

Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme

General Council Report 1457

(Meeting/s of 27 September 2000, 25 June 2003, 27 July 2005)

That the post of Employee Assistance Officer in the Civil Service (and the current incumbents in these posts) be upgraded from Higher Executive Officer to Assistant Principal Officer.

1. This claim was lodged by staff side on 13 September, 2000. The staff side claim that claim is based on the premise that, since the post of EAO was graded at HEO level in 1986, the post of EAO has evolved to the extent that it is now undergraded by reference to similar posts in other employments and in comparison to the responsibilities attached to it in 1986.

2. The Staff side cited a 1986 General Council Report (no. 1081) which described the roles and responsibilities of what were then described as 'Welfare Officers' as a 'confidential counselling and referral service on problems arising both within the workplace and outside'. In addition, the Report stated that Welfare Officers had the role of developing contacts within a range of welfare agencies and specialist services while also operating in an independent way, exercising discretion on when and where to consult.

3. The Staff side stated that the role of the Welfare Officer has now evolved to a fully fledged employee assistance service which is more pro-active and preventive in nature. There are now extra responsibilities attached to the post of EAO, together with a greater workload and depth of case-work.

4. The Staff side claimed state that candidates for posts in the Employee Assistance Service (EAS) are required to have qualifications and/or experience deemed necessary for the welfare area while also continually engaging in ongoing professional development and training. The staff side also stated further consider that EAOs have no promotion prospects and must often leave the EAS in order to acquire relevant experience for promotion. Staff side stated that grading at AP would increase the professional standing of the EAOs among managers while they also contended that EAOs are paid a lower amount than other public sector social worker posts, despite the fact that they have a higher level of responsibility.

5. The official side agreed to a meeting with the staff side on 16 November 2000 at which the staff side reiterated the basis for their claim and while the

official side sought further details on some of the points raised in the claim.

6. Following this meeting, the official side considered the claim in detail and found the following:

- Although there is an appreciation of the competencies and dedication of EAOs and an appreciation of the service they provide, the official side does not accept that a sufficiently strong case was not made to demonstrate that the role of the EAO has evolved greatly between 1986 and the present to such an extent as would warrant the upgrade sought.
- It considers that changes in the nature of work performed by EAOs and the flexibility given in this work are part of the normal on-going change process which is covered by current and previous pay agreements.
- It does not accept that the possession of qualifications in excess of the minimum required for the position is a justification for an upgrade of the position. Many Civil Servants hold qualifications which are in excess of the minimum required for their job. not necessary for their job. In fact, Civil Service it is a policy, agreed at General Council to encourages staff to pursue such additional qualifications. However, in no way is the holding of basic qualifications, or the pursuit of further qualifications, accepted as a basis for upgrading.

•

- The official side does not accept that EAOs have no promotion prospects, or that their roles are not perceived as relevant experience for purposes of promotion. EAOs are entitled to enter all promotion competitions for AP on the same basis as other HEOs.
- The official side also do not accept that an upgrade to AP would lessen any perceived difficulties they have in dealing with more senior managers as the professional standing of the EAOs is not in question. will be dictated more by their competence in their role than in their grade. In any event, even if EAOs were upgraded, they would still have to deal with managers of a higher grade.
- Finally, the official side do not accept the pay comparisons that the staff side have made with other public sector areas.

7. Following consideration of these and other issues, the official side decided to refuse the claim and informed the staff side of this by letter dated 26 April 2001.

8. The staff side then asked that disagreement be recorded on the claim.

9. This disagreed report was adopted on 27 July 2005.

Agreed report, recording disagreement.

This report was adopted on 27 July 2005