



THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE TEACHER

NEWSLETTER OF THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE DIVISION NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS ~ DECEMBER 2002

Divisional Secretary **Andy Johnson** writes:

Time for SATs to go!

Supporting our members

Much of the Union's work in and around the County involves supporting members facing difficulties at work. Those difficulties can be many and varied. If you are facing problems, we would advise you to contact us sooner rather than later as matters are more easily resolved if addressed early.

Gloucestershire NUT's Guidance for Primary School teachers on planning

was sent to the NUT representative in every primary school in the County. If you are an NUT rep in a Primary School did you receive yours? The next step is to send one to every primary school NUT member.

"You don't fatten a pig by weighing it"

This was one of the first catchphrases of the campaign against testing for seven year olds when SATs were introduced, over a decade ago, by the Thatcher government. Now, fourteen years later, the down-to-earth wisdom of this saying is being consistently borne out in the mounting evidence from many quarters of the futility of tests as an indicator of children's learning, and of the damage being inflicted on some children in the name of education. Teaching to the test is so prevalent that even those in charge of the curriculum at government level are concerned about the squeezing out of creativity. Schools - are locked into a punishing regime governed by the league tables created by testing.

It's time for SAT's to go, time for teachers to stop passing the pressures onto children, time for parents to recognise the difference between government educational spin and real learning. It's time to stop this test driven, number - crunching madness.

It's not the cheating in tests, which may be more widespread than people believe, which is annoying but the monumental waste of teaching time and emotional energy for children and teachers that takes place in the run up to SAT's. For the most part it's not about education, it concerns getting children and schools to jump through hoops. Of course, some hoops are useful - GCSE's and other similar qualifications can help get you a job or a college place. But SAT's simply concern government targets. If schools are not reaching those targets (eg more Level Fours in year 6) there's always OFSTED to punish them.

If too many schools are not reaching those targets, and it looks as if the government is in trouble, we get something really cynical like Booster Classes. They're not about giving a boost to children who really need it - they are for a specific group, those just below the targeted borderline for their year group e.g. level threes for KS2. They can have extra tuition - often out of school hours. The government can find money for this but continues to leave provision for children with special educational needs starved of resources.

Fixed Term Contracts – new legal rights

Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment Regulations are now in force which give fixed term employees the right:

- not to be treated less favourably than comparable permanent employees unless any discrimination is justified;
- to convert to a permanent contract after four years;
- to be informed of permanent vacancies and to be offered training.

The regulations also provide that any redundancy waiver clause in a fixed term contract which is agreed, extended or renewed after 1st October 2002, will be invalid.

NOF ICT TRAINING 2002/3

The purpose of this article is to bring to your attention a change in the arrangements for New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT training in 2002 – 2003.

Schools' agreements with training providers had to be signed by March 2002 (that hasn't changed) and originally the training had to be completed by March 2003. The New Opportunities Fund website, www.nof.org.uk, now states, however, that teachers do not have to have completed their training until December 2003, offering teachers greater flexibility when deciding the actual starting date of their training.

NOF has advised the Union that if schools have previously overbooked NOF ICT courses (for example, places were booked for ten teachers and only eight attended) they should be able to claim the funding for those extra places back from their LEA and use it to provide training for staff who have not yet undertaken it. Schools continue to be required to notify NOF by e-mail, to ict@nof.org.uk, of their training arrangements.

As the NOF funding received by LEAs is solely for the purpose of the ICT training and cannot be retained, any unspent NOF funding should be made available to schools to ensure that any teachers who have not yet received the training can do so. NOF will reclaim any ICT funding not used by LEAs after 31 March 2003.

DEVOLUTION OF SEN FUNDING

The devolution of SEN funding to schools has been piloted in a few secondary schools. This is money for statements of special educational needs previously funded by the LEA. Reports back to the LEA from the head teachers of the schools involved in the pilot have been favourable. As a result, delegation of funds to all secondary schools will commence from 1st April 2003.

Head-teachers of primary schools have many more concerns. Smaller primaries are unlikely to receive sufficient funding under a formulaic approach to meet the needs of one child. A working party of representative heads and LEA officers will be established to look into the following issues:

1. Is there any point in delegating or should the money continue to be held centrally as at present?
2. If the money is to be delegated, what would be the most appropriate basis for doing so?
3. What safeguarding procedures will be effective?

If you have any views your Divisional Secretary would be happy to know of them.

THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE TEACHER

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Members articles/letters welcomed

Upper Pay Scale Level 2

Information and guidance has already been distributed by the Union nationally so this is simply a reinforcement of that message and a reminder to you that if your head teacher/line manager isn't conforming to the Union's guidelines you need to let us know.

The Union's advice is simple. The only criteria for progression on the Upper Pay Spine are those contained within the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 2002. There are two criteria to be found there (paragraph 17.4 page 37):

- a) *there has first been a review of the performance of the post-threshold teacher; and*
- b) *the achievements of the post-threshold teacher and his contribution to the school or a school or schools in which the teacher has previously worked, have been substantial and sustained.*

The existing threshold standards cover a wide field including a teacher's contribution to the school. Those teachers who crossed the threshold in 2000, and have maintained those achievements, should be regarded as having met the criteria of "substantial and sustained". No additional evidence or local criteria are needed. Unless there is some obvious reason otherwise, all those who successfully went through the threshold in September 2000 should move automatically onto Level 2 of the Upper Pay Spine.

Criterion a) does require that there be a review of the performance of the post-threshold teacher. It makes no statement about how that review should be carried out or by whom or indeed what the outcome of such a review should be. Nor does it make any connection to Performance Management and the targets set as a part of that process.

Some head teachers and line managers are in danger of taking a sledge hammer to crack a nut. All that is required in this process is a light touch by the head teacher/line manager in ascertaining whether a member of staff is still working at the same level as they were two years ago. No further review is necessary. Neither criteria a) nor b) requires the production of further evidence by teachers. The head teacher/line manager may wish to have a conversation with the various line managers in the school to be seen to be checking that teachers have maintained the same level of performance. Needless to say it would be of serious concern to the Union were one of our members to learn for the first time at this stage that their performance is deemed to have diminished when no concerns had been raised with them hitherto.

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NUT WEBSITE

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Are you in your fourth or fifth year of teaching? If you are then read on...

The DfES is offering teachers in England in their fourth and/or fifth year of teaching bursaries of up to £500 to spend on their professional development.

To be eligible, teachers must be qualified; have successfully completed their induction; have not less than three years nor more than five years teaching experience; and be employed currently full-time or part-time in a school. Absence on maternity and paternity leave will count towards eligible service. Unattached and supply teachers in their fourth and fifth years' of service can also apply for professional bursaries.

The NUT has welcomed this scheme, which allows teachers to obtain funding for their own identified professional development needs. The funding is additional to professional development funding delegated to schools as part of the Standards Fund. Obtaining bursaries should not diminish professional development opportunities available to teachers in their fourth and fifth years through their schools and/or LEAs.

If you are interested you can obtain a DfES information pack, which includes an application form by:

- telephoning the DfES professional bursaries helpline 0845 0390 208; or
- telephoning DfES Publications 0845 602 2260 quoting reference DfES/0237/2002; or
- downloading a claim form from the DfES Continuing Professional Development (CPD) website: www.teachernet.gov.uk/bursaries.

The DfES intends that teachers decide their own professional development needs and the means by which they can be met. A range of professional development opportunities eligible for bursaries is listed by the DfES and includes classroom observation; purchase of CPD materials; course fees; guest speakers; mentoring; attending courses or visiting key sites abroad; work shadowing; visiting other schools; attending workshops, seminars or conferences; travel, subsistence and care costs (to make any of the above possible); and supply cover to enable teachers to take part in development activities.

The above list is not exclusive but teachers are recommended by the DfES to call its professional development bursaries helpline (0845 0390 208) to confirm the eligibility of any professional development activity before they commit themselves to making any advance payment.

NUT workshops and conferences, which are advertised as being part of the Union's Professional Development Programme, would be eligible for DfES bursaries. For example, any NUT members in their 4th or 5th year of teaching who wanted to attend a Teacher2Teacher programme during 2002/3 could get free admission to the programme, as members, and apply for DfES bursaries to pay for all or part of the supply cover they would need to attend.

HAD YOUR SAY YET?

The debate about the future structure of the Union in Gloucestershire goes on. The Division, and all the constituent associations are continuing to consider the implications and need as much input from the membership as possible.

It's your Union - have your say!