

# Women Teachers' Consultation Confer



Chris Keates, NASUWT General Secretary, addresses the Conference

The NASUWT's General Secretary congratulated hundreds of women members for their solidarity and support to protect our world-class education service at the Women Teachers' Consultation Conference.

The Conference, which was chaired by NASUWT President Graham Dawson, saw teachers gathering in Birmingham to discuss the challenges they face and to attend a series of professional development workshops.

The impact of another year of cuts and attacks by the Government on teachers and pupils, on the poorest and most vulnerable and on our civil and human rights, has resulted in the rolling back of vital gender equality gains for women and girls, Ms Keates told the Conference.

She highlighted plans to introduce a Trade Union Bill, which seeks to introduce draconian limits on unions' ability to represent working people, and the repeal of the Human Rights Act.

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She added: "There is a chilling common thread through all of these legislative provisions. Every one is about stifling and restricting opposition and attacking our democratic freedoms."

The Government's relentless assault on the pay and working conditions of teachers has continued, she told the Conference, with the result that the gender pay gap for teachers is widening, with men's pay advantage over women standing at an average of £2,400 in local authority secondaries and over £4,700 in primary academies.

The abuse of performance management and appraisal processes in too many schools is contributing to this issue, Ms Keates said, with "the imposition of crippling data-driven performance management objectives which no teacher can ever hope to achieve".

The NASUWT is continuing to make a stand to defend teachers' pay and conditions and professionalism and Ms Keates thanked members for their support which has helped to secure a number of gains.

## Empowering teachers

To mark World Teachers' Day, attendees were encouraged to describe what empowerment means for them as a teacher and NASUWT member.



Contributions included:



*"I am empowered by the support from my union, the NASUWT, and my colleagues in my Local Association."*



*"I am empowered by good friends and colleagues."*



*"I am empowered through being active in my union, the NASUWT."*



*"I am empowered by the creativity and young minds of my students."*

## Ajaz Aslam, Southwark



**What issues are currently concerning you as a teacher?**

"The General Secretary was saying that we should have had at least a 1% pay award but I couldn't see that in my pay packet in September and I am not sure if we are going to get it. I think we should automatically get at least the 1% as we have lost a lot of money over the last few years."

**What does being a member of the NASUWT mean to you?**

"Some years ago I had a problem when my father-in-law died. I am the eldest daughter-in-law and I had to go abroad to sort everything out. I told the school and they said it was okay for me to have time off, but when I came back my headteacher did not believe I had been dealing with a family emergency and accused me of having been on holiday and took my management point away, even though I brought in the death certificate."

"The NASUWT was able to help me and with its support I got my management point back."

## Suzanne Vowles, NE Essex



**Why did you become active within the NASUWT?**

"On a personal level, what I get out of it is the camaraderie, support and friendship. On a broader level it is the only way that I as a working woman can affect what happens to me. The right to withdraw my labour is a fundamental entitlement if I don't agree with what is happening, and the only way to do that is through collective action."

**What do you see as some of the biggest challenges for teaching and women teachers in particular?**

"As an older woman teacher, I have had my children and now I am coming to the end of my career. I see the depression in teachers' pay and that it is unfair, and I see the fact that I am more vulnerable because I am an older, more expensive woman teacher, despite the fact that I have and still can offer as much as any other teacher."

## Kathryn Thomas, Sheffield



**What attracted you to today's Conference?**

"I came to the Conference to get some professional development and also so I could feed back to other women in my school who have been talking to me about the issues that are affecting them."

**What do you think are the biggest issues facing women teachers today?**

"I think pay progression and being able to stand up for our rights. There are still disparities between women and men, and it's possible that women aren't going to be as assertive as men in a performance management review."

# Women teachers being denied access to flexible working

Despite the fact that the right to request flexible working was extended last year to all workers, an electronic voting session revealed women teachers are continuing to face unacceptable barriers and prejudice when seeking to work more flexibly

## Flexible working requests

**23%**

Only 23% said their workplace has adopted a flexible working policy, despite the fact that all schools and colleges should have a policy in place by law and make workers aware they have the right to request to work flexibly.

**8%**

Just 8% said flexible working requests are encouraged in their workplace.

"We got a new headteacher about 18 months ago and he had a rule that he only wanted full-time workers in the school and so flexible working requests have been turned down and people are now discouraged from working flexibly or part time."

**45%**

While 30% said they had made a flexible working request, 45% of those who had requested it had been turned down by their employer.

"I made a flexible working request to the principal but they said it was up to my department to decide. My department said the timetable had already been done so it was not going to be possible and that because I teach a core subject they couldn't let me work flexibly. I was told that it is difficult in maths to find schools which will take flexible working requests so I might want to think about taking a career break instead."

"People are afraid to ask for flexible working because they are scared it will make them look weak. People do not want to flag up a request for flexible working in case they are vulnerable when redundancies are made further down the line."

## Working hours

**50%**

Only half said that colleagues working reduced hours are provided with 'workable' timetables.

**52%**

Just over half said colleagues working reduced hours will attend the same number of parents' evenings, inset training days and staff meetings as full-time colleagues.

"At my school the issue is that it depends on the department; some are better than others. They don't take into account that you might need to organise childcare, but people are often not able to see their timetable far enough in advance to be able to make arrangements. I think it depends on your leadership and relationship with them as to whether you can make it work."

**19%**

Only 19% said they knew of any senior leadership colleagues in their school who work flexibly.

"A colleague who worked part time wasn't expected to attend inset days, but if she didn't she was left feeling out of the loop. It is hard to keep up with what is going on if you don't attend."

## Discrimination

**30%**

Nearly a third said they feel they or colleagues have been discriminated against by having flexible working requests rejected and 33% felt they or colleagues working flexibly had been discriminated against by being given unworkable timetables.

"I am in a senior leadership post and I work flexibly but I am expected to do as much work as colleagues who work full time. I have to go home and catch up with work there. I still do the same amount of work as a full-time person so it is not really flexible working as such."

"One of the ways we are being discriminated against is that if we have been turned down for flexible working we are deemed to not be coping and we are put on support programmes."

"When I had my last child my school asked me to come back early from maternity leave. I came back but asked to go part time as my son had a lot of medical problems and I wasn't able to get much sleep. The school said that as I was the only IT teacher I couldn't go part time. We had Ofsted and I failed as I was struggling to cope with working full time and looking after my son. The school's response was to try to put me on capability. I was diagnosed with post-natal depression and this was the only reason the school eventually allowed me to go part time. However, the timetable they gave me was not helpful."

"I have got flexible working hours. I have been on a 0.9 contract for three years where I have one day off a fortnight. Then, this year, instead of one day off, I have been given two half days, which doesn't really work well for me."

## Trans awareness



A practical workshop offered members advice on how to support trans people in the workplace.

Led by Jay Stewart of Gendered Intelligence, a company providing training and resources to support greater awareness around trans issues, the workshop offered practical advice on ensuring workplaces are trans-friendly spaces and also offered information on what being trans means.

Mr Stewart emphasised the need to treat every trans person as an individual, saying it was important for colleagues not to make assumptions about the trans person's preferred pronouns and use of language to describe them.

He said: "If you are working with a trans person you are working with an individual. Even if you have worked with one, two or 20 trans people before, every one may have different experiences and use different language to describe themselves."

He added: "Work with the person in front of you, speak to them and find out what language they use. Don't be scared or have a fear of language; if you do use the wrong pronoun to address them, just apologise and move on."

## Tips for employers

- Don't make assumptions about what a trans person will need in the workplace. Work with them and use the person's new name, pronouns and title;
- Provide access to appropriate clothing, toilets etc in the workplace;
- Provide a support person they are comfortable with, who they can go to with any concerns;
- If they might be going on school trips or travelling abroad, consider whether the country could be a hostile environment for a trans person;
- Enable the person to have time off for medical appointments;
- Take confidentiality seriously and do not 'out' people unnecessarily;
- Be confident in challenging inappropriate behaviour or language from colleagues, parents or pupils.

## NEXT CONFERENCE

### Women Teachers' Consultation Conference

Saturday 15 October 2016

ICC, Birmingham

**BOOK NOW ON**

03330 145550

or e-mail [conferencesandevents@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:conferencesandevents@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)

[www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)



## Assertiveness in the classroom



An engaging and interactive session run by Education Consultant Emily Hunter [left] offered teachers valuable advice on how to deal with challenging and difficult situations which they can regularly face in school.

Members were involved in a range of exercises to explore how very simple changes to their own behaviour could demonstrate assertiveness and positively impact on the behaviour of others, including pupils and managers.

Members observed actors carrying out a realistic scenario of a teacher addressing the disruptive behaviour of a pupil and were then invited to make suggestions and re-enact the scene, trying different approaches to resolve the situation. These included tone of voice, type of language used, eye contact and other techniques to retain control and exhibit assertiveness.

One of Ms Hunter's tips included the importance of being able to say "no", whether to a manager that is putting a teacher under pressure to take on extra work, a pupil who is misbehaving, or a colleague who is acting inappropriately. The session supported the members in practising how and when to say no, so they could draw on this when back in the classroom.

Members were also encouraged to not be afraid to challenge unprofessional behaviour, as well as unacceptable and derogatory language.

## Supporting teachers to tackle bullying and harassment



At a workshop on dealing with bullying and harassment, teachers were advised on how to recognise and handle these negative behaviours. The informative session was run by Dave Whiting [left] of Acas, the workplace relations and employment law specialists.

Mr Whiting clarified the legal definitions of both bullying and harassment, demonstrating that specific legal protection applies to

harassment related to gender, race, disability, religion/belief, sexual orientation or age.

He outlined how to handle conversations with someone who is displaying bullying behaviour.

His advice included:

- don't start by calling them a bully – this could lead to them becoming defensive, reducing the chances of reaching a positive resolution;
- focus on how their behaviour makes you feel; for example, "when you are rude to me in front of students, it makes me feel bullied". It's much harder for someone to defend this, as they are your feelings;
- describe the impact of the behaviour, such as "it makes me feel uncomfortable", "it affects my wellbeing";
- if there is still no positive outcome, you can choose to move to formal procedures – you have given them the opportunity and chance to change.

## Supporting teachers on pay



Women teachers were urged to harness the knowledge and strength of the NASUWT to challenge unlawful and unfair attempts to deny them pay progression.

Providing members with the tools and knowledge to empower themselves through the performance management and pay progression process was the aim of the workshop run by NASUWT National Negotiating Officials Paula Roe [left] and Victor Aguera.

The importance of members playing an active and equal role in their performance management was strongly emphasised, with Ms Roe saying: "Objectives should be agreed, there should be a professional dialogue. You are a professional and it is reasonable that you should be involved in professional dialogue about your objectives."

Attempts to deny pay progression or to impose unachievable or data-driven objectives during the performance management process must be challenged, Ms Roe told members, setting out some of the spurious tactics some schools commonly employ to seek to prevent teachers progressing their pay.

"Pay progression should not be determined on whether you have run a trip or painted a classroom or attended every school event", she said, adding: "As an individual you may be afraid to stand up and challenge alone, but with the support of the NASUWT, together we are strong and our successful cases prove this."