

NASUWT THE
TEACHERS'
UNION



PRESIDENT'S
ADDRESS

President's Address

Colleagues, friends, and fellow members,

It is both a privilege and a profound honour to stand before you today in Birmingham as President of NASUWT – The Teachers' Union.

As a teacher of Biology in Kent, I have spent my career in classrooms just like yours: classrooms full of curiosity, challenges, and incredible potential. But also a profession on life support, where school funding is a major challenge and unrelenting workload and high-stakes accountability is evident, leading to teacher burnout, poor mental health and a crisis in recruitment and retention.

My own journey in trade union activism began in the early 2000s, when the retiring Rep at my school asked whether I had thought about standing as the new Rep. I made the error that many before and since have made, and said, "well, if nobody else wants to do it, then I would be happy to pick up the baton."

The rest is history, but throughout my journey I have had the support and encouragement of numerous colleagues. In my early years, the Local Secretary, Julia Harris, who later became the National Executive Member for District 27, encouraged my activism in the old Maidstone Local Association, and then, as NEM, encouraged me to stand as Kent Federation President.

My thanks go to Trevor Desmoyers-Davis, the Kent Federation Secretary, for his encouragement, support and tireless activism when I stepped up to the role of NEM, after Julia retired. And all of the other amazing comrades I have had the pleasure to work with in Kent and Medway.

People like Graham Russell, who has been a member of NASUWT for 50 years, still teaching and still co-ordinating health and safety in the South East Region. I salute him and all the other activists, who make this the best teacher trade union in the UK.

This conference is not simply a meeting of members; it is the heartbeat of our Union. It is where our shared strength becomes visible, where our collective determination takes shape, and where our commitment to tackling the causes of the cancers eating away at the teaching profession are put into Union policy.

Today, I want to speak with clarity, conviction, and urgency about the path ahead for our profession and for our Union. The challenges are real, but so too is our capacity to meet them, together. I look forward to chairing this conference, here in Birmingham, and hearing the voices of real teachers debate the motions selected by our membership.

Let me begin with an issue that has never been more important: the mental health and wellbeing of our members. Every day, teachers face demands that are not just challenging; they are overwhelming. Expectations from government, schools, parents, and society have increased, while resources have not. Teachers are asked to do more with less, and to maintain professionalism, energy, and care in the process. In England that means working to a contract that sets a maximum directed time of 1,265 hours, but contains a clause that means teachers in many schools are working in excess of 60-hour weeks; working into the late evening and weekends to meet the demands placed on them.

I have seen it in my own career. I have seen colleagues stay late into the evening, not because of ambition, but because the system leaves them no choice. I have seen brilliant educators leave the profession because the pressure became unbearable.

Supporting mental health is not an optional extra; it is central to sustaining a highly educated, resilient, motivated, and effective workforce. This Union will continue to fight for:

- accessible, high-quality mental health support for every teacher;
- legislation that ensures all schools and colleges are legally held to account for the mental health and wellbeing of their staff;

- funding to support these aims, ring-fenced to stop academies syphoning it off to further enrich CEOs and executive headteachers.

Because the message to all governments is simple: a system that burns out its teachers will ultimately fail the children it is meant to serve.

Secondly, and closely tied to wellbeing, is the issue of workload. We all know that workload is not simply a matter of hours, it is the weight that accumulates over time, the constant juggling of teaching, marking, planning, assessment, and bureaucratic requirements.

My priority is clear: our Union will continue to fight and campaign to reduce workload, so teachers can teach and pupils learn.

We will continue to demand:

- enforceable limits on working hours as already agreed at Annual Conference;
- the removal of all unnecessary and burdensome paperwork;
- trust in teachers' professional judgement without excessive micromanagement.

A profession that is overwhelmed cannot be a profession that thrives. Reducing workload is not only fair, it is essential for high-quality education.

And then there is pay, the most tangible recognition of the value of our profession. Teachers went for years enduring real-terms pay cuts. We have had two successive, small, above-inflation awards, but the majority of the teaching profession – executive heads and CEOs excluded – are well below where their salaries should be, if they had kept pace with inflation since 2010. Our members continue to teach out of a commitment to their pupils, and out of faith in the promise of education. But goodwill is not enough.

We are clear: teachers deserve pay that reflects their expertise, responsibility, dedication and standing as a postgraduate profession. We will not accept anything less than an above-inflation, fully funded pay settlement.

'Fully funded' means exactly that: schools should not be forced to cut staff, support services, or essential provision to cover the cost of a pay rise. Our fight is for fairness, for dignity, and for recognition. And we will pursue it with the same determination that defined the founding of this great trade union.

Finally, our Union must be strong, vibrant and future-proofed. Renewal is about growth, innovation, and excellence. It is about ensuring that every member feels their union is relevant to them.

Union renewal means:

- strengthening local networks and supporting Reps, with relevant training and clear communication;
- ensuring the leadership of this Union reflects the membership; we currently have more females than males on our National Executive, which is as it should be, but the current Officers are mainly white males. We need to make sure that female and Black members are encouraged to stand and we need to remove the barriers preventing them;
- developing innovative ways to engage members in every region and devolved nation;
- ensuring our Union is equipped to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow;
- putting organising as the top priority.

A renewed Union is a stronger Union. And a stronger Union wins: on pay, on workload, on wellbeing, and on the respect our profession deserves.

As a science teacher, I know the importance of evidence, of responsibility, and of acting before it is too late. We have already committed to becoming a net-zero organisation by 2050, but we must accelerate that journey.

Moving towards net zero is not just about the environment; it is about leadership, integrity, and the legacy we leave for future generations. It is also a key tool in engaging with young teachers at the start of their careers and to recruit them. A union that identifies with their beliefs must:

- continue to reduce its carbon footprint wherever possible;
- continue to identify and promote sustainable practices in all our operations;
- continue to be a strong voice in the wider trade union movement, demonstrating that organisations can be both effective and environmentally responsible.

This must be part of our broader renewal: to ensure that our Union is not only strong and fair, but also responsible and forward-looking.

Throughout my years of union activism, I have seen the power of trade union members standing together. I have seen it in national campaigns, in negotiations, and in schools up and down the country. When we act collectively, not only are we stronger, we win!

Colleagues, the road ahead is clear. We will:

- protect and support mental health across our profession;
- reduce workload to sustainable levels;
- secure a fair, above-inflation, fully funded pay settlement;
- renew and strengthen our Union to meet the challenges of the future;
- accelerate our journey to net zero, showing leadership on climate and sustainability.

These priorities are not mine alone, they are yours, too. They come from the voices of elected representatives at previous conferences who have spoken up; they come from members who stood up, and refused to settle for less.

I look forward to the next two days of debate that will further shape the Union's policies and direction moving forwards. I look forward to meeting you during the Conference and hopefully having time to converse. I further relish the coming year, when I will have the privilege of meeting members across jurisdictions where we are the voice of teachers.

Thank you for your activism. Thank you for giving up your precious time to attend Conference. And thank you for everything you do for the students you teach and the colleagues you support.

Finally, I wish to thank Wayne for both his leadership and friendship over the last year. I know how hard it has been at times.

And I'm pleased to be able to welcome our new General Secretary, Matt Wrack, to his first conference.

I wish you all a productive, inspiring, and empowering conference.



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