

FairPensions is the campaign for responsible investment of UK pension funds.

FairPensions and Oxfam join forces to pressure Novartis over access to medicines

Over the last few months, FairPensions has been working with Oxfam on a campaign to help persuade pharmaceutical company Novartis to drop a legal action which Oxfam believes will jeopardise access to vital medicines for poor people across the developing world. Thanks to all those people - including many FairPensions supporters - who took part in this campaign, we have seen an unprecedented response from pension funds.

FairPensions and Oxfam have been calling for pension funds

and other investors to put pressure on Novartis to withdraw their challenge to Indian patent law, and asking people to email their pension funds to let them know that they want to see action taken on this issue.

One fund manager reported to Oxfam that they had 'never had so many questions from pension funds on a campaign issue', and Novartis admit they 'didn't quite expect the uproar we've had' (*Wall Street Journal Europe*, 5th March 2007.)

We are currently working to ensure pension funds keep up the pressure on Novartis. Their shareholder power will be vital in eliciting change from the pharmaceutical company.

For more information on the Novartis case see www.oxfam.org.uk/a2m.

If you have not yet emailed your pension fund on this issue, please do so now!
<http://fairpensions.ntsols.com>.

FairPensions persuades Lewisham to adopt responsible investment

We are delighted to announce that the London Borough of Lewisham's pension fund has decided to adopt a policy of responsible investment.

Following briefings and a presentation by FairPensions, Lewisham's pension fund committee have decided to survey all their members about ethical issues. This move will

make them one of the only UK pension funds to give their members a say in how their money is invested.

They will also join the Local Authority Pension Fund Forum, which uses their collective shareholder influence to promote high levels of corporate social responsibility among the companies in which they invest.

FairPensions becomes a charity

We are extremely pleased to announce that in January this year FairPensions was finally awarded charity status. This is a fantastic achievement for FairPensions, which is now the first charity of its kind. This recognises - for the first time - the benefits that shareholder activism can have on human rights, development and environmental sustainability.

Becoming a charity also means that FairPensions can now claim Gift Aid on all our donations - which will help us to substantially increase our funds. If you are, or have been, a donor, and have not filled out a Gift Aid declaration, please fill out the form enclosed. This will allow us to reclaim tax on any past donations.

We need your help...

In the last 6 months, FairPensions has been working hard to increase the force of responsible investment. The idea that shareholders should hold companies to account on environmental and social issues is beginning to be recognised for the first time. It is vital that we continue this process to ensure consistent improvement for the treatment of people and their environment.

Please help us by supporting our work. We are a small organisation, and each donation we receive makes a real difference to what we can achieve!

Even if you cannot afford to donate, please remember to fill in the Gift Aid form and return it to us. If you are a UK tax payer, this will allow us to claim the tax back on any donations you have made since 2004!

USS unveils new responsible investment strategy

The Universities Superannuation Scheme, the UK's second-largest pension fund, recently released the results of a five-year review of its responsible investment strategy.

FairPensions was pleased to see that the review stated that "feedback from certain parties, including a member group, suggests a degree of concern in respect of the fact that the scheme's responsible investment

strategy does not fully address their desire for engagement with individual companies" and that the resulting strategy now includes direct engagement with specific companies.

USS also recognises that their size gives them significant influence on the companies in their portfolio, and has allowed them to successfully affect change in corporate behaviour - illustrating why it is so important

for them to engage with companies on environmental and human rights issues.

FairPensions has expressed disappointment that the new strategy does not mention specific issues to be addressed - which makes it hard to track progress - and will continue with its dialogue with USS on this issue.

FairPensions launches 'email your pension fund'

We have now made it easier for people to push their pension fund to adopt responsible investment. Those with a pension can now email their fund directly from our website, asking them what they are doing to monitor and take action on social and environmental issues.

We hope that this will prompt more people to contact their pension funds, and make them aware that people care about how their money is invested. You can take this action today by going to www.fairpensions.org.uk/act_now/email.htm. The more people put pressure on their pension fund, the harder it will be for them to ignore you. If you don't have a pension fund, you can also use the webpage to email your friends about this action.

FairPensions survey shows pension funds keep members in the dark

Research by FairPensions on the top 20 pension schemes found that the majority were failing to disclose policies on social and environmental responsibility. This indicates that schemes are largely failing to act on these issues. Of the twenty pension schemes surveyed, only one (BT) was disclosing how shareholder votes have been cast on scheme members' behalf, but they were beaten by USS on other criteria.

This lack of transparency means that members could be unwittingly voting for unethical company behaviour such as business ventures in oppressive regimes, or an oil company's climate-change denial policy.

The UK's 20 largest occupational pension schemes are a group worth over £250 billion, with a total membership of 3.8 million. It is vital they act to hold companies to account. Highlighting these results publicly has already prompted promises from pension funds to improve their transparency on social and environmental issues.

National Pensions Saving Scheme: the fight for responsible investment continues

In our last newsletter we told you that we were lobbying the government over their planned National Pensions Savings Scheme, in which all employees not covered by a workplace

pension will be enrolled. We were pleased to see that the government's White Paper on the proposed scheme recognised the demand for ethical options. We were, however, disappointed

to see no mention of responsible investment requirements for the scheme as a whole. We continue to lobby on this subject.