

**Minute of the National Joint Negotiating Committee (NJNC) – Side Table (Support) Meeting on Wednesday 12 March 2025 (1000-1200), at Colleges Scotland Offices, Argyll Court, Stirling.**

<b>In Attendance</b>	
Debbie Kerr	Management Side
Chris O’Neil	“ “
Alan Ritchie	“ “
David Watt	“ “ (Chair)
Alison MacLean	Staff Side
Laura McLean	“ “
Janet Stewart	Staff Side Joint Secretary
John Anderson	Management Side Joint Secretary
Michael Boyd	Working Groups Officer
Jillian Cheape	Secretariat
Anne Davidson	Note Taker

**14/24 Welcome and Apologies**

The Management Side was in the Chair for this meeting. The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Gary McIntosh, Staff Side.

**15/24 Minutes of Previous Meetings and Any Matters Arising**

The minutes of the following meetings were agreed:

- Tuesday 5 December 2023 – Job Evaluation
- Monday 29 January 2024 – Job Evaluation
- Wednesday 5 June 2024
- Wednesday 11 September 2024
- Wednesday 25 September 2024

It was noted that the minute of the meeting on Job Evaluation held on Thursday 2 November 2023 was still outstanding with the Staff Side, it has been agreed by the Joint Secretaries to present this at the next scheduled NJNC – Side Table (Support) meeting in June 2025.

**16/24 Support Staff Pay Claim**

**Support Staff Pay Claim 2025-2026 and 2026-2027**

Paper 2 presented the Support Staff Pay Claim for 2025-26 which was submitted by the Staff Side on Tuesday 11 February 2025. The Staff Side advised it was awaiting a formal response to the claim.

**Management Side Initial Response to Pay Claim**

The Management Side thanked the Staff Side for its pay claim and referred to Paper 3 that set out the background to these negotiations and the financial challenges the sector continues to face.

The Management Side then verbally provided an opening statement that noted the Pay Claim asks for a two-year settlement for Academic Year (AY) 2025/26 and 2026/27, and acknowledged that its view is that multi-year settlements are beneficial, however, as a result of confirmation from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) in relation to changes to the funding model and the uncertainty this brings, it is unlikely that the sector will be able to agree to a two year proposal.

The Management Side stated that it could not agree to a flat rate increase of £2000 for AY 2025/26 and 2026/27, noting that this equates to an average 5.6% increase which would mean a cost to the sector of £15 million. Historic flat rate rises have resulted in squeezing differentials at both ends of the pay scale resulting in affordability issues. On this basis, the Management Side made a counteroffer of a 2.5% increase on all salary points for support staff, noting this is marginally above the forecasted level of inflation.

The Management side acknowledged that whilst this offer may be lower than the Staff Side would have wanted, it is significantly higher than the 1.9% increase to the sector budget. It also noted that the offer factors in the recent increase in employers National Insurance Contributions and the impact this will have on the sector given that the SFC has been allocated £5.5 million to settle the increase in National Insurance and this sum equates to only approximately 50% of the figure needed in reality by the sector.

In relation to the claims request for a no compulsory guarantee, the Management Side confirmed that it cannot agree to this and noted that colleges run voluntary severance schemes and confirmed that compulsory redundancy is a last resort.

The Management Side confirmed it is open to considering the point at which overtime ceases to be paid but stated that this would be considered alongside additional costs as part of the overall settlement.

It also confirmed it is open to exploring an increase on the current rate with the Staff Side, but again, any additional costs will be considered when arriving at our final pay offer.

In relation to the request to raise the First Aid rate to increase to £550 per annum, the Management Side confirmed it cannot agree to this, as First Aid payments already account for a significantly higher cost when compared to other parts of the public sector.

The Management Side also requested consideration of a Public Communications Protocol, whereby both sides agree not to make public statements to the media during the negotiation period, unless otherwise jointly agreed.

It stated that it did not see this infringing on either sides' right to communicate with their respective membership, but hope this approach avoids the 'war of words' that has marred previous pay negotiations.

The Management Side formally tabled its offer in writing for the Staff Side to consider.

The Staff Side expressed its understanding from a recent meeting it had attended with the SFC, is that the college sector is subject to Public Sector Pay Policy (PSPP) and that this favours multiyear deals, which is in contrast to what the Management Side has advised.

The Management Side confirmed it had sought clarification on this and verbally shared a response it had been given from a representative of the Scottish Government which stated:

- *The Public Sector Pay Policy, directly applies to 71 public bodies, Chief Executives, chairs and board members, and public and ministerial appointments.*
- *In a change to previous years, the pay metrics which set the parameters for pay negotiations, apply to most public sector workforce groups across Scotland, noting different negotiating arrangements are in place for sectors such as Further Education.*

The Management Side confirmed it had agreement to share the “lines” received from the Scottish Government and it was agreed that further clarification was required from both the Scottish Government and SFC.

It was agreed to have an adjournment to allow the Staff Side to consider the offer.

### Adjournment

Following an adjournment, the Staff Side rejected the offer of 2.5% on all salary points.

It also advised it had carried out simultaneous checks regarding the sector’s inclusion or otherwise in PSPP and suggested that clarification be sought jointly from both SFC and the Scottish Government on this point. It also sought clarity on the dates of when budget allocations will be known advising it was keen to look at a multi-year deal and other areas in the pay claim.

The Management Side confirmed its expectation is that indicative funding levels will be known by the end of March 2025 and that usually, this is confirmed by end of May 2025.

The Staff Side expressed that it is keen to make swift progress on the key issue of its claim and requested that meetings be continued throughout the summer period to achieve this end.

The Management Side was in agreement with this proposal but noted the inherent difficulties in fielding teams of negotiators during the summer period. It confirmed it is also keen to make progress and agreed with the Staff Side on making a joint approach for clarification on PSPP.

The Staff Side wished to note that its Pay Claim is from Unite and UNISON only as there has not been any response from GMB.

Both parties agreed that there are benefits to having a multi-year deal as this gives certainty and it was agreed that there is a need to establish the Scottish Government/SFC position re PSPP before clarity can be gained as to whether a multi-year deal is possible.

The Staff Side again confirmed it would not take a one year offer to its members and reiterated its rejection of the offer of 2.5%. It did indicate that it may consider a multi-year percentage-based offer similar to the current PSPP figures or a hybrid of flat cash/percentage whilst acknowledging flat cash settlements have squeezed the differential in pay grades. It was agreed to convene a series on meetings to further discuss on pay once more information on funding is known.

The Staff Side advised that in response to the request for a Public Communications Protocol that it would depend on where negotiations get to. It also stated that similar to the Management Side, it cannot control a member going to the media.

### **17/24 National Recognition and Procedures Agreement**

UNISON and Unite verbally confirmed that they would be serving notice on the current National Recognition and Procedures (NRPA) and that written notice is to follow. UNISON and Unite confirmed that they would then like to conduct negotiations on a new NRPA for Support Staff only. It advised that GMB has not provided a position and confirmed that they have advised EIS colleagues on this matter.

The Staff Side advised that the notice period will be given in the written notification but also stated this will be a 6-month period. The Staff Side’s view is that it expects its members to be positive about this change as this is the normal process.

The Management Side advised it would respond formally on receipt of written notification.

## **18/24 National Agreements**

### **Four-Day Working Week Update**

The Management Side referred to Paper 4 and noted that the Four Day Working Week included in 2022 and 2024 National Agreements included a commitment to a Four Day Working Week pilot taking place in at least one college.

The Side Table was updated that West Lothian College has been piloting a compressed working week since March 2024 and that West Lothian College have produced a report on the success of this pilot that was shared with the Staff Side. The Management Side noted that feedback from staff who participated in the pilot has been very positive

The Staff Side view was that the pilot does not represent what was originally asked many years before which was on the basis of compressed hours to reduce the working week to four days and work reduced hours of 28 hours but be paid for 35. It did however recognise that the UNISON Branch prior to supervision had recently changed its position on this, and it was now compressed hours with no reduction in hours. Its view is that this pilot comes under flexible working instead.

It was agreed with the Staff Side that this pilot satisfies the terms of the agreement and agreed that it will be fully discussed by CES at its upcoming meeting in May 2025, and presented as an example of good practice for other colleges to consider.

### **Draft National Organisational Change Guidance**

The Management Side confirmed its intention to share a document which covers a National Framework around consultation and the avoidance of redundancy and noted that three key areas from National Agreements – Organisational Change, Consultation, and the Avoidance of Compulsory Redundancy – have been merged to form the Draft National Organisational Change Guidance.

The guidance provides a sector-wide framework for managing organisational change, restructuring, and potential workforce reductions. The guidance outlines key principles, including early consultation with trade unions, staff engagement, redeployment options, and minimising redundancies where possible. It also establishes a commitment to staff development, training opportunities, and support mechanisms to mitigate any salary detriment or displacement impacts.

It was agreed with UNISON that the draft document will now be shared with the HR community for comment before being presented to CES in May 2025 for discussion before the Side Table in June 2025.

## **19/24 Miscellaneous Leave**

The Management Side noted that the Terms and Conditions Working Group has concluded its review of miscellaneous leave provisions, originally raised as part of the 2022/23 pay claim. It advised the Paper 5, Appendix four, the final output report, was shared with college HR Leads. and the feedback from this is now being collated.

The Staff Side queried some of the wording in the document however, the Side Table agreed that the working group has concluded its work on this area.

It was agreed that once the feedback has been collated from the HR Leads, a final review will take place between the Joint Secretaries with the outcome presented to CES in May 2025 for discussion.

## **20/24 Job Evaluation**

The Management Side noted that regular discussions are taking place with the support staff trade unions . At the most recent meeting, the Management Side Joint Secretary presented an extract from collated data from the sector and following lengthy discussions, advised that the employers' position is that there will be no pay harmonisation.

The Support Staff Joint Secretary advised it was disappointed by the level of information shared as part of the data gathering exercise, specifically the lack of salary information shared. It requested the employers' position be put in writing and the Management Side confirmed it would provide this.

The Management Side also advised that there had been discussions around the backdating of pay and the means to allow for this within any new Job Evaluation exercise. In this respect, an exercise has been undertaken to request details on status of historic job descriptions available from each college and this is currently being collated. Conceptually this is possible if colleges have job descriptions dating back to the 2018 deadline.

The Management Side confirmed it will provide this data to the Staff Side Joint Secretary for discussions at its next scheduled meeting.

## **21/24 Date of Next Scheduled Meeting**

The date of the next scheduled meeting is Wednesday 4 June 2025.

## Action Monitoring Log

<b>Wednesday 8 December 2021</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Continue discussions on Job Evaluation Post 2018 Roles.	Joint Secretaries	Complete
<b>Wednesday 7 December 2022</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Continue discussions on the Pay and Grading element of the Job Evaluation Dispute.	Joint Secretaries	In Progress
Consider referring the implementation of Circular 02/21 to the Central Committee for full discussion.	Joint Secretaries	Overtaken/Complete
Provide a response to the Management Side on Scope.	Staff Side	Overtaken/Complete
<b>Wednesday 28 June 2023</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Forward compliance issues to the Joint Secretaries to allow for an assessment of the situation's scope.	Staff Side	Overtaken/Complete
<b>Wednesday 06 December 2023</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
The Management Side offered to look into arrangements on insurance liability for Staff Members historically and review previous agreements used.	Management Side	Overtaken/Complete
<b>Wednesday 11 September 2024</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Collect data to understand the scale of Overtime in the sector to progress discussions on Overtime Ceiling.	Joint Secretaries	Complete
Present findings of research on implementation of RLW in colleges	Staff Side	Overtaken/Complete
<b>Wednesday 25 September 2024 – Reconvened from Wednesday 11 September 2024</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Continue to progress the Job Security Working Group.	Joint Secretaries	Complete
<b>Wednesday 12 March 2025</b>		
<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Status/ Anticipated/ Completion Date</b>
Jointly approach the Scottish Government/SFC to establish its clear position re PSPP.	Management Side/Staff Side	March 2025
Convene a series of meetings to further discuss Pay once more information on funding is known.	CES Team	In Progress

Formally respond to Unite and UNISON's resignation from the NRPA on receipt of written notification.	Management Side	Complete – March 2025
Pilot Four-Day Working Week report to be fully discussed at CES at its upcoming meeting in May 2025, with a recommendation that this is an example of good practice for other colleges to consider.	CES Team	Complete
Draft National Organisational Change Guidance document to be shared with the HR community for comment before being presented to CES in May 2025.	CES Team	Complete
Present Draft National Organisational Change to CES at its meeting in May 2025 for discussion before the Side Table in June 2025.	CES Team	Complete
Final review of the Miscellaneous Leave document to take place between the Joint Secretaries once the feedback has been collated from the HR Leads	Management Side/Staff Side	May 2025
Outcome of the final review of Miscellaneous Leave to be presented to CES in May 2025 for discussion.	CES Team	Complete
Confirm in writing that following analysis of collated data from the sector, CES position on pay harmonisation.	Management Side Joint Secretary	March 2025
Job descriptions data results to be provided to the Staff Side Joint Secretary for discussions by the end of next week (21 March 2025).	Management Side Joint Secretary	Complete – March 2025