

RTÉ executive's attempted raid on RTÉ Superannuation pension scheme.

We represent over 1100 retired RTÉ staff who devoted their working careers to public service. We are the people who typed, researched, designed, filmed, directed, edited, constructed, archived, delivered News, Current Affairs, Song Contests, Nationwides, Late Lates, All Irelands, horrors in Belfast and Derry, the support people behind it all, day, and night - and we balanced the books scrupulously. Not a "high earner" between us. We have been absent from the debate on RTÉ. We wish to raise two issues:

1. RTÉ recently applied to the Government for permission to transfer the administrative and operational expenses to the RTÉ Superannuation pension scheme (RTÉSA). The request was refused, but a new representation has been made. We are concerned that our fund will be raided, to the detriment of pensioners' income.
2. Pensioners were recently awarded a 2% increase, the first since 2008. The granting of any increase is in the gift of the Government, a process which can take up to a year.

Let me expand on these points:

1. As background, you may know that our conditions of employment stipulated that we would pay a D stamp, which meant we would not qualify for a state pension (plus Christmas bonuses etc.). The RTÉSA is managed by a Board of Trustees and is in a healthy state due to prudent investment and excellent stewardship. Our pensions are not a burden on the public purse.

RTÉ, the CFO of which, de facto, is a member of the RTÉSA Trustees, decided that the scheme's administrative and operational expenses should henceforth be transferred to the Pension fund as RTÉ's financial situation position was becoming parlous. This decision was and is impermissible under the RTÉSA Scheme Regulations. Government permission was sought and refused. We, the RTÉ Retired Staff Association, opposed the proposal, making our case that the true costs would escalate over time, and would breach the rule stipulating that the accrued reserves of the RTÉ Pension Scheme were to be used exclusively for the benefit of retired staff.

We wrote to the former Director General, Ms Dee Forbes, and to the former Chairperson of the RTÉ Board, Ms Moya Doherty, but did not receive an acknowledgment. This story may provide a small insight into the much-discussed "silo" attitudes within the organisation. The Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies - Remuneration and Superannuation, clearly states that the administration costs of the superannuation schemes of Commercial State Bodies will be met by the State Body.

2. Due to inflation, the real value of RTÉSA pensions by mid 2022 had fallen by more than 11% since the recession of 2008. The majority of RTÉSA pensioners (85%) are on less than the average industrial wage. Over a third receive less than €20,000. Historically, RTÉSA pensions have increased in line with wage and pay agreements and many of our members have documents confirming this practice.

The RTÉSA Trustees, acting on external actuarial advice, in the past year decided that another small pension increase was necessary and easily affordable. An application for another 2.5 % increase was submitted to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media ten months ago. The department's previous circular 16/2021 addressed the procedure for a commercial state body, such as RTÉ, to seek ministerial consent for a pension increase. This circular amended the code of practice for Commercial State Bodies. The request for a ministerial approval must be made in the first instance to the parent department and if the relevant Minister wishes to approve the pension increase, that department must communicate their intention to the Minister for Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery and Reform, and request their consent.

This decision-making procedure is opaque and very slow. It can take a year or more, and over that short period, 60 or more of our members may have died. It is an unacceptable delay, and this is a major issue which must be addressed urgently.

Apart from these considerations, there is growing concern among our members that, in the light of the current debate about RTÉ and its funding, Government may delay our badly needed pension increase further.

Yours sincerely,

The RTÉRSA (RTÉ Retired Staff Association) committee