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General Secretary/Ysgrifennydd Cyffredinol: **Dr Patrick Roach**

By email: [DSME@gov.wales](mailto:DSME@gov.wales)

Dear Kirsty,

## **SUPPLY TEACHERS**

I am writing to you regarding the situation affecting supply teachers.

The NASUWT recognises the importance and vital work of committed and dedicated supply teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. I know that you appreciate the valuable contribution that supply teachers make to pupils' education and the need for schools to be confident that they can call upon an available supply of teachers as they seek to maintain provision throughout the Coronavirus pandemic and beyond.

However, we are concerned that:

- current arrangements are failing to support supply teachers or to benefit children, young people and schools;
- supply teachers are facing increased financial uncertainty as a result of the implementation of Government guidance within schools to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 transmission;
- the impact of existing arrangements for the sourcing of supply teachers from employment agencies and umbrella companies is detrimental to the interests of the taxpayer.

The actions of many agencies and umbrella companies throughout the pandemic has been a major cause for concern for our members. Many supply teachers have reported that they have been denied access to the Government's furlough scheme by agencies. In some cases, teachers working through umbrella companies have been furloughed at 80% of the National Minimum Wage. Other supply teachers have had their employment assignments terminated with little or no notice, despite Government advice and guidance to the contrary.

The problems experienced by supply teachers are now being compounded by revisions to the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) from the autumn where agencies are refusing to commit financially towards the scheme, further reducing financial protection for supply teachers, at a time where work opportunities remain scarce.

Prior to and following the full reopening of schools on 1 September, the NASUWT has received numerous reports from supply teachers who have been advised that they will be unable to access work opportunities as schools seek to minimise social contact by the use of education bubbles. Coupled with the decision to end the CJRS, this will leave many qualified supply teachers facing financial misery this term, and this may well force many teachers to seek work outside of teaching and education.

Many supply teachers who are being employed are concerned that any promise of regular work may be endangered if they or their bubble are told to self-isolate - during which period the school may well not honour financially the agreed work over the period of self-isolation.

The NASUWT asks the Welsh Government to intervene to ensure that financial support continues to be provided to supply teachers at this time.

Whilst acknowledging that spending on supply teaching in Wales has reduced, there is no doubt that it remains big business. The Welsh Audit Office report that approximately £54 Million was spent on supply cover in 2011-12.<sup>1</sup> By 2016-17 this figure appears to have reduced to £40 Million.<sup>2</sup> Schools are charged up to a 40% commission fee which goes direct to the agency. Many agencies also charge finder's fees to schools, which restrict access to employment for teachers who may be able to take up permanent or temporary job opportunities in schools. We have evidence of fees to the value of £10,000 being charged to release a teacher.

The rates of pay of supply teachers have remained stagnant for the overwhelming majority of supply teachers and have been eroded by inflation and have largely been omitted from the scope of pay awards recommended by the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body. Furthermore, supply teachers employed through agencies are also currently unable to be active members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). The NASUWT maintains that there is a strong argument that supply teachers, working alongside other employed teachers, should be afforded the right to access the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

As you are aware, there is strong evidence that well managed banks of directly employed supply teachers, operated by central government, local authorities or clusters of schools have significant advantages for both schools and for supply teachers.<sup>3</sup> This has the potential to reduce overheads, provide better pay, pensions, working conditions and CPD entitlements for teachers, whilst giving schools greater confidence and assurance.

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<sup>1</sup> Wales Audit Office 2013 Covering Teachers' Absence.

<sup>2</sup> £40 M spent on supply teachers in Wales Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-46263250> Accessed on 27.1.20

<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government (2019)

In considering how to eradicate the dysfunctional supply teacher market, we would also ask you to prioritise the following:

- Provide additional job protection funding to assist those supply teachers who, through no fault of their own, will be unable to secure work during the autumn term as a result of the implementation of Covid-19 measures.
- Ensure that the pay framework for supply teachers who work in state funded schools mirrors the pay of other teachers from day one and that pay rates reflect experience in the job.
- Limit the level of financial overhead that agencies may charge schools as part of their fee structures.
- Use existing funding agreement levers to incentivise schools to move towards directly employed or pooled arrangements for sourcing supply teachers.

I look forward to your consideration of these matters and the opportunity to discuss with you our proposals in this important area.

Yours sincerely,

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

Dr Patrick Roach  
**General Secretary**