Working Time Agreements

School Reps may well wish to give thought to existing Working Time Agreements and consider how well they have worked thus far this session and what adjustments our members may wish to make for next session. This office suggests the following.

a) A meeting of the Committee be convened and formal evaluation by the Committee on this session’s agreement be undertaken.

b) The views of members be solicited and presented clearly at the meeting.

c) An evaluation be formally presented to all staff.

It is to be remembered that the convening of Working Time Committee is not simply within the gift of the Head Teacher but a matter for all members of the Committee. Membership of the Committee confers equal rights on all members. In other words, it is not the Head Teacher’s Committee.

This office would also wish to give School Representatives advice on the general matter of School Working Time Agreements.

a) The Agreement is NEGOTIATED not simply subject to consultation. In simple terms, agreement is required. It cannot be imposed on the say so of the Head Teacher.

b) Should dispute arise then the matter must be referred to the Local Authority and arbitration effected by a group including the Teacher Side Secretary.

c) Agreements should at all times be seen as reasonable. School Reps who are in any doubt should seek advice from this office.

d) All major school events should be captured in the Agreement and published clearly in the calendar which should accompany the agreement.

e) Time allocation under headings will by definition vary but should include the following generic headings
   - Meetings with parents
   - Collegiate meetings in School
   - Assessment and curriculum development.

f) We would advise against the inclusion of significant amounts of time under the heading of “flexibility”. We do accept the merit of some flexibility but consider that the Agreement, articulating as it should with School Improvement Plans and Departmental Improvement Plans, is by definition rigid to allow teachers to have control of their own workload. This office is increasingly concerned over the practice of “parachuting” initiatives into Improvement Plans or Schedules taking no account of workload.
g) Where Agreements collect time for “Working groups” under the heading of collegiate meetings it should be made clear what the status of these groups are. In the first place we would discourage simply allocating staff to working groups without reference to individual choice. Secondly, should “voluntary” membership of such groups be invited then, for those who do not volunteer, the Agreement should clearly indicate the manner in which that contractual time will be allocated. We would suggest that some form of meeting is necessary to satisfy the concept of “collegiality”. We do not believe the time can simply be “written off”.

h) The holding of meetings covered by the Agreement at times other than the end of a “school day” is fraught with difficulty. Undoubtedly, many schools attempt this but it should be recognised that if even one participant objects, then a contractual default has to be available. We believe it is cleaner and simpler to allocate meeting times at the end of the school day.

i) There should be a clear understanding at the Working Time Committee meeting that subsequent meeting will be convened to monitor and evaluate the operation of the agreement through the session. We believe this is essential.

j) In circumstances in which a planned or notified meeting is cancelled the meeting cannot simply be slotted in at a time chosen by the Head Teacher. We would recommend that the time is simply cancelled. However, should the Head Teacher wish to slot the meeting elsewhere, then the Committee should meet to agree this. It should also be made clear that a colleague’s prior engagements MUST be respected without the need to give detailed explanation. This should be agreed by Committee.