

Fórsa survey reveals how driven public servants are on basic pay

ANDY PRENDERGAST

New survey research commissioned by Fórsa shows there is a clear, determined focus on basic pay increases amongst public and civil servants this year, but that the desire to achieve this through industrial action is measured.

As public service unions get ready for negotiating a successor agreement to Building Momentum later this year, a new survey commissioned by the largest public service union, Fórsa, conducted by Amárach Research, shows union members have a concentrated focus on basic pay rises in the context of ongoing cost of living pressures.

Inflation-matching pay increases are of significant preference to younger workers (90%), with 83% overall of Fórsa members saying it was very important that pay negotiations secure increases that match inflation.

Over 90% of respondents said it was important or very important that pay negotiations cover any shortfall in the withdrawal of government supports, such as the energy credits.

Respondents to the survey were more likely to be female (74%) and over the age of 40 (75%). Just 5% were aged under 30. The survey results reveal some expected differences along age lines, where aspects such as higher basic pay increases are more important to younger workers, who are also more willing to take industrial action over same, whereas affordable childcare is more important to workers in their 30s.

INDUSTRIAL ACTION

On willingness to take industrial action over “negotiated increases below inflation”, the picture is more nuanced. Overall, 56% of union members said they would be in favour of Fórsa organising a ballot for action.

Of those aged under 30, there was a 74% ‘yes’ response, but with those aged over 50 – the largest age cohort in the survey – it drops to 51%. The category of members who are undecided or who indicated it would depend on how much the pay offer was below inflation, represent two-fifths of members overall.

This would reflect a more considered approach amongst the union’s membership. Older workers would also have the benefit of experiencing successful results achieved by their union in past agreements.

There is a general low favourability (21%) amongst workers for accepting a lower negotiated pay increase if the union was able to make a supplementary claim on behalf of the workers' grades or professions during the duration of any proposed agreement.

However, a plurality of workers (42%) are undecided on this issue, and the younger the worker, the more likely they are to indicate they are not sure about supplementary claims – perhaps understandably as older workers have more experience of public service industrial relations.

There is a general reluctance to accept lower pay increases in return for improved access to hybrid or blended working (18%), and an even lower willingness (7%) to accept lower pay increases for improved sick leave. (However, it should be noted that public service sick pay provisions – three months full and three months half pay – are more favourable than sick leave in the private sector in general)