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Northern Ireland Audit Office

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General
for Northern Ireland

The
Management
of
Substitution
Cover for
Teachers

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This report has been prepared under Article 8 of the Audit (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 for presentation to the Northern Ireland Assembly in accordance with Article 11 of the Order.

J M Dowdall   Northern Ireland Audit Office
Comptroller and Auditor General   12 December 2002

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Abbreviations

CASS   Curriculum, Advisory and Support Service

CCMS   Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

GCSE   General Certificate of Secondary Education

GMI   Grant Maintained Integrated

LEA   Local Education Authority

NEOST   National Employers Organisation for School Teachers

NIAO   Northern Ireland Audit Office

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THE MANAGEMENT OF SUBSTITUTION COVER FOR TEACHERS

Executive Summary

Background

1. Substitution cover in schools, involving a whole range of teachers, is a normal and unavoidable part of school managment everywhere. Such cover can be used to fill a teaching vacancy or it may be required due to the short term or long term absence of permanent staff for such reasons as illness, maternity leave, secondment and professional development.

2. Teachers providing substitution cover make a valuable contribution to the education system which depends heavily on them to maintain the smooth running of its schools. In 2000-01, substitute cover provided by teachers equated to an additional 1,735 full time equivalent teachers and cost £38 million. A whole range of teachers are employed to provide substitution cover, for example:

    - newly qualified or young mobile teachers who are not yet in full-time employment;

    - teachers with young families who are returning to teaching after a career break; and

    - teachers who have taken early retirement and usually only wish to find occasional work.

3. The strategies used in managing the substitution cover provided by teachers can have significant implications for the educational experiences of pupils. Moreover, developing the effective management of teachers providing substitute cover is more difficult when the absence of a permanent member of staff is unplanned.

Proper attention to managing attendance can help to reduce absence rates.

Scope of the Examination

4.   Our review examined the extent to which the arrangements covering the supply of substitute teachers offer the best value for money. The factors we used in our assessment were:

- the arrangements in place for assuring the quality of teachers providing substitution cover, including the effectiveness of the management of their selection, support and performance. The extent to which teacher absenteeism and subsequent teacher replacements can affect pupil attainment was also considered;

- the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers to provide substitution cover; and

- the efforts invested in the effective management of teacher attendance in the first instance.

5.   In the course of our examination we surveyed 100 schools across the controlled and maintained sectors and interviewed the employing authorities to inform our understanding of the practical issues facing parties involved in the management of substitution cover.

Main Conclusions and Recommendations

On Assuring the Quality of Teachers Providing Substitution Cover (Part 2 of the Report)

6.   Within the employing authorities, the existence of some form of central list should help to facilitate monitoring, oversight and the more effective planning of substitution cover, and reduce inequity between schools and teachers providing substitution cover (paragraph 2.7).

7.   The Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) recommends that the employing authorities should consider setting up and maintaining a networked booking database, to be used by

principals, which would provide more detail on the previous work experience, areas of expertise and references of teachers providing substitution cover. We understand that such a system has been successfully introduced in a number of education authorities in Scotland. A regional database could be organised on a geographical basis (paragraph 2.10).

8. We consider that concentrating on key employment checks before teachers are recruited to provide substitution cover can reduce risks to the quality of tuition provided to pupils. To do this effectively, we believe that schools also need to rely on there being robust systems in place which provide details of the employment history, expertise and references of teachers (paragraph 2.15).

9. While the use of recruitment agencies may increase the availability of substitute teachers to schools, we consider that caution should be exercised in their use. Responsibility for the professional development of agency substitutes, and for ensuring that they are suitably qualified and reasonably competent, falls to the agencies rather than the Boards as traditional employing authorities. As a result, there is an onus on the Boards to ensure that the agency substitutes deployed by schools are suitably competent to carry out the work required (paragraph 2.19).

10. Our survey of schools indicated that the consistency with which temporary teachers are inducted needs to be improved if employing authorities and schools are to have confidence that these teachers clearly understand school procedures and the limits of their responsibilities. While we recognise again that it may not be appropriate in all circumstances, we recommend that effective induction should be a standard procedure offered to substitute teachers when they take up temporary appointments (paragraph 2.25).

11. Substitute teaching, done well, is demanding. We consider that investing more in the training of teachers providing substitution cover will help to maintain and improve the effectiveness of their teaching and ensure that pupil learning and attainment levels do not suffer adversely in the absence of permanent staff. We acknowledge that the Boards are conscious of the need to give such teachers the opportunity of access to training provision and that they operate an "open door" policy. We

recommend, therefore, that the Department of Education, the General Teaching Council and the employing authorities work together to develop a system of on-going training and support for teachers providing substitution cover, drawing on available good practice (paragraph 2.35).

12.   While many of the schools surveyed had positive experiences of substitute teachers, thirty-five of the 66 schools that replied (53 per cent) indicated either that there were usually not enough or never enough good quality substitutes available. Only four schools (6 per cent) felt there were always enough good substitutes available.   Fifty-seven (86 per cent) indicated that evaluation of teachers providing substitution cover was on a purely informal basis, five (8 per cent) used a mixture of formal and informal evaluation and only four (6 per cent) used formal evaluation. We consider that informal assessment and evaluation of such teachers is of little help to their professional development nor does it help schools in selecting placements. In order to ensure that professional standards are maintained, there should be mechanisms in place to help substitute teachers evaluate their own teaching skills. We consider that action is required at various levels within the education system.

At school level:

Individual schools need to ensure that, in addition to effective induction, teachers providing substitution cover receive timely feedback on their performance. In our view, the evaluation of substitute teachers' performance, in the form of a two-way dialogue, should be an in-built feature of the management system.

At employing authority level:

Schools should provide feedback to employing authorities on the quality of substitution used.   This should then be used by the Boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) to develop a strategy to help teachers with weaknesses, who provide substitution cover, to improve their performance.

At Departmental level:

Although it is clear that substitute teachers play a significant role in the education of school children in Northern Ireland, there has been a general absence of evaluative review of their management and effectiveness. We consider that conducting a more formal and detailed examination would lead to a better understanding of the issues surrounding substitution cover and help to develop good practice. In view of this, we recommend that the Education and Training Inspectorate should consider, as a separate exercise, a review of the quality of teaching provided during substitution cover in order to promote best practice in managing the demand for their services (paragraphs 2.40 to 2.48).

13. Ultimately the most critical concern over the use of substitution cover is how such teaching will affect the quality of pupils' education. A statistical analysis carried out by the Department showed that social deprivation and temporary teaching days (i.e. substitution cover) had a highly statistically significant effect on Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 results and a statistically significant effect on GCSE outcomes. The analysis confirmed the widespread view among educationalists of a strong link between social deprivation and educational achievement, however it also showed that when temporary teaching days were included as an additional variable, the statistical model was strengthened slightly (paragraphs 2.51 to 2.53).

14. While it appears that there is a link between the use of teachers to provide substitution cover and reduced pupil attainment levels, the correlation remains slight. NIAO recognises that it would be dangerous, therefore, to regard such statistical analysis as implying a causal effect between the use of substitution cover and examination results. Indeed, the Department points out that there is a wide range of factors that may interact and which may not only lead to an increased need for substitute cover but may also have an impact on attainment levels. Moreover, the Department considers it essential to examine the whole context for an individual school's performance before drawing any conclusions as to cause and effect (paragraphs 2.55 and 2.56).

15. The Department points out that substitute teachers are required to meet the same eligibility criteria as permanent teachers

and they added that there is no evidence from the Education and Training Inspection programme to suggest that the performance profile of these teachers is any less than that of permanent teachers. Nonetheless, in our view, the statistical analysis, taken in conjunction with the evidence from our survey of variable induction procedures, unstructured training provision and a lack of formal assessment and evaluation, indicates that the procedures governing the management of substitution cover merit review (paragraphs 2.58 and 2.59).

On the Re-employment of Retired Teachers (Part 3 of the Report)

16.   In 1984 and 1998, the Department advised employers that teachers who had been retired on grounds of redundancy or in the interests of the efficient discharge of the employers function should be re-employed in teaching in only the most exceptional circumstances. It said that when filling temporary teaching posts, preference should be given to newly-qualified, unemployed teachers. However, we found that, as a proportion of all temporary days worked, those worked by prematurely retired teachers rose from over ten per cent to over 13 per cent between 1996-97 and 2000-01.   The Department and employing authorities have issued reminders to schools in the past two years of their responsiblities when employing teachers to provide substitution cover, emphasising the need to minimise the use of prematurely-retired staff (paragraphs 3.5 to 3.10).

17.   We acknowledge the extent of the practical difficulties that can confront schools in providing effective substitution arrangements and that the Department is limited by what employment law would permit. However, we consider it essential to the education system in Northern Ireland that the issue of the re-employment of prematurely-retired teachers is addressed effectively, in line with the recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts in 1992. Young and newly qualified teachers working as substitutes today are the permanent teachers of the future. Their employment as substitutes is also advantageous in terms of cost and the structured support programme in place for them.   Providing newly-qualified teachers with sufficient opportunity to experience teaching as substitutes will be an investment in the quality of the future teaching stock. In line with

this, we recommend that the Department should also consider guidance on limiting retired teachers' re-employment to very short-term vacancies (paragraph 3.14).

On Managing Teacher Absences (Part 4 of the Report)

18.   In 2000-01, £10 million was spent providing cover for both short-term and long-term sickness absences. In addition to the costs of substitute cover, another significant cost of teacher absence is the ongoing salaries paid to the permanent teachers they replace. Figures supplied by the Department on sickness absences in schools in 2000-01 show that the sick pay bill for teachers in 2000-01 was £15.3 million (paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4).

19.   Comparative data for Great Britain shows that Northern Ireland schools have a much higher level of teacher sickness absence than the English regions. In 2000, on average, just over ten working days were lost for every full time teaching post in Northern Ireland compared to six days in England. If teacher sickness absences in Northern Ireland were reduced to the levels in Great Britain (i.e. by 40 per cent), pro-rata savings on substitute teachers would be of the order of £4 million, while the teaching and learning benefits of £6 million worth of permanent teachers' time would not be lost to the classroom (paragraphs 4.5 to 4.7).

20.   In 1999 the employing authorities for schools produced a Managing Attendance policy and associated procedures, in an effort to address the issue of sickness absences. Our survey found that only 41 of the 66 schools responding (62 per cent) said they had formally adopted the employing authorities' policy and procedures for managing attendance.   Of those 41, 37 (90 per cent) indicated that adoption of the policy had made no marked difference to the level of sickness absence in their schools. NIAO recommends that employing authorities should review their managing attendance policy, ensuring that trigger points for action are appropriate and that principals have the necessary management information to act on these. The policy should then be re-launched (paragraphs 4.12 to 4.13).

21.   In 1999, the Department set up an extensive menu of reports based on data available from its payroll and personnel system,

which the employing authorities can access in order to explore aspects of sickness absence which may be causing them concern. Managers in the employing authorities and schools need to know about the level and detail of sickness absences and how these compare with other authorities and schools so that they can identify ways in which sickness absence can be reduced. The Department also needs to monitor the same information at a global level to ensure that effective management action is being taken to reduce sickness absence and that management effort is well targeted. We recommend that the Department and employing authorities review the level of access and format of standard sickness reports. It may be necessary to re-define the requirements of the employing authorities in order to produce a set of routine local and corporate reports on levels and patterns of sickness that will help managers to monitor further the absence of individuals or particular groups of teachers, and take appropriate action (paragraph 4.18).

22. We found that targets have not been established for reducing sickness absence either at the regional level or by all individual employing authorities. We recommend that the sickness management strategies of the employing authorities should be based on the establishment of local patterns and trends in sickness absence, the identification of appropriate levels of management accountability and the setting of demanding targets for reducing sickness absence within their schools (paragraph 4.23).

23. One method of welfare intervention which has shown itself capable of reducing absenteeism is workplace counselling. While available research is generally supportive of counselling, we consider that further research is required in the form of controlled trials. We recommend, therefore, that the employing authorities should make counselling available to schools on a pilot basis so as to assess more thoroughly the cost-benefit of the actual impact on teacher absences (paragraphs 4.27 and 4.28).

24. The Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) in the Boards have endeavoured to increased the proportion of courses run in schools, often supporting the teacher in the classroom. CASS have also made efforts to identify alternative strategies for training which would minimise teachers' absences from the classroom. In order to minimise teacher absences due to

training, we believe that there is scope for more innovation in delivery of training. In particular, we recommend that the Boards continue to seek new ways of applying available and developing information technology to meet training needs. The Boards should also explore the scope for use of "outside hours" training, with teachers being paid to attend such courses, although the extent to which this can be used may be limited (paragraph 4.34).

Part 1: Introduction and Scope

Introduction

1.1   Schools have the statutory responsibility to determine their teacher staffing complements under Local Management of Schools arrangements. In filling posts, they have a range of flexibilities open to them. They can employ full-time and part-time staff, and make use of permanent and temporary employment contracts.   For example, they can offer job sharing to facilitate teachers who wish to work part time, and temporary contracts to cover posts of a fixed duration. Temporary employment contracts, full-time and part-time, also help schools cover for teaching vacancies and for teachers who will be returning to their posts after being absent for reasons such as career breaks, maternity leave, sickness, and professional development. This is known as substitution cover and is a normal and unavoidable part of school management everywhere.

1.2   A whole range of teachers are employed to provide substitution cover, for example:

- newly qualified or young mobile teachers who are not yet in full-time employment;

- teachers with young families who are returning to teaching after a career break; and

- teachers who have taken early retirement and usually only wish to find occasional work.

1.3   Excluding the voluntary grammar sector (see paragraph 1.9), the Department of Education (the Department), the Education and Library Boards (the Boards) and schools in Northern Ireland spent around £422 million on approximately 17,000 permanent teachers during 2000-01. In the same year, substitution cover provided by teachers equated to an additional 1,735 full time equivalent teachers, costing a further £38 million, plus employers' national insurance and superannuation costs of £6.5 million.

1.4   Expenditure on teaching staff providing substitution cover has risen rapidly over recent years, increasing by 29 per cent in real terms since 1996-97 (see Figure 1). In addition, in 2000-01 just over

£1 million was spent on temporary teachers sourced through employment agencies. The overall increase in expenditure masks differences between the Boards and sectors. These are summarised in Appendix 1.

Figure 1

Expenditure on Substitution Cover

Type of cover	1996-97 £	1997-98 £	1998-99 £	1999-00 £	2000-01 £	5-year increase	Real terms increase
Daily cover	24,609,126	26,035,383	28,583,449	32,041,525	34,318,516	39.5%	26.5%
Hourly cover	2,011,814	2,499,453	2,811,167	3,207,404	3,424,422	70.2%	54.4%
Total	26,620,940	28,534,836	31,394,616	35,248,929	37,742,938	41.8%	28.6%

Source: Department of Education

Note: figures exclude employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions and reflect annual salary increases of around 3 per cent.

1.5 Substitute teaching cover is required for a number of reasons. The Department was able to provide a breakdown, by reason, of the figure for daily cover (but not hourly cover) for 2000-01. The Department pointed out that cover for vacant posts cost £11.45 million, but this would not have been an additional cost to a school's budget as funding would already have been in place to cover the vacant post.

Figure 2

Cost of Daily Cover by Reason 2000-01

Reason	Amount £
Vacant Posts[1]	11,451,500
Sickness	10,687,900
Training/curriculum	3,751,900
Maternity/adoption	3,697,000
Personal business	677,400
Educational visits	454,300
Relief for teaching principal	162,800
Union business	100,100
Other [2]	3,335,600
Total daily cover	**34,318,500**

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1   The "vacant post" classification is also used as a default by the Department if a school does not provide a reason for the absence of a permanent teacher. As a result, this figure will be overstated and those for other categories understated.

2   For example, public service absence.

1.6   Under Local Management of Schools arrangements, the financial consequences of a teacher's absence from work can fall on either the school's delegated budget or on the non-delegated funds held centrally by the relevant Board or the Department. In 2000-01, £24 million (64 per cent) of the £38 million (Figure 1) spent on temporary teaching replacements was borne by schools, principally for short-term sickness absences, maternity cover and cover for vacant posts. The remaining £14 million (36 per cent) of the total bill for substitution cover in 2000-01, which was met by the Boards and the Department, was largely for long-term sickness absences and absences due to Board training for teachers.

Scope of the Review

1.7   In view of the costs, it is important that temporary teaching cover is used appropriately. It is also essential that the quality of teaching provided during substitution cover is no less than that expected of permanent teaching staff. This review examined the extent to which the arrangements covering the supply of substitute teachers offer the best value for money.

- Part 2 of the Report examines the arrangements in place for assuring the quality of teachers providing substitution cover by assessing the effectiveness of the management of their selection, support and performance. It also looks at the extent to which teacher absenteeism and subsequent teacher replacements can affect pupil attainment;

- Part 3 examines the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers to provide substitution cover; and

- Part 4 shifts the focus away from the supply-side solution by considering whether sufficient effort is being invested in the effective management of teacher attendance in the first instance.

1.8   While the Department carries central responsibility for schools, five autonomous Boards are statutorily charged with the delivery of education services in their respective areas. Schools are funded by the Department, either directly or through the Boards. From their budgets, schools can decide their own spending priorities, including expenditure on substitute teachers. The employing authorities for teachers are the Boards for controlled schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) for

Catholic maintained schools and Boards of Governors for voluntary grammar and grant-maintained integrated (GMI) schools and other voluntary maintained schools (see Appendix 2 for details of different school types).

1.9 The Department operates a computerised teachers' pay system for all schools apart from the 54 voluntary grammar schools, which have their own payroll systems. Given the difficulties associated with collecting data from such a number of independent systems, our review excluded these schools, which account for less than five per cent of all schools in Northern Ireland. However, any lessons emerging from this Report on how the provision of temporary teaching cover can be improved should also be relevant to the voluntary grammar school sector.

1.10 Teachers employed to provide substitution cover have contracts ranging from the occasional day in order to provide short notice cover, to longer periods covering, for example, maternity absences. Within this Report, the provision of substitution cover refers to the temporary employment of teachers in the event of a teaching vacancy or the absence of a permanent teacher. It includes both "long-term substitution" such as cover for extended illness, and "short-term substitution" for occasional absences.

1.11 Professional advice in relation to the report was provided by Tom Nolan, former Chief Executive of the South Eastern Education and Library Board, and Jennifer Spratt, who has written extensively on the topic of substitute teaching in Scotland (for example, see footnote 1, paragraph 2.9).

Assuring the Quality of Substitute Teachers

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The use of teachers to provide substitution cover for teaching vacancies and both short and long-term staff absences is a normal feature within schools. The way in which they are recruited, supported, developed and evaluated is important in assuring the quality of teaching provided during periods of substitution cover.

Introduction

2.1   Employing authorities (see paragraph 1.8) depend heavily on substitution cover to provide a valuable service. On average, over the five years to 2000-01, about ten per cent of available teaching days have been taught by teachers providing substitution cover (see Figure 3). While we recognise that the exposure of pupils to substitute teachers will not be evenly spread, given these figures it would not be unreasonable to estimate that the 350,000 pupils who attend all schools annually will have spent at least one year with a substitute teacher between entering nursery provision and leaving secondary education.

Figure 3	**Permanent and Temporary Teaching Days 1996-97 to 2000-01**

	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	Total
Permanent days	3,226,860	3,181,230	3,147,495	3,148,665	3,154,320	15,858,570
Temporary days*	281,041	290,161	306,469	328,634	338,330	1,544,635
%	**8.7%**	**9.1%**	**9.7%**	**10.4%**	**10.7%**	**9.7%**

*Includes part-time hours converted to equivalent days.

2.2   The level of substitution cover can vary significantly between schools. For all primary schools in 2000-01, on average 12.6% of teaching days were taught by teachers providing substitution cover. However, out of a total of almost 1,000 primary schools, 105 had a level of substitution cover of 25% or more (ie twice the average). In secondary schools, on average 8.7% of teaching days were taught by teachers providing substitution cover, but eight out of almost 200 secondary schools had a level of substitution cover of more than twice this average.

2.3   While the smooth running of schools relies on the services of teachers providing substitution cover, objectively, their day-to-day use can be problematic both from the point of view of school management and the teachers themselves. School principals have to cope with ever-changing situations, matching short-term absences to available staff, often at very short notice. They also need to ensure that teachers will be able to dedicate themselves

professionally and sensitively to the needs of a class and pick up where absent teachers have left off. On the other hand, teachers providing substitution cover may be required to deliver lessons to pupils they do not know, in an unfamiliar environment, and perhaps with little time to prepare if called in at short notice.

2.4   The disruption to the continuity of the learning process by the introduction of a different teacher increases the possibility of classroom management problems. This increases the risk that standards of curriculum delivery and pupil learning will be adversely affected. As a result, the strategies used in managing substitute teachers could have significant implications for the educational experiences of pupils. The following paragraphs examine the administrative arrangements of how teachers providing substitution cover are appointed to temporary posts and the effectiveness of the systems in place to minimise the risks to the quality of educational provision by ensuring that they:

- are appropriately qualified, experienced and fit for the roles they are asked to perform;

- receive effective local, as well as general, induction; have access to training and development opportunities; and

- receive regular, timely and objective feedback, so that any problems with their performance are recognised at an early stage and are dealt with promptly.

Identifying Teachers for Substitution Cover

2.5   Prior to the introduction of Local Management of Schools arrangements in 1990, the Boards and CCMS played an active role in identifying teachers to provide substitution cover, through a central system. Since that time, however, they have dispensed with the centrally-funded "supply pools" from which they drew teachers to cover for the absence of permanent teachers. Instead, the recruitment and support of substitute teaching staff has now largely been devolved to individual schools. Only one Board (the Southern) maintains a formal central listing of available teachers. Teachers can apply to be included on this list, subject to Board checks on qualifications and criminal record. The list is reviewed and updated annually. Another Board (the Western) keeps lists of available teachers at its Teachers' Centres, but schools largely use their own local lists. In addition, some schools make use of lists held by teaching unions.

2.6   The devolution of substitute recruitment to schools has the advantage of allowing individual schools to build up close relations with teachers providing substitution cover. Schools are likely to value this freedom, especially in situations where there are plenty of teachers available, so that they can choose those who they feel fit in best in their particular school. On the other hand, if there is a shortage of substitute teachers, the maintenance of a central list offers schools a wider choice of suitably qualified individuals than they may have if operating independently. In this way, the maintenance of a central list does not preclude schools from continuing to build close relations with favoured staff, but widens their choice. It also has the potential advantage of reducing the hidden cost of the time spent by principals trying to contact appropriate staff to fill vacancies. At the same time, we recognise that account has to be taken of practical circumstances such as whether teachers (especially those with families) will work in a school which is a significant distance from their homes.

2.7   Within the employing authorities, the existence of some form of central list should also help to facilitate monitoring, oversight and the more effective planning of substitution, and reduce inequity between schools and teachers providing substitution cover. As the Department and employing authorities have a role to play in ensuring that the best interests of pupils guide educational practice, it is important that the current and on-going movement to improve standards of practice in schools should apply equally to substitute teaching.

2.8   Although the Boards no longer fund central supply pools, they are still required to meet the costs of substitute cover for a range of teacher absences in controlled and maintained schools, and they also provide the funding for schools' delegated budgets. The Department fulfils this role in the case of GMI schools. As noted at paragraph 1.3, substitute cover in schools consumes significant resources and yet it operates with little, if any, direct oversight or input from the Department and employing authorities.

2.9   Recent research in Scotland[1] and England[2] has highlighted the changing role of local education authorities in relation to teaching cover. Some years ago, all would have maintained salaried "supply" pools of teachers providing substitution cover but the influence of local management of schools led to a position where

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1   *The Cover Story: A Survey of the Management of Supply Teachers by Scottish Education Authorities*, Jennifer Spratt, University of Aberdeen, 2001.

2   *Supply Teachers: Symptom of the Problem or Part of the Solution*, Institute for Public Policy Research, November 2001.

schools largely organised their own cover on a local basis. More recently there has been a rapid and significant rise in the use of recruitment agencies (see paragraph 2.16). The research, however, points up the advantages of having a more centralised system of teaching cover, in particular the opportunities for better planning, monitoring and quality control. It also gives examples of some local education authorities re-establishing their supply pools in response to requests from schools for such a service.

2.10 NIAO recommends that the employing authorities should consider setting up and maintaining a networked database, to be used by principals and authorised senior managers, which would provide more detail on the previous work experience, areas of expertise and references of teachers providing substitution cover. We understand that such a system has been successfully introduced in a number of education authorities in Scotland. A regional database could be organised on a geographical basis. Another possibility would be to integrate into the database an electronic booking system so that when a teacher was committed to providing substitution cover in one school, this could be entered on the database for the information of other schools.

2.11   The Department said that it has reservations as to whether the proposed database would in reality offer a wider choice of substitute teachers. In addition, it said that its practicability and value for money would need to be fully and rigorously assessed. We fully accept that these are important considerations and would expect the employing authorities to fully cost and evaluate any new system before embarking on the introduction of a database.

Selection of Teachers to Provide Substitution Cover

2.12   As only one Board compiles and issues information to schools on teachers providing substitution cover, the recruitment of suitable candidates often depends on the planning and judgment of principals and senior managers. In a survey of 100 schools, NIAO found that the normal scenario was of schools attempting as far as possible to build up relationships with competent staff, whom they

used regularly. Of the 66 schools which replied to the survey, 58 (88 per cent) indicated that the main basis for selection of a teacher to provide substitution cover was previous experience of that person. The second main way of selecting a substitute was on the basis of a verbal recommendation from another school principal - 49 schools (74 per cent) indicated this as their second choice.

2.13   When informed that a teacher has been employed by a school to provide substitution cover, the Department will check that the individual concerned holds a teaching qualification and has not been retired due to ill-health or had their eligibility to teach taken away. It is the responsibility of employing authorities to check with the police whether persons who apply to work with children have a criminal record. In selecting prospective substitute teaching staff it should be normal practice for schools to employ the same recruitment procedures as for substantive posts: for example, obtaining satisfactory written references, particularly from a previous employer. Schools also have a responsibility to ensure that temporary teachers are familiar with the curriculum, up-to-date in their teaching practices, and that pupils are receiving instruction from competent staff. The onus is on Boards of Governors and principals to ensure as far as possible that the person appointed is competent and to take account of all guidance issued by their Education and Library Board, including guidance on equality of opportunity.

2.14   In our survey, we asked what checks schools carried out before recruiting a teacher to provide substitution cover. Thirty (45 per cent) relied on word-of-mouth recommendations from other schools where the person had taught, in some cases backed up with written references. A further 24 (36 per cent) carried out no specific checks, as they used only substitute teachers previously known to them. Seven schools relied on written references and four actually interviewed the teachers. One school did not respond to this question.

2.15   We consider that concentrating on the employment checks set out in paragraph 2.13, before teachers are recruited to provide substitution cover, can reduce risks to the quality of tuition provided to pupils. To do this effectively, we believe that schools also need to rely on there being robust systems in place which provide details of the employment history, expertise and references

of teachers. The use of a centralised database maintained by the employing authorities, as recommended at paragraph 2.10, should allow schools to select substitute teachers with more confidence.

Recruitment Agencies

2.16   We found that, since 1999, there has been a marked increase in the use of recruitment agencies as a source of securing teachers to provide substitution cover, as shown in Figure 4 below. The Department told us that it was aware of four recruitment agencies providing substitute teachers to schools in Northern Ireland.

Payments to Agencies for Substitute Teachers

| | 1999-00 | 2000-01 |
	£	£
Belfast	284,527	307,903
North Eastern	139,313	249,288
South Eastern	44,576	393,436
Southern	17,671	95,053
Western	206	48,446
Total	**486,293**	**1,094,126**

Source: Boards

2.17 In many ways the main advantages to schools of using agencies appear similar to those which could be claimed for the centralised "pooling" system operated by the Boards prior to the introduction of local management arrangements:

- convenience, in that only one telephone call is required to the agency and the agency then contacts teachers directly to fill the vacancy

- the agency carries out a series of checks on teachers, including professional qualifications, experience, criminal check and references, on behalf of schools

- the agency, through its teacher database, can offer a greater choice of substitutes, rather than schools relying on their own small local lists.

2.18 Recent research in England by the Institute of Public Policy Research (see paragraph 2.9) also notes the rise of supply agencies and voices some concerns. For example, wide-scale use of agency teachers, who are subject to different terms and conditions of employment, may create a "two-tiered" profession. Teachers will register with the agency that pays them the highest rate, so the cost to schools of hiring a substitute may be greater. There have also been some concerns about specific agencies failing to carry out basic checks on teachers.

2.19 While the use of recruitment agencies may increase the availability of substitute teachers to schools, we consider that caution should be exercised in their use. Responsibility for the development of agency substitutes, and for ensuring that they are suitably qualified and reasonably competent, falls to the agencies rather than the Boards as traditional employing authorities. As a result, there is an onus on the Boards to ensure that the agency substitutes deployed by schools are suitably competent to carry out the work required. Based on a Departmental circular released in 1990, we note the guidance issued by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools on the need for schools to carry out pre-employment checks on agency substitutes. We recommend that other employing authorities take similar action to emphasise the importance of the Department's guidance and that all employing authorities assure themselves, perhaps through internal audit checks, that schools have complied with this guidance when agency substitute teachers are deployed.

2.20 Against a background of teacher shortages in England, the Institute of Public Policy Research outlines possibilities for local education authorities (LEAs) and recruitment agencies to work more closely together. For example, the agency could be responsible for recruitment and allocation and the LEA for monitoring effectiveness and controlling costs. The Institute recommends that closer working between high-quality agencies and LEAs should be encouraged.

2.21 As part of its on-going teaching reforms, the Department of Education and Skills in Great Britain has been developing a policy to introduce Quality Marks for local education authorities and

recruitment agencies in England and Wales. The purpose will be to recognise those that demonstrate good practice in the recruitment, placement, appraisal and training of supply teachers. The proposal outlines 17 good practice standards to be achieved and the evidence required to demonstrate their achievement. It is still at draft stage.

Guidance and Induction

2.22 Teachers providing substitution cover are most in need of support when new to a school and they need to familiarise themselves with pupils, colleagues, resources and procedures as rapidly as possible. Such teachers, however well qualified or experienced, are likely to perform better when they receive appropriate guidance and induction. Overcoming a lack of familiarity can help reduce any risk to the quality of teaching provided. By ensuring that induction is appropriate and effective, schools enable substitute teachers to rely less on permanent staff for guidance and make them more able and more likely to comply with school policies and procedures. In addition to any general induction provided, it is also important that teachers providing substitution cover receive appropriate induction to the particular curriculum area they are working in.

2.23 While we recognise that the following measures may not be practicable in all circumstances, good practice on the induction of teachers coming into a school on a temporary basis could include:

- a permanent member of staff within the school being responsible for guiding substitute teachers during their time in the school

- introduction to key personnel within the school eg subject head, head of key stage etc

- a brief tour of key locations within the school eg staff room, notice boards, school office etc

- written general information, in the form of a small handbook or summary sheet, including school start and finish times; lunch and break times; lunch arrangements; register procedures; summary of school behaviour policy; emergency/fire drill arrangements

- specific information on the class to be taught eg number and names of pupils; work to be covered; any particular behavioural or special needs issues; name of classroom assistant if there is one.

2.24 Of the 66 schools that responded to the survey, 31 (47 per cent) said they provided some form of written guidance to teachers providing substitution cover. Twenty-two (33 per cent) indicated that they provided some form of induction for substitute teachers and 40 (61 per cent) indicated that a permanent member of staff was available to support any substitute teachers in the school.

2.25 The survey results indicate that the consistency with which temporary teachers are inducted within schools needs to be improved if employing authorities and schools are to have confidence that these teachers clearly understand school procedures and the limits of their responsibilities. While we recognise again that it may not be appropriate in all circumstances, we recommend that effective induction should be a standard procedure offered to substitute teachers when they take up temporary appointments. One practical way in which some schools in the survey support teachers providing substitution cover is through the production of a substitute teaching booklet or pack which contains, for example, information on lesson times, location of key staff, availability of resources, discipline procedures and so on. Such a booklet need not be lengthy or overly detailed but could be of considerable benefit to temporary teachers. We recommend that all schools should include such documentation in their induction procedures.

2.26 NIAO is aware that, for beginning teachers, a detailed and structured induction programme and set of procedures are in place. The Teacher Education Partnership Handbook, produced in 1998, sets out the roles of the Department, employing authorities and schools in supporting beginning teachers, including those employed as substitutes. This Handbook could be used as a basis for developing induction material for substitute teachers other than beginning teachers.

Training and Development

2.27 Substitute teaching, done well, is demanding. Yet given the sporadic nature of much temporary teaching work, teachers providing substitution cover have fewer opportunities to maintain their technical competence and knowledge and to address changing skills needs than those in permanent teaching posts. If ongoing

support through training is not provided, in time this may deplete the teaching skills of substitute teachers and undermine their ability to perform new or extended roles. Recognising and addressing any weaknesses in the support provided to substitute teachers is key to maintaining the quality of teaching provided to pupils and to helping individual substitutes to enhance their careers.

2.28 In-service teacher training is largely the responsibility of the Curriculum, Advisory and Support Service (CASS) within each of the Boards. The Education Reform (NI) Order 1989 (the 1989 Order) states that each Board will prepare a programme of advice and support for its schools, and that any such programme shall contain provision for "the further training of teachers, whether or not employed on the staff of a particular school". Each Board's CASS service consults annually with all schools in its area, with a view to identifying training and support needs for the incoming year. Provision is also built in for Departmental and Board initiatives. CASS provides a structured three year programme of support for newly qualified teachers (see paragraph 2.34), a proportion of whom will begin their working life providing substitution cover. CASS would also expect that any substitute teachers in a school when in-school training is taking place would be included in the training sessions. Teachers who regularly undertake substitute duties are therefore likely to have some exposure to training courses in an ad-hoc way. However, no specific training provision is made for substitute teachers.

2.29 Teachers who provide substitution cover only occasionally will not have regular exposure to training. CASS does not have a database of such teachers and would have little or no contact with them. Training materials can be provided if these teachers make a specific request, but there is no training or support pack designed specifically for them.

2.30 Boards told NIAO that they are conscious of the need to give teachers providing substitution cover the opportunity of access to training provision and operate an "open door" policy. Information can be found on Board web sites about training programmes. Teachers with a desire to maintain and develop their skills can contact their relevant Board about access to courses and, if places are available, the Boards will facilitate the teacher providing substitution cover.

2.31 One Board (the North Eastern) has given consideration to establishing a specific web site for teachers providing substitution cover on a casual basis but felt it would not have the resources to maintain it properly and keep it current. The Board did suggest that such a site could be established on a five-Board basis, as a prime source of information and advice for all substitute teachers. The Department agreed that there would be opportunities to develop web-based support for teachers on foot of its Information Technology Strategy and investment in new technology.

2.32 In our questionnaire to schools, we asked whether teachers providing substitution cover attend in-school training. Five of the 66 schools that responded (8 per cent) indicated that such teachers would always attend in-house training. Fifty-five schools (83 per cent) said that teachers providing substitute cover may attend training courses but attendance would depend on the length of period of cover being provided.

2.33 We asked schools whether they thought a Board-organised training programme for teachers providing substitution cover was needed. Sixty-four of those responding (97 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed that such a programme was required. Presumably these schools feel that the teachers they have engaged to provide substitution cover are lacking in some areas of expertise.

2.34 Teachers providing substitution cover, like other teachers, have a need for ongoing training to keep them abreast of changes in the profession. Whilst beginning teachers are catered for through the structured programme of support provided by CASS and those on long-term appointments may have the opportunity to avail of a school's in-service training, the lack of formal provision for teachers providing short-term substitution cover lies in sharp contrast to the extent to which the school system depends on them. We recognise that difficulties may arise from the practicality of arranging to provide additional training for a substitute employed for a short period. Moreover, differing levels of motivation among teachers providing substitution cover to avail of training opportunities may be a problem and while they could have access to school/teaching-centre training, they would not receive payment for doing so. However at a time of constant change in the education of children, we regard it as essential that teachers providing substitution cover, who are increasingly put in charge of classes, have a firm grasp of current curriculum developments.

2.35 We consider that investing more in the training of teachers providing substitution cover will help to maintain and improve the effectiveness of their teaching and ensure that pupil learning and attainment levels do not suffer adversely in the absence of permanent staff. We recommend, therefore, that the Department of Education, the General Teaching Council and the employing authorities work together to develop a system of on-going training and support for teachers providing substitution cover, drawing on available good practice. This is an area where consultation with substitute teachers themselves could be fruitful. Such a system could include published materials, and the use of information technology both to inform teachers about what training opportunities are available and to provide direct access to both materials and advice.

2.36 At the present time the need for continuing professional development is being stressed. For example, in England the Learning and Skills Council[3] is piloting a scheme to give 1,000 substitute teachers the opportunity to get a Professional Development Qualification. This has been designed specifically to help substitute teachers further their classroom skills and educational knowledge.

2.37 In our view, schools, teachers and the employing authorities are best placed to know what development activity will meet the particular needs of teachers providing substitution cover. We recommend, therefore, that the General Teaching Council should consider coordinating an examination of how substitute teachers can be encouraged to show more commitment to their professional development. In this regard, highlighting how undertaking professional development training can be used as evidence for Performance Threshold Assessments[4] may provide an incentive to greater participation.

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3 The Learning and Skills Council has replaced Training and Enterprise Councils in England and the Further Education Funding Council. It is responsible for funding and planning education and training for over16-year-olds.

4 Performance Threshold was introduced in 2000 as an element of teaching pay reforms. Classroom teachers who "cross the threshold" are paid on a five-point upperscale. Once gained, threshold status is a permanent accreditation, which will be recognised for any employment as a classroom teacher, including work as a substitute teacher.

2.38 Improving the teaching and learning environment when a teacher providing substitution cover is in the classroom also has wider training implications for schools. The use of such teachers should be seen as a co-operative venture and should involve training not only of those providing substitution cover, but also the permanent teaching staff in how to prepare for substitution. In addition, pupils also need to know that expectations for their performance will be held constant between the permanent teacher and the temporary replacement.

2.39 The Department of Education and Skills in England and Wales is currently finalising a set of self-study materials for supply teachers, which it hopes will be available in 2002. This will also be backed up with materials on the Departmental web-site. In addition, there are proposals for supply teachers to maintain a portfolio of evidence of completed training, which will be linked to the quality mark (see paragraph 2.21 above).

Quality Assessment and Evaluation

2.40 It is in a school's interest to ensure that there is appropriate coverage when vacancies occur or during the absence of permanent staff. Our survey asked schools for their views on the availability of good quality substitute teachers. In the context of the questionnaire, "good quality" is taken as a measure of the standard performance that would be expected of a satisfactory permanent teacher. While many of the schools surveyed had positive experiences of substitute teachers, 35 of the 66 schools that replied (53 per cent) indicated either that there were usually not enough or never enough good quality substitutes available. Only four schools (6 per cent) felt there were always enough good substitutes available.

2.41 We consider that the perspective of schools cannot be explained simply in terms of inadequacies among teachers providing substitution cover. We recognise that the situations and problems with which a covering teacher might be faced can arise from a number of interacting elements which lie entirely outside the control of the substitute teachers: for example, there can be problems with the issue of guidance, induction, training and development (see paragraphs 2.22 to 2.39). In addition, schools may be faced with a range of difficulties depending on their circumstances and in turn this may affect their ability to attract

suitable teachers to provide substitution cover. In our view, a more detailed examination of the network of contributory factors giving rise to the perceptions of substitute teachers encountered in schools is needed to help inform dialogue about substitute teaching issues and to develop future practice.

2.42 Responsibility for assessing and reporting on teaching and learning in schools lies with the Department of Education's Education and Training Inspectorate. Inspections would include the work of teachers providing substitution cover who may be in a school at the time of an inspection. On the basis of this coverage, the Department told us that the Inspectorate had no evidence in overall terms of problems with the quality of service being provided by such teachers. Indeed, the Department told us that while it recognised the negative views expressed by some of the schools who responded to our survey, the performance of substitute teachers needed to be balanced against the Inspectorate's positive experience.

2.43 However, given the cyclical and often focussed nature of inspection and the chance that an inspection may not coincide with a period when teachers providing substitution cover are being used in a school, there is no systematic coverage of the standard of substitute teaching. While we recognise that there are many good quality teachers providing substitute cover, the feedback from our survey of schools showed that the experience of a substantial proportion of principals who responded was that getting good quality substitute teachers often presents a challenge and at the very least, substitute teaching could be described as variable. No generalisation can be drawn from our survey, however, we consider that the findings do indicate the need for substitute teaching to be subject to more regular and focussed evaluation in order to better inform and guide the development and utilisation of teachers providing substitution cover.

2.44 Within individual schools the principal plays a key role in monitoring and evaluating the quality of all teaching. In terms of work undertaken by teachers providing substitution cover, this role provides an opportunity for school principals, permanent teachers and substitutes themselves to discuss any areas of difficulty and to look for positive solutions. The fact that teachers may work across a number of different schools within a given period makes consistency and continuity of performance review and assessment of development needs difficult.

2.45 Good practice suggests that two-way evaluation can help strengthen the working relationship between a school and a substitute teacher. Evaluation need not be a complex task. A simple form, to be completed by the substitute teacher and permanent class teacher and maintained as a record, helps formalise the process and can identify weaknesses and training needs. A positive approach to this, which is in operation in schools within Glasgow City Council, is the use of a substitute teacher's logbook. This records the substitutes teaching experience, as well as evaluation reports. The use of the logbook allows school principals to see what stage teachers providing substitution cover are at, courses attended, support provided in other schools and areas of developmental need. In this way the substitute teacher is able to use the logbook both as a record of service and a tool for self-evaluation.

2.46 Of the 66 schools that responded to NIAO's survey, 57 (86 per cent) indicated that evaluation of teachers providing substitution cover was on a purely informal basis, five (8 per cent) used a mixture of formal and informal evaluation and only four (6 per cent) used formal evaluation. We consider that such piece-meal assessment and evaluation of such teachers is of little help to their professional development nor does it help schools in selecting placements.

2.47 Informal evaluation often means that poor performance may simply lead to a teacher not being approached by the school in the future. The absence of formal systems for monitoring and appraising the performance of substitute teachers means that the teacher can remain unaware of his or her shortcomings and these may then be replicated elsewhere in the school system as the teacher takes up other appointments. Therefore, the learning of pupils may be put at risk if poor performance is not systematically identified and measures taken to ensure that an optimum level of teaching is provided.

2.48 Teachers who provide substitution cover have a valuable role to play in the drive to raise standards in schools. In order to ensure that professional standards are maintained, there should be mechanisms in place to help these teachers evaluate their own teaching skills. We consider that action is required at various levels within the education system.

At school level:

Individual schools need to ensure that, in addition to effective induction, teachers providing substitution cover receive timely feedback on their performance. In our view, the evaluation of substitute teachers' performance, in the form of a two-way dialogue, should be an in-built feature of the management system.

At employing authority level:

Schools should provide feedback to employing authorities on the quality of substitution used. This should then be used by the Boards and CCMS to develop a strategy to help teachers with weaknesses, who provide substitution cover, to improve their performance. This could be in conjunction with the new General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland, part of whose role is to advise the Department on teacher performance and standards of teaching.

At Departmental level:

Although it is clear that substitute teachers play a significant role in the education of school children in Northern Ireland, there has been a general absence of evaluative review of their management and effectiveness. We consider that conducting a more formal and detailed examination would lead to a better understanding of the issues surrounding substitution cover and help to develop good practice. In view of this, we recommend that the Education and Training Inspectorate should consider, as a separate exercise, a review of the quality of teaching provided during substitution cover in order to promote best practice in managing the demand for their services.

2.49 We understand that Management Side of the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee (Schools) has been considering a performance management scheme, the purpose of which is to develop all teaching staff and to help raise standards by ensuring that schools and teachers are clear about what they expect their pupils to achieve. We note also that the terms of reference of an Inquiry recently established by the Minister for Education into teachers' salaries and conditions of service include taking account of the principle of developing a framework that will support the professional development of teachers in line with a school's development plan.

2.50 In view of these initiatives, we acknowledge that the Department would have difficulty in implementing, at this time, the specific recommendations we have made concerning the performance of teachers providing substitute cover. However, as teachers employed to provide substitution cover have a valuable role to play in the drive to raise standards in schools, we consider that the issues we have highlighted should be addressed within the context of the current deliberations over a performance management system for teachers.

Substitution and Pupil Attainment

2.51 Ultimately the most critical concern over the use of substitution cover is how such teaching will affect the quality of pupils' education. As we have indicated above, in the absence of a permanent teacher, the quality of experience which pupils have in the classroom can be affected by how up-to-date, well trained and professionally supported the teachers providing substitution cover are. In addition, the increasing reliance of schools on substitution cover can disrupt the continuity of the classroom environment, which may have a negative impact on pupil achievement. Indeed, research in the United States[5] has shown that teacher absences and the use of replacements can adversely affect student attainment levels.

2.52 To test the hypothesis that the time pupils are engaged in instruction with replacement teachers can adversely affect learning outcomes, we asked the Department to carry out some analysis of the relationships between substitute cover, levels of social deprivation (as measured by free school meal entitlement) and

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5 *Teacher Absences and Substitute Teachers*, Los Angeles Unified School District, Independent Analysis Unit, September 2000.

pupils' educational achievement at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and GCSE levels.

2.53 The analysis carried out by the Department showed that social deprivation and temporary teaching days (i.e. substitution cover) had a highly statistically significant effect on Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 results and a statistically significant effect on GCSE outcomes. The analysis confirmed the widespread view among educationalists of a strong link between social deprivation and educational achievement, however it also showed that when temporary teaching days were included as an additional variable, the statistical model was strengthened slightly. Further details of the Department's statistical analysis are included in Appendix 3.

2.54 In addition to a link between the increased use of substitution cover and lower pupil attainment levels, another facet of the Department's statistical analysis was that greater use of substitute cover correlated weakly (but statistically significantly) with schools having higher percentages of socially deprived pupils. In other words, it appears that the absence of permanent teachers tends to be more predominant in those schools that can least afford to lose the continuity provided by regular staff.

2.55 While it appears that there is a link between the use of teachers to provide substitution cover and reduced pupil attainment levels, the correlation remains slight (see paragraph 2.53). NIAO recognises that it would be dangerous, therefore, to regard such statistical analysis as implying a causal effect between the use of substitution cover and examination results. A regression analysis, like any statistical model, can never claim to provide a full explanation of the phenomenon under observation. Free school meal entitlement and substitute teaching days between them leave much of the variation in schools' examination results unaccounted for.

2.56 The Department points out that there is a wide range of factors that may interact and which may not only lead to an increased need for substitute cover but may also have an impact on attainment levels. These factors may include: the school's budget; the frequency of substitution and the average length of substitution periods; pupil teacher ratios and class sizes in the school; pupil behaviour and discipline, especially the proportion of disruptive

pupils; levels of pupil absence; specific subject areas or year groups in which teacher absences occur; the quality of the permanent teaching staff in the school; the availability of substitute teachers; and the specific reason for teacher absences. Such is the range and scope of these factors that the Department considers it essential to examine the whole context for individual school's performance before drawing any conclusions as to cause and effect.

2.57   It also considers that any performance issues arising from the incidence of substitution are more likely to relate to these factors and also from the handover arrangements within the school i.e. the extent to which the absent teacher has planned for his/her replacement to take over without any disruption to the study programme for individual pupils and classes rather than on the performance of the substitute teacher, though this too will be important.

2.58   The Department also points out that substitute teachers are required to meet the same eligibility criteria as permanent teachers. In exceptional circumstances there is a provision for short-term appointment of someone who is not eligible to teach, however, this can only take place if the employing authority is satisfied that no person eligible to teach is available. There is no evidence from the Education and Training Inspection programme to suggest that the performance profile of these teachers is any less than that of permanent teachers.

2.59 NIAO notes the Department's concerns and reservations. Nonetheless, in our view, the statistical analysis, taken in conjunction with the evidence from our survey of variable induction procedures, unstructured training provision and a lack of formal assessment and evaluation, indicates that the procedures governing the management of substitution cover merit review. Given the acknowledged importance of academic learning time, we consider that the Department would want to ensure that value for money is achieved for the £38 million currently spent on teachers providing substitution cover. The current movement to elevate standards of practice in schools applies equally to teachers providing substitution cover. Towards this end, therefore, we recommend that the Department, employing authorities and the General Teaching Council should direct their attention to developing a sound substitute teacher programme structured around the areas highlighted in this section:

- improved recruitment procedures;

- maintenance of an up-to-date, comprehensive database of substitute teachers;

- development of standard induction procedures and materials;

- provision of training to meet specific needs of teachers providing substitution cover; and

- provision of evaluation and feedback to teachers.

Re-employment of Retired Teachers
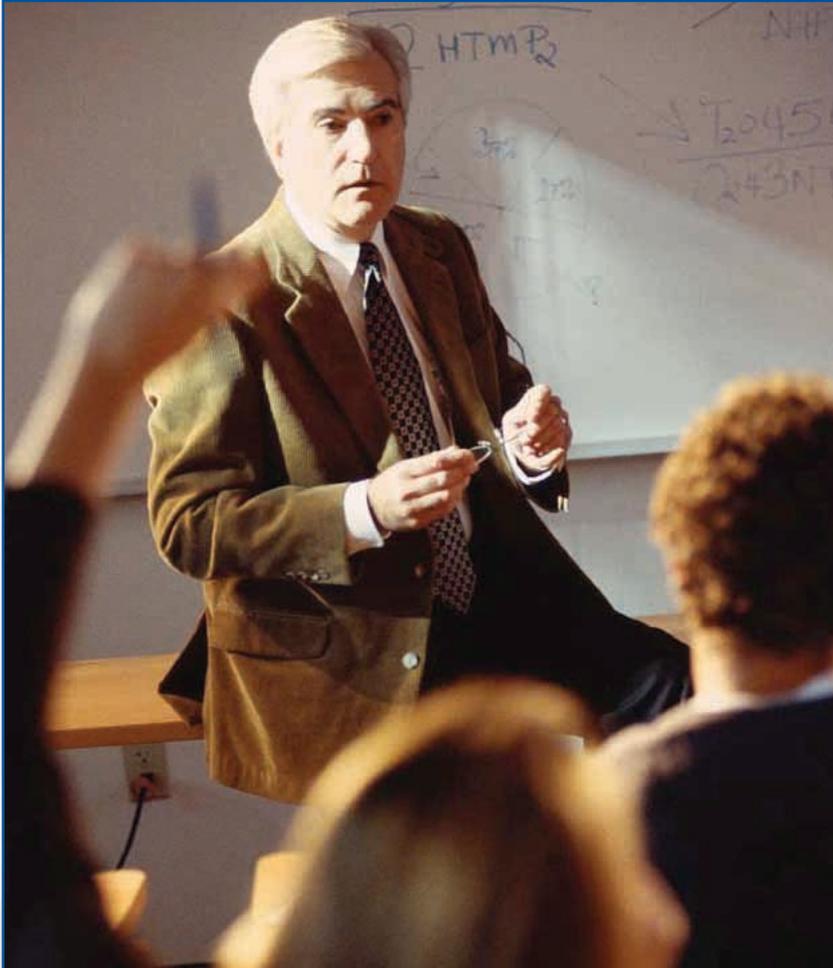
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In dealing with teacher absences many schools opt to re-employ retired teachers, a large proportion of whom will have retired early. The Committee of Public Accounts at Westminster recommended in 1992 that strict controls should be exercised over the re-employment of those who have benefited from premature retirement terms. If the re-employment of retired teachers leads to significant under-employment of newly qualified teachers, there is a risk of under- development or loss of new teachers to the profession.

Introduction

3.1   As noted in paragraph 1.2, retired teachers provide schools with one possible source of replacement, in the absence of permanent staff. Moreover, the bulk of this category of substitute teacher comprises those who have retired prematurely. Analysis of new pension awards over the last ten years shows that premature retirements have accounted for around 70 per cent of all teaching retirements (see Appendix 4).

3.2   The Teachers' Premature Retirement Scheme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1978. It is intended to provide a management tool which employing authorities can use to bring about a qualitative improvement in the educational provision in their schools.   The scheme provides for the payment of accrued superannuation allowances and discretionary compensation to teachers aged 50 or over, whose services are terminated in the interests of the efficient discharge of the employer's function or by reason of redundancy. Similar benefits to those provided under the Scheme are normally available to teachers who retire prematurely at any age on infirmity grounds.

3.3   When a teacher is retired on the grounds of redundancy or efficient discharge, benefits are calculated in the same way as a normal retirement pension and lump sum allowance.   These benefits may be supplemented at the discretion of the employer by awarding compensation (additional years) calculated according to the years of pensionable service earned by the teacher. In 2000-01 £5.9 million was paid out by the Boards in respect of compensation to teachers who had retired prematurely in that and previous years. Teachers who are re-employed and have benefited from a premature retirement package can earn up to the difference between the annual rate of their salary on retirement and their current pension before their pension is abated.

3.4   We found that the number of temporary days worked by retired teachers in providing substitution cover has risen significantly in the five years to 2000-01, from around 34,000 in 1996-97 to just over 50,000. As Figure 5 shows, the vast majority (around 90 per cent) of these have been worked by prematurely retired teachers. Indeed, there has been an increase of 50 per cent in the temporary days worked by prematurely retired teachers over the five years.

Figure 5

Temporary Days Worked by Retired Teachers Providing Substitution Cover

	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	Trend
Efficient discharge	8,057	5,046	4,775	4,037	3,656	-54.6%
Infirmity	50	149	164	86	0	-100.0%
Redundancy	21,609	23,452	27,539	33,761	40,922	+89.4%
Sub-Total (premature)	**29,716**	**28,647**	**32,478**	**37,884**	**44,578**	**+50.0%**
Age	4,314	4,536	4,977	5,615	5,790	+34.2%
Retired Total	**34,030**	**33,183**	**37,455**	**43,499**	**50,368**	**+48.0%**

Source: Department of Education

Notes: (1)Figures include temporary hours converted to days; (2) Under Departmental Regulations, teachers who retired on grounds of ill- health (infirmity) should not be re-employed unless they satisfy a prospective employer of their fitness to teach again. In such instances, ill-health pension payable will be stopped.

3.5   In 1984 and 1988, the Department advised employers that teachers who had been retired prematurely on grounds of redundancy or in the interests of the efficient discharge of the employers function should be re-employed in teaching in only the most exceptional circumstances. It said that when filling temporary teaching posts, preference should be given to newly-qualified, unemployed teachers. However, despite this guidance, a Report by the NIAO in 1992[6] found that large numbers of prematurely retired teachers were re-employed on a temporary basis.

Committee of Public Accounts

3.6   Following our Report, the Committee of Public Accounts[7] recommended that strict controls should be exercised over the re-employment of those who have benefited from premature retirement terms. The Committee called on the Department to ensure that the guidance previously issued in 1984 and 1988 was observed. In response the Department pointed out that monitoring arrangements had been introduced which would provide the Boards and CCMS with monthly information on the scale of re-employed pensioners. It indicated that this would provide a basis for regular review by the Department in order to see to what extent employers had given preference to recently-qualified teachers.

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6   *Department of Education for Northern Ireland: Premature Retirement of Teachers*, Northern Ireland Audit Office, February 1992, HC 248.

7   Committee of Public Accounts, 17th Report, Session 1992-93, HC 84.

3.7   In 1998, a NIAO Report on Initial Teacher Training[8] noted that, despite the steps taken by the Department to discourage re-employment of teachers retired prematurely on efficiency grounds, the number of temporary days worked by them had increased marginally between 1989-90 and 1996-97. In 1999, the Department's Accounting Officer told the Audit Review Group[9] that the Department was discouraging the use of prematurely retired teachers as substitutes and that, under the premature retirement scheme, schools were required to obtain permission from their Education and Library Board before doing so.

3.8   Figure 5 above shows that the number of temporary days worked by prematurely retired teachers increased by 50 per cent between 1996-97 and 2000-01. During the same period, the total number of temporary days worked by all substitute teachers increased from 281,041 to 338,330, a rise of just over 20 per cent. As a proportion of all temporary days, those worked by prematurely retired teachers rose from over ten per cent to over 13 per cent in the period (see Figure 6).

Figure 6	**Proportion of Substitution Cover Provided by Prematurely Retired Teachers 1996-97 to 2000-01**					
	1996-97	**1997-98**	**1998-99**	**1999-00**	**2000-01**	**Trend**
Total Days worked by prematurely retired teachers	29,716	28,647	32,478	37,884	44,578	+50.0%
Total Substitution Days	281,041	290,161	306,469	328,634	338,330	+20.4%
Prematurely retired as % of total substitution days	**10.6%**	**9.9%**	**10.6%**	**11.5%**	**13.2%**	

Source: Department of Education

3.9   It is clear that both the relative rate and proportionate increase of substitute cover provided by prematurely retired teachers are not consistent with the undertakings given to the Committee of Public Accounts in 1992 (see paragraph 3.6). However, we acknowledge the success of the efforts of employing authorities to discourage the re-employment of teachers prematurely retired on the basis of

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8   *Provision of Initial Teacher Training*, Northern Ireland Audit Office, February 1998, HC 501.

9   Prior to devolution this Group, chaired by the Department of Finance and Personnel, considered Comptroller and Auditor General Reports not taken by the Committee of Public Accounts in Westminster.

efficient discharge. Figure 5 shows that there has been a 54.6 per cent reduction in the re-employment of teachers retired on such grounds since 1996-97. It also shows that the overall increase in prematurely-retired substitution is accounted for by the expansion in the number of temporary days worked by those who retired early for redundancy reasons. The Department told us that one of the main reasons teachers retire prematurely on grounds of redundancy is to allow employing authorities to make necessary organisational changes. In its view, it is reasonable to expect such teachers to seek out opportunities as substitute teachers to supplement their pensions.

3.10 The Department and employing authorities have issued reminders to schools in the past two years of their responsibilities when employing teachers to provide substitution cover, emphasising the need to minimise the use of prematurely-retired staff. However, the Department pointed out that it was important to recognise that there are a number of factors which can influence an employer's choice of substitute teacher, for example, demographic considerations, experience and availability. Indeed, some of the employing authorities pointed out that the unavailability of teachers often meant that there may be no alternative but to use prematurely retired teachers. It is also interesting to note that 30 per cent of schools who responded to NIAO's survey indicated that their preferred choice of substitute would be a retired teacher, with 21 per cent opting for a newly-qualified teacher as their preferred choice.

3.11 In addition to quality, the recruitment of teachers to provide substitution cover also needs to be subject to cost considerations. Schools may opt for a retired teacher for their experience and because they are known to the school, and it values the standard of their proven practice. However, such teachers will normally have retired at a comparatively high point on their salary scale and will be considerably more expensive to employ than a newly-qualified teacher. NIAO believes, therefore, that there are substantial opportunities for cost containment through the more prudent use of younger newly-qualified teachers.

3.12 In an effort to contain costs and discourage schools from re-employing retired teachers, the Boards have "capped" the amount they will pay for central substitution at Point 6 on the teachers' pay

scale. If schools employ someone above this, they must pay the difference. However, where schools are responsible for substitution costs, they can employ whom they choose at whatever point on the scale they choose.

3.13 Over-reliance on prematurely retired teachers for substitution cover also raises another important issue. It is not only a question of a potential imbalance in the number of placements given to retired teachers compared with newly-qualified teachers. The duration of placements can also be a crucial factor. The extent to which retired teachers are being re-employed in longer-term placements can mean that there is a risk that probationary teachers who are engaged on a short-term, piecemeal basis will be denied the opportunity to develop a full range of skills.

> 3.14 We acknowledge the extent of the practical difficulties that can confront schools in providing effective substitution arrangements and that the Department is limited by what employment law would permit. However, we consider it essential to the education system in Northern Ireland that the issue of the re-employment of prematurely-retired teachers is addressed effectively, in line with the previous recommendations of the Committee of Public Accounts. Young and newly qualified teachers working as substitutes today are the permanent teachers of the future. Their employment as substitutes is also advantageous in terms of cost and the structured support programme in place for them. Providing newly-qualified teachers with sufficient opportunity to experience teaching as substitutes will be an investment in the quality of the future teaching stock. In line with this, we recommend that the Department should also consider guidance on limiting retired teachers' re-employment to very short-term vacancies.

Managing Teacher Absences

4

Teaching can be a demanding job and teachers need to be physically fit and well motivated. Indeed, the health of teachers has a direct effect on the quality of education school children receive. High levels of sickness absence also increase the need for substitute cover which is costly. It is, therefore, important for employing authorities and schools to have policies and procedures to ensure that as few teachers as possible are ineffective or absent from work because of sickness.

Introduction

4.1   The need for teachers to provide substitution cover flows directly from the absence of permanent teachers from schools owing to illness, maternity leave, secondment, training and so on. We recognise that the potential for reducing such absences will not be possible in all cases, however, as has been shown at paragraph 1.4, teacher absences can be extremely costly to the education system in terms of the remuneration of teachers providing substitution cover. In addition, high levels of absences may also put a strain on other permanent teaching staff, who may have to cover for absent colleagues. As pointed out at paragraph 2.52, the true cost of teacher absenteeism and substitution may exceed immediate monetary considerations, as the statistical analysis carried out by the Department showed that there may be a weak correlation between the use of substitution cover and reduced pupil attainment.

4.2   In our view, the costs associated with substitution cover and the potential impact on the school system make the control of absence an important part of effective school management. While certain types of absence may be unavoidable, it is essential that the reasons for teacher absenteeism are fully identified and investigated and, where possible, positive action taken to reduce its incidence. Failure to do so could lead to millions of pounds being diverted each year from classroom resources to pay for substitution cover.

Level of Sickness Absences

4.3   Figure 2 at paragraph 1.5 shows that, along with training absences, long-term sickness absences require substantial substitution cover. Long-term sickness absence[10] is a particular problem for employing authorities because it is in effect "demand-led" and therefore more difficult to budget for and control. Figure 2 shows that over £10 million was spent in 2000-01 providing cover for both short-term and long-term sickness absences.

4.4   In addition to the costs of substitute cover, another significant cost of teacher absence is the ongoing salaries paid to the permanent teachers they replace. Figures supplied by the Department on sickness absences in schools in 2000-01 show that, on average, just

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10 Long-term sickness is defined as periods of more than 10 working days for schools with up to three full-time teachers, and periods of more than 20 days for schools with four or more full-time teachers.

over ten working days were lost for every full time post (see Figure 7). The Minister for Education, in response to an Assembly question, indicated that the sick pay bill for teachers in 2000-01 was £15.3 million. Sickness absences were concentrated among 69 per cent of the teaching workforce, which meant that those who were absent due to illness were on sick leave for an average of 15 days each. We asked the Department why the incidence of sickness absence was particularly high within grant maintained integrated (GMI) schools. The Department told us that in a small sector, a small number of long-term absences can distort the figures. However, it added that it would like to examine trends over several years before drawing any firm conclusions.

| Figure 7 | **Average Sickness Days per Permanent Teacher in Post 2000-01** |

Board /Sector	Sick days	Permanent Teachers In Post	Sick days Per Teacher In Post
Belfast	9,875	1,039	9.5
North Eastern	19,195	2,129	9.0
South Eastern	14,143	1,912	7.4
Southern	13,047	1,526	8.6
Western	7,301	925	7.9
Controlled Total	**63,561**	**7,531**	**8.4**
Catholic Maintained	74,195	6,975	10.6
Other Maintained	621	91	6.8
Maintained Total	**74,816**	**7,066**	**10.6**
Special	10,884	743	14.7
Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI)	12,634	657	19.2
Total	**161,895**	**15,997**	**10.1**

Source: Department of Education

4.5   Comparative data for Great Britain shows that Northern Ireland schools have a much higher level of teacher sickness absence than the English regions. Moreover, there is much greater variation between the Boards and sectors in Northern Ireland than between the English regions. In comparison with Northern Ireland, sickness absence in England centred on 60 per cent of teachers who were out of the classroom for an average of 10 days each.

Figure 8

Teacher Sickness Absence Figures for England in 2000

Region	Sick Days per Teacher in Post	Sick Days per Teacher Taking Sick Leave
North East	6	8
North West	6	10
Yorkshire and Humber	7	12
East Midlands	6	10
West Midlands	7	11
East of England	6	9
London	5	8
South East	5	9
South West	7	10
England Total	**6**	**10**
Northern Ireland Total	**10**	**15**

Source: Department for Education and Employment (now the Department of Education and Skills)

4.6   When the £15 million paid in sick pay to absent teachers is viewed alongside the £10 million paid for sickness absence cover (see paragraph 4.3), it can be seen that in many cases individual sick absences will have a double cost impact. At the same time, instances where schools choose not to use a substitute to cover a sickness absence can also have value for money implications. Our survey showed that, in these situations, pupils may be supervised by other permanent teachers in the school or classes may be combined, with a consequent impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

4.7   It seems reasonable to conclude that strategies which have a clear impact on reducing teacher absences have the potential both to provide savings in the cost of substitution cover and to improve the value added in terms of teaching and learning. For instance, if teacher sickness absences in Northern Ireland were reduced to the levels in Great Britain (i.e. by 40 per cent), pro-rata savings on substitute teachers would be of the order of £4 million, while the teaching and learning benefits of £6 million worth of permanent teachers' time would not be lost to the classroom.

Controlling Sickness Absences

4.8   Appropriate and timely management intervention can lead to improved attendance levels and there already exists a body of good practice and guidance on the management of sickness absence. Appendix 5 sets out the key principles of good practice in managing sickness absence, drawing on work by the National Audit Office[11] and the Cabinet Office.[12] In 1999, the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST) published a guidance booklet[13] in response to the Cabinet Office recommendations, endorsing the recommendations and highlighting examples of good practice found in local education authorities.

4.9   Our report focused on three of the main areas within the good practice guidance in order to assess the performance of employing authorities and schools in managing sickness absence. These were:

- the need for clarity of roles and procedures, including establishing an absence policy to be applied uniformly to staff at all levels and identifying trigger points for management action

- the need for accurate data on the level and pattern of sickness absence within organisations and the setting of targets for reduction of sickness absences

- an acknowledgement that prevention is better than cure, for example through the adoption of health awareness programmes for staff.

Policy on Sickness Absence

4.10   In 1999, in a joint initiative, the employing authorities for schools in Northern Ireland produced a Managing Attendance policy and associated procedures, in an effort to address the issue of sickness absences (see Appendix 6). The model policy picks up on many points of good practice, in particular

- a clear statement of roles and responsibilities

- details of welfare support arrangements

- identification of trigger points for management action.

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11 *The Management of Sickness Absence in the Metropolitan Police Service*, National Audit Office, 1997
12 *Working Well Together : Managing Attendance in the Public Sector*, Cabinet Office, June 1998
13 *Monitoring and Management of Sickness Absence in Schools*, NEOST, 1999

4.11 Training in support of the new policy consisted of awareness seminars for principals in three Boards, but they indicated to us that not all principals would have attended. The two remaining Boards have only recently begun to address training needs, more than two years after the introduction of the policy. The Cabinet Office report (see paragraph 4.8) stresses the importance of training, not just at the introduction of an absence policy but on an on-going basis, to ensure continued momentum and show sustained senior management commitment.

4.12 The policy document introduced by the employing authorities says that "the policy and procedures....shall be formally adopted by each Board of Governors". In NIAO's survey of schools, only 41 of the 66 schools responding (62 per cent) said they had formally adopted the policy and procedures. Of those 41, 37 (90 per cent) indicated that adoption of the policy had made no marked difference to the level of sickness absence in their schools. These statistics indicate that schools do not appear to be using the policy and procedures as envisaged by the employing authorities to place the oversight of sickness absence on a firmer footing.

> 4.13 NIAO recommends that employing authorities should review their Managing Attendance policy, ensuring that trigger points for action are appropriate and that principals have the necessary management information to act on these. The policy should then be re-launched. It is essential, however, that proper training is provided by the Boards to reinforce the policy and procedures so that a practical impact is achieved in terms of reduced sickness absences. Training should be provided to principals and governors, and also to school staff who have clearly defined responsibilities within the policy. Adoption of the policy should be seen as of benefit to all staff and not just something imposed by management.

Management Information and Target Setting

4.14 An important step in tackling sickness absence among teachers is to establish reliable information on the levels, causes and patterns of sickness absence. Information about sickness absence should be easily accessible to managers and provided in a format

which facilitates its regular review. This information could then be used to consider how sickness rates compare across schools and between employing authorities, to set targets and monitor their achievement and to identify ways in which absences can be reduced.

4.15 The Department records information about teacher attendance and sickness absence on its payroll and personnel system. In response to approaches from the employing authorities in 1999, and as a result of discussions about user requirements, it set up an extensive menu of reports based on data available from this system, which the employing authorities can access in order to explore aspects of sickness absence which may be causing them concern. These include reports on such elements as illness absences at Board level, sickness absence patterns and individual teacher sickness absence histories (see Appendix 7). The Department also told us that it provides information to employing authorities on an ad-hoc basis in response to specific requests.

4.16 Despite this, all the employing authorities told us that they had concerns about the level of access to the information available from the Department's system and the user-friendliness of the reports. They expressed a need for greater access and the ability to use information in order to provide meaningful management reports which they consider as being essential to enhancing their monitoring role. The Department indicated that there were limitations to the current Teachers Pay and Pensions computer system, which could be a source of frustration to the employing authorities. However, it pointed out that a recent upgrade of communication links between the Department and the Boards may provide greater scope for the manipulation of the information available. The Department told us that the project team working on the replacement of the Teachers Pay and Pensions computer system would explore the development of these interfaces.

4.17 While we found that all the employing authorities have instituted some form of reporting on sickness absence, because of the difficulties they have been experiencing with the system there is no consistency in the form this takes. All employing authorities provide schools with periodic reports (quarterly, by term, or 6-monthly) of individual teacher absences in their schools, showing number of days' absence and number of periods of absence within the time-frame of the report. Under local management of schools

arrangements it is then up to school principals to act upon this information as they see fit, in line with the Managing Attendance Policy and Procedures (see paragraph 4.10).

> 4.18 Managers in the employing authorities and schools need to know about the level and detail of sickness absences and how these compare with other authorities and schools so that they can identify ways in which sickness absence can be reduced. The Department also needs to monitor the same information at a global level to ensure that effective management action is being taken to reduce sickness absence and that management effort is well targeted. We recommend that the Department and employing authorities review the level of access and format of standard reports provided since 1999. It may be necessary to re-define the requirements of the employing authorities in order to produce a set of routine local and corporate reports on levels and patterns of sickness that will help managers to monitor further the absence of individuals or particular groups of teachers, and take appropriate action.

4.19 Once such a system is operating effectively, the Department and employing authorities should use the data collected to establish norms and identify trends. Targets could then be set both locally and regionally for reductions in teacher sickness absence rates, as a basis for monitoring. Establishing corporate objectives, performance objectives and targets for absence rates enables managers to be made responsible and accountable for controlling the incidence of sickness absence. It is also a visible demonstration of senior management commitment to managing sickness. Paragraph 4.7 demonstrates the scale of resources that would be released if sickness absence rates were at least in line with those in England.   For instance, annual reductions of around 10 per cent would lead to savings of almost £1 million on substitute teachers which could then be spent in the classroom.

4.20 As a result of the Cabinet Office report (see paragraph 4.8), target reduction figures were set for the public sector - a 20 per cent reduction in sickness absence rates by 2001 and 30 per cent by 2003. In May 2000, the Secretary of State for Education in Great Britain wrote to all schools, emphasising the good practice contained in the Cabinet Office report and setting a more challenging target for

schools. He asked them to achieve a reduction of 30 per cent in sickness absence rates by the end of 2002, using 1999 as the base year.

4.21 Only the policy of the CCMS includes some guidance on possible performance measures which could be used by school principals when monitoring sickness absences. None of the model policies refers to targets for reduction in sickness absence levels. CCMS indicated that targets for reduction could not be included as baseline information was not available on sickness absence levels.

4.22 The Western Board has for some time had concerns about the level of long-term sickness absence among both teaching and non-teaching staff in the schools for which it is responsible, and the resource implications for the Board. As part of its business planning process it has drawn up an action plan for monitoring such absences. This includes the identification of possible performance measures and provision for the establishment of a realistic target for reduction in long-term sickness absences. Implementation of the action plan is on-going.

> 4.23 Targets have not been established for reducing sickness absence either at the regional level or by all individual employing authorities. We recommend that the sickness management strategies of the employing authorities should be based on the establishment of local patterns and trends in sickness absence, the identification of appropriate levels of management accountability and the setting of demanding targets for reducing sickness absence within their schools.

Sickness Absence Prevention

4.24 The South Eastern Board and CCMS are the only employing authorities to have officers dedicated totally to absence monitoring and associated welfare duties. The other employing authorities are now taking steps to address welfare issues, for example through the appointment of welfare officers and the implementation of staff care or staff welfare schemes, so that problems can be tackled early before there is a significant impact in terms of sickness absence.

4.25 Strong sickness management needs to be bolstered by effective policies which promote health in the work-place and which make appropriate use of occupational health services. Employing authorities need to have proactive programmes which assist in the identification and resolution of personal and work-related concerns which may affect performance. We acknowledge that employing authorities are now taking steps to intervene early before situations become problematic. To achieve this successfully, employing authorities and schools need to have sufficient knowledge of the health trends within the teaching workforce in order to tailor their policies and interventions, and understand the problems that need to be tackled. This reinforces the recommendation made at paragraph 4.13 which stresses the need for the recording and reporting of appropriate management information.

4.26 Some commentators suggest that the high incidence of sickness absence among teachers is a direct result of an increase in the pace of change within the teaching profession in recent years which has adversely affected teachers' health and well-being. In this regard we note that the Department launched a teachers' health and well-being survey in November 2001 to identify issues that may impact on teachers and, where appropriate, to develop strategies to encourage healthier working practices. The draft report of the survey is currently under consideration and when finalised will be discussed by employers and teacher unions with a view to developing measures which, it is hoped, will help to contribute to reduced teacher sickness absences.

4.27 One method of welfare intervention which has shown itself capable of reducing absenteeism is workplace counselling. Research[14] has indicated that recordable reductions in absenteeism were typically reported to vary from 25 to 50 per cent, with about seven per cent of the workforce of an organisation expected to approach and use a counselling service provided by that organisation. In terms of teaching, Lothian Education Department[15] has undertaken a comprehensive evaluation of its school counselling service and found a reduction in absenteeism of 62 per cent among teachers counselled, representing a reduction in the salaries paid to absent teachers of £4,000 per person counselled. The conditions that provide the most obvious support for the hypothesis that counselling might have an impact on sickness absence among

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14 *Counselling in the Workplace: The Facts*, Rugby, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 2001.
15 *Final Proposal from the Working Party [on stress] with Accompanying Notes and Appendices*, unpublished report to the Finance and Manpower Division, Edinburgh, Lothian Region Education Dartment, 1993.

teachers are stress and depression which, as indicated above, are a matter of growing concern among the teaching community.

> 4.28   While available research is generally supportive of counselling, we consider that further research is required in the form of controlled trials. We recommend, therefore, that the employing authorities should make counselling available to schools on a pilot basis so as to assess more thoroughly the cost-benefit of the actual impact on teacher absences.

Training Absences

4.29   The growth, in recent years, in the number of initiatives aimed at school improvement has also increased the need for the professional development of teachers, often requiring them to participate in out-of-classroom courses and seminars.   In our survey of schools, 47 per cent of those who responded said that absence for training courses was the main reason that a substitute teacher had to be employed.   Figure 2 at paragraph 1.5 shows that almost £4 million was spent by Boards on substitute cover for training absences in 2000-01.

4.30   The Curriculum Advisory and Support Services (CASS) in the Boards have endeavoured to increase the proportion of courses run in schools, often supporting the teacher in the classroom. They are aware of the potential for disruption to teaching and learning when permanent teachers are absent on training courses.

4.31   CASS have also made efforts to identify alternative strategies for training which would minimise teachers' absences from the classroom. These include:

- "twilight" courses, run in the late afternoon after the teaching day is over. All Boards offer a range of these courses, although the Department said that such courses are not without controversy;

- some residential courses for specific initiatives, such as the School Support Programme; and

- greater use of information and communication technology, for example posting training materials on the Boards' web sites and possible development and piloting of on-line courses.

4.32   At least two Boards believe there is scope for further consideration of running weekend courses and paying teachers to attend. The cost would be less than paying a substitute teacher and there would be no disruption to classroom teaching.

4.33   A recent report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (see footnote 2 at paragraph 2.9) acknowledged that, while in-service training may have a positive impact on learning, schools may struggle to cope with the short-term implications of such absences. It suggested that one solution would be for a greater proportion of continuing professional development to be done during twilight, weekend or holiday sessions. The Institute recognised that there may be a need to pay teachers "overtime", but that costs incurred would be lower than paying for supply cover. It recommended that this option be explored at national level.

> 4.34 In order to minimise teacher absences due to training, we believe that there is scope for more innovation in delivery of training. In particular, we recommend that the Boards continue to seek new ways of applying available and developing information technology to meet training needs. The Boards should also explore the scope for use of "outside hours" training, with teachers being paid to attend such courses, although the extent to which this can be used may be limited.

Appendices

Analysis of Expenditure on Substitute Teachers by Board

	1996-97 £	1997-98 £	1998-99 £	1999-00 £	2000-01 £	% Increase	Real Terms % Increase
Belfast	4,675,955	4,905,404	4,977,508	5,273,139	5,885,015	25.9%	**14.2%**
North Eastern	4,699,617	5,443,365	6,107,350	7,065,420	7,722,673	64.3%	**49.1%**
South Eastern	5,091,314	5,199,744	5,667,940	6,230,139	6,502,669	27.7%	**15.9%**
Southern	5,410,843	6,230,407	7,091,163	7,435,524	7,757,211	43.4%	**30.0%**
Western	4,679,315	4,379,968	4,707,719	5,683,214	5,917,707	26.5%	**14.7%**
Special	1,595,958	1,754,321	2,053,422	2,533,275	2,701,917	69.3%	**53.6%**
GMI**	467,938	621,627	789,514	1,028,222	1,255,746	168.4%	**143.5%**
Total	**26,620,940**	**28,534,836**	**31,394,616**	**35,248,929**	**37,742,938**	**41.8%**	**28.6%**

Source: Department of Education

Note: figures exclude employers' national insurance and superannuation contributions
The number of grant-maintained integrated (GMI) schools has increased in the period from 25 to 30. If the expenditure of these five schools was omitted from the 2000-01 totals, the increases for the GMI sector would be 135% in cash terms and 114% in real terms.

Analysis of Expenditure on Substitute Teachers by Sector

	1996-97 £	1997-98 £	1998-99 £	1999-00 £	2000-01 £	% Increase	Real Terms % Increase
Nursery	343,751	281,338	399,506	359,101	545,579	58.7%	**44.0%**
Primary	15,481,584	16,274,835	17,989,823	20,232,333	21,604,643	39.6%	**26.6%**
Secondary	7,760,448	8,542,847	9,207,077	10,109,376	10,444,871	34.6%	**22.1%**
Grammar	971,261	1,059,868	955,274	986,622	1,190,182	22.5%	**11.2%**
Special	1,595,958	1,754,321	2,053,422	2,533,275	2,701,917	69.3%	**53.6%**
GMI**	467,938	621,627	789,514	1,028,222	1,255,746	168.4%	**143.5%**
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Types of Schools Management and Funding

Controlled

These include nursery, primary, secondary, grammar, special and integrated schools which are provided by the Education and Library Boards and managed by Boards of Governors. They are funded by the Boards, which also employ the staff.

Maintained

These include nursery, primary and secondary schools which are owned by the Roman Catholic Church through a system of trustees and managed by Boards of Governors, on which the trustees are represented. Their recurrent expenditure is funded by the Boards. Teaching staff are employed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).

Grant Maintained Integrated

These schools are privately owned, mainly by trustees, and managed by Boards of Governors. They are funded directly by the Department of Education and employ their own staff.

Voluntary Grammar

These schools are owned by trustees and managed by Boards of Governors. They are funded directly by the Department of Education. They employ their own staff and operate their own payrolls.

The Relationship between Social Deprivation, Teacher Substitution Days and Pupil Attainment

The Department examined the relationship between pupil attainment levels and free school meal entitlement in 1999-00 and a five-year index of temporary teaching days (1996-97 to 2000-01). In practical terms, the Department's statistical analysis suggest that temporary teaching days may have the following impacts on educational attainment levels:

- At Key Stage 2, if for every full-time teacher there are 20 temporary days per year, the proportion of pupils at a school who achive the standard (Level 4) or above falls by 3.5 percentage points (the true impact could be more or less than this, but is unlikely to be less than 2.2 percentage points);

- At Key Stage 3, if for every full-time teacher there are 20 temporary days per year, the proportion of pupils at a school who achive the standard (Level 5) or above falls by 8.7 percentage points (the true impact could be more or less than this, but is unlikely to be less than 2.5 percentage points);

- At GCSE Level, if for every full-time teacher there are 20 temporary days per year, the proportion of pupils at a school achieving five or more GCSEs at A* - C grades falls by 9.7 percentage points (the true impact could be more or less than this, but is unlikely to be less than 1.0 percentage points).

New Pension Awards 1990-91 to 1999-00

	PREMATURE RETIREMENTS (PR)									
Year	Age Retirements	Efficient Discharge (ED)	Redundancy (RED) Cases	Infirmity (inf) Cases	AII PR Cases	Total Retirements	ED as % of Total	Red as % of Total	Inf as % of Total	AII PR Cases as % of Total
1990-91	170	246	164	103	513	**683**	36%	24%	15%	**75%**
1991-92	154	208	174	84	466	**620**	34%	28%	14%	**75%**
1992-93	173	131	149	115	395	**568**	23%	26%	20%	**70%**
1993-94	185	106	166	141	413	**598**	18%	28%	24%	**69%**
1994-95	160	85	173	159	417	**577**	15%	30%	38%	**72%**
1995-96	196	60	170	211	441	**637**	9%	27%	33%	**69%**
1996-97	202	56	275	185	516	**718**	8%	38%	26%	**72%**
1997-98	219	52	410	175	637	**856**	6%	48%	20%	**74%**
1998-99	226	61	326	187	574	**800**	8%	41%	23%	**72%**
1999-00	217	52	286	174	512	**729**	7%	39%	24%	**70%**
TOTAL	**1,902**	**1,057**	**2,293**	**1,534**	**4,884**	**6,786**	**16%**	**34%**	**23%**	**72%**

Key Principles of Good Practice in Managing Sickness Absence

Secure senior management commitment to reducing sickness absence

- formulate a clear policy for sickness absence in a statement linked to business objectives;
- develop performance measures and set targets for reducing existing levels of sickness absence; and
- demonstrate the organisation's commitment to care for staff health, safety and welfare.

Establish sickness absence procedures and systems for reporting and reviewing sickness absence

- establish and disseminate clear procedures on the management of sickness absence which define the roles and responsibilities of staff, line managers, local and central personnel managers;
- establish procedures for local reporting and recording of sickness absence which are clear, precise and well publicised; and
- provide appropriate and reliable information on sickness absence to senior management and to line managers, who should use the information to regularly review staff sickness absence at corporate and individual levels.

Supervise sickness absence effectively

- make early contact with absent staff and maintain regular contact with them;
- carry out return to work interviews in all cases to establish underlying reasons for absence;
- take early and effective action by referring staff on long-term sickness absence, or those whose attendance is irregular, to an occupational health adviser; and
- where appropriate, identify the scope for offering recuperative or restricted duties to staff returning from long-term sickness absence.

Encourage attendance

- recognise good attendance; and
- take sanctions against staff suspected of inappropriately taking excessive sickness absence.

Train managers in the relevant skills

- provide appropriate training in sickness management for all management grades.

Sources:

- The Management of Sickness Absence in the Metropolitan Police Service, National Audit Office, 1997.

- Working Well Together: Managing Attendance in the Public Sector, Cabinet Office, 1998.

- Monitoring and Management of Sickness Absence in Schools, National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers, 1999.

Managing Attendance in Schools

Introduction

The following procedures have been developed to support the Policy on Managing Attendance at Work, in order to facilitate a consistent approach to staff attendance across all schools and to clarify the roles of principals, staff and Human Resources.

Care should be taken by all concerned to ensure that personal, medical or other relevant information on individual members of staff is maintained confidentially.

It is recognised that circumstances differ and each case must be treated sensitively. In certain cases, such as terminal illness, referral to the Board's Occupational Health Physician may not always be appropriate.

Principals and staff are advised to familiarise themselves with the procedures.

Advice on the operation of the Policy and Procedures is available from the Human Resource Unit, Board Headquarters.

Policy Statement

The Board is committed to promoting high quality education by employing and supporting staff who will work with a high degree of commitment and professionalism in a healthy environment. The Board and Board of Governors are committed to providing a caring and supportive school environment which recognises that members of staff are individuals whose personal well-being is of value to the education of the children and the smooth running of the school. Staff health and welfare is an essential part of this and augments other aspects of school management.

The purpose of this policy and accompanying procedures is to establish a clear framework for managing absence at local level, supported by sound professional Human Resource advice. Principals and staff should familiarise themselves with the policy and procedures.

General

This policy applies to staff employed in grant aided schools with fully delegated budgets. The principles of the policy will apply to schools with partially delegated budgets.

The policy covers absence which is reported as sickness absence. It does not apply to authorised absences e.g. holidays, training courses, jury service, nor to ante natal care or absence on maternity leave.

The policy and procedures have been drawn up jointly by the Northern Ireland Employing Authorities in consultation with the Department of Education and the recognised Trades Unions and comply with the Teachers' (Eligibility) Regulations (NI) 1997.

The Board recognises its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act and the Health and Safety at Work Order and is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and a healthy working environment for all its employees.

The policy and procedures, which take effect from 1 April 1999, shall be formally adopted by each Board of Governors.

Aims of the Policy

- to ensure that all staff are treated fairly, consistently and with sensitivity during times of illness;

- to inform staff and Boards of Governors of the policy and procedures for managing attendance in schools, to maintain confidentiality of information and to facilitate a consistent approach to staff attendance across all schools;

- to promote and encourage an attendance culture which recognises that good attendance enhances the learning experience of children;

- to address the negative effect on staff morale where frequent or prolonged absences of colleagues creates additional workload, pressure and stress; and

- to raise awareness of the Staff Care Service (where applicable) and its supportive role.

Staff Care Service

The Board recognises that from time to time staff may require support in resolving personal or other issues which may impact on their work life and affect their attendance at work.

The Staff Care Service provides, on a confidential basis, support to staff when problems become persistent, unmanageable or affect health and well-being. It provides support for those suffering stress, anxiety or having difficulty coping with experiences such as bereavement, relationships, family or financial difficulties, addiction and work related problems.

The decision to request or accept assistance from the Staff Care Service is the personal choice of the individual, whose identity will remain confidential to the Service and will not be disclosed to the School or the Board.

The Board also has in place a number of other policies to assist and support staff - the Alcohol Policy, special and compassionate leave, the Career Break Scheme and the Job Share Scheme. Further advice on these policies is available from Human Resources.

Roles

The Principal

- within the context of the school's pastoral care policy;

- to ensure that all new staff are informed of sickness absence procedures and policy as part of the induction process;

- to monitor the absence of staff in a fair, consistent and confidential manner and to ensure that appropriate documentation is submitted to the Human Resource Unit on a timely basis;

- to maintain appropriate contact with staff, particularly those on long term absence;

- to liaise with staff regarding arrangements for referral to the Occupational Health Physician or other agency;

- to carry out return to work interviews and keep appropriate records;

- to ensure staff are aware of the Staff Care Service (where appropriate); and

- to support, as far as practicable, any rehabilitation programme which may be recommended by the Occupational Health Physician.

Monitoring Attendance

It is the responsibility of the principal to monitor the attendance of staff.

Monitoring ensures that issues of public accountability for expenditure on salaries and sick pay are satisfied; it enables principals to make decisions about temporary arrangements such as deputising; it also ensures that principals are fully aware of the absenteeism rates of staff and can address any problems promptly.

Human Resources will provide principals with regular reports, detailing the number of self/medically certified absences.

Action by the principal should normally be initiated by any of the following:

- more than 8 casual days absence in a 12 month rolling period;
- more than 3 periods of absence in a 12 month rolling period, each in excess of 3 days duration;
- continuous absence of 4 weeks or more;
- an individual member of staff with an absence rate of 5% or more.Circumstances will vary from case to case and principals may have additional information which would make under this procedure inappropriate; and
- in such cases advice should be sought from Human Resources.

Human Resources

- to provide available information to principals to facilitate;
- to advise, assist and support principals in the management of attendance;
- to arrange medical referrals and act as liaison between principals and the Occupational Health Physician;
- to provide advice and support to principals and staff on welfare issues and the appropriate use of the staff care service;
- to assist principals in the investigation of re-deployment opportunities within the school where a member of staff is found incapable of continuing in their current position; and
- to monitor the application of the policy and ensure that there is a fair and consistent approach to all members of staff who are ill.

Finance

- to provide available information on the cost of absence; and
- to monitor financial expenditure on absence.

The Employee

- to report all sickness absence in accordance with procedures and provide appropriate documentation promptly;
- to maintain appropriate regular contact with the principal during any period of absence;

- to follow any professional advice, including medical, aimed at ensuring a timely return to work; and

- to advise the principal of matters relevant to the absence particularly where there may be other problems either at home or at work contributing to the sence.

Reporting Absence

On those occasions where illness prevents a member of staff from attending work, he/she must personally, or make arrangements to:

- notify the principal by telephone, if possible, one hour before school starts and no later than 9.30 am (or within one hour of start time). If the principal is unavailable, the vice principal or other designated member of staff should be informed. In exceptional circumstances, if a member of staff is incapable of notifying the principal, a relative or friend may do so. In the case of a principal, he/she should notify the vice principal or other designated member of staff who in turn should inform the chairman of the Board of Governors;

- at the time of the initial notification, give an explanation of the absence and, if possible, an estimate of its likely duration;

- ensure that the principal is kept informed of the illness regularly, in order that alternative arrangements can be put in place; and

- provide documentation promptly to the school in support of any absence from work due to sickness as follows:

    - up to 7 Calendar days - self certification form must be after the 3rd day of absence.
    - more than 7 days - Doctor's statement must be submitted before expiry of the 2nd week of absence.

Note:

The Teachers' Salaries Regulations (N.I.) 1993, Regulation 19(8) (b) states:

> *A teacher who has been absent because of illness for a total of 20 working days in any year ending 31 March and who has not submitted a doctor's statement in respect of any of those 20 days shall not be entitled to salary for any subsequent days of absence through illness in that year unless he furnishes a doctor's statement...*

Notify the principal in advance of the date of return to work. If the absence has been of 4 weeks or more duration the principal, or in the case of a principal, the Chairman of the Board of Governors, should be given, where possible, one week's notice of intention to return to work.

It should be noted that failure to comply with the above may result in the absence being regarded as unauthorised, in pay being withheld and/or disciplinary action being taken.

Where the original doctor's statement covers a period exceeding 14 days, or where more than one statement is required, the member of staff must, before returning to work, obtain a final statement certifying fitness to resume duties.

Conduct During Absence

In all cases of sickness or injury which necessitate taking time off work, it is expected that staff will do their utmost to facilitate a speedy return to fitness and to work. The following are examples of activities

which would be considered inconsistent with genuine sickness or injury and may result in disciplinary action being taken.

- participating in any sport, hobby, social or other activity which is inconsistent with the illness or injury or which could aggravate the illness or injury or which could delay recovery;

- undertaking any other employment, whether paid or unpaid;

- altering or causing to have altered any details on a medical, eg dates or signature;

- failing to respond to requests to attend absence meetings or medical examination without good reason; and

- taking holidays during sickness absence will be a cause of concern unless there is acceptable evidence to support the contention that the holiday is deemed to be required as part of treatment or necessary recuperation. Staff contemplating taking holidays should discuss this with the principal in advance.

The above list is illustrative only. The type of behaviour expected of staff will depend upon the individual nature of the case and the nature and severity of the illness. Principals are expected to be alert to such issues and report any substantiated incidents which come to their attention to Human Resources. Such cases will be fully investigated before any action is taken.

Management of Different Types of Absences

Short Term Absence

This is defined as frequent, minor and usually unconnected illnesses which cause regular absence from work.

The principal has a valuable role to play in the management of short term absence and is well placed to ascertain the full facts of the situation. It is his/her responsibility to monitor absence and observe patterns and this will be assisted by regular information provided by Human Resources.

Where a principal is concerned about the absence of a staff member he/she should contact Human Resources for advice. The action necessary will depend upon the circumstances of each case. Where a member of staff's absence falls within this category, a medical referral may not be considered appropriate.

In situations where the frequency of absences gives cause for concern, the principal must ensure that the member of staff is aware of the difficulties caused by the absence, the improvement which is required and the possible consequences of failure to improve. (See Paragraph 4 - Return to Work Interviews).

Persistent short term absence which gives cause for concern may lead to disciplinary action. Principals must consult Human Resources before invoking the Disciplinary Procedure.

Persistent Intermittent Absence

This is defined as regular short and/or long term absences which may or may not result from an underlying medical condition. In this type of absence the medical prognosis may be such that the member of staff could not be deemed to be permanently unfit for work but the absences may be of such a significant level that the member of staff can be deemed to be incapable of giving regular attendance at work.

Dependent upon the particular circumstances of the case, a referral to the Occupational Health Physician may be considered appropriate. Where a referral is considered appropriate, the principal should, where possible, contact the member of staff and advise them of the referral. Persistent intermittent

absence is the most difficult type of absence pattern to assess and control as it requires sensitive judgement, supported by all available information. This judgement could lead to one of two approaches -

- Where it has been established through medical referral/assessment that the member of staff is not suffering from any significantly debilitating illness and where counselling has failed to achieve improved attendance the Disciplinary Procedure should be implemented. Any resultant disciplinary action will be by reason of 'inability to attend work regularly'.

- Where, through medical referral/assessment, the prognosis establishes the member of staff's medical incapability to work, the relevant procedure for termination of employment on grounds of ill health should be implemented.

It should be noted that a member of staff's absence pattern can straddle all categories of absence. In this situation the key assessment is the member of staff's likely ability to attend work regularly based on any continuing absence which has occurred following counselling/warning.

Long Term Absence

This is defined as illness or injury which is likely to result in an absence from work of at least 4 weeks or longer or which could result in staff being unable to return to work.

When a member of staff has been absent for 4 weeks continuously and there is no indication of an imminent return to duty, the principal should assess the situation in consultation with Human Resources. Each case will be dealt with sympathetically, on its own merits with full consideration of the circumstances. Dependent upon the particular circumstances of the case a referral to the Occupational Health Physician will be considered. Where a referral is considered appropriate, the principal should, where possible, contact the member of staff and advise them of the referral.

Following the medical examination, Human Resources in consultation with the principal, will consider what subsequent action is necessary based on the report of the Occupational Health Physician.

In cases where the prognosis indicates that a return to work is not possible, the procedure for the retirement of staff on grounds of permanent ill health or termination of employment on the grounds of ill health will be implemented.

Contact During Absence

There is a responsibility on the management of the school and the teacher to maintain contact with each other whilst the teacher is on sickness absence. Such contact should always be of a friendly supportive nature and mindful of the welfare needs of the teacher. The maintenance of such contact should enable effective communication between the parties and facilitate the teacher's return to work.

Return to Work Interviews

In order to effectively assess and manage attendance it may be necessary to meet with staff either during the course of their absence or on their return to work. The purposes of such meetings will be for some or all of the following reasons:
- to welcome the member of staff back and to reassure him/her that the principal is concerned about his/her welfare and attendance;
- to establish the current status of the absence and to attempt to establish whether there is an underlying cause for frequent absences such as difficulty at work, a more serious health condition or a personal or domestic problem. (Principals must be sensitive to the fact that staff may not wish

to discuss personal problems with them. In such cases, it may be appropriate for a member of Human Resources to deal with the case);

- to update the member of staff on school developments;

- to explain the importance of regular and reliable attendance and to draw his/her attention to the effect of absences on the workload of colleagues;

- to advise of the availability of the Staff Care Scheme/Welfare Service (where appropriate);

- to encourage improved attendance, establish the level of improvement required, the monitoring period for review and to explain the consequences of maintaining an unsatisfactory level of attendance;

- to establish if a medical referral is required if this has not already been established; and

- to provide feedback on a medical referral and any proposed action.

Principals need to exercise discretion with regard to the nature and content of a Return to Work interview. Following such a meeting a brief note should be compiled noting the substance of the meeting and any action which it is proposed to take including continuing monitoring, medical referral or potential movement to formal discipline if attendance does not improve. A copy of this note should be made available to the member of staff and a copy forwarded to Human Resources for the personal file together with any requests for medical referral.

Note: If attendance is subsequently referred for disciplinary action, such action will be started at least at written warning level.

Principals have a responsibility to ensure that all information relating to staff absence is treated with sensitivity and confidentiality. A Return to Work interview must be conducted in private and in a sympathetic and helpful manner. Staff who wish to be interviewed by a person of the same gender should be accommodated where possible.

In particularly sensitive or difficult cases an officer from Human Resources may be in attendance by way of assistance to local management.

Sick Leave

The Employing Authority provides a supportive occupational sick pay scheme which is designed to alleviate hardship and anxiety on those occasions when staff are unable to carry out their duties due to illness or injury.

Paid sickness absence is designed to facilitate a full and proper recovery. Sickness absence is not an extension of leave, an alternative to special or unpaid leave or an entitlement to a certain number of days per year.

All staff should note that the misuse of sickness absence is regarded as misconduct and will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Medical Examinations

A member of staff shall, if required, submit to a medical examination by a registered medical practitioner or a medical consultant appointed by the Board or recommended by the Board's Occupational Health Physician. This medical examination will be at no cost to the member of staff unless he/she fails to attend without reasonable notice and/or good reason.

Information may also be sought from the member of staff's general practitioner or specialist with the

permission of the member of staff. The seeking of such information is governed by the provisions of The Access to Personal Files and Medical Reports (NI) Order 1991.

The process of medical examination will be governed by separate procedures.

Staff may be referred for assessment or examination to the Board's Occupational Health Physician in any of the following circumstances:

when absences in a rolling 12 month period give cause for concern and the Board wishes to establish whether or not there is an underlying medical condition which may be causing the absence;

when a member of staff has been on a prolonged continuous absence (in excess of 4 weeks) and there is no prospect of a return to work:

- when a member of staff has been on prolonged sickness absence and wishes to return on a temporary or alternative working pattern for medical reasons;

- when the duration of the absence seems excessive for the nature of the illness;

- when, at any time, a member of staff's behaviour gives cause for concern;

- when a non-teaching probationer's sickness absence record is such that it raises doubt with regard to the advisability of continuing his/her employment;

- when a request is received from a member of staff for premature retirement on the grounds of ill-health;

- when the Board is of the opinion that dismissal on the grounds of ill health may be considered in light of previous and current sickness absences; and

- when the rate of sickness absence in a particular work area is significantly higher than average and there is no obvious explanation.

Consideration of alternative work/phased return to own duties

On occasions where a member of staff is deemed by the Board's Occupational Health Physician to be incapable of maintaining regular and reliable attendance at work, it may   be necessary to consider the possibility of alternative work to resolve the situation. This type of re-deployment must be discussed in detail with the Human Resource Unit. Examples of alternatives which may be considered, dependent upon the circumstances of each case, are part-time work or duties of a different grade.

Where an employee is deemed to be fit to return to existing duties the Board may consider a phased return to facilitate a resumption to normal working. In normal circumstances this will not exceed a period of 4 weeks. Salary will be calculated and paid for actual hours worked, subject to the category of sick pay entitlement current.

Termination of employment on grounds of ill health

The Board may, having considered all available information including, where appropriate, medical information, determine that an individual's employment should be terminated on grounds of ill health. Such a determination does not automatically qualify the member of staff for release of pension entitlements where the member of staff is a member of an occupational pension scheme.

In circumstances where dismissal on grounds of ill health is proposed the appropriate procedure will apply.

Medical Recommendation to return to work

Where, following a medical referral, the Board's medical adviser indicates that a member of staff is fit to return to work the member of staff will be advised of this outcome and a date will be set for return. If the member of staff disagrees with the determination of the Board's medical adviser he/she will be offered the facility to appeal against the instruction to return. Such appeal must be lodged within 5 working days of the notification to return and must be accompanied by a medical statement. The appeal will be referred to an independent medical examiner agreeable to both parties, who has not previously been involved in the case and whose medical opinion will be binding. Sick pay may be suspended from the expected date of return pending the outcome of the independent medical examination.

If the appeal is upheld sick pay will be restored and a decision will be taken on continued employment or continued monitoring. If the appeal is not upheld the member of staff will be given one final opportunity to return to work. If the member of staff fails to return to work he/she will be deemed to be in breach of contract.

Ill Health and Disability

In keeping with the Code of Practice on Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities, the Employing Authority will, where practicable, attempt to re-deploy an individual who is found to be unfit for their current post provided he/she is deemed to be fit for alternative work. No guarantee can be given as to the availability of such work as this is entirely dependent upon a suitable alternative post being available.

Consideration may be given to retraining, dependent upon the circumstances of the case, the resources available and the aptitude of the individual.

Sickness Absence and Discipline

Where a member of staff who is subject to disciplinary investigations or proceedings absents him/herself on health grounds, the Board reserves the right, at any stage, to require the member of staff to submit to a medical examination by a registered medical practitioner or consultant appointed by the Board and to progress the disciplinary case, as appropriate.

Reports on Teacher Absences Available to Employing Authorities

Education and Library Boards

Periods of absence due to illness - Board level

Periods of absence due to illness - school level

Sickness absence pattern - Board level

Individual teacher sickness absence history

Sickness code absence pattern - Board level

Sickness code absence pattern - school level

12 month rolling period - 8 or more casual days

12 month rolling period 3 periods of absence of 3 days duration

CCMS

Periods of absence due to illness CCMS level

Periods of absence due to illness - Diocese level

Periods of absence due to illness schools level

Sickness absence pattern - school level

Individual teacher sickness absence history

Sickness code absence pattern - CCMS level

Sickness code absence pattern - Diocese level

Sickness code absence pattern - school level

NI Council for Integrated Education (advisory body)

Periods of absence due to illness - Board level

Periods of absence due to illness - school level Sickness absence pattern - school level

Individual teacher sickness absence history

Sickness code absence pattern - Board level

Sickness code absence pattern - school level

12 month rolling period - 8 or more casual days

12 month rolling period - 3 periods of absence of 3 days duration

List of NIAO Reports

Title	NIA No.	Date Published
2001		
National Agricultural Support: Fraud	NIA29/00	9 January 2001
A Review of Pathology Laboratories in NI	NIA31/00	8 February 2001
Road Openings by Utilities	NIA35/00	22 February 2001
Water Service: Leakage Management and Water Efficiency	NIA49/00	5 April 2001
The Management of Social Security Debt Collection	NIA71/00	28 June 2001
Belfast Action Teams: Investigations into Suspected Fraud within the Former Suffolk Action Team } Building Maintenance in the Education and Library Boards }	NIA72/00	2 July 2001
Brucellosis Outbreak at the Agricultural Research Institute	NIA02/01	27 September 2001
2002		
Northern Ireland Tourist Board Accounts 2000/01 } Travelling People: Monagh Wood Scheme }	NIA 45/01	26 February 2002
Indicators of Educational Performance and Provision	NIA 48/01	21 February 2002
NIHE: Housing the Homeless	NIA 55/01	21 March 2002
Repayment of Community Regeneration Loans	NIA 59/01	28 March 2002
Investing in Partnership: Government Grants to Voluntary Bodies	NIA 78/01	16 May 2002
Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Grant to the Malone Lodge Hotel	NIA 83/01	20 May 2002
LEDU: The Export Start Scheme	NIA105/01	2 July 2002
Compensation Payments for Clinical Negligence	NIA 112/01	5 July 2002
Re-roofing of the Agriculture and Food Science Centre at Newforge	NIA 24/02	17 October 2002

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ISBN 0-339-40120-6

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