

These notes refer to the Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (c.2) which received Royal Assent on 11 March 2014

Public Service Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

EXPLANATORY NOTES

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Transitional

Section 18: Restriction of existing pension schemes

Section 18 provides that benefits may not be provided under existing pension schemes in relation to service after the closing date for the scheme. Its effect is to bring to an end further accrual of pension benefits in existing schemes, except where transitional arrangements have been agreed to allow those who are closest to retirement to continue to accrue benefits under the scheme. The transitional arrangements for each scheme may vary within the parameters set by the Act.

Subsection (1) prohibits the provision of benefits under an existing scheme for service after the closing date for that scheme, as provided by subsection (4). Subsection (1) does not require the scheme to be wound up, and will not crystallise the liabilities in that scheme.

Subsection (2) specifies that “existing schemes” for the purposes of the Act are those listed in Schedule 5.

Subsection (3) provides that the above restriction does not apply to defined contribution schemes or to the benefits specifically excepted by Schedule 5, which are injury and compensation benefits.

Subsection (4) sets out that the closing date mentioned in subsection (1) is 31st March 2015.

Subsection (5) permits scheme regulations to provide exceptions to subsection (1) for:

- persons who were, or were eligible to be, members of an existing scheme immediately before 1st April 2012; and
- for other persons who ceased to be, or to be eligible to be, members of existing schemes before that date.

Subsection (6) permits scheme regulations to also provide exceptions to subsection (1) for:

- persons who were, or were eligible to be, members of an existing public body scheme immediately before 1st April 2012; and
- for other persons who ceased to be, or to be eligible to be, members of existing public body schemes before that date.

This provision is permissive, but not mandatory; schemes may decide not to adopt transitional arrangements if they wish. It is anticipated that schemes will, in practice, provide transitional protections.

Such exceptions may, by subsection (7), be framed in particular by reference to a person reaching normal pension age under their existing scheme, or another age, or to the satisfaction of another condition before a particular date. These exceptions are to permit the various transitional arrangements that have been agreed as part of developing reformed public service pension schemes, and to enable delivery of the new Fair Deal policy (to which section 29 and Schedule 9 are also relevant).

Subsection (8) allows for additional transitional provisions for those who do not fall within the categories that scheme regulations provide under subsection (6). These provisions may extend qualified transitional arrangements for up to a further four years. This subsection allows the impact of reformed schemes to be moderated for those who fall just outside of the main categories for which transitional protection has been agreed. This is typically people who are between 10 and 14 years from retirement in their existing schemes. These ‘tapering’ provisions are designed to afford protection to those scheme members who do not benefit from full exemption under transitional agreements.

Subsection (9) allows the arrangements under subsections (5), (6) and (8) to be provided by amending existing schemes through scheme regulations.

Subsection (10) clarifies that death in service benefits are included within the reference to “benefits” in subsection (1).