

In this issue:

Save Our Pensions

IfL Latest

2011/12 Pay Offer

Save Our Pensions: The Campaign Escalates

The campaign to defend pensions steps up significantly with the announcement that a TUC co-ordinated day of action is to be held on 30 November. This follows the failure of the government to engage properly in negotiations over plans to worsen public sector pensions including the Teachers Pension Scheme. It is the first day of action and unions will be discussing further action if there is no movement from the government.

Over 10 trade unions are balloting members for industrial action on that day. UCU and the other unions who have had successful ballots, and took action on 30 June, will join the protest, giving the possibility of over 3 million trade unionists taking action together. UCU will be calling on members in FE, AE and Post '92 Universities in England and Wales to take a one day strike and is planning to ballot members in Northern Ireland and Scotland to do likewise.

In announcing the action the TUC said:

"This call reflects the huge anger of public service workers over the threat to their pensions and the deep frustration over difficulties of securing government engagement in meaningful negotiations. This planned day of action will be an unprecedented coming together of the whole public service workforce and the communities they serve in a united demand for pensions justice."

Imposition not Negotiation

David Cameron and other ministers are making much noise about trade unions being irresponsible in taking action whilst negotiations are still underway. The simple fact however is there have been no meaningful negotiations. A number of meetings have been held since May between the government and the TUC and now separate scheme discussions have begun. However, so far the government has refused to give an inch on the key elements either on its plans for short term savings or changes to schemes from 2015. Whilst talking about negotiations it refuses to budge from its decisions to:

- Switch the indexation of pension increases from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the lower consumer Price Index (CPI) leaving lecturers thousands of pounds worse off over the average retirement
- Phase in increased pension contributions of around 3% between April 2012 and 2014/15 in order to make 2.8 billion savings
- Change the formula by which future pension liabilities are measured (Discount Rate) – meaning that future pension schemes appear more expensive

On top of this, unions have been told to expect a government decision by the end of the month on the overall cost ceiling available for new pension schemes, followed shortly by the cost contribution ie the maximum employers will be asked to pay.

The government refuses to honour agreements made in 2005 on the sharing of such costs but is insisting that these are to be based on what it calls a "reference scheme" which includes linking normal pension age to the state retirement age and moving from a final salary to a career average based scheme.

Whilst the government continues to shackle the talks in this way meaningful negotiation is proving impossible. As the TUC made clear last week:

"The government is urged to bring new proposals to the table urgently to make progress possible.The TUC and unions remain absolutely committed, in good faith, to seeking a fair negotiated settlement of this dispute so that this action will not be necessary."

Petition and Lobby of Parliament 26 October

Seven educational unions (ASCL, ATL, NAHT, NASUWT, NUT, UCAC and UCU) are organising a lobby of parliament on 26 October under the slogan 'Decent Pensions: Securing the Future For All'. The intention is for one representative from every school, college, adult education branch and new university to lobby their MP urging a rethink by government and a call for proper negotiations.

The unions have also launched a mass petition to accompany the lobby. You can sign up online at:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/tpspetition>

IfL Latest

We anticipate that the details of the independent review will be announced within a few weeks. Following discussions we are confident that practitioners will have an opportunity to put forward their views and we also intend to consult members during the course of the review.

Meanwhile, please remember the boycott of fees remains following the agreement of all parties involved and a recommendation from the minister that staff that have not paid fees should not be put under pressure to do so by any party.

2011/12 Pay Offer

Branch representatives are currently being consulted in a series of regional briefings on whether UCU should go into dispute and ballot for industrial action on the AoC offer of £125 per annum.

The FE committee of the national executive decided that the offer was clearly derisory in the context of current inflation rates and previous appalling offers that reversed gains made on closing the gap with schoolteachers.

The committee however felt it was important to gauge the mood of branches prior to taking a decision at its next meeting on 7 October. Further information will follow.

Further Education Policy Consultations

BIS, DfE and OFSTED have launched a series of consultations on various aspects of Further Education. These include: FE Loans and Review of Informal and Community Learning.

UCU will be making responses to all of these. If UCU members would like to comment on any of these consultation documents and/or make suggestions as to what should go into the UCU responses, go to:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/policynews>