

Pay 2005 - Apples and Pears

Someone once taught me that the role of the Cavalry on the battlefield is to add a sense of decorum to proceedings which the infantry would otherwise reduce to an unseemly brawl.

Well the current respective positions on pay may not be a battle quite yet, but it is important that we retain a sense of decorum whilst we wait for the results of the unions' ballots. Therefore despite the obvious temptation of HR's latest Pay Notice No 6 (2005), I do not intend to either revisit or continue the pay negotiations through email, trading who did or didn't say what to whom in any particular meeting; nor to rise to the obvious bait of HMRC staff suddenly becoming 'specialists' and consequently somehow worthy of their higher salaries. That would simply bring a plague on both our houses, and end up like some pre-season panto based on 'oh yes you did' and 'oh no we didn't'!

I should however (as I intended to do this week anyway) like to clarify something of the trade unions' position with regard to benchmarking.

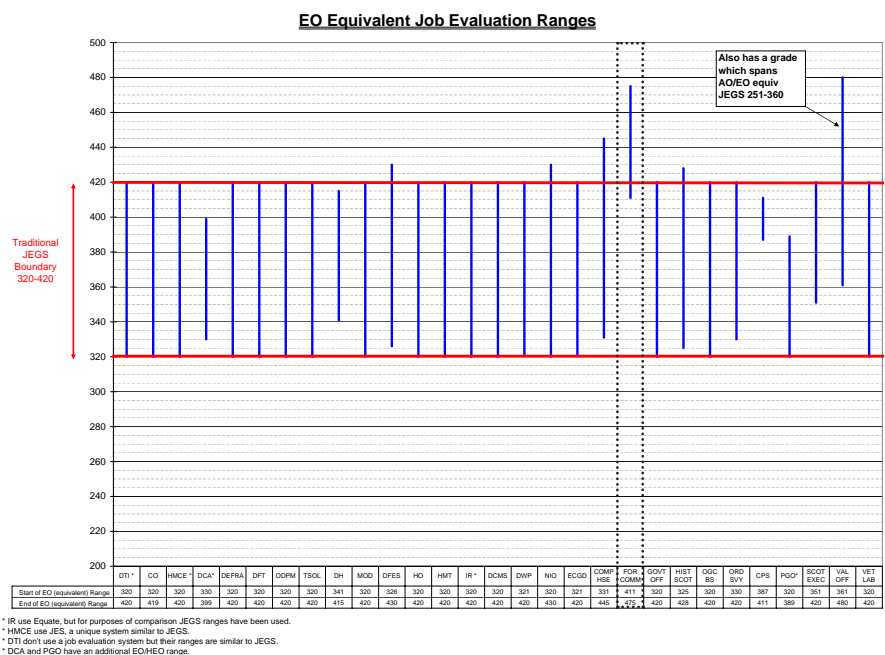
Benchmarking

Benchmarking the Forestry Commission against other government departments or the private sector is a perfectly legitimate process; but it is not a simple one if it is to be done right. Therefore when, at the end of the last (2004) pay negotiations, HR issued their final notice (Pay Notice 1 (2005)) which stated that one of HR's principles was 'improving our benchmarking of FC salaries with external pay levels', the unions had no basic problem and we suggested that we work together on it over the summer.

The reason for trying to work together on this is that with over 200 separate bargaining areas in the Civil Service alone it is all too easy for any one side to cherry-pick one, two or even thirty six comparators to support any point they want to make. Leaving aside the question of against whom you benchmark, you also have to ask how you do it? Do you look at band minima, band maxima, spine points, target salaries, average salaries, progression times, annual leave or maternity leave; and what constitutes a significant variation which justifies corrective action? It's the old adage of lies, damn lies and statistics: both sides can do it but unless we do it together it gets us nowhere. Unless both sides in a negotiation agree precisely how comparisons will be made at the outset the comparisons are worthless: whether you use Croner the Cabinet Office or anyone else's data, both sides just end up trading figures which the other party will not accept.

Grading Structures

The further complication is that thanks to the wonders of delegated grading and pay systems, it is no longer the case that jobs of a particular level will fall into the same pay band in different government departments; in other words what constitutes a pay band five job in one department might form a pay band four or six job in another. Consequently to try and compare salary figures from different departments without looking at the underlying grading structure is like trying to compare apples and pears.



We know that the FC has a different grading structure from DEFRA and in turn both are different from the Scottish Executive.

Illustrating this point are three graphs from PCS, but produced by the Cabinet Office, whom according to HR at least are independent. These show the relative weight of our scales against other government departments. I have chosen to include the EO, HEO and SEO scales, but they are available for all of the other traditional pay bands. The graphs speak for themselves.

Now as HR Pay Notice No 6 quite rightly points out it *is* 'difficult' to compare job scores across departments. But if this is the case it is no excuse to simply ignore the problem and look at the salary figures in isolation. That it is difficult is not a reason for not bothering, but rather one for working harder, working together and doing the job right.

So the bottom line to all of this is that I stick by my view that simply picking salary comparators and ignoring grading structures is to compare apples and pears; and stating that maintaining the value of our pay scales and pensions would 'boost already higher salaries' is misleading and bogus.

Union Recommendation

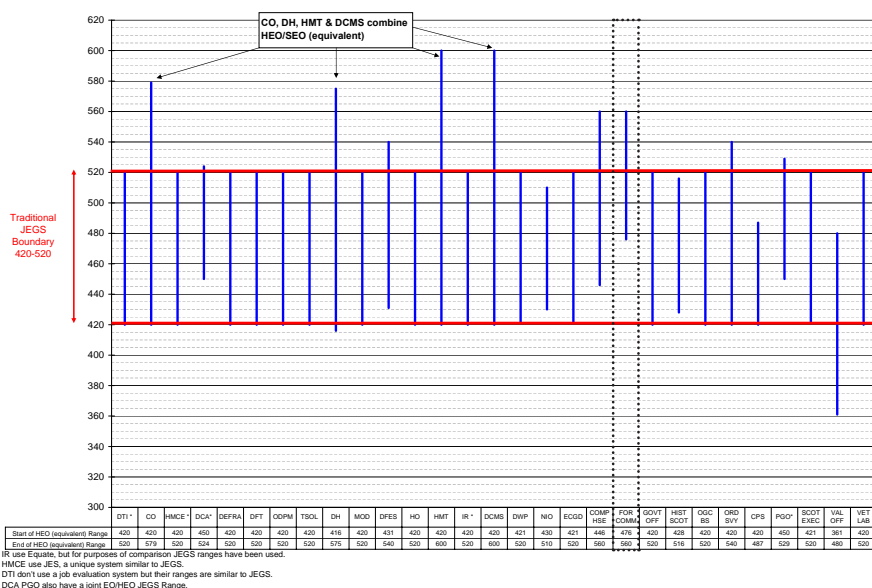
As stated in our previous *logBook*, in all our pay negotiations we have tried to balance what is affordable and possible for the Commission alongside what is fair and justified for all of us as union members. In previous years we have reluctantly accepted the freezing of band maxima because the FC couldn't afford to increase these as well as implement pay progression. We have also reluctantly accepted the discriminatory and de-motivating performance pay system because we know that management are locked into this by the Cabinet Office.

However the issues this year are nothing to do with affordability or external edicts. It is simply the case that the FC management team have used bogus evidence to justify reducing the value of our pay scales and pensions.

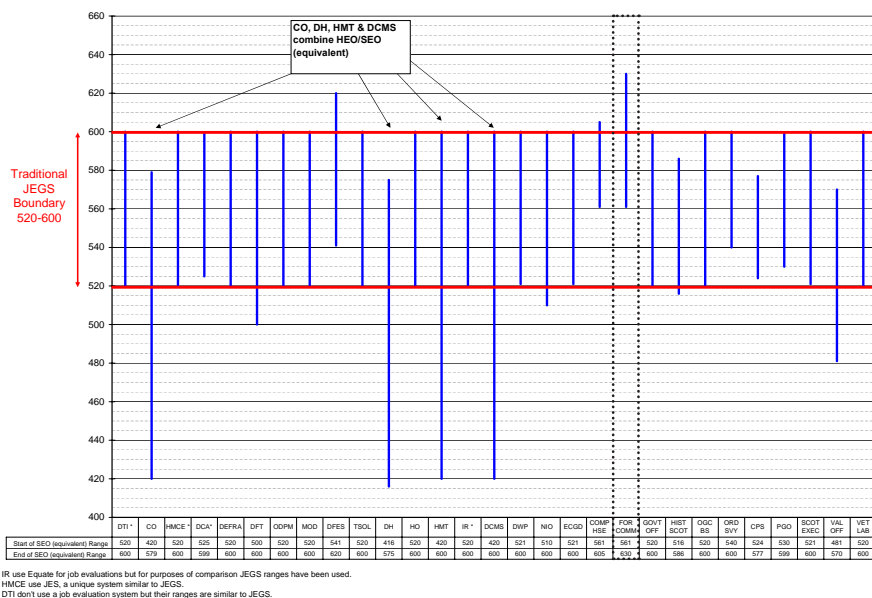
We believe that all members should stand firm and say NO to the reduction in the value of all our pay scales, NO to the reduction to the value of all our pensions. Vote NO to this pay offer.

Edward Shephard
Secretary
25th October 2005

HEO Equivalent Job Evaluation Ranges



SEO Equivalent Job Evaluation Ranges



Contact Details

Enquiries should be directed to Sue Gillingwater or Fiona Hopkins via:

Forestry Commission Trade Unions,
231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh,
EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 314 6195.
Fax: 0131 316 4822.
Email: unions@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Intranet links

If you don't have access to the FC's intranet and would like copies of any of the documents referred to in this update then please speak to your local rep or contact the FCTU office.