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New focus on pay and conditions?

The new national negotiating body for support staff in England was formally launched on **1 September**. Comprising of representatives from government, the local authorities (LAs) and trade unions, the new body has been set a challenging series of objectives by the **DCSF**:

At the time of going to press, the independent chairperson of the new negotiating body had yet to be officially appointed. ATL will monitor the work of the negotiating body through our membership of the social partnership (also known as the workforce agreement monitoring group – WAMG); the new negotiating body is required to report all of its discussions and decisions to WAMG. Any significant development will be reported in this newsletter.

A new WAMG note, WAMG 22, entitled 'The appropriate deployment of support staff in schools', provides a welcome reminder to schools of the correct approach to the employment, deployment and payment of support staff.

The note provides timely reminders to schools and LAs on the following perennial bugbears:

- inappropriate contractual arrangements for support staff
- insufficient opportunities being given to those support staff with particular skills (such as HLTAs) to use those skills on a continuing basis
- the confusion between cover for unforeseen teacher absence and normal timetabled arrangements for taking a class while the class teacher is taking their planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time or other regular non-contact time
- support staff without appropriate training and skills being required to supervise pupils and/or deliver specified work
- some members of support staff being expected to undertake 'unpaid overtime'.

Members will also want to ensure that their school establishes "distinct and documented cover and PPA policies", as called for in note 22. See www.atl.org.uk/help-and-advice/workload-and-hours/WAMG-notes.asp to download a copy of the note.

A bespoke survey for support staff members in the maintained sector on a range of workload issues was recently issued to all members with email addresses. A separate survey on pay and conditions was sent to ATL members working in independent schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Results from both surveys will be published in the near future.

1

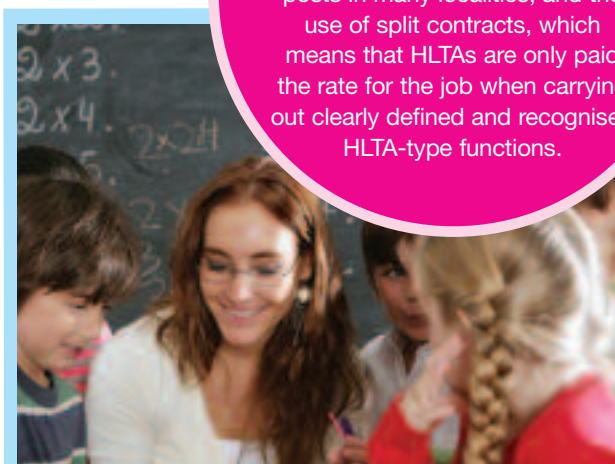
To establish a national pay and conditions framework, which will assist in the government's overall objective to secure fair and more consistent pay and employment terms for support staff in the maintained sector.

2

To address the various anomalies surrounding higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) – in particular, the lack of HLTA posts in many localities, and the use of split contracts, which means that HLTAs are only paid the rate for the job when carrying out clearly defined and recognised HLTA-type functions.

3

To deal with the ongoing injustice of term-time only contracts. Heads, managers and teachers do not have to suffer this indignity – so why should support staff?



Supporting Yourself

A grand time was had by all at the recent **Supporting yourself** training event, held at Birkbeck College in London on a sunny July Saturday. Fifteen members from as far afield as North Wales, Liverpool, Nottingham, as well as London and the Home Counties, assembled to learn more about ATL and the world of work. Sessions on your rights at work, assertiveness and 'ATL and you' proved extremely popular, and provoked some lively discussions as members related their experiences of working in both the maintained and independent sectors.

There are two more **Supporting yourself** courses coming up:

October 18	2008	Bristol
January 24	2009	Chorley

Other courses useful for support staff are the **Assertiveness weekender**

November 28/29	2008	Chorley
and Working in classroom teams		
October 3/4	2008	London
January 16/17	2009	Cardiff

Attendance is free to ATL members and we will also cover your travel costs. If you are interested, please contact training@atl.org.uk without delay, as places are limited.

And don't forget that ATL's partnership with Edge Hill University offers training opportunities for support staff. The autumn and spring courses are below. Visit www.atl.org.uk/edgehill for more information.

Autumn term 2008

- FTL 1000** Supporting Teaching and Learning including child development and behaviour management (suitable for primary and secondary)
- FTL 1004** Supporting Literacy in the Primary classroom
- FTL 1008** Supporting Literacy in the Secondary Classroom

Spring term 2009

- FTL 1005** Supporting Numeracy in the Primary Classroom
- FTL 1007** Supporting Science in the Primary Classroom
- FTL 1009** Supporting Numeracy in the Secondary Classroom
- FTL 1011** Supporting Science in the Secondary





Early years explained


From September 2008 in England, the early years foundation stage (EYFS) will replace the foundation stage. It is a combination of the foundation stage and 'birth to three matters', and will cover children from birth to the end of the reception year.


Although there has been a great deal of press coverage, many comparisons have been made with the Welsh (play-based) foundation phase, for those staff working in the foundation stage there are no fundamental changes to the (play-based) curriculum or its assessment. In recent weeks, the government has made a welcome commitment to reviewing two of the early learning goals for literacy, but this is part of the ongoing review of the primary curriculum and will not have changed for September.

There has, however, been some clarification of the situation regarding staffing in the EYFS. More detail can be found on the web – www.teachernet.gov.uk – but in essence the position is this:


 In maintained nursery classes there must be at least one member of staff for every 13 children. At least one member of staff must be a qualified teacher, and one must hold a level 3 qualification. This is not new, but has been made clearer.

 It is not necessary for a teacher to be with the class at all times, for example during the teacher's PPA time. During that time, and wherever possible during short-term teacher absence, one of the remaining members of staff must be assisting or supporting the work of a teacher, be subject to the direction and supervision of a qualified teacher in accordance with arrangements made by the headteacher and the headteacher must be satisfied that they have the skills, expertise and experience necessary.

 During those times, the ratio remains one adult to 13 children.

 While reception classes are also part of the EYFS, for staffing purposes they fall within the infant class size legislation

(providing the majority of pupils will reach the age of five or over during the course of the school year). This means that there must not be more than 30 children with one teacher. Guidance states that schools should take into account the age and needs of these young children when making staffing arrangements, and suggests that it is good practice for full time support staff to work alongside teachers in reception classes.

 Some schools may organise the EYFS across nursery and reception. In these cases, it may be possible to meet the legal requirements in more than one way and providers should use their professional judgement in deciding which staffing arrangements are most appropriate for their specific circumstances and to meet children's needs. *Practice guidance for the early years foundation stage*, available from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs, sets out examples of different ways of meeting the requirements.

ATL believes that teachers and support staff bring different but vital skills and expertise to the EYFS and that children learn and develop best when those staff work together to support them. We have argued very strongly that support staff should not be required to take sole charge of foundation stage classes. We will continue to argue that children in the reception class are entitled to at least the same amount of adult support (ie, one teacher and one member of support staff to 26 children) as those in nursery classes.

If you have any queries or concerns about the staffing implications of the EYFS, please contact Peter Morris, national official, at pmorris@atl.org.uk.

A vital part of education

In response to our request for stories from learning mentors, you told us your experiences.

The Learning Mentor Functional Map describes the work of a learning mentor as providing "support and guidance to children, young people and those engaged with them, by removing barriers to learning in order to promote effective participation, enhance individual learning, raise aspirations and achieve full potential." Quite a task, but those of you who got in touch certainly seem to enjoy your work.

"I love my job, working among some of the most deprived kids in England," says Sue Draper, an ATL member in Lancashire. "Some of them are considered anti-social but when I was threatened with redundancy they were my most vocal supporters," she continues, relating how the young people with whom she works were worried how they would cope without someone to talk to.

"It's a very interesting job – there's never a dull moment and I don't know when I turn up in the morning what I will be dealing with that day," explains Bernadette Fitzpatrick, an ATL member and learning mentor at a college in Lincolnshire.

"Learning mentors are a vital part of education," believes Kate Kent who works at a school in West Sussex. "Our team coaches children through bereavement, separation, anger management, self esteem, social skills and addiction problems."



The variety of tasks taken on by learning mentors can be bewildering. Steph Cooper from Yorkshire is part of a team of mentors working on group work programmes such as healthy eating, revision skills, friendship groups, smoking cessation and fire service training.

The breadth of the role can lead to problems, says Sue Draper. "Nobody knows what we're for really but at least we're not teachers so you can expect us to do anything!"

"The government is urging focus on behaviour and social skills for those disaffected with learning and life in general," says Kate Kent. "My own view is that, although [the learning mentor programme] is in the early stages of development it is not being given the recognition and top priority it deserves. If you recognise that it makes a difference then give us the resources to build on it and develop its success.

"This is an exciting area of pastoral work and really does make a difference in preparing young people for working life and giving them a sense of achievement, positivism and wellbeing."



Can you claim tax credit?

Nine out of ten families with children are entitled to tax credits, says the charity Working Families, which is raising awareness of the scheme.

Tax credits are regular payments from the government designed to help with the costs of living. As many support staff are raising families, it may be worth investigating whether you are eligible for child tax credit or working tax credit.

To claim tax credits or for more information call HMRC on **0845 300 3900**. Lines are open daily 8am to 8pm, or visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits. For advice call the Working Families free helpline on **0800 013 0313** or visit www.workingfamilies.org.uk.

Jean Ward, ATL branch secretary



TA takes over branch

Teaching assistant **Jean Ward** has become the first support staff member to become an ATL branch secretary, at Halton in Cheshire.

"I'm looking forward to getting involved and supporting members," she explained prior to officially taking up her role on 1 September.

Already a school rep, Jean was encouraged to step into the vacant Halton branch secretary post by regional official Jenny Greenwood and has also been helped by support from colleagues. "Everyone really accepted me as school rep straight away and I hope that it will be the same as branch secretary."

Branch members will benefit from Jean's previous experience as a manager in business and her knowledge of employment law. "I always enjoyed ensuring people were treated fairly," she recalls.

Jean was surprised to be told that she was the first support staff member to take up the role, but believes **it is a good opportunity for support staff to have their voices heard.**

ATL's new website



It's all change for ATL's website this term, with the launch of a brand-new site that promises to make it easier to find the information you need as easily as possible.

If you haven't taken a look at www.atl.org.uk in a while, then now is a good time to start. Our old website was no longer serving its purpose, with over half of you telling us you didn't use it. Many of you said that you knew information was there, but you simply couldn't find it!

In response, ATL set about asking members what they wanted from their union's website.

By answering online surveys, attending focus groups, filling in charts at events and taking part in online user testing, you told us that your top priorities were to be able to get answers to your employment questions and find information on pay, to be able to download or order a publication and find out about training courses; all as easily and quickly as possible. So, improving the navigation so that as much as possible was only one click away was our top priority.

As you can see from the picture, much of the information you will want to access sits within a central coloured panel, which has a series of drop-down menus.

It is here you will find ATL's publications, training courses and over 100 topics giving help and advice on employment or pay issues, all updated by ATL's legal and pay and conditions teams. Each section has a 'see also' list, from which you can download related documents, or access related sections of the website. And if you need to pass the information on to a colleague, you can use the icons in the top right corner of the page to print a printer-friendly version of the information or to email it.

As a support staff member, we know you will want to access the information most relevant to you. This is what the **MyATL** column on the right-hand side of the home page is for. Choose your role, your sector and your area, then click on **Activate my defaults**. Your screen will refresh and quick links will appear to the areas of the website most relevant to you.

You can also find out how to get involved in your union – whether it is by answering a survey or joining a special interest group – in our **Get involved** section. And you can download all of ATL's policies on the key education issues of the day in our **Policy and campaigns** section.

The ATL website is a work in progress – we'll be continuing to develop new features and add new content. If you have any comments, or something you would like to see, please email vposkitt@atl.org.uk.

Local government pension scheme factsheet

Following a change in the local government pension scheme earlier this year, ATL's legal and pensions departments have produced a free factsheet to help you make sense of the changes. It includes details on what you need to do and what you are entitled to if you retire early or want to continue working beyond age 65.

Local government pension scheme (AV22) is available to download free from the publications and resources section of ATL's website at www.atl.org.uk.



Win a holiday!

All ATL members will by now have received information on the "Sign up a member" initiative. Every time a member persuades a work colleague to join ATL, he or she will be entered into a prize draw. There will be a series of draws throughout the autumn and spring terms, with top prizes including a holiday worth £5,000 and bikes worth £500.

For further information on this important recruitment initiative, and for tips on how to recruit new members and the benefits of joining ATL, please visit our website at www.atl.org.uk.



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