

# Re-gradings for Social Work Paraprofessionals

## Hints & Tips

### Introduction

Social work paraprofessionals encompass a range of different job roles and titles across Local Authorities in Scotland including social work assistants (SWAs), family support workers (FSWs) and staff in other support roles including justice officers and community care assistants.

UNISON Scotland's recent survey of social work paraprofessional members found that 68% say their responsibilities have increased since they came into post. They frequently report taking over the duties of qualified social workers or doing the same job as a social worker: holding complex cases alone, having full responsibility for carrying out higher level assessments. For some this includes adult and child protection work.

However, many are on salaries much lower than qualified social work staff and many believe that their posts need to be regraded. Some have already had successful regradings, others have not.

This brief guide produced by the Social Work Issues Group looks at what paraprofessionals, with the support of their UNISON branch can do to maximise their chances of their roles being recognised and their post regraded.

### The Job Evaluation (JE) Scheme

Most authorities in Scotland (apart from South Lanarkshire) now use the Scottish Joint Council Job Evaluation Scheme, now in its third edition. It is a scheme which breaks down jobs into 13 areas, known as factors, which are all assessed, and points awarded. It is then scored using a matrix.

- 1 WORKING ENVIRONMENT** - considers the physical environment in which the job is carried out.
- 2 PHYSICAL CO-ORDINATION** - considers the physical co-ordination required to do the job.
- 3 PHYSICAL EFFORT** - considers the strength and stamina required to do the job.
- 4 MENTAL SKILLS** - considers the thinking requirement in the job.
- 5 CONCENTRATION** - considers the concentration required to do the job.
- 6 COMMUNICATION SKILLS** - considers the predominant requirement of spoken and written communication during normal working.
- 7 DEALING WITH RELATIONSHIPS** - considers the demands on the jobholder arising from the circumstances and/or behaviour of those he/she comes into contact with as an integral part of normal working.

### KEY INFORMATION:

- [UNISON survey of Social Work Paraprofessionals](#) (June 2023)
- [Scottish Joint Council Job Evaluation Scheme \(3<sup>rd</sup> edition\)](#)
- [Job Evaluation Scheme Job Holder Questionnaire](#)
- **Contact your branch**  
[UNISON Branch Finder | UNISON Branch Finder](#)

**8 RESPONSIBILITY FOR EMPLOYEES** - considers the responsibility of the jobholder for the supervision, co-ordination or management of employees, or equivalent others.

**9 RESPONSIBILITY FOR SERVICES TO OTHERS** - considers the jobholder's responsibility to others in terms of the quality and delivery of service provision.

**10 RESPONSIBILITY FOR FINANCIAL RESOURCES** - considers the jobholder's responsibility for financial resources.

**11 RESPONSIBILITY FOR PHYSICAL AND INFORMATION RESOURCES** - considers the jobholder's primary and secondary responsibilities for the Council's physical and information resources.

**12 INITIATIVE AND INDEPENDENCE** - considers the jobholder's scope to exercise initiative and the extent to which they have freedom to act.

**13 KNOWLEDGE** - considers what the jobholder needs to know to do the job.

## Applying for regrading

Every council will have its own procedure for submitting and evaluating a regrading claim, which should have been negotiated with the trade unions. It's important to find out what yours is. Contact your local branch [UNISON Branch Finder | UNISON Branch Finder](#) for assistance.

You should also request from HR a copy of your current Job Description or Job Profile and your factor scores.

## Your Job Description

This is a key document for how your post will be evaluated. The first principle of the JE scheme is that it is *the post* that's evaluated, *not* the person. So, if you are doing work over and above your JD when there is no requirement for you to do so, then you won't be credited for that.

However, if you are expected to undertake roles and tasks not included in your current JD, the first thing to do is to make sure your JD accurately reflects the work that you do.

Read it very carefully. Does it really reflect all the tasks your job entails? Add to it, but also think of how you can evidence this. Look out for key words. For example, "contribute" means it's not your responsibility. If it is your responsibility, you need another word, such as undertake.

Remember, this is your JD: **if it's not written in there you don't do it.**

So, for example if your JD implies that you mainly work under supervision but in reality you are out and about doing face to face work with families or individuals, monitoring supervised contact etc and doing home visits, then you will have to deal with whatever presents, thinking on your feet and keeping everyone including yourself safe. This must be properly included in your JD. You will have proof of that through your rota, work plan, calendar, supervision notes and/or records you keep.

## Key factors

Be prepared to concentrate on certain factors. Not every factor will go up and some might even go down. The factors that may be particularly relevant for social work paraprofessional posts are

### **Factor 5 Concentration:**

You should look at the requirements short/focused/high concentration.

For example, many SW paraprofessionals deal with a range of activities, eg meetings, driving, report writing, supervised contact, where some of them can be simultaneous and/or present conflicting demands. E.g. focused while driving and short, as interruptions are unavoidable.

***This can be reflected in the Job Description as follows:***

- ***Good time management***
- ***Manage customer expectations by responding and prioritising customer requests, taking account of other work demands***

### ***Factor 6 Communication***

Many SW paraprofessionals will exercise developed communication skills in advising, guiding, counselling, persuading, or negotiating in order to encourage others to adopt a particular course of action. If you see clients and families on a face-to-face basis on your own, then you will be responsible for this.

***This can be reflected in the Job Description as follows:***

- ***Provide a range of advice and guidance on non-complex cases to promote independence and self-management by customers/clients.***
- ***Provide a range of practical support to vulnerable children and adults to facilitate casework objectives.***

### ***Factor 9 Services to others***

It is important to establish what the SW paraprofessional does during meetings with clients.

For example, do you follow a pre-set plan (prepared by someone else) or do you check in with a client, see what needs to be done and then (in conjunction with the client) decide on a plan of action?

If you assess your client's basic needs or service requirements and implement appropriate processes for service provision/delivery, then this will attract a higher score for this factor.

***This can be reflected in the Job Description as follows:***

- ***Undertake non-complex assessments which identify the needs of service users and coordinate care packages that respond to identified need.***
- ***Undertake non-complex assessments for vulnerable children and adults to ensure identify needs and the requirement for services.***

### ***Factor 13 Knowledge***

*This can be a tricky factor to change. While it is the best to bump up scores, it places existing job holders without the new qualification at risk of capability proceedings.*

Many SW paraprofessional roles require predominantly technical or specialist knowledge, including an appreciation of theory. The jobholder needs advanced knowledge acquired through either education, vocational qualification, on or off-the-job training, or job-related experience.

And/or

The jobholder requires knowledge of a wide range of jobs and activities. Jobholders will generally need an extended period of relevant working experience to become fully competent and familiar with all aspects of the job.

***This needs to be reflected in the Job Description but see bullet point 2 below.***

## JE questionnaire

The JE scheme also contains a questionnaire. It has 150 questions so it can take time to fill in. However, it is worth doing along with your UNISON rep as it helps you understand what evidence the analyst will be looking for, particularly for the bits you have added in to your JD. Give as many examples as possible. If you are unsure which box to tick, tick them all. Together with the examples it will help the Job Analyst, who will score your job, to translate your answers into a factor level.

## Gauge

Gauge is factor-based job evaluation software which helps assess jobs and create a value and description for each.

- It is worth finding out if/how your council uses Gauge.
- Some councils such as Shetland use both paper and Gauge in job evaluations to ensure any anomalies in Gauge are eliminated. Every trained job analyst, both HR and union, has an account.
- Although easy to use Gauge can take you down a specific route so care is needed

## Some points to be aware of

- Make sure you are thorough in describing all aspects of your job and your responsibilities. But don't over egg it. Your line manager will be asked for their views on it. It can often be helpful to speak to them first to see if they are in support.
- Don't put yourself in a capability scenario. For example, the knowledge factor is one of the highest weighted ones, so going up a level there can be helpful to your overall score. However, if this is translated into a qualification you don't have then you might end up not meeting the criteria for your own job.

## Some ideas for reps and branches

- Get as many reps trained in JE as possible, it comes in handy more times than you might think.
- If possible, try and use a rep from a different department to do a JE case. You can easily read something in a JD to mean one thing, because you think you know the job. Someone looking in from the outside might have to query some details, which can help to identify any changes to improve the JD.
- If you are not sure about the JD, check out some of the JDs on the internet and see if you can spot some phrasing that you think should be adopted. Or find a branch with a successful regrading and look at the wording on their JDs.
- Setting up joint training with the HR Job Analyst can be helpful, if both sides know they have been trained at the same level.
- If your employer is using Gauge, it is worth your UNISON Stewards asking to be given an account, so they can practice it for themselves. But they will have to ask an administrator of the scheme to give them the final scores, as this should be kept separate.



### Contact UNISON's Social Work Issues Group:

Mo Dickson  
[M.dickson@unison.co.uk](mailto:M.dickson@unison.co.uk)

### Contact UNISON's Bargaining & Campaigns team:

Susan Galloway  
[s.galloway@unison.co.uk](mailto:s.galloway@unison.co.uk)