

16 August 2024

National campaign update for members

Following the publication of the civil service pay remit guidance, the national executive committee (NEC) met on 12 August to consider the way forward for our national campaign.

Bargaining objectives

Following the election of the new government, we tabled a set of bargaining objectives to them related to their manifesto commitments. The objectives focus on the key issues of pay, pensions, jobs, terms and conditions, insourcing and industrial relations.

Our bargaining objectives are obviously wide-ranging and cover significant ground. Securing them will involve negotiations over a period of time. However, the employer has provided an interim response to our letter, particularly focused on the issues linked to our current national campaign.

In short, they confirmed that:

- they are committed to talks with us on our bargaining agenda
- they have listened carefully to our concerns on pay, as has the new government, and they have issued Civil Service pay remit guidance this year allowing departments to make awards of an average of up to 5%.
- they remain firmly committed to talks with us on long-term Civil Service pay and reward strategy
- the Civil Service headcount cap announced by the previous administration will be lifted; and they are committed to continuing discussions with us on job security and future ways of working.
- On pensions, they are committed to further talks on the best possible reward package

Considerations for the NEC

During our campaign, we have taken 304 days of targeted strike action and 3 days of strike action involving all members in the dispute.

That action has forced significant concessions from the employer.

Last year, we more than doubled the civil service pay remit headline figure for 2023 to 4.5% (5% for the lowest paid), secured a £1500 lump sum for members and forced the abandonment by the previous government of their manifesto commitment to cut redundancy terms by one third.

In respect of outcomes at delegated level, the average pay rise for 2023/24 by grade across bargaining units in the UK civil service was: AA 7.5%; AO 6.5%; EO 5.5%; HEO 5.0%; SEO 4.8%; Grade 7 4.5%; Grade 6 4.6%.

This year, in order to try to exert additional leverage on the employer, we balloted members further on industrial action. Overall, 83.7% of members voted to take strike action. However, due to the restrictions created by anti-trade unions laws requiring a 50% turnout, we only secured legal mandates in 64 covering 19,160 members. 107 employers did not cross the 50% turnout threshold, covering 127,800 members.

This year's pay remit guidance for the civil service sets the headline figure at 5%. As evidence by our approach last year, more may be secured at delegated level in the final analysis.

The new government is seeking to deal with pay this year and then negotiate longer term deals in the next spending review. Our industrial action campaign has clearly influenced their decision, with the chancellor justifying the pay remits that she has agreed by stating that there is a cost to not settling industrial disputes. The Cabinet Office has been clear that they are prepared to move to immediate discussions on the longer-term reward strategy.

On jobs, the new government has lifted the headcount restriction for the civil service, effectively meaning that the arbitrary job cuts figure announced by the Tories has been abandoned.

The key judgement for the NEC was therefore whether to bank the concessions won and concentrate on further talks with the new government to try to secure further concessions; or to embark on a campaign of industrial action to try to force further immediate concessions this year.

NEC decisions

At the meeting the general secretary tabled a series of recommendations, based on the above judgements.

The recommendations to the NEC included:

- welcoming the concessions made so far on pay, jobs, and redundancy terms
- pausing plans for industrial action (except in areas where the employer fails to meet the average 5% increase)
- pausing the levy as no action is currently being considered
- engaging in delegated talks to pursue the maximum distribution of the 5% remit, targeting the lowest paid
- pursuing our longer-term demands in further talks with the Cabinet Office
- balloting members on this strategy

The NEC rejected all recommendations on a majority decision at its meeting on 12 August 2024. The implications of those recommendations being defeated are that:

- Members will not be balloted on the national campaign at this stage
- Where the employer fails to make good on the full 5% concession, we will not be calling sustained, targeted action at this stage
- The levy will continue
- PCS negotiators will refrain from entering pay talks at delegated level at this stage.

The NEC will meet again in September to consider matters further, following the feedback from two senior lay reps' forums that will be held this month, where PCS representatives will discuss this approach.