

One union for teachers? They don't all think the same way.

Your question Why isn't there one union for the teaching profession? (April 11) has got the emphasis wrong. Not all teaching unions have the same philosophy. For example, the Professional Association of Teachers puts the pupils first, while others stress the welfare of teachers and put the emphasis on being a trade union. The article gives a lot of space to Steve Sinnott, the general secretary of the National Union of Teachers. He wants one teachers' organisation "because I'm a trade unionist". The Professional Association of Teachers represents teachers who are committed not to strike under any circumstances because that can only harm pupils. There must be room for both viewpoints.

Francis Bennion
(Chairman Emeritus, Professional Association of Teachers)
Salterton, Devon



Steve Sinnott, putting teachers first

Two readers responded to FB's letter:

I read Francis Bennion's letter (Teachers don't all think the same way, April 18) with some surprise. As a lifelong trade unionist, I have belonged because my union protected me and my interests against those of my employer - that is why trade unions were set up.

I have just attended NUT conference in Torquay. The majority of the motions debated addressed teaching conditions, but without exception, every person referred to the way in which children, as well as teachers, were affected by these conditions. Yes, if necessary, we are prepared to take action, such as striking to defend our members and the children we teach. I would have more respect for the Professional Association of Teachers if its members refused the benefits fought for by other unions, but I don't expect to see that happen.

Caryl Hughes Stockport NUT

Why isn't there just one union for the teaching profession? The truth is, unity does not suit those running the unions, as many full-time jobs would disappear with the economies of scale that would follow. Several grassroots initiatives were made in the early 90s within the NASUWT, but all were scotched. Raising the matter of unity was seen as disloyalty. There is little opposition at classroom level to unity, but no appetite for it at executive level. It would be like turkeys voting for Christmas.

David Handley Skipton, Yorkshire

On 2 May 2006, *Philip Parkin*, General Secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers, responded to the two letters printed above

Like Caryl Hughes (Disunity among unions, April 25) I joined my union because it "protected me and my interests". However, striking is not the only way of taking action. My union gains members because of its policy of solving problems by negotiation instead of conflict. Striking

does harm the children we teach and, ultimately, the profession in the eyes of the public. Caryl Hughes implies that the employee must be in conflict with the employer and that their interests cannot be the same. The best education for children and the best conditions for those who teach them are surely the same interests.

Have NUT members refused the benefits of planning, preparation and assessment time, and cover limits, fought for by PAT and the other unions that negotiated the workload agreement with the government? I don't expect so.

Philip Parkin, General Secretary, Professional Association of Teachers, Derby