

Update on Pay

There is a growing list of fire and rescue services that are running trials or intending to run trials on alternative pay systems. These changes recognise that the old way of rewarding retained personnel is becoming difficult to sustain against a background of call management, changes in call levels and response and a new emphasis on prevention rather than cure.

As well as the original scheme in South Wales, alternative pay schemes are being developed in Dorset, Devon, Staffordshire, Grampian, and many other brigades are working up their ideas.

The Retained Review Team supported the development of local solutions and recognised that alternative methods of remuneration should be explored to reward commitment and to improve recruitment and retention. The RFU will support schemes that meet these objectives, providing there are safeguards that look after the interests of existing personnel.

Retained Review Team Report Approved

The recommendations of the Retained Review Team have now been approved by the Practitioner's Forum and will now go to the Minister for approval and formulate a national campaign. There are 43 recommendations which cover:

- *Recognition and Publicity*
- *Opportunities for Retained personnel to contribute to modernisation*
- *Integration and removing restrictive practices*
- *Recruitment and Retention*
- *Implementation and making it happen*

Full details are available on the RFU's website (or ring us and we will send you the information).

These changes provide an opportunity at last for retained personnel to end their long-standing second class status and to make a full contribution to the fire and rescue service of the future.

The Retained Review Team was set up following Ministerial support of a RFU conference at Anglia Polytechnic University last December. The RFU was the only fire service trade union to fully support the Review from beginning to end.

End of the Dispute - They think it's all over! National Joint Council

Whatever the reality of whether the dispute is really over or not, this does now pave the way for resolving the last remaining issue of setting up the new National Joint Council (NJC).

The Government White Paper published in June 2003 called for a new constitution with membership by the RFU and the officers union FOA, and this has been supported on many occasions by Ministerial statements in the Houses of Commons and Lords. The Government has taken reserve powers in the new Fire and Rescue Services Act that enable them to impose a new constitution on the NJC if this is not achieved voluntarily.

We understand the National Employer's and the Government see a new NJC as a priority, and we expect a resolution in the next couple of months.

The combination of the recommendations in the Retained Review Team and a new NJC with RFU membership will at last provide some real improvements for Retained personnel.

The New Grey Book *(not that many Retained have ever seen the old one!)*

The new Grey Book has been published, and is available on the RFU website. This provides for local consultation and negotiation with all recognised trade unions. This of course includes the RFU, because it is individual fire authorities, as employers, that are the only bodies that can grant recognition under trade union law- and the majority do recognise the RFU.

Local Recognition

Local recognition of the RFU continues to gather pace due to our imminent inclusion onto the NJC, with the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority being the latest to grant full recognition to the RFU. We are also in the throws of processing local agreements with East Sussex and Kent Fire & Rescue Services. This means that we can fully represent our growing membership, in accordance with the provisions of the Grey Book and employment law.

Pensions

Details of a new pension scheme for all fire and rescue service uniformed personnel is expected to be published by Ministers soon, and we are assured this will contain provisions for future pension rights for Retained personnel, probably from 2006.

The pension backdating claims of personnel are still held up, pending resolution of the FBU's application to the Court of Appeal following their loss of their case at the lower Employment Appeals Tribunal.

Working Time Regulations

The European Commission is proposing further changes that will:

- Continue the opt out for those individuals who work more than 48 hours a week.
- Require this to be given in writing and renewed annually.
- There will be an overall limit of 65 hours.
- But, the opt out will now be subject to collective agreement.
- For the first time, stand-by time on call is defined (as a result of recent court cases) and will be specifically excluded from working time, but again this is subject to collective agreement.

The RFU will be watching this situation closely as there are already worrying signs of efforts to force through restrictive arrangements under the guise of health and safety.

But there are anomalies, as the working time regulations do not apply to the self-employed (a significant number of retained), nor do they attempt to control any other activities outside an individuals primary employment. This means that you can go all night fishing or clubbing after a days work, but there are potential restrictions on serving your community as a retained firefighter.

The RFU fully supports necessary controls that are in the interests of the health and safety of our members. But, we are aware of many personnel who can organise their life around their fire and rescue service activities, and this includes some who are still able to provide cover for 168 hours a week. However, it is up to fire and rescue services, according to local circumstances and individual occurrences to ensure that personnel are properly relieved at prolonged incidents.

These proposals have to go through the EU Council and Parliament, before the changes can be implemented here. We will be watching this situation very carefully, as we expect there will be efforts to limit the activities of retained personnel to support other restrictive practices.