

QUALITY

PUBLIC SERVICES

PUBLIC SERVANTS

PENSIONS

JOINT BRIEFING DOCUMENT

JOINT LOBBY OF MPs

TO OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS TO RAISE
THE NORMAL PENSION AGE FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS



NATFHE
The University & College
Lecturers' Union



JOINT BRIEFING DOCUMENT

1. The unions in this joint campaign, which accords with official TUC policy, represent around 1.2 million members in schools, colleges, universities, Government departments, agencies and local authorities. They are unanimously opposed to the Government's proposals to:
 - i) impose a normal pension age of 65 on all public service pension schemes;
 - ii) require people to work longer to receive the same levels of benefit to those now payable at age 60;
 - iii) worsen the pensions entitlement of current and future employees; and
 - iv) raise the age limit for the payment of early retirement pensions in cases of redundancy or retirement in the interests of the services efficiency to age 55.
2. The unions believe that all workers, whether in the public or private sectors, should have access to a secure and sufficient income in retirement. They fully support the defence and promotion of final salary pension schemes and the need for an adequate, basic state provision, linked to average earnings, sufficient to live on with dignity and without recourse to means testing.
3. Staff across the public sector are strongly opposed to the Government's proposed worsening of their pension schemes. They believe that these proposed changes will seriously damage public servants' motivation and morale, worsen the already serious problems of recruitment and retention and thereby damage the quality of public services.
4. There is real anger amongst existing staff that the Government is proposing to take away from them their existing entitlement and to worsen their future pension benefits. They entered and remained in public services on the basis of pension promises which they believed were secure and would be honoured by Government. Many, who have given twenty or thirty years service, face the prospect of a minimum of about a quarter of their future pension benefit being cut back. Many more are faced with half or more of their existing pension entitlement being cut back and worsened.
5. Many workers in central and local government have very active and not uncommonly, physically difficult or dangerous tasks. Examples include health and safety inspectors, prison officers, customs staff involved in law enforcement and government vets. The physical, quite apart from the mental, demands of, for example, teaching in the classroom are such that

only a small minority at best, will be fit enough to continue beyond the age of 60. Indeed, many now have great difficulty in coping with all the demands of the job until the current or effective normal retirement age of 60. Therefore, in a wide range of public service occupations, effective, safe and healthy working beyond age 60 is unrealistic and not feasible.

6. Whilst it is likely that there will still be an option to retire at age 60, the proposed terms for the Teachers' Pension Scheme on which staff could still retire at age 60 in the future involve such swingeing actuarial reductions in pension benefits that very few could afford to contemplate that option. Similar details are not yet available for other schemes but it is highly unlikely that they will be very different.
7. Occupational pension schemes generally have provision for early retirement pensions from age 50, in order to cushion or assist with unavoidable redundancies, restructuring, or to meet other efficiency needs of their employers, e.g. unbalanced age structures and effective succession planning. Such circumstances have, over a long period of time, affected staff at all age levels. It has, however, been recognised that the effects are greater, for those aged 50 and over, who inevitably find it more difficult to secure suitable further employment. There has been no reduction in the incidence of such situations. Indeed, it is more likely that the Government's reform agenda for the public services will increase the likelihood of such situations. It would therefore be unfair to confine early retirement provision to those aged 55 and over. It would also make it more difficult for change to be effected by joint employer/union agreement and harm the prospects of maintaining good staff/management relations. Public servants who have given long and faithful service to the public deserve proper compensation through their pensions schemes for any early curtailment of their careers, which arises through no fault of their own.
8. The vast majority of public service pension schemes currently make no provision for benefits for unmarried partners. The Government is prepared to make such pension provision, but unlike the existing provision for married partners, where the costs are shared, it is insisting that employees meet the full cost of this long overdue change. Such blatant discrimination between the treatment of married and unmarried partners is unacceptable. The Government and employers should meet their share of the cost of bringing public service pension schemes into line with today's changed social environment.
9. The unions fully support the reform of public service occupational pension schemes to facilitate more flexible retirement patterns. They are, however, strongly opposed to such change being introduced as a component part of an imposed increase in the normal age of retirement, a worsening of benefits and the breaking of the pension promises to existing staff.

