

# the grapevine

## Technician Proposal

As you will all know the Trust approached our branch to request a resolution to the outstanding technician banding issue that has affected both our old Trusts since the adoption of Agenda for Change terms and conditions in October 2004.

This led to negotiations around ways in which we could recognise the technician role and achieve band 5. In order to achieve this proposal your branch had to drop its original objection to the old technician role being in band 4.

We began negotiations during 2009 with a ballot run from 28th October to 23rd November 2009. 396 Ballot papers were sent out. The return rate for the ballot was an amazing 86.62%!

This means that the ballot has been accepted by the members and we have written to the Trust to confirm this and let them know to make the necessary payments.

We also wanted to say a thank you to all the original authors of the JAQ's (Job Analysis Questionnaires) that meant the appeal was successfully lodged. Without the hard work of these people the collective bargaining would not have been so successful so thank you from the branch.

We would like to assure all technicians and advanced technicians that we are still working with the Trust to ensure your continued development and raising the issue of paramedic courses. This work is ongoing.

**If you are retired member and have not yet claimed your missed opportunity payment then please visit our website where you can download a template letter to send to SWAST.**

## Education and Development Grants Available



This is a reminder to members that there are grants available to members to help with the costs of education, courses and books to aid personal development. We want to give something back to our members so that they can develop themselves. To apply for one of these grants please see your sector secretary. Each application will be reviewed on a case by case basis.



### BALLOT RESULTS

**96.79% returning a yes vote**  
**2.91% returning a no vote**  
**0.30% spoilt voting papers**

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## NHS Direct Sector

NHS Direct is a sector with South Western Ambulance Branch and covers a large area with multiple workplaces. There is a lot of organisational change taking place at the moment and members are concerned about redundancies and redeployments. We would like to reassure our members that we have representatives who are there to speak to should you be placed at risk and offer practical advice and support.

## Devon Doctors Sector

Our Devon Doctors members have recently nominated 3 new reps to help them support and develop the services.

Mike, Sue and Anja are new reps and are now part way through their UNISON course. As a branch we are grateful to these 3 who have shown a real enthusiasm for getting the workplace active.

They have been instrumental in negotiating a 2 year pay award with Devon Doctors, getting regular meetings with management to discuss workplace issues early on behalf of their members and finding out how the Union works. Thank you to all of you for your hard work and support.

## Clinical Hub Sector

As many of you will be feeling the performance pressures we are all under it is worth remembering our members in control who are always being performance managed and audited to ensure they are performing to the high standard set by the Trust.

There are also lots of changes going on within the control room and we want to reassure our control members that we will always support you as a branch and fight any changes that effect your terms and conditions or future employment.

# Who's Driving?

We want to inform members of a number of incidents where paramedic members have left ECA's in the back of the ambulance with a patient and subsequently faced disciplinary investigations.

There are no strict rules covering this practice but staff must be mindful of their professional registration when leaving a less qualified crew member in the back on journeys to hospital. It is absolutely essential that you record your rationale in a good



patient record as this may form part of your defence should that decision be challenged. It is not uncommon to see a very basic CR1 which was not completed by the paramedic

and is then used as evidence. All professionally registered individuals should be mindful that they may be called to their registrant bodies to answer allegations as well as face investigation by the Trust. Make sure that the decisions you make are easily justified and if you are in any doubt then go in the back.

## Meal Breaks Grievance

Members everywhere are experiencing difficulties with their meal breaks. This is especially relevant to Dorset members who regularly have late first breaks and miss second breaks. The branch has received a reply to the grievance sent to John Dyer about meal break concerns and is now in negotiations with management to try and overcome the issues with meal breaks that affect our members. At our recent branch exec it was decided that we need to

keep pressure on the Trust and put into procedure our member's frustrations about meal breaks. We all know that our job will inevitably involve the odd missed or late break, but worryingly, this trend is happening more frequently.

Our negotiations are continuing well with a stage III hearing date now set for 28th April 2010. It is hoped that we can reach agreement with the Trust on meal breaks before this date.

# CONFLICT OF INTEREST

***The Trust recently asked us to agree a conflict of interest policy at the PPPG. We took this policy to our branch executive committee for discussion. The reality is that sometimes relationships can lead to a conflict of interest.***

This could come from a friend who has a business which is in direct competition with the Trust, a line manager and subordinate relationship or it could be in the form of a relationship with a patient. This new policy is there to give guidance on what to do should you feel there is a conflict of interest. Essentially the Trust would like you to report this to them so they can make a judgement on whether there is a conflict. The extent of this policy is yet to be seen and at this stage your branch is refusing to

agree the policy. There are many members who are in relationships across the Trust and we feel that this is your human right to a private life.

There are those, however, whose relationships may be reportable under the new policy and have a possible conflict of interest so we want to remain impartial and able to represent members when needed. If you are concerned and want a confidential chat then please contact the branch for advice on your next steps.

## Where are you now?

This is a reminder for all members that we need your details to be correct. This could be for sending you relevant information or to do with a ballot. If you have moved base station, been promoted, demoted or simply moved into another post then we need to know.

Please could I ask all our members to check with UNISON Direct on 0845 355 0845 or our membership secretary, Dick Pound [richard@pound.eclipse.co.uk](mailto:richard@pound.eclipse.co.uk)

and make sure the details we hold are correct.

We would also like to urge all members to check their payslips to ensure their deductions for UNISON subscriptions are coming out each month. We have had a number of people approach the branch for help in the belief they are members but we have been unable to help them. It is your responsibility to ensure you keep up regular payments.

## More Reps Please

We are currently looking for reps in **North Devon, West Somerset and West Cornwall.**

There are many varied roles and training to develop yourself. It is not always necessary to be the stereotypical workplace steward. There are education, equalities, health & safety opportunities to name but a few. Please go to our website to download a nomination form and get active. Remember that if there are no reps in your area you are missing out on important news and protection for members should they need us.

## ECA Workplace Plan

We met with the Trust on 29th January for a special JNCC to discuss a proposed workforce plan that the Trust have developed. This plan will see a conversion of ECA's to Student Paramedics and will include a career pathway which will be accessible to all staff. This will involve the Open University path to becoming a paramedic. Our branch has looked through the workforce plan, and whilst we are happy to see a career pathway for our members, we remain concerned about a few issues such as the utilisation of Student Paramedics and payment for staff during the training. We also want to focus on the quality of care that can be delivered by this new grade of staff and their freedom to act autonomously. We have submitted a stage III grievance against the proposed plans with a hearing date of 28th April. This will compliment UNISON's national strategy which can be seen at [www.unison.org.uk/file/A9446%20ECAUNISONbulletin250909.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/file/A9446%20ECAUNISONbulletin250909.pdf)

We will update you via our website on any news.

# AGM Report



Thank you to all those members that made the journey to our AGM in Taunton in March. We had a packed room full of all our members from SWAST, Devon Docs and NHS Direct. It was a very productive meeting and we would like to welcome some new reps and officers into their posts.

**Branch Chair** – Ian Knight  
**Vice Chair** – Mike Berridge  
**Branch Secretary** – Alan Lofthouse  
**Asst Branch Secretary** – Simon Moss  
**Branch Treasurer** – Graham Rowland  
**Branch Welfare Officer** – Pete Hornsby  
**Branch Communications Officers** –  
Andrew Stiling & Rob Horton  
**Branch Education Co-ordinator** –  
Ursula Beatty  
**Branch Equalities Co-ordinator** –  
Sal Field  
**Branch H&S Officer** –  
Paul Short & Gordon Bailey  
**Branch Membership Officer** –  
Dick Pound  
**Branch Retired Members Secretaries** –  
Steve Gazzard & Tom Louis

We would also like to mention the new reps that we have:

**Gary Hatton** –  
Dorset Sector Secretary - Poole

**Andrew Stevens** – Clinical Hub East  
**Michelle Goodman** – NHS Direct - Exeter  
**Marc Moyle** – Exeter  
**Huw Jones** – Torquay  
**Mark Bradford** – Exmouth  
**Nick Dalton** – Bournemouth  
**John Shaddick** – Barnstaple  
**Sue Newsome** – Devon Docs  
**Mike Newton** – Devon Docs  
**Anja Burgess** – Devon Docs  
**Michelle Axtel** – ULR Poole  
**Gary Chant** – Blandford  
**Rich Smith** – Dorchester

These compliment our reps already in place on stations and workplaces around the branch and I'm sure you'll join us in thanking these members for coming forward to represent you in your workplaces. If your workplace is not covered then please contact the branch or download a nomination form to get active.

## Branch Website

Soon our branch will be updating our website thanks to the help of one of our members. We want the website to look fresh and have relevant up to date information for members. Please let us know what you want to see on the website by emailing the branch at [sw-amb@ntlworld.com](mailto:sw-amb@ntlworld.com)

## Union Learning Reps

We have just had a new Union Learning Rep (ULR) trained and would like to promote the work of these important reps. A ULR is someone trained in workplace learning and has an understanding of what an employer should be doing with regards to your learning and development. They can signpost services and help with negotiations around time off to access education.

UNISON has a partnership with the Open University which gives all unison members 10% off OU courses. There are also bursaries available to undertake some learning from UNISON and they can help you access these. Remember that learning is something that we do all our lives and sometimes going back after many years away can be a daunting prospect. Our ULR's will give specialist help and advice. Anyone thinking of taking on this role please see your sector secretary or our new educational co-ordinator.



## TOIL or Overtime?

Members are asking questions about Time off in Lieu (T.O.I.L) and how it is managed. Most of us are on contracts that are 37.5 hours per week. For operational staff seeing an increase in late finishes and missed meal breaks this means an increase in hours. Most staff put in for overtime payments when this happens but it is important to know that you can request T.O.I.L instead of claiming overtime. If you are unable to have the T.O.I.L due to operational reasons within three months this must be paid to you at overtime rate. We feel that if staff applied for T.O.I.L, instead of overtime, that this may help put pressure on the management to reduce missed breaks and late finishes. Agreeing T.O.I.L should be done in the same way as leave, in agreement between employee and line manager.

# Sickness Absence

As reported in the last Grapevine, the Trust had proposed a new sickness policy. We have rejected this policy on the following points:

- *there is one less review period,*
- *there are less review periods available to have your representative with you,*
- *the minimum attendance levels of sickness have been lowered from 4 to 3 in a rolling 12 months,*
- *and they are proposing the removal of the payment for phased return to work negotiated by your branch.*

Our branch executive feels that this is a degradation of your terms and conditions

and have opposed this change. At the same time we are under increasing pressure due to a trend of increased sickness levels. We have informed the Trust that more needs to be done concerning the root causes of sickness before we can agree to a change in the policy.

We can now confirm that the Trust have agreed not to make changes to the sickness policy so it remains the same. However, they recognise a need to manage the sickness absence to reduce it. We support proper sickness management where staff are encouraged and supported to return to work as soon as possible but we need to keep the pressure

on employers to make the work environment safer and report any hazards so they can be risk assessed and controls put into place.

It can be a worrying time during a sickness review so we would urge you to contact your nearest rep, if you are facing a formal meeting, to ensure you get the most out of the process.

We are about to see the introduction of a fit note system which will focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do. These new changes came into force on 6<sup>th</sup> April so we will be keeping a close eye on what effects this has. There is lots of information out there so please look into it and make sure you know how this affects you.

## Social Networking Websites



**A word of caution for staff that use Facebook, the social networking site, or similar websites:**

*Please remember that whilst on sites like this you are still responsible for the things you say and do. If someone is offended by comments made on the site then you could face potential disciplinary action. Please read the Trust ICT User policy for more information.*

**Stay safe, have fun and be careful!**

## Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA)

Members who have access to children or vulnerable adults will soon have to apply to the ISA to be registered. This covers most ambulance staff and UNISON has concerns about how this will affect its members. The Vetting and Barring Scheme aims to prevent unsuitable people from undertaking certain paid or volunteer work with

children or vulnerable adults ('regulated activity'). It will do this by vetting all those who wish to work with vulnerable groups and barring those where the information shows they pose a risk of harm and (in due course) vetting those who wish to do certain other types of work ('controlled activity'). The fee will be £64 which is

a one off payment and is transferable between employers. The advanced CRB element will still be in place and SWAST has already agreed to fund this element. We are concerned that the registration fee will proportionally affect lower paid staff and those with HPC registrations will find themselves paying duplicate registrations.

The new regulations will only be applicable to new starters from April 2010 but all staff will have to be registered by 1st April 2011.

More information is available at our website or [www.isa-gov.org.uk](http://www.isa-gov.org.uk)



Independent Safeguarding Authority

## UNISON Professional Services Unit

UNISON has now got its professional services unit in good shape following the appointment of Sam Oestreicher, previously lead ambulance officer for UNISON ambulance sector. We are sorry that Sam has left the sector but he is now in a great position to help those members who have the daunting task of facing the HPC at a hearing. As part of your membership, and case dependant, you get the services of this unit to help and support you through the process. Many members are not aware that at an HPC hearing you will see barristers presenting the case. Non members either have to pay a barrister or represent themselves. As a UNISON member you get the support of the largest public service union. Recruit a friend who isn't as well protected as you. You are doing them a favour!

## Charities Supported through SWAMB

We are looking for nominations for charities to make an annual donation to.

We would like the charities to be related to the ambulance service, communities or trade unions either locally, nationally or internationally. Please email suggestions to [sw-amb@ntlworld.com](mailto:sw-amb@ntlworld.com)



# Contacting the Press

**RECENTLY** there have been a few occasions when members of staff have approached the press about an incident they believe needs highlighting to the public. This can cause the media to put their own spin on incidents and can have a negative effect on the public's perception of us. It can also lead to a breach of contract and you could find yourself facing disciplinary action. There are other ways to disclose these incidents and

you are protected from any detrimental treatment under the Public Disclosure Act. The Trust has a whistle blowing policy which details how to go about making a disclosure and we have the assurance of the Chief Executive that he wants an open culture where staff are encouraged to report concerns. We know the difficulties involved and will support any member through a disclosure or grievance relating to their work.

# Change to Protect

**UNISON and your Branch are acutely aware of the financial crisis which the country and in particular the NHS finds itself in. The reality of reduced funding, increased productivity and efficiency are now bywords for the NHS.**

As you will all have seen in the Trusts Special Bulletin, our Trust has outlined its 5 year plan designed to address the financial deficit it now finds itself in. As with all other NHS Trusts, in order to save money our Trust will be looking for efficiency savings coupled with increased productivity whilst maintaining our excellent record. The Trust has expressed its intent to stay away from any job losses rather to recoup savings from other areas.

Whilst there are no firm proposals at the moment, the impact will be felt by all staff, whether frontline or clerical. Your Branch will, as always seek to

protect and represent the interest of all our members and will always listen to your views and ideas, but most importantly we will be led by your wishes.

It has always been our view that we need to work in partnership with the Trust as it results in a better understanding of both sides and means we can influence any changes or decisions. We feel at this important time, partnership working is essential as without it we cannot effectively protect your interests and ensure any changes are fairly implemented.

We will now enter into discussions with the Trust and when any proposals are forthcoming we will seek your views and opinions before any agreement is reached. If you have any concerns or questions, please ask your local stewards and we will keep you informed of any further developments via the Grapevine.

# FT or not FT, that is the question

Our members are contacting the branch about the recent developments in FT. The consultation period is now over and the Trust are about to apply for FT status. This involves some considerable work with the secretary of state and our SHA to ensure we are fit to be a Foundation Trust. This process will take until at least September to complete.

Part of the process of becoming an FT is to have enough members to make the Trust representative and well governed in all its constituent parts. As part of this process, and as the letter from the Chair attached to last month's payslip states, they have automatically opted in all staff. This has caused some concern and has led to many members asking what is their Branch's view and standpoint on FT.

UNISON remains opposed to FT nationally but on a local level we recognise the need to be involved and represent our member's views on this important issue. FT does have some good aspects such as the business planning for 5

years and better governance arrangements. In some Trusts around the country branches have seen the in-sourcing of services previously outsourced.

We have assurances from the Trust on issues such as A4C and pay awards and these are available from our website. There is also a memorandum of understanding in the back of the Trade Union Facilities agreement available on the intranet.

The choice of whether to stay a member of FT is an individual one. There have been staff and stations that have taken the view to opt out due to a "disconnect" between the Trust's direction and their perceptions of where the Trust should be heading. At this stage we are not recommending our members to leave FT but we would encourage you all to use the rights and freedoms to access Trust information and look into the issues.

We have some fairly large workforce issues ongoing at the moment and we are trying to work in partnership with the Trust to overcome these issues. If we feel that the Trust does not have our members best interests at heart then we may change our stance.

## Points of contact

UNISON direct  
0845 355 0845

**Ian Knight**  
Chairman 07866 254 106

**Alan Lofthouse**  
Branch Secretary  
07773 034 636

**Simon Moss**  
Assistant Branch Secretary  
07989 832 611

**Sal Field**  
Cornwall Sector Secretary,  
Equalities Co-ordinator  
07779 318 574

**Ursula Beatty**  
Education Co-ordinator  
07968 694 035

**Richard Woodyatt**  
Control & Admin Sector  
Secretary 07716 574 850

**Dave Phillips**  
Somerset Sector Secretary  
01373 453 356

**Gary Hatton**  
Dorset Sector Secretary  
07979 2344222

**Richard Pound**  
NE Devon Sector Secretary  
07759 839 895

**Mike Berridge**  
Plymouth Sector Secretary  
07877 578 789

**Pete Hornsby**  
Welfare Officer  
07870 841 232

**Paul Short**  
H&S Officer  
07772 625 817

[www.swamb.com](http://www.swamb.com)

## Tax Relief Through UNISON

Overleaf is a template letter, which you can also download from our website, to send to your local tax office to claim the tax back on your UNISON subscription, the cost of laundering your uniform (for ambulance staff, if your employer doesn't provide

facilities) and a professional subscription such as HPC fees.

Please see your sector secretary for more advice or contact your local tax office. More can be found at [www.swamb.com](http://www.swamb.com) and [www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/taxrelief.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/healthcare/taxrelief.asp)

To:  
HM Inspector of Taxes  
HMRC  
Plymouth Office  
Penhaligon House  
Trinity Street  
St Austel  
Cornwall  
PL 25 5BG

Home Address

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Employers Tax Reference**

470/D9884

**Employer**

South Western Ambulance Service  
Abbey Court  
Eagle Way  
Exeter  
EX2 7HY

**National Insurance Number**

**Payroll Number**

Dear Sirs,

I have been employed with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust since  
As a condition of my employment I am required to wear the uniform that they provide.  
The garments issued include the crown badge of H.R.H (Ambulance Service U.K) and the NHS logo.

- I claim the amount of Tax Relief agreed for Ambulance Workers working for an employer, to cover the cost of Laundering my Uniform, please amend my PAYE code to allow for this cost. I believe that the (free application for this tax year is £140.
- I work as an Ambulance worker
- I have to wear a uniform as part of my employment and they are worn by me only
- I have to bear the cost of laundering my uniform
- I have not already claimed this cost and my employer does not provide laundering services
  
- I claim tax Relief on my Professional Registration fee charged in the amount of £ \_\_\_\_\_
- I claim tax relief on my Union fees paid during the year in the amount of £ \_\_\_\_\_

Accordingly I would like to claim these concessions, and any outstanding since my appointment

Surname

First Name

Signature \_\_\_\_\_