

UNISON's  
newsletter for  
members in the  
probation  
service

# Probation

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## A pay deal at last in probation



It has been a long time coming but we at last have a pay deal agreed following UNISON members' overwhelming endorsement.

I recognise that the settlement does not meet all the aspirations we had for this pay round but it was clearly the best that could have been negotiated by UNISON on behalf of its members. It also compares well with other public sector pay deals and continues to recognise incremental progression at least until 2010.

We will continue to argue that incremental progression is essential in a modern pay structure and should be defended.

The actions of UNISON members during the pay dispute were pivotal in getting a resolution. The indicative ballot was a tremendous result that strengthened our position. It also ensured the intervention of the Government to find ways forward.

Those who doubt the value of a recognised trade union should acknowledge the success of UNISON in getting better pay and conditions. Without the efforts of UNISON members we would have had a derisory offer. We must persuade more non-members to join on the back of our progress.

Talking of progress, it was very pleasing that both Dave Prentis and the Probation Minister David Hanson addressed us at our recent National Probation Seminar (see page 2). The event was again a great success and further raises the profile of UNISON probation members both within UNISON itself and within the Ministry of Justice.

It was also pleasing to hear Dave Prentis's support for a criminal justice focus within UNISON and should this come about, I am convinced it will be a major step forward for us in Probation.

More alarmingly, the Minister warned of tough times ahead in terms of resources. He said that the Ministry of Justice had been set a target of spending less money. We have real concerns about the possibility of this being achieved without real, damaging cuts to frontline delivery. We have been warned that as many as 5,000 jobs could be lost from a workforce of 22,000. The Minister denied this and has agreed to further discussions with us on this subject.

The resourcing crisis affects not just Probation but the whole criminal justice sector. For this reason UNISON is working with other Unions to campaign against any cuts. Justice Week in December was part of an ongoing campaign by unions to highlight the plight of the sector. Working together we demonstrate our commitment to tackle the real dangers which will come from an underfunded criminal justice system.

### Matthew Lay

Chair, National Probation Committee

Probation seminar: delegates get down to business-see page 2



## UNISON Insurance lifts the travel worries

Maria Giacoumi was stumped - again - when she tried to arrange health insurance for a holiday in the United States this autumn. Maria, who works for Greater Manchester Probation Service has a long term medical condition and has received a kidney transplant.

The reaction of many insurance companies she has approached for holiday travel cover in the past has been to say 'no' or to exclude anything to do with her heart or circulation - a serious worry.

But Maria has also found some companies insulting. One told her that they 'would not profit from her' - a response that she found discriminatory.

This year another company changed its mind after Maria had gone ahead and booked a holiday in the US on the strength of an earlier assurance. She was infuriated.

'Then someone asked me "Are you in a union?,"' Maria said.

'I had never thought of that, so I rang UNISON Insurance. They were fantastic and the rep was empathetic and helpful. There was none of the usual, "We do not think so, No" and "Here's 101 questions".

'I wasn't on the phone very long and there was no problem. The price was very reasonable, they covered everything and I couldn't believe what I was hearing.'

Maria and her husband have since been on holiday to Miami and Las Vegas and they had a wonderful time - with no health worries. But she has come back with a message - 'I would recommend UNISON Insurance to anyone. I now have insurance for a full year so I can plan other trips.'

Call UNISON Insurance on 0800 668855

# Probation profile is on the rise

UNISON's second national probation seminar attracted a Government minister and UNISON's general secretary Dave Prentis as speakers. It reflects how closely the Ministry of Justice is listening to the union's views on the future of the service and recognition by UNISON that this is a key workforce

The well-attended event built on the momentum of last year's seminar and there was overwhelming support for continuation in 2009. The event was held in more comfortable surroundings and delegates commented on the improved facilities.

There were plenary sessions and intense workshop activity. The qualification training project workshop was led by Suzy Dymond-White, project manager for the Probation Qualification Framework review. It offered delegates a chance to feed into the review, which is looking at professionalising the PSO role, through the introduction of NVQs (see remarks by David Hanson). Other workshops focused on the future of pay and recruitment and organisation.



## David Hanson

The Government will have to find 'significant savings' in the Probation Service, David Hanson, Minister for Probation at the Ministry of Justice warned.

He told delegates he was looking for £1 billion 'without affecting the core business.'

Mr Hanson insisted that he wanted to target 'unnecessary oversight' and make reductions at regional

and national offices. He also wanted to reduce the use of external consultants adding: 'It drives me mad that we are not investing in providing these services in-house.'

If (staff) reductions were necessary they would be done with redeployment and staff turnover.

On the role of NOMS, Mr Hanson said distinct prison and probation services would remain. It would not be a case of merging.

He wanted to see all Probation Boards as trusts by April 2010 but stressed: 'I only want mergers on a voluntary basis and after discussions with staff. I am not seeking to force mergers.'

The minister admitted that he probably could not do the work of approved premises staff: 'It's a bloody difficult job. Dealing with some of the most difficult people leaving prison.'

'I expect double waking night cover to remain the norm – safety is paramount. If there are going to be changes I want to discuss it with colleagues, nationally and locally.'

Mr Hanson also confirmed that from October 2009 there would be a new accreditation training programme for probation staff. PSOs could work towards an NVQ and should be able to gain qualifications without facing a cut in pay.



## Failure of the market

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said that as the market collapsed the lessons of the crisis and the failure of the private sector to deliver public services had to be learned.

Trade unions were not some kind of interest group that had to be overcome by Government. If Government wanted support in its reform agenda it was going to have

to review pay increases that were half the rate of inflation and not take away increments.

He paid a particular tribute to activists in Probation who, he said, were dedicated and committed: 'Without you there would be no union.'

National Probation Committee chair Matthew Lay warned that with financial cutbacks the Probation Service could be facing 5,000 job cuts. It was 'devastating news' that could affect the improvements already made.

'Few public services can point to the level of improvements, year on year achieved in Probation.'

'The Government thankfully came up with additional money and performance continued to improve so I hope it will have the foresight to do so again.'

Matthew also warned that the National Offender Management Service had a preference to run probation along the lines of the prison service: 'It is a uniformed, militaristic command culture alien to many of us.'

In plenary: delegates listening to Dave Prentis



# UNISON recognises Elaine's excellence

Meniere's Disease led to progressive hearing difficulties, and UNISON member Elaine Turbill saw conventional career opportunities dwindle. But UNISON's support, encouragement and need for talent helped her find a new focus and make a significant contribution

'UNISON offered a chance to excel'.

That is probably one of the best reasons to get involved in the union's work – at any level. The testimony comes from Elaine Turbill who works in administration in the West Midlands Probation Service.

The union's policy and practice on equal opportunities was the bedrock of her development.

'I went to the disabled members' conference in 2004 and it was wonderful. It was the first time (since I had Meniere's) that I did not feel disabled.'

With confidence building, Elaine took on her passion for health and safety and became a rep. She compares UNISON's support with traditional workplace attitudes to the disabled: 'In lots of places they would push you aside. But the union encouraged me, sent me on training and gave me a life. I could keep growing and realise some ambitions.'

She felt moved to become a health and safety rep because she recognised the shortage of volunteers in the branch and felt a 'passionate concern' for better

standards. She has been a health and safety rep for five years and has seen big improvements in that time.

'When I first started there was some overcrowding and some poor practice – staff were standing on desks to open windows and there were concerns about vermin and ants.'

Since then her office has moved to new, more spacious premises and these issues are not a problem. But Elaine recognises that health and safety is always a work in progress and it is partly to do with changing attitudes.

'I am 54, working part-time and I have health problems. But this has made me a stronger person and I will raise health and safety concerns. There are many younger people, concerned about their career and their job, who think raising health and safety will be seen as "making a fuss".'

And she is also concerned that many are deterred from taking on the rep's job because of the lack of facility time.

Nevertheless she can see the difference in both facilities and attitudes in recent



years: 'I have sat on health and safety committees with NAPO and there is a strong push to improve safety and wellbeing. Recently, the local manager has been talking to me about more meetings to look at issues.'

Elaine's common sense has helped make a difference but her story also recognises that the empowerment, which UNISON offers, plays a big part in people's working lives.

## Justice week rallies staff under pressure

UNISON and other trade unions organised a week of action and campaigning activities in December, styled as 'Justice Week'.

As part of Justice Week, all the justice unions organised a mass lobby of parliament. Labour backbench MPs booked rooms in the House of Commons to accommodate lobbyists.

UNISON invited speakers to address lobbyists, including MPs and Peers from all parties, pressure groups, academics and others who support the principles behind Justice Week. Representatives from the Police Federation were also invited to speak at the meetings.

The action was planned because of the common threats faced by all the unions and associations. Workers across the justice sector are experiencing below inflation pay offers, soaring workloads, cuts to budgets and privatisation.

Staff pointed out to parliamentarians, at a rally in the House of Commons in June, that the justice system was facing 'meltdown'.



## Why join UNISON in the probation service?

- more members mean a stronger union able to defend your job and the probation service
- UNISON is campaigning on a wide range of probation issues that affect you in the workplace, including privatisation, role boundaries, workloads, unpaid work, equality and health and safety hazards
- you will have the strength of Britain's biggest union supporting you
- you will receive expert representation on workplace issues.



If you require further information or wish to join UNISON, call  
0845 355 0845 (Textphone)  
0800 0 967 968 (Text Tel)

Lines open from 6am to midnight, Monday-Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday. Alternatively visit UNISON's website [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

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