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## **ADVICE NOTE FOR MEMBERS ON THE CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LITERACY, INCLUDING PHONICS AND NUMERACY**

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### **Introduction**

1. This document provides information for members on the introduction of the revised Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics and the DCSF recommendations concerning schools' selection of phonics programmes.

### **The Revised Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics**

2. The revised Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics was issued in October 2006. The changes contained in it include:
  - the inclusion of the Foundation Stage curriculum guidance and Early Learning Goals relating to the 'Communication, Language and Literacy' and 'Mathematical Development' areas of learning;
  - slimmed down learning objectives with more flexibility, presented yearly rather than termly;
  - greater freedom to use pupil assessment to influence planning;
  - some learning objectives to be introduced at an earlier stage;
  - a greater focus on planning for progression, through longer teaching sequences covering two to four week 'blocks';
  - the core aspects of learning are presented in key 'strands';
  - the introduction of speaking and listening, drama and ICT skills;
  - guidance on making cross-curricular links and embedding literacy and mathematics in other curriculum areas;
  - an increased emphasis on the teaching of phonics and early reading, to reflect the recommendations of the Rose Review; and
  - web-based support materials rather than paper copies, including a tool to support planning, teaching and assessment and links to a library of teaching and learning resources.

### What do Schools Need to Do?

3. **The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies remain non-statutory. Their use, and the implementation actions which the Framework documentation suggest, have advisory status only.**
4. The NUT believes that the priorities identified by schools should be reflected in CPD provision, in order to support effective implementation. There should be no expectation on teachers to introduce new elements of the Framework where training and appropriate resources have not been made available.
5. The responsibility to decide whether to adopt the Framework; adapt it; or not to use it at all, remains with the head teacher. The timetable for its introduction also lies with the head teacher. Where the course adopted by the head teacher is different from that recommended by the Strategies or local authority, the NUT advises that head teachers, in conjunction with those with posts of responsibility for literacy and/or mathematics, should document in written form the reasons for adopting an alternative approach.
6. Members who are concerned about pressure from their local authority or Strategies personnel to implement all of the elements of the new Framework at once or the impact of implementation on their workload should contact their NUT Regional Office for advice.

### How does the New Framework Affect Teachers' Planning?

7. **Members are reminded that planning is for the teacher to determine. Detailed advice for members on planning is available to download from the NUT website at <http://www.nut.org.uk/story.php?id=4004>.**
8. The Framework's new approach to planning is welcome. The Framework encourages teachers to use their professional judgement about the pace and content of their lessons. Teachers will be able to plan their lessons with greater freedom and decide the order of work appropriate to their children's needs, at a time chosen by them.
9. The provision of web-based, rather than paper, Framework materials was designed to reduce teachers' planning, preparation and assessment by providing a "one stop shop" for literacy and mathematics teaching. The Primary Framework interactive planning tool, which can be accessed via the website <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primaryframeworks/planningtool/> enables teachers to plan electronically using the Framework content.
10. The recently published DCSF document, 'Making Great Progress', repeats helpful DCSF guidance on planning; 'the underlying principle for planning is to amend and adapt existing plans to match the needs of children and not start from scratch'.
11. **Members are reminded that plans should not be required to be in any standard format; to be very long; or to be complex. They can be set out in the form of bullet points or notes, including how learning objectives will be achieved.**

12. The use of the planning tool and associated resources is a matter for teachers' professional judgment. The Framework document says *"It is for teachers to decide to what extent this guidance is used. It should be particularly useful for teachers new to a year group or wanting support with specific aspects of literacy teaching"*. Members who feel pressurised to use the planning tool should contact the appropriate NUT regional offices for advice.
13. Although ICT can be a very effective means of reducing the planning burden, this strategy is very much dependent on individual teachers' access to ICT and on their levels of skill and confidence. It should be remembered that the amount of time spent producing plans might initially be longer than those produced by more traditional means, although time can be saved if this work is able to be edited and re-used in the future.
14. Most schools and teachers will already have long and medium-term plans in place. It will not be necessary to abandon all of this existing work. Members are advised to familiarise themselves with the new Framework and then adapt their existing planning to suit their own situations where necessary. The National Union of Teachers will continue to protect members from excessive planning expectations.

#### **DCSF Advice on Phonic Work and Choosing an Effective Phonics Programme**

15. In March 2007, the DCSF published guidance for schools on the teaching of early reading and the selection of phonics programmes. Its guidance is available to download from the Standards website [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics/) . All quotations used in this briefing are taken from the DCSF guidance, unless otherwise stated.
16. In March 2006 Jim Rose completed his 'Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading'. The Review report provided clear recommendations on what constituted 'high quality phonics work'. All principles underpinning these recommendations have been incorporated into the revised Primary Framework for literacy; the Key Stage1 English Programme of Study for reading; and the Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals.
17. The main findings presented in the Report for the teaching of successful reading were: *"a well-trained teaching force; well designed, systematic programmes of work that are implemented thoroughly; incisive assessment of teaching and learning; and strong, supportive leadership."*
18. **The National Curriculum Programmes of Study and Foundation Stage Early Learning Goals are statutory. The Primary Framework for Literacy remains non-statutory.**
19. **DCSF guidance on both the teaching of early reading and choosing phonics programmes is non-statutory. The DCSF guidance emphasises that teachers in schools and settings should use their professional judgement about which phonics programmes they use. It says it wants to *"encourage schools and settings to make their own professional***

***judgements about which phonics programmes they use.*** These are not required to be commercial programmes.

## Phonics Programmes

20. The DCSF advises that the 'core criteria' for phonics programmes are as follows:
- *“present high quality systematic phonic work, as defined by the Independent review of teaching of early reading and now encapsulated in the Primary Framework, as the prime approach to decoding print;*
  - *enable children to start learning phonic knowledge and skills systematically by the age of five with the expectation that they will be fluent readers having secured word recognition skills by the end of key stage one;*
  - *be designed for the teaching of discrete, daily sessions progressing from simple to more complex phonic knowledge and skills and covering the major grapheme phoneme correspondences;*
  - *enable children's progress to be assessed;*
  - *use a multi-sensory approach so that children learn variously from simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities which are designed to secure essential phonic knowledge and skills;*
  - *demonstrate that phonemes should be blended, in order, from left to right, 'all through the word' for reading;*
  - *demonstrate how words can be segmented into their constituent phonemes for spelling and that this is the reverse of blending phonemes to read words;*
  - *ensure children apply phonic knowledge and skills as their first approach to reading and spelling even if a word is not completely phonically regular;*
  - *ensure that children are taught high frequency words that do not conform completely to grapheme/phoneme correspondence rules; and*
  - *ensure that, as early as possible, children have opportunities to read texts (and spell words) that are within the reach of their phonic knowledge and skills even though every single word in the text may not be entirely decodable by the children unaided.”*
21. Additional explanatory notes on the 'core criteria' are available on the DCSF Standards website at [www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics/programmes/core/](http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/phonics/programmes/core/).
22. The DCSF advises that as long as schools consider all the points listed in its 'core criteria' they are “free to use –or devise – any good phonics programme that fits their needs”. It says “If you are happy with the programme you are currently using and are confident that it meets the core criteria which define an effective phonics programme then we would encourage you to continue using it”.

23. Nothing in the DCSF guidance constrains teachers from using their professional judgement in considering which programme best fits the needs of the pupils in their school or setting. The NUT believes that schools should be able to draw on the resources of one or more phonics programmes, in order to meet the needs of all of their pupils.
24. **The Primary and Secondary National Strategies are non-statutory. With the exception of requirements on school governing bodies to set targets for test results at the end of Key Stages two and three, all other elements of the Strategies are non-statutory. Teachers are free to adapt and modify the strategies according to the children they teach, the resources available and their own professional judgement.**
25. **Where members feel pressured to use phonics programmes which, in their professional judgement, would not meet effectively the needs of their pupils, they should contact their NUT Regional Office for advice.**

#### **Further Advice**

26. Members may find helpful the points set out below when selecting or devising phonics programmes.
  - The phonics materials should not be so formal as to discourage pupils from enjoying both choosing and 'reading' books for pleasure before they can actually decode every word in the book.
  - The phonics materials should help make links across the wider curriculum.
  - Speaking and listening activities should be a key element of the phonics programme.
  - There must be a clear reference, which is integral to the programme, to the inclusion of pupils with SEN and disability within the materials and advice to teachers on using the materials with a range of pupil abilities.
  - The materials should be easily adaptable for use with pupils with both hearing and visual impairments.
  - The materials can be structured around a play-based approach to learning, particularly for pupils in Key Stage one.
  - The philosophy and principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage, in particular, its play-based approach to learning, can be reflected in any materials designed for use with children below the age of five.
  - Phonics programmes and teaching approaches can include opportunities for exposure to print in 'realistic' situations; role play opportunities, both inside the classroom and out in the playground in which children are encouraged to use print media; and appropriate adult intervention to support and move forward children's progress.

- A range of multi-sensory approaches can be included in the materials which would allow teachers themselves to make a judgement on whether they were appropriate for use within their own classroom.
27. **Where members experience pressure from their head teacher or local authority to use any phonics programme which, in their professional judgement and taking into consideration the 'core criteria', they deem to be inappropriate they should contact their NUT Regional Office for advice.**
  28. **Where members are required to carry out unreasonable additional preparation due to changes in phonics programmes in schools, they should contact their NUT Regional Office for advice.**