

RPA Cross Sector HR Forum meeting 12 October 2006

Present: Linda Brown (CPG)
Michael Daly (CPG)
Noel Kelly (DSO)
Jim McKeown (RPA)
Damien Prince (RPA)
David Bingham (DHSSPS)
Patricia Carey (OFMDFM)
Maura McCusker (DE)
Ian Maye (DOE)
Maureen Taggart (NIHE)
Judena Goldring (DCAL)
John McKeown (DEL)
Michael Henderson (OFMDFM)
Jacqui Wallace (CPG)

Apologies: June Ingram (DEL)
Billy Gamble (OFMDFM)
Orla Murray (DSO)
Matthew Alford (DE)

1. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising

Linda Brown welcomed everyone to the meeting particularly Judena Goldring (DCAL), Maureen Taggart (NIHE) and all those deputising.

On RPA Affected Group Linda Brown confirmed that a note on this has now issued with employers being ask to, in consultation with TUS, refine the definition in partially affected areas. Maura McCusker outlined the difficulties this is presenting within the Education Sector and confirmed how the issue is being handled. Patricia Carey highlighted that the Equality Commission wish to be consulted on the RPA Affected Group and confirmed that this had been reported at the Equality Sub-group. Jim McKeown advised that PSC may refine their definition of RPA Affected Group.

Linda Brown stated that salary protection was a substantive item on the agenda.

On membership of the group Linda Brown confirmed that Judena Goldring (DCAL) and Maureen Taggart (NIHE) have now joined the Forum. Maura McCusker reported that within the Education Sector the RPA HR Project Board have expressed concerns on the membership of the Forum and consider that they should have a representative at the table. She highlighted a particular issue in relation to Pensions. Linda Brown confirmed that it was for each member of the forum to consult within their Sector as they consider appropriate and to bring papers on issues to the table. She confirmed that where the Forum considers that it would be useful to invite an external expert to deliver a presentation on a specific

issue there is flexibility to facilitate this.. It was acknowledged that a barrier to consultation within the Sectors is the short time available to consider papers. It was highlighted that on the issue of pensions government would be advised by GAD.

Linda Brown confirmed that the RPA Guidance Note on managing vacancies had issued. She also confirmed that work on the draft paper on “clearing house” was underway. She flagged up that there would be a general discussion on the preparation of draft papers under agenda item 6.

The issue of filling vacancies in new organisations was discussed and it was agreed that David Bingham would produce a brief draft paper to PSC on the issue.

Action: David Bingham

2. Update on feedback from PSC meetings

Jim McKeown referred to the PSCs draft 3rd Guiding Principle on Staff Transfers. He confirmed the up to date position on dispute resolution mechanisms and pensions. He confirmed how it was proposed to take this forward through meetings with PSC, George Gray and NICICTU.

On the PSCs draft 4th Guiding Principle on Filling Posts in New Organisations Jim reported the decision of the Minister on the issue of “the power of direction”. He highlighted that there was unlikely to be any progress on the issue of “employee protection until after the PSC meeting on 1 November.

Jim confirmed that PSC are now working on a 5th Guiding Principle on early retirement/redundancy.

3. Discussion on draft proposals on Harmonisation of Terms and Conditions Post Transfer

Michael Daly introduced the draft paper on Harmonisation of Terms and Conditions Post Transfer and explained the background to this. There was a brief discussion on the paper. David Bingham suggested adding a paragraph on the protection against equal pay claims and this was agreed. The paper with this one amendment was agreed.

Action: Michael Daly

4. Discussion paper on pay protection

Michael Daly introduced the discussion paper on pay protection and explained the background to this. Linda Brown emphasized the need to be clear on what the issue is. David Bingham described the position with the Health Sector and explained how they propose to handle the issues.

Maureen Taggart confirmed that the terms and conditions of NIHE staff do not include salary protection. It was agreed that there is a need for accurate information on which staff in which sectors have contractual salary protection.

Action: All

5. Discussion on any emerging Cross Sector issues

Michael Daly updated the meeting on the issue of pensions. He undertook to produce a brief paper for the forum in this regard.

Action: Michael Daly

David Bingham flagged up that the pensions issue remains a huge concern for staff. Maura McCusker confirmed this and highlighted the need to inform staff of how their interests are being protected. Linda Brown suggested an article for the RPA Bulletin on consultation arrangements. This was agreed.

Action: Michael Daly

Patricia Carey referred to the work of the Equality Sub-group. She confirmed that there were concerns on location issues and that these would be discussed with the Estates Sub-group.

David Bingham informed the meeting of the position on recruitment to Health Sector 2nd level posts. He then highlighted the HR Framework document to the meeting. It was agreed that any suggested amendments to this document should be sent to David direct. David also informed the group of the problems which arose at the RPA HR Advisory Group.

Action: All

Jim McKeown informed the meeting that the RPA Central Unit has compiled a list of issues/papers referred to PSC where no response has been received. These outstanding issues, including the HR Principles paper, have been referred to Brian Martin.

Ian Maye updated the meeting on the work underway on the Local Government Taskforce. He outlined the position being put forward by NIPSA in this regard and how they propose to respond to this.

Maura McCusker informed the meeting of the position on the Gateway review of the Programme within the Education Sector. Maura outlined the arrangements in place for trade union engagement and informed the group of an issue which has arisen in relation to representation. Noel Kelly explained the legal requirements on consultation. There was a general discussion in this regard.

John McKeown confirmed that DEL has set a date to meet with TUS.

Judena Goldring confirmed that she had nothing to add to earlier discussions.

Maureen Taggart explained the arrangements in relation to NIHE and DSD and confirmed that they, at employer level, have arrangements in place for consultation with TUS. She highlighted that a main concern for staff is the future location of jobs and that as a result filling vacancies is more difficult.

6. Future working arrangements for Cross Sector Forum

Linda Brown outlined her view on the future working arrangements of the forum. She highlighted the role of the forum, frequency of meetings and preparation of papers. There was a general discussion in this regard and it was agreed that in future: -

- a. The role of the forum is as set out in its terms of reference.
- b. Meetings should continue broadly on a monthly basis but tied in with the timing of PSC meetings to allow for feedback and discussion.
- c. The secretariat would take the lead on preparation of papers with input from forum members.

Ian Maye suggested an addition to the work programme on the issue of a Single Public Sector Staff Commission. Addition to the work programme was agreed.

Linda Brown stated that for future meetings agendas would be carefully managed in an effort to contain the meeting to a two-hour maximum.

7. Guidance Notes – timing/impact to Sectoral arrangements

Maura McCusker explained to the meeting the issues, which have arisen within the Education Sector in this regard. She highlighted the confusion which has followed the decision by the PSC and RPA Implementation Team to write to affected employers direct. Ian Maye endorsed the points made by Maura and explained that a lot of confusion had been created. It was agreed that this matter would be discussed outside the meeting.

8. Communicating with staff

Michael Henderson explained his role in this regard. He confirmed that:-

- The First RPA bulletin was sent to 150 organisations at end of August for distribution to their staff. It was also placed on the RPA Website and has had 25,000 hits to date.
- Work is underway on the second bulletin to be issued within next two weeks

- A list of key communicators across the public sector is being developed.

Michael asked the group to consider what top line HR messages should be sent. He stated that PSC Guiding Principles and Recommendations accepted by Government would be included. He went on to ask whether Departments are content with arrangements currently in place to brief staff, both within NICS and wider public sector.

Michael also highlighted that he is working with Bruce Robinson to promote the use of Team Briefing on the reform programme, which includes RPA

9. Date of next meeting

2pm on 2 November 2006