

Reasons for a Reunited Probation Service

Reason 1 - We have a two-tier workforce for pay, conditions and professional standards

Following the split of the workforce in 2014, the National Negotiating Committee (NNC) disbanded, unsurprisingly, due to the increase of employers and the desire for CRCs to have independent control over their staff's terms and conditions. As such we now have a variety of pay rates, HR policies etc. across the country. This has created a two tier workforce between the CRCs and the NPS, severely damaged staff morale as staff feel the worth less in the CRCs and vastly different professional standards and expectations for the job.

Pay

With the collapse of the NNC it was inevitable that pay would begin to vary across the different employers. The NPS is still negotiated nationally whilst each of the CRCs hold their own negotiations with Napo at a local level. Napo has found itself having to request pay talks rather than them being offered then and has also had to challenge CRCs who have tried to impose pay deals and avoid negotiating altogether. Pay offers have fallen woefully short of inflation and have left our members with considerably out of pocket. On average CRCs have imposed a 1% pay rise for staff despite the ever increasing workloads and pressures placed upon them.

In November 2018 the NPS agreed a pay reform that reduced the spinal points of each pay band from 26 to 6 and gave the majority of members a significant increase of pay. This has not been replicated in the CRCs and we now have a pay gap of, on average, 4.5% and clear two-tier workforce in terms of pay.

Term & Conditions

It is not only in the area of pay that the differential exists. With the loss of the NNC there is no national guidance for terms and conditions and policies such as absence management, etc. The variation across England and Wales is now vast with NPS staff moving to civil service terms and conditions and each CRC establishing their own policies.

Many CRCs have harmonised policies to the lowest denominator cutting the terms of long-standing staff. This has been most clearly demonstrated in relation to redundancy payments as CRCs have made huge staff cuts to reduce costs and staff have left on far inferior terms than they would have previously.

The most stark example is the difference in maternity pay: Staff in the NPS get 12 weeks full pay while those working for a CRC get only 6wks at 90% pay.

All probation staff deserve the best possible terms and conditions for their employment and should not be a postcode lottery in relation to the benefits of your employment. Napo believes that you cannot have a two-tier workforce with staff carrying out the same role. We must reunify probation and harmonise terms and conditions across England and Wales.

Professional Standards

The split of staff has also caused a two-tier workforce in relation to professional standards. When practitioners transferred into the CRCs they immediately lost their right to appear in Court to advise sentencers either verbally or via pre sentence reports as well as other talks such as attending oral hearings in prison. Although they are qualified to do so, they are no longer able to as employees of the private sector. This had a significant professional and emotional impact on experienced staff who saw these tasks as being central to their roles.

As has been evidenced by Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Probation reports, there is a clear difference between the level and quality of service delivered by the NPS and the 21 CRCs. At no fault of the staff who have always been acknowledged as being tireless in their efforts despite the environment in which they work but due to poor delivery models, standards and focus. The reports regularly note that CRCs have introduced poor operating models such as remote supervision and cut staff resulting in dangerously high workloads. As a result, professional standards have slipped with CRC management more focused on targets and contract management than on rehabilitation and public protection. This has led to a de-skilling of professionals, with some feeling like nothing more than a call centre operative rather than a criminal justice professional.

Questions you may wish to ask:

- With probation performing such a vital public service for rehabilitation and public protection, what steps will the Minister take to ensure that all staff delivering probation services are treated equally in terms of pay and terms and conditions?
- What action has been taken against the CRCs that have failed to deliver a quality service and will they still be able to bid for future contracts despite this failure?
- What are the costs associated with reunification of the probation service into the public sector in comparison to re-letting contracts to private providers?

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