

UNISON – Written evidence (FFF0022)

Response to the House of Lords Public Service Committee inquiry into designing a public services workforce fit for the future

Introduction

UNISON is the UK's largest union, with more than 1.3 million members providing public services – in the NHS, local government, education, the police service and energy. They are employed in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

This brief response uses some sector specific examples to highlight UNISON's answers to a number of the questions that the Committee are looking at in this inquiry.

By way of summary, the union's headline points are as follows.

1. Addressing the recruitment, retention and staff burnout challenges in public services will require an immediate change to the government's pay policy. The real value of pay has fallen right across the public services since 2010. With inflation forecast to rise to 7%, it's crucial that funding is made available to enable public services to receive a decent pay rise this year.
2. To build a resilient future workforce after the pandemic, the government must implement a public sector jobs drive to increase capacity. This must be backed by a fully-funded workforce strategy developed with unions

Answers to selected questions

1) It is difficult to predict accurately how the public services workforce will need to change in the long term, and yet it is necessary to prepare now for the future. What is an appropriate approach to long-term planning for workforce needs and demand in public services, and how should current training adapt, not just at the point of employees' entry into the workforce but throughout their careers?

Clearly there is a need for appropriate workforce planning processes and structures in each part of public services. At the current time the picture is patchy at best. The results can be seen in the recruitment and retention problems and the low morale of underpaid and overworked staff across public services.

Senior management and trade unions need to be at the heart of the planning process, that should also take a strategic overview of training and continuing professional development.

Specific plans are needed in sectors that face particular challenges. The situation in the NHS has been well documented, but the challenges range right across public services.

In policing UNISON notes that Boris Johnson's election pledge to recruit an additional 20,000 police officers over the next three years will not bring down serious and violent crime if the officers don't get the whole police team rebuilt around them.

The government didn't just cut 20,000 police officers since 2010, it also cut 26,500 police staff and police community support officers (PCSOs).

So replacing 20,000 officers is only doing half the job. The police workforce is made up of 60% police officers and 40% police staff, including PCSOs. Police staff undertake vital work for police forces, including 999 call takers, crime scene examiners, fingerprint experts, investigators, crime analysts, cyber crime specialists, trainers, detention officers and many more, too numerous to mention.

In the same way that recruiting 20,000 new hospital doctors will not cure more patients if they are not supported by more nurses, porters, radiographers etc, so 20,000 new police officers will not be able to patrol the beat and tackle more crime without corresponding investment in the police staff and PCSOs to work alongside them.

In simple terms it takes four police staff to put six officers on the beat. Not enough police staff means less time for officers on the street, as they are tied up with paperwork back in the station.

PCSOs were the backbone of neighbourhood policing, and made up 75% of community policing teams. Without new PCSOs, neighbourhood policing won't recover from the cuts.

Workforce modernisation over the last 20 years has led to police staff doing many of the jobs previously undertaken by officers, thereby freeing up officers to tackle serious crime out on the streets.

The public won't want to see new officers backfilling vacant police staff roles.

Police staff particularly PCSOs were a success story in making the police service a more diverse workforce. 60% of police staff are women, and back in 2006 15% of PCSOs identified as BME. Sadly the

cuts to PCSO numbers have seen the percentage of BME PCSOs decline to only 9.5% in 2018.

UNISON is writing to the Police Minister, National Police Chiefs Council, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the College of Policing and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to ask for support for UNISON's campaign to Rebuild the Whole Police Team.

The main impact of the police cuts has been a substantial contraction in the entire police workforce, not just police officers. The following tableⁱ shows how the different parts of the police workforce declined between March 2010 and September 2016, when police staff numbers hit their lowest ebb.

All figures are obtained from Home Office published Police Workforce data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>

	March 2010	September 2016	% Decline
PCSOs	16,918	10,551	-37.63%
Police Staff	83,843	64,805	-22.71%
Police Officers	143,734	122,859	-14.52%

Since September 2016 the police staff workforce has increased by 4,500 employees. The police officer workforce has seen a much smaller increase of only 312 officers. But, the PCSO workforce has continued to contract with 1,004 fewer PCSOs today than there were in 2016.

So if we compare the 2010 workforce numbers with their equivalent in 2019 they look like this:

	March 2010	March 2019	% Decline
PCSOs	16,918	9,547	-43.57%
Police Staff	83,843	69,305	-17.34%
Police Officers	143,734	123,171	-14.30%

To be effective in cutting crime, the restoration of 20,000 police officers will require the recruitment of an additional 14,538 new police staff and 7,371 new PCSOs to replace those cut since 2010. These figures are obtained by subtracting the March 2019 police staff and PCSO numbers from their March 2010 levels.

This produces a current total shortfall of 21,909 police staff and PCSOs, hence UNISON's call for an additional 22,000 police staff and PCSOs to accompany the 20,000 police officers pledged by the government.

In social care a wide ranging people plan is needed to address problems in the sector. Currently those employed in the social care sector do not feel looked after despite the best efforts of many employers. The pandemic has too often put them in danger and more than 469 care and support workers have died. It is equally true that employees who feel cared for, who work in a compassionate and inclusive culture, provide a better service. The Social Care People Plan (SCPP) should include a Social Care People Promise to be drawn up by Government in conjunction with employers, those who draw on social care and support, trade unions and care and support workers including personal assistants.

The SCPP should include a commitment to a healthy and safe workforce to be guaranteed nationwide through a binding Charter of Good Practice – or potentially through legislation. The SCPP should recommend that pay for care and support workers is increased to the Real Living Wage level immediately; and to NHS healthcare assistant band 3 level over the next Spending Review period. The SCPP should make clear that all employers are obligated to give employees a choice of rejecting a zero hours contract and the option of a 'Living Hours' contract.

The 1.5 million NHS workforce has a distinct culture: there is a nationally known, and highly respected brand, and from this derives a sense of identity, of pride, of belonging. This sense of belonging is reinforced by the fact that there is one employer and a plethora of esteemed national institutions including Royal Colleges. In comparison the 1.52 million care workforce is disparate and fragmented, and standards are not universally developed across all groups in the workforce. There are 18,200 organisations providing social care services at 38,000 establishments, and an estimated 70,000 individuals employing 135,000 personal assistants. As James Bullion, former President of ADASS, has pointed out, leadership of the sector is fractured with no unified voice equivalent to NHS Employers or NHS England. It has also been a sector of the economy that has for too long been able to continue without sufficient national attention, guidance and intervention. There is therefore very little sense of belonging in the care sector. The SCPP should recommend that the Government should consult on a national compulsory register for social care and support workers as soon as practicably possible. The SCPP should include a commitment similar to that made by the NHS to make the culture of social care services understanding, supportive and inclusive. The SCPP should recommend a national Social Care Partnership Forum – between national and local government, employers, representatives of those who draw on social care and support and employees including trade unions – be introduced as soon as possible to design mechanisms to negotiate key terms and conditions for the social care workforce including

annual reviews of pay similar to arrangements in the NHS or local government.

The social care sector is worth £41 billion per year to the UK economy and constitutes 6% of all those in employment. It is set to increase in size due to demographic change with estimates by Skills for Care that by 2035 a further 520,000 staff will be required. The country faces a stark choice – seeing social care as a key part of the recovery from the recession created by Covid-19 or consigning it to continuing failure with regards to those it employs, the employers themselves, local government and, most importantly, the people who draw on social care and support services.

4) How might the public sector become more attractive as an employer, particularly in comparison with the private sector? How might it become attractive enough to retain workers throughout their careers while maintaining a level of turnover that brings fresh ideas to organisations?

Declining real terms pay and the sense of being systematically undervalued through years of cuts and austerity have to be addressed, or employees will vote with their feet and look for work elsewhere.

More than two in five (42%) teaching assistants, caretakers, cleaners and other school support staff in England and Wales are actively looking for better paid jobs because of the rising cost of living and persistent low pay in education, according to a recent UNISON survey.

The survey responses paint a bleak picture of school employees living with no heating or hot water because of broken boilers they can't afford to fix, worrying about how to pay for dental treatment, relying on their children for money, or going to food banks.

The findings reveal an overwhelming majority (96%) say the rate of pay for their school job isn't enough for them to cope with increasing prices. Three in ten (31%) say they only take home between £1,000 and £1,199 each month. A similar proportion earn less than £1,000 a month.

While the survey reveals how only half of school support staff (49%) feel valued at work, many say they do feel appreciated by their colleagues and the children in school.

Seven in ten (71%) are worried about paying their utility and council tax bills and more than four in ten (47%) are anxious about paying their mortgage or rent.

As money is so tight, a quarter (25%) have resorted to taking second or even third jobs simply to make ends meet and stay in the job they love. Four in ten (41%) say they've had to cut back on spending and 35% have borrowed money from friends and family just to get by.

Some say they've had to sell possessions online, others are working in nail bars, call centres, bars, restaurants and supermarkets, in addition to their job in school.

6) How can providers of public services recruit a more diverse workforce? How should they improve their recruitment of BAME people, people with disabilities, older people and people who use public services and live in the communities that providers serve?

Equality must be threaded through all workforce planning. Only a diverse and inclusive workforce can meet the needs of all users of public services. This requires action by employers, but also by government too.

For years disabled workers have been saying that they could often do their job better and with less pain if they could work from home. Although this right to work from home as a reasonable adjustment existed theoretically under the Equality Act 2010, disabled workers frequently encounter employers who state that home working is "not our policy" or just wouldn't be possible.

Covid 19 has shown very much that it is possible. A UNISON survey found that half of disabled workers worked from home every day during the pandemic and 73% said they were as productive or more productive. 54% would like to continue to work from home after COVID – likely to reduce their need for sick leave and help to address the disability employment and pay gaps - but many expect to be turned down by their employer.

Of course, not everyone wants to work from home. But disabled workers who want to work from home should have a new right to do so.

28 February 2022
