

LENGTH OF SCHOOL SESSION TIMES : NUT BRIEFING ON PROCEDURES FOR CHANGING THE PATTERN OF THE SCHOOL DAY

This briefing gives details of the procedures which must be followed when the governing body of any community, voluntary controlled or community special school proposes to make changes to the time of school sessions. The school day is divided into two sessions, morning and afternoon. The procedures set out in the Session Times (England) Regulations 1999 and in the Changing of School Session Times (Wales) Regulations 2000 apply firstly to proposals to change the start or finishing time of the school day, and secondly to proposals to change the lunch break by altering the length of the morning session or the beginning of the afternoon session. Proposals which alter the length of the lunch break are also dealt with in the final section of this document.

Provisions for Changing School Session Times

The relevant sections from the Session Times (England) Regulations 1999 are reproduced below. The same procedures have been introduced in Wales in the Changing School Session Times (Wales) Regulations 2000.

Regulation 2

- (1) Where the governors propose to make any change in those times, they must:
 - (a) consult the local education authority, the headteacher and all teaching and non-teaching staff employed in the school before taking any of the actions mentioned in sub-paragraphs (b) to (h) below;
 - (b) prepare a statement:
 - (i) indicating that they propose to make a change in those times;
 - (ii) specifying the proposed change and when they propose that it should take effect;
 - (iii) drawing attention to any comment on the proposal included as an annex to the statement by virtue of sub-paragraph (c) below and including such response to the comment as they may consider appropriate; and

- (iv) giving details of the date, time and place of the meeting which they are required to hold by virtue of sub-paragraph (f) below;
- (c) if so required by the local education authority, include as an annex to that statement such written comment on the proposal as the authority may provide for that purpose;
- (d) produce that statement and any annex in such language or languages (in addition to English), if any, as they consider appropriate or as the local education authority may direct;
- (e) take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure:
 - (i) that the parents of all registered pupils at the school and all persons employed at the school are given (free of charge) a copy of the statement and any annex not less than two weeks before the meeting which the governing body are required to hold by virtue of sub-paragraph (f) below; and
 - (ii) that copies of the statement and any annex are available for inspection (at all reasonable times and free of charge) at the school during the two week period immediately preceding that meeting;
- (f) provide an opportunity for discussion of the proposal at a meeting which is open to:
 - (i) all parents of registered pupils at the school;
 - (ii) the headteacher; and
 - (iii) such other persons as the governing body may invite;
- (g) consider any comments made at the meeting on the proposal before determining whether any change in those times should be made and (if so) whether the proposal should be implemented with or without any modification; and
- (h) except where paragraph 2 below applies, not less six weeks before any change in those times is to take effect:
 - (i) inform the local education authority of the change and of when it is to take effect; and

- (ii) take such steps as are reasonably practicable to secure that the parents of all registered pupils at the school are so informed.
- (2) Where the proposal concerns the times at which a school session is to begin in the morning or end in the afternoon (or both, as the case may be) the period referred to in paragraph 1(h) above shall not be less than three months.

Regulation 3

No change in the times of a school session shall be made as to take effect:

- (a) where paragraph 2 above applies, otherwise than at the beginning of a school year;
- (b) in all other cases, otherwise than at the beginning of a school term.

Minimum weekly teaching times

DfEE Circular 7/90 sets out the following suggested minimum weekly teaching times as a guide for schools:

Age 5-7	21 hours
Age 8-11	23.5 hours
Age 12-16	24 hours

The above guidance does not outline the standard minimum hours to be operated by schools. It stands as non-statutory guidance and has advisory status only. In addition, there may be attempts to increase the length of school sessions to accommodate new developments in the National Curriculum, such as the introduction of citizenship either as guidelines at Key Stages 1 and 2 or as a requirement at Key Stages 3 and 4. These proposals have not as yet altered the status of DfEE guidance to schools on the length of session times. It is NUT policy to oppose the lengthening of sessions to accommodate such initiatives.

Implications for teachers

The Regulations have made two changes to the previous procedures. Firstly, the governing body is required to consult all teaching and non-teaching staff in the school as well as the headteacher and the LEA about the proposed changes before taking any further steps. The Union has consistently advocated full consultation with all teaching staff prior to any changes in the times of school sessions and therefore welcomes this new requirement.

Secondly, the new procedures reduce the period of notice required for changes in the times of the pupil lunch break between the morning and afternoon sessions. Where a proposed change in school session times affects the times at which the school day begins or ends (or both), then the period of notice that the governing body must give the LEA and parents remains at least three months and the change can only take effect from the beginning of the school year. However, where a proposed change affects only the time of the end of the morning session or the start of the afternoon session, consequently affecting the length of the pupil lunch break, the governing body only has to give six weeks' notice and the change can take effect from the beginning of any school term. The Union is not in favour of this alteration.

The provisions of the Pay and Conditions Document, entitling classroom teachers to a break of reasonable length between school sessions, remain unaltered.

Where NUT members in a school object to proposals to increase the length of school sessions, including any proposals which would reduce their lunch break entitlement, they should in the first instance seek advice from their division secretary.