

Unite Health NISC Statement on Pensions

6 January 2012

Unite's Health National Industrial Sector Committee (NISC) met Thursday (5 January 2011) and unanimously rejected the government's latest proposals on NHS pensions - the 'Heads of Agreement' - as a basis for a satisfactory outcome of the pensions dispute.

The NISC, representing workers from across the NHS, see this as a pernicious attempt by the government to make hard working and dedicated NHS staff pay more, work longer and get less when they retire.

With the NHS Pension Scheme being in a healthy condition, the Unite representatives see the government's attacks on their pensions as being politically motivated, part of an overall design to privatise the NHS, cut public services, and an attempt to break-up the national agreements, disrupt legitimate trade union activities and organisation.

The Health NISC recognised the members' clear support in November, from the outcome of the NHS Industrial Action ballot through to the turnout on 30 November, that the members were strongly opposed to the attacks on their pensions and believe Heads of Agreement makes little progress.

We believe it is important to continue a campaign to maintain a fair and equitable system of public sector pensions and call on ministers to enter into real, genuine and meaningful negotiations on the future of NHS pensions and public sector pensions.

Unite's concerns centre on three areas:

- A high proportion of NHS staff will see their pension contributions jump from the current 6.5 per cent to 9.3 per cent by 2014/15, and other staff will see their contributions leap by nearly 50 per cent, with some paying 14.5 per cent of their salary into their pensions.
- The linking of the NHS retirement age to the ever-increasing age that people will receive their state pensions. The state retirement age is set to rise to 66 in 2020 and 67 by 2026, with the prospect of working even longer in future decades. Unite is concerned that, for example, paramedics and nurses could be doing heavy lifting into their late 60s.
- The proposed benefits to NHS staff provide worse value than those planned for other public sector schemes.

The Health NISC is due to meet again on 11 January to formulate future strategy.