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Circular: 2025HOC0348SW

Date: 10 October 2025

To: All Members

Dear Members,

Pay Reform and Progression Structure – Progress Update for Members

In June, I wrote to all members following Conference 2025 to confirm that the FBU had accepted the national employers 2025 pay offer and that our union's number one industrial priority for the year ahead would be to deliver reform of the national pay structure. That circular – 2025HOC0214SW – set out the background, the agreed policy from Conference, and the programme of work being led by the Executive Council.

This circular provides the first major update on that work.

Since June, significant discussions have taken place – both within our own union structures and through the formal mechanisms of the National Joint Council (NJC). The pace of activity has been high, and while the work is complex, the direction of travel remains clear: to secure a fair, modern, and professional progressive pay structure for all firefighters, control staff and managers.

Progress Since June – National and Internal Discussions

The Executive Council has continued to meet regularly to direct and oversee our work on pay reform. Several dedicated strategy sessions have been held to guide the union's position and ensure that our approach remains aligned with Conference policy.

In addition, the Assistant General Secretary and I have attended multiple meetings of the Joint Secretaries.

Brigade and Regional meetings have been arranged to discuss in detail the progress being made and we have received feedback from officials and members across the country. Alongside the President, the Assistant General Secretary and I will seek to attend as many committee meetings as possible.

To ensure every level of the union is fully involved, a number of key meetings have been held over recent months:

- 20 August – A national meeting for brigade officials was held in Birmingham, bringing together officials from across the U.K. The meeting provided an update on the progress to date, allowed for in-depth discussion of the emerging work on pay reform, and enabled officials to directly shape the future direction of the union's approach. Feedback was extremely positive, with clear recognition of the importance of the work and a shared commitment to moving forward together.
- 25 September – A meeting of regional officials followed, providing a more detailed examination of potential pay models and structures. The meeting considered feedback from the brigade officials' session, alongside updates from the Joint Secretariat meetings, ensuring the union's developing position remains informed by all parts of our organisation.

This update also follows the recent meeting of the National Joint Council (NJC) held in Cardiff this week. At that meeting, both the Employees' and Employers' Sides reaffirmed their commitment to advancing pay reform as the central focus of current negotiations.

Discussion on Roles

As part of the wider NJC discussions, there will need to be clarity about the future role of Fire and Rescue Services, and therefore the future role of a firefighter.

The shared understanding is that our existing role maps do not fully reflect the functional responsibilities already set out within the Fire and Rescue Services Act and 2007 Regulations and the acts and regulations in each of the devolved nations. The FBU is clear and suspect the Employers accept that while there is an established foundation from which to build, this work should support allowing Fire and Rescue Services to look ahead to emerging risks and to remain agile in responding to new challenges.

It will be important to explore whether we can improve our collective understanding of the intent and demands of existing roles, while also considering how the service may evolve. There may be areas, beyond the current scope of legislation, where Fire Service intervention could deliver tangible benefits to communities – but such activities must remain within an agreed framework focused on a professional blue-light response.

There is also discussion of how some preventative activities could complement operational response – for example, flood prevention work.

The national joint secretaries acknowledge that there are, what could be described as historic arguments. We are clear that we cannot allow this opportunity to fall into the trenches of the past, and therefore remain committed to working in collaboration, alongside government, to deliver a positive and sustainable change.

Pay Reform – Progress and Principles

On pay reform itself, the FBU remain broadly pleased with the progress achieved through the Joint Secretaries meetings which has been developing shared understandings of each sides priorities and the strategies being undertaken. Success in this work will require both sides to have their own internal debate and discussion and we understand the National Employers are also carrying out that sort of exercise. Each side will have their own priorities and objectives, but both sides are committed to working together to identify consensus and to finally address some of these long-standing issues of debate.

For the first time in more than a decade, we have reached a position where the National Employers, the NFCC, central government and our union are all engaged in a shared discussion about reforming the national pay structure. That, in itself, is a significant step forward.

The task is complex and cannot be rushed. We are clear that this work must build solid foundations recognising the importance of getting it right. It has taken over ten years to reach this point, and we

must now ensure that the opportunity to secure a modern, fair and professional pay structure is not lost.

We have been clear in the NJC that this reform must deliver for firefighters. It must:

- Create a structure that rewards development, progression and competence in role.
- Address inequality, including disparities between roles and duty systems.
- Provide agility to recognise the different skills that firefighters bring and can develop.
- Support the journey to competence and create genuine career progression opportunities.

This is about building a system that works – for now and for the future – and that recognises the professionalism, skill and contribution of every member of our service.

Funding the Fire and Rescue Service

The NJC also discussed the wider issue of funding.

The reality is that the opportunity of a better future remains overshadowed by more than a decade of cuts. Since 2010, around 12,000 firefighter jobs have been lost – roughly one in four. Stations have closed, appliances have been withdrawn, and over a third of control rooms have disappeared.

The FBU has always said that such cuts put lives at risk. We welcome that the NFCC and the National Employers are now increasingly echoing that position. But we also made clear that our opposition to austerity has never changed – and never will.

The Westminster government and our devolved governments must provide the investment needed for a properly resourced fire and rescue service, capable of meeting the challenges identified in the 2025 National Risk Register – from major fires and system failures to flooding, storms and wildfires.

We have asked for the issue of funding remains a standing item for ongoing NJC consideration, and we have called for a more joined-up approach in lobbying governments. There should be no job losses, no station closures, and no cuts to appliances that go unchallenged by this union.

Next Steps and Continuing Work

The Executive Council will continue to meet regularly, including at the forthcoming EC business meeting being held 13 - 15 October, to direct and monitor progress. A further EC business meeting is scheduled for December, where we will review developments in detail.

The Joint Secretaries will continue their regular meetings, ensuring that work on pay reform moves forward between NJC sessions. The next formal NJC meeting in February 2026 is expected to consider further details. Meanwhile, regional and brigade officials have been asked to continue briefing members locally, ensuring that all FBU members understand the scale and importance of this work.

This is a significant undertaking – drawing together two decades of pay and role-related issues into one coherent framework. Our focus remains clear:

- To deliver a reformed national pay structure that is fair, progressive and professional.
- To increase our members' pay and improve their financial standing.

This is challenging work, but it is work worth doing – and it will define the future of our profession.

We will continue to keep members updated following each NJC meeting and at any significant juncture.

Your continued engagement and support remain crucial as we move forward together.

In unity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Steve Wright', written in a cursive style.

Steve Wright
General Secretary