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Medical Scientists serve notice of Industrial Action for March 30th

Medical Scientists to take action to resolve 20% unfilled posts

Medical Scientists have served notice of Industrial Action for Wednesday March 30th in frustration over long-standing pay and career development issues that are affecting recruitment and retention in the sector.

The notice follows an unsuccessful period of talks within the *Building Momentum* public sector agreement, which have failed to resolve the grievances.

MLSA Chairperson Kevin O'Boyle said Medical Scientists are highly frustrated and want their long-standing issues properly resolved for once and for all. The notice was sanctioned at a meeting of its Executive Committee last night.

"In its 60-year history the MLSA has only once taken full industrial action, and that was in 1969, so this is a big step. However, we are left with no alternative. While we regret the difficulties it may cause, there is huge frustration among our members that the severe recruitment and retention problems in the sector have been ignored and they strongly support taking action.

"Up to 20% of approved medical scientist posts are unfilled in hospitals across the country."

MLSA General Secretary Terry Casey said that the Union's door remains open to any meaningful approach or solution from the employer which could avert the action.

"There has been a long build up to this moment. The Union served its claim in January 2020 and has been involved in numerous rounds of Sectoral Bargaining talks and also in a series of talks with the HSE and Department of Health at the Workplace Relations Commission since the summer of 2020, the commencement of which was delayed by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic."

The MLSA has notified employers that strike action will take place between 8am and 8pm on Wednesday March 30th. If no progress is made on the union's issues, a further two days of action are planned for April 5th and 7th.

In a ballot of MLSA members last November 98% voted in favour of taking industrial action. In January 2021, 96% of members voted to reject the *Building Momentum* public sector agreement. Previously, at the MLSA AGM in September 2020, 99% of attendees voted in favour of holding a ballot for industrial action.

Terry Casey continued: "The Medical Scientists' dispute dates back to 2002 and involves a claim for restoration of pay parity with scientific colleagues who work in Biochemistry Laboratories. Parity was awarded in 2001 following an Expert Group Report, but was lost due to an unintentional procedural effect of the 2002 benchmarking process.

"Medical Scientists carry out identical work, with the same responsibilities, and yet are paid on average 8% less, with fewer promotional and career development opportunities and less support for training and education.

"Public Sector health workers from Nurses, Consultants to Lab Aides have secured significant pay increases in recent years. For Medical Scientists this, combined with the advancing role of laboratory diagnostics, increased responsibility, increased workloads and the long-standing challenges in recruitment and retention mean these employment issues need to be addressed with the HSE, DOH and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER).



“There remains an ongoing significant national shortage of Medical Scientists across the public health service. This is in no small part due to inferior pay and conditions, poor career structure and limited promotional opportunities. This must be addressed so that the Irish health service can have the clinical diagnostic laboratory service it requires.” Mr Casey concluded.

Medical Laboratory Scientists Association (MLSA)

The MLSA is the Trade Union representing Medical Scientists, the scientific professionals who carry out critical diagnostic testing of patient samples. It represents more than 1,800 Medical Scientists employed in public voluntary hospitals, HSE hospitals, private hospitals and the Irish Blood Transfusion Service. www.mlsa.ie