

BUILDING MOMENTUM: Review of Pay Terms Ballot

Standing Committee recently decided to conduct a ballot of members in September, for potential industrial action by members, unless the Government makes a substantial and credible pay offer in talks with the ICTU Public Services Committee.

This decision was taken following a request by the ICTU Public Services Committee to all its affiliates to hold ballots and prepare for a coordinated campaign with a view to uniting public sector unions in seeking a pay increase to address the cost-of-living crisis.

The imperative to substantially improve public service pay comes against the background of high and sustained inflation.

The Government has failed to engage in further talks being held under the auspices of the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) for several weeks.



Ballot material will
arrive in schools
in late August/
early September.

Message from ASTI President Miriam Duggan:



Dear ASTI member,

The challenges we face this year are both personal and professional. Teachers, no less than the rest of society, are struggling to cope with sustained rises in the cost of living.

With inflation close to double digits, any pay offer must be substantial if we are to be able to deal with the soaring cost of energy, fuel, food and other basic essentials.

At the time of writing, we are awaiting further pay talks and, if the Government makes a realistic offer of pay increases, Central Executive Council may direct us to ballot our members on whether or not to accept it. If, however, the Government fails to make such an offer, we will ballot our members on taking industrial action in conjunction with the other public sector unions in ICTU. At its meeting on August 10th, Standing Committee recommended that we join with our fellow public sector unions in taking industrial action against what are effectively pay cuts caused by inflation. Should the ballot take place, Standing Committee is recommending that members vote yes.

In the professional sphere, our challenges are no less daunting. The Minister's proposed changes to Senior Cycle were announced abruptly, showing scant regard for the collective voice of professional teachers and even less evidence that her proposals will benefit our education system. A separate Nuacht outlining ASTI's Senior Cycle campaign will arrive in schools shortly.

Now more than ever, your participation in the ASTI is central. I would encourage you to keep up to date with events through your School Steward, your Branch and Standing Committee representatives and our website. We must speak as one voice in the interests of maintaining standards and ensuring that we have an education system in which we can have confidence.

Finally, I would like to wish you every success in the year ahead in your personal and professional lives.

Miriam Duggan, President

The ICTU Public
Services Committee
has asked affiliates
to participate in a
coordinated campaign,
including industrial
action ballots.



Why is a ballot being prepared?

The objective is to secure an acceptable review of the pay terms set out in the Building Momentum public service agreement. The ICTU Public Services Committee triggered a review clause in the agreement in early March 2022, with a view to gaining significant improvements in pay to take account of higher-than-expected inflation in 2021 and 2022.

The Government did not respond until May, when it accepted that the Building Momentum pay terms should be improved. It also said it wanted to discuss pay for 2023 to have certainty over next year's public service pay bill.

Talks got underway in the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) but ended without agreement on 17th June.

Despite some mixed signals from senior political figures, there was no subsequent indication of any improved offer from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) officials who negotiate on behalf of the Government.

On 15th July, the ICTU Public Services Committee agreed to ask affiliates to participate in a coordinated campaign, including industrial action ballots.

The WRC then invited the parties to re-engage and union negotiators agreed to this.

At time of going to press, the ICTU Public Services Committee is awaiting a date for talks in the WRC.

But, in the absence of any indication that the Government is prepared to significantly improve its stance, unions were asked to agree that preparations for ballots should go ahead.

How does the Government's offer fall short?

When the talks broke down in mid-June, the Government had offered an additional 2.5% to cover 2021-2022, a period in which overall inflation looked set to exceed 10%. They also offered a 2.5% increase in 2023, a year in which most analysts expect inflation to at least top 4%. This would guarantee substantial real cuts in wages.

This campaign has developed because of the Government's wholly inadequate response to the cost-of-living crisis and, specifically, its impact on public servants. ICTU negotiators have told the WRC that they are ready to be flexible in negotiations if the Government is prepared to move.

When and how will the ballot take place?

Balloting will take place in early September with a view to achieving a collective outcome that would give a mandate for industrial action from the end of September for all unions affiliated to ICTU across the public sector.

Full details of this school-based ballot will be communicated to School Stewards in due course.

What will the ballot paper ask?

The question you will be asked on the ballot paper will be as follows:

Are you in favour of taking industrial action up to and including strike action, as directed by ASTI Standing Committee, in order to secure an acceptable review of the pay terms set out in Building Momentum?

Who can vote?

Only serving teachers can vote in this ballot as it relates to industrial action.

What form will industrial action take?

ASTI members will be asked to sanction industrial action up to and including strike action. This will give a mandate to take strike action and/or more limited forms of action or other forms of non-co-operation.

Industrial action includes, for example, non-co-operation, stoppages for a short duration and placing of pickets. Strike action is a full withdrawal of labour and may be accompanied by the placing of pickets.

The precise nature and timing of industrial action will be decided by the ASTI Standing Committee, in consultation with the ICTU Public Services Committee.

Has Standing Committee made a recommendation?

Standing Committee is recommending that all members **Vote Yes** in this ballot.

This will enable the ASTI to play its part in the struggle by all public servants to secure a pay uplift in the context of spiralling inflation and the cost-of-living crisis.

What penalties may be applied if ASTI members take strike action?

In this instance, the ASTI would be acting as part of a coordinated campaign with other public sector unions. It is likely that strike action would result in loss of pay for the duration of the work stoppage. It is important to note that the penalties previously imposed on ASTI members under *Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest* (FEMPI) legislation have expired and are no longer available to the Government.



The ASTI is urging

members to

vote YES in

this ballot.



**Completed ballot
papers must be
received by 5.30p.m.
on Thursday,
15th September.**

Ballot arrangements

Ballot material will arrive in schools in late August/early September. The ASTI is requesting School Stewards to distribute and collect ballot material promptly after the 5th of September to ensure completion and return by the closing date. **The closing date for the return of completed ballot papers is 5.30p.m. on Thursday 15th September 2022.** Post can take a number of days. Please post early to ensure your vote is counted.

Guidance for School Stewards

Ballot material and instructions for conducting this school-based ballot are being sent to School Stewards. In addition, an instructional video for School Stewards is available on the ASTI website www.asti.ie

Completed ballot papers must be received by 5.30p.m. on Thursday, 15th September.

The ASTI wishes to thank School Stewards for the distribution and collection of ballot material in their schools. School Stewards play a vital role in ensuring ASTI ballots are conducted in an efficient and transparent manner.

It is vital that all members who are entitled to vote, participate in the ballot.

Members should make sure to visit the ASTI website www.asti.ie regularly for latest news and further information.

Vote YES

**Have your
voice heard –
make sure
you vote**