



AN UPDATE FROM YOUR LEAD OFFICER GEOFF KITE

Welcome to the first edition of the RMT RFA Newsletter.

A key message that has been fed back to me since being lead officer of the RFA was that we needed to give members more information and need to be seen more on vessels, keeping you the members updated.

This first newsletter will cover some ongoing issues with a report from myself and the Convenor (Ian Parkin).



Unfortunately, our ballot for action short did not pass the legal threshold and therefore we could not put the action short of strike on. We were also advised by Nautilus that they had the same issue.

It has been agreed that although we do not agree to the implementation of the 2.95% pay and 0.05% on allowances we have to move on and prepare for the 2023/4 pay negotiations.

I will start with the disappointing parts first. As you all know the RFA have implemented the 2022/3 pay even though both unions have rejected the offer.

This may be disappointing to some of you, however, we must stand together now and push for a decent pay increase.

RFA BONUS SCHEME

This is something once again where they have just done what they wanted to do; there was no agreement between the trade unions and the RFA and we were advised what they were doing via email before the scheduled meeting with the Commodore to discuss a fair split.

We have raised our disappointment with the Commodore and have sought assurances that it doesn't happen again.

Moving forward, the RFA have started informal discussions on the pay for 2023/4. They have told us that again they will be tied to the civil service pay cap, however we can look at a multi-year deal if we could look at T&C's.

I have made it clear that this union does not sell T&C's to improve pay and all we would be looking at would be to improve T&C's and a substantial pay increase. More formal discussions are due to take place soon. Please contact myself or Ian Parkin if you have ideas to put forward to us to discuss with the RFA.

SHIPS VISITS

I am setting out a program where I can visit ships when docked in the UK to see as many of you as possible and will be joined on these visits by Ian (Convenor). These meetings can discuss pay, T&C's, RFA issues and anything else that is relevant. I have already visited Mount Bay at Portsmouth and thank you for the warm welcome I received.

Thank you to all those that took part in the survey we sent out. I have outlined some of the headlines and will continue working through your concerns that you have sent in. Thank you to those who have said they would like to get more active, I will be in contact very shortly to discuss.

Lastly congratulations to Olly Longden who has been elected to serve on the RMT National Executive Committee, we are working with the RFA to get Olly released from duty.

As this is the first newsletter, we have covered the main points, but there is a lot more that you would like dealing with. So I will be working hard on the with the next edition which will cover a lot more.

If you would like to contact me my email is G.kite@rmt.org.uk and number is 07830 470909

*Yours Fraternally,
Geoff Kite*

Lead Officer

CONTACT DETAILS

All RMT members need to ensure that if you change employer, change job title, change mobile numbers, change your email address etc you inform head office. If we don't have your correct details on file then we will be ineffective in our communication to you.

**If you do not receive texts from RMT – we do not have your correct mobile number.
If you do not receive RMT news at home – we do not have your correct home address.
If you do not receive emails from RMT – we do not have your correct email address.**

Contact RMT Head office on 0800 376 3706, use the app or log on to the website to update your personal details.

CONVENOR COLUMN BY IAN PARKIN

After our latest postal ballot not reaching the threshold to make it legal, due to no fault of our own, but very bad timing with the escalations of the Royal Mail dispute and postal backlogs, we now find ourselves being pushed over in some areas by senior management. The latest move being the implementation of the 2023 bonus.



compared to 2022 award.

Both MTUs asked for further talks and asked for it to be put on hold and it be awarded in the March payroll like it has in the all previous years. Regrettably our pleas have not been heard and COMRFA insisted that this was done for the coming payroll so people on low pay could benefit with the current cost of living crisis.

Both MTUs had requested consultation and submitted prior ideas so the figure could be distributed evenly.

This unfortunately has fallen on deaf ears and COMRFA have made it their business to roll out the bonus in February's pay to all. This will consist of a figure of £809 across all substantive Grades including COC holders and £402 for Trainees.

We asked COMRFA for a full explanation regarding the figures for 2023 and were told it is a combination of a previous National Insurance over payment and a bigger pool of people qualifying with less sick, misconducts and more employees

The RMT's thought on this was if members are low paid then only one person could improve this issue and that was COMRFA.

We have had initial informal discussions in late February and are looking to take forward the next round of pay talks for 2023/24 and to explore issues around perhaps a multi-year deal, pension emoluments and some other allowances where there may be potential to offer more to the workforce.

I will keep you all informed of this and request that updates are sent out also via RMT text services.

NEW SHIPS

January 2023 saw the delivery of two new ships to RFA service. Although these ships have just been delivered talks have been held regarding the manning of the vessels. These vessels will be manned similarly to our Crusader and Centurion days and will consist of around 28 personnel across all Grades excluding CIS, on a month on, month off, basis or thereabouts. This is of course early days and things can change at short notice. One vessel is currently in Lairds and the other is in Devon Port. The vessel in Devon unfortunately suffered a small galley fire two weeks ago, this has highlighted some potential safety failures which will be rectified and upgraded to current standards, this vessel is ten years old so will no doubt come with some small issues what will need investment in to bring to our standards.

The next RMT quarterly is being held on 13th June 2023, these are held with RFA Management and Business Partners every three months. If you have any questions or issues that can not be answered by your onboard Rep, please get them to me by no later then then close of play on the 9th June for prior submission to AOB. **If you would like to get involved and attend these meetings with myself and the lead officer then please get in contact with me.**

2023 will no doubt be hard on us all, we seem to be gapped in most depts and manpower shortages are evident more than ever across the Fleet with some vessels running at base manning and plugging gaps with RN personnel as a temp fix to get them operational. This itself is wrong but if there is no other alternative then someone is better than G-Billet, on our visits to ships we can see the drain and impact this has on ships crew and are told this frequently by our members. We always bring this to management's attention and are constantly knocking at the relevant doors. Unfortunately, the days have gone when we were all in the same building and knocking on a door of RM15 or senior management to iron out issues is long gone. Now it's a matter of hunting them down or reaching out via skype call, email or message, if they choose to ignore the issue then I sometimes have no other alternative then to knock on Commodore's door and if he continues to ignore then escalate further.

INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Recently on a ships visit to Mounts bay it was highlighted to me that there was an issue with Bandwidth and the ships TV receiver.

This unfortunately could not be rectified before the vessel sailed, but a resolution was put in place so the ship could supply smart TVs to all cabins which are Hard Drive capable and can run via WIFI, it was also decided to only use the bandwidth during the working day for ships business and then ceasing ships business so full advantage could be taking to make use of a bad situation.

MEMBER REPRESENTATION

One of the many benefits of being in the union is member representation and we have recently seen an increase in misconduct and disciplinary issues that have required direct intervention and support for RMT members.

Most hearings are favourable and some do not even take place due to the length of time they have taken and with interim intervention reminding them of the policy and the detrimental effect it has on our member's mental health and well-being.

Can all Reps who are about to pay off your respective ships ensure that someone else is taking over as Rep, POC etc contact me so that our vessel data is up to date.

If you would like to contact me my email is rfaconvenor@rmt.org.uk and my number is 07888 521746.

Best Regards,

Jan Parkin

RFA/RMT Convenor & ADO/CDO Admin

SURVEY OF RFA MEMBERS IN RFA

Further to the recent RMT RFA member survey, I would like to thank those that participated. Please find a summary below.

We had a total of **253** responses.

Of the 14 questions asked, all had varying degrees of completion; with all questions having various rates of participants choosing to skip responding. All questions were responded to.

WHAT HAS THE SURVEY TOLD US?

Which department do you work in?

The highest response rates came from deck, closely followed by engine room and catering. There was then a steep decline in participant numbers from comms, stores and laundry respectively.

Having representative response rates is vital to the survey outputs benefiting all members, rather than one department over another. Therefore, what this question has shown us is that, if the RMT and RFA run this survey again, there needs to be more proactive communications to ensure all departments are given the opportunity to complete the survey.

How long have you worked for the RFA?

The highest response rate came from the longest serving members – having 20+ years under their belts. They were followed by those with 10 – 20 years' service, 5 – 10 years, 1 – 5 years and, finally, the smallest respondent group – less than 1 year of service.

This tells us that the longest serving members we the most able to complete the survey. This could be

due to IT accessibility, geographic ability, confidence in expressing views etc. What it does highlight is that those with lower lengths of service have not been as represented in the responses. This could be down to the fact that onboarding new seafarers within the UK into the RFA is becoming more problematic and identifies a skills shortage that will inevitably lead to a succession crisis once the longest serving members chose to retire.

What is your Gender?

With nearly 93% of respondents being male, this clearly shows that RFA is a very male orientated sector and has, unsurprisingly, a huge gender gap issue.

This tells us that more needs to be done to actively encourage females into the RFA and the seafaring industry.

When did you last attend an RMT branch meeting?

Sadly, nearly 67% of respondents have never attended an RMT branch meeting, with only just over 16% attending one in the last 12 months.

What this shows is that RMT branch meetings need to be more accessible – in terms of delivery, timing and regularity to ensure that all, like those at sea, have the opportunity to attend/ dial in and feel they are being actively represented and engaged in union activities.

On a scale of 1 - 10 (worst to best) how would you rate the internet connectivity onboard RFA vessels?

Overwhelmingly the overall response to this was that the connectivity is poor – with the average score being only 2.5 out of 10.

This clearly demonstrates that internet connectivity is a real issue and major investment is needed on infrastructure and boosting connectivity and internet speed. Having a reliable internet connection is vital to the wellbeing of members when at sea so they can maintain contact with family, children, friends etc.

This is going to be an area that the RMT are going to work with the RFA to improve, and ensure you all have the infrastructure you need to be connected to your loved ones.

In order to improve engagement we are considering new ways of communicating with members, please rank the below in order of your preference.

An RFA specific newsletter came out on top, and here is the first one. Second was ships visits, we are in the process of setting up more ships visits with the lead officer, National Secretary and RMT convenor. These will be advertised when the visits are planned.

Are you interested in becoming more involved in RMT and helping to strengthen your Union's organisation within the RFA?

We have had a number of members come forward expressing an interest to be more active, as a result of this survey, which is positive and encouraging. We will be in touch with these individuals shortly to discuss next steps. The opportunity to be more involved is always available – just reach out to the Lead Officer or the Convenor if you are interested.



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