

5th January 2021

COVID-19 UPDATE

Protecting members

School and College Reopening

The Prime Minister made a statement to the nation on coronavirus on 4 January 2021.

The statement confirmed that with effect from 5 January:

- primary (reception onwards) and secondary schools and colleges will remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers;
- all other pupils will learn remotely until at least the February half-term.

The Government has also confirmed that it will be working with Ofqual to consult rapidly on putting in place alternative arrangements to public examinations in 2021.

Public exams and vocational assessments scheduled to take place in January will go ahead as planned.

The new national restrictions which come into force from 5 January mean that:

- you may only leave your home for work if you cannot reasonably work from home;
- where people cannot work from home – including, but not limited to, people who work in the critical areas of national infrastructure, construction or manufacturing – they should continue to travel to their workplace. This is essential to keeping the country operating and in supporting these sectors and employers;
- public sector employees working in essential services, including childcare or education, should continue to go into work.

The Government also advises that employers and employees should discuss their working arrangements, and employers should take every possible step to facilitate their employees working from home, including providing suitable IT and equipment to enable remote working. Extra consideration should be given to those people at higher risk.

There are circumstances in which individuals will be allowed to meet others from outside their household, childcare or support bubble in larger groups, but this should not be for socialising and only for permitted purposes. A full list of these circumstances will be included in Regulations to be published by the Government. The police can take action if individuals meet in larger groups, including issuing fines (fixed penalty notices).

Individuals must not leave home unless they have a reasonable excuse (for example, for work or education purposes). The Government advises that if you need to travel you should stay local and reduce the number of journeys you make overall. The list of reasons you can leave your home and area include, but are not limited to:

- Work – where you cannot reasonably work from home;
- accessing education and for caring responsibilities;
- visiting those in your support bubble – or your childcare bubble for childcare;
- visiting hospital, GP and other medical appointments or visits where you have had an accident or are concerned about your health;
- buying goods or services that you need, but this should be within your local area wherever possible;
- outdoor exercise. This should be done locally wherever possible, but you can travel a short distance within your area if necessary (for example, to access an open space);
- attending to the care and exercise of an animal, or accessing veterinary services.

Car sharing with anyone from outside your household or your support bubble should be avoided.

The Government has also published **safer travel guidance** for those who need to use public transport.

The NASUWT's position

The Union has been continuing to make active representations about the impact of the new variant of coronavirus, rising infection levels and the impact on the reopening of schools and colleges. Prior to the start of the Spring term, the NASUWT called on the Government to end the confusion and chaos across the country, to put safety and public health first, and to move immediately to remote education on a nationwide basis.

A national lockdown was the only credible response to the current situation facing the country. It is right that the Government has accepted the NASUWT's calls for an immediate move to remote learning which will operate until the February half-term in the first instance.

Reopening schools again after half-term without further disruption will, however, mean that lessons must be learned. The NASUWT is calling on the Government to:

- work with the sector to develop credible and lasting solutions;
- introduce tougher control measures and enforce compliance;
- introduce a robust system of testing led by public health teams;
- give priority to the education workforce in the rollout of the coronavirus vaccine.

The NASUWT has also made clear that the Union expects to be fully involved in discussions around preparation of alternatives to the Summer 2021 public examination series, and that preparations for the 2021 primary school statutory assessments should be abandoned.

NASUWT Information, Advice and Support

Information and advice for members will continue to be updated as further guidance is published by the Government.

In the first instance, members should find out from their school/college the arrangements that will be put into place to support provision for vulnerable children and children of key workers, and for remote education provision.

It is essential that arrangements take account of the health and safety and workload considerations and are subject to consultation with members.

The NASUWT has published an **extensive suite** of guidance and support materials on managing COVID-19 in schools. Given the rapidly changing circumstances during the pandemic, members should continue to stay updated on latest developments and advice via the NASUWT website.

The NASUWT's **Frequently Asked Questions** section on the website should be consulted in the first instance where a member has a question or concern about practices in their workplace.

Where concerns raised by members relate to whole-school or employer-wide policies and practices that have implications for all or a significant number of staff, it is important that members alert the NASUWT as soon as possible.

The NASUWT has published coronavirus checklists for members on **Health and Safety** and on **Workload**. Members can use these checklists to protect and safeguard their health and safety and ensure that their workload and working practices are manageable and sustainable. Members should raise any concerns with their line manager/headteacher/principal and alert the NASUWT to any specific issues affecting the maintenance of safe and sustainable working practices in their school/college.

Further information and advice for members is available on the Union's **Coronavirus Hub** and can also be found in our information and advice on **Remote Teaching and Learning**.



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