

Collective bargaining: This is how ST works to secure better terms

The collective bargaining round is the time when the balance of power between employer and employee is at its most even. However, preparations begin much earlier. Learn more about how Fackförbundet ST (the Union of Civil Servants) goes about improving its members' salaries and employment terms – through long-term collective bargaining.

Once the old collective agreement expires the union is no longer bound by its no-strike agreement. This means that we have all of our tools at our disposal, the most extreme of which is striking. If our pressure is to be effective, and the balance of power equalised, we need strong trade unions. Every member is therefore vital in negotiations.

How we prepare for a collective bargaining round

Each round of collective bargaining begins where the last one ended. We will return to any demands that went unanswered last time having gathered further facts and arguments. We monitor external events and statistics to gather knowledge about new problems, as well as conducting an extensive survey of our members.

We begin gearing up about 18 months before the start of the collective bargaining round by compiling documentation on which the union's General Assembly can base its decisions when setting overall objectives. These are then published in a policy document we call an agreement platform.

Influencing our counterparty

In negotiations, it is important that the other party shares one's view of the issues. This work begins some time before the collective bargaining round through, for example, seminars, debate articles and workplace activities. In the best-case scenario, we will get public opinion and other trade unions on board, thus increasing the likelihood that the employer organisation will realise that these are issues we need to discuss.

The first step of collective bargaining is that both sides state their demands. Each side then has a couple of months for consideration. It is not enough to simply explain what we want, we must also be able to explain why we oppose the other party's wishes.

Does Fackförbundet ST have any common threads running through negotiations?

Generally speaking, there are two issues on which Fackförbundet ST would be very reluctant to give ground:

1. The influence our members have over their working lives should never decrease.
2. We oppose all agreements without specific figures; for us, it is crucial that all agreed salary increases are written down in the collective agreement. These figures protect our members against employers who might wish to finance their businesses by withholding salary increases.

Face-to-face negotiation

In negotiations, the point of departure for our delegates is the claims contained in the agreement platform. After that, it is a matter of give and take and those sitting around the negotiating table must continuously check back with our delegations and the Executive Committee, who ultimately make the decisions. Delegates to the negotiations also need to discuss matters between themselves, as it is vital that all choices are supported.

We have enjoyed success in recent collective bargaining rounds

Over recent years we have succeeded in halting proposals from the employer organisation that would have been to the detriment of our members. Defending our members gains on the labour market is at least as important as improving their terms of employment. Of course, we also work to achieve improvements. Here are a few recent examples:

- Sick pay remuneration was extended from 3 to 12 months and the pension agreement for state civil servants on parental leave was significantly improved.
- Greater provisions for the flex-pension in the agreement areas Communications and Rail Transport.
- A number of work environment and sustainable working life initiatives were launched in all agreement areas.

What happens when a collective agreement is signed and sealed?

Having finished the marathon, the collective agreement now needs to be put into practice. A significant amount of work remains to educate and inform the trade union's members and officials, as well as to support elected officials prior to vital local negotiations. By the time this is done, it is time to start preparing for the next round of collective bargaining.