

POLICY NOTE

THE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME (CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISIONS) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 2015

S.S.I. 2015/

The Regulations make consequential provision in relation to the new public service pension scheme under the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 (c.25). They modify the effect of other statutory provisions in their application to the Scottish firefighter pension schemes. The above instrument is subject to affirmative procedure.

Policy Objectives

Certification provisions for contracting-out

Some employers choose to set up company pension schemes to provide a pension which replaces all, or part, of the additional State Pension provided the scheme meets minimum standards known as the Reference Scheme Test. This is known as “contracting-out” of the additional State Pension. Individuals who are members of a contracted-out scheme and their employers pay lower National Insurance contributions. This arrangement is known as the National Insurance rebate. The UK Government intends that new public Service schemes (introduced from 1 April 2015), like the existing schemes, should be contracted-out of the additional State Pension, until contracting-out ends in April 2016. Part 2 of the Regulations deals with contracting-out under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 (c. 48) (“the 1993 Act”) for the period from 1 April 2015 to 5 April 2016, inclusive. Certain procedural requirements are dis-applied that would otherwise apply by virtue of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Contracting-out) Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996/1172): for example, formal notices to earners. New schemes must still meet the requirements in section 9 of the 1993 Act: in particular, they must satisfy the Reference Scheme Test.

Provisions about pensionable service and early leavers

The effect of the 2013 Act, and scheme regulations once made, is that the existing scheme must close, and current members (except for specific protected groups) transfer into the new scheme. However, these transferring members will retain certain benefits in the existing scheme (described in the Regulations as their “old scheme”). Although they will accrue new benefits in the new scheme only, the member will, strictly speaking, belong to both schemes at once. In certain cases such a member will have a “final salary link” (see Schedule 7 to the 2013 Act) which means that their final salary in the new scheme will be used to determine their final salary for the purposes of the old scheme.

Part 3 of the Regulations reflects the policy intention that those with on-going service in the old scheme and the new scheme should generally (subject to certain conditions) be treated as if they remained active members for particular purposes or in “pensionable service” for the old scheme until their pensionable service in the new scheme is terminated. The objective is to prevent them from becoming deferred

members, thereby triggering rights that are inconsistent with them remaining in service with the same employer in a successor pension scheme.

The 1993 Act contains provisions about occupational pension schemes – not only public service schemes – including as to their contracting-out of the additional State Pension (see Part 3 of the 1993 Act); and as to members who leave their scheme before retirement age (“early leavers”) (Part 4 of the 1993 Act).

For the purposes of the 2013 Act and scheme regulations, a number of those provisions need to be modified in relation to members of an old scheme who transfer to a new scheme. The modifications described below affect only this category of members, and not those who remain fully active members of the old scheme (primarily, those near to normal pension age at the time of the reforms). It does not affect those who have become fully deferred members of the old scheme, nor brand new members who join the new scheme on or after 1 April 2015.

One reference to “pensionable service” in Part 3 of the 1993 Act, which concerns certification requirements for contracted-out pension schemes, is modified so that the person is treated as having a single period of pensionable service in one scheme.

There are further provisions in Part 4 of the Act which concern the rights of early leavers. Chapter 1 provides for preservation of benefits and sets out the principle of short service benefit for those persons. The Regulations provide that a person will not have access to short service benefit until pensionable service terminates in the new scheme, rather than when the person transfers into the new scheme. Certain provisions will apply as though the old scheme and the new scheme were a single scheme.

Chapter 2 of Part 4 concerns the revaluation of a person’s benefits during the period between the person leaving their occupational scheme and reaching normal pension age. The requirements of that Chapter should not apply to someone’s old scheme benefits when the person transfers into the new scheme but remains in service. Instead, the amount of their old scheme benefits will be determined in accordance with the scheme rules and the member’s final salary in the new scheme. The Regulations provide that old scheme benefits are not to be revalued under Chapter 2 while the person remains in pensionable service in the new scheme. This is to ensure that their old scheme benefits are not effectively revalued twice.

Chapter 3 of Part 4 concerns “anti-franking”, or the protection of increases in guaranteed minimum pensions (“GMPs”) which contracted-out schemes had to provide until 1997. For this purpose, the Regulations provide that the “cessation date” when a person ceases to be in contracted-out employment under the old scheme (and from which point GMPs may need to be increased) is treated as the date when the person leaves the new scheme, and not the date when they transfer from the old scheme to the new scheme. The Regulations include a subsequent modification of the definition of “cessation date” in section 87 of the 1993 Act, which will take effect when that definition is amended by the Pensions Act 2014 (c.19) as part of the abolition of contracting-out.

Chapter 4 of Part 4 concerns cash equivalent transfers for early leavers. The Regulations provide that a person will not acquire the statutory right to a cash

equivalent under the old scheme until pensionable service terminates in the new scheme, rather than when the person transfers into the new scheme.

There are also modifications to the Occupational Pension Schemes (Transfer Values) Regulations 1996 (S.I. 1996/1847) which were made under that Chapter, to enable scheme managers in certain circumstances to delay transfers of preserved benefits until the transition member has left new scheme employment. This is designed to restrict transfers out (from either scheme) by a person who has voluntarily opted out of membership of the new scheme, but remains in employment.

Ill-health benefits

A 'single source model' has been agreed for the payment of ill-health pensions in the new public service pension schemes. Under the single source model, all payments of ill-health pension will be made from the new pension scheme during the period between retirement and the scheme member reaching normal pension age in the old scheme. This model delivers certainty over the ill-health pensions that are payable to members with service in both schemes, and prevents the administrative difficulty of performing two parallel ill-health calculations.

Accordingly, the pension payable to the scheme member from the new scheme will contain 3 elements:

- (1) An element in respect of any Lower Tier ill-health pension entitlement in respect of service in the old scheme;
- (2) A pension in respect of service in the new scheme; and
- (3) In the case of an Upper Tier ill-health pension, an uplift.

When the person receiving an ill-health pension from the new scheme reaches their normal pension age in the old scheme, then the first element will cease to be paid out of the new scheme. At this point, the element in respect of the lower Tier ill-health pension entitlement related to their old scheme pension will come into payment from the old scheme. The member will see no difference in the amount that they receive.

Part 4 of the Regulations modifies the tax regime in order to correct some unintended consequences.

Under the current legislation, element (1) above would count as an increase in the value of the pension over the pension input period. If that increase meant that the amount of the annual allowance for the pension input period was exceeded, then a tax charge would arise. Regulation 15 modifies the application of the current legislation to remove element (1) from the calculation of the pension input period during the pension input period in which the member takes ill-health retirement.

Under the current legislation, the initial value of the ill-health pension –elements (1), (2), and in cases of serious ill-health, (3) – would be measured against the lifetime allowance. However, when the member taking ill-health retirement reaches their normal pension age under the new scheme, the current legislation would measure the element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement from the old scheme coming into payment against the member's remaining lifetime allowance, notwithstanding that element (1) will cease to be paid from the new scheme. If that

second measurement results in the total amount of pension exceeding the lifetime allowance, then a tax charge will arise. Regulation 14 modifies the application of the current legislation to ensure that the payment of the element in respect of the lower tier ill-health pension entitlement paid from the old scheme will not count against the lifetime allowance.

Accordingly, both regulations operate so that a member will not suffer any unexpected tax consequences as a result of the way the ill-health provisions have been structured in the new scheme.

Deferred pension age for the uniformed services

Part 5 of the Regulations concerns pension age and short service benefits.

That Part resolves a conflict between the short service benefit provisions in Chapter 1 of Part 4 of the 1993 Act, and the requirements as to pension age in section 10 of the 2013 Act, that an active member has a normal pension age of 60 but a deferred member has a pension age set equal to the state pension age.

The short service benefit provisions in the 1993 Act operate to ensure that the benefits of a deferred member (short service benefits) are calculated in the same way as the equivalent benefits held by an active member (long service benefits).

However, section 10 of the 2013 Act requires different calculations for active and deferred members. For example, an active member aged 61 could take an immediate unreduced pension as they have reached their normal pension age, but a deferred member aged 61 has not reached their deferred pension age and is not entitled to an immediate unreduced pension.

Active members of the Scottish firefighters pension scheme are exempted from the requirement on most other public service pension schemes to have their normal pension age equal to the deferred pension age. This is to reflect the specific occupational requirements of firefighting. However, deferred members of the scheme have left service and so no longer need the protection of the lower pension age put in place for active members to recognise the demands of the occupation.

Regulation 15 resolves this conflict by ensuring that any difference in the calculation of the short service benefits of deferred members and the long service benefits of active members resulting from the necessary requirements of section 10 about pension age does not breach the short service benefit provisions in the 1993 Act.

Consultation

The Scottish Public Pensions Agency conducted a 5 week public consultation exercise which ended on 4 January 2015. The consultation was circulated to interested parties via email on 27 November as well as being hosted on the SPPA website. The consultation received two responses.

One respondent indicated that the draft regulations were complicated and offered a suggestion on the preferred terminology used to identify the three Firefighter pension schemes.

One respondent sought improvements to the benefits of existing schemes by permitting former members of the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme 2006 to transfer their 2006 scheme benefits into the 2015 scheme, and allowing 1992 scheme members to take their pension without having to retire or face a tax charge.

Early leavers will be able to transfer their pension to another pension scheme, where this is so permitted by other legislation. However, members cannot transfer their pension rights out of the firefighters' pension schemes while they continue to be an active member of that scheme. The Regulations recognise the rights of scheme members to move between different pension schemes and scheme members who are not entitled to the final salary link will be able to transfer their old scheme rights out to another eligible pension scheme.

The point raised on allowing 1992 scheme members to take their pensions without retiring could substantially increase costs as unfunded 1992 scheme pension benefits would come into payment earlier than under the current rules of the scheme.

Impact Assessments

No equality impact statement has been done for this instrument as one will be prepared for the wider pension reforms being introduced to the Firefighter schemes.

Financial Effects

No Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment has been prepared because no impact on the private or voluntary sector is foreseen.

Scottish Public Pensions Agency
An Agency of the Scottish Government
January 2015