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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

29 January 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to you again, this time as a matter of urgency, to seek your support in ensuring job protection for supply teachers and support staff while schools remain closed. We have also written to Rishi Sunak regarding this.

Lack of support for agency workers

There are tens of thousands supply teachers and support staff in the UK, many of whom are supplied by the 350+ compliant education agencies represented by the Recruitment & Employment Confederation. Education agencies have been instrumental in helping schools meet the spikes in demand for teachers and support staff during the Covid-19 pandemic. Supply teachers provide a vital service to schools in normal circumstances - but many schools would not have been operational without them over recent months. While the support package available from Government during the crisis has been generous in many areas, there is a lack of financial support available to supply teachers and staff. Agencies that have decided to furlough their supply staff now cannot backdate their claim to the start of the school term in January. This, combined with the lack of income available as a result of schools being closed, has left supply staff struggling - a situation which needs to be urgently addressed.

Impact of current furlough scheme

The inability to backdate furlough to the start of January has put thousands of supply teachers and support staff out of pocket. The lack of clarity around whether claims could be backdated (this lack of clarity comes from there being a change granted last year that allowed the backdating of claims but thus far, has not been included in the current government guidance on furloughing) and the short notice when schools closed, has left staffing businesses unable to provide furlough agreements to their teachers in time.

Action to help schools and agencies



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Ultimately the difficulty in furloughing supply teachers will leave schools caught short on staffing levels when they re-open. Swift action needs to be taken to:

- Reissue the Procurement Policy Notice (PPN 04/20) that was put in place during the first lockdown.
- Allow agencies to backdate furlough claims to the start of the January term to minimise the loss of income to supply teachers and other staff.

These changes, which mirror the support provided last year, will help to avoid a staffing crisis when the 'R' rate reduces sufficiently and schools and colleges can reopen.

The furlough scheme has helped many but at the moment it is failing supply teachers and support staff. Much rides on correcting this. We are ready to work with you to help resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

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