

New Year, New Teachers' Union?

The question on so many lips as 2016 came to an end was how to ensure that 2017 was a better year. That won't be easy of course, not least because there are so many things we don't control. This term, however, you will have the opportunity, as an NUT member, to do something which could shift the balance of power in education towards teachers and other school staff for the first time in decades. Between February 27 and March 21 you will be balloted on a proposal to form a new education union. If agreed, this union will be an amalgamation of the current NUT and ATL and will be not only the largest (as the NUT already are) but also the majority union in our education system. It is likely also to be the majority union in almost every school. Nottinghamshire NUT will be urging members to vote YES in this ballot and we would like to explain our reasons.

Unity is strength: It has never made sense for there to be so many teacher unions and it has been the aim of the NUT for many years to create one union for all teachers. Every classroom teacher knows that whether it comes to resolving problems in an individual school or taking effective national action, we are hampered by our own disunity. This is an indefensible, pointless and indulgent disunity which serves no-one better than it serves our employers and government. We have tried hard to involve all three classroom teacher unions in unity discussions. The ATL have responded positively and, after two years of talks and preparation both unions have agreed to propose a new union to their members.

New circumstances: the education world has changed beyond



recognition in recent years. Where we once had one employer (the local authority) we now have a multitude of academy chains, free-standing academies, trusts, free schools and the local authority. This makes it so much harder to ensure that all members are represented effectively and their conditions of service negotiated properly. It makes no sense for at least three separate unions to stretch their limited resources trying to send three people to each negotiating meeting when one united union could represent all. **First step not the last:** we see the proposed new union as a beginning not an end. The NUT aim remains one union for all teachers and we will continue to work with other unions to achieve this. The invitation for unity with the NASUWT remains on the table as it always will. Membership of the new union will also be open to support staff so the possibilities for unity and increased strength in schools is very significant indeed.

Widespread support: the proposal for a new union has already been supported overwhelmingly by conferences of both unions held simultaneously on November 5 2016. Nottinghamshire delegates at that

conference voted in support of the new Union as did 97% of the other delegates.

Some key facts about the new union:

- It will be called the **National Education Union (NEU)**.
- The NEU will exist from September 2017.
- There will be a transition period from September 2017-December 2018 during which there will be ATL and NUT sections. Local branches and the NECs of both unions will continue to exist during this period.
- From January 2019 these sections will disappear and there will be one NEU at local and national levels.
- The rules of the new union guarantee representation on the National Executive for Sixth Form, Independent sector and support staff members as well as the current NUT equality seats (disability, BAME and LGBT).

The NUT is a democratic member-led union so the decision is now with you. The final stage in the process towards a new union is a ballot of our members later this term. At the same time ATL members will be taking part in their own ballot on the same question. Nottinghamshire NUT is convinced that the advantages to be gained by reducing the unnecessary, outdated, divisions between teacher unions are huge and the prospect of a new union representing the great majority of teachers is a sure way of making 2017 and beyond better than 2016. On that basis we would strongly urge you to vote **YES** to the new union.

Dutch kids happiest in the world

Whilst children in British schools rate very low on the happiness scale, UNICEF has found that children in Holland are the happiest in the world. So what's the secret?

Simple really, don't follow the example of the UK. Whilst teachers and kids here are bogged down with tests and pressure, when Dutch children start at school there is no academic pressure at all. Primary school teacher Annelies Van Eijk says, *"when there is not so much pressure, children start school in a positive way by enjoying it and by feeling that this is something nice to do."*

Surely this will damage their prospects in later life? Not a bit of it! Dutch children are more likely to go on to further education than their British counterparts.

Most of all, the Dutch value independence in children and place a high emphasis on play and spending time outdoors rather than stuck in classrooms all day.

Will the Government take note? Don't hold your breath.

More news on funding cuts

Schools are already struggling to settle their budgets as a result of the 8% increased costs imposed by the Government. Across the country we are seeing class sizes going up, support staff being made redundant, some course and extra tuition being stopped and much more.

Although there was little mention of education in the Autumn Statement, the Government will soon publish proposals on funding which are likely to see schools facing even more cuts. Please visit www.schoolcuts.org.uk to see the NUT projections on how the cuts will impact on individual schools. Email your MP to express your concern about the damage such cuts will do to education.

Unless the Government allocates additional money, schools and academies will lose huge amounts of money - rising to £3 billion a year in real terms by 2020. We estimate that 98% of schools could lose out, even after the introduction of a new funding formula.

The NUT and the ATL are calling on the Government to take immediate action to inject much needed money into an already beleaguered system and protect schools from rising costs.

Workload remains unsustainable for teachers

Following the Government's workload challenge survey in 2014, three independent groups were established to report on, and suggest solutions to, unnecessary burdens linked to excessive marking, planning and data management.

We are encouraging school groups to discuss the reports and see how they can be used to make some changes to policies in schools - you can download the NUT summaries at www.teachers.org.uk. Posters covering the main recommendations from these reports are being sent to all schools. Make sure they are displayed for all to see - not just NUT members.

Primary Assessment

Justine Greening has announced a number of changes to the arrangements for SATs in 2017. The NUT view, and the view of members, is that these do not go anywhere near far enough to meet our concerns.

The Government is organising some roadshows this term as part of a consultation on assessment and we will be organising some activities around these.

The NUT is calling for the 2017 tests to be cancelled and for a full review of primary assessment and accountability.

We are working with an impressive range of organisations on a campaign called **More Than A Score** which is getting a lot of publicity and which held a successful conference in December.

Please visit www.morethanascore.co.uk which has some good campaigning videos and resources. Show to colleagues in your school!

