

## **Scotland's colleges 2024: Written submission from UNISON Scotland, 15 November 2024.**

**The Committee asks for a response to the following questions—**

- In your view, why has there been such slow progress of the job evaluation process?**

I would firstly ask the Committee to note that I took over as UNISON Scotland Lead Officer for Further Education in November 2023 at a time when the JE project had, I understand, only began being discussed again after a 'pause' since January 2023. As such, I have required to clarify with colleagues who are still in post in order to answer your questions.

The JE project stemmed from a commitment contained in the 2015/16 pay settlement. An agreement was formalised in 2017/18.

It is unclear to me now in 2024 what the anticipated timescale for the project originally was and I therefore cannot comment on any anticipated agreed timescale; nor am I able to comment on whether sufficient resources were put into the project at commencement. Regardless it is apparent today that an unusually long length of time has passed without completion or near completion. I have no doubt that there would have been some impact from the COVID19 pandemic, however, it is unclear today to me what impact that had timewise as, I understand, work did continue, albeit it may have slowed or even paused at the beginning of the pandemic.

Fundamentally, the completion of the project relied on a high degree of joint working (TUs and employers and project management) and it is apparent that this did not work well as there were many 'disputes' and subsequent negotiations over matters which should have been agreed at the commencement of the project (and agreements adhered to) or should have simply followed the FEDRA scheme process.

At the time of the project being paused in (I believe) January 2023 I understand this came at a point when most posts had had an evaluation and individual college rank orders were available and a disagreement ensued about the validity and integrity of the data making up the rank orders. I have no knowledge of how/why this led to a 'pause' or who was aware of the reasoning behind the 'pause'. There was an initial attempt at a form of 'buy out' around October 2023, however, for UNISON Scotland it was never likely that this was going to be a solution which would satisfy equality issues. The project then stalled until around March 2024 when discussions re-commenced.

I believe that poor industrial relations generally and a lack of robust project management and governance contributed to delays; this was undoubtedly compounded by those involved lacking the expertise in and understanding of

job evaluation and by, for reasons unknown to me, external support not being made use of.

- **Has a timeline for the resolution of the job evaluation process been agreed, if so, is UNISON Scotland content with it?**

I have been the lead UNISON negotiator on the TU side since taking over as UNISON Scotland FE Lead Officer in November 2023. I hold the role of Staff Side Secretary within the FE National Bargaining set-up.

It is fair to say that discussions on JE have taken place since around March 2024; I do not believe that there is an actual timeline for JE project resolution at this exact point in time, however, I would be content to state that a joint route forward is clear and that it is only the matter of whether there will be a national pay model or not which requires to be negotiated (and an agreement on) before a firm and realistic timeline can be committed to.

- **Has agreement been reached on the inclusion of back pay for staff whose roles are undergoing evaluation, and if so, are you able to share your views on this?**

There is an existing Collective Agreement committing to back pay stemming from the JE project outcomes which provides for back payment from 1 September 2018. No change to this collective agreement has been notified to, or indicated to the TUs.

- **What impact has the slow progress of the job evaluation process had on support staff?**

As with any JE scheme there will be 'winners and losers'. For our members who will gain from the JE exercise they will ultimately receive the back payment they are due; however, this does not detract from the length of time they have waited or for what they could have done with money they are due especially during the ongoing cost of living crisis. Where our members 'lose out' from the JE exercise, it is arguable that they have benefitted from the delay in that had the project been completed in, for example, 2022 they would have been marking time salary wise and would not have necessarily benefitted from the pay award (and back pay) as agreed in June 2024.

This factual position does not take away from the fact that we have members who are frustrated at the time this exercise has taken and many members who no longer have faith in or believe there will ever be JE completion in FE.

It is the UNISON Scotland position that we need to as swiftly as possible agree the end pay model and, thereafter, agree the quickest and most robust manner in which to conclude this longstanding commitment to JE.

The Committee's oversight and clarification sought is appreciated.

*Best wishes*

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**UNISON Regional Organiser**