

The National Association for Primary Education

NAPE and the Primary Sector (2013)

This paper reviews the association's position and influence with regard to primary education nationally and offers ways of further strengthening that position.

NAPE's reach into the national scene has developed strongly over the last eight to ten years. This gain in influence has been achieved through a number of policy moves.

Joint membership with the National Association for the Teaching of English is offered and although Ian McNeilly, the former Director of NATE with whom we concluded the membership agreement, has now left them the shared view of the two associations with regard to the central importance of children's language development has promise of future cooperation. The link is important in that it gives us access to the Council for Subject Associations which continues to deny us full membership.

Our closest partnership is with the Association for the Study of Primary Education. NAPE is represented on the ASPE executive committee and has taken responsibility for the minuting of meetings. However this association moves only slowly and action is currently inhibited by the lack of an elected Chair. A further deepening of the link could well occur following the association's AGM in November and the election of Mark Brundrett as Chair. By then there should be a report of progress on the six university based seminars for which a major financial bid has been made. Mark is editor of the journal, 3 to 13, and it is intended that, once elected, he will be approached with a view to an extension of cooperation between NAPE and ASPE with regard to our journal, Primary First. We have strong allies on the executive who have expressed their determination that the two associations should move to federation and this remains our long term objective. The link with ASPE has given us access to the HE sector and this is becoming increasingly productive.

The Primary Umbrella Group provides one of the most effective routes to national influence and it remains important that we ensure regular termly attendance by three NAPE representatives. PUG gives us contact with the Early Childhood Forum and subject associations, most strongly with the Geography Association and the Design and Technology Association and the major unions. We are especially close to the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers. The Chair has a high regard for NAPE and it is relatively easy to catch his eye and to speak at meetings. We have been entrusted with the responsibility of organising and maintaining contact on behalf of PUG with education ministers and shadow ministers. Our participation in the professional campaign against the testing of five and six year olds phonic awareness has led to effective partnership with the United Kingdom Literacy Association.

NAPE's active membership of the National Literacy Association continues in the form of a trusteeship and we hold the office of Vice Chairman and so are fully involved in the directorate of the association. A wide range of associations, unions and publishers attend meetings. In 2012 NAPE took responsibility for the devising and submission of a research proposal to the Education Endowment Foundation. The bid in the sum of £100,000 over 4 years focused on the teaching of reading in Years 7 and 8 but was not successful. However EEF has encouraged NLA to submit further bids in the future.

The association's email network extends well beyond our core membership and there is regular contact with the around 500 members of the network and there has never been a request for an address to be removed. Increased attention is paid to the wording of the covering email to which the information is attached since it is vital that attention is attracted in order to reduce the number of times when the attachment is deleted unread. An experimental approach to membership has been launched in Greenwich. Local head teachers are being approached in order to find if there is support for the new membership category. Should this prove worthy of further development a second phase will be explored in Oxfordshire where support for the category has already been expressed informally. Another experiment is under way through which participants in conferences supported by exhibitors arranged by Mondale are offered free membership for a year in the hope that a proportion will pay to renew membership the following year. There is a need for these experiments in new membership categories to be monitored carefully in order that any successes can be used as the basis for widespread application.

The main website has been reconfigured and is now updated once every week. Google Analytics are tracking visitors to the site and we will receive monthly reports showing what visitors are doing on the site. Another site dedicated to our marketing of the Jarman handwriting has now been created and, in addition to the usual sales pitch, a termly newsletter titled Handwriting News is offered. Efforts are currently being made to create a website dedicated to the on line publication of our journal, Primary First. All three of the NAPE websites will be interlinked. The association is a member of a consortium which posts news of activities on a website provided by Teachit Primary. This is another valuable link with subject associations and it is hoped that joint activities will be arranged in the future. However cooperation beyond attendance at meetings is far from easy because the primary subject associations are quick to protect the teaching of their particular subject in primary schools. The situation is improving as associations see advantages accruing from joint action such as the Consultation Conference arranged by the partnership of ASPE and NAPE.

The National Festival of Voices has been organised after a break of several years. Local effort in the Greenwich area led to a successful venture in 2012 which is to be extended to two days in the current year. Particularly pleasing was the enthusiastic support of families and there is clear potential for festivals to provide an attractive way of involving parents in NAPE. Immediately, there is an urgent need to protect the existence of the Oxfordshire festival the organiser of which has indicated that she will retire in 2014. The festival held in the Dorchester on Thames Abbey generates a high proportion of the core national membership and is the bedrock of the local association.

NAPE was successful in bringing FilmClub and Scholastic together to create opportunities for schools to add selected books to the viewing of films. An agreement was reached and the scheme is now running. This led to an invitation, which we accepted, to provide support for a bid to the Lottery Fund for £26 million over four years to deliver the BFI's 5-19 Education Scheme. The bid was successful and a new company with the name, Film Nation UK has been set up to undertake the work. Beyond a warm letter of thanks for our support from FilmClub nothing more has been heard beyond an invitation from the Chair of Film Nation UK to the launch of the National Youth Film Festival. It is unlikely that there will be much activity before the newly appointed Chief Executive begins his or her work in September. Needless to say NAPE expects to be involved and in correspondence we are continuing to demonstrate our interest and expectation.

Further contacts which are characterised by goodwill and a shared view of primary education are maintained with National Numeracy, Achievement for All, Play England, the Alliance for Childhood, Globe Education, Community Playthings, the Advisory Centre for Education and Creative Junction. These contacts have rich potential for development and a major expansion of the membership of the National Council could add to the number of colleagues who would be prepared to spend time in fostering links and cooperative ventures.

Two ventures for the future

*The association has been active in opposing the current Government proposals for a new national Curriculum. Indeed at times we have been the focus of such opposition. Now we wait for the outcome of the public consultation but it will be surprising if there are any major changes to the draft proposals. Only changes to the PoS for History and for Design Technology are at all likely and the core of “more, earlier” English and mathematics will almost certainly be left untouched. The more we have shouted our opposition the more the Secretary of State has made political points, calling teachers, “Enemies of promise” and academics, “Marxists who want to hold children back”. Such crude and abusive rhetoric does no good for children and this paper suggests we focus attention on an alternative with a future government in mind. It is suggested that **we rally support round the Cambridge Primary Review**. While we may not agree with every conclusion and recommendation of the review, it draws on research and is internationally recognised as a substantial contribution to debate. I have put this suggestion to Robin Alexander and, naturally cautious as he is, he at least did not demur. We must be ready to respond to any initiatives which the new Cambridge Primary Review Trust may initiate. It is very important that we move from a posture of opposition to one of constructive debate.*

*A second suggestion is offered by this paper. Government rhetoric is that teaching methods (pedagogy) should be left to teachers. Increasingly this is only partly true. Pedagogy has crept into the primary Programmes of Study notably in the specification of phonics as the prime method of teaching beginning reading and in the specification of methods of multiplication and division described as “efficient” and “reliable”. However the Government rhetoric which claims that teachers are to be set free is persistent and it is suggested that we should act accordingly. **As soon as the new curriculum is authorised for 2014 we should begin work on suggestions for implementation**. We should draw on the Rose recommendations which although imperfect at least acknowledged the nature of young children and how they learn best. Our published ideas for the consideration of practitioners should propose an active, experiential school life out of which is drawn the essential core skills laid down by the Programmes of Study. The Secretary of State and the DfE would not be involved and if intervention is attempted or imposed through inspection we should remind ministers of their rhetoric which affirms that teachers, not politicians or bureaucrats, are responsible for pedagogy. Many allies can be found for this work and while only the bravest and most expert of our colleagues may respond, the undertaking of it will be a strong affirmation of the NAPE ethos which places children first.*

