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Date: 18 February 2021

Our Ref: 210218/Swinney J/PR/TF

General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

By email: DFMCSE@gov.scot

Dear John,

Income protection for supply teachers

I am writing to you regarding the financial provisions for supply teachers during the national lockdown and the phased reopening of schools in Scotland from 22 February 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst recognising the importance of the measures imposed to curtail the spread of the disease, it cannot go unnoticed that an inevitable consequence is that there will now be large numbers of supply teachers unable to work, had work cancelled, or who are now only able to obtain drastically reduced employment opportunities. The NASUWT is seriously concerned at the situation for hardworking and dedicated supply teachers and the increased financial uncertainty they face.

We trust that you recognise and appreciate the vital service supply teachers provide to schools and colleges and the need to support them at this uncertain time to cover the loss of pay.

The NASUWT appreciated the decisive nature of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) Supply Teachers Job Retention Scheme for eligible supply teachers who lost work or were unable to work during 2020, but the Union is concerned that the absence of any such scheme from January 2021 has resulted in many supply teachers reporting that their incomes and livelihoods have been detrimentally impacted upon.

Indeed, results from the recent 2020/21 NASUWT Annual Scotland Supply Teachers Survey shows that the lack of financial support available to a number of supply teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a situation many supply teachers have been forced to secure work outside of teaching, often at rates of pay that are not commensurate with the level of income derived from teaching. This has exposed the disparity between the pay of supply teachers and others, as well as placing supply teachers in a precarious financial situation where they have had to make tough decisions about their expenditure, or rely on the increased use of credit or the generosity of family and friends to make ends meet. Some supply teachers have been forced to claim Universal Credit and there are those who have had to rely on food banks.

Whilst recognising that opportunities for supply work will potentially emerge for some supply teachers with the phased reopening of schools, the NASUWT believes that further consideration is given to how the Scottish Government is able to support supply teachers, and would welcome an assurance from you that this will be looked into as a matter of urgency, including reinstating the SNCT Supply Teachers Job Retention Scheme, as well as issuing further advice and guidance to employers for the utilisation of supply teachers from February 2021.

We are acutely aware of the demands being made of you and the Government at this time, but we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with you at the earliest opportunity.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Roach', written in a cursive style.

Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary