Background

Agenda for Change is a national pay, terms and conditions package agreed between the Department of Health, employing organisations and trade unions. There are three interconnected strands within the package:

- Job evaluation – designed to transfer staff from the old system of Whitley Grades to eight new pay bands
- Knowledge and skills framework, which sets out competencies for each post
- Terms and conditions.

The content and processes relevant to these three strands have been agreed in partnership with unions at national level and will be implemented in partnership at local level. Your organisation should have an Agenda for Change Project Board to plan and oversee the implementation of Agenda for Change, and project groups to manage the different elements of the work.

Targets and deadlines

The process of moving staff over to the new system should be completed throughout the UK by the end of September 2005. You should be informed of your local project target dates for completion of the different elements within the exercise.

The Terms and conditions and Knowledge and skills framework projects will run alongside the job evaluation project, and you should find out the project plans and deadlines associated with these two areas of work. However, as a manager your initial area of responsibility will be to assist in moving your staff to the new pay structure, and so the work on job evaluation will be the most immediately pressing.

Preparation

Familiarise yourself with all three parts of the agreement. Useful resources can be found on the following websites: www.unison.co.uk; www.dh.gov.uk

Implementing Agenda for Change

You are the manager of a counselling service to the NHS. What are your key priorities in implementing Agenda for Change? The following article, based on experience from Early Implementer sites, should help you out.

New Year gifts for NHS staff

December 1, 2004, marked an major milestone in the history of the NHS – the implementation of Agenda for Change, a new pay, terms and conditions package affecting 1.2 million staff, including an estimated 7500 counsellors working in the health service. It represents a particularly significant landmark for the counselling profession, since with its introduction counsellors are at last recognised as part of the core NHS workforce. Counsellors in the health service will now have their job roles profiled, and work alongside their NHS colleagues on the same salary structure, ensuring parity across the workforce. For the first time, counsellors will be on a level playing field with other healthcare professionals.

It is likely to be a while before the effects of all the changes are felt, as many Trusts still have much to do to prepare their employees for the implementation of the Agenda. Nevertheless, it is expected that Agenda for Change will be fully operational by September 2005.

Those of you who have followed my previous articles in HCPJ will know that each role within the NHS is being evaluated according to the same 16-factor job evaluation scheme. The whole system is built around the principles of equal pay for work of equal value, and the level of pay that each post-holder should receive will be determined by application of the scheme.

National job profiles, which apply the job evaluation scheme to common counsellor roles, became available at the end of October 2004, and they can be found with the corresponding pay bands on pages 35-37.

Before levels of pay can be determined through the job evaluation process, job descriptions need to be completed. The enquiries I have received from counsellors lately are to do with writing these job descriptions, and what it means if a person’s job is one of a cluster. You will find the answer to both of these questions in the following two articles, aimed at managers of counselling services: ‘Implementing Agenda for Change’ and ‘About job clustering.’

Counsellors are managed in a variety of different ways: sometimes by other counsellors, sometimes by a nurse, or by a psychologist within a psychology department, sometimes by a dedicated health service manager. Managers have a great responsibility to make sure that their staff are fully briefed on all the changes that will affect their working lives. Please let us know how these changes affect you as counsellors, or managers of counselling services.

Pat Seber is FHCP Deputy Chair and Employment Advisor
Find out the local project group structures and plans for roll-out in your trust, and meet with the leads for the three main working groups to discuss the process.

Encourage your staff to attend any ‘detailed awareness’ job evaluation courses being run in-house.

Consider putting yourself forward for job evaluation training if this is still available – you will gain a deeper understanding of the job evaluation process.

**Job evaluation**

The NHS job evaluation scheme has been agreed at national level. It provides a means for comparing jobs against an agreed set of 16 factors. All jobs covered by the Agenda for Change will be compared against this factor plan using one of the following two processes, applied at a local level:

- **Job matching**, in which the job description and person specification for a job (or cluster of jobs) are compared with a suitable national job profile to see if there is a match.
- **Job evaluation**, in which a job that does not match with a national profile is evaluated on an individual basis.

The job evaluation process can be summarised with a simple inputs-process-output diagram (see Figure 1).

Managers cannot influence the job matching and evaluation process as this has to be applied consistently to all posts in all settings. Thus in order to ensure robust outputs, or evaluation outcomes, managers need to invest their efforts in the preparation of the inputs – the job descriptions and person specifications.

If you are not sure how to proceed with this, you should:

- forge links with other managers in your area and share expertise
- use the guidance on preparing job descriptions on the FHCP or UNISON websites.

Job descriptions

Remember that job descriptions should:

- describe the key tasks and responsibilities required
- describe the requirements of the post, not the job-holder
- avoid using jargon or language copied from national profiles
- give an accurate picture of the current job demands
- be signed off by the job-holder.

**Person specifications**

The job evaluation factor plan has 16 factors, each carrying a weighted score. The ‘Knowledge, training and experience’ factor (factor 2) carries almost a quarter of the total points, and thus is a key element in determining the banding outcome for a post.

It is important therefore that person specifications are up-to-date and describe the knowledge, training and experience required for the post in detail. In clinical fields such as counselling, for which there are few post-diploma qualifications, the equivalent experience or on-the-job learning needs to be emphasised. When preparing person specifications, it may help to bear the following points in mind.

- Consider the tasks and responsibilities set out in the job description and describe a ‘competent practitioner in post’ rather than the knowledge and skills held at the point of recruitment.
- What knowledge does the job-holder need to fulfil this level of competency?
- What skills do they need for this?
- How will the post-holder have developed these skills: what formal training or experience will be involved?

---

**What is a national job profile?**

A national job profile is a published and agreed evaluation of a job commonly occurring across the NHS. It gives people a chance to see where they may be placed on the Agenda for Change pay bands, and helps job evaluation project managers move people to the new pay system more efficiently. Job profiles are labelled according to a national protocol and there is no correlation between profile labels and current job titles. Profiles do not describe jobs – they describe the levels to which people commonly work within the role defined in the profile job statement. The matching rules mean that jobs can vary slightly from the levels stated, so most jobs should be able to ‘match’ to a national profile. There will be jobs that do not fit the profiles: provided your department has up-to-date job descriptions and you have clustered your jobs accurately, the matching process will identify these jobs at an early stage.

Job profiles are labelled according to a national protocol and there is no correlation between profile labels and current job titles. Profiles do not describe jobs – they describe the levels to which people commonly work within the role defined in the profile job statement. The matching rules mean that jobs can vary slightly from the levels stated, so most jobs should be able to ‘match’ to a national profile. There will be jobs that do not fit the profiles: provided your department has up-to-date job descriptions and you have clustered your jobs accurately, the matching process will identify these jobs at an early stage.

**Figure 1. Inputs-process-output**

```
Inputs

| Job descriptions + person specifications (for clusters or individuals) |
| Job analysis questionnaires (for those being locally evaluated) |

Process

| NHS job evaluation systems (job matching against national profiles or local evaluation) |

Output

| Agenda for Change pay band |
```
Agenda for Change during the matching process. That these differentials are considered and, if this is the case, jobs should be responsibility and clinical experience counselling teams, there may be person specification. However, within together, as they each have a similar group all the basic-grade posts identified they may be covered by a common job description and person specification, and grouped together for the purposes of job evaluation or job matching.

For example, it may be possible to group all the basic-grade posts together, as they each have a similar person specification. However, within counselling teams, there may be significantly different levels of responsibility and clinical experience and, if this is the case, jobs should be clustered into smaller groups to ensure that these differentials are considered during the matching process.

Fortunately or unfortunately, there is no ‘right way’ to cluster posts; job clustering will depend on local circumstances. However, managers should bear in mind the following in identifying clusters:

- Clusters that are too small will lead to unnecessary duplication of work.
- Clusters that are too large may disadvantage those with a ‘glass ceiling’ in the current grading structure, and will feel impersonal to staff.
- Often people are doing different things, but with a similar level of responsibility, skills and experience.
- Staff have the right to request a review if they are unhappy with the job evaluation process.

The Agenda for Change package offers opportunities to address long-standing problems in current pay structures, such as that of counsellors being paid on administrative and clerical grades.

Job clusters
Job clustering is used to identify groups of workers within larger job groups who can have common job descriptions and person specifications. As a first step when preparing the ‘inputs’ to the NHS job evaluation process, counselling service managers need to work in partnership with staff representatives to consider whether there are clusters of jobs with similar responsibilities, knowledge and skills. Once these clusters have been identified they may be covered by a common job description and person specification, and grouped together for the purposes of job evaluation or job matching.

For example, it may be possible to group all the basic-grade posts together, as they each have a similar person specification. However, within counselling teams, there may be significantly different levels of responsibility and clinical experience and, if this is the case, jobs should be clustered into smaller groups to ensure that these differentials are considered during the matching process.

Job evaluation
For jobs that do not match a national profile under the matching rules, a job analysis questionnaire will need to be completed in preparation for local evaluation. This can be completed for an individual post, or for a group of similar jobs that do not match the national profiles.

The job analysis questionnaire gathers detailed information on the 16 factors covered by the job evaluation scheme. The form is complex, and so managers can support staff in the process by:

- ring-fencing time for the job-holder to complete the form in work time
- ensuring that staff completing the job analysis questionnaire have had detailed awareness training in job evaluation
- facilitating other staff covered by the job analysis questionnaire to participate in completion of the form
- offering the job-holder guidance when filling in the form
- checking and countersigning the final version prior to submission for local evaluation.

Supporting roll-out
Agenda for Change is complex, and staff will raise many concerns and queries. You will need to work in partnership with your local UNISON representative and FHCP lead to ensure that you guide your staff through the process. You will need to:

- let staff know what is going on
- use professional networks to share learning and monitor results locally
- make sure there is representation on working groups on terms and conditions
- link in with the local leads for the Knowledge and skills framework and participate in implementation
- keep up-to-date – check the UNISON and FHCP websites for guidance and best practice.