

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

9th April 2003

STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL ASSESSMENTS FOR SOULBURY OFFICERS

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the agreement of the Regulatory Committee to set aside some of the provisions of a National Soulbury Committee Agreement and apply local arrangements in respect of Structured Professional Assessments for Officers employed within the Department for Children, Education and Libraries.

Background

2. In 2001, a National Agreement was reached in respect of a scheme of Structured Professional Assessments (SPAs) for Officers paid on Soulbury grades within the Department for Children, Education and Libraries. The scheme offers the opportunity for Officers to apply for up to two additional increments, provided that certain eligibility criteria is met. The criteria set nationally is 4 years' Soulbury service with this Authority and 2 years in the current post. An extract from the National Agreement setting out details of the scheme is attached as Appendix 1.
3. The majority of Soulbury Officers have already satisfied the eligibility criteria and have been successful in their application for the additional increments.
4. The establishment of the new Department for Children, Education and Libraries has resulted in a number of new positions being created in the changed departmental structures. A number of these have been within the new Schools Branch. Appointments were 'ringfenced' to existing Advisors, who have been appointed.
5. When SPAs were introduced, it was clear but not explicit in the National Agreement, that the award of additional increments applied to an individual's performance in a specific post, therefore allowing the opportunity to apply again in the future if a promotion was gained (once the eligibility criteria had again been met). Interpretation of the National Agreement regarding the application of SPA increments to the post and not the postholder has been raised with the National Employers Organisation, who are party to the National Agreement. The National Employer's Organisation have made it very clear that under the terms of the National Agreement, the award of the additional increments is based on the range of duties, responsibilities and achievements against objectives for the post and not the postholder. A number of other local authorities have also been contacted, all of whom interpret the scheme in the same way as the National Employers Organisation.

Main Considerations for the Council

6. The Authority has, so far implemented the National Agreement (set out in Appendix 1) as outlined in paragraph 5 above. However, this approach is now causing serious difficulties within the Schools Branch. Those managers who have been appointed to new posts as a result of restructuring (with an increase in grade) are now receiving no financial advantage, as they are unable to carry their SPA increments forward to the new positions. They are now in the position of undertaking bigger jobs with additional responsibility, for no increase in salary.

7. The following example illustrates the current situation:

	Soulbury Grade	Postholder's SCP	SPA Increments	Actual SCP paid
Old Post	18 – 21	21	+2	23
New Post	20 – 23	23	-	23

Therefore any financial gain that would have been realised has been eroded, as their previous salaries, plus SPA increments, equates to the substantive grade of the new post and SPAs cannot be applied for until 2 years in the new post.

8. There are already serious recruitment and retention difficulties within the Advisory Service of Schools Branch. A number of employees have left in the last 2 years and appointing replacements has proved extremely difficult, placing additional pressures on the Service. There is concern that strict application of the National Agreement, which brings no financial advantage, despite promotion, might incline staff to look elsewhere, thereby adding to the retention pressures. The Authority needs to retain as many of its high quality staff as possible.
9. As a party to collective bargaining, the County Council normally applies the terms of National Agreements. The application of the national terms relating to SPAs does not help, but rather hinders the County Council's ability to retain some critical staff. This being so, on this occasion it is proposed that the County Council sets aside the national terms and implements a local arrangement whereby individuals are able to apply to the Director, Department for Children, Education and Libraries, when applying for promotion or being the subject of a restructuring, within the same discipline, to retain their SPA increments if they have already been granted them. Retention of the increments would be subject to the Director's approval to ensure a consistent approach across the department. If agreed, individuals would not then be able to apply again after two years in post. They would only be able to receive the increments once, which they would then carry forward in to the promoted post.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

10. None

Risk Assessment

11. None

Financial Implications

12. The immediate financial implications are limited to the costs of paying up to two additional increments on appointment, rather than after 2 years in the new post. This currently affects 4 Strategic Managers within the Schools Branch. This equates to a maximum of cost of £6,978 in the 2003/2004 financial year. It is not possible to give exact costs for future years, as this will depend on the number of approved cases, however the average value of an increment is approximately £1000. Increased costs will need to be met from existing budgetary provision.

Options Considered

13. An alternative to the proposal outlined above was to offer up to 2 recruitment and retention increments, as allowed for within the Soulbury Pay Agreement. However, although this would achieve the same financial outcome, it may be construed as not recognising the valuable contribution to the department that each individual makes.

Reasons for Proposals

14. During times of reorganisation it is recognised that stability within the organisation and the contribution from key members of staff is crucial. The reasons for the proposal as outlined in paragraph 9 above are therefore to retain existing valued staff during a time when there are already significant recruitment difficulties within those staff groups employed under Soulbury pay and conditions.

Proposals

15. That the Regulatory Committee be recommended to:
- (i) set aside the terms of the National Agreement in respect of Structured Professional Assessments for Soulbury Officers employed within the Department for Children, Education and Libraries, and
 - (ii) establish a local arrangement, as outlined in paragraph 9 of this report.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report: None

SOULBURY COMMITTEE AGREEMENT

Structured Professional Assessments

1. The Soulbury Committee has reached agreement to introduce local assessments to recognise the contribution of Soulbury officers to the authority's role in raising standards in schools, improving involvement of young people in community activities and the promotion of child development and learning. This agreement provides a framework for local decisions relating to an assessment of the officer's contribution.
2. The Committee recognises that arrangements for the assessment of Soulbury officers' contributions will have been designed locally. The Committee does not want to introduce new arrangements but will consider providing an outline of good practice on local procedures if this is required. The Committee has agreed that all local procedures will need to provide for reviews in cases where officers believe they have grounds to challenge a local assessment.
3. The key aim is arrangements which provide for a structured assessment by the Chief Education Officer of the officer's contribution. Local arrangements will need to provide for:
 - The opportunity for officers to apply to their Chief Education Officer after four years' Soulbury service with that authority. In normal circumstances, this would be after not less than 2 years in the current post. CEOs can consider applications before the four years, in exceptional cases. A new local assessment will not be necessary where a local review has already taken place.
 - Assessments will be based on the officer's contribution over the four-year period. This will be at two levels.
 - Local assessments need to be based on the range of duties and responsibilities and achievements against targets and objectives for the post. This assessment of the overall contribution will need to take account of the following for the first level:
 - Development – Officers must show that they are fully informed of the developments in their area of specialism.
 - Developing the Services – Officers must make a recognised contribution to the policy, planning and meeting of performance targets for their authority.
 - Improving standards – Officers must make an identified contribution to the improvement and evaluation of service delivery across all appropriate aspects of the authority's functions.
 - Management and administration – Officers must manage and assess resources to provide efficient delivery of services.
 - Equal opportunities – Officers must contribute to the development of the authority's policies in improving access to their services and in raising achievement levels for their local communities.
 - For the second level, officers' contributions will need to be based on showing that they have made a sustained contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.

Salary rewards

4. Officers who have been assessed as achieving the first level will receive an additional pay point on the Soulbury spine. Those achieving the second level will receive a second point on the Soulbury spine. The first point will be paid from 1 May 2001. Any second point will be paid from 1 September 2001. These additional points will extend normal scale maxima by up to 2 points.

Further work to be undertaken by the Soulbury Committee

1. The Soulbury Committee has agreed to undertake an assessment of the range of factors that affect recruitment and retention of Soulbury officers. Both sides will be able to put forward relevant issues. The Committee has agreed to assess the use of discretionary points within the existing structure. It is recognised that the effects of developments in the pay structure of teachers and other relevant groups will need to form part of this assessment. The outcome of the assessment will be reported to the Soulbury Committee by the end of September 2001.

