Threshold and the Upper Pay Scale

This factsheet has been produced for teachers working in state-maintained schools to help you understand the threshold and upper pay range progression.

What is the upper pay range?
The upper pay range is a salary range available to qualified teachers who have been assessed by their employer as being eligible to be paid on the upper pay range.

Accessing the upper pay range is often referred to as ‘crossing the threshold’.

Who can apply to cross the threshold?
Any teacher is eligible to be considered for progression on to the upper pay range. You do not have to be at the top of the main pay range to apply.

What are the criteria for crossing the threshold?
The criteria you must meet before moving onto the upper pay range are:

• that you are highly competent in all elements of the relevant standards; and

• that your achievements and contribution to the school are substantial and sustained.

What are the relevant standards?
For teachers in England it will usually be the Teachers’ Standards and for teachers in Wales it will usually be the Practising Teacher Standards. Both sets of standards are published in the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document or are available at www.atl.org.uk. The relevant standards will be stipulated in the school’s pay policy.

Some teachers (ie those whose qualification is in post-16 teaching) may be assessed by other standards in accordance with the school’s pay policy.

What does ‘substantial and sustained’ mean?
There is no strict definition of substantial and sustained in the School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions Document. The Department for Education model pay policy makes no firm recommendation and advises schools to insert an ‘agreed definition’ into their policy. You should check your school’s pay policy as most policies have defined substantial and sustained.

ATL believes that as long as you have met the relevant standards and your performance appraisal objectives, then there should be no question that you have met the substantial criterion. The sustained criterion should be no more than the two years previously required to cross the threshold.

What is the application process?
There is no formal application process to cross the threshold. As it is a voluntary process you should make your headteacher or appraiser aware that you wish to be considered for progression on to the upper pay range. You should also check your school’s pay policy for information about how the process will be handled.

What evidence is taken into consideration?
Your school’s pay policy will outline what evidence will be used to assess applications. This will usually be evidence from your performance appraisal reviews, but other evidence may also be considered. You should not be required to maintain a portfolio of evidence to support your application.
When should I apply to move on to the upper pay range?
Your school’s pay policy will include the process for applying to cross the threshold. The pay policy may include deadlines by which you must make known your wish to be considered to progress and what criteria will be used to make any determination. The application process should normally be linked to your performance appraisal cycle.

I have just started at a new school - can I still apply?
There is nothing to stop you applying to be assessed to move to the upper pay range in accordance with your new school’s pay policy. However, the criteria for progressing clearly state that you must have made a substantial and sustained contribution to your current school. It may, therefore, not be possible to be successful until you have shown this. Your new school’s pay policy should give you details.

I work at more than one school. How will this affect crossing the threshold?
If you are employed to teach at two or more schools you must make a separate application at each school. The decision of one school cannot be binding on any other school. It is possible for you to be paid on the upper pay range at one school and on the main pay range at another.

I have just returned from maternity/paternity/adoption leave. Can I cross the threshold?
Periods of absence on maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave, which are statutory or contractual, cannot preclude you from crossing the threshold.

Your school’s pay policy will outline how periods of absence due to maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave will be dealt with.

I have recently returned from long-term sick leave. Can I still be assessed to cross the threshold?
Absences as a result of injury or sickness should not preclude you from applying to cross the threshold. Your school’s pay policy should outline how absences will be dealt with in the application process.

I work part time and my headteacher has told me I cannot apply to cross the threshold. Is that correct?
No. Whether your service has been part time, regular or otherwise, this cannot preclude you from being assessed.

I am a supply teacher. Can I cross the threshold?
As a supply teacher, you will need to discuss the process and assessment of your application with your headteacher or local authority manager. You will need to show evidence that you have met the criteria. It may be difficult to show you have met the substantial and sustained criteria needed to cross the threshold without performance appraisal reviews.

All teachers with a contract of one term or more should have performance appraisal objectives set and reviewed.

You will need to apply in each school that you undertake supply teaching.

I have been on the leadership scale for several years and I will be giving up my post of responsibility. Do I still need to apply in order to be paid on the upper pay range?
If you remain at the same school then you must be paid on the upper pay range if you step down. If you change schools, then the new school has the discretion to pay you on the upper pay range, or you will need to apply in accordance with the school’s pay policy.

I have been on the leadership scale for several years; previously I was a classroom teacher on the upper pay scale. If I step down from my leadership post, where should I be on the upper pay scale?
If you remain at the same school, the lowest point you could be placed on the upper pay scale is the point you were on when you joined the leadership scale at that school.

If you change schools, then the school have the discretion to pay you on the upper pay range or you will
need to apply in accordance with the school’s pay policy.

I have requested assessment to cross the threshold, when can I expect to hear back from my headteacher?
Unfortunately, there is no timescale that must be adhered to when assessing an application, although your school’s pay policy may cover this. If you are concerned about the length of time it is taking, please contact your ATL school representative, your branch secretary or ATL’s London or Cardiff offices.

Is my headteacher required to provide feedback and, if so, when should this take place?
Once your application has been assessed and you have been informed of the decision, you should be informed in writing of the outcome.

If you have been unsuccessful, you should also receive oral feedback from your headteacher or LA manager on each standard and the reasons for the outcome of your application. You should receive advice on aspects of performance that would benefit from further development.

I have been unsuccessful in my application. When can I be reassessed?
Teachers can only be assessed once in an academic year at each school they work in. You must wait until the beginning of the following academic year before requesting a further assessment.

Can I appeal?
Unsuccessful applicants may appeal against a failed application through the school’s pay procedure. Information about making an appeal should be available in your school’s pay policy.

If you are considering making an appeal, you should contact your ATL school representative, your branch secretary or ATL’s London or Cardiff offices.

When can I progress further on the upper pay range?
Progression on the upper pay range will be determined by the outcome of your performance appraisal review. Prior to September 2013, teachers had to wait two years before they could progress on the upper pay range but this requirement has now been removed.

What are the criteria for progression on the upper pay range?
Progression on the upper pay scale is based on your performance. Your performance appraisal review should ensure you are maintaining the relevant standards and have grown professionally by developing your teaching expertise.

Can my headteacher withhold progression on the upper pay range?
Headteachers who withhold progression should provide a detailed explanation for their reasoning. To be fair and transparent, judgements must be properly rooted in evidence. Headteachers should also demonstrate how a teacher should have performed in order to have achieved progression. Any concerns about your performance or overall contribution should have been raised during performance appraisal meetings.

Further information
This is part of a series of factsheets on teachers’ pay, which also includes:

- Performance-Related Progression (ADV70)
- Appraisal Review Meetings (ADV71)
- Teacher Appraisals: Setting Objectives (ADV72)
- Appealing a Pay Progression Decision (ADV73)
- Salary Safeguarding for Teachers (ADV74)
- Teachers’ Pay: Main and Upper Pay Ranges (ADV75)