

## **MINUTES - Support Staff Members' Advisory Group (SSMAG) Saturday March 12<sup>th</sup> 2011, ATL London Office, Meeting Room 2, starting at 1.15pm**

Present: Jenny Inglis (Chairperson – JI), Shelagh Hirst (Honorary Secretary – SH), Kathryn Booth (KB), Marilyn Dixon (MD), Bella Hewes (BH), Lee Mumbray-Williams (LM-W), Debbie Polwarth (DP), Stella Thompson (ST), Peter Morris (National Official – PM), Aleksandra Bartosz (AB – Admin Assistant)

### 1) Welcome from Chair

Ji welcomed everyone to the meeting and members introduced themselves briefly.

### 2) Apologies for absence

Gail Atkinson, Gloria Clarke, Yvonne Walls

### 3) Minutes of the last meeting (November 20th 2010)

The minutes were AGREED.

### 4) Maintained Sector Pay (2011/12) – Update

PM updated members on the maintained sector pay freeze. As reported at the last meeting, the local government unions submitted a claim for a minimum of £250 pa, payable from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.

The letter from the Local Government Employers Association (LGE) dated 17 February 2011 confirms the pay freeze for the next 2 years. The letter states that meeting the union pay claim would increase the local government pay bill by £265 million and add significantly to the funding gap of £6.5 billion facing councils in 2011/12<sup>?</sup>. The members then exchanged views on the matter.

There was a discussion around the contracts and terms and conditions of support staff members. The Chair talked about the importance of reading contracts before signing them as they can often be misunderstood because of their complexity or terminology used.

Another issue discussed was the growth of academies. Members agreed that there has been a 'deliberate spreading of misinformation' across the schools that decided to transfer to academy status.

Members agreed that clear information should reach the Reps in schools and asked PM to send them the links to all the useful information ATL produces on academies.

**Action 1:** PM to send links on academies to the Group members.

**Action 2:** PM to put Academies on the agenda of the next meeting.

### 5) Schools Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)

In a letter of 15 December 2010, Secretary of State Michael Gove confirmed his decision to abolish the SSSNB. Whilst he has agreed to encourage joint LEA/union work on job role profiles, Mr Gove

was also keen to stress that schools should continue to have ‘the freedom to organise staff and resources in a way that reflects local priorities and needs.’

PM commented that there were a number of options for ATL action, but any decisions will inevitably have to wait until UNISON take a position. UNISON are currently consulting their school support staff members on a range of options, including a ballot for industrial action.

#### 6) ATL Pension Campaign

PM updated the Group on the ATL Pension Campaign:

- The Hutton Report – it was said that the changes introduced in the report will mostly affect high pay workers and the exact implications for support staff are still not clear.
- Ballot – PM asked members for their opinion on the industrial action and whether they consider that support staff should be included in any industrial action taken by ATL, and whether the union should take any industrial action as a whole body. The Group agreed that support staff in both independent and maintained sector should be included in the ballot.
- Pension Roadshows: PM informed the Group about the events that are organised around the country. The next Pensions Roadshows will take place in:
  - Chester – 4 May , 5.30- 7.30
  - Ipswich – 11 May, 5.30- 7.30
  - Derby – 17 May, 5.30-7.30
  - Bedford – 19 May, 5.30 – 7.30

**Action 3:** AB to send any additional information on the roadshows to the Group.

#### 7) ATL Membership update

PM reported that membership growth is stable and at the end of February, there were 14,154 Standard, Group and Individual Affiliate members of ATL. PM shared the latest figures and highlighted that the net growth of support staff members was 137 in Jan/Feb 2011 in comparison to 101 in Jan/Feb 2010. PM also pointed out that the membership is growing in spite of an increase in job losses and redundancies.

DP highlighted that there are 95 support staff members in her school and PM thanked her for her contribution and recruitment efforts.

It was agreed that ATL Plus and our education and training package are of great benefit to ATL support staff members.

#### 8) Independent Sector Recruitment

PM commented that the ATL membership in the independent sector is going from strength to strength, with the membership numbers having more than doubled over the last four years: From 674 in Feb 2007 to 1469 in Feb 2011.

PM gave an update on the results of the Independent Sector Pay & Conditions Survey which had very positive membership engagement with 1,400 members taking part in the survey and 13 members willing to organise a meeting in their workplace. PM also commented on the fact that there is estimated 40,000 support staff in the independent sector and with most schools not recognising ATL.

PM also talked briefly about the UCST and GDST visits. The majority of the USCT schools were visited in the autumn and there are a number of the GDST schools still to be visited till the end of next term. The initiative has been quite challenging but resulted in a number of new support staff members signing up.

DP commented on the recruitment activities carried out in the North-East and shared her positive feedback on the recruitment, involvement and collaboration with a large number of schools. She also mentioned her work with Richard Marshall and talked about future recruitment targets and actions.

**Action 4:** AB to provide DP with copies of schools and membership lists within North Tyneside borough.

#### 9) Communications

PM gave an update on the main communication channels for support staff:

- The first edition of *ATL Independent Support* was sent to members electronically at the beginning of March and will be produced termly.
- *ATL Support Staff News* – also written by PM and sent to all support staff members on a regular basis.
- *ATL Support* – Produced on a termly basis, and mailed out to all support staff members. Also emailed to all members for whom we have email addresses.
- *ATL website* – where publications, factsheets and immediate updates on breaking news on current issues can be found

KB raised the question of Twitter and proposed the creation of a Twitter account for the Group. A number of questions and concerns about its potential uses and benefits arose. The Group agreed that it could be a very useful tool raising ATL profile, but that somebody will have to be in charge of maintaining and following the information published on the new account.

KB agreed to produce a short document explaining the rules and ways of using the account. The issue will have to be considered by the Executive Committee and be put forward to the Communication Department who are also responsible for the main ATL Facebook account.

**Action 5:** KB to produce the said paper.

**Action 6:** PM and AB to then discuss the matter with the Communication Department.

**Action 7:** PM asked members to contribute ideas, articles, stories etc to PM

**Action 8:** DP asked the Group to make sure that all the contact details of the ATL members within their branches are up to date.

#### 10) Equalities

The Chair talked about the letter received from Mark Baker (Chair of the Equalities Advisory Committee) and his concern that the responsibility for equalities issues rest exclusively with the Committee, thus limiting any impact across the organisation.

The SSMAG agreed that further clarification and information is needed, and to invite Mark Baker to the next meeting for further discussion.

**Action 9:** PM to invite Mark Baker to the meeting on June 11<sup>th</sup>.

11) ATL CPD

PM advised the Group of the remaining dates for this year's courses:

- “Supporting Yourself” – 21 May – London
- “Behaviour Management for Support Staff” – 6 July - York

**Action 10:** DP raised a question about expenses and whether they would still be paid to attendees for both courses: PM to confirm.

12) ATL Conference 2011

PM updated the Group on the ATL Annual Conference in Liverpool and informed the Group that Support Staff Conference Zone will take place from 2 – 3.30pm on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> April.

13) Any Other Business

DP thanked JI for the effort put into her correspondence with Michael Gove.

PM mentioned a series of online videos on various campaigning issues that are being prepared by the Communication Department and asked members if they would like to appear.

JI expressed her appreciation and thanked DP for her presence at the Executive Committee and her great impact on Support Staff issues.

14) Date of Next Meeting

11<sup>th</sup> June 2011.