

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL: PAY NEWS

GROWING UNREST OVER PAY

Conscious that many members expressed anger at the late settlement of the pay award last year, UCU and the other MRC trade unions lodged an early claim for 2008 and asked for immediate negotiating meetings with the MRC.

THE CLAIM

Working with the other MRC trade unions, your UCU representatives have tried to keep the claim as simple as possible. It was agreed to include elements to address the historic loss of pay resulting from the unfair practice of counting incremental progression in the overall pay award. Knowing the current pay system is becoming discredited and that piecemeal attempts to patch the existing pay system are not working, the trade unions also asked for a root and branch review of the existing arrangements.

In summary, the joint trade union side's claim was for:

1. A de coupling of the annual award from incremental progression.
2. A 10% increase in pay rates (to compensate employees for the decrease in their pay over the last few years, especially for those at the top of their bands).
3. London weighting and other allowances to be increased by 10%.
4. A review of the MRC pay structure to include the following components:
 - An equal pay audit
 - Band structures including the urgent solution to the Band 2 issues under discussion
 - Developing a career structure for colleagues in the non scientific function
 - Discussion on future use of JEGS (the management's preferred mechanism for evaluating jobs which UCU has resisted)

MANAGEMENT AGREE TO REVIEW

Management has commissioned Consultants, Towers Perrin (TP) to look at ways of developing a new pay and grading structure.

Although the trade unions raised a number of issues about the approach management has suggested to TP, given the diminishing number of HR professionals employed at the MRC, we have recognised their need to seek advice. At this stage it is impossible to predict accurately what the TP/management proposals will produce. However, experience suggests that there will be elements we agree with, but also some that we will not.

To make the traded union side position clear, a joint meeting on 18 March concluded with your negotiators making a statement to the management which included the following:

- Both sides agree that a 'root and branch' review of the pay structure seems appropriate
- Trade Union Side (TUS) note the management side (MS) brief for Towers Perrin and consider it to provide a useful basis of discussion
- TUS note the MS assertion that this is a management led review
- TUS welcome the ability to put their views being put forward to the consultants
- TUS welcome their involvement in the Testing Team (for the TP proposals)
- TUS hope that the review will develop a package which is then subject to negotiation and hopefully agreement
- TUS consider the two aspects of the pay award date and the review and can be mutually supportive and suggest it would be helpful if MS were to offer a formal proposal for action on an interim basis. TUS fully acknowledge that this is not necessarily an easy task.

BUT WHAT ABOUT MY PAY RISE?

Management are working to an ambitious time table and hope to get an agreed outline of a new pay system to the Department of Innovation and Universities (DIUS) sometime in June. The reference to DIUS is necessary under the Government's approach to signing-off deals in the civil/public services. UCU considers that the June target is unrealistic and, in any event, with the other trade unions have been pressurising management to make an early offer to take effect from 1 April. We are keen to avoid a repeat of last year where the pay award was unacceptably delayed.

At a meeting on 21 April, management accepted that they do need to consider what they can offer on an interim basis. They have agreed to send the trade unions a formal, written, response to our claim by mid-May. The trade unions will then take soundings from members before the next negotiating meeting at the end of May. Your representatives will ensure that the views of UCU members are fully reflected in those discussions.

WATCH THIS SPACE/JOIN UCU

What is clear is that change is on the cards. It is important that MRC staff can ensure that their views are effectively represented at the negotiating table. From the above it is evident that UCU continues to press the demands of our members employed by the MRC.

If you are not a UCU member and are reading this, then why not join? If you are a member but know of colleagues who are not, then why not pass them a copy of this newsletter.

The more members we have, the stronger we are.

For more information about joining, contact: www.ucu.org.uk/join