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# NASUWT

## The Teachers' Union

Hillscourt Education Centre  
Rose Hill  
Rednal  
Birmingham  
B45 8RS

General Secretary  
**Dr Patrick Roach**

Telephone: 0121 453 6150 Facsimile: 0121 457 6208

E-mail: [nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk) Website: [www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)

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

Dear Gavin,

### **SUPPLY TEACHERS**

I am writing to you further to our previous discussions on 13 August 2020 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 not 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 is now being compounded by revisions to the 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 Coronavirus Job Retention Fund, 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.

The NASUWT believes that the Government needs to intervene to continue to provide financial support for supply teachers at this time.

Supply teachers often have no choice but to obtain work via different supply agencies, leaving them vulnerable to the vagaries of precarious, intermittent and insecure employment. In the past, schools engaged supply teachers directly or accessed them from local-authority supply pools. Private supply agencies existed at the margins, but not to the extent they do now. The NASUWT's annual survey of supply teachers has found that the overwhelming majority of supply teachers (88%) reported that private supply agencies were the only way they could obtain work. Since 2014, the use of supply agencies by supply teachers has risen by 25%.<sup>1</sup>

The amount spent by maintained schools on supply teachers for 2018/19 was in excess of £550 million.<sup>2</sup> Of this, in excess of three-quarters (77% or c.£425 million) was spent sourcing supply teachers from employment agencies. The figure for academy schools for the period 2018-19 was in excess of £199 million.<sup>3</sup>

Schools are charged up to a 40% commission fee which goes direct to the agency. This equates to over £170 million for local authority maintained schools and over £34.5 million for academies. 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 been omitted from the pay awards recommended by the School Teachers' Review Body. Without the application of the national pay framework, supply teachers have seen their pay plummet relative to other teachers, with no national entitlement to an annual pay award when employed via supply agencies. The majority of supply teachers report that they are paid between £100 and £149 per day and that they have not seen their remuneration increase since 2014.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/fbd07752-41cb-400b-b80b6c6505ea351c.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/la-and-school-expenditure-2018-to-2019-financial-year>

<sup>3</sup> <https://schools-financial-benchmarking.service.gov.uk/Help/DataSources>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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.

In other nations/jurisdictions, there exist national frameworks which ensure that supply teachers are directly employed nationally, regionally/locally or by schools on an individual or consortia basis. 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. There is strong evidence that well managed banks of directly employed supply teachers, operated by central government, local authorities, Multi-Academy Trusts or clusters of schools have significant advantages for both schools and for supply teachers.

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 and academies 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,



Dr Patrick Roach  
**General Secretary**