IFUT
Irish Federation of University Teachers
Cónaidhm Éireannach na Múinteoirí Ollscoile

11 Merrion Square,
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Building Momentum
A New Public Service Agreement 2021-22

Your questions answered

What is the duration of the Agreement?

It would be a two-year agreement which, if ratified, would run from 1st January 2021 until 31st December 2022. This is shorter than usual and, if the deal is ratified, IFUT expects that negotiations on a successor agreement would begin in the early summer of 2022.

Has IFUT taken a position on the proposed agreement?

IFUT members will decide whether or not the Union will back acceptance of the package. This will be done through a postal ballot. The IFUT Executive Committee and Council Committee are due to meet on 14 January 2021 and 16 January 2021 respectively to discuss the proposed new deal.

What are the pay terms?

- 1st October 2021: A general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater, would kick in one year after the final pay amendment under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA). The €500 a year floor means those on lower incomes will receive a significantly larger percentage increase than higher paid staff.

- 1st February 2022: The equivalent of a 1% increase in annualised basic salaries through a 'Sectoral Bargaining Fund'.

- 1st October 2022: A second general round increase worth 1% of gross pay or €500 a year, whichever is the greater. Again, this means those on lower incomes will receive a significantly larger percentage increase than higher paid staff.

- Higher-paid public servants (who are due a final phase of pay restoration in 2021 or 2022) will not get the general round increase in that year. But, if the amount of restoration due is less than the general round increase, they will be paid the balance on the date of the general round increase.

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- If the proposed agreement is accepted, Unions will not be able to lodge 'cost-increasing' claims for improvements in pay or conditions during the lifetime of the agreement.

What is the 'Sectoral Bargaining Fund'?

If ratified, the agreement would see the establishment of a 'sectoral bargaining fund,' initially worth 1% of basic pensionable pay during the lifetime of the agreement. It is not possible to increase the allocation by proposing productivity measures. Neither can the process "give rise to unintended cost increasing outcomes."

This can be used to deal with outstanding adjudications, recommendations, awards and claims that are relevant to specific grades, groups or categories of workers within the various sectors of the public service.

Alternatively, groups could opt to use the available allocation, or part of it, as a sectoral pay round.

The bargaining units (i.e. the different grades, groups and categories) are to be agreed between Unions and employer representatives by the end of February 2021. Unions and management will then decide how the fund will apply in each bargaining unit no later than the end of March 2021. Management and Unions would then agree proposals, which must be submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DEPR) for verification by the end of June 2021. Payment would fall due on 1st February 2022.

It will not be possible to discuss issues that are standard across grades, groups and categories (e.g. overtime rates, weekly hours of attendance, leave entitlements, pension arrangements).

If the issue(s) identified for a grade, group or category cannot be fully addressed within the 1% allocation, the parties will have to agree which elements can be implemented within this agreement. Outstanding elements "will fall to be addressed in a future sectoral bargaining fund as part of the next agreement."

No sectoral or grade-based claims will be allowed outside this process during the lifetime of the agreement.

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Will the proposals lead to more outsourcing?

Strong protections against outsourcing remain in place. The management side initially sought measures that would have increased the risk of outsourcing and privatisation. But the final text retains existing safeguards. These include requirements on employers to present a 'business case' if they want to outsource a service or part of a service, and a requirement to consult with staff representatives. Crucially, employers are forbidden to include labour costs in any business case.

This is a substantial safeguard because discarding the labour cost provision would effectively mean the majority of business cases would support outsourcing and lead to the privatisation of public services – on the basis of minimum wage and rock-bottom workers' rights – regardless of the impact on service quality and worker protections.

What happens if the economic and fiscal situation changes?

Like the current Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), the proposed new agreement contains a provision to review the terms of the agreement "where the underlying assumptions of the agreement need to be revisited." However, the union negotiators successfully insisted that PSSA language, which linked this specifically to a worsening economic situation, was deleted. This creates the opportunity to seek a review of the package if the economic situation improves beyond expectations.

What are the implications for public service pensioners?

If the proposed agreement is ratified, existing policy on the application of pay increases to civil and public service pensions will continue for the duration of the agreement. In the main, this means that pension payments will be adjusted in line with pay adjustments for serving staff.

However, this will be done in a way that takes account of the fact that, in a small number of cases, pension payments currently exceed parity with pay. This is because pensions were not reduced by the same extent as pay during the last fiscal crisis.

Pensions are adjusted in line with inflation (the Consumer Price Index, or CPI) in the case of the single public service pension scheme, which applies to all civil and public servants who entered public service employment on or after 1st January 2013. This means that the pensions of members of this scheme are not affected by pay movements, including those in the proposed agreement.

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What happens if the proposed agreement is rejected?

If the proposals are rejected, there will be no public service agreement in place after 31st December 2020. That means that existing protections, which restrict management's ability to impose workplace and other changes without discussion or agreement, would cease to be in place, as would the strong protections against outsourcing that currently exist. Needless to say, the proposed pay improvements and progress on other issues would be off the table. The Government might be willing to re-enter talks, but Union negotiators do not believe it would be possible to agree a better outcome at this time.

What happens next?

A postal ballot of IFUT members who would be covered by the agreement will determine whether IFUT supports acceptance or rejection of the package.

The ballot's closing date will be before 15th February 2021, which is when the ICTU Public Services Committee will accept or reject the package on the basis of aggregated Union ballot outcomes.

The ICTU Public Service Committee (PSC) represents all ICTU-affiliated Unions with members in the civil and public service. It decides through a weighted aggregate of the outcomes of all the Union ballots, which means the voting strength of each Union is determined by the number of members it has in the civil and public service.

Ask a question

If you have a question about the proposed agreement, please send it by e-mail to GeneralSecretary@ifut.ie.