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Worker Career Progression Framework

UNISON opposes the proposed restrictions to progression to Band 12 for the following reasons.

- Most notably this proposal does not adhere to the thrust of the SW Task Force recommendations to build and maintain frontline expertise by encouraging and rewarding practising SWs to remain working in the field. The balance therefore should be towards building a workforce that employs more social workers in the highest banding rather than in the lower bandings, with the present proposals representing a modest extension of the present structure in which there are a few lead practitioner posts. It is inevitable that career progression to a limited number of posts will be seen by many practitioners as a means to progress to management positions rather than encouraging practitioners to remain practising in the field.
- The Social Work Task also note that many of the single status job evaluations have introduced equality proofed structures that have underrated the skills and experience of social workers in comparison to other professionals - leading to unfair pay (IDS report). Lack of parity with these professional groups will inevitably have a long term impact on levels of competency and recruitment to social work. The salaries of SWs therefore need to be raised if parity is to be maintained with professionals, especially at the higher end of the scale.
- Recruitment and Retention of SWs will be impeded by the necessity to apply for a limited number of lead or senior practitioner posts. DCC SWs trapped on band 11 will inevitably be encouraged to move to other authorities with SWs from other authorities being dissuaded from applying for SWs posts in Derbyshire in view of the cap on the number of higher paid posts that have to be obtained through competitive interview.
- The proposal does not recognise the current experience of SWs who were at the top of the previous scale point system. These practitioners should be assimilated on a similar point on the new scale above Band 11 with the current proposals devaluing and not recognising their experience. These workers already have been assessed as having SW Level Three status and have met the previous appropriate progression guidelines and targets with the new system in effect representing a demotion for these time served social workers.
- The insistence on possession of PQ1-6 for entry into Banding 12 posts is also highly discriminatory and unfair. Because of unavailability of training opportunities and work pressures, most experienced and competent SWs ((including AMHPs) have not been able to acquire these qualifications. Consequently, there has been variable take up of PQ training with recognition needed that the introduction of this qualification requirement should be phased in over time to make allowance for the present difficulties in experienced SWs obtaining these qualifications. Indeed, as things stand, it could well be the case

creates a workforce in which a disproportionate number of less experienced social workers who possess PQ1-6 are promoted to higher posts at the expense of their more experienced colleagues.

- In turn, this has further impact on career opportunities for time served SW Level 3 staff since they are now effectively being downgraded with future service manager requirements presumably requiring that prospective applicants must also have the full PQ1-6 portfolio of qualifications. We would add that the vast majority of existing middle and senior managers will not have these PQ1-6 qualifications which were obviously not previously seen as a bar to progression, with some current SW practitioners (within what is an ageing workforce) having more fieldwork experience than these managers. This experience has however been discounted with these experienced practitioners needing to be assimilated into Band 12 or 13 senior posts.
- The career structure has not acknowledged the contradictions in career progression that have emerged following the single status evaluation. The vast majority of adult social care assessment workers undertake care management responsibilities. These functions are integral to their posts. However, all care managers are being placed on Band 11 whilst other adult care social workers who are doing exactly the same job are still being placed on Bands 9 and 10 and being expected to progress in the manner described in the proposals. This contradiction immediately raises equal job, equal pay claims. Indeed, one contrasts the requirements for newly qualified social work employees to have a probationary year with exacting hurdles to overcome (as recommended by the SW Task Force) with the absence of progression requirements for the other workgroups.
- Similarly, the new structure is not recognising the value of the Dip. SW qualification in relation to other vocational or professional qualifications. All children's and adult social workers have to be awarded a Dip. SW qualification (with accompanying degree). Yet SWs start on band 9 whilst care managers immediately commence on band 11, although they can be appointed if they have an alternative but lower vocational qualification such as NVQ level 4, which previously limited their career progression on the spinal scale. The new structure is further compromised by the fact that persons with NVQ are being recruited as acting service managers (for two year periods) and supervising higher qualified and much more experienced SW staff.
- It is also noted that Occupational Therapists have all been placed on Band 11, again without any expectation of progression through lower bandings.
- Finally, the new structure does not restore the agreements that had been negotiated into the previous structure that social workers with additional responsibilities, such as AHMPS, were deserving of additional payments.

Summary

UNISON is mindful that there may be wide sweeping changes to the social work profession following the Social Work Task Force report with a single nationally

ing alongside other reforms including a national development of social workers, a dedicated programme ers and clear, universal and binding standards for employers regarding how frontline social work should be resourced, managed and supported. However, these new proposals seemingly fail to acknowledge the full import of these wider recommendations with DCC particularly not sufficiently considering how resources can be reallocated to make a difference on the frontline. Instead, the limited and rigid conditions imposed on career progression for all experienced social workers into band 12 straight jackets career development according to possession of PQ1-6, which perversely may be more common amongst less experienced practitioners. Ultimately therefore, UNISON feels that this will do little to reduce the recruitment and retention crisis currently affecting the CAYA department and its present unsustainable reliance on agency workers.

Similarly, there has been little cognisance of the change of mindset and practice that is desirable to accompany proposed changes of social work practice in the Adult Care Department. The change to generic patch based ways of working to accompany the personalisation agenda should ideally incorporate a change of mindset from office based to localised, community based ways of working that demand new training opportunities over and above the knowledge base that accompanies the PQ1-6 qualifications.

In conclusion, with DCC refusing to recognise that social work salaries at the higher end of the pay scale should rise to restore parity with other senior practitioners in other professions, or with other social workers in other authorities (see footnote) UNISON will not be able to recommend these proposals to social workers, many of whom will face a salary cut when the employment protection period expires. Indeed, should there be no changes to the proposed career progression structure, UNISON will have no alternative to consult with social workers as to how they would like to respond to the suggested framework.

G. Johnston/ N. Ploughman. UNISON March 2010

***Footnote**

The present cap for the vast majority of social workers including AMHPs, who were on the highest scale point (SP39) in the previous NJC scale, will now be £31,800. A cursory examination of current job vacancies reveals that AMHPs in the following Councils can earn up to the following amounts, Vis;

Coventry City Council	£39,985
Barnsley MBC	£38,042
Surrey County Council	£36,912
Croydon Council	£38,574

Indeed, the Independent Review commissioned by DCC into the AHMP service noted that DCC were already paying less than 5 comparator rural central England authorities. Moreover, in comparing DCC salaries with 17 other authorities, the Independent Review found that DCC salaries came out in 14th place, with an average of £1,700 per year less. Given that this evaluation occurred before the further £1000



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