

About the conference

The issue of pensions affects huge numbers of men and women and is at the top of the trades unions' agenda to protect workers' rights. The world of pensions is changing fast and now, more than ever, it is vital that trade unionists and others who protect workers' rights understand the implications of these changes – both for people currently receiving a pension and for all of us who will be affected in years to come.

There are two significant pieces of legislation: The Public Service Pension Act which received royal assent in April 2013 and the Pensions Bill 2013 which is still going through the parliamentary process.

The Public Service Pension Act affects workers in the public services – the NHS, the civil service, teachers and the armed forces – and has introduced a number of reforms including increasing the average contributions that scheme members must pay; linking the amount of pension benefit that a person receives on retirement to their average salary rather than to their final salary; and linking the Normal Pension Age (NPA) to the State Pension Age (SPA) so that people can now only claim their pension when they reach state retirement age of 67.

The Pensions Bill proposes changes to the state pension which includes the introduction of a 'single-tier' state pension, which would replace the current system of a basic state pension plus an earnings-related state second pension. It is argued that this will lead to some simplification of the State pension but this will be a long-time coming and, crucially, the proposed rate of £146.30 per week in current terms, is much too low. In the longer term the reforms mean that most working people will end up receiving a significantly lower State pension. And the reforms do nothing for existing pensioners.

Further proposed changes include the abolition of contracting out, where people who have contracted out don't accumulate a state second pension but instead pay a lower rate of NICs; an acceleration of the increase in the state pension age to 67; and regular reviews of state pension age via a mechanism to hold a compulsory review of the state pension age at least every six years.

Pensions will be one of the key battlegrounds in the coming general election and this conference will provide the experts and the arguments to enable trade unionists to arm themselves and challenge the Coalition's attack on pensions.

Programme

- 9.30 Registration
- 9.50 Welcome from Chair
Carolyn Jones, Director of IER
- 10.00 Pensions overview: where are we now?
Bryn Davies, Director, Union Pension Services
- 10.30 Third Time Lucky: building a progressive pensions consensus
Craig Berry, University of Sheffield
- 11.00 Questions and discussion
- 11.15 Break
- 11.30 The impact of contracting out
Speaker to be confirmed
- 12:00 The single-tier state pension
Neil Duncan-Jordan, National Pensioners Convention
- 12:30 Questions and discussion
- 12:45 LUNCH
- 1.45 The Beckmann Judgement: protecting income benefits after redundancy
Michael Ford QC, Old Square Chambers
- 2:15 Developments in public sector pensions: new 'Fair Deal' arrangements
Christine Haswell, PCS
- 2:45 If public service pensions survive, can they halt the decline for everyone else?
Glyn Jenkins, UNISON
- 3:15 Questions and Discussion
- 3:30 Close