

The Association for Clinical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine

Federation of Clinical Scientists

Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Clinical Scientists, held at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds on Wednesday 14th June 2023.

The Chair of the FCS, Emma Lewis, called the meeting to order at 13:53h.

Present: Emma Lewis, Chair
and 60 other members of the Federation.

26.1 Apologies

Received from Lisa Garrison (Secretary), Mike Cornes (National Negotiator), Geoff Lester (Pensions Scheme Advisory Board representative), Rob Shorten, Lorraine Brunt, Beverley Harris, Suzy Armitage, Ben Johns, Adam Hawker, Mollie Joyce, Callum Goolden and Marie Chattaway.

26.2 Minutes of the twenty-fifth FCS AGM held at held on 13th July 2022

These were received and approved. The acceptance of the minutes was proposed by Kath Hayden, seconded by Sarah Glover and carried *nemine contradicente*.

26.3 To consider matters arising

There were none raised not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

26.4 Chair's report by Emma Lewis (EL)

EL reported that things are slowly returning to a more normal pace of work this year, after the increased work schedules due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Meetings, particularly Social Partnership Forum, have become less about Covid-19 and more about business as usual. Whilst many have continued to be held virtually, some are now with the lifting of many restrictions, starting to become hybrid and in-person meetings. FCS continues to attend these meetings to represent our members and input our views.

We have started to work more closely with the Health & Care Professions Council-UK (HCPC) to input into a range of issues that affect our members and to respond to their consultations. This year we have responded to the consultation on the increase in fees and there is one about to close on standards, ethics and social media.

We continue to work with the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) for the members we represent there.

There has been a lot of work been done with the joint unions on pay and we have issued a survey on pay and on the no strike clause in our Bye-Laws. We will be revisiting this this over the coming year.

We continue to support our members with help and advice on issues that affect them in the workplace and are grateful to our local and regional reps who provide support with this. We have provided training for our reps this year, which has been given by our Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) colleagues, Emma Lenehan and Iain Croker. We are grateful to them for the training they provide and to Emma for the support she gives us with the more difficult cases as well as other advice and guidance.

A more detailed summary of the activities of the Federation can be found on pages 27 & 28 of the Association's Annual Report.

26.5 National Negotiator's report by Mike Cornes (MC), delivered by Chair Emma Lewis

MC reminds members that, since the inception of Agenda for Change (AfC) in 2004, NHS Staff Council has negotiated terms and conditions. We also remind members that full Members of the ACB are automatically members of FCS.

MC reports that it has continued to be a challenging time for the NHS following the Covid-19 pandemic and the drive for recovery of backlogs leading to increasing workload at a time where staff is short in some areas. Coupled with the rise in cost-of-living, times have been challenging.

The legislation that was brought in to cover Covid and Covid Sickness has now become a part of normal NHS sickness protocol. All the temporary changes that were brought in through Covid have been documented and filed away meaning in the event of another pandemic we will benefit from lessons learnt and won't have to reinvent the wheel. Long Covid guidance has been produced, but it's being treated now as you would any other long-term sickness process.

One benefit of the pandemic is that there are now much improved terms and conditions relating to flexible, remote and hybrid working. The downside is that there are increasing cases around flexible working to be worked through.

Discussions on salaries and pay deals have taken up much of the conversation amongst the TU leads, as is evident from strike action and in the media.

2022/2023 award - On 20th July 2022, a pay award from the government for NHS staff in England was accepted. For AfC staff this amounted to £1400 or a minimum of 4% for all staff up to and including Band 7. For Bands 8a through 9 the £1400 was applied which equates to a pay rise of approximately 2.5% down to 1.3%. With the impact this has on pension contributions, plus pension changes and tax increases, this means that the majority of staff in Bands 7 to 9 will see a net drop in take-home pay compared to last year. Those on the bottom of Band 8A will also owe money to their employer to cover unpaid pension contributions. The FCS felt at the time that this was an extremely disappointing outcome for a significant proportion of our members and feels particularly unequitable given that very senior managers were awarded a minimum of 3%.

2023/2024 award - Significant talks were held following the disappointing 2022/2023 award alongside strike action from a number of unions, which led in March 2023 to the announcement of a pay offer consisting of several parts:

1. For 2022-2023
 - A non-consolidated pay offer of 2% of salary
 - A one-off tiered 'NHS backlogs' bonus. The tiers differ and are based on experience and basic pay. For Band 5-8A this a payment of £1350, for Band 8b and 8c it is £1450, for Band 8d it is £1550 and for band 9 it is £1600
 - Both of these payments are one-off payments and non-consolidated i.e. do not count towards pension contributions or for the calculation of additional earnings.
 2. For 2023-2024
 - A consolidated payment to all staff of 5% of earnings.
 3. The deal also includes several non-pay measures to support NHS staff.
- Further details can be found on the NHS Employers website at [Government and Agenda for Change trade unions 'offer in principle' | NHS Employers](#)

A couple of surveys were actioned by the FCS over the year. The first was to gauge views on the pay prior to the offer and look at what the appetite was for action around this. There was clear unhappiness with the pay deal and there appeared an appetite both for action and to review our no-strike policy. A group will be established to work through the implications of this before formally balloting members.

The second survey was to consult members on whether to accept or reject the pay offer above. FCS members voted 78:22 to accept the deal with a turnout of 42%.

The pay deal has been accepted in Wales. Northern Ireland are still working to secure the payment. In Scotland a separate deal with an average of 6.5% was negotiated. Details of this can be seen at [NHS staff pay deal: 2023 to 2024 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

NHS Pensions Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) representative's report by Geoff Lester (GL), delivered by Chair Emma Lewis

GL reminds members that the FCS is a member of both statutory boards advising the Secretary of State on the NHS Pension Scheme. The Scheme Advisory Board (SAB) gives advice on changes to the scheme and the Pension Board scrutinises the quality of the scheme administration.

Firstly, GL reports on the routine numbers:

- For NHS Pensioners: From 10th April gross pensions in payment were increased by 10.1% (CPI in September 2022).
- For active members their 2015 CARE pension pot was increased by 11.6% (CPI + 1.5%).

GL notes that this increase in a pension pot represents a reasonably good deal, especially at a time of high inflation and sub-inflationary pay increases.

The past year has again seen a number of significant changes many of which are modernisations to the scheme given that, on the enactment of the first phase of the "McCloud remedy", all accruing pensions are now in the 2015 CARE scheme:

- The contribution structure has removed the highest two tiers and now the most populace contributions tier is the scheme target average (set by HM Treasury) of 9.8%.
- The tier boundaries are updated each year by the general increase to AfC pay bands. This reduces the number of members (especially in the past at band 8a) who will suffer the cliff edge effect of a small AfC pay increase resulting in a large increase in contributions. It is technically challenging to align the tier boundary increase date with pay increase effective date, as the former is set in regulations which must be formally amended by parliamentary process, but all parties are determined to overcome the challenges.
- The contributions tier is now determined by actual pensionable pay rather than Whole Time Equivalent pay. This is much fairer to part time workers contributing to a CARE scheme design and gives members some flexibility to control their pension and contributions by adjusting worked hours.

The pension scheme remains seen as an important element of reward to NHS staff. The more rigid regulations of the 1995 Final Salary scheme have however been perceived as barriers to retention of older and more senior staff as the NHS wrestles with its staffing pressures (crisis, if you like). A number of flexibilities were introduced during the pandemic response and these have been extended or even made permanent. One of the most important changes is that, going forward, members can now retire with 1995 scheme benefits and still accrue more NHS pension benefits. There are also more ways of partially retiring or being re-employed after retirement.

Central government has also been addressing the detrimental effects of pensions tax, Annual and Life Time Allowances on retention of higher paid health care staff.

All of these improvements mean that those approaching pension age (in their particular schemes) should take some time to:

- check that your employment and pensions data is correct, download and check your TRS, challenge and correct any inaccuracies in your data with NHS BSA
- research the possibilities – in the first place see the NHS BSA website for information on “re-employment after retirement” and “pension retirement flexibilities”
- consider how you might want to wind down or retire – think about your retirement planning
- consider taking independent advice (you will probably have to pay for this)
- talk to your managers and Trust pensions team.

The NHS Scheme Advisory Board is currently working with DHSC about the practicalities of phase 2 of the McCloud remedy – how, for those in scope, the application of choice at retirement for the 2015-2022 remedy period or how this will be applied retrospectively for those already retired and the many complex possible scenarios that may arise. It is anticipated that business as usual for this choice will not be in place until 2025 but it is assured that the right benefits will be paid in due course.

Finally, NHS BSA is working through testing its “My NHS Pension” portal which, when active will make your pension information and decisions much easier.

26.6 Secretary’s report by Lisa Garrison (LG), delivered by Chair Emma Lewis

LG reports that this year we have been able to return to a more normal pattern of work however some of the benefits of the pandemic such as increased availability of virtual working has led to an increase in attendance at meetings.

Member’s cases - Whilst the number of cases we have remain relatively low there appears to be an increase in the complexity of these cases, with some going on for extended periods of time and requiring a lot of intervention. We thank the reps for their support and the CSP’s Emma Lenehan for her advice in these complex cases.

Training days - This year again we have been able to offer training session, led by Emma and Iain from the CSP, to our local and regional reps on a range of subjects which has been generally well received.

Committees - Whilst many of our reps are long standing, we do have some gaps in the committee which we are looking to fill as soon as possible.

We would like to thank all our reps both regional and local for the work they do. We would also like to thank Jane Pritchard and all the staff team of the Association/Federation for all their help and support.

26.7 Treasurer’s report by Ben Nicholson (BN)

BN reported that the accounts for the Association as a whole, which includes those of the FCS, can be found in the documentation that accompanied the Annual Report and notices of this Annual General Meeting.

26.8 Any other business

There were no other items of business raised.

The meeting closed at 14:08h.