

FACT AND FICTION:

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE PROPOSED MULTI-YEAR AGREEMENT

FICTION: *There was no mandate from members to hold talks on a multi-year pay deal with the government.*

FACT: The final pay agreement for 2007 included a commitment to negotiate to see if a three-year pay deal could be reached.

This was included in the agreement circulated to all members, and accepted in a postal ballot of all UNISON members in September 2007.

It said: 'All parties (i.e. the four UK health departments, NHS Employers and the NHS trades unions) are committed to entering into discussions on the potential for a multi-year pay deal.'

The commitment was for negotiations to include changes to the bottom of the pay scale to help the low paid, a progressive reduction in the number of pay points in long pay bands and the unions' claim for a reduction in hours of the working week.

FICTION: *The proposed multi-year agreement was negotiated by UNISON and the RCN who broke ranks with other unions and negotiated their own 'deal'.*

FACT: Six unions formed the negotiating group for the multi-year pay talks: UNISON, RCN, Unite, RCM, CSP and GMB.

All these unions were involved in the talks from September 2007 until the final round of talks at the beginning of April 2008.

On the final day of negotiations (April 4th) several of the smaller unions said they could not put their name to the proposed agreement.

However, the Unite representative said they had no objections to UNISON and RCN concluding the proposed agreement so that it could go out to consultation, so UNISON and the RCN went ahead.

FICTION: *These smaller unions opposed the proposed multi-year agreement because the offer is below the rate of inflation.*

FICTION: *There will be no agreement unless the majority of unions support it.*

FICTION: *The proposed agreement is less than inflation in years two and three.*

FICTION: *The re-opener clause is too weak.*

FACT: The smaller unions, led by Unite, have written to NHS Employers offering to do a one-year deal on the 2.75% increase, without any of the additional money for the lowest paid or bands 5&6.

NHS Employers told them a single-year deal is not on the table and that they are not interested in meeting with them.

Indeed, during negotiations these smaller unions said they were not accepting the deal because they did not support the extra money for the low paid or for Band 5 staff. These unions represent mostly higher graded staff in Bands 6 and 7.

FACT: Health union membership in the NHS is as follows:

- UNISON 470,000
- RCN 400,000
- Unite 77,000
- RCM 40,000
- GMB 40,000
- CSP 25,000
- BAOT 25,000

There are seven other unions with membership of between 2,000 and 15,000.

If UNISON and RCN members support it, there will be an agreement.

FACT: No one knows what inflation is going to be in future years. The average of all independent forecasts is that the Retail Price Index will be 2.5% during 2009.

However, if inflation were to go up rather than down the union could trigger the 're-opener clause' in the agreement.

FACT: The re-opener clause allows unions to go back to the independent NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB) if there is a significant change to recruitment and retention in the NHS or if inflation takes off.

If the NHSPRB agrees that the conditions have changed they will make a recommendation to government that the previously agreed increase be reviewed.

This is the same process as if there were a single year deal. The unions would still have to give evidence to the NHSPRB, which would make a recommendation to government.

If the government were to act unreasonably in response to the NHSPRB recommendation UNISON could take legal, political or industrial action.

FICTION: *The whole deal is a pay cut!*

FACT: No-one's pay is going to be cut. The issue is whether the pay rise will keep pace with inflation and what will happen to earnings over the three years.

The proposal is worth a minimum of 7.6% but almost two-thirds of staff would get more than this – in particular the low paid and those on Bands 5 and the beginning on Band 6.

Most staff would get 8% with some getting over 10%. This doesn't include the incremental increases that the vast majority of staff will receive during this period.

When these are included increases in earnings for most people will be between 15% and 21% (see the attached table).

FICTION: *Existing staff will not benefit from the increase in the NHS minimum wage.*

FACT: The lowest wage in the NHS would rise immediately from £6.23 to £6.40; in 2009 it would rise to £6.77 and in 2010 to £6.98.

Many staff working for private contractors on the minimum wage would benefit as would any new staff.

One of UNISON's key policies is to raise the minimum wage in the public sector to £6.75 per hour.

FICTION: *Members are having to suffer years of below-inflation increases.*

FACT: It is true that last year the overall increase was 2% in England and 2.5% in the rest of the UK.

However, thanks to UNISON the low paid got up to 3.4% due to the £400 flat rate increase.

In the four years prior to 2007 each year's pay increase was above inflation.

In addition, many members have received increases from 1st April 2008 through the new unsocial hours payment scheme.

FICTION: *We can reject the multi-year proposal and accept 2.75% for year one and take our chances in future years.*

FACT: There is no guarantee that 2.75% will be paid in a single year deal.

The government has only guaranteed it will pay it as part of the multi-year deal.

In fact, the government has stated that it will consider staging or reducing the 2.75% if the multi-year proposal is rejected.

The Scottish Government has said that 2.75% is not guaranteed in a single year deal.

UNISON's Health Conference in April rejected a motion calling for a one-year deal at 2.75%.

No one knows what the government would actually do if the multi-year deal were rejected but there are clear risks.

There are further risks attached to relying on the NHSPRB to recommend higher rates in future years, particularly against the background of a predicted fall in the level of national pay settlements.

A multi-year deal would provide certainty and ensure increases are paid on time – not months late.

FICTION: *Other public sector workers are taking strike action; our members want to join them.*

FACT: There was a one-day strike on 24th April by some civil servants, lecturers and one teaching union; the other teaching unions have already accepted a multi-year deal that gives lower increases than those offered to the NHS unions.

We will need to wait and see if this will develop into more than a one-day protest.

The outcome of the Local Government pay consultation on a 2.5% offer is currently being awaited.

Most other public sector groups are settled on a 2.2% increase for this year.

Whether UNISON's members want to strike will only be known after the all-member ballot between 16th May and 6th June.

UNISON's members will be given a straight choice to either accept the multi-year proposals or reject them and support industrial action.

FICTION: *If UNISON and RCN joined the other unions that want to reject, we could get more.*

FACT: No one knows what the members of Unite want because their Executive chose not to consult them.

RCM and CSP stated that their members would reject the offer, but then said their members would not support a campaign of industrial action to increase the offer.

In other words these unions want UNISON members to reject the offer and take industrial action to get them a better pay increase, while they do nothing.

Rejecting the proposed deal and doing nothing about it is the weakest position of all.