

6 January 2021

## **COVID-19 UPDATE**

### ***Protecting members***

#### **School Guidance**

The First Minister made a statement to Parliament on coronavirus on 4 January 2021.

The statement confirmed that with effect from 5 January:

- schools and nurseries will be closed for the majority of pupils but will remain open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers;
- all other pupils will learn remotely until at least 1 February 2021;
- this date will be reviewed on 18 January 2021.

The new national restrictions which come into force from 5 January mean that:

- with the exception of some islands, all mainland areas are now under tighter restrictions than Level 4, with everyone required to stay at home, apart from essential shopping, care commitments or exercise;
- you may only leave your home for work if you cannot undertake this work from home;
- outdoor gatherings are now restricted to meetings between a maximum of two people from two households, including young people aged 12-17.

The Government has also asked that employers and employees immediately review and discuss their working arrangements to clearly establish what specific work functions cannot be done from home, and employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees working from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working.

Individuals must not leave home unless they have a reasonable excuse (for example, for work or education purposes). The Government advises that if you need to travel you should stay local and reduce the number of journeys you make overall. The list of reasons for which you can leave your home and area include, but are not limited to:

- work – where you cannot reasonably work from home;
- accessing education and for caring responsibilities;
- visiting those in your extended household;

- visiting hospital or GP, and other medical appointments or visits where you have had an accident or are concerned about your health;
- buying essential goods or services, but this should be within your local area wherever possible;
- outdoor exercise. This should be done locally wherever possible, but you can travel a short distance within your area if necessary (for example, to access an open space);
- attending to the care and exercise of an animal, or accessing veterinary services.

Car sharing with anyone from outside your household should be avoided.

### **The NASUWT's Position**

The Union has been continuing to make active representations about the impact of the new variant of coronavirus and rising infection levels on the reopening of schools and colleges. Prior to the start of the Spring term, the NASUWT called on the Government to end the confusion and chaos across the country, to put safety and public health first, and to move immediately to remote education on a nationwide basis.

A national lockdown was the only credible response to the current situation facing the country. It is right that the Government has accepted the NASUWT's calls for an immediate move to remote learning which will operate until 1 February in the first instance.

Reopening schools again is the first priority for the Government. However, to avoid further disruption, lessons must be learned. The NASUWT is calling on the Government to:

- work with the sector to develop credible and lasting solutions;
- introduce tougher control measures and enforce compliance;
- introduce a robust system of testing led by public health teams;
- honour the commitment made to give priority to the education workforce in the rollout of the coronavirus vaccine.

### **NASUWT Information, Advice and Support**

Information and advice for members will continue to be updated as further guidance is published by the Government.

In the first instance, members should find out from their school the arrangements that will be put into place to support provision for vulnerable children and children of key workers, and for remote education provision.

We are aware that plans for your return were put in place prior to the break. However, following the First Minister's announcement, these may now need to change.

## Remote Learning

The First Minister announced on 4 January 2021 that school pupils will now learn remotely until 1 February 2021, with the exception of vulnerable children and children of key workers.

The Scottish Government statement was explicitly clear that:

*'anyone who is able to work from home, must do so. It will only be a reasonable excuse to leave your home to go to work, if that work cannot be done from home'.*

*'If you were shielding and you cannot work from home, our clear advice now is that you should not go into work at all'.*

The Union wrote to all Directors of Education on 4 January 2021, following the First Minister's announcement, setting out our expectation that employers will follow the Government's advice carefully and that schools should not therefore be requiring all staff to attend in person as usual on the day of return. While preparations will be required to support home learning and arrangements made for supporting vulnerable children and the children of key workers, the Union is clear that these should be done remotely wherever possible.

We have received feedback that some staff, particularly promoted staff, may still be expected to attend in person to prepare to support key worker children and Additional Support Needs (ASN) pupils. These arrangements may have pre-dated the First Minister's announcement. If this does apply to you and you consider that it is possible to undertake such activity from home, please contact your line manager to discuss how you can be supported to work from home. Should you encounter any difficulties, please contact: [rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk).

## Vulnerable/Shielding People

The First Minister in her statement of 4 January 2021 stated:

*'We are also providing new guidance for people who are in the shielding category. If you were shielding and you cannot work from home, our clear advice now is that you should not go into work at all.'*

*'The Chief Medical Officer is writing to everyone who falls into this category, and his letter will count as a Fit Note for those who need it.'*

The NASUWT is clear that those staff who were shielding should not be asked to go into schools.

Staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) should be contacted by their employer to confirm that they are going to work from home. All other staff should be encouraged to work from home and liaise virtually wherever possible.

The Union has also made representations to each Director of Education that workers who are clinically vulnerable, pregnant or in any other higher risk group (e.g. from a BAME background, disabled or aged over 60) should not be asked to attend a school

setting without having first been provided with an updated individual risk assessment that takes account of the new, more virulent strain of COVID-19.

The Union has further requested all local authority employers to:

- ensure their COVID-security plans are reviewed and updated in consultation with staff, the NASUWT and other trade unions;
- note that any risk assessments prepared for the Autumn term 2020 are not sufficient for the purpose of meeting their statutory employer duties and legal obligations for health and safety at work;
- complete new individual risk assessments for clinically vulnerable employees and with regard to other employees identified as being at higher risk from coronavirus.
- ensure that all employees who are CEV must be supported to stay at home/work from home;
- put into place plans and protocols with regard to the safe deployment of supply teachers.

The NASUWT will seek to work collaboratively with local authority employers to discuss and agree appropriate local hub models and appropriate COVID-safe protocols, including better and tougher mitigations to protect staff. It is essential that arrangements take account of the health and safety and workload considerations and are subject to consultation with members. Please do not hesitate to contact your local secretary for further details on education provision arrangements in your area. Should you encounter any difficulty, please do not hesitate to contact us on: **rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk**.

### **Special Schools**

The NASUWT welcomes the First Minister's commitment to look at prioritising school staff for vaccination. The Union believes that vaccination of teachers and other staff must be introduced as a central pillar of ensuring the safe operation of schools during the pandemic. At the very least, staff working in special settings to support ASN pupils, where working from home is unlikely and those who are at greater risk due to the inability of pupils to follow safety mitigations, should be prioritised for vaccination. The NASUWT has raised this for consideration with Scottish Government Officials.

### **Childcare**

Scottish Government guidance clarifies that all school staff providing support for vulnerable and key worker children, including learning and childcare, who are required to attend their work in person, would qualify as category 1 or 2 key workers.

As the Scottish Government has included teachers in the definition of 'key workers', they should therefore have access to the same childcare support as other key workers.

The NASUWT encourages all employers to provide additional flexibility to support individuals who have childcare issues. Should you encounter any difficulties, please contact: **rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk** for further advice.

## Supply

The NASUWT appreciates that the announcement by the First Minister will have created increased anxiety amongst supply members. If you are a supply member under a current contract of employment, then that contract should continue and any decisions on whether you should work from home, or in school to support vulnerable/key worker children, should be based on your COVID risk and not your supply status.

If you are a supply worker who is not currently engaged in ongoing supply work, we appreciate that this will be a particularly stressful time. The Government has said that it is committed to utilising the teacher workforce and has provided additional funding for local authorities during the pandemic, so we would advise you to continue to actively seek employment with the local authorities that you are registered with. Beyond that, no clear plans have been provided currently on further financial support to supply workers. A model of support was developed through the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) during the lockdown from March to August 2020, and the NASUWT will campaign for a similar model to be put in place.

## Resources

The NASUWT has published an **extensive suite** of guidance and support materials on managing Covid-19 in schools, including updated advice on **Checklist for the Use and Management of Live Streaming**.

The NASUWT's **Frequently Asked Questions** section on the website should be consulted in the first instance where a member has a question or concern about practices in their workplace.

Where concerns raised by members relate to whole-school or employer-wide policies and practices that have implications for all or a significant number of staff, it is important that members alert the NASUWT as soon as possible.

The NASUWT has published coronavirus checklists for members on **Health and Safety** and on **Workload**. Members can use these checklists to protect and safeguard their health and safety and ensure that their workload and working practices are manageable and sustainable. Members should raise any concerns with their line manager/headteacher and alert the NASUWT to any specific issues affecting the maintenance of safe and sustainable working practices in their school.

Further information and advice for members is available on the Union's **Coronavirus Hub** and can also be found in our information and advice on **Remote Teaching and Learning**.

## NASUWT Scotland in conversation with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

In recognition of the enormity of the changes to the national qualifications' arrangements for 2021, the NASUWT is holding an online engagement event on Wednesday 20 January 2021 from 5pm to 6pm.

Join us to hear up-to-date information and a short presentation from the SQA, as well as the opportunity to participate in a Q&A session.

The event will be chaired by Mike Corbett, NASUWT National Executive Member and NASUWT Representative on the Curriculum and Assessment Board. SQA attendees will include Fiona Robertson, Dr Gill Stewart and Jean Blair.

Please email [rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:rc-scotland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk) to register your interest.

Further details will be circulated before the event.

