



Fire Brigades Union press release
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For immediate release



Firefighters' union wins landmark pensions case

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has secured a major victory in its long-running dispute with the government over changes made to firefighters' pensions in 2015. The Supreme Court has refused the government's application to appeal the Court of Appeal ruling which it lost in December. This is the last legal hurdle in the dispute, leaving the government with no further avenue to exhaust. The case will now be remitted back to employment tribunal for remedy.

The firefighters' pension scheme was substantially worsened in 2015, and the FBU argued that the protection imposed on younger members was unlawful on age, sex and race discrimination grounds. The 2015 changes meant that older members could stay in the existing and better pension scheme, and younger members had to transfer to a new and worse scheme, causing huge financial losses. The FBU initiated over 6,000 Employment Tribunal claims alleging that the changes amounted to unlawful discrimination.

The government's transitional arrangements for pensions were ruled discriminatory by the Court of Appeal last December. The government applied for permission to appeal to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court has today refused the application because it does not raise an arguable point of law. In addition, the government has been ordered to pay the costs of the case. The landmark legal case will likely impact on all public sector workers. The FBU is the only organisation in the fire and rescue service, and the only trade union of public sector workers, to take on this legal battle.

Matt Wrack, general secretary said:

"This is a hard fought victory for the union and more importantly for our members. FBU members took action for what they believed to be right, and today, we have been vindicated. We never gave up on our fight for justice, and we are delighted that our perseverance has paid off.

"This ruling proves that the government has discriminated against thousands of younger firefighters. They must now rectify the damage they unnecessarily caused.

"The Tory/Lib Dem government took no notice of the evidence we provided about the specific nature of firefighters' work. An occupational pension should be based on the realities of that occupation. The government ignored this.

"The overwhelming message from this fight is that unity is strength. When workers unite we can take on the bosses and the government, and we can win. This is not the end, we will continue to fight for pension justice across the board. The FBU will always fight for our members."

Ends

Notes to editors

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Details on the Court of Appeal ruling last December can be found here:
<https://www.fbu.org.uk/news/2018/12/20/firefighters-win-major-pension-legal-case-against-government-2015>

Background

Under the new scheme, firefighters would not be able to retire before reaching the age of 60. A review commissioned by the coalition government agreed, that in the best case, 23% of current firefighters won't be able to maintain the required level of fitness until 60, while in the worst case, 92% will not be able to do so. If members chose to retire early, at the former pension age of 55, firefighters in England would see their pension reduced by 21.8%.