

re**vitalise** our
public
services

**The way
forward
for Scotland's
Social
Work**

The way forward for Scotland's Social Work



UNISON is the union for social work and social care workers. We have acted to address the concerns about the service raised by members working in all sectors. We have established a Social Work Issues Group. It has raised concerns of members with employers, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). The Group all work in Scotland's social care.

UNISON recently submitted a report to COSLA's working group reviewing recruitment and retention of social workers. The report also formed the basis for recent discussions with the SSSC and the Scottish Executive. These are our main points.

The need for a review

UNISON welcomed the focus that was now being given to social work. There has been much talk of a "crisis in social work". Local experience and anecdotal evidence re-inforce this perception. The COSLA review and the Scottish Executive's recent initiatives are helping to assess the issues.

A significant issue is the negative portrayal of social work in the media and the scapegoating of social work staff when things go wrong. Newspaper editors and politicians are too ready to highlight individual failings instead of recognising the enormous achievements of social care with extremely limited resources. Staff work in difficult circumstances with the most vulnerable people in the community and UNISON will challenge negative portrayals of the service and promote a positive understanding of our members' role.

We think a thorough review is required in Scottish Social Work. It must look at a range of issues, including pay, recruitment, training, retention and appropriate resources to enable staff to carry out their job effectively in safe conditions and with a level of job satisfaction. It should look beyond qualified social workers (QSW) and consider all sections of the social care workforce, including the impact on the voluntary/independent sector. However, we recognise that QSW is a benchmark within the service.

Recruitment

Socialwork recruitment is low across all sectors of the workforce. QSW student intake is down and a shortage of graduates is leading to significant vacancy levels. However the interest in social work and social care posts is high and evidenced by response to adverts.

The general image of the sector and relatively low pay within the public sector in comparison to the general jobs market, contribute to recruitment difficulties. Local recruitment initiatives and market supplements simply seek to attract a limited workforce pool and cause internal market competition. They do not increase the workforce numbers, and deal with the main problem.

Pay

Public sector pay was held back throughout the 1990s, with the result that earnings fell behind those in the private sector. However, there were higher rewards for specific groups within the public sector eg. nurses, who saw their earnings rise relative to those of their public sector colleagues. Local government settlements, however, have been at the lower end of pay rises in the public sector over the past few years. Recent initiatives on cost-of-living supplements, location allowances and other targeted payments have also boosted the earnings of groups such as nurses, police officers and school teachers.

There have been no similar initiatives for social workers. Despite a serious national shortage (caused partly by fewer entering the profession), there has been no targeting of government money to deal with this problem. Therefore, social workers' earnings have fallen behind those of other groups. According to the latest figures*, average gross weekly earnings for social workers stand at £427, below the averages for nurses, police officers and teachers, and below the average for all employees, which stands at £444.

Looking at basic pay, a newly qualified social worker in Scotland could expect to be paid around £18,600 when they start, although some councils have offered "golden hellos" to attract graduates. For most social workers, it is possible to progress to around £23,000. However, in an increasing number of councils around



the country, the maximum salary has been boosted above the levels recommended by the national 'defined grading scheme', in order to retain experienced staff. With extra experience and additional responsibilities, a 'senior practitioner' can earn up to £26,000.

Meanwhile, pay modernisation in the NHS and for police officers looks set to increase earnings for nurses and constables even further. But the 'single-status' process has yet to bear fruit in local government, with very slow progress on other local authority social care staff. The key factor underlying this appears to be the cost to councils of introducing single status.

* statistics taken from *Comparative Earnings for QSW 1991-2001* an IDS Research Paper Commissioned by UNISON May 2002

Retention

Retention of existing staff is not merely a question of pay. Neither is it an issue for QSW's alone. Other groups in the social care workforce are finding staff voting with their feet, fed up with their working conditions. Workloads of existing staff have grown and some councils report a failure to allocate cases quickly enough. Staff are becoming stressed and low levels of morale are everywhere. In some areas there are particular pressures on child protection teams but similar issues exist across all teams

SWA (Social Work Assistants) and other non-QSW staff are being used more often to cover for QSW work. Particularly in non-child protection work, SWA's may carry complex caseloads, some times almost identical to QSW caseloads.

Residential care continues to be seen as a lesser service. It suffers from low morale, staff shortages, lack of resources and the financial difficulties of the private/not-for-profit sector. Additional pressures are being exerted on staff by the closure of children's secure units and the closure of long-term hospital beds. Day services for both adults and older people have similar staff shortages and low morale. Violence and lone working continue to be issues in both residential and day care.

Home Care Services have been subject to 'Best Value' reviews and changes to service delivery and in some cases changes to terms and condition. Moving towards a 24 hour/7 day personal care service whilst continually having to compare and compete with the private sector for varying levels of care and service provision. Home carers continue to be pressured and under paid.

The creation of the SSSC and the introduction of regulation criteria is moving social work into a new era which presents its own challenges and further pressure on staff. Many staff will require to attain specific qualifications in order to register. This will add pressure to individuals and will distort training budgets.

The introduction of national standards has implications for workload management and working practices. All of the above issues contribute to the difficulties with the retention of staff. UNISON is determined to put these issues on to the agenda.

The Way Forward

UNISON will push for improvements in pay for QSWs in line with improvements enjoyed by other professional groups. We will also highlight the need for increased pay for other groups within the social care workforce. For example, Social Work Assistants who often have heavy caseloads.

National Occupational Standards/Workforce Planning

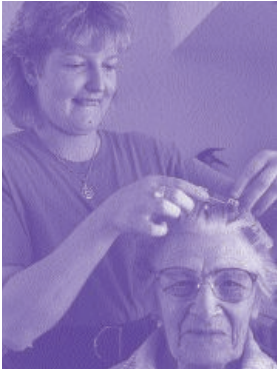
There is no agreed definition for a QSW. Some functions within legislation identify the need for a QSW but these are few. However there is a general view that a QSW is required for many job functions (child protection, court work, etc). The national job evaluation scheme will evaluate jobs on the tasks performed and not the qualifications of the post holder. This creates the possibility of differing pay rates for QSWs in neighbouring authorities. UNISON has raised with COSLA, the SSSC and the Scottish Executive the need for an agreed Scottish definition of what a social worker is and can do, and what non-qualified staff cannot. We believe that

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this would establish a recognisable and agreed occupational norm or minimum. This would then assist in the job evaluation process and ensuring that dilution is ended.

In conjunction with this approach we must look at how the Scottish Executive can set standards for the number of QSWs to be employed in each Council area to carry out defined tasks, giving each QSW a manageable workload. At the same time we should open discussion on a similar agreed definition of other posts within the workforce such as Residential Child Care Workers, Social Work Assistants, etc.

Support for Front-line Staff



The introduction of National Standards and the SSSC codes for Employers and Employees have implications for workload management and working practices. Workload management and professional supervision are minimal due to internal management pressures and staffing levels and vacancies. This contributes to a cycle of high absence and sickness rates.

The introduction of ICT is to often systems-led, and has meant an increase in administrative tasks in assessment and reporting procedures for professional staff (e.g. single assessments, and standard hearing reports).

The SSSC should clarify the appropriate levels of supervision, support and training that staff working in frontline posts can expect. Other recommendations in this document, if adopted, would also positively impact on support for front line staff.

Professional Training - open to all

There is a history of fragmentation of different elements of the services with different classes in a hierarchical system of training, pay and management profile. There is a need for an integrated education and training programme, clearly defined progression opportunities with linked grading, through the various elements of the wider spectrum of service. These aims present different challenges for different sectors.

The new honours degree based QSW is welcomed. However individual training costs are a disincentive.

We will push for a training regime that allows a member starting as a home help or social care assistant a route towards a QSW without needing to leave work for a (unpaid) period. This could utilise R2L, SVQ, Open University etc. until the attainment of a QSW is achieved. This would allow a long term, sustainable answer to planning for future recruitment and retention. It will require significant investment in training resources. However we believe that this is essential for the future of the service and the workforce.

Continuing the Pressure

UNISON Scotland will continue to press for the appropriate action to be taken on these issues by our employers, the SSSC and the Scottish Executive. Without this action the "crisis in Social Work" will be an ongoing and worsening problem. Most people working in social care know that it can be a rewarding and personally satisfying career. They can make a real difference to lives of the most vulnerable people. UNISON members are committed to providing the highest levels of care.

UNISON Scotland is committed to campaigning to ensure they have the pay, resources, support and training to allow them to achieve these levels. Our *Revitalise our Public Services* campaign states that public services should be based on these and other principles to deliver the public services Scotland's people deserve.

The Social Work Issues Group would welcome any comments from members on these issues. Please send them to the address below.

For further Information, or to join the union that fights for Scotland's Social Work service and those who deliver them please contact **Joe Di Paola, Scottish Organiser (Local Government), UNISON, 60 Belford Road, Edinburgh, EH4 3UQ. Tel 0870 7777 006.**

Keep up to date with the campaign by checking the UNISONScotland website.
www.unison-scotland.org.uk