

# UNISON MATTERS

Issue 3

MORAY

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## Single Status in Local Government – Update

Most members will have heard of the Single Status agreement at some time or other. You will probably be more aware of the Job Evaluation process which has begun as this has formed the main focus of the implementation of Single Status to date.

Job Evaluation has begun through the Primary Benchmarking process.

The Secondary Benchmarking process is about to get underway with this then feeding into the wider evaluation of all posts within the Council. There has been some delay in the Benchmarking process due to faults which were discovered in the computer soft-

ware.

These have now been rectified with the new software being implemented with the agreement of the Trade Unions.

As the Job Evaluation process moves on, consideration of the wider issues needs to take place. These include negotiations over a new pay and grading structure, bonus payments and consideration of a variety of terms and conditions which will all be up for local bargaining.

Moray UNISON is represented on the Single Status Steering Group by Ken Matthews, Branch Secretary, supported by the Branch Officers and the wider Branch Com-

mittee.

Speaking on the development of the agreement, Ken said

“Much of the implementation of the agreement and the Job Evaluation process has been directed at a national level. As implementation progresses, a greater emphasis will be placed on local bargaining and negotiation. The Branch will therefore formalise the consultation process with members, through a Single Status Working Group. We can then base our negotiations on the direct feedback from members on matters up for discussion.”

Regular reports will also feature in issues of the newsletter.

## Stressed And Underpaid But Committed To The Job

A survey from UNISON reveals that voluntary and community sector workers are stressed and underpaid, but so committed to their jobs, that just under half regularly do hours of overtime for nothing.

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Commenting on the findings of the survey, Steve McCullough, a senior Community Care Worker for a Mental Health Agency said, “The findings are of concern but not surprising. Working in the voluntary sector I come across colleagues who suffer under stress and anxiety due to high expectations. In some workplaces poor employment procedures and uncertainty over funding adds to that burden”.

Key survey findings include:-

- 80% thought their workload and pressure had increased in the last 12 months
- 77% wanted job related training
- 57% thought they were underpaid for the job they do
- 85% described themselves as open to change in the workplace
- 42% had given serious consideration to leaving their current job
- 67% said the main reason they stayed in their current job was their commitment to the work

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## Pensions Victory

UNISON has won a major victory for a large number of members who were barred from joining their employers pension scheme, after the House of Lords ruled that part-time workers had suffered discrimination.

The judgement means that employees, most of whom are women, can claim back-dated memberships of the pension schemes, provided they can establish indirect discrimination, and pay any back contributions.

For some this could mean having their claim backdated to April 1976.

For UNISON it has certainly been a very hard fought victory. However there is a sting in the tail. The Law Lords upheld an earlier ruling that claims must be submitted to employment tribunals within six months of claimants leaving their jobs. This means that claimants who took out their claims more than six months after retirement will not be allowed to proceed.

So what now?

If you have already submitted a claim or know of a friend or former work colleague who has, but this was submitted more than six months after the end of employment, you or they will receive a letter from the employment tribunal saying that unless it can be shown that there was good reason why the claim was not lodged the claim will be dismissed.

If you submitted a claim within the six month period it will remain on hold whilst the tribunals work out the implications of the Lords' judgement.

You do not need to take any action at the moment, but should gather relevant information associated with your claim ie periods of part-time work undertaken since 8<sup>th</sup> April 1976, including the name of the employer, dates of employment, and name of pension scheme.

If you are still in work or retired in the last six months and were discriminated against by being denied pension scheme membership you can contact the Unison Regional Office on 01224 620624 to submit an employment tribunal claim.

But you need to remember that Unison can only be involved from the start; it is therefore important that you contact the Regional Office before making a claim.



## Unions Are "Necessary" says poll

Unions are seen as very important by the general public according to the findings of a recent poll.

More than three quarters (77%), of those interviewed said they believe unions are necessary for the protection of workers and 79% said they did not believe that employers treat their staff fairly. And 71% said they knew of a trade union doing good work in supporting their members in the workplace. The survey also confirmed people's top workplace concerns as pay and job security.

## Voluntary and Community Sector News

The Scottish Committee has been in discussion on proposals for improving the level of support and organisation to members within this sector. Details will be released soon and Moray UNISON will play an active role in implementing these proposals. Watch this space.....

## SCVO/STUC Forum

UNISON is playing a significant role in this body to promote good employment practice and a partnership approach to addressing employment issues of common interest to employers, employees and trade unions in the sector.

This has led to the partnership getting funds from the Department of Trade and Industry for a project to develop family friendly policies and practices in the sector. New guidelines are being drawn up and joint training is planned for managers and trade union representatives.

Good practice will be shared and disseminated through a website. The project will last for about two years and will produce benefits for all the partners.

## Scotland's Water

Water and sewerage systems in Scotland are in desperate need of investment. Without the required investment there will be further damage to the environment and a threat to the safety of the public and staff.

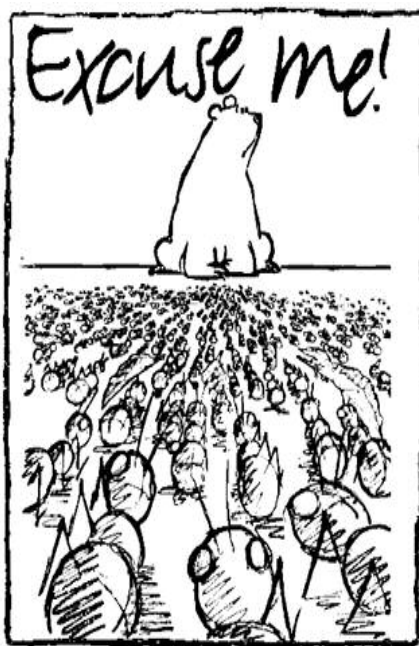
The service is grossly underfunded and UNISON in Scotland will be actively campaigning for the Scottish Executive to reverse the falling standards and to invest money for the future of all of Scotland.

## Equal Pay.

UNISON has launched a major drive to end women's pay inequality through its Getting Equal Campaign. Despite 600,000 women in Local Government making up 71% of the total workforce, their earnings are 21% less than those of male staff.

The Getting Equal Campaign will be at the heart of Unisons bargaining agenda from now until the inequality is erased.

## Ill-Health Retirement



Local Authorities, in conjunction with Central Government, are currently drawing up plans to reduce local government ill-health retirement.

This follows a review of ill-health retirement in the public sector published by the Treasury last summer.

At the time UNISON made it clear that it welcomed proposals to improve working practice and redeployment opportunities to reduce ill-health.

However the union remains very sceptical of proposals to reduce the level of the ill-health retirement benefit itself as this means making it more difficult for those who are genuinely ill to retire on a pension.

Plans to consult of the proposals with a view to implementation are progressing fast in Local Government.

Employer/trade union brainstorming is currently being planned to discuss four issues;

- Should pension schemes pay a reduced pension or just a severance payment to those who are judged to be capable of employment elsewhere;
- should schemes introduce a review procedure for the continued payment of ill-health retirement pension and how can this be achieved;
- should schemes monitor earnings of those in receipt of ill-health pension;
- and to consider whether the current formula for enhancing ill-health retirement should be changed.

**UNISON is rightly considerably concerned about the proposals. It is therefore vitally important that UNISON plays a full part in all stages of these proposals.**

Further information on the proposals will be in future newsletters.

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## The Moray Council – Disciplinary Procedure

In our continuing look at the Council's procedures we are this time around going to take a brief look at the Disciplinary Procedures. This is a very detailed procedure and for those members who wish to see the whole agreement it can be accessed on the Council's Intranet under Personnel Procedures.

We have to acknowledge at the start that all Councils require to have procedures in place to deal with staff failing to reach agreed standards of performance or behaviour. The aim of the procedures should be to assist a staff member to reach the required standard. It is clearly stated that the procedures should not be used to deliberately threaten or harass an employee.

Heads of Department are responsible for the management and discipline of their Department. Types of conduct that may lead to an employee being faced with disciplinary action include;

- Unacceptable performance in quality or output of work;
- Poor attendance/Poor timekeeping;
- Non compliance with authorised work instructions or procedures;
- Breach of any Council Policies or Procedures.
- Theft or wilful damage of Council property;

- Fraud or attempted fraud;
- Violent, threatening, abusive or some other form of unacceptable behaviour towards fellow staff or a member of the public;
- Serious negligence;
- Breach of confidentiality.

These lists are far from being exhaustive. Clearly, also some of the behaviours indicated above could and would be considered very serious whilst others are less so.

The Procedure itself is very explicit in terms of the various stages involved. The informal stage allows for issues to be dealt with through the employee being given advice and guidance to rectify any shortcomings in performance.

The formal stage is invoked where either the informal stage has been unsuccessful or where the specifics of the issue are too serious to be dealt with informally.

What must always be remembered is that any individual who is subject to formal disciplinary procedures has the right to union representation. Unison strongly advises members never to take part in any interview or meeting without this representation.

There also has to be a full and fair investigation of the allegations being made against the employee and if it is deemed appropriate to convene a Disciplinary Hearing, again members have the right of representation.

The outcome of Disciplinary Hearings can be varied. If the allegations fail to be substantiated then no further action is taken. Where part or all of an allegation is found proven then the employee can receive a verbal or written warning or in more severe cases receive a final written warning. In the severest cases of all, employees can be dismissed from employment.

Whatever the outcome all employees have the right of appeal. All decisions made apart from dismissal have timescales where the warning remains on an employees record. Further breaches during this period can therefore have a more significant outcome. As indicated at the start the procedure is considerable.

The most important thing for members to remember is to always consult with your trade union if you are the subject of Disciplinary Procedures, and it is very important that you do this immediately.

## Working Families Tax Credit

Tax credits operate by paying a credit to the recipient through the income tax system rather than a benefit paid through the social security system.

Q. Who qualifies for the working families tax credit?

A. Families, ie couples (married or unmarried) or lone parents who have one or more children under sixteen (or under nineteen if in school) living with them; work at least 16 hours per week (for couples at least one partner); are resident in the United Kingdom and are entitled to work here; and have savings of £8000 or less.

Q. How much is the working families credit worth?

A. The tax credit is made up of a basic tax credit of £54 from April 2001 (rising to £59 from the 5<sup>th</sup> of June) (one for each family)

a 30 hour tax credit of £11.45 (where at least one earner works at least 30 hours per week)

a tax credit for each child in the family

£26 under sixteen

£26.75 from September following 16<sup>th</sup> birthday up to the day of the 19<sup>th</sup> birthday

£30 for families with a child who has a disability.

There is a childcare tax credit of up to 70% of eligible childcare costs up to a maximum cost of £100 per week for one child (rising to £135 from the 5<sup>th</sup> of June) and £150 for two children or more (rising to £200 from the 5<sup>th</sup> of June).

Certain rules must be fulfilled to qualify for the childcare tax credit and childcare must be arranged before application for the working families tax credit - check with the tax office.

Q. How is the working families tax credit calculated?

A. It is calculated by adding the credits together. If the family income (after tax and national insurance contributions and from relevant savings) is above £92.90 per week this is reduced by 55p for each £1 above the £92.90.

Q. So how do I receive payment?

A. Applications are made to the Inland Revenue who will assess and work out how much working families tax credit you will get.

Since April 2000 most applicants receive the tax credit via the employer who will not know any private details about the family just how much tax credit is due. Couples have the choice of which partner should be the "applicant" and thus receive the tax credit. Once the weekly amount of the working families tax credit payable has been awarded this will normally be fixed for twenty six weeks. If you wish further information on the working families tax credit phone 0845 609500 or get a leaflet WFTC/BK1 from your local tax office.

The UNISON logo features the word "UNISON" in a bold, sans-serif font. To the left of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of three curved, overlapping lines that suggest movement or a flame.

### Free Wills Service

We believe it is important for everyone to make a will. The free wills service enables UNISON members to safeguard themselves and the future of their families as a benefit of membership. It represents a significant saving as drawing up a will can cost £100 or more. To give yourself and your family peace of mind, simply contact UNISON – 01224 620624 for a copy of our free wills leaflet.

## Moray College

A breath of fresh air is blowing through the corridors of Moray College, at least for the time being.

With the recent appointment of the new Principal, Dr Jim Logan, a new and more open management style has been introduced. In my opinion not a moment too soon, with staff morale being at an all time low. Jim as the Principal likes to be called, has lifted the air of gloom and doom and I believe has given most of the staff hope for the future. He has consulted with ALL staff on his views for the way ahead and inviting their input to the matter, he appears to be taking their views on board and has produced a draft proposal to the Board of Management which includes many of the suggestions put forward.

Certainly things are looking much better than they have been in the past few years. But - time will tell!! Let us all hope that the promising start Jim has made will continue for many years to come.

The Union awaits with hope, renewed talks on a pay deal of some description to address the past and future, so the staff at Moray College can at least end up with salaries similar to our colleagues in Moray Council.

*Alan Stevens*