



## APPRAISAL: Stay 'SMART' Don't accept unachievable targets

The NUT recognises that a fair appraisal system can support staff development needs as well as improving pupil outcomes. However, linking appraisal to performance-pay presents a very real danger to both teachers and education.

International research warns that performance-pay fails to improve pupil achievement. It divides, discriminates and demoralises, distorting teaching and undermining collaborative work. It is, of course, really about cutting the teachers' pay bill. Regrettably, there is already evidence that new performance-pay and appraisal systems are indeed damaging morale, as well as being used to hold back teachers' pay. Since schools' decisions about awarding pay progression have to be based on appraisal reviews, it is essential that NUT members make sure that they oppose any attempts to impose unachievable targets - targets which can then be used as evidence to try and stop them progressing up the pay spine.

### ● Make sure your objectives really are 'SMART'

Most school appraisal policies, including Lewisham Authority's own model policy, state that appraisal objectives should be 'SMART':

**S: Specific** means that objectives are clearly defined and well understood by you and your appraiser. They identify the expected action / achievement / outcome in precise terms to help you and your appraiser consider whether the objective has been achieved.

**M: Measurable** means you can decide whether the objective has been achieved by looking at appropriate evidence. Lewisham's policy says the evidence to be used should be specified in the planning statement.

**A: Achievable** means that the objectives are realistic and linked to factors within your control. For example, they should take into account what a part time teacher can achieve compared to a full time equivalent. Factors which might be beyond your control and impact on your ability to meet an objective could include changes to your class or promised training / support not being provided. Make sure to raise any particular individual circumstances, including any disabilities, or maternity/adoption leave, which might affect the achievement of your objectives.

**R: Relevant** means that the objectives are linked to the school or department's development priorities - but also "take into account the professional aspirations of the teacher" (again, according to the Lewisham policy).

**T: Timed** means that the objectives have a clear timetable for progress and achievement, with interim milestones where appropriate, to help you assess how you are progressing towards them.

NUT advice to our members is clear: Do not agree objectives which do not meet these 'SMART' criteria.

### ● The NUT opposes the use of numerical targets

It is impossible for an individual teacher to guarantee that exact percentages will be achieved. Test results are not simply linked to standards of teaching - so many other factors are involved, such as family circumstances and levels of parental educational achievement. It's also hard to identify what progress has been made as a result of one particular teacher's input. The use of end of year examinations to assess individual performance - just like overall school performance - can also be very unfair in a system where standards of assessment may vary and change.

This is why the NUT believes that numerical targets are unlikely to be genuinely 'SMART' and the National NUT advice is: Do not agree to your objectives being based on numerical target increases in examinations or tests etc. unless you feel that their use is appropriate. In that case, the objectives should be reasonable, taking into account the context in which you work, and recognise that factors outside your control may affect achievement.

The Lewisham model policy does state that "where use of numerical targets is appropriate, these will be reasonable in the circumstances in which the teacher works and it will be recognised that factors outside teachers' control may significantly affect success". It also states that "good progress towards the achievement of a challenging objective, even if performance criteria have not been met in full, may be assessed favourably". This needs to be noted when targets are being set - and also when they are being reviewed.

### ● Statistical objections to numerical targets

It isn't only external factors that can make numerical targets inappropriate. Statisticians have also been pulling apart the legitimacy and reliability of some of the DfE's data and methodology (such as the idea that secondary students should all make 'three levels of progress' - e.g. from 'Level 4' to a grade C GCSE).

For more detail, have a look at Henry Stewart's 2015 post on the Local Schools Network blog, '**How to use data badly: levels of progress**'. He points out that national data consistently shows that higher achieving pupils also find it easier to make higher rates of progress. That's why setting '3LOP' as a standard measure for all discriminates against schools - and teachers - with students at a lower starting-point.

These arguments should also be applicable at KS1 and KS2. 'Assessment without levels' might start to cut across these problems - but it seems some schools may just be finding other ways to allocate 'scores'.

Given the 'aspirational' targets being set by some schools, Stewart also warns that he is "wary of the

This is a summary of advice posted on the National Union of Teachers website [www.teachers.org.uk](http://www.teachers.org.uk)  
Look on the NUT website for further information. Get in touch with Lewisham NUT if you need support.

*trend to more and more ambitious target setting. One school near me has set a target of one full level a year for all students ... that would mean all level 3 students achieving a B at GCSE. ... Maybe some magical new educational method will enable this level of progress. But to me setting targets entirely unrelated to what the data tells us is more reminiscent of Soviet Stakhanovite targets than targets rooted in sound educational knowledge".*

If that sounds at all like your school, get in touch!

### ● **So what targets should teachers accept?**

There's lots of good practice to share from schools - and you might have your own good examples - but here are just some suggestions from the National NUT website:

- Make better use of ICT in the classroom to demonstrably develop pupils' skills in using technology to enhance their learning.
- Develop and implement a strategy/strategies to improve pupils' extended writing skills.
- Consider how pupil groupings in your classroom can improve pupils' speaking and listening skills, implement any necessary changes and assess their impact.
- Develop strategies to increase opportunities for reading for pleasure to improve reading skills for your pupils and begin to assess their impact.
- Undertake relevant CPD to develop further the positive behaviour of learners.
- Work with the SENCO to develop distinctive teaching approaches to support those pupils with English as an additional language.

### ● **'Teachers' Standards' are only there to 'inform'**

There is no requirement to assess teachers' performance against the national Teachers' Standards individually. The DfE's own advice confirms that schools should not "adopt rigid models that seek to set out exactly what the relevant standards mean for teachers at different stages in their careers, and teachers should not be expected routinely to provide evidence that they meet all the standards."

The NUT/NASUWT appraisal checklist - backed up by our 'Action Short of Strike Action' policy states that: Teachers' Standards will be used to inform the setting of the teacher's objectives; they will not be used as a checklist against which the teacher's performance is assessed".

If this is an issue in your school, call the NUT!

### ● **Do not accept more than three objectives**

The Lewisham policy acknowledges that "setting too many objectives can lead to teachers experiencing unreasonable workload and pressure, making the objectives more difficult to achieve" so advises that "generally three to four objectives would be considered reasonable". However, NUT policy has long been clear that setting more than three objectives, or adding to them by using 'sub-targets', is unacceptable. Our appraisal checklist makes clear that: 'no more than three objectives will be set for any teacher'.

### ● **Make sure that training needs are recorded**

The Lewisham policy states that "details of any training and support which have been agreed" will be included in the planning statement. NUT advice is: Do not agree your objectives unless you are satisfied that your training and development needs will be addressed.

### ● **But what if we can't agree on objectives?**

Lewisham policy says that "The appraiser and the teacher will seek to agree the objectives". It's a good idea to draft your own preferred objectives in advance of any meeting with your line manager. Above all, don't be pressurised into accepting objectives that you are unhappy with - it's then much harder to object if things go wrong as you feared.

If you can't agree, then, according to Lewisham's policy, "the final decision on allocation of objectives rests with the headteacher". It also states (and we would recommend teachers follow this advice) that "where a teacher objects to any of the entries in the written appraisal report, those objections should be put in writing and, if requested, a meeting will be held to discuss this with the headteacher". The Lewisham policy also states that a member of staff can raise a grievance during the appraisal process as well.

There will also be a separate appeals procedure set out in the school's pay policy to be followed should your appraisal record, or some other grounds, be used to try and block you from progressing up the pay spine. The NUT has produced separate advice on pay appeals and how the Union and your colleagues can act to give support.

### ● **Don't just object individually, act collectively**

Inappropriate appraisal processes try to divide staff and make them feel that they should just accept they are 'failing'. Yet, if one teacher is finding things difficult, their colleagues are often facing similar challenges too. Regular school union meetings are the best way to come together to discuss common concerns and to identify issues that teachers need school management to act upon. The NUT will back you - right up to taking strike action if necessary.

Those concerns may be about how workload or other pressures are making it harder for teachers to succeed. They might be about how the actual appraisal and/or performance-pay systems are operating in their school. If your school is operating appraisal policies in a way that doesn't match NUT guidelines, perhaps by imposing too many and/or inappropriate objectives, then act together as a union group to object - and to win a changed approach.

Some school groups have succeeded in changing school policies by meeting together, agreeing the action they are ready to take, and then meeting the headteacher to negotiate a way forward. For example, the national NUT website includes an example of success in Camden where school union reps met with the headteacher to request that numerical target requirements be removed from their policy. This was initially rejected so the reps informed the head that they would consult with members to discuss what action they wished to take. They built for a well-attended meeting and, after discussion, won unanimous agreement from teachers for a united campaign of action. The reps distributed a statement to all members to be handed to the appraiser during the target setting meeting if they insisted on a numerical target. It said: "the school policy states that objectives will be SMART. The numerical objectives I have been set are not in line with this policy". This collective approach was made clear to the head too. Success was achieved as, firstly, no numerical targets were set by appraisers. Finally, reps were able to negotiate a permanent change to the appraisal policy to remove any numerical requirement. Why not try a similar approach?