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Medical Scientists to vote on Industrial Action

Medical Scientists dissatisfied at lack of progress on parity with scientific colleagues

Medical Scientists will debate a motion calling on their Union to ballot Members for Industrial Action – at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) this weekend.

The motion, which calls on the Medical Laboratory Scientists Association (MLSA) Executive Committee to initiate a ballot process, comes as members have become increasingly dissatisfied with lack of progress in talks regarding a longstanding pay and career development grievance.

96% of MLSA members voted in January 2021 to reject the Building Momentum public sector agreement because they believed it was insufficient to deal with the serious problems in the sector.

MLSA Chairperson Kevin O'Boyle said: "The MLSA has been engaged in talks with the HSE and Department of Health since summer 2020. Despite this, no clarity has emerged on how and when its members' serious grievance, and the critical recruitment and retention issues created by it, will be addressed. If the motion passes at Saturday's AGM the Executive will meet urgently to initiate a ballot."

Medical Scientists carry out critical diagnostic testing of patient samples in acute hospitals, including urgent testing for COVID-19.

MLSA General Secretary Terry Casey said the Union remains open to engagement on how solutions can be found.

"The strong message from Medical Scientists is that the current Building Momentum deal does not address longstanding recruitment and retention issues in the laboratory sector and these must be addressed urgently."

"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 longstanding 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 is a significant national shortage of Medical Scientists across the public health service, with up to 130 posts unfilled even before the additional pressures of the pandemic arose in 2020. The reasons for this are inferior pay and conditions, poor career structure and limited promotional opportunities," 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