UNISON is balloting its 800,000 members in local government over industrial action to fight changes in their pension scheme. The changes proposed in the Local Government Pension Scheme – and now also in the NHS Scheme – would mean people working longer, or retiring on smaller pensions.

The government has been “reviewing” all public sector pension schemes in the light of claims that people are living longer to draw their pensions, resulting in escalating costs. They have already decided as a matter of policy to increase the normal pension age in all schemes from 60 to 65 years. This proposal alone cuts the value of schemes by up to 30 per cent.

In addition the minimum age at which a pension will become payable (except on grounds of ill health) is set to increase from age 50 to 55 years.

Proposals to switch from final salary to career average schemes in the civil service and now the NHS are also causing widespread concern and could lead to similar proposals elsewhere.

UNISON is mounting a co-ordinated campaign across our service groups against the proposals, and working with other unions and the TUC to resist these changes.

To suggest that NHS workers should be forced to work until they are 65 is living in cloud cuckoo land. Working for the NHS is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding. It is a highly stressful environment because of the rapid changes in technology, the rapid turnover of patients and constant reforms and changes.

73% of paramedics are already forced to retire through ill health before they reach the age of 60, let alone carry on until they are 65.

Forcing staff to work longer will simply raise the level of ill health retirements and end up costing the NHS more.

If staff continue to work in vital occupations to avoid reducing their pension benefits there are possible risks to patients, who may find themselves being cared for by people whose capability is compromised by age-related problems, but who are not eligible for ill-health retirement.

Under the proposals, all new NHS employees joining from 2006 would be asked to work up to the age of 65, while existing employees who have not hit 60 by 2013 will be required to work until 65 before retiring.

MARCH 23 named as pensions day of action

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UNISON's bombshell!

PAY UP FOR PENSIONS
News in BRIEF

Mental Health: thumbs down for latest draft Bill

The BMA has joined ranks with unions and campaigners, and called on ministers to scrap their latest effort at a Mental Health Bill — and start again.

“We believe that it is not possible to tinker with these proposals and pass them,” said the chair of the BMA’s ethics committee Dr Michael Wilks.

“The government really does need to start again by talking to health professionals and other interested groups about what kind of legislation is needed to help people suffering from mental illness as well as protecting the community at large.”

The BMA has concluded that the bill is too complex, and so confusing that many health care professionals and lawyers will struggle to understand it.

But once again the key problem that shoots down the Bill is the proposal for people to be detained and treated against their will, which is defined in such a way as potentially to include alcoholics and people with learning difficulties — which is defined in such a way as potentially to include people with alcohol problems, learning difficulties and personality disorders.

And by scrapping the principle of delivering the least restrictive treatment, the BMA believes the Bill is unethical.

To cap it all, the Department of Health has admitted that the Bill would require a further 130 consultant psychiatrists in post — at a time when one post in every eight is vacant in England and Wales, and there seem to be no plans to recruit the extra doctors.

Dav e Preti ns wins another term

UNISON’s current General Secretary Dave Prentis has secured a second term of office, with a hefty 76 percent of the vote in a postal ballot in which only one in six members voted.

Left wing opposition to Prentis was split, with previous challenger Roger Bannister securing almost 17 percent and rival left winger Jon Rogers securing over 7 percent.

Health branches call for action on pensions

The Government’s plans to attack the pension schemes of Public sector workers will affect literally millions of NHS staff and other public sector workers.

All the public sector unions representing five million workers (council workers, NHS staff, teachers, fire fighters, college workers and Civil servants are currently planning a day of action on March 23.

UNISON’s Health Group conference last year voted unanimously for strike action if the government went forward with plans to raise the NHS retirement age to 65.

With the recent announcement saying exactly that, it is time to act.

Civil service union leader Mark Serwotka has called for a one day public sector strike, and resolutions to UNISON’s Health Conference (to take place this April in Plymouth) call for action including ballots for lawful strikes.

With a general election looming, the last thing the government needs is millions of public sector workers taking to the streets. This is a battle we can win.

What should you do about it now?

1. When you receive your consultation papers from the Department of Health make sure you reply and oppose the cuts.

2. Write to your local MP candidates saying that you would not vote for them if they support these proposals.

3. Make sure you attend the meetings called by the UNISON to organize the campaign to save our pensions.

4. Vote YES if balloted for industrial action in defence of our pensions.

5. Get your work mates to join UNISON: the bigger we are, the stronger we are.

Tsunami appeal: UNISON donates £20,000

UNISON has donated an immediate £10,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee fund to help survivors of the south Asian earthquake and tsunami, and is urging all branches and members to give generously in support of the appeal.

The union has also earmarked a further £10,000 to help sister trade unions in the area rebuild their organisations after the disaster.

The union is working closely with the TUC and international union federations on the issue and general secretary Dave Prentis has written to all UNISON’s sister unions in the area to express condolences and pledged to help them at this terrible time.

We need YOU!

Have you ever thought about getting more involved in your Union?

If you have, we can guarantee that we won’t throw you in at the deep end. We’ll only ask you to do as much as you’re prepared to take on.

Although we’re always on the look out for new stewards and health and safety reps there are plenty of other ways that you can get involved. If you are interested please don’t hesitate, just drop us a line or two on this slip and send it back to us.

Go on, you know it makes sense!
Pensions policy is a blow to all health workers

The widespread protests led by local government staff on February 18, and the action on March 23 against a drastic worsening of public sector pensions should sound the warning bells for staff in the NHS: we, too are under attack.

While changes in the local government pension scheme to increase the retirement age from 60 to 65 are due to be introduced as early as April, it is very clear from the situation of the civil servants and the fire brigade that this government is determined to cut back on all public sector pensions – and that means you and me.

An increase from 60 to 65 in the standard retirement age for entitlement to full pension is equivalent to a cut of almost 30 per cent in its value; and since pensions are deferred wages, it is effectively imposing a substantial wage cut.

But don’t be fooled into thinking that it’s only older members of staff who stand to lose out: this cutback is targeted at the age group least likely to be conscious of pensions and their likely needs in old age – staff who are still young enough not to reach their 60th birthday by 2013 when the new rules would come in.

Up to now the fat cars in private industry have been shamefully allowed to play fast and loose with the pension rights of millions of workers. Some have pocketed the cash, others slashed back benefits.

Ministers have done too little too late to protect workers, and at the same time they have abandoned Labour’s long-standing promise to reverse the link between the state pension and average wages – allowing Michael Howard, a member of the government that first broke the link to pose bizarrely now as the pensioners’ friend, by offering to reverse it.

But now ministers are looking to spread the misery into the public sector, where the pension has been seen as a compensation for poor wages and stressful work. UNISON has been at the forefront of the unions rejecting this attack.

It seems that only a firm and unified response from the public sector unions can prevent a massive new pensions rip-off affecting millions of workers.
Panels make slow progress on Agenda for Change

“We’ve got really good facilities,” says UNISON Branch Secretary Stuart Egan, who is the staff side lead on Agenda for Change in the Trust. “And we are trying to run seven matching panels each day.”

“Our Trust has agreed to every request we have made for resources to carry this process through, whether it be finance or facilities.”

“AUC has been among the Trust’s top five priorities.

“In fact we have been evaluating and matching jobs faster than payroll can assimilate them onto the new pay bands.”

“Trusts in Wales have been given a deadline of September by the National Assembly to complete the process of assimilation to AMC. So will we make it in Cardiff & Vale?”

“Not a hope in hell,” says Stuart. “We would need 20 experienced payroll officers, along with suitable accommodation and equipment to enable us to meet the deadline.”

“IT system is also a problem: it was supposed to be improved to make assimilation easy, but the Trusts who have tried it have found it’s not working properly.”

“The result is that if you get your new pay band in month 1, you still have to wait to month 2 to get your back pay. That creates extra work, and means that each file has to be kept active twice as long.”

“Payroll should be able to do each assimilation once and then move on.

“It would cost a lot for an all singing, all dancing IT system – and the Assembly would have to pay for it. At present the current costs of implementation are being borne by the Trusts, not the government.”

“With the branch so strongly committed to the implementation of the deal, what can be done?”

“For us, the key now is a damage limitation exercise, to try to limit people’s expectations.”

“The slow progress is nobody’s fault: we are rediscovering the problems that they found in the Early Implementer Trusts. It has not been a straightforward task as some thought, and the back-up has not been there to help us through.”

“Some initial decisions have been made, however.

“All new starters since December 1 are coming in not at 37.5 hours a week, but on the hours of the staff group they are joining, to prevent people working side by side on a different working week.”

**Overtime pay**

“The new overtime rates were not introduced on December 1. Instead ancillary staff will still get double time for working their next days, with this to be reviewed in March.”

“We have been criticised for this, but all it’s doing is ensure our staff are valued and motivated. We didn’t want to take money off people now, but make them wait two
trust has shown to them.

To do the work required, and remunerated. Now they are prepared. The new system cannot be implemented without their support.

Trust payroll staff are treated as staff side reps than staff side. "At the panels," says Stuart. "At the matching all other jobs.

"We couldn't win the case, but we have at least ensured that our HR director along with the «CH team put a paper together on this and submitted it to all HR managers in Wales: it was rejected.

"We have to remember that the national profiles for finance staff, including payroll, in Wales would leave a lot of payroll staff worse off.

"We said you have to look at the need not only for a local recruitment and retention premium to get around this, but an all-Wales premium, too.

"We couldn't win the case, but we have at least ensured that our Trust payroll staff are treated properly, without their support the new system cannot be implemented. Now they are prepared to do the work required, and seem grateful for the support the Trust has shown to them."

Block on matching

Up to now Trusts have only been allowed to begin matching nurses and allied health professionals in Wales there was a block on matching on all other jobs.

Recently the block has been removed from ancillary staff, but there is still no decision to proceed with admin & clerical.

"We still need more members to come forward and train to act as staff side reps on the matching panels," says Stuart. "At the moment there are more management side reps than staff side."

"We have also decided as a branch to have a team of trained advocates in place who will be available to meet with staff when they receive their letters giving them their pay bands.

"The advocates will sit down with staff and advise them whether or not they have a case for requesting a review of the decision.

"But we are not going to take the stance that we may have done in past regarding exercises, of just urging staff to request a review regardless of how good a case they have.

"We will assess in each case whether or not there are grounds to think that the banding is wrong, and request a review.

"If the banding seems to be right, we will tell them so: we will be completely open and honest with people, and not give them false hopes.

Partnership

This process has been different from clinical grading in 1988: the matching process has been done in partnership, and unless something has gone horribly wrong it should normally be OK."

Of course there will be some cases where people have been incorrectly banded:

"Yes, of course there is the issue of the quality of the Job Description. It may have been inadequate, and may have been wrongly signed off as true and accurate by the member of staff. That won't be the case for everyone.

"And of course thought there are four people on each panel, we all do make mistakes from time to time, and everyone has an "off-day" – so I wouldn't want to argue that every single match is necessarily right.

"But we are working to make as many right decisions as possible, and we don't want to go round in circles challenging the ones we got right."

Jacqui Rafferty is the UNISON Regional Officer assigned to work with our branch. Our Informer reporter caught up with her at the CRI in late February.

"I have other branches to look after as well, in local government, and the Welsh Blood Service/Velindre branch, but I have been working with Cardiff & Vale health branch for about 18 months."

Jacqui has been a UNISON officer for 10 years, and enjoys the buzz of activity: "I get drawn into everything, from campaigning on issues like NHS pensions, to advocacy for individual members.

"I firmly believe in a member-led union. It would be really good to train people to the point where the branches could do away with us full-timers."

"Cardiff & Vale is a big branch, and a big challenge. One good thing is so many good people are already acting as stewards and reps. With more reps it is easier to recruit more people.

"That makes life easier on one level: but the branch also has members in various GP surgeries and in nursing homes, where the membership is thinner on the ground and it is harder to find reps."

"Many of the staff employed by nursing homes in south Wales are overseas nurses, mostly from the Philippines or Poland and Eastern Europe. They face special problems. Their problem is that they are treated really badly by the nursing home bosses, on contracts which often offer them only the minimum wage."

"Of course many of them are highly trained nurses: the homes get them working as care assistants. They are supposed to work a period and then be assimilated to nursing posts, but this does not happen for many of them."

"A nursing home may bring in over 20-30 Filipino nurses, but can't assimilate more than 2-3 of them to nursing jobs: the rest are left to work as care assistants."

"It's very sad to see these experienced and well educated staff and their talent being squandered by private sector homes."

"What does UNISON offer these staff? If they join the union we can offer them representation and support.

"Many have been caught out because they signed contracts in the Philippines which have been endorsed by their government, but when they get here they are pressed to sign a different, much worse, contract, which their government has not seen or endorsed – and often they do so without seeking advice."

"We are trying to find ways we can get in to these cases earlier and offer help in time to stop contracts like this being signed."

"One particular home gets people to sign contracts under which staff are given accommodation – owned by the care home, or its senior employees – which, despite being far from cheap, leaves people sharing rooms."

"These staff face a real double whammy, with low wages and inflated rents."

"The Trust also does its own recruitment and brings staff over from the Philippines so there can be few vacancies available for staff stuck in low-paid work in care homes. A transfer can be very complicated, given the issues of work permits."

"One nurse moved over to the NHS but then found they had to pay back the air fare which had been paid by the nursing home. Others find they have to pay some compensation to the care home if they break the contracts they have signed."

"The Branch has overseas nurses reps, Rio and Roberto, who do a lot of work contacting people and letting them know what UNISON is about."

"The issue is with UNISON's solicitors in Head Office now. They are looking for ways of cutting off the supply of recruits to the companies which issue these exploitative contracts."

"Jacqui is also working with a small group of Branch activists on the campaign to defend the NHS pension against the latest government proposals."

"I enjoy that side of things, getting people to meet, and getting information across."

"For years pensions have not been seen as a sexy issue: people don't realise the impact on them and their future if these changes go through."

"If the going gets tough, perhaps the Branch might need to call on one of Jacqui's other accomplishments: helping originally from the north of England, she is a qualified Rugby league coach!"
THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FRAMEWORK

What will it mean for you?

The NHS and the development review process is designed to apply across the whole of the NHS. It is designed to be:
- Simple and easy to understand
- Feasible to implement operationally
- Able to link with current and emerging competence frameworks

NHS KSF has been developed in Partnership throughout the NHS. It sets out a development review process, which identifies the knowledge and skills needed to apply to their posts and helps guide the development of individuals.

It provides a fair and objective framework on which to base review and development for all staff, and also provides the basis of Pay Progression within the service.

Gateways:
- Foundation: this relates to the knowledge and skills that need to be applied from the outset in a post.
- Second Gateway: The knowledge and skills needed to be applied and demonstrated by someone fully developed in a post.
- Third Gateway: The knowledge and skills that are needed by an individual in the NHS to do their particular job (these are produced in a KSF Post Outline).

The Knowledge and Skills Framework is designed to do four things:
1. Identify what skills and knowledge are needed by an individual in the NHS to do their particular job.
2. Help identify any gap between the skills and knowledge needed to do the job and the current skills and knowledge of the individual.
3. If a gap exists, help to identify training and development to close it.
4. Provide a system of pay progression across the service based on a single agreed system.

What are the benefits of the KSF?

- Many NHS staff – particularly those in ancillary grades – have found a lack of opportunities for learning and development: the KSF is designed to change all that.
- It will help staff to identify clear areas and set objectives for developing specific skills and knowledge to meet the requirements of the job that they do.
- Anyone who is interested in working in a different NHS job can set themselves a goal to achieve the necessary skills and knowledge which will equip them to make a career change, and then apply for a different NHS job role within the service.
- After decades in which low paid workers have been deprived opportunities to access education and training, the Knowledge & Skills Framework access to training and development becomes a right, not a privilege.

Launch of Partnership Learning: UNISON and Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust

“LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP”

Skills for Life and Government Policy and commitment to Life Long Learning recognised that good basic skills form the foundation for all learning.

The Government was concerned to get this right that it commissioned a report in 1999 on improving numeracy and literacy, and it was called “A Fresh Start”. It was often referred to as the “Moosor Report” after Sir Claus Moser. In 2004 Unison and Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust were successful with their application to the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF).

The Welsh Assembly awarded the grant to Unison Branch Cardiff & Vale and Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust in their support of the Learning in Trusts Projects.

The funding is intended to support effective and sustainable activity by trade unions and their partners (employers) which promotes and supports Life Long Learning within the workplace. This will build a strategy and competiveness, employability within the NHS. It supports the Trust’s Life Long Learning Manager with the Employer Pledge to provide training courses for employees with basic skills (numeracy/literacy) and ICT basic skills training.

The “Learning in Partnership” was launched by the Trust’s Chair Mr Simon Jones along with Mr Jayne Dando Deputy Director Human Resources with whom UNISON are pleased to have taken the project forward.

Lynwen Davies was appointed as the Project Manager and will be supported in her role by Unison’s Life Long Learning Advisor/Representatives.

For more information contact Kathy Unal or email kathy.unal@cardiffandvale.wales.nhs.uk
Making cleaner hospitals a reality

AS THE DEBATE about cleaner hospitals continues, UNISON has launched a report – Cleaners’ Voices – that contains the views of the experts — the thousands of professional cleaners who are working tirelessly, against all the odds, to keep our hospitals clean.

From hospitals across the NHS, including Morristorn and Singleton Hospitals in Swansea, a common message emerges from the cleaning staff that have spoken out.

They want to be given the resources to do a better job of cleaning our hospitals; enough resources to ease the stress caused by massive under-investment.

Some of the actions they are suggesting already prevail in the best-managed NHS hospitals: but they are not common practice.

Ten key steps cleaners want to see to make cleaner hospitals a reality:

1 Prioritise cleaning services

Clearing staff throughout the NHS want to see hospital cleaning services made a genuine priority for NHS Trusts, from the topmost level of management downwards, including medical and professional staff.

We need a complete break from the culture that has largely prevailed at management level since the Competitive Tendering of the mid 1980s, a culture slashed back hours of work and quality of care in pursuit of the lowest cost.

2 More staff, more hours

Hospital cleaning remains in essence a hard, labour-intensive job, in which technology has made little impact in the last 20 years.

Any improvement in cleaning standards therefore requires a major increase in the number of hours worked, which in turn means an increase in numbers of cleaning staff.

3 More and better resources

Cleaning staff also need the right physical resources to work with: this means adequate supplies of properly maintained equipment and high quality cleaning materials, along with proper provision of staff rooms, changing rooms, and sufficient uniforms and protective clothing to enable all staff to comply with good practice in infection control.

4 Staff involvement to ensure contracts match needs

Cleaning contracts, especially those that have emerged after a period of privatisation, must be redrawn to ensure sufficient staff and resources to meet the clinical needs of each Trust. UNISON members should be involved in that process.

Many staff complain about the poor quality of monitoring and quality control that means poor standards have been allowed to continue in many trusts.

New contracts must be properly resourced, and strictly monitored by suitably qualified staff to ensure that the stipulated hours are being worked and that the specified standards are being consistently delivered.

5 Effective teams

Cleaners cannot be secured simply through the existing cleaning staff working harder: any improvement has to be a team effort.

“Cleaner Hospital” teams should include representatives of cleaning staff, whose specialist knowledge, commitment and professionalism is vital to day to day cleanliness on wards and throughout each hospital.

6 Respect and improving communication

It will take more than just inviting the cleaners to team parties and nights out, or putting their photographs on the wards, to make them part of the team.

Steps need to be taken, by Trust and ward-level management, to combat divisive or alien attitudes towards cleaning staff that often leads to domestic staff being invisible.

7 Training for all

To deliver high quality cleaning services, and win the respect of experienced cleaning staff, it is necessary for the management and supervision within these services, as well as front-line staff, to be appropriately trained in cleaning techniques, in health & safety, and in management skills.

8 Giving scope to respond to criticism

Any system which urges more members of the public to complain about standards of cleaning and other services must be balanced by a procedure that ensures that staff in the affected service are given genuine opportunities to respond to criticism, and encouraged to work to reshape services to improve standards.

9 Bringing cleaning services back in-house

Experience in the NHS shows 20 years of failures as a result of a system of market testing which has led to drastic cost cutting and declining and unacceptable levels of cleaning standards in hospitals.

Competition for contracts within this system has reduced even in-house services to the lowest common denominator.

10 Better pay and conditions

As well as the need to increase staffing establishments, serious attention is needed to address the high turnover and intolerable working conditions.

Paying decent levels of pay and conditions of service is one way to ensure that Agenda for Change becomes a reality for all cleaning staff.

Contacting the Branch

If you have a problem at work, first contact your workplace steward or rep.

As we go to press, Cardiff & Vale Branch is about to hold its 2005 AGM, at which a number of reps and stewards will be elected.

A full list of newly-elected officers and stewards will be published in our next issue.

But if you need to contact the Branch Office at UHW, it is open 10-12am on weekdays, telephone 029 2074 8280.

The Branch office at LLANDOUGH can be contacted on 029 2074 6722

The Branch office at WHITCHURCH Hospital ring 029 2052 7030
If you have been a member of a trade union before, Payroll number (from your payslip)...

$1,295 after one year's continuous membership, £2,875 for ten years membership, to be paid to the member's partner or children.

Members who suffer partial or total incapacity due to injury while at work are entitled to £1,437 for partial, or £2,875 for total incapacity, as described in the rule book.

Members can apply to the Welfare Fund for convalescent accommodation:
- To recover from an illness
- To have a temporary rest for the benefit of health
- To take a holiday they could not otherwise afford.

£2.90 per day of sickness, £14.50 per week maximum, up to a maximum of 30 days or £87 in any calendar year.

Members can be considered for a grant by the NEC for training or study courses.

Members can be considered for a grant by the NEC for training or study courses.

UNISON provides free advice on state and welfare issues. These include courses leading to professional qualifications, GCSEs and vocational qualifications.

UNISON represents nearly 1.5 million employees across Britain, making us the biggest trade union in Britain. We only recruit people who work to provide services to the public - so our size and our specialisation mean that we offer strong, professional and effective protection to all our members.

UNISON's trained representatives provide free support and advice on any problems you might have at work.

UNISON provides professional legal representation for accidents at work and while travelling to and from work, and free representation on other employment related issues.

We also offer legal advice for domestic and other problems at much reduced rates. UNISON's trained health and safety representatives provide free services to make your workplace safe to be in.

UNISON pays benefits to members, including accident and death benefits.

UNISON looks after you. We provide convalescent facilities at reduced rates, offer financial assistance to members suffering unforeseen hardship, and give free advice on state and welfare benefits.

UNISON provides a wide range of competitive financial services. These include reduced rates mortgages, home, car and holiday insurance, road rescue, personal loans, credit cards and financial planning advice.

UNISON offers great break-away holidays through our travel club, as well as a family holiday centre in Devon.

UNISON offers a range of education and training courses. These include courses leading to professional qualifications, GCSEs and vocational qualifications.

Don’t delay, join today!