

REVIEW OF WORK LEVEL DEFINITIONS PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION

INTRODUCTION

The Public Service Association (PSA) provides the following submission on the Review of the Professional Officer Work Level Definitions (WLDs) contained within the *SA Government Wages Parity (Salaried) Enterprise Agreement 2006 (EA)*.

The submission is based on feedback which has been provided to the Public Sector Workforce Division (PSWD) in previous correspondence (including letters dated 9 October 2007 and 31 October 2006), and in consultation with PSA members on the overall implementation and operation of the WLDs.

There are over 53 professional occupations in the public sector. The old classification structure provided guidance for the classification of occupations within five homogeneous groups. Given this diversity, additional information may assist in the classifying process given that there is a considerable difference in the work of an Engineer as opposed to a Social Worker.

One of the general concerns PSA members have expressed about the WLDs is that they are not as clear or specific as they need to be, and do not incorporate the 'criticality' of the work, or high degree of technical skill which is required at some levels.

On an operational level, the PSA has been disappointed in the implementation process at the agency/health unit level, including the assessment of positions against the new WLDs. Feedback from PSA members has demonstrated this has occurred in an inconsistent and ad-hoc manner. The implementation of the Managerial Allowance in particular, has been challenged in cases where it is clear employees were working in managerial positions before the certification of the new *EA*. The PSA is assisting members in a number of appeals over the failure to pay a Managerial Allowance in accordance with the *EA*. Agency compliance is therefore a significant issue which needs to be addressed to ensure the WLDs are the standard by which public sector employees are appropriately remunerated.

The *EA* was specific at Schedule 1.21 as to the Translation Arrangements from the *S.A. Public Sector Salaried Employees Interim Award 1994 SAPSSEI (Award)* classification levels of Professional Services Officers (PSO) and Medical Scientists (MS) to the new *Award* remuneration levels for Professional Officers (PO's) and Medical Scientists (MeS) to come into effect from the 1st pay period on or after 1 October 2006, but gave no guidance as to the implementation of the new structure.

For example, how do individual positions now measure up against the new criteria. In discussions between PSWD and PSA there was an expectation on the part of PSWD that health units, departments and agencies would develop their own processes in doing this.

There was an expectation from PSWD that the Performance Management process or at least annual reviews would assist in this. This expectation was not met. That Government has recognized that this responsibility has not been met, to the extent that they have proposed that this be mandatory in the draft *Public Sector Bill 2008* at clause 4 and clause 7. The response from many agencies to the PSA that individuals have the right of pursuing an individual reclassification application is not good enough, as this should only occur if there is disagreement between employer and employee regarding the appropriate remuneration level. This then required an assessment by the employer of the requirements of each PO/MeS position against the new criteria. In most cases this still needs to occur.

It may be helpful for PSWD to provide pro-formas to Government agencies to assist with the assessment of employees on the 5th increment of PO1/MeS1. The PSA has found agencies have developed their own pro-formas which have resulted in inconsistencies across agencies, resulting in significant delays in the process.

1. DEFINITIONS

Whilst the terms "practitioner" or "senior practitioner" are not used in the current definitions, these terms maybe useful in clarifying differences between the managerial role and responsibilities and those of a specialist.

It is clear that many agencies have had difficulty in the implementation of the new WLDs and there continues to be confusion in the classification of many professional positions.

Whilst the definitions describe three professional career streams at some levels, managerial specialist and senior practitioner, there is confusion in agencies about what constitutes a specialist. The PSA believes clarity could be provided within the definitions. For professionals reading the definitions for guidance in relation to establishing their specialist career, it can be difficult to determine exactly what is required. Additional wording that clearly sets out in broad terms what constitutes a specialist would be of great assistance.

It is important to include in the work level definitions the definitions for practitioner and senior practitioner.

In some workplaces there continues to be confusion regarding the term "professional supervision". It is confused with the general term "supervision". This could be addressed by including a definition of Professional Supervision.

2. MANAGERS ALLOWANCE

The PSA has received advice from members that agencies have considerable difficulties with the implementation of the managerial allowance.

The PSA's view is that three out of the five criteria should be sufficient for an individual to be paid the managerial allowance. With clear guidelines it would make it much easier for agencies to assess where employees are fulfilling the majority of the criteria as it is unlikely many would fulfill all of them.

3. IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

In the Health sector some occupations require significant levels of skills, such as Perfusionists. This small group of professionals work in a highly skilled, very specialised area. The capacity to be innovative and make departures from traditional methods of operating are very limited and may not necessarily address the criteria, therefore the significant skill required does not seem to be adequately reflected in the work level definitions which is a barrier to progression. Other disciplines, such as Medical Imaging, have the same limitations to being creative, but none the less professionals exercise significant levels of skill.

At the PO 5 level there is an expectation that the individual would have established a high profile in their Profession by the publication of articles in Professional Journals etc. This expectation may be appropriate for those Professionals working in research organisations, but not practically possible for those experienced and skilled professionals working in service organisations. The skills, experience and knowledge should be recognised by the classification structure and not be reliant on a “research” framework.

There is also support for the PO 6 classification to provide an appropriate classification for the national and international expert/specialist.

4. REVIEWING SCHEDULE 3, PROFESSIONAL SERVICES STREAM SAPSSEI AWARD

Given the length of time since the list of professions contained within Schedule 3 was developed, the PSA believes significant changes have occurred in a number of disciplines and the creation of new degrees warrants a review. This would ensure that many 'newer' qualifications which are not included on the list are able to be classified under the Professional Stream which is where they most appropriately fit. Agencies are requiring these new qualifications for employees to undertake new roles developed over the past 15 years, and professions which have never been included, eg; IT, Geographical Information Systems, Accountancy etc.

5. CONCLUSION

The PSA is concerned if the current issues surrounding the WLDs are not addressed, there will be the potential to inhibit rather than assist in career development, for example through specialist skills acquisition. The PSA does not believe that this was the intention of the new structure when it was developed. Given the significant skills shortages which exist, particularly in a number of professional occupations, and the ageing profile of the Public Sector, it is imperative that any barriers to ensuring employees are appropriately classified are removed. It is also evident that a number of agencies are having difficulties in correctly applying the new structure and greater assistance provided by PSWD would assist in resolving this and ensure greater consistency across Government.

Attachment A

S.A. PUBLIC SECTOR SALARIED EMPLOYEES INTERIM AWARD

Schedule 3 – Classification Criteria

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES STREAM

Classification Structure

OVERVIEW STATEMENT

The work in the Professional Services Stream (within agency operating programs) may consist of research, development, review and extension of the established principles of a recognised professional discipline, requiring the application of skills, knowledge and judgement to a variety of situations.

The level of knowledge demanded will have been gained, in the first instance, in a recognised degree or, on occasion, the addition of a post-graduate course of study.

The nature of the work demands professional knowledge at the outset, and the development of discipline expertise and experience is gained on the job.

Professional officers within the stream increase their levels of expertise, and may specialise in some facets of the discipline during the progress of their career. Recognition of having attained 'expert' status is awarded by peer acknowledgement.

The Stream Work Level definitions form one part of the total classification criteria package for the Professional Services Stream. In classifying positions, regard must be had to Career Group Work Level definitions and Position Information Documents contained in the published classification standards by the Commissioner for Public Employment under Section 29 of the Government Management and Employment Act (1985) and as varied from time to time.

QUALIFICATIONS

Mandatory qualifications exist for assignment to each category, and at certain levels for some disciplines, within the Professional Services Stream.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Employees and/or the organisation will anticipate a contribution to the development of the profession through participation in professional conferences, preparation of papers of intellectual and/or notable content, or the exercise of levels of initiative which utilise established professional principles.

Attachment B

DEFINITIONS

Include the term "practitioner" and "senior practitioner" in the list of definitions.

PO 1

This classification level should be confined to the "trainee" or "internship" role. Any references to complex work should be removed. This position is a base grade classification. The professional officer with experience may undertake a range of learned professional techniques but should not act or provide advice without supervision from a senior professional.

It is not appropriate for a PO 1 to contribute to the development of the "professional discipline" as they undertake work under some guidance and supervision. Given the professional officer at this level works within established procedures, specific guidelines and standardised instructions it is not appropriate for them to provide advice regarding statutory action.

PO 1 LEVEL – 6th AND 7th INCREMENTS

A further dot point to make it clear that the assessment process does not change the incremental date:

"The incremental date will be maintained."

- (a) There also needs to be some capacity for accelerated progression to the 7th increment. For experienced Professionals who leave the service and then return, it is not reasonable for them to have to work a further 12 months before achieving the top increment.
- (b) In an exchange of letters with the PSA it has been agreed that Clinical Psychologists be appointed to the 2nd top increment of the PSO 1. There needs to be clarity in the criteria relating to the entry level for these professionals.

PO 2 LEVEL

The first dot point under Knowledge and Experience is causing confusion as it appears to require higher levels of expertise than the second dot point.

It would be appropriate to delete the first dot point.

At this level it would also be appropriate to refer to the work of a "practitioner".

It is not thought to be appropriate for post graduate qualifications to be a requirement at this level.

Under Operational Outcomes the dot point which states “Coordinates all phases of a project or assignment” should be removed and placed in the PO 3 classification.

PO 3 LEVEL

Within this definition, reference should be made to the work of the "Practitioner". This will assist as the definition discusses "as a recognised specialist, as a professional officer with responsibilities for complex duties, or as a team leader”.

There appears to be some confusion about the role of a "specialist". By including reference to the senior practitioner (a term used in some agencies) it would be seen that there is a clear distinction between a "specialist" and a "practitioner".

Under Knowledge and Experience include the first dot point from PO 2. “Has attained greater specialized knowledge within the discipline and is achieving higher level of outcomes under reduced professional direction within the discipline.”

PO 4 LEVEL

There are several outcomes listed under this criteria which would more appropriately be placed at the PO 5 level. It is unlikely that the PO 4 would be responsible for crucial professional advice for the development of Government policy and industry or national planning and initiatives.

There is an expectation that the role would be crucial and influence the workplace and agency level but not more broadly. The reference to having an impact “on the State” should be removed.

PO 5 LEVEL

The reference to “highly innovative” should be replaced with “advanced complexity”.

The expectation that professionals working at this level would have an international reputation is not realistic. Whilst they are likely to be a leading professional manager or specialist their role is confined more to the local working environment.

The capacity to influence is also at the state and national level and not likely to be international.