

# ***THE LATEST ON PARALLEL PROGRESSION***

## **BOFESETE vs Ministry of Education**

### **BOFESETE bitterness**

Botswana Federation of Secondary School Teachers (BOFESETE), has informed Teaching Service Management (TSM) in its last meeting (22 March 2004) that it is not convinced that the Ministry of Education is treating the parallel progression issue with the seriousness it deserves. BOFESETE blamed TSM for failing to fulfil its promises of a speedy implementation of parallel progression. BOFESETE warned the Ministry that the time bomb was ticking away its time and the explosion would be regrettable. It further informed TSM that teachers' main concern with parallel progression (PP) is that many of them (teachers) have not received letters updating their status; worries of heavy taxation and no interest; when the whole exercise will be completed; why the blocked casualty system has not increased the number of beneficiaries tremendously as been promised; why not pay for the new scales immediately; the demoralising effect of the delays and the resultant injustices; speedy assistance for those going to Ministry for inquiry and appealing to be attended and recovering money from those who have been acting.

### **TSM explains, but regrets**

When responding, TSM Director, Mr Pheto, who was accompanied by his Deputy, Ms Bantsi, Chief Personnel Officer, Ms Tibone and the Public Relations Officer Ms Keobeile informed BOFESETE that the slow implementation of parallel progression was a neck pain and has even reached the Office of the President (OP). He said they had proposed to the OP through Mr Mfa that this PP be treated as a special project with its separate offices and personnel so that the exercise is expedited. The TSM management however declined to tell when such an office will be established. BOFESETE further expressed fear that it was not a guarantee that the OP will accept TSM proposal for such an office.

TSM explained that they had increased the number of officers calculating the teachers' benefits to ten and those writing teachers' letters to the same number too. They hoped this would result in the increase of letters for those who have not received them yet. TSM agreed that the delays obviously disadvantaged teachers in that the delayed lump payments do not attract interest but are heavily taxed, though it is not the teachers' fault. The MOE officials said they could not tell when the whole exercise will be completed, something that worries the teachers as they want the implementation time table. On the blocked casualty return system, the Ministry said that there was a marked improvement, as per the figures provided below. BOFESETE queried this as the figures were inconsistent and did not show any serious increase. TSM maintains that it is a taxing exercise to work through all the more than 20 000 teachers' files.

### **The heat is on**

As for immediately paying for the new scales, TSM said that the back pays and the new scales are handled by two different offices resulting in them effecting at different times. The directorate also concurred that PP was a hot potato as they also face the teachers' music, especially during Mfa's nation wide tour.

### **Some teachers are special**

It was also revealed to BOFESETE that 167 special request payments were processed for teachers who jumped the queue. The Director said these were teachers who had serious medical problems, the heavily indebted, bereaved and other humanitarian reasons. He

said this has now been stopped as they have detected cases of abuse. The issue of recovering money from those who were acting was referred to TSM consultative committee (TSMCC) which met on the 26 March 2004 at MOE headquarters. The referral was made so that the officers who did the calculations would be invited to explain. At TSMCC the issue was deferred again as the concerned officers were unable to turn up for the meeting.

### **Some 'forgotten' teachers**

TSM also explained that when the new block casualty return system was introduced, some letters were 'forgotten' but are now being attended to. This explains why some teachers have not received their letters yet. To other BOFESETE questions, TSM explained that an officer completes an average of 30 files per day and this depends on the history of the file. For example, the files for the year 1994 are more complicated than the 2000 ones due to the entries therein.

### **There is enough money for everyone!**

TSM also said that they have sufficient funds to pay all the teachers and that they secured supplementary funds in November 2003. In other words, funds have never been a problem to MOE. The other reasons for the delay in payment were said to be the introduction of the new pay roll system which withdrew personnel from PP, the PBRs workshops that had to be attended by all officers and some officers going on leave especially during the festive season.

### **Has the block casualty return system failed?**

BOFESETE also asked why the effect of block casualty system cannot be felt in schools. The system had promised that a large number of teachers in a school will be paid since the names have been sent in lumps. TSM explained that payments came in dribs and drabs in schools because some files lacked crucial information like TSM number and therefore investigation has to be instituted first. As such, the submitted form with inadequate information is put aside for updating while the other one is being processed.

### **The latest payments are as follows:**

- **From old casualty system=800 teachers paid**
- **October 2003= 583**
- **November 2003= 351**
- **December 2003 = 101**
- **January 2004= 311**
- **February 2004 = 338**
- **March 2004= 1104**
- **Special Requests= 167**
- **Total= 3756**

Note that the block casualty system started to pay from October 2003.

### **Why inconsistent figures?**

BOFESETE then wanted to know about the inconsistencies apparent in these figures. From October's 583, one expected the figures to rise in November, December and so on as the officers get accustomed to the block casualty system. TSM says some officers then went for leave as it was around the festive season; December is a half month as Salaries dept closes early. BOFESETE then observed that January 2004 then should have doubled to 700 or more since those cut out in December should have been carried over to January. BOFESETE felt that the officers engaged in this exercise were not thoroughly supervised

resulting in a low output. PBRS workshops are said to have withdrawn workers from their normal duty. The figure jumped from 338 to 1104 in March 2004 because more officers have been employed to do the calculations. With about 18 000 teachers left to be paid, does it mean that at the average of about 1000 teachers per month the whole exercise will take 18 months to complete (i.e up to September 2005)? TSM says it has employed more officers and has approached OP to fund it as a special project. Whether OP will agree to this proposal can be left for your own guess. What is true is that Teachers are still smarting from the rejected overtime allowance that was promised by the OP.

The above whole scenario was played back again to a higher authority that comprises senior education officers and teacher organisations. This was at the TSMCC, which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary in the MOE, Mr Philimon Ramatsui. Other top officials are the Directors of TSM and Secondary Department, Mr Tiroentle Pheto and Mr Reuben Motswakae respectively. In few words, they concurred with the teachers that parallel progression was poorly implemented and appreciated the misery teachers were going through.

At the end of it all, BOFESETE expressed their disappointment at the way teachers were being treated and the seemingly lack of seriousness by the authorities. The Ministry has however promised to do the best.

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