

Local Management of Schools

There is little doubt that schools are feeling the effects of LMS. INTO considers it essential that individual schools do not attempt to mask the problems they are now encountering. The Organisation has already seen examples of governing bodies being urged to make savings in one year in order to carry out over a surplus to mitigate anticipated reductions in the next financial year. It is not difficult to predict what would happen if all schools were to follow such a procedure.

LMS does not allow Boards of Governors to change any conditions of service which are the subject of agreements arrived at by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Negotiating Committee. It does not allow Boards of Governors to opt out of Northern Ireland determined pay and conditions of service. Any potential infringement of an agreement should be notified to your Northern Committee representative or to the Northern Office immediately.

This brief guide does not give advice on the policy documents provided by the ELB to the school. Recognised union representatives should ensure that they have copies of the documentation or manuals produced by their ELBs and, where appropriate, Boards of Governors. Advice on the interpretation of these documents can be obtained by contacting your Northern Committee Representative or Northern Office.

Further advice on monitoring is available from Northern Office.

The law requires that the Education and Library Board set a budget which has to be available by the beginning of April. In most circumstances, it should be possible for schools to be in receipt of budgets by the end of the Spring term. Union representatives have rights in law to have the information contained in such budget statements. The law even requires copies of the budget under the Education Reform Order 1989 to be available in Public Libraries so that there can be no legitimate argument that the information is restricted to governors alone.

Questions and Answers

Q. How can I find out what the school budget for my school is for this year?

A. The financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March. Before 1 April each year, ELBs have to produce a financial statement, which must be sent to every school showing overall ELB planned spending and each school's individual budget.

Q. How do I know if my school achieved a budget surplus or deficit last year?

A. The Organisation believes that this should already have been made known and discussed in the school. If not, the ELB has to produce an Out-turn Statement by the end of October each year showing the ELB's actual spending together with details of the spending of each school compared to its allocated budget and showing either a carry over surplus or deficit.

Q. Surely if a school carries over a surplus, this is a good thing?

A. There are procedure leading towards savings that the INTO would find acceptable. However, any savings achieved should have been planned with the teaching staff in advance. There are unacceptably high surpluses in many schools at both primary and secondary levels in Northern Ireland. The danger is that those outside the education system may well claim that schools must be “over resourced” and further cuts in education budgets might ensue.

Q. What should we do if the school has overspent its budget and what can the INTO do about this?

A. The most important thing is to identify which budget head as been overspent. If it is on, say, staff costs, then it may be that your school has particularly high actual salary costs. This problem would need to be discussed with your Northern Committee Representative. Suppose, though you found that your examination entry costs were vastly in excess of the budget allocated. The INTO would check with other schools to see if they had the same problem and if they had resolved it by viring money from elsewhere or by reducing access to public examinations for some pupils. This would mean that the formula was flawed and the union would seek the necessary changes.

LMS Monitoring

The INTO has established a monitoring sub-committee to advise on LMS.

The Organisation is uniquely placed to identify problems with the schemes which may be common to a number of schools and which cannot be explained by local circumstances alone. The union has made representations at many levels – Employing Authority, Education and Library Boards, LMS Steering Group and the Department of Education in relation to problems arising from LMS. Success, however, can only be achieved if the union has accurate and up-to-date information on what is happening in schools.

All the union structures must combine to ensure that support is available for the education of pupils, and that the conditions of service and professionalism of members are not under threat.

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