



# Learning the Hard Way

## Survey of Further Education Members

September 2015

## Key Findings

**Number of colleges has reduced from 37 to 20**

**Real terms funding has fallen by 12.3%**

**Colleges have transferred £99m to independent foundations. Colleges have secured about £20million from these funds**

**64% of staff in colleges who responded to our survey feel the service has declined. 77% doubtful or extremely doubtful that services will improve within 1 year**

**72% of respondents say dissatisfied or very dissatisfied in opportunities for advancement.**

**Staff morale is at rock bottom with 79% of respondents saying staff felt negative or extremely negative at their colleges. 90% of respondents believe sector underfunded.**

**63% said lack of transparency on mergers was a key issue and 70% say trust levels in management low**

## Further Education in Scotland

The Post-16 Education Reform Bill has brought about rapid and radical change in further education colleges at a time of substantial budget cuts. In 2011 there were 37 colleges now we have 20 and a new regional board structure. Real terms funding fell by £53million between 2011 and 2014. Staff numbers have dropped 9.3% since 2011-12. According to a recent BBC report student numbers have fallen to 240,000 from 375,000 in 2008. The focus is now on full time courses for 16-24 year olds. This has led to a 48% drop in part-time students and a 41% reduction in those aged 25 and over.

Part-time students tends to be young people who are sent by employers to improve their skills and women returning to education trying to get on the first rung of the ladder to find work or take up better opportunities as their children grow up. And of course, others who are doing their best to get back to work. We already know there are now 80,000 less women in further education in Scotland than a few years ago.

UNISON believes that further education colleges play a crucial role in lifelong learning and the health and well being of our communities. Part-time courses are not hobbies but are vital for both those with caring responsibilities or in paid work to gain new skills. Even so called hobby courses like car maintenance or cookery classes can be a vital stepping stone to learning for many. They enable confidence building, are an opportunity for contact with new people for many. This can be life changing steps for many marginalised, oppressed and or lonely people and offer continued stimulation, mental challenges and social interaction which improved both physical and mental health for all.

UNISON activists in our colleges were concerned about how members were coping with the pressures of budgets cuts and reorganisations. They decided to undertake a wider survey to find out if the concerns about the future of colleges that members brought to up in meetings or encounters with activists were widespread. The results of our survey show that, if anything, its the optimists that have been coming along to meetings.

Over two hundred members from 16 different colleges responded to our electronic survey. Only 15% of respondents believe that college services have improved following the mergers/regionalisation process, 64% feel the service has declined. 77% are doubtful or extremely doubtful that services will improve within 1 year.

- **72% of respondents say dissatisfied or very dissatisfied in opportunities for advancement. This is damning for a sector which is concerned with developing and improvement of individuals.**
- **Staff morale is at rock bottom with 79% of respondents saying staff felt negative or extremely negative at their colleges. 90% of respondents believe sector under-funded.**
- **63% said lack of transparency on mergers was a key issue and 70% say trust levels in management low. Revelations like the details of severance packages for senior managers at the former Coatbridge College show why this is the case.**
- **The job evaluation processes is also causing problems – 75% say very secretive or secretive.**
- **It is clear from the responses to our survey that there is something very wrong in FE**

# Key Points

## Staff deeply unhappy with life in FE

- Think things are worse instead of better after post 16 reform
- Unhappy with the mergers/regionalisation
- Unhappy about the funding cuts
- Unhappy with job losses, scared about keeping their own jobs
- Unhappy about how much work they have to do now that staff numbers have been reduced
- Unhappy with the way management have implemented the changes

## Budget cuts

- Less staff
- Loss of experienced staff
- Management not giving clear guidance so making workload harder to handle
- Importance of good managers round those who were feeling more positive
- See aims of FE changing and so not helping students like it used to
- Lots of change and extra work for no extra money

## Wages

- Wages: overall lack of wage rise but also concern round job evaluation process and results
- High salaries at the top low pay at the bottom
- Cost of payoffs
- Very little faith in the process so far
- Fear round where what it will lead to

## Mergers / regionalisation

- Feels more like take over
- Again management not engaged with involving staff
- Lack of clarity/guidance about what to do
- Lack of transparency about merger process

## Management/leadership

Good management is the key to delivering change. Where respondents are more positive it is frequently down to good leadership in the area/team in which they work. Conversely the way that change has been implemented is clearly impacting on members working lives.

- Unhappiness at high wages for senior staff and big redundancy payments for those at the top
- Take over
- No clarity
- Lack of leadership when it matters
- Real concern about how job evaluation is/has been implemented

## The Survey

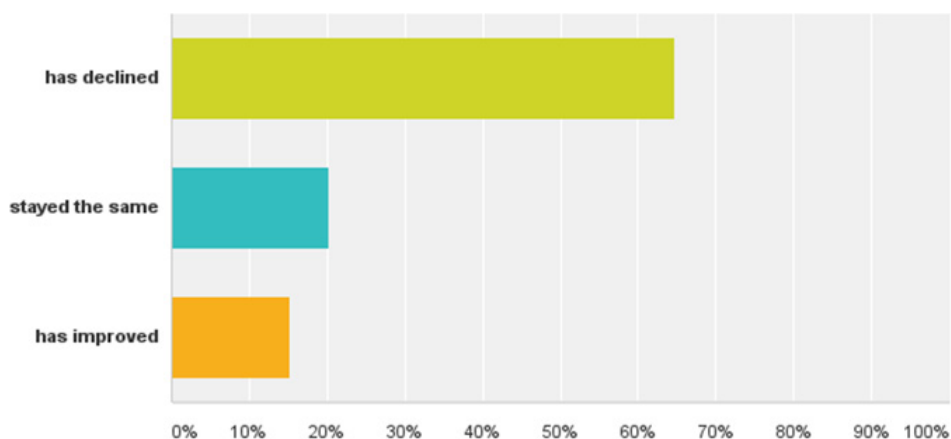
In June 2015 UNISON Scotland asked members working in further education colleges for whom they had an email address (923 members) to fill in an electronic survey about changes in their workplaces. Two hundred and sixty-six members responded from 16 different colleges.

This survey was undertaken to check whether the issues/complaints that UNISON reps were dealing with on a day to day basis in colleges was reflected in the experiences of our wider FE membership. The vast majority (65%) of those who responded believe that the service has got worse over the last two years. While 15% believe it has improved.

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### Q4 Do you feel that the service you or your team offer has improved or declined over the last two years ?

Answered: 263 Skipped: 3



Workload pressures leave many who responded feeling that they are unable to provide the level of services they once did. Comments given in answer to this question were frequently along the same theme: job cuts, course cuts, poorly handled merger process and poor management

## What FE members said

“Due to increased workload”

“Massive reduction in staff has led to an inability to provide the most basic of services to our students”.

“There are fewer of us so we can't support the students in the same way we used to. We also provided a support role to teaching staff, so with that in decline, the students are bound to suffer”.

“I am currently doing the job of 2 people due to redundancy”

“Job content now that previously done by three others previously”.

“Staff reduced due to budget cuts, more work less staff, increase in staff sickness due to workload pressure and stress.”

“The workload has tripled but the staffing has been reduced to the bare bones. There is no prioritisation of workload from management or filtering of jobs.”

The role of management and the merger process was also raised in this section. Many feel that rather than creating a new body theirs has been taken over

“The joining of the three colleges was more like a takeover” is typical of comments particularly when there has been a difference in size between colleges who have been merged.

“Poor Senior Management who have created and implemented a structure which is totally inadequate of allowing staff to offer anything other than a very poor quality of service to students. In addition, the Senior Management do not have the people skills to effectively manage individuals or teams. There is no inspirational leadership.”

“For the last 4 - 5 years we've been “spinning plates”

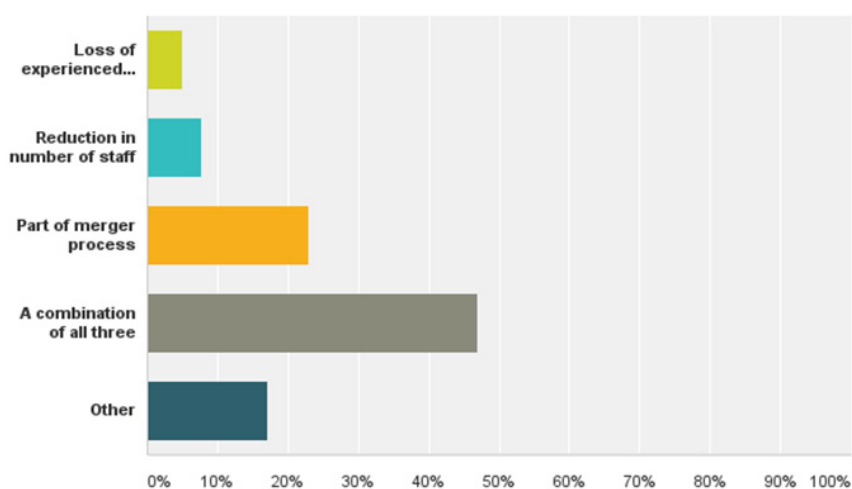
“Flexible learning classes have been cut from 6 per week to 3. Students no longer have a choice of days to attend. Although they are called flexible learning each of the sessions are for specific courses. All sessions previously were for any course giving a lot of flexibility to fit around work or family commitments; this is no longer the case. A number of student who wished to return this year from last were unable to because they could not attend on the day there class was set.”

“Cancelling of special need classes only students that they see show progression are to be allowed on courses. Students who can go onto employment are wanted”.

A second question asked why this was the case: over 40% of members felt that cuts in staff numbers and the loss of the more experienced staff and the merger were a combining to make to make things worse. Over 20% blamed the merger process alone. Exploring their wider comments on the issues

### Q5 Why do you think this is the case?

Answered: 256 Skipped: 10



Respondants comments on this question were along a few themes. The effects of mergers and regionalisation, the role of management and the impact of budget cuts.

Many felt that the loss of experienced staff was impacting on the effectiveness of the remaining operation.

Many feel that managers are part of the problem rather than showing leadership through a period of upheaval.

## What FE members said about mergers

“Good team having to work very hard, and very smart, to achieve objectives, with merger causing significant problems.”

“Merged IT and Finance services now based on a different site, less efficient for us.”

“Merger of Technical Support staff”

“Part of the merger we lost far too many experienced staff through VS”

“A lot of experienced staff took VS & new staff not given adequate training. Also the new structure has resulted in inadequate resources in most areas & is totally inflexible.”

“The amount of staff our dept has lost and not replaced has put a great deal of pressure on the staff who have been left. Added to that is the reluctance of managers to listen to staff’s concerns.

The underlying message from higher management is “if you don’t like it there is the door” Staff have been pressured into rushing through new systems that have not been tested properly and we are left to pick up the pieces when things go wrong.”

“Dominant merger partner assuming dictatorial approach thus creating lack of trust.

‘Best Practice’ and consultation process have not been applied. Quality and quantity of services to students have declined.”

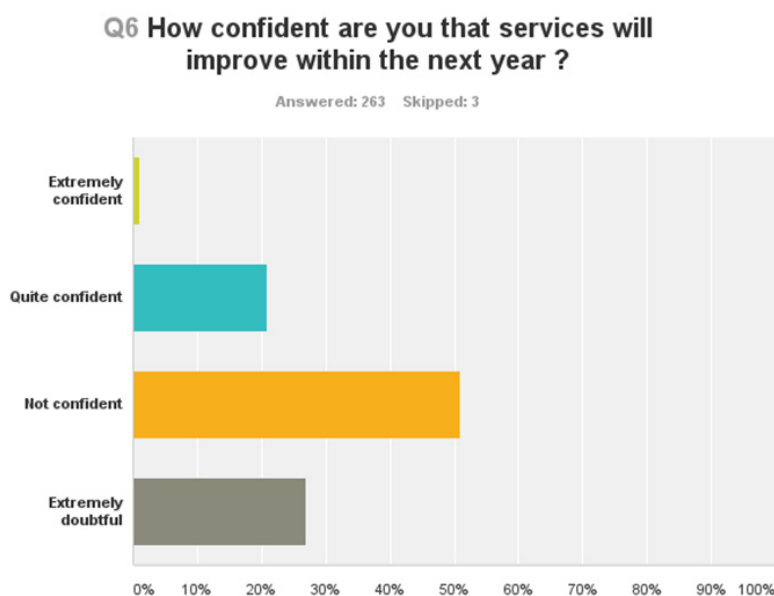
“Change to non-supportive management.”

“also dictatorial senior management who do not want to listen to experiences and opinions of the staff member doing the job or their managers.”

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Worryingly members do not see the issue as a short term one. Only 21% felt confident that services will improve within the next year. Half are not confident and 27% extremely doubtful. Change is always difficult but people can cope if they see that it will be worth it. It is very difficult to deliver when you have no confidence that things will improve.

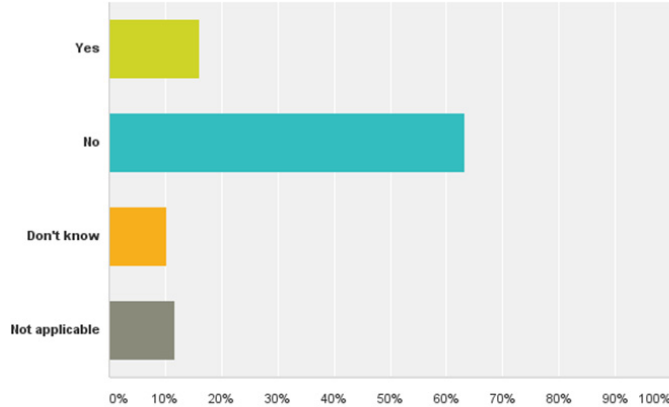


While the impact of cuts and job losses are identified by members as reasons for the problems they are experiencing trying to deliver services the role of managers is also having a significant impact. Only 16% of staff felt that there was proper communication between management and staff during the merger process while over 60% did not. All organisations go through periods of change. Openness, keeping staff informed and listening to them about the possible impact of what you are doing and are about to do is enables organisations to function well. Staff are able to ensure that managers are informed of key details which avoid time wasting or expensive failures. Overall people work better when they understand what's expected of them and when it's expected. The stress of "not knowing" makes it hard be effective, it's also de-motivating which also reduces performance.

The impact of cuts and the change process is impacting on members overall perception of their workplaces. Just over half of members (52%) are satisfied or very satisfied with

**Q8 If your college was involved in a merger do you think there was proper communication and transparency from your College Management team during the process?**

Answered: 266 Skipped: 0

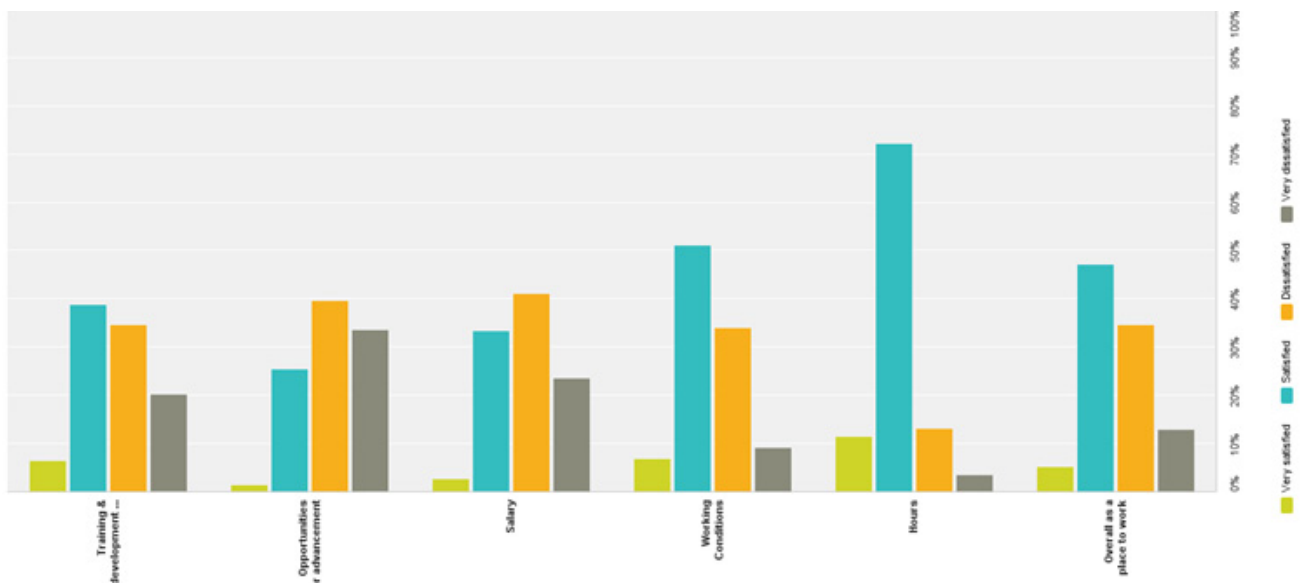


FE as a place to work hardly a ringing endorsement. Working hours (84% satisfied or very satisfied) are the most popular thing for members about working in FE. Only just over half (58%) are satisfied or very satisfied with working conditions in general. The key issues are wages and opportunities for advancement: 74% are both unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their wages. This is a combination of the impact of job evaluation and the lack of wage rises in recent years.

An equal number of respondents are unhappy with their opportunities for advancement. Only 45% of members are satisfied with training and development.

**Q9 How do you feel about the following in your workplace?**

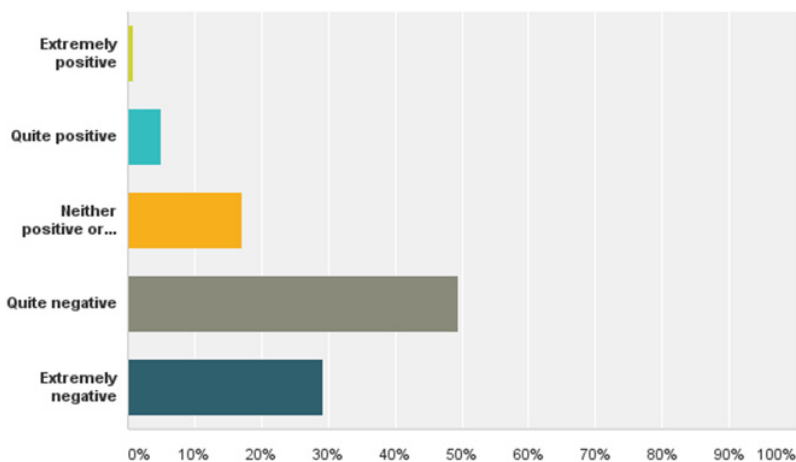
Answered: 264 Skipped: 2



Only 6% of members describe the mood in their college is positive or extremely positive while 78% say it's quite or extremely negative. Not only does this highlight the level of problems in the sector it shows how hard it will be to retain high quality staff in the sector if things do not improve.

### Q11 How would you describe the mood of staff within your college?

Answered: 263 Skipped: 3



When asked to elaborate members focused on the impact of job losses, many fear that more job losses are to come. Stress is leading to increased sickness levels further increasing the workload of those who remain.

The added comments paint a picture of highly stressed staff struggling to deliver.

## What FE members said about moral

“Morale is at an all time low. Sickness levels are increasing, stress levels have gone up, in a recent staff survey 67% of staff said they often felt stressed due to their increasing workloads. The management don't seem to care; they certainly don't acknowledge there is a problem.”

“Feels like a sinking ship”

“Everyone is under a lot of pressure with unrealistic workloads”

“People are afraid for their jobs.

“I have never experienced a place where so many people are unhappy and there is no clear direction as to where we are going”

“Very top down management style appears out of touch. Have put little effort into harmonising support staff term and conditions. Still under previous legacy colleges conditions 5 years after merger

“Staff are unhappy as they feel they are no longer fulfilled in their job role as job has been downgraded. It is unfair as our department is one of the Central areas in use by students and lecturers but we have now been pushed into more of a general assistant role, rather than allowing us to use our work experience and qualifications. The job States HNC is required but majority of staff in department are graduates (even new staff) and so frustration is common as job is not challenging enough. Staff training is available and encouraged, however as a part-time worker (due to health) there has really been no part time opportunities to enable me to develop my career (I have worked with college for 2.5 years)”

“the lack of communication and consultation from management also wealth of knowledge and experience in teams being ignored leaves staff feeling undervalued”

“Having been through several rounds of job cuts and a shambles of a merger we still have no consistent leadership in the college. Staff morale is incredibly low and we're being asked to make even more cuts! Not to mention the recent “job evaluation” process which is a complete disgrace!”

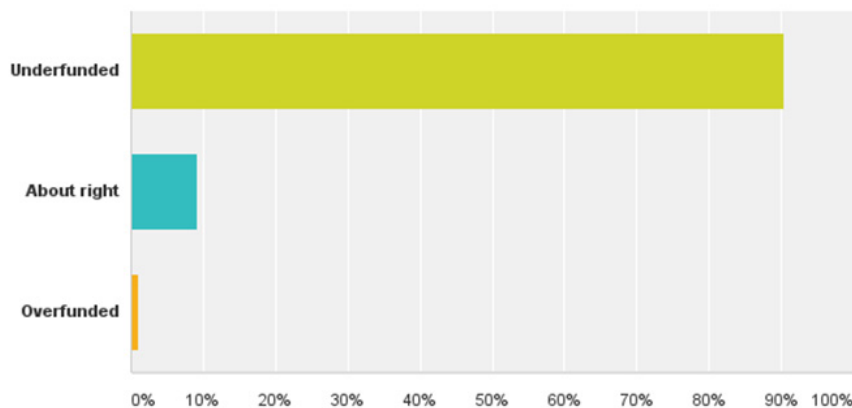
“After having our salary cut it's left very low moral as I'm a very diligent hard working member of staff who always goes the extra mile. To be awarded a decrease in salary was degrading and humiliating. Did not get a satisfactory answer when I questioned their reasoning.”

“Uncertainty regarding mergers, funding and so on. Also the loss of some senior staff indicates they are not confident in the future which has a knock on effect.”

90% of members surveyed feel that colleges are underfunded. This is no surprise given the level of funding cuts that the sector has experienced: Real terms funding fell by £53million between 2011 and 2014.

### Q10 What do you feel about funding in the college sector?

Answered: 263 Skipped: 3



### Additional comments include

“Government need to increase funding to the sector (directly for staff wage increase & increased numbers of staff) in order to give more applicants the chance to come to college and gain the most from the experience whilst receiving help/assistance form a well manned motivated support & lecturing staff.”

“Underfunded and being cut. As a result activity has to be reduced and therefore staff jobs not OMT or SMT.”

“Top management and top staff redundancy pay-offs are far too high, while campus attendants and cleaners are paid too little. Some money is wasted by hasty spending at end of financial year on pointless items, when essentials are neglected for years.”

“Massive underinvestment is now having a direct impact on all aspects of the organisation. From infrastructure, salaries, redundancies and pretty much every part of the college is suffering so much.”

“The sector is drowning, mergers have been mismanaged, and like a football club in trouble, we need a massive package of financial support to drag us out of the mire.”

## What FE members said about impact on students

### Many focused on the impact on students or those who have lost out on the chance to become students

“By changing the definition of full time (21 hours per week down to 15) the government are able to balance the books to the detriment of students and staff”

“Over the recent years we have seen the number of classes we offer being considerably reduced, particularly the Highers. Applications are still high but now we have to say ‘no’ to more students”

“Loss of part time provision badly affecting adults who want to gain the qualification for employment or further study. Policy double disadvantages individuals who have missed out on the education system. Difficult to find routes for adults into education from disadvantaged backgrounds. Needs to be a rebalance in education funding.”

Too much money has been wasted on severance packages that did not fulfil the “business need” requirement. E.g. staff being told they had packages and THE NEXT WEEK their jobs being advertised. Poor decision making - in this college there was a fiasco last year when many staff were decanted into portacabins, rooms stripped - and lots of furniture / equipment dumped - when tenders for the proposed building works had not even been received. We are now experiencing a rerun this year staff have been turfed out of workrooms, classrooms have been taken over at great inconvenience to students and only now SIX weeks later is there any sign of activity of preparation for building works. We have been told that the college will be posting a deficit in July - reasons being severance costs (1) and bursary payments!!!

## Job evaluation process

UNISON has repeatedly made the point that postponing dealing with staffing issues during mergers is a mistake. Despite this colleges continue to merge before undertaking job evaluation. This means the work has to be done in teams where people are already working side by side on different terms and conditions: it's not just wages but full-time hours, leave entitlements etc.

The lack of information and perceptions of secrecy round the post-merger job evaluation process just increase bad feeling both between members of staff and staff and management. Over 60% of respondents felt that the management had been secretive of very secretive about the process and 70% felt that trust in management was low or very low.

No one seems to understand how or why they have been evaluated.

## What FE members said about job evaluation process

No one seems to understand how or why they have been evaluated.

“I've no idea who did it and what criteria was used”

“Poorly communicated and appeals route even worse. Not much help from HR as they don't really know either.”

“There was no employee engagement, they used generic job specs that had insufficient detail for the staff to know what it meant, so not sure how the JE company could score or rank the post. There is no appeal process. No one went down in pay so they seem to think it's ok. It was a paper exercise to lend credibility to the Salary Scales they created the year before. It was a complete scam of a process carried out by a charlatan who claimed the FE-DRA scheme was used and therefore endorsed by UNISON. The scheme used contained none of the elements UNISON contributed to or sought”

“The process was badly conducted and staff confidence and morale have been seriously affected. The whole process has had to be started again.”

“Job evaluation was appalling - all managers awarded huge rises to a 'national rate', all support staff nailed down to the lowest possible 'Inverness' salary the college could get away with. WE NOW HAVE NEW MANAGEMENT”

“When job evaluation was carried, the in-house HR department employed a consultant to teach them the process of job evaluation. This exercise was painted up as being done by an external agency as to look impartial - it wasn't. Neither the staff themselves nor their managers were consulted in this process. How can you evaluate something without interviewing the people occupying these roles when it is not known what responsibilities they are actually carrying out? I myself am paid circa £5,000k less per annum than I should be. My position has been graded wrongly by those that do not understand it yet are happy to benefit from it.”

“We went through job evaluation and appeals panel before merger to retain our salaries. Now we're being advised that our job no longer exists, but that the new role that we are possibly being slotted into carries the same duties, but lower salary, without any further job evaluation being carried out.”

“Management tell us it was open and transparent. No staff were actually evaluated... it was a paper exercise “

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## CONCLUSION

UNISON believes that further education colleges play a crucial role in lifelong learning and the health and well being of our communities. They provide opportunities for many to study full-time and on to higher education or skilled jobs. They are much more than this.

Part-time courses are vital for both those with caring responsibilities or in paid work to continue to learn and gain new skills. Even so called hobby courses like car maintenance or cookery classes can be a vital stepping stone to learning for many. They enable confidence building, are an opportunity for contact with new people. This can be life changing steps for many marginalised, oppressed and or lonely people and offer continued stimulation, mental challenges and social interaction. These improve both physical and mental health for all.

The sector is undergoing radical change at a time of substantial budget cuts. This survey indicated that this is having a severe impact of the services colleges provide and that staff are under enormous pressure as they attempt to deliver a high quality service

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