NASUWT THE TEACHERS' UNION

CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT

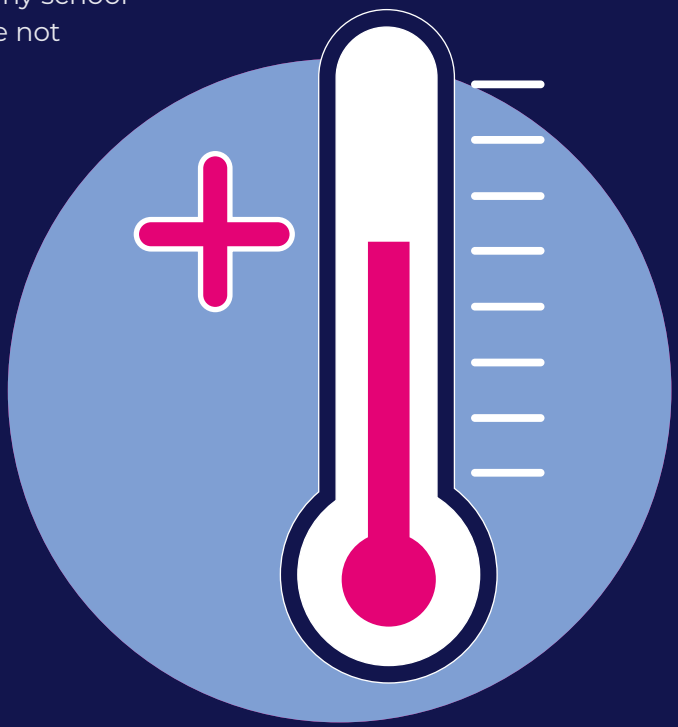
Excessive Working Temperatures

Introduction

This toolkit has been developed to support NASUWT Health and Safety Representatives and Workplace Representatives in protecting members' health, safety and wellbeing in relation to excessive working temperatures.

Teachers and pupils have the right to work and learn in environments that are safe, comfortable and conducive to effective teaching and learning. However, increasing numbers of schools and colleges are experiencing problems with excessive heat during summer months, inadequate heating during winter, and poor ventilation throughout the year.

Climate change is leading to more frequent and severe periods of hot weather. At the same time, many school buildings are ageing, poorly insulated or were not designed to cope with modern temperature extremes. As a result, members are increasingly reporting classrooms that become uncomfortably hot, poorly ventilated or excessively cold.



Excessive temperatures are not merely an issue of comfort. They are a significant health and safety issue that can affect physical health, mental wellbeing, concentration, behaviour and educational outcomes.

This toolkit provides the guidance, tools and campaign resources needed to assess, challenge and improve temperature management practices in your workplace.

Why this issue matters

Teacher wellbeing

Working in excessively hot or cold environments can have a significant impact on physical and mental wellbeing. High temperatures can cause dehydration, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, heat stress and heat exhaustion. Low temperatures can result in discomfort, reduced concentration and increased susceptibility to illness.

Teachers who spend prolonged periods working in uncomfortable conditions are more likely to experience stress, fatigue and reduced wellbeing.

Teaching and learning

Research consistently demonstrates that temperature affects concentration, attention, memory and performance. Excessively hot classrooms can make it difficult for pupils to focus and participate effectively in lessons. Poor environmental conditions can also contribute to behavioural issues and increased fatigue among both pupils and staff.

Climate change

Extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common across the UK. Heatwaves that were once considered exceptional are now occurring more frequently and lasting longer. School buildings must be adapted to cope with these changing conditions.

NASUWT has highlighted concerns that many schools and colleges are not adequately prepared for increasing temperatures and that greater investment is needed to ensure safe working environments.

Workload and working conditions

Excessive temperatures can make teaching significantly more challenging. Members frequently report difficulties maintaining concentration, increased exhaustion and reduced productivity during periods of extreme heat or cold.

Poor temperature management can also result in additional workload pressures as teachers attempt to adapt lessons, relocate activities or manage the effects of uncomfortable working conditions.

NASUWT policy

NASUWT believes that all teachers and pupils should be able to work and learn in safe and comfortable environments.

The Union has called for:

- stronger legal protections relating to workplace temperatures;
- greater investment in school buildings to improve resilience to climate change;
- effective ventilation, shading and insulation measures;
- robust employer risk assessments;
- meaningful consultation with trade unions on workplace temperature management; and
- the adoption of the Joint Union Heatwave Protocol during periods of extreme heat.

The legal framework

Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974/Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978

Employers have a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees.

This includes protecting staff from risks arising from excessive temperatures and ensuring that workplaces are safe and suitable for occupation.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999/Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000

Employers must undertake suitable and sufficient risk assessments and take appropriate action to control identified risks.

Temperature-related risks should be assessed and reviewed regularly, particularly during periods of extreme weather.

Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992/Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993

The regulations require employers to maintain a reasonable temperature in indoor workplaces during working hours.

They also require sufficient thermometers to be available, to enable workplace temperatures to be monitored.

While the regulations do not prescribe a maximum temperature, employers must ensure conditions remain reasonable.

Employers must provide effective and suitable ventilation in enclosed workplaces.

Poor ventilation can worsen the effects of excessive heat and create additional health concerns.

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977/The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979

Recognised trade union representatives have the right to investigate health and safety concerns, inspect workplaces and make representations to employers regarding working conditions.

What Workplace Representatives should look for

Excessive heat

Representatives should identify:

- classrooms regularly exceeding comfortable temperatures;
- areas exposed to prolonged direct sunlight;
- poor ventilation;
- inadequate shading;
- lack of access to drinking water;
- rooms containing heat-generating equipment; and
- staff reporting heat-related symptoms.

Excessive cold

Representatives should identify:

- inadequate heating;
- persistent cold spots within buildings;
- faulty heating systems;
- draughts;
- poor insulation; and
- temporary accommodation with inadequate temperature control.

Evidence gathering

Effective campaigning relies on evidence.

Representatives should collect:

- temperature readings;
- details of affected rooms;
- dates and times temperatures were recorded;
- photographs where appropriate;
- examples of disrupted teaching and learning;
- member testimonies;
- records of health concerns or incidents; and
- copies of risk assessments.

Temperature monitoring logs can be particularly useful in establishing patterns and supporting discussions with employers.

Campaign actions

Step 1: Raise awareness

Discuss temperature concerns with members and encourage them to report issues.

Ensure members understand their health and safety rights and the employer's responsibilities.

Step 2: Gather evidence

Collect information regarding temperatures, affected areas and the impact on staff and pupils.

Establish whether concerns are isolated or widespread.

Step 3: Request risk assessments

Seek copies of existing risk assessments and ask whether specific assessments have been undertaken during periods of extreme weather.

Challenge inadequate or outdated assessments.

Step 4: Engage with leadership

Raise concerns through established consultation arrangements and health and safety committees.

Request immediate and long-term actions to address identified issues.

Step 5: Promote the Joint Union Heatwave Protocol

Encourage employers to adopt and implement the protocol during periods of hot weather.

Ensure measures are agreed in advance rather than being introduced reactively.

What employers should do

Immediate actions

Employers should consider:

- providing free access to drinking water;
- relaxing dress codes;
- relocating classes where appropriate;
- adjusting lesson activities;
- providing fans where suitable;
- improving ventilation;
- reducing heat generating activities; and
- monitoring vulnerable staff and pupils.

Long-term actions

Employers should invest in:

- improved ventilation systems;
- solar shading;
- reflective window films;
- better insulation;
- climate-resilient building design;
- tree planting and external shading; and
- refurbishment of unsuitable accommodation.

The Joint Union Heatwave Protocol

The Joint Union Heatwave Protocol provides practical guidance to schools and colleges on managing excessive temperatures.

Key recommendations include:

- monitoring weather forecasts and heat warnings;
- consulting trade unions;
- ensuring access to water;
- relaxing uniform and dress code requirements;
- adapting physical activity;
- relocating teaching where necessary;
- adjusting working arrangements; and
- taking action to protect vulnerable individuals.

Representatives should encourage employers to adopt the protocol before periods of extreme weather occur.

Supporting vulnerable staff

Particular consideration should be given to:

- pregnant teachers;
- staff with disabilities;
- staff with cardiovascular conditions;
- staff with respiratory conditions;
- staff affected by menopause symptoms; and
- staff taking medication affected by temperature extremes.

Individual risk assessments may be required.

Escalation and support

Where concerns cannot be resolved locally, representatives should:

- contact their Local Association Secretary;
- seek advice from their National Executive Member;
- contact NASUWT Regional Centre staff; and
- where appropriate, request support from NASUWT Health and Safety Specialists.

Early intervention is often the most effective way of securing improvements.

Key messages for members

- Excessive temperatures are a health and safety issue.
- Employers have a legal duty to provide a reasonable working environment.
- There is no legal maximum workplace temperature, but employers must assess and manage risks.
- Members should report concerns and support evidence-gathering.
- NASUWT is campaigning for stronger protections and improved school environments.

Safe and comfortable working temperatures are essential for teacher wellbeing, effective teaching and successful learning.

By using this toolkit, Workplace Representatives can help ensure that employers take meaningful action to protect staff and pupils from excessive temperatures and create healthier, safer working environments for all.