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ATL support staff members frustrated by pay offer

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of ATL said: "The response to ATL's online survey on the local government pay offer demonstrates growing frustration amongst teaching assistants and other support staff members.

"Members are particularly unhappy about the employers' final offer of 2.45% which will add little to their already low pay. The lack of a fair and transparent national pay system for school support staff is also causing increasing dissatisfaction.

"The majority of ATL support staff members who responded would not vote for strike action, the survey found. ATL will continue to monitor the situation closely, not least in light of any action undertaken by other support staff unions. Members' patience is clearly wearing thin."

Please refer to the ATL website – www.atl.org.uk – for an up-to-the-minute statement of ATL's view on local government pay.

New pay body for support staff



A new national negotiating body for school support staff will be in place by September, the government has confirmed.

Led by an independent chair, the negotiating body's first task will be to develop a new national framework for pay and conditions. The Support Staff Working Group, a sub group of the Social Partnership between teaching unions and government of which ATL is a member, is in the process of agreeing its constitution. ATL general secretary Dr Mary Bousted said the move would help to prevent the pay inequalities that meant support staff could earn more stacking shelves in a supermarket than supporting a child with special educational needs.

"We have long campaigned for support staff to be treated as professional school staff with a national pay scale, terms and conditions, so we are pleased the government has recognised the invaluable role they play," Dr Bousted said.

"Teaching assistants and cover supervisors are professionals with specialist skills and deserve to be treated as such. They play a key role in schools helping children's learning, and should be treated the same as the other professional school staff, and be paid the same basic rate for their work wherever they are employed in England."

ATL and other teaching unions are continuing discussions with the Department for Children, Schools and Families over details of how the negotiating body will work.

ATL Conference – support staff quiz schools minister



ATL's annual Conference was held just before Easter in sunny (but chilly!) Torquay, and many of the debates highlighted the key problems faced by classroom assistants and other support staff during their daily work

In her opening address to Conference, ATL general secretary Mary Bousted spelt out the union's continuing commitment to its growing support staff membership. She noted that **“support staff play a vital role in our schools and colleges”**, and that the work of teaching assistants, librarians, technicians and other support staff is **“valued highly by teachers and lecturers who recognise that the contribution of their support staff colleagues allows them to teach much more effectively”**.

A passionate debate took place around the terms of resolution 13, which urged the Executive Council to lobby government to ensure that support staff are not exploited by their use as teachers in all but name (and pay).

Janice Walsh of the Reading branch condemned the attitude of too many head teachers, who use higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs) as de facto teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) to cover PPA time. She said that perhaps the Training and Development Agency should adopt a new motto – “If you want to be paid as a teaching assistant but work as a teacher, then become an HLTA”. Janice also pointed out that none of this is the fault of our members: “Support staff will continue to take on this extra responsibility because they do not want children to be let down.” Other speakers were equally indignant. Sam Bechler from Wolverhampton asked: “Are TAs so unimportant that they can be used in this arbitrary fashion?” Andrea Gaskell of Wigan branch reported that her school had lost good TAs because of a lack of funds to pay the HLTA rate. And Zoe Fail (pictured) from Kent said that “we urgently need new guidance before current realities become accepted practice.”

Andy Ballard, senior vice president, offered full support for the resolution, which was carried unanimously.

One of the highlights of Conference was the address given by Jim Knight MP, the Minister of State for Schools and Learners. Mr Knight reiterated the government's determination to get the new support staff national negotiating body up and running this year (see front page), to achieve “more consistency and progression for this critical group of professionals”. He also emphasised that he did not believe in “rewarding and relieving teachers at the expense of teaching assistants”.

When asked by Cathy Tattersfield from Derbyshire about the continuing scandal of term-time only contracts, Mr. Knight said that this would be a matter for the new negotiating body. But he went on to stress that the government is “hugely concerned at the lack of progression for support staff, at the variation from different employers in the way that the support staff are rewarded, and the problems when people want to move from one employer to another in that the progression they have made is not recognised when they go to another employer”. He finally made reference to term-time contracts when he said that “there are the issues around TAs not being paid full-time even though it is a full-time job.”

ATL welcomes these statements from the Minister, and will be following developments very closely.

For more on ATL's Conference 2008 go to: www.atl.org.uk/atl_en/news/conferences/conference_2008/default.asp.



Potty guidance

ATL receives a steady stream of enquiries from support staff members asking about their responsibilities when pupils wet or soil themselves in class.

While some support staff's job descriptions do include the duty of administering such personal care more often there is no reference made at all. If there is nothing in a job description or contract of employment about administering personal care in helping a pupil to change their clothing, then there should not be an assumption that a member of staff will undertake such duties.

In these circumstances, staff who assist pupils in changing should be treated as volunteers. An ATL member in these circumstances should make it clear to their head teacher that they are assisting pupils as a volunteer, and that their actions should not be regarded as a contractual obligation. The same principle applies to those who administer medication to pupils.

Additionally, under no circumstances should support staff be expected to potty train children, unless this expectation is specifically included in the job description by agreement. ATL members are reporting an increasing number of four- and five-year-olds starting school without having been potty trained. Where this occurs, members should report the matter to their line manager, and the school should then take appropriate action.

If there is a contractual requirement to change clothes in the event of an accident or someone agrees to help a pupil change clothes voluntarily schools are required to do the following:

- For pupils with special educational needs where more general developmental delay and learning difficulties may be involved, schools should take into account the specific needs of individual pupils and ensure that staff are aware of these.
- Obtain written permission from all parents that they accept such procedures.



- Have a clear policy, understood and accepted by staff, parents and pupils, that provides an agreed basis for ensuring pupils receive proper personal care and support when at school.
- Provide appropriate information and training for staff on issues such as personal hygiene and provide clear written guidelines on how pupils should be assisted at such times.
- Ensure that when pupils are helped to change clothes, there is more than one adult present, who should preferably be of the same sex as the pupil.
- Be aware of, and comply with, appropriate health and safety procedures and risk assessment.
- Provide protective clothing: e.g. plastic gloves/aprons.
- Ensure that insurance policies provide appropriate cover.
- Consult with Social Services departments before changing pupils who are on the child protection register or whenever any Social Services children's teams are involved.
- Seek advice on potential health issues from NHS trust schools who provide a school health service.

Members with any concerns about helping pupils after such occasions are advised to contact ATL's London office on **020 7930 6441**.

ATL offers single status advice

Local authorities are at varying stages of implementing the single status agreement. The job evaluation process which comes with single status can have a major effect on the hours, pay and terms and conditions of teaching assistants and school support staff.

Our general advice to support staff members on any job evaluation process introduced as part of the roll-out of single status is as follows:

- Make sure that the job evaluation is based on your current job description, and that it includes all of your current duties.
- Once the initial outcome of the evaluation is communicated to you, and if you are unhappy with it, raise any queries with your line manager in the first instance, and ask for the decision to be reviewed.
- If in spite of this, you remain dissatisfied with the job evaluation, you will have a formal right of appeal against the decision. Your ATL branch will support you in lodging the appeal, and you should contact your branch immediately.

If members wish to discuss any issues relating to single status, job evaluation or equal pay, please contact Peter Morris at pmorris@atl.org.uk.

Cooking up a storm

ATL support staff member Jane Jackson launched her career in her role of union learning rep at The Bordeaux Quay Cookery School in Bristol accompanied by 14 of her colleagues from Westbury-on-Trym C of E Primary School. Jane tells us about the day

“On arrival we were met by Kate and Maxine who were going to put us through our paces in a kitchen equipped with everything you could possibly need to create culinary masterpieces, at least for the professionals!

We were split into groups to create three-course meals for each other, complete with bread and those little dainty things you have before the meal. Hands scrubbed and aprons on, away we went.

The kitchen suddenly became a hive of activity with people beating and whisking as if their lives depended on it, trying to avoid the disaster of over-emulsifying. Teamwork abounded but a very definite competitive edge was evident as people enthusiastically shouted directions.

After what seemed like an eternity, dishes started to come together, wonderful smells permeated the room, and we were ready to eat.

But not before we cleaned and tidied ALL work areas, folded the napkins (not a swan in sight!), and presented the food beautifully. Finally, surfaces checked, areas clean, we all sat down and ate wonderful dishes successfully completed by each other.

The event had been a huge success; colleagues were laughing, learning, respecting one another, being resourceful, listening, and above all having fun.”

The union learning fund made Jane's role possible. To find out more email training@atl.org.uk.



Help us to help you

ATL is looking for support staff members to join the support staff members working group (SSMWG) and help guide the way we work for you.

SSMWG is an advisory body which meets once a term to consider current issues of concern to teaching assistants and other school support staff professionals. It is made up of support staff members from around the UK, and is an invaluable source of advice and information for the ATL Executive Committee and full-time officials who deal with support staff matters.

Support staff member Carol Deane is already a member of the SSMWG and is active in our Berkshire branch. In February, Carol attended the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's first ever support staff conference along with nearly five hundred classroom TAs, technicians, librarians and office managers. Everyone listened to presentations from borough staff on CPD and funding and chose from a variety of workshops, ranging from pensions advice to classroom displays and playground games. The high point for Carol was being able to meet and chat with other TAs. Through her membership of the SSMWG, Carol is able to share experiences like this with other ATL members and explore how the union can encourage this kind of best practice elsewhere.

Would you like to be part of the group and help shape ATL's policy and plans for support staff? For more information, please contact Peter Morris at pmorris@atl.org.uk Working group members can take part in meetings either by attending in person in London (for which travel expenses are paid), or by conference call.

ATL courses for you

ATL offers a wide range of courses to benefit support staff. Read on for more details

Supporting yourself

Supporting yourself is a one-day course for support staff on 19 July in London. It allows support staff the opportunity to work together and take part in sessions on their rights at work, the role of support staff at ATL, effective communications and assertiveness. This course is free to support staff members and we will cover travel costs. If you are interested in attending please email training@atl.org.uk.

Look out for the ATL Education and training programme for 2008-2009 that has been sent to all members with this mailing. It includes an extensive range of CPD courses that are available to all members of ATL.

For example, further one-day Supporting yourself courses will be held on:

Saturday 18 October 2008 in Bristol
Saturday 24 January 2009 in Chorley
Saturday 9 May 2009 in London



Another course support staff may like to attend is Working in classroom teams – a course which has an equal number of teachers and support staff and explores communication, how to work effectively as a team and the changing roles in the classroom. Managing challenging behaviour, the Assertiveness weekender and Using your voice may also interest support staff. For further information on these courses visit the ATL website at: www.atl.org.uk/training.

Working in classroom teams

Friday 3 and Saturday 4 October 2008 in London
Friday 16 and Saturday 17 January 2009 in Cardiff
Friday 5 and Saturday 6 June 2009 in York

Assertiveness weekender

Friday 28 and Saturday 29 November 2008 in Chorley
Friday 15 and Saturday 16 May in 2009 London

Managing challenging behaviour

Friday 6 and Saturday 7 February 2009 in Bristol
Friday 19 and Saturday 20 June 2009 in Durham

Wanted:

learning mentors' stories

Are you a learning mentor? This specialist role gets very little publicity in the education press, and yet represents a vital and growing section of the support staff population.

We'd like to feature learning mentors in a future edition of ATL Support, but we need your input to do so. If you are interested in contributing, please contact Peter Morris at pmorris@atl.org.uk, or ring him on his direct line: **020 7782 1557**.

Pension scheme changes

A number of changes have been made to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). These changes came into effect from 1 April 2008.

You should by now have received a letter from your employer, outlining the impact of the changes. For further information, please go to the LGPS website at: www.lgps.org.uk/lge/core/page.do?pageId=102727.

In addition, an ATL factsheet is being produced, which will provide information on the main terms and benefits of the revised scheme, with information on contributions; the definition of "normal retirement age"; how benefits are calculated; retirement; death benefits; and how to improve your pensions benefits. This will be available at www.atl.org.uk.

If you have any queries in relation to the LGPS changes, or any other pensions-related questions, please contact Peter Morris at pmorris@atl.org.uk.

Rotherham shows its support

Rotherham branch is leading the way in engaging and involving support staff through its successful recent events.

Two briefings for local support staff in November and April heard from a member of the workforce development team from the local authority (LA) who spoke about training opportunities for support staff, ranging from the training provided by the LA to degree routes and progression to qualified teacher status.

After the briefings a general meeting was held which enabled support staff members to meet and talk with branch secretary Keith Stoddart and ATL organiser Katherine Fry.

Both events were well received and members have gone on to show an interest in further ATL activity. Buoyed by its success, Rotherham branch is looking to organise more support staff-focused events in the future.

If you are interested in finding out what is happening in your area, contact your branch secretary for details or to make suggestions.



Improve your skills **for free**

- Do you want to update your skills in supporting teaching and learning?
- Do you want to learn flexibly to avoid taking time out of your school or setting?
- Do you want to gain university credits while you work?
- Have you thought about doing a foundation degree but wonder what is involved?

ATL and Edge Hill university have designed a way in which teaching assistants can combine professional development with accreditation for a foundation degree in Supporting Teaching and Learning.

Each term a range of modules will be available for ATL members to access online. Each of these modules has work-based tasks and background theory to enhance your professional practice.

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 Classroom

Summer Term 2009

FTL 1010 Supporting ICT in the Secondary Classroom

FTL1003 Meeting Individual Learning Needs (suitable for primary and secondary)

These modules are designed for online learning. Once you register you will be given a user name and password, this will give you:

- access to all the learning materials needed
- access to the Edge Hill library and learning services
- access to a 'discussion board' where you will have learning e-conversations about the modules
- access to an Edge Hill personal tutor.

You have the option of submitting an assignment at the end of the module to gain credits that can be used against corresponding modules on the foundation degree in Supporting Teaching and Learning. This degree is also available online and face-to-face in some areas.

Why might this be of interest to me?

This could be of particular interest to anyone who would like to

- try higher education
- develop study skills
- develop professional skills
- achieve university credits

Do I need any qualifications?

No formal qualifications are needed to access these modules, but you need to be able to write at Level 2 or equivalent GCSE level. If you decide to go on to enrol for the foundation degree you will need to have, or be studying for level 2 English and maths.

Do I need to live in a particular area?

It does not matter where you live as you will not need to attend an EHU site although you have access to all their facilities if you visit.

Do I need to have access to the internet / email to do this accreditation?

Yes, because access to the resources is online and access to the EHU personal tutor is most effective by email, however, contact by telephone can be arranged by appointment.

What sort of tasks will I need to do to complete the module?

Usually the assignment is based on:

- Collecting evidence from your work-based tasks
- Reading around the subject of your module
- Curriculum guidance and government documentation
- An evaluation and reflection of your experiences.

How long will it take?

You will usually submit your assignment in the first week of the term following your online module.

What if I have any problems while taking the course?

You can request an extension to give you extra time to submit your assignment. If you decide not to submit any work you may do so without any financial penalties.

What support will I get from Edge Hill university during the course?

- Access to EHU tutor
- Online library access
- Access to learning services
- Access to facilities at EHU

Is there any financial cost for doing the course?

There is no cost if you are a member of ATL as ATL has a partnership with Edge Hill university.

What about doing a foundation degree?

If you register for and complete the accreditation, you can apply to be exempt from corresponding modules on the foundation degree in Supporting Teaching and Learning. This will reduce the cost of the degree.

What will I get if I complete the course?

A transcript which states how many credits you have gained; in this case 30 credits at level 4.

Do I have student status for other purposes?

You will have all the same entitlements to student services as full time students.

Who should I contact for further information?

Joanne Sutcliffe
Programme Leader FD Supporting Teaching and Learning
Tel 01695 584 591
sutclifj@edgehill.ac.uk

Alexis Moore
Senior Lecturer
Tel 01695 650 836
alexis.moore@edgehill.ac.uk

You can contact the ATL training team on **020 7782 1582**, email: training@atl.org.uk or go to www.atl.org.uk/edgehill.



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June 2008. ATL product code: BUL03.
Call ATL Despatch for additional copies (0845 4500 009).

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