

Pensions ballot

Your questions answered

May 2011

speaking
out for
pensions
ATL

Q: Why has ATL decided to ballot members for strike action?

A: ATL's Executive Committee has decided to ballot you, the membership, for strike action because the government is planning to worsen the terms of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) by making you:

PAY MORE:

An increase in your contributions from 6.4% to 9.8% means a teacher will pay on average £1,145 a year more while a headteacher will pay £1,965.

WORK LONGER:

Your normal retirement age will rise to 66 and then to 68 and possibly even higher.

GET LESS:

The replacement of the final salary scheme by a career average scheme means 15% less in retirement, while changes in the way pension increases are calculated – a move from RPI to CPI – mean a £10,000 a year pension has already lost £150 this year.

EXCLUDED:

Teachers in independent schools are to be excluded from the TPS.

Q: Surely the country can't afford the current pension scheme?

A: Not so. The teacher unions agreed changes to the TPS with the government in 2006 which has made it sustainable for the long term, taking account of increased life expectancy.

The National Audit Office confirmed recently that the cost of public sector pension schemes will fall as planned – from 1.9% of GDP now to 1.4% of GDP in 2060.

The average TPS pension is just £10,000 a year. Only 5% of TPS pensions amount to £20,000 or more.

Q: Then why is the government proposing to raise contributions?

A: The Chancellor has repeatedly stated he needs £2.8 billion from public sector workers to reduce the budget deficit now. The proposals for increasing contributions have not been proposed for the long-term security of the pension schemes. ATL believes this is unfair taxation.

Q: What about negotiations?

A: The TUC is representing education staff and other public sector workers in talks with ministers. However, to date the government won't back down on any of its proposals, with plans to make you pay more into your pension likely to be finalised in June.

Ministers can't provide a proper justification for these changes and haven't carried out the required valuation which would demonstrate the actual costs of your pension.

We will continue to talk to the government, but we are balloting to take action if necessary to demonstrate how strongly you feel. The government is more likely to take negotiations seriously if it sees strong support for industrial action.

Q: Can't we use other methods of persuasion?

A: Mary Bousted, ATL general secretary, has put the case to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for education, in meetings and correspondence. Many members have written to their MPs – and it's not too late to contact your MP to lobby ministers to change their mind. A petition signed by 15,000 teachers, lecturers and leaders has been presented to Downing Street.

Q: But won't a strike damage children's education?

A: ATL would select a date after the end of all primary, secondary and FE tests and exams but before important end-of-year events. School leaders' organisations have expressed sympathy for ATL's campaign.

Q: But why ballot now, before the end of negotiations?

A: So far the government has shown no intention of changing its mind. Worse, it intends to end negotiations with the TUC in June and move immediately to a proposal to make you pay more.

The purpose of the ballot is to demonstrate your strength of feeling, so encouraging the government to change its mind.

Without a show of opposition before the end of June, you will find increased contributions are a fait accompli by the autumn.

Nick Gibb, the schools minister, was shocked at the anger expressed by members at ATL's conference, but the government needs to have our position emphasised once again by a 'yes' vote in a ballot of ATL members, who are widely known to be moderate.

Strike action, if it became necessary, would take place only after the end of the TUC negotiations in June and only if no meaningful concessions had been offered. For ATL, strike action is always a last resort.

Q: What about other unions?

A: Teachers, lecturers, school and college leaders are united in opposition when they learn about proposals for their pensions. Their various organisations all support campaigns against the changes.

ATL and NUT aim to take action together, including members of the Association of Managers in Education (AMiE). The NAHT is also balloting its members for action and other leadership unions are sympathetic to the campaign. One other major teachers' union is not currently planning on balloting.

Q: Who is being called on to strike?

A: All ATL and AMiE members in England and Wales who are eligible for membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) and who would normally be working on the day of the strike will be balloted.

This includes all ATL members employed as teachers, lecturers or leaders in:

- **local authority maintained schools**, whether community, voluntary controlled, voluntary aided or foundation schools
- **local authority central services** who are paid as teachers and eligible for TPS
- **academies**
- **sixth form colleges and FE colleges** which are part of the TPS
- **independent schools** which have been admitted to the TPS.

The ballot excludes supply teacher members, members in other independent schools, overseas teachers, unattached teachers and members not employed as teachers and not eligible for the TPS, eg support staff and Soulbury paid members.

Q: Why is ATL not balloting supply teachers?

A: Supply teachers who work for a supply agency cannot join the TPS; and supply teachers who work for an LA or individual school are not able to take part in industrial action due to the nature of their contracts.

Q: Why are support staff members not being balloted?

A: Support staff are members of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). The LGPS is a fundamentally different pension scheme from the TPS, with members across a huge range of public services. Negotiations on changes to the LGPS are not at the same stage as those involving the TPS and ATL will need to monitor developments carefully. Accordingly, we are not balloting support staff members at this time.

Q: Further questions?

A: A more detailed and regularly updated set of frequently asked questions is available at www.atl.org.uk/pensionscampaign or you can call **020 7782 1616**.



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