

Second level teachers seek straight increase under sectoral bargaining

## **COLMAN HIGGINS**

**Both second level teacher unions are understood to have requested that the remaining one-third of their sectoral bargaining fund under Building Momentum (BM) be applied to all members as a straightforward pay increase.**

IRN understands that this means that ASTI has given up on plans to use the remaining fund to address the ongoing disadvantage for many of its members arising from an increment freeze imposed by the Government for almost a year in 2016/17, due to industrial action by the union at the time.

The 1% of pay bill for each public service group available under BM sectoral bargaining clause allowed for long-standing pay claims to be addressed, but with a default option of simply applying the 1% as a straight pay increase.

Indeed, many parts of the public service went for this default option, given the potential for division within unions if some members were to use these funds – available equally to all – to resolve their particular issues.

The school teaching sectors – both primary and secondary – were relatively unusual under BM sectoral bargaining by foregoing the option of a straight increase for all and using sectoral bargaining as intended, to address long-standing issues.

In the primary sector, the INTO did an agreement to use the 1% to implement a long-standing increase in allowances for principals and deputy principals (about a fifth of primary teachers), originally awarded under the second Benchmarking Body report from 2007.

In the second-level sector, both the ASTI and TUI unions had been strongly arguing for some years to restore the €1,314 allowance for holding a Higher Diploma in Education (HDip), which almost all second level teachers require.

The allowance had been abolished for new entrants in 2012, with a growing minority of second level teachers affected, with a broad consensus in both unions that it needed to be dealt with.

About two-thirds of the €23.5 million sectoral bargaining fund for second level teachers was used to address this issue in 2022, by adding €1,314 to all points of the post-2012 second level scale.

## **INCREMENT FREEZE**

This left over €7 million in the sectoral bargaining fund. ASTI was seeking to use this to bring those teachers who have been an increment behind since the 2016/17 increment freeze further up the scale, as each year they are losing out by one increment compared to where they would have been without the 2016/17 increment freeze.

At one point, the TUI – which had originally sought to use the remaining fund to start teachers on the third rather than first point of the scale – was understood to be considering allowing ASTI the use of all of the remaining €7 million or so to address their increments issue.

There were hopes on the TUI side that this significant concession to the ASTI could help smooth the path towards a merger of the two second level teacher unions.

However, ASTI strongly insisted that there was no linkage between the merger talks and the increment freeze amelioration proposal.

In any case, after over a year of engagement with the management side on the proposal, both unions have come to the belief that the increment issue is not going to be resolved under the sectoral bargaining clause of Building Momentum.

An ASTI spokesperson confirmed to IRN this week that the union “is now seeking that the remaining unpaid element of the sectoral bargaining fund will be applied as a straight pay increase (about 0.33%) for all second-level teachers”.

Sources in the TUI confirmed that it is also seeking the straight 0.33% increase, which means that both second level unions are taking the same approach.

This was the last outstanding issue under the sectoral bargaining clause of Building Momentum, bringing that phase of public service industrial relations to an end.

### **NEW LOCAL DEALS**

Meanwhile, engagement on the successor to sectoral bargaining – the local bargaining clause of the current Public Service Agreement 2024-2026 – is expected to begin in earnest in the coming months.

The clause allows for 3% of pay bill for each group to be structured to address additional changes in pay and conditions, with the first 1% of the fund to be implemented from September 1, 2025, and the remaining 2% under future public service agreements.

Negotiations were supposed to take place between July 2024 and June 2025, with a guide to the process for public service managers, from the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, saying bargaining templates need to be submitted to the Department by April 30, 2025.

However, in the education sector at least, many unions are still waiting on costings from the official side before they can prioritise different elements of their claims.

An INTO spokesman said last week: “We understand that the Department of Education will engage with education unions this month. We submitted claims for costing last August and expect to receive indicative costings within the next month.”

“Our executive will then consider these and may have to prioritise which claims INTO will formally lodge.”

“Although engagement between unions and departments must conclude by April 30, INTO will seek an earlier end date so that we can update members at annual congress.” The teacher congresses take place during the week starting Monday, April 21.