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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Neil Carberry, Chief Executive, REC
By email: neil@rec.uk.com

14 March 2021

Thank you for your joint letter with the NASUWT of 15 January, regarding financial support available to supply teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak. I apologise for the delay in my response.

Supply teachers and other supply staff perform a valuable role in our schools. They make an important contribution to the smooth running of schools and how they effectively manage absences.

Our published guidance on supply teachers and other contingent workers encourages schools to continue to pay supply staff for the duration of their existing assignments, and not cut short these agreements. The guidance also details how schools may calculate payments to support supply staff they engage on a casual basis, in line with support that agency staff receive via the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS). The guidance also provides advice for schools on how they may continue to pay agencies for agreed assignments at 80% of the agreed contracted rates so that agency staff can continue to be paid.

The guidance includes full details of all the financial support available for supply teachers, and also broader financial support for early years, schools, colleges and higher education institutions during the COVID-19 outbreak.

A key principle behind the government's plan for education is to give teachers and school leaders the freedom to use their professional judgement to decide the structure of their schools' workforce that best meets the needs of their pupils. Therefore, the guidance we have issued is advisory only, which recognises the autonomy of school leaders. The guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/1G9f9pm.

As you will appreciate, responsibility for the CJRS policy lies with HM Treasury and the operational delivery responsibility lies with HM Revenue & Customs. The guidelines for CJRS state that the decision to furlough an employee, fully or flexibly, is entirely at the employer's discretion as it is dependent on a range of factors that the employer is best placed to determine, for example, the amount of work available for employees. The guidelines, eligibility criteria and calculation rules are the same across all employers and all sectors, other than those employers whose staff costs are publicly funded, with no exceptions for certain sectors.

On the CJRS and employer contributions, from 1 November employers will pay employer National Insurance and pension contributions for the hours the employee is on furlough. Employer National Insurance contributions (NICs) and pension contributions are the only required contributions under the extension to the CJRS. For an average claim, this accounts for just 5% of total employment costs or £70 per employee per month.

This is a fair way to ask employers to contribute because it protects lower paid workers, by limiting the cost to employers of lower paid workers. Indeed, an early assessment of CJRS claims suggested around 40% of employees using the scheme are below the NICs and pensions threshold and will, therefore, have no employer costs in the CJRS. Furthermore, many small employers can benefit from the employment allowance for support with their NICs bill.

The guidelines, eligibility criteria and calculation rules are the same across all employers and all sectors and are applied without exception. Supply teachers who are required to self-isolate under existing guidelines and who meet the benefits-linked eligibility criteria will be entitled to a Test and Trace Support Payment of £500, payable as a lump sum by local authorities, to ensure they are able to play their part in controlling the virus by isolating at home.

If supply teachers do not fulfil the criteria for it, they could be eligible for a £500 discretionary payment if they are unable to work from home and will lose income as a result of self-isolating. Information about eligibility for the Test and Trace Support Payments is available at: tinyurl.com/nvbsJrs7.

The government has provided additional financial support for those unable to work because they have COVID-19 or are self-isolating. More information is available at: tinyurl.com/1nk3shr3.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a large circular flourish underneath.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education