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First Minister and Deputy First Minister
The Executive Office
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Dear Ministers

I am compelled to bring to your attention the dire state of industrial relations in the Northern Ireland Further Education sector.

Last week the UCU was left with no alternative but to declare a formal trade dispute with all six of the regional colleges. The dispute follows the breakdown of pay and conditions

conceived in the absence of a Minister.

opinions such as trade unionism. Impartiality is an expressed clause in the Northern
Ireland Civil Service Code of Ethics insisting Civil Servants must not ³DFW LQ D ZD\ WK
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face of it, it rather



Arguments in Favour of Maintaining the Exemption

- x The development of the Transform To Deliver policy is still at the formative stage and will require final ministerial approval before implementation. The release of confidential information before ministerial approval is obtained would undermine their ability to make objective policy decisions and could potentially compromise their role as Minister.
- x The area under discussion: employee terms and conditions is particularly sensitive and access to such information has been very tightly controlled both within the Department and in Colleges. The release of policy proposals/consideration prior to agreement between colleges and TUS and before Ministerial approval is sought and obtained would have major repercussions for industrial relations, and for the ongoing negotiations. It could damage the
- x The release of information around the respective costs and affordability of options being considered could potentially endanger public finances, giving rise to undeliverable expectations and resulting in undeliverable budgetary pressures, possibly impacting on the ability of the FE Colleges to meet the needs of both individual learners and of the economy as a whole.
- x Proposals are still under discussion and may change over time. It is important that officials have the space to develop and formulate policy away from public scrutiny.

On the basis of the assessment set out above, the Department considers that it is not in the public interest to disclose the information covered by the exemption under section 35 (1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

An Access to Information Factsheet available at <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/access-information#toc-3> provides information on what to do if you are not happy with our response.

Yours sincerely

SEAN BROLLY
FE TRANSFORMATION BRANCH



