

FE pay ballot – England Frequently asked questions

What are we voting on?

Members are being asked to vote on the Association of Colleges (AoC) 2008/09 recommended pay increase for further education (FE) staff in England. The AoC recommendation is for:

- A 3.2% increase on all salaries and allowances from 1 October 2008 or £550 – whichever is the greater. So if a 3.2% increase gives you less than £550 you will get a £550 flat rate increase instead.

How does the AoC pay recommendation affect me and my college?

The AoC is the national body that negotiates the pay recommendation on behalf of all FE colleges in England. This recommendation, once agreed by the unions, sets what should be the minimum pay increase awarded in all FE colleges in England. A large number of colleges in fact automatically implement the AoC pay recommendation every year.

Is this a strike ballot?

No. This is a consultative ballot to ask members if they accept the AoC pay recommendation. If members however vote to reject the AoC recommendation UNISON would then need to hold a national strike ballot of all FE members in England. The strike ballot would be on sustained and escalating industrial action beginning with a two-day all-out strike

The AoC has made clear that the recommendation is its final offer and that negotiations have concluded. Members therefore would have to be prepared to take strike action if they reject the offer in an attempt to force the AoC to reopen talks.

Our college usually pays an increase in August so what is the AoC pay recommendation worth over the year from August to August?

Over the year from August to August the AoC recommendation is equivalent to getting an increase of between 2.7% and 4.32%. The actual increase you would get depends on the current level of your pay and the impact of the £550 payment (see table below).

The advantage of paying it as a minimum 3.2% rise from October rather than a minimum 2.7% from August is that your pensionable pay will be higher at the end of the year.

The pay scales would also increase by a minimum of 3.2% for everybody.

The FE minimum wage recommended by the AoC would also increase to £6.91 per hour. This compares with £6.20 an hour being offered to local government workers in England and the new NHS minimum wage of £6.40 an hour for 2008.

If I vote in favour of the AoC pay recommendation does it mean the national implementation date for the pay increase will change to October from now on?

No. This deal is only for one year and doesn't represent a permanent change to your normal pay implementation date.

Who will be eligible for the £550?

If you earn less than £17,000 a year you should get the £550, meaning you would get a pay increase worth more than 3.2%. For example:

If you're on	%increase	If you're on	%increase
£12,738	4.32%	£15,120	3.64%
£13,107	4.20%	£15,558	3.54%
£13,482	4.08%	£16,014	3.43%

£13,878	3.96%	£16,482	3.34%
£14,280	3.85%	£16,962	3.24%
£14,694	3.74%		

What's UNISON's position on the AoC final offer?

UNISON recognises that the final offer is below the rate of inflation. We also recognise however that the offer is better than the deals being offered to some other public sector workers. For instance local government workers in England are currently being offered 2.45% with an additional £100 for just the bottom three grades. Teachers in England are being awarded 2.45% (2008), 2.3% (2009) and 2.3% (2010)

UNISON's position therefore is that the AoC final recommendation is the best that can be achieved by negotiation. If members vote to reject the offer they must be prepared to take part in sustained and escalating industrial action beginning with a two-day all-out strike in an attempt to get an increased offer.

My college has failed to implement the AoC recommendation in the past so why should I vote in this ballot?

We are aware that a number of colleges in the past have failed to implement the AoC pay recommendation in full. UNISON is clear that this is unacceptable and that there must be 100% implementation.

If the 2008/09 AoC pay recommendation is agreed we will target those colleges who are refusing to pay. This will be a co-ordinated campaign working with the other FE unions. However, we can only move on to this implementation campaign once we have resolved the issue of the 2008/09 pay recommendation. So it's vital members in all colleges – regardless of local circumstances – vote in this ballot.

We have reached a local agreement on our pay rise for 2008/09 so why should we vote in this ballot?

If your college has reached a local pay agreement, UNISON's position is clear: regardless of local circumstances it is vital that all UNISON members in colleges in the ballot should cast their vote. This is a ballot on a national pay recommendation that covers all FE colleges in England. If the AoC recommendation is rejected in this consultative ballot, FE members will be balloted for strike action whether they settle locally or not, so please ensure all FE members make their voice heard now by voting.

My college does not use the AoC pay spine so does the AoC offer affect me?

Yes. The offer applies to all FE colleges.

Our college is not a member of the AoC so why are we being balloted on the AoC offer?

The pay recommendation covers the whole of the FE sector in England. The pay recommendation applies to all FE colleges, including those that are not members of the AoC. For this reason we are balloting all FE members in England.

Why are we balloting members over the summer holidays?

The national date for agreeing the pay recommendation is 1 August. This year many colleges didn't get confirmation of their Learning and Skills Council (LSC) budget allocations until June. As a result the AoC didn't make a final pay offer until the 25 June. UNISON usually conducts a consultation on the AoC recommendation via branches and college reps, but as a result of this year's delay we took the decision to hold a postal ballot of all FE members. We have done this to ensure members on term-time contracts get a say. We have also extended the ballot so that it takes place over the first week of September when most staff will be back in college.

I haven't received my ballot paper what do I need to do?

If you have not received your ballot paper by Wednesday 20 August please call UNISONdirect on 0845 355 0845 (textphone 0800 0 967 968). The deadline for requesting a ballot paper is noon on 3 September.

When do I need to vote by?

Ballot papers need to be returned by 10am Monday 8 September at the latest. Any ballot papers received after this deadline will be discounted.

Does the AoC pay recommendation cover sixth form colleges?

No. Sixth form colleges are covered by separate national pay negotiations to FE colleges.

Where can I get more advice now or during the ballot?

You can contact your local UNISON rep. You can also find updates on the further education section of the UNISON website:

www.unison.org.uk/furthereducation