive society or in a country that the Scottish Government has declared will be a **world** leader in Fair Work by next year. The Scottish Government does not seem to be able to convince the public bodies that it funds and is responsible for, to deliver Fair Work for their public servants.

"This assault on trade union members' right to take industrial action short of strike action is more akin to the spirit and intent of the UK Government's anti-trade union laws than it is to the spirit of



Gavin Donoghue, Director of College Employers Scotland, said: “It is deeply regrettable that the EIS-FELA is once again calling on lecturers to take part in a resulting boycott that could cause significant disruption to student outcomes.

“A similar resulting boycott last year was only mitigated thanks to the hard work of college staff and colleagues at partner organisations, who sought to minimise the impact on student progression.

“The priority of colleges is to protect the interests of students, and they are determined to avoid a repeat of last year’s situation. That is why college leaders have now made it clear to staff who may participate in a new resulting boycott that this would be considered a breach of contract and could lead to pay deductions.

“Deducting pay from staff is never a measure that colleges want to take. However, they simply cannot accept the risks that another resulting boycott would create for the awarding of qualifications, and the ability of students to progress in their learning journeys and careers.

“We urge the EIS-FELA to face up to the reality of the financial challenges facing colleges, cancel the damaging resulting boycott, and ballot its members so they have a chance to accept the full and final fair pay offer on the table from employers.”

UHI Perth first to announce pay deductions

One of the first colleges to announce pay deductions was UHI Perth. Late on Friday afternoon, staff received a letter from principal and chief executive Dr Margaret Cook.

In it, she warned that taking part in action short of strike, particularly the resulting boycott, will be considered "unacceptable partial performance and a breach of contract" and result in a full pay deduction.

She added: "It is essential that I make it clear to you what action we intend to take and why this is the case prior to you making any decisions about participating in the ASOS."

Read more: UHI Perth staff have been warned industrial action will cost them full pay

Explaining the decision to dock full pay for participating staff, she said that the resulting boycott has the potential to stop college operations altogether through its impact on student progression.

"My decision to take a stronger line in relation to deductions is wholly based on my concerns for the future of UHI Perth, in the light of the levels of annual disruption and bad publicity that the ongoing disputes have had on our community and on our students, in particular.

Colleges and staff are in dispute over a new pay deal, with EIS-FELA continuing to hold out against the most recent offer of a £5,000 raise over three years.

The dispute began with a joint claim for all college staff, including lecturers and support workers.

Although the largest support staff union, Unison, remains in dispute, the two other support unions involved – GMB and Unite – have recently accepted the £5,000 offer.

Due to the bargaining structure and Unison's relative size, however, support staff will not receive any pay raise for as long as Unison refuses the deal.

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