

Medical Scientists vote overwhelmingly to ballot members for Industrial Action

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

Medical Scientists voted overwhelmingly to ballot Members for Industrial Action at their Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Saturday.

There was a record high turnout for the hybrid AGM and 99% of attendees voted for a ballot for industrial action. Members expressed their frustration at the lack of progress in talks that reconvened in August 2020 regarding the longstanding pay and career development grievance since 2002.

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: "Medical Scientists have patiently waited their turn, while responding to all of the clinical and professional challenges that have arisen for the twenty years since this grievance arose, but we will wait no longer. The MLSA has taken full industrial action only once in its 60-year history so this is a big step, but we are now left with no alternative."

He called on all MLSA members to vote in the upcoming ballot and urged them to back the Executive Committee with a strong vote in favour of action.

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