

The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adult Services – 12 November 2014

Agenda Item	22.
Report No	ECAS 61/14

Trainee Schemes

Report by Director of Care and Learning

Summary

Maintenance of a qualified professional workforce in children's services is at times undermined by difficulty in recruiting to vacant Care and Learning service posts in Health Visiting, School Nursing, Educational Psychology and Social Work. Workforce planning and recruitment is helped through arrangements to recruit trainees to the staffing establishment. Solutions to difficulties in different professional sectors demand varied approaches. Some budget savings can be secured due to the differential between trainee and qualified staff grades.

1. Background

- 1.1 National recruitment to several Care and Learning professions is becoming increasingly difficult as the numbers of available, suitability trained individuals has fallen. This is reflected in Highland with some vacancies remaining unfilled for several months.
- 1.2 In March 2013, the Adult and Children's Committee approved the Educational Psychologists trainee scheme resulting in four trainees being supported to undertake the post graduate degree. In May 2013 the Adult and Children's Committee approved the establishment of two Public Health Nurse trainee posts to assist with recruitment difficulties to Health Visitor and School Nurse posts.
- 1.3 The problem in recruitment of qualified Social Workers to the Highland Council is not of the magnitude it once was, but there is often little competition for some posts and recruitment to vacancies can be protracted.

2. Health Visiting and School Nursing

- 2.1 Highland Council's original Public Health Nurse trainee scheme involved the addition of two trainee posts to the current Highland establishment. Using these two posts and by converting additional hard to recruit to posts, this has enabled six nurses to undergo the Public Health Nurse degree. This post-registration qualification allows nurses to work either as health visitors or school nurses. The scheme provided the trainees with a full-time post within a Public Health Nurse team, but did not contribute to course fees. One nurse has already qualified and is working as a health visitor in East Ross, a further three will qualify in autumn 2015 and the final two will qualify in autumn 2016.
- 2.2 Earlier this year, the Scottish Government announced that the Public Health Nurse role would be divided into the two separate roles of Health Visitor and School Nurse. A national working group has been set up under the Chief Nursing Officer for Scotland's office which is reviewing the requirements in respect of these changes, including the roles and responsibilities, the education requirements to

fulfil these new roles, and workforce planning. The work around the Health Visitor role has been reported back to the Government, resulting in proposals to increase the number of health visitor posts across Scotland by 500 over the next three years, with the requisite funding being released to Health Boards.

- 2.3 The Scottish Government has also provided funding to five Higher Educational Institutes to provide funded places on the revised Health Visitor training course. In January 2015, for the first time, the University of Stirling will be providing a Health Visitor course which will be accessible through the Highland Campus in Inverness. It is anticipated that Highland Council will have five students on this first course and a further ten students in January 2016. These trainee posts will be funded from the additional funding being allocated to the Health Boards to increase the number of health visitors. The course is a blend of direct teaching and practice experience and students will be expected to undertake the course over 12 months.
- 2.4 To facilitate these additional health visitor trainee posts, it is intended to offer an additional two secondments to existing health visitors enabling them to undertake the practice teaching module. This will add to our current complement of four practice teachers, enabling Highland Council to provide the necessary standard of practice support to the health visiting students. This will also be funded from the additional funding allocation.
- 2.5 The national group reviewing the role and training of school nurses is still to report back to the Government. However, it is anticipated that will be done by the end of this year. It is expected that it will recommend that all caseload holding school nurses hold a specialist qualification, enabling their work to focus less on the universal provision of child health services but more at the areas of additional need and vulnerability that we know affects children's outcomes. These would include a focus on mental health issues, complex health needs, and children who are looked after or face other vulnerabilities. It is also expected that there will be a recommendation that additional staff nurses are available to undertake a revised amount of universal health screening and the increasing school based vaccination programmes. At present, there are no revised educational courses for school nurses, and there is no indication as to whether additional funding, similar to that agreed for the health visitor review, will follow.
- 2.6 Because of the current review of health visiting and school nursing training requirements, and the additional funding available to fund health visitor training courses and increase the number of health visiting posts, it may be appropriate to consider if the additional trainee posts introduced into the establishment 2013 will still be required once the current post holders graduate in September 2015. It may be appropriate to remove one or both of them until the outcome of the national wave of traineeships is known in 2018.

3. Educational Psychology

- 3.1 Over a number of years it has proven exceedingly difficult to recruit to vacancies within the Educational Psychology Service. This has been a national issue and the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists (ASPEP) has raised concerns with the Scottish Government in relation to training courses and the supply of qualified educational psychologists. Workforce planning information from ASPEP continues to indicate that there will be a shortage of qualified Educational Psychologists available to fill vacancies across the country, due to the aging profile of the profession.

- 3.2 There has also been a change to the funding of training courses for graduates accepted onto the University courses for Educational Psychology. Graduates now have to self-fund the £9,000 course fee for each of the two years of the course. Accordingly, the number of applications to Universities is falling significantly.
- 3.3 Vacancies within the Highland Council Psychological Service have in the past resulted in restricted provision to several areas within the authority. Retired Psychologists have been recruited to provide temporary part-time cover, to help operate the service in some areas, and there has been good use made of Educational Psychologists in training.
- 3.4 Prior to 2013, the Service had recruited Assistant Educational Psychologists, and this had proved an excellent way to support the on-going work, as well as skilling up assistants, all of whom have successfully gone on to professional training courses.
- 3.5 It was therefore proposed to create a graduate recruit scheme for 4 suitably qualified local psychology graduates as Assistant Educational Psychologists, with agreement to this being given at the Adult and Children's Committee in March 2013. This scheme has enabled the recruitment of up to four Assistant Psychologists on 23 month contracts, providing them with two opportunities to gain a place on courses at the Universities of Dundee or Strathclyde. In exceptional circumstances, we would consider extending an appointment for 12 months, to provide a third and final opportunity.
- 3.6 For those who are successful in gaining University admission, the scheme enables Assistants to be offered a two year trainee post, conditional on agreement to be employed for a minimum of a two further years on qualification as an Educational Psychologist, within Highland Council. It is very encouraging that the first cohort of Assistants ALL gained places on the MSc professional training course for Educational Psychologists in September 2014.
- 3.7 As there is a large fieldwork component on the University course (usually two days per week as well as three week block placements); Trainee Educational Psychologists on the course are able to continue to carry out work for Highland on placement. It is also expected that the dissertation, which is a major research project, would be focused on a topic linked to children and young people in Highland.
- 3.9 The cost of a full time qualified Educational Psychologist is currently £40,638pa plus on-costs. Assistants/Trainees have a salary of £21,749 (HC06). Because the Assistants are restricted in the duties they can undertake and because they require to be closely supervised in their practice, some additional time has been provided on a supply basis to some areas, requiring some of the savings to be redirected to cover these costs. However, the saving to the Council in appointing 4 Assistant Psychologists rather than fully qualified Educational Psychologists has been estimated to be in the region of £30k.
- 3.10 In time obviously, the present cohort of Assistants will move through the system and become fully qualified and will be able to provide the full range of duties within the service and command the full salary. However, the scheme has been so successful in supporting Workforce Planning within the Service that the intention is to continue with it, employing up to 4 Assistant Psychologists at any given point.

4. Social Work

- 4.1 Prior to Job Evaluation, The Highland Council struggled to recruit to some qualified social worker posts in the Social Work Service. This was detrimental to the delivery of a safe service and to workforce development. For a period of time, a number of vacancies were utilised to recruit trainees who subsequently completed distance learning university programmes, eventually increasing the qualified workforce. Prior to qualification and employment as registered social workers, trainees provided some capacity to operational social work teams between formal study and placement blocks. The recruitment and development of trainees was supported by a full time co-ordinator/practice teacher post at HC9.
- 4.2 In the new Care & Learning Service, recruitment to social worker vacancies is not a chronic difficulty, though the choice of candidates for vacancies can be more limited than in other parts of Scotland that have higher populations. The overall turnover of staff in social worker posts is not excessive, relative to other areas, and includes people moving between roles within the Council or NHS Highland and retirements. In more remote areas however, there is very little competition for posts and recruitment to vacancies takes longer. Unfilled posts in operational teams always have a significant impact on service delivery, particularly in the North and West areas and in smaller teams. This impact is exacerbated by sickness absence and maternity leave.
- 4.3 Workforce planning and development in support of a high standard of social work practice requires the availability of a balanced cohort of workers in terms of experience, with investment in all career stages, pre and post qualification. There is no current formally constituted trainee social worker scheme within the Service. The full time post of the existing placement co-ordinator/practice teacher has recently become vacant. A small number of experienced social care employees secure places on distance learning programmes as self-funding students on their own initiative. In individual cases, requests for 'support in kind' by way leave to attend study blocks and placements have been supported.
- 4.4 105 full time equivalent qualified social worker posts are spread across the Family Team, Youth Action, Fostering and Adoption and Disability/Health services. This does not include Criminal Justice and Mental Health Officer services. The salary range for HC09 is £32,032 to £34,999. An indicative scale point 40 on HC9 carries an annual salary of £34,016. 100 qualified social workers on this mid-range of HC9 incur basic salary costs of £3,401,600, mitigated by lower scale points and vacancy periods.
- 4.5 Social workers are mainly supervised by Practice Leads (Care & Protection), all of whom are registered and experienced social workers. The responsibilities of the Practice Lead include a proportion of direct practice, co-working/mentoring and training. A significant number of Practice Leads (School Years) are also registered social workers.
- 4.6 The opportunity to convert qualified social worker posts to trainee posts would occur as vacancies arise. Trainees could be recruited on HC5 (£21,476) and/or HC6 – (£24,497). Trainees may be recruited to post at any point in the year as students are likely to join programmes at different stages, depending on the individual's entry level. Some trainees would therefore provide full time capacity to an operational team before matriculation as a student. Two distance learning social work degree courses are available in Scotland and both require some prior

academic credits and experience. The period of study would range between 30 months to 48 months, depending on the university programme and the entry level. The current fee costs for either Open University or Robert Gordon's University are up to £11,500, excluding any travel and accommodation costs incurred by university study blocks and placements. Trainees could not be required to remain in the employment of the Council nor repay any investment in training costs.

- 4.7 For every social worker post at HC9 converted to a trainee post at HC6, a difference in annual salary costs of around £9,000 would be recorded. Trainees would take an average of 3 years to complete to qualification. Course fees would vary, depending on entry level and course provider, as would travel and accommodation costs. If we used a notional average of £5000 per trainee per year for fees and other costs, the saving in salary is reduced to £4000 per annum for each post, mitigated by differing scale points or salary bands. If only course fees were borne by the employer, the saving per post each year would increase to around £5000.
- 4.8 Trainees make a contribution to team resources but cannot assume the range of responsibilities of a qualified social worker, and would not be consistently available due to their student status. The balance and number of trainees in each team needs to be monitored, so as not to compromise the quality and safety of care for children at risk and with complex needs.
- 4.9 Accordingly, North, Mid and West areas might each appoint around one trainee social worker each year, with the South area recruiting around two trainees each year.

5. Implications

- 5.1 **Resources:** The current national review of health visiting supports an increase in the number of health visitors on our establishment. Over the next four years, additional Scottish Government funding will enable an increase in the number of health visitor trainees who will then fill those additional posts. Consideration should be given to removing the current trainee posts at the end of 2015 and reviewing their requirement at the end of the national training and recruitment programme in 2018. This would create a potential budget saving of £71,000
- 5.2 The Assistant/Trainee Psychologist scheme has enabled better workforce planning for the Highland Council Psychological Service and therefore ensured greater equity of access to this service for children, young people and families, across all Areas of Highland. It has made best use of the resource available and also provided a process for securing service provision for the future.
- 5.4 A small cohort of trainee social workers would be able to be co-ordinated by the Practice Support Officer currently in post, as an extension of current practice learning activity and dependent on reliable capacity from existing Practice Lead post holders who are registered social workers. An immediate saving of £35,000 can be made by removing the recently vacated Practice Teacher post. 10 trainee social workers, recruited from converted social worker vacancies over a 2 year period, create potential to save upwards of £40,000.
- 5.5 **Rural implications:** Particular consideration will need to be given to the use of trainees in rural areas.

5.6 There are no other implications.

6. Recommendation

6.1 Members are invited to endorse the use of trainees across these various professional disciplines.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 3 November 2014