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Medical Scientists vote to take Industrial Action

Medical Scientists to plan Industrial Action for early next year

A ballot of Medical Scientists has returned overwhelmingly in favour of taking Industrial Action to resolve long-standing pay and career development grievances.

In a Medical Laboratory Scientists Association (MLSA) ballot announced today, 94% voted in favour of taking Industrial Action up to strike action.

The result comes amid mounting frustration that the sector's longstanding pay and career progression issues are not being addressed.

MLSA Chairperson Kevin O'Boyle said Medical Scientists are tired of waiting patiently and want a satisfactory outcome in the short term.

"The MLSA has taken full industrial action only once in its 60-year history so this is a big step, but we are left with no alternative – our members strongly support action."

MLSA General Secretary Terry Casey said the Union would continue as scheduled to enter Sectoral Bargaining talks on the *Building Momentum* public sector pay deal in the coming weeks, in the hope that acceptable progress could yet be achieved on the pay side of the MLSA claim for parity with scientific colleagues.

The Union had been involved in talks on career progression issues with the HSE and Department of Health at the Workplace Relations Commission since then, but the employer side withdrew from discussions without reaching agreement in April 2021.

However, he said the MLSA Executive Committee would now also move to discuss the industrial action campaign, plan a timeline and serve the necessary notice periods.

"Industrial Action will be planned unless the issues can be addressed through the upcoming negotiations. The bottom line is that members want their issues resolved urgently and industrial action is now imminent if that doesn't happen."

At the MLSA AGM last September 99% of attendees voted in favour of a ballot for industrial action. In January 2021, 96% of members voted to reject the *Building Momentum* public sector agreement, because they believed it did not deal with the problems in the sector.

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

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 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 remains an ongoing significant national shortage of Medical Scientists across the public health service, in no small part due to 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

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