



Joint Ambulance Trade Union Statement

1 September 2017

Newly Qualified Paramedic Update

In December 2016, employers and trade unions signed up to a new national agreement to move paramedics into Agenda for Change band 6. Part of this agreement was to create a Newly Qualified Paramedic (NQP) role with the implementation date retrospectively applied to all paramedics employed after 1 September 2016.

UNISON, GMB and Unite have continued to engage with employers, representing the views and frustrations of all NQPs – beginning with a two day joint NQP event in November 2016 where the NQP programme was developed and the principle of a Fast Track Process was agreed.

Recently we have become increasingly concerned about the ability of employers to reach a national agreement on a Fast Track Process. This notice is being sent to all affected staff to inform them that, on the effective anniversary of the implementation of the NQP role, we have written to employers to reject their latest offer on Fast Track. We need to explain what our concerns are and why we have taken this decision.

Retrospective application

Many union members have contacted us with concerns about the way in which the national banding agreement was retrospectively applied to the 1 September 2016. Our response has been that, whilst this was far from ideal, it was a red line in negotiations and therefore required agreement to secure the banding agreement to achieve band 6 for existing paramedics and for NQPs after a maximum of 24 months. In the event that we did not reach agreement, the move to band 6 may not have happened when it did.

However, since then we have been campaigning for those staff who were retrospectively applied to the NQP role to have their cases heard on a local level within each service and have been applying pressure to the national Fast Track Process talks to get the unique experience gained during the period from 1 September 2016 to 1 April 2017 as “relevant” and “weighted” evidence towards meeting the competencies of the NQP programme. We also requested that employers guarantee all NQPs in this group, who can demonstrate the evidence, a review under the fast track scheme no later than their 12 month review.

In earlier correspondence, we had suggested removing the retrospective application date of the national agreement. Employers were not able to agree to change the national agreement but agreed to the request for a 12 month review. In the latest offer from employers they have suggested offering the review at 12 months for those employed between 2 September and 31 December 2016 and only offering those NQPs to end their programme at 18 months – 6 months later than we expected.

The Fast Track Process

In correspondence with employers we have agreed a number of concessions to the eligibility criteria for the Fast Track Process. However, we have not been able to agree one final point and therefore we have reached an impasse. They are holding that in order to Fast Track, NQPs “*should be able to evidence prior experience of mentoring (i.e. a practice education role) in a clinical setting.*” We believe that the effect of this criteria will be to prevent many NQPs, especially those taking an internal progression route, being able to fast track – despite being able to demonstrate fully meeting the other Consolidation of Learning competencies.



We should be clear that we are not arguing for a drop in quality in the NQP programme, rather that experience of mentoring can be gained without the need to be in a formal practice educator role and that the mentorship module can be delivered earlier in the NQP programme, or once in the band 6 role.

Funding

The other reason that employers have been unable to change their position on the Fast Track Scheme is that there is no central funding for NQPs who fast track, meaning there is a financial pressure on individual services to pay band 6 earlier than 24 months. Employers have stated that this is not their primary concern but we are also aware of the challenges employers are facing in securing ongoing funding from NHS England for band 6 in future years.

Inconsistent NQP programme implementation

The aims of the NQP programme are to provide a structured programme to properly integrate and support the newly qualified paramedic in their transition to an effective, confident and fully autonomous band 6 clinician. In early 2017, ambulance employers requested some time to develop and implement the NQP support programme in each service. The request was to allow until 1 April 2017, to have in place the systems for support (preceptorship, clinical advice etc) and clarity on the difference in autonomy between the band 5 and band 6 roles.

The failure of many ambulance services to make the distinction between the band 5 and band 6 roles has created a feeling of resentment amongst this affected group, many of whom are rightly asking what the difference between the roles in skill, autonomy and practice actually is, meaning they feel they are in band 5 unreasonably.

We have written to employers to warn them that, due to inconsistent implementation of the NQP programme, in many services NQPs are being deployed alongside other paramedic colleagues but not being paid equally. The recent news that in Scotland all paramedics will qualify and move straight into band 6, without an NQP period, puts further pressure on our national agreement.

With the above in mind, we believe we have a number of outstanding issues that need to be resolved

1. Inconsistent application of NQP programme by English Ambulance Services
2. Many NQPs working as full paramedics without the programme support
3. No functional fast track scheme in place

We would still be open to making an agreement for future cohorts of NQPs but we must find a more urgent approach to those that have been adversely affected by the inconsistent application of the national agreement, despite the best attempts of our local staff sides to encourage implementation.

We are now at a point where some staff have reached their 12 month anniversary as an NQP and we need to communicate our reasons for not reaching agreement on a fast track process. The proposal from the employers falls below expectations and therefore we are not able to enter into an unsatisfactory agreement on behalf of our members.

We will now review whether our efforts would be best applied to supporting our branches to engage in their local dispute procedures to support members in highlighting the lack of progress against the NQP programme and the national principles we all signed up to last year.

We will keep you informed of progress and thank you all for your ongoing support.

Our collective voice is strong. Working together we make a difference

GMB

UNISON

Unite