Scottish Social Services Council

FAIR WORK IN YOUR SECTOR

What is the main sector you work in or represent? [drop down list]

Human health and social work activities

1. **What are the main opportunities for adopting fair work practices in your sector?**

   We support the work being carried out by a number of Scottish Government working groups which promote the aspirations of the Scottish Government's Fair Work Agenda. One such area of work is the work being carried out to develop a National Care Service for Scotland. This area presents an opportunity to build on work being progressed by the Fair Work in Social Care group to address issues relating to Fair Work across the sector such as pay, investment and working conditions. The National Care Service consultation document also places a high level of importance on ethical commissioning across the sector.

   The Scottish Government's consultation document on the development of a National Care Service discusses the idea of establishing a national forum with representation from the workforce, employers and community health and social care boards. We believe that creating a forum like this which gives workers across all levels of the sector an opportunity to have their voice heard in a meaningful way presents a real opportunity to address issues in the sector. We are presently contributing to work in this area through our involvement in the development and testing of the Effective Voice Standards. The work in this area includes the development of a national forum.

2. **Please explain how you think these opportunities can be maximised in your sector?**

   Ensuring that the social work, social care and early years sectors are fully included in the development of the NCS, the national forum and the Effective Voice standards would maximise the opportunities for promoting Fair Work principles presented by these proposals.

3. **What are the main challenges to adopting fair work practices in your sector?**

One of the main challenges facing the social work, social care and early years sectors is making sure workers feel valued. During the Covid-19 pandemic the social service workforce demonstrated high levels of commitment to the work they carry out. These sectors have made sure that vital services have continued to be provided to some of the most vulnerable people in society, often at great personal risk to themselves. However, it has taken a pandemic for the value of these workers to begin to be appreciated.

One of the ways to ensure the workforce feels valued is to make sure they receive adequate levels of pay for the work they do. Currently there is no mechanism for setting standards for conditions and pay across the sector, this is something that should be addressed to make sure that there is consistency in the sector. The introduction of the real living wage for social work, social care and early years workers in direct care roles is a welcome step in the right direction, however, more needs to be done to make sure the sector feels valued. The focus on embedding ethical commissioning at the local level, as laid out in the Nation Care Service consultation document, should work to ensure Fair Work practices are the norm at all levels of the social work, social care and early years sectors in Scotland.

Another way to make the sector feel valued is to make sure there are clear and accessible avenues for career progression in all areas of the sector for those that want it. This will need to include making sure that staff have the necessary skills to advance through their careers with access to the right education and training to support them to do so. Achieving this will require making sure that social service workplaces have adequate funding and resources, time and the right workplace conditions to support their workers through education and training. The work we are supporting in relation to the development of the Effective Voice standards aims to address some of these issues. Many of the Effective Voice standards relate to personal and professional development, team meetings, clarifying policies and procedures for staff to raise concerns and to provide opportunities to suggest service improvements.

Ensuring that workers in the social work, social care and early years sectors have effective voice in relation to employment terms and conditions is one of the main challenges facing the sector. We

anticipate that significant numbers of the sector are not part of a union or membership body which acts as a barrier to ensuring their voice is heard effectively in relation to terms and conditions.

Ensuring that social work, social care and early years are seen as careers of choice is a challenge that needs to be addressed. Without making progress in relation to this there may be increased difficulty in filling vacancies across the sector. Our Workforce Vacancy report 2021 highlights that the sector continues to experience challenges around recruitment, retention and development of staff. A high level of vacancy across the sector could have a detrimental effect on working conditions, requiring extended periods overtime or irregular shift patterns. This could result in higher levels of workplace stress in the sector and would also have an impact on the wellbeing of the workforce.

A further consequence of the difficulty in recruitment, and high attrition rate, of the sector is that the ability to mentor new staff will be reduced. With services operating with reduced staffing levels, senior staff and managers will struggle to make the time to carry out on the job mentoring and training in the way they had once been able. This means there is an increased need for staff to have greater experience and understanding of social care, social work and early years work prior to employment. Because of this, greater investment in pre-employment and employability support is needed to make the sector more sustainable in terms of recruitment and retention.

4. **Please explain how you think these challenges might be overcome, including your ideas on any specific interventions and support needed in your sector?**

Raising the profile of the workforce through better pay and conditions may overcome some of the issue presented by sector vacancies.

Ensuring that the members of the workforce are aware of and participate in unions and membership bodies may address issues relating to lack of effective voice across the sector.

Ensuring that ethical commissioning is properly embedded in the social work, social care and early years sectors is one of the best ways to make sure that workforce terms and conditions support, develop, empower and value staff across the sector.

FAIR WORK IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CONTEXT

5. **What do you believe are the barriers to delivering Fair Work given the current economic challenges in Scotland?**

   We welcome the commitment the Scottish Government has made to increasing investment in the social work, social care and early years sectors in Scotland as one of the main barriers to delivering Fair Work across the social care sector is budget. The proposals made by the Government in their consultation document on the NCS will be of benefit to the sector. However, sufficient funding needs to be guaranteed to ensure that progress toward Fair Work is delivered effectively and sustainably.

6. **What do you believe are the opportunities for delivering Fair Work in the current economic climate in Scotland?**

   The shift to remote/digital working made necessary by the Covid-19 pandemic presents many opportunities for delivering Fair Work in Scotland. For example, the reduced need for work related travel or other geographic constraints may make employment more accessible to greater numbers of people.

   However, during the pandemic the social work, social care and early years sectors have continued to provide face to face care. The restrictions associated with the pandemic have led to additional pressures being felt by the social work, social care and early years sectors, as well as additional responsibilities. Remote working has been possible for some workers within this sector, especially at management level, however, this has meant that support for workers from management is not as readily available as had been before the pandemic.

   While the rise in the use of digital technologies as a result of the pandemic may create opportunities to provide support delivery of person-centred care in new ways across the sector, this needs to be done in a way that is sustainable for the sector and that makes sure workers get support for training and learning in relation to the use of new technologies. The use of new technologies across the sector may also provide opportunities to raising the standard of effective voice for workers in the sector.

FURTHER ACTIONS TO DELIVER FAIR WORK

7. **Please set out any further actions you think the Scottish Government should take to deliver Fair Work for everyone. This may include for example any further support you think is needed.**

   In Scotland, the areas of the social work, social care and early years workforces that are required to register with the SSSC include approximately 169,000 individuals. This is a highly skilled and passionate workforce that have been historically under-valued and under-paid, establishing a clear plan for how the NCS is going to support these workers and address the issues faced by the sector is key in ensuring Fair Work is realised in the sector.

   However, not all providers of social care and support are presently registered with the SSSC. Personal Assistants, for example, are not required to register with us. These workers are as skilled and passionate as those workers we regulate, so it is important that the principles of Fair Work are applied to them and all individuals working across this sector.

   Providing a clear plan for the National Care Service, who is to be included in it, what it will deliver and how it will be resourced will be instrumental in delivering Fair Work to the sector.

8. **Please set out any other actions you think are required to deliver Fair Work for everyone, including who should take this action.**

   We believe that a Fair Work accreditation scheme would encourage improvements to the social care, social work and early years workforce's employment terms and conditions and should be made mandatory across the sector.

FAIR WORK AND EMPLOYMENT POWERS

9. **If Scotland had full control over employment law, which issues would you like to see addressed as a priority in order to deliver fairer work in Scotland?**

   The removal of exploitative zero hour contracts would be a priority if Scotland had full control over employment law. There are circumstances where zero hours contracts may be beneficial to employees or may be required by employers. However, it is crucial

that staff working in the social work, social care and early years sectors in Scotland are employed in a way that gives them predictable working patterns on terms that suit their own individual needs.

FURTHER IDEAS

10. What is the most important thing that you or your organisation can do to help Scotland become a Fair Work Nation?

The SSSC sets the Codes of Practice for Social Service Workers and Employers. The Code of Practice for Employers sets out the responsibilities of employers in the regulation of social service workers. We are currently in the process of reviewing the Codes of Practice to strengthen the requirement for employers to meet the codes. Our role around setting the standards for social work, social care and early years employers means that we are well positioned to support the workforce with this and help move toward Scotland becoming a Fair Work nation.

The consultation on the National Care Service identifies increased awareness of, and opportunity to, complete formal accreditation and qualifications as something that my make social care workers feel more valued in their role. Feeling more valued in a role appears to be consistent with the principles of Fair Work

We will continue to support development of the effective voice standards and national forum.

11. Please use the box below to tell us about anything else relevant to Scotland becoming a Fair Work Nation and any further ideas you might have on the action that will be needed to achieve this.

N/A

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