

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

15 October 1996

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Report No 823/96

SCHOOL TERMS AND HOLIDAYS 1997/98

ABSTRACT

This report describes the views of teachers and head teachers on the proposed draft scheme of school terms and holiday dates for 1997/98, and recommends that the Committee approves the draft scheme.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Education Committee approves the enclosed scheme of school term and holiday dates for 1997/98.

BACKGROUND

As part of the annual exercise in planning school terms and holiday dates for the future school session, the enclosed scheme was sent to all the associations representing teaching staff, and to the local associations of primary and secondary head teachers. The JCC has also been consulted about the scheme, and its views will be reported to the Committee. Views expressed by other consultees are noted below:

- The EIS would welcome the draft scheme.
- The SSTA believes the scheme is probably acceptable to most, but raises concerns about the two occasional days and how these are selected, believing that staff working in schools without School Boards have no recognised means of being consulted about these two days. In a subsequent letter the SSTA has unanimously condemned "the inclusion of Easter Monday as a holiday at the expense of the last day of the summer term."
- PAT fully endorse the draft and make a specific suggestion that the two occasional days ought to be Friday 13 February 1998 and Monday 16 February 1998.
- NAS/UWT has no objections to the draft scheme.

- The Association of Primary Head Teachers in Angus has no objections to the draft scheme.
- The Angus Rectors' Association have raised a number of concerns specifically about the proposals to include Monday 13 April 1998 (Easter Monday) as a holiday, and to end the school session on Thursday 2 July 1998.

CONCLUSIONS

- The overall holiday pattern seems to be universally acceptable.
- The choice of two occasional holiday dates in addition to the main pattern of terms and holidays seems to be posing some minor difficulties. Whilst there would appear to be unanimous acceptance of the desirability of having two holiday dates at some point, or points, outwith the main holidays there are some differences of opinion as to when these days ought to be selected, and indeed as to how the selection is made. In the latter context, members are reminded that School Boards have a statutory responsibility to fix occasional holiday dates after consulting their education authority. By agreement with representatives of School Boards who attended a meeting last November chaired by the Convener of the Education Committee, I nominated two occasional holiday dates for 1996/97 and sought the agreement of individual School Boards to these dates. In the event, School Boards in the Carnoustie and Kirriemuir areas were the only Boards which did not comply with my recommendation - agreeing to one of the two dates I had recommended (a Monday in mid February) but selecting a Tuesday in early May as a holiday instead of the mid February Friday suggested.

In all the circumstances I would recommend that a similar arrangement is put in place for 1997/98, and that I recommend to School Boards that the two occasional holiday dates be Friday 13 February 1998 and Monday 16 February 1998.

- Reservations about including Easter Monday as a holiday have only been made by 6 of the Council's 8 secondary head teachers and now also by the SSTA. These reservations are that (a) the loss of this day as a teaching day would be significant, particularly in the context of preparation for SCE examinations; (b) a scheme where a holiday lasts from a Monday to a Friday and where a new term begins on a Monday is much clearer and more readily understood; (c) concerns are expressed that in future years the moveable nature of the dates of Good Friday and Easter Monday might be a recipe for unnecessary confusion.

In considering these reservations it is important to note firstly that the education authority has no choice but to ensure that the number of school days for pupils must total 190 days in each school year. The total number of working days, therefore, is unchanged and there should be no detriment accruing to pupils in terms of overall exam preparation. The dates of SCE

examinations are now later in the year than used to be the case some years ago when there could have been only a one week period between the start of the summer term and the commencement of the SCE examinations. It seems highly probable that other education authorities will adopt slightly different holiday patterns, with some quite likely to have a later Spring holiday ending on 20 April, leaving even less time for last minute SCE examination preparation. Whilst the concerns are understood, it is impossible to provide hard evidence to substantiate them, and counter arguments can be readily adduced.

By agreeing to the proposed dates there is no binding decision on the education authority in future years; in particular the date of Easter in future years may not lend itself so readily to being combined with the spring holiday. If this is the case, it is perfectly reasonable not to agree to a school holiday at Easter (although some School Boards have in the past indicated a view that in such circumstances they would wish to select one of their occasional holidays at Easter time). However, since Easter Monday 1998 happens to fall at the end of the spring holiday fortnight, there does seem to be merit in incorporating it into this particular holiday, and I would recommend that this be done.

- Reservations about the last day of summer term being a Thursday in 1998, instead of a Wednesday as has been the pattern in recent years, once again have only been made by secondary head teachers (and now also by the SSTA) who suggest that attendance problems from which most schools suffer at the very end of session will be exacerbated, and that a negative psychological effect on staff is likely.

As with the consideration of Easter Monday, it is possible to bring forward arguments for and against proposals to the most minute level of detail. In the case of the selection of a day on which to end the session, many other education authorities choose a Friday for this purpose and over the years different days of the week have been selected by Tayside Regional Council. The case for insisting that the summer term must end on a Wednesday is not a strong one.

On balance, I am satisfied that the enclosed scheme is as satisfactory as possible, and I would recommend that the Education Committee approves it without amendment.

CONSULTATION

This report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive and the Director of Law and Administration.

JIM ANDERSON

DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

APPENDICES

ANGUS COUNCIL - EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

School Terms and Holidays 1997/98							School Days
Autumn Term	Start	Staff Pupils	Monday	18	August	1997	35
	End		Tuesday	19	August	1997	
		Friday	3	October	1997		
Autumn Holiday	Start		Monday	6	October	1997	
	End		Friday	17	October	1997 (10 school days)	
Winter Term	Start		Monday	20	October	1997	45
	End		Friday	19	December	1997	
Christmas Holiday	Start		Monday	22	December	1997	
	End		Friday	2	January	1998 (10 school days)	
Spring Term	Start		Monday	5	January	1998	60
	End		Friday	27	March	1998	
Spring Holiday	Start		Monday	30	March	1998	
	End		Monday	13	April	1998 (11 school days)	
Summer Term	Start		Tuesday	14	April	1998	58
	End		Thursday	2	July	1998	
May Day			Monday	4	May	1998	
Occasional Holiday Dates		Two to be fixed by School Boards, after consultation					(2)
Total No of Working Days for Staff							195
No of school days for pupils in session 1997/98 after deduction of 5 in-service training days							190
Session 1998/99	Start	Staff Pupils	Tuesday	18	August	1998	
			Wednesday	19	August	1998	

Notes:

Commencement of SCE Examinations 1998
Easter Day 1998

- 1 May 1998 (subject to confirmation)
- Sunday 12 April 1998

