

TUS NEWSLETTER

October 2011

The MRC is in the process of considerable change. The move towards University Units is gaining momentum as are the consultations with The NIMR staff on the complex move to The Francis Crick Institute. These changes raise important questions about the future shape of the MRC and its approach to delivering a focused, strategic approach to medical research in the UK. The National Trade Union Side (NTUS) have a role in asking these questions and ensuring that the views of staff are properly considered during the decision making process. These changes are set against a back drop of difficult economic conditions and political pressures for reform of public sector pensions.

It is therefore important to have effective lines of communication between the NTUS, staff and managers. Over the last year a forum has been developed to allow regular meetings with the NTUS and corporate MRC directors. We are also in the process of constructing a website aimed at both informing members of the important work of the NTUS and at improving the flow of staff views.

Meanwhile life in the MRC goes on and important changes to our pay and grading structure and redundancy provisions have, after consultations with the MRC and subsequently membership ballots been agreed. Below is an update on the work that the NTUS has carried out over the summer months.

Pay

Members of the MRC trade unions have voted overwhelmingly to accept proposals for a new pay and grading scheme. The proposals followed representation made over a number of years by the NTUS regarding the structural inconsistencies and uncompetitive reward package provided by the old scheme.

The NTUS worked constructively with the HR director and his team over the period of eighteen months to develop a system that, while less ambitious than originally aimed, goes some way towards addressing the problems. The full proposals also deal with the need for career development and progression for work groups other than scientific staff and further work is to be done towards achieving this. The highlights of the new scheme are:

- An increase in band maximums and removal of standard pay points.

- An increase in the value of increments and a commitment from the MRC to annual incremental progression as well as inflationary pay rises; subject to a sufficient annual pay settlement from government.
- The adoption of a promotion mechanism that provides for an accelerated progression through the pay bands.
- The introduction of an ethos of career progression and development within the current roles.

The NTUS met staff at MRC units throughout the UK to discuss these proposals and the response from staff was mainly positive, recognizing the proposals represented progress. The NTUS share concerns that staff expressed with respect to the political support for full implementation of the pay reforms.

Redundancy Compensation

The Department for Business and Skills (BIS) advised that as a publically funded body they expected the MRC to change its redundancy compensation scheme to align with the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS) which was implemented for civil servants using the Superannuation Act 2010.

The MRC redundancy compensation scheme is contractual and varied when compared to the original CSCS. Therefore during negotiations we were able to obtain some significant enhancements to the CSCS, although it is recognized that the provision is less generous than that previously offered.

The proposals were put to a vote of members of each union. They were accepted by four unions and rejected by PCS. This majority result was accepted by the MRC and the change in policy was implemented on the 26 September. The differences to the CSCS were recognized by the following measures:

- The six month “resettlement period” is to be retained for both Voluntary Redundancy (including Voluntary Exits) and Compulsory Redundancy.
- Staff that joined the MRC prior to 1 January 2004 and transferred benefits into the MRC pension scheme before 31 July 2005 will continue to have this service counted as reckonable service.
- Redundancy payments will be made for Career Development Fellows.
- Notice period for Compulsory Redundancy will remain at six months, the new CSCS offers only three.

- When redundancies cannot be avoided these will, wherever possible, be restricted to genuine volunteers. This approach will be reflected in a new Redundancy and Redeployment Policy to be agreed with the MRC separately.

Consultation

The NTUS is a democratically elected body composed of representatives and officials of the MRC trade unions. The NTUS is consulted on all issues that affect staff working conditions and negotiates with management on pay, and terms of employment. It provides support and advice for the local trade union sides and also individual staff members. There are five trade unions recognised by the MRC because they have a strong and stable membership that can reflect the views of a substantial number of employees. The MRC unions are:

- British Medical Association (BMA)
- First Division Association (FDA)
- Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS)
- Unite the Union (Unite)
- University and College Union (UCU)

The NTUS is chaired by Terry McDonald (Unite) and Kelvin Cain (UCU). Consultation between the NTUS committee members and management is continually being carried out on a range of issues but is underpinned by monthly Joint Negotiating and Consultative (JNCC) meetings usually held at Head Office London. This is a new arrangement of this forum that allows more regular meetings with corporate HR managers and directors aimed at giving a contemporary relevance to discussions. Members are encouraged to provide their views and opinions to steer the NTUS view and policy work carried out.

University Units

At the May 2011 Council meeting plans were endorsed for the transfer of further MRC units to the University Unit funding model. Three units have been established, six units are at various stages of active planning and Council has given approval for consideration to create a further nine.

The NTUS, while recognising some of the potential benefits of University Units, are concerned at the speed that this largely untested funding model is being adopted. Out concerns were documented in a paper presented to the March Council meeting and are summarised:

- That the MRC could lose, when combined with the move to The Crick, some control of the strategic focus of its research portfolio.
- The role that MRC units have played in providing a stable base for supporting highly successful long term speculative research could be lost.
- The MRC brand will become diluted and devalued.
- A reduced employee base will compromise the continued ability of the MRC to maintain its remaining intramural research.

The move to University Units and the accompanying change of employer can be an uncertain and unsettling experience for staff. The NTUS, led by its full time officials, have played a leading role in explaining and demystifying the transfer regulations and coordinating successful staff consultations with the universities and the MRC. This role has been recognized and is well appreciated by the staff in these units. As part of the help offered to staff a set of questions has been produced that staff should consider asking management as part of the consultation process. This is available on request.

The Francis Crick Institute

With construction of the site for the new The Francis Crick Institute now firmly underway, consultations have been taking place between a sub-committee of the Local Trade Union Side at NIMR and MRC Management since June 2011. The LTUS sub-committee has thirteen members representing scientific, technical and administrative staff within NIMR and has met three times. There have also been three general meetings of all NIMR staff to keep them updated on negotiations. These negotiations are complex due to the large number of staff involved (there could be up to 1500 at the new institute) and also because of the number of organisations involved in the new facility. These are the MRC, Cancer Research UK, The Board of The Francis Crick Institute, London's three major universities (UCL, Kings and Imperial) and the project is of course overseen by central government. The full time officers of each union and the NTUS are also on hand to provide help and advice. Discussions will also take place with the universities senior union representatives and the staff representatives of the London Research Institute (CRUK).

Policy Watch

The NTUS officers spend a lot of time working on staff HR policies. As these are contractual, management must negotiate with NTUS to agree any policy changes. In the last few months much work has been done on several policies including Maternity, Adoptive, Maternity Support and Parental Leave which is being updated to reflect changes within the legislation. Furthermore, the Learning and Development policies are also being updated to include changes in legislation that support the right to request time off for study or training. On top of this substantial work, the Redundancy and Redeployment (Green Book) and pay policies are also being developed. The NTUS are also working with management on the

sickness absence and code of conduct policies at present.

NTUS Website

Work is under way on the construction of the MRC Trade Unions Website. We are expecting to launch the full website by the end of the year and this will be the main route of providing information to our members and collecting members views. A temporary page is underway and will soon be available.

Contact Us

Anyone with any issues or questions raised by this newsletter should contact louise.craig@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk where they will be directed to the appropriate person within the NTUS.

Terry McDonald on behalf of the MRC trade unions

(BMA, FDA, PCS, UCU and Unite)

