

THE APPROPRIATE USE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND SUBSTITUTE TEACHER REGISTER (NISTR) AND ENGAGEMENT OF SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS IN ALL SCHOOLS

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to clearly set out for school principals, senior leaders, teachers and boards of governors the purposes for which NISTR should be used, paying particular attention to the circumstances when it is permissible to use NISTR to engage teachers.

The NISTR benefits both schools and teachers in dealing with the practical issues involved in arranging qualified teaching cover. The “Register” is supported and endorsed by the Department of Education (DE), employing authorities, GTCNI and the Northern Ireland Teachers’ Council and Teaching Unions. NISTR is the only mechanism for engaging substitute teachers in all schools.

Background

It is fully appreciated that there will always be circumstances where it is reasonable to fill a post on a temporary basis e.g. to cover the absence of a permanent teacher due to career break, secondment or maternity leave or to fill a post created by the availability of temporary funding or receipt of approval from the Department of Education to increase the FTE teaching complement.

In most other circumstances however, posts should normally be filled on a permanent basis. This is particularly where the post would fall within the staffing complement for the school, where clearly there is an on-going need for the post and where a post has been identified as viable in the financial plan.

There is little doubt that uncertainties around issues such as school funding, demographic trends and area planning mean that many schools have concerns about advertising and recruiting to vacant posts on a permanent basis and possibly to short term temporary positions. Whilst accepting that these pressures can be very real for school managers, it is important however, to take account of some emerging concerns arising from some aspects of current practice in the employment of teachers, particularly those of a substitute or temporary nature.

Appropriate Use of NISTR

It is considered useful therefore to set out the following guidance in relation to the appropriate use of the Northern Ireland Substitute Register (NISTR), drawing particular attention to the circumstances where it is deemed appropriate to engage teachers through NISTR.

NISTR **should be** used:

- To provide immediate, unplanned, short-term cover **only** and for a period not (*normally*) in excess of 6 months.
In exceptional circumstances, where short term appointment/s through NISTR may require extension beyond a 6 month period, schools will be required to seek advice

and guidance and, if necessary, approval **before** an extension to a contract through NISTR is effected.

- To fill vacancies which are short term and which at the outset are known to last no more than 6 months, i.e. examples being vacancies relating to short term attendance management issues. Such vacancies may be filled using substitute teachers. In all circumstances substitute teachers **must be sourced** and appointed through the Northern Ireland Substitute Register (NISTR).

In accessing substitute teachers through NISTR schools must be mindful of the Department of Education's recommendation that preference should be given to newly qualified or experienced non-prematurely retired teachers seeking to return to employment when filling vacancies, including those of a temporary or substitute nature (DE Circular 2011/07 refers).

NISTR **should not** be used in the following circumstances:

- To provide cover for Principal Release days, irrespective of the number of days release per week. Such positions **should** be publicly advertised and appointed in accordance with the relevant Teaching Appointments Scheme and, in most circumstances, should be made on a permanent basis if constituting a sustainable and ongoing arrangement.
- In situations where a vacancy/vacancies are anticipated to extend beyond six months and occur in a school that has facilitated voluntary redundancy for a member/s of its teaching staff (*from 2010 onwards*). In such instances specific approval must be received from the Department of Education before any such vacancy can be filled.
- To cover vacant full time and part time posts which are temporary in nature, i.e. relating to long term ill health management, maternity leave, secondment or career break and which are **expected to last for a minimum period of 6 months**. Such positions should (*normally*) be publicly advertised and appointed in accordance with the relevant Teaching Appointments Scheme.

Finally, in order to ensure that the Register is being used for the purpose for which it is intended i.e. to provide immediate, unplanned, short term teaching cover, the engagement activity of substitute teachers through NISTR will be monitored by the employing authority. Where it is apparent that substitute teachers are being engaged for any other purpose and/or for periods of tenure beyond 6 months, **without any** justifiable reason and/or prior approval received, steps will be taken by the employing authority to regulate this activity.