

RFU National News

Newsletter for the Retained

Vol. 3 Issue 02



Pensions - What are we doing?

The RFU's lone campaign for a Retained pension continues. Many thousands of you completed Employment Tribunal applications for parity of pay and pensions, but before these could be heard the FBU jumped on the bandwagon and pursued their own claims, it is interesting to note that the FBU's application refers to 3 points of parity whereas the RFU's document contains 12! These have now gone through the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeals Tribunal, where they were lost. The Court of Appeal heard the FBU cases at the end of March, and a decision is expected by the end of April.

The reason the FBU lost at the earlier stages were that the "comparators" they picked were retained firefighters in Kent and Royal Berkshire, where retained personnel do not undertake the full range of duties carried out by their wholetime colleagues. Until the FBU cases are settled, the RFU is prevented from pursuing our cases in brigades where Retained do carry out the same duties as wholetime personnel. If the FBU pursue their cases to the House of Lords and the European Court of Justice this could delay a resolution for many more years!

Light at the end of the tunnel

In the meantime, RFU lobbying of Bain, Government and the Common's Select Committee has wrung a commitment from Government to provide for retained pensions in the changes being made to the Firemen's Pension Scheme. A consultation document is expected by the end of June, with legislation to implement this next year.

Changes for Retained Personnel step up a gear

Retained Pay

The November pay deal (agreed by the FBU and National Employers) continues to cause anger for those who are losing money and it seems that the RFU is the only union drawing the attention of the employers and the Government to the many anomalies in our pay. We believe that the message has been getting through, and in the short-term we have been working with brigades to ensure members are covered by the "safeguarding" arrangements. In the medium to longer term, we believe the option of alternative pay systems which are based on availability rather than response would benefit most personnel and the communities they serve, especially as the whole aim of modernisation is to concentrate on prevention. Changes are already under way in respect of AFA responses which due to 'call management' will reduce the number of turnouts we receive to AFA's. We have set up our own retained pay review to gauge the views of members, and to inform employers and government. We would welcome your views.

Pay Agreement - Stage 3 (01.07.04)

We are awaiting a response from the NJC on the impact the change in payment for redirections and calls on drill nights will have. According to the Head of Agreement document in October 2003, any savings fire authorities make by the above change will be used to increase the disturbance payment above the stage 3 level (£3.28). However we have expressed our concern over how the fire authorities used for this monitoring process were chosen. Watch this space!

Revised Grey Book

We have major concerns over the contents of the revised 'Grey Book' as this will ensure Retained personnel receive yet another pay cut! Employers circular 03/04 (see RFU website) states;

Overtime

'The method of calculating pay for the first hour of any period of casual overtime is unchanged but payment beyond the first hour will now be made for complete periods of a quarter of an hour worked (at time and a half). As a consequence, for employees on the retained duty system, the method of calculating pay for the hour beyond the first hour is unchanged but payment beyond the second hour will be for complete periods of a quarter of an hour.'

The RFU is disappointed (though not surprised) that the FBU have agreed to this in the draft document; in fact the only opposition they have raised throughout the entire list of revisions is the issue of 'stand-down' time relating to the Wholetime duty system. If this change was to go ahead then Retained personnel will receive a pay cut for any fire call exceeding 2 ¼ hours.

Recruitment and Retention

The Minister announced the setting up of a Retained Review Team at a RFU conference in December, and we are using this to push the needs of our members. A major conference is to be held over two days later this month, at which proposals will be discussed for dealing with many issues, including recruitment; retention; work/life balance; treating ALL personnel fairly; public awareness; under-represented groups; employer attitudes and incentives; medical standards; retirement age; pensions, etc.

Financial incentives are recognised by the Retained Review Team as an important issue. There is an email address for the Review Team at the ODPM (retained@odpm.gov.uk), on which we urge you to give your views.

Retained Awareness

Thanks entirely to the RFU, the interests of the Retained Service continue to receive maximum exposure (and cross-party support) in Parliament. Following the RFU's evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee, the Government has accepted the Committee's recommendations for urgent action on a number of the issues we have mentioned above.

Insurance and New Dimension

RFU members are committed to providing the main response to civil and New Dimension emergencies in many parts of the UK. There has been some scaremongering about the lack of insurance cover, which is largely untrue. All of the provisions of payments for loss of earnings under the Grey Book and pensions still apply. Some insurance companies may limit recently renewed policy payments for income and mortgage protection liabilities arising from terrorist incidents, but this varies from company to company and for different types of policies. You are advised to check your own insurance policies to determine if they are affected. However the RFU is pressing the issue with the ODPM to obtain clarification on how personnel will be recompensed should any personal insurance policies fail to recognise terrorist attacks. Further details are given on the RFU website.

Wholetime / Retained contracts

A number of vacancies on Retained stations are being filled by Wholetime personnel and we welcome the valuable contribution this provides to all concerned. We would like to remind personnel, that due to a great deal of interest, the RFU amended its rules in 2001 to enable Wholetime personnel undertaking Retained duties to join the RFU offering representation in both duty systems. Contact HQ for more details.

Retained not up to the job in Norfolk?

While the RFU is making great strides to eradicate the Retained's 'second class' status, our job has been made all the more difficult by other organisations and their conflicts of interests. Norfolk Fire Service's response to their IRMP consultation document contains the following statement from the FBU which refers to Retained

personnel crewing Rescue appliances which states '*FBU have also stated their belief that retained crews can not acquire or maintain the skills required to crew rescue pumps without the support of their wholetime colleagues.*'

These types of comments highlight a lack of understanding, respect and appreciation that Retained personnel deserve not to mention making our goals all the more difficult to achieve.

Paid Maternity Support Leave

Few Retained personnel realise they are entitled to 5 days paid maternity support leave. This entitlement arises from an amendment to the 'Grey Book' in accordance with NJC Circular 3/97 which states:

'Paid maternity support leave of at leave five working days (for members conditioned to the shift duty system this will be four duty shifts) shall be granted to the child's father or the partner or the nominated carer of the expected mother at or around the time of birth. A nominated carer is the person nominated by the mother to assist in the care of the child and to provide support to the mother at or around the time of birth.'

For more information see the RFU website.

NJC Review

The RFU continues to await the outcome of the review of the NJC and the commitment by Bain, employers and the Government in their White Paper for RFU representation. Until this happens, there will be no fair representation for Retained personnel, which is very worrying given the unfairness already imposed on pay and pensions. However, many observers share our fear that changes arising from new standards of fire cover will further expose the dangers of Retained personnel not having their own representation.

Further details on these issues can be obtained by looking on our website, contacting your brigade RFU officials or by telephoning our Head Office. Please also contact us by email or telephone if you would like to know more about RFU membership.