

YOUR VOICE

Voice
community

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LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera down a long, arched tunnel. The tunnel's walls are made of reflective, metallic panels that create a shimmering effect. At the far end of the tunnel, a bright light source creates a strong glow, silhouetting the person walking towards it. The overall mood is one of hope and perseverance.

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE TOGETHER

- > VACCINATION
- > MASS TESTING
- > YOUR SKILLS, YOUR FUTURE
- > THE FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT

VOICE COMMUNITY REFERRALS



Voice Community understands just how valuable your recommendation can be in helping someone make the choice to join us.

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that you can use to highlight why Voice Community offers everything an education, early years or childcare professional needs to support them throughout their career.

*Referred member must join as a paid or Newly Qualified member to qualify the referrer for gift card eligibility. Gift card will be issued by post within 90 days of the new member's joining date, to the referrer's home address, as recorded in their Voice membership records, on the proviso that the joining member's payments commence. Student members are not eligible to receive referral gifts. No cash alternative available. Non-transferable. UK residents only. Referrer must be a current Voice Community member.

Find out more at:
www.voicetheunion.org.uk/referrals
and start referring your friends and colleagues.

Voice
community

VOICE CONTENTS

- 1 Voice Update: COVID-19
- 2-3 Voice Community News
- 4 Assistant General Secretary's voice
- 5 Welcome from General Secretary Roy Rickhuss
- 6 Community Benefits
- 7 Voice Rewards
- 8 Pattinson & Brewer Legal Advertorial
- 9-10 Legal Focus: Transfer of undertakings
- 11-16 Student Focus
- 17 Early Years Workforce Commission report
- 18 Secondary, Further & Higher Education: The future of the curriculum and assessment
- 19 Teachers' Pay (England)/ Pensions (UK)
- 20-21 Wales: News & updates
- 22-24 Scotland: News & updates
- 25 Northern Ireland
- 26 TES SEN Show London

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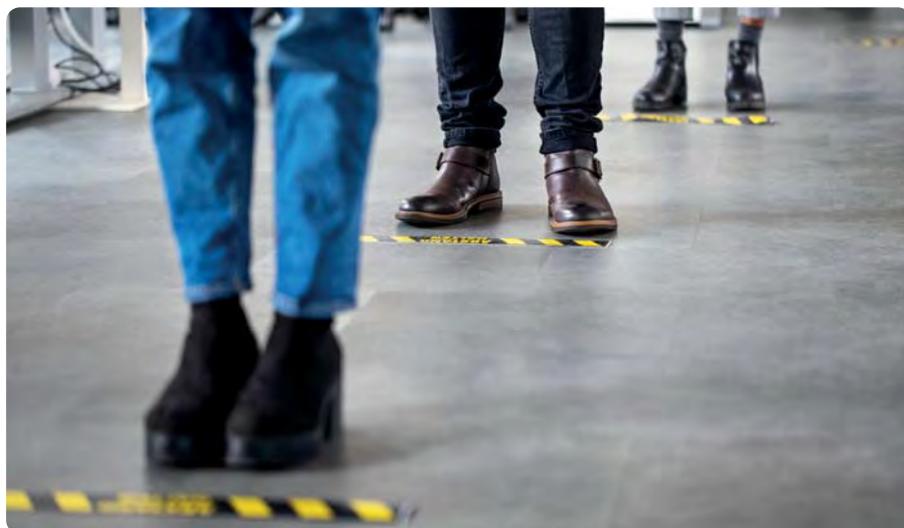
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VOICE UPDATE



CORONAVIRUS UPDATE

Coronavirus resources & information

We continue to provide regular news updates on our website, by email and on social media to keep you informed.



See www.voicetheunion.org.uk for resources including:

- > the **latest information and government guidance** from across the UK (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/coronavirus); and
- > your **FAQs** (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/faqs).



Social media

You can also follow Voice on **Facebook** (www.facebook.com/Voicetheunion) and **Twitter** (@Voicetheunion, @VoiceCymru, @VoiceScotland) for news, shared content and resources.

Advice and support

If you need **advice or support with a workplace issue**, we cannot do this via Facebook or Twitter, so please **contact us and ask for the duty officer**: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/contact-us.

You can also contact us there if you have an enquiry about **membership subscriptions, receiving our email updates, or updating your details**. (Direct messages sent via Facebook, including out of office hours, may not be seen until the next working day.)

VOICE COMMUNITY NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS, CATHERINE!



Catherine Scrivens, Voice's Solicitor and Director of Legal & Casework, has been appointed Head of Legal Services for Community.

General Secretary Roy Rickhuss said: 'I am delighted to announce Catherine's appointment as Head of Legal Services for the whole of Community, and wish her every success in her new role.'

Community News & views

Why having a menopause policy at work is important

Menopause is not really talked about, and many people don't understand it until it happens to them or someone close to them, even though over half the population of the planet go through menopause at some point in their lives. **Jennifer Dean**, an Organiser for Community's Northern Region, writes about why it's important to have a menopause policy at work: <https://community-tu.org/why-having-a-menopause-policy-at-work-is-important>

Reasonable adjustments

Read the article by **Lauren Crowley**, Community's Head of Equalities, on why workplace adjustments, including flexible working, are critical for so many disabled people, and find out more about Community's guidance on this issue: <https://community-tu.org/reasonable-adjustments-guidance-launched>

Coronavirus has shown why young workers need unions

Member **Jack Whiston** on how the pandemic has highlighted why trade unions are so important to young workers, with under-25s more likely to be furloughed than any other age group: <https://community-tu.org/coronavirus-has-shown-why-young-workers-need-unions>

(See the article from our August 2020 issue on Giving our young people a voice: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/engaging-future-giving-our-young-people-voice).

ON THE BLOG



MY SKIN, MY HAIR

'If my skin was my hair, what would you say?' Guest contributor **Michelle De Leon**, founder of World Afro Day, reflects on Afro hair, skin and discrimination: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/my-skin-my-hair

EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS CALENDAR 2021

Series of events to 20 February 2021

[Early Years Scotland Online Wellbeing Events](#)

Series of events to 31 December 2021

[Becoming a Higher Level Teaching Assistant Certification](#)

Learning how to become a higher level teaching assistant is the ultimate guide to elevating your teaching skills and opening up exciting job opportunities in the school you're working in or anywhere around the world!

Series of events to 23 February 2021

[A four-week series of life writing workshops, with a focus on wellbeing](#)

Mental health awareness is something that is very important, especially over the past year with the pandemic. Join us working in partnership with TCHC Training to provide an online training session on mental health for Voice Community members.

10 February 2021 14:00-15:00

[Creative Writing workshop](#)
Online session

16 February 2021 10:00-15:00

[Mental Health Awareness Training](#)

Mental health awareness is something that is very important, especially over the past year with the pandemic. Join us working in partnership with TCHC Training to provide an online training session on mental health for Voice Community members.

27 February 2021

[Childcare & Education Virtual Summit](#)

Free educational event for early years and primary practitioners.

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/events

VOICE COMMUNITY NEWS

IN MEMORY

Jim O'Neill, National Chairman Emeritus and Leicestershire Field Officer

Bob Gale, Leicestershire Federation

Jim O'Neill, who served for many years on Council and as National Chairman in 2002-2003 (when Voice was the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT)) sadly passed away from COVID-19 in January.

Jim was a special person in Leicestershire. He could come across as quiet, but he was never shy when it came to letting people know what he thought. He thought a lot about



teaching, schools and the children in our care.

He was a member and later Chairman of the PAT Federation Committee in Leicestershire for many years, and also served as an officer attending

meetings in Leicester and Rutland, as well as on National Council and as National Chairman. He even came out of retirement to serve as the National Officer for Scotland.

He approached all the roles he performed with the same attitude – to do the best he possibly could for all those working in education, and above all to give young people the best possible start in life. He was committed, hard-working, loyal and passionate – he will be greatly missed.

Geraldine Everett, President Emeritus and Leicestershire member, added: 'Jim often appeared quiet and unassuming but supported our members with determination and stood his ground. A kind, courteous and reliable man who made a worthy contribution to our union.'

Joyce Watts, National Chairman Emeritus and London Field Officer

Chairman Emeritus Joyce Watts died in December, aged 91. Joyce served on Council for many years, as National Chairman (1991-1992) and as Honorary Treasurer (2004-2007). Joyce was also the union's Inner London Federation Secretary during the 1980s and 1990s, and a long-serving and very busy Field Officer.

Following an earlier business career, Joyce became a mature entrant to the teaching profession in the 1970s, at a girls' senior school in Greenwich, where she became an active member.

Joyce taught full-time into her mid-60s, continuing part time into her mid-70s. Bored with retirement, she volunteered at the Suffolk primary school where her daughter was headteacher.

Many members remain grateful to Joyce for the support she gave them as a Field Officer. She was also a source of wisdom, support and training to her fellow Field Officers (including me!).

In recent years, after retirement from her official duties, Joyce retained a lively interest in union matters, regularly commenting on the Voice Blog



and keeping in close contact with union officers.

Joyce leaves a son, two daughters, seven grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. A small, COVID-compliant family funeral is planned during February, to be followed by a more fitting celebration of Joyce's life when public health considerations allow.

Michael Barton, Chairman Emeritus

I first met Joyce over 30 years ago at my first Council Meeting. She guided me through the proceedings and made sure I met everybody, making the day far less daunting than I feared. It was so typical of Joyce to be inclusive

and supportive. Over the years she continued to be a ready listener, someone with whom one could debate, disagree, be convinced by, or convince. She was a meticulous note taker and would search her archives to settle points or queries.

Her manner was always courteous, but she was not afraid to give her considered opinion even in the face of opposition. Her passion for education, the young people whom she taught and our members was paramount in her service to our union. As a Field Officer she would always go the extra mile in supporting members and was instrumental in keeping Federations active in her locality.

I feel very privileged to have known her professionally and as a friend, and have countless fond memories. The last time I met up with Joyce was at her 90th birthday party, a joyous occasion with family and friends. Joyce was her usual inimitable self, constantly circulating and chatting away, making sure everyone had a good time, looking out for others not herself. It is that memory of her caring attitude, and her dedication to our union and its purpose and ethos that sums Joyce up for me.

Geraldine Everett, President Emeritus

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY'S VOICE

SUPPORTING MEMBERS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

By Deborah Lawson, Assistant General Secretary (Voice Section)
(DLawson@community-tu.org)

As we end the first month of 2021, it might seem that little has changed since 2020. COVID-19 continues to disrupt all our lives.

The continuation of mixed messages and short / no notice changes during the Christmas holiday and at the beginning of term unsurprisingly led to high volume of calls from members across the UK, seeking answers and support to ensure their safety at work when infection rates were rising.

I know from the many positive responses we have received from you by email and on social media that, wherever you are in the UK, you are reassured that Voice Community continues to support you.

We continue to work with governments and officials across the nations of the UK, continually seeking up-to-date information, and passing on your concerns and requests for protective equipment. We also continue to highlight the case of the early years, which are often overlooked by both governments and the media.

Vaccination

Our recent survey (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/publications-resources/covid-19-safety-snapshot-december-2020) that so many of you took the time to participate in provided valuable evidence that we have used in our meetings with ministers, officials and politicians. We have told them what makes you feel unsafe and what would make you feel safer in your work. It also prompted our call for all UK education and early years staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible, and for mass testing of staff and children.



Although schools and colleges are closed to most students, teachers and support staff continue to work face-to-face with key worker and vulnerable children, while nurseries, alternative provision (AP) and special educational needs settings in many areas remain fully open.

We continue to press the Government to publish the data they use for decision making. We know that there is limited data collected about the virus in schools and so are cautious when they are declared 'safe' or that 'teachers are at twice the risk of other professions'. While schools were identified as 'vectors' in January, it remains difficult to identify exactly where transmission occurs, so please ensure that you are taking every measure to stay safe.

Settings have also suffered severe staff shortages because of infections and the need to self-isolate.

If we want to get transmission rates down, and schools, colleges and nurseries to return to some form of normality, we must test and vaccinate those working on the frontline. General Secretary Roy Rickhuss has written to ministers in all the UK nations, calling for education and early years staff to be prioritised for vaccination (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news/vaccine-letters).

Nadhim Zahawi, the Minister for Vaccine Deployment, and Education Secretary Gavin Williamson, Education Minister Kirsty Williams in Wales and Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon have all indicated that priority for key workers such as teachers and support staff is being considered for the next phase of vaccination.

John Swinney, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Education, replied to Roy's letter: *'We are currently working with health colleagues to consider whether other key worker groups, including school staff (both teaching and non-teaching staff) and childcare workers, could be considered a priority for vaccination, once the clinically high-risk groups have been vaccinated.'*

In Northern Ireland, Education Minister Peter Weir said he's asking that *'COVID-19 vaccines be prioritised for school staff and within that wider grouping all special school staff are vaccinated first'*. We will be contacting him to push for early years staff to be included.

England's schools won't reopen before March

The Prime Minister has announced 'it will not be possible' to reopen schools in England after the February half-term break, but he hopes they can resume from 8 March. A final decision depends on meeting vaccination targets, but schools will get two weeks' notice. The Government will also provide a catch-up programme, including tutoring, summer schools and a long-term plan.

We will be engaging with DfE officials to establish the details underneath the headlines, and contribute to plans, working on members' behalf to ensure their pupils' safety is paramount.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

By Roy Rickhuss CBE, General Secretary of Community, who also serves on the Government's Industrial Strategy Council and the Money and Mental Health Commission.



2020 was a challenging year, one many people, myself included, were glad to see the back of. However, the challenges and uncertainty we faced showed us the best parts of our country too. People reached out and delivered shopping to vulnerable neighbours, members of our union rang around our elderly members seeing if they needed any assistance, and key workers kept our country going.

I know how our dedicated members in the education and early years sector have continued to care for and educate our children and young people in the face of the challenges of the pandemic, undertaking extra duties and working through holidays and lockdowns.

That's why it was so disappointing that the public sector pay freeze continues. It's my view that all those working in the sector are long overdue a decent pay rise. A pay rise that reflects the growing responsibility that comes with working in the sector now, and the important role that each one of you plays in our society.

As a country we must remember the lessons the last year taught us. The crisis served to shine a light on those jobs that are vital to keeping our country going, both in times of peace, and times of crisis.

Hope as we work together

With 2021 ahead of us, we can be full of hope about the future. There will be many more challenges as we begin to recover from the crisis, I'm sure, but if we continue to work together in our communities and in our workplaces, we will end up in a better place. It's my personal hope that as a country we don't forget the community spirit that has been so strong during the crisis.

Before the crisis began, deep divisions were growing for many years across our country, and as a result we saw a spike in hate crime, and abuse online skyrocketed. The crisis has shown it doesn't have to be this way. As an organisation representing working people across the UK and in every sector of the economy, we have a role to play in ensuring the future for all young people has less division and more of that community spirit. That's why we have partnered with other organisations on a coalition called **together (together.org.uk)** that seeks to heal these divides and bring people together.

As a union, we will continue to pull in the same direction – towards a better world of work for everyone. We'll campaign together for safer workplaces and stand shoulder to shoulder with those facing unfair treatment or discrimination at work.

As your union, we will continue to be there for you when you need us. We will also work to improve the services and support available to you – from new discounts and savings (**community-tu.org/our-services**) that help you save each week, to new equalities guidance and more online courses. Please do reach out when you need us – we are here for you.

COMMUNITY MEMBER BENEFITS



YOUR SKILLS, YOUR FUTURE

By Kate Dearden, Head of Research, Policy and External Relations at Community, who leads on the union's skills campaign

We know that, prior to the pandemic, employers were facing skills shortages and that nationwide we faced a mismatch between the skills workers held and the skills they needed to succeed in their jobs. The nature of work, and careers, are changing fast. Skills are the new currency in work and will be critical if we are to successfully revive post-COVID Britain.

As trade unionists, we have an opportunity to ensure workers can not only identify their skills but can own them. At Voice Community, we want to ensure workers and our members have access to the skills development they need to succeed and excel both in their work and home lives.

That's why over the past few months we have been working with Workerbird, an innovative tech for good start-up that aims to improve the working conditions for millions of workers across the UK. Working together, and in consultation with members from sectors across our union, we have developed our own '**skills assessment**' for every member.

Using the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) database, we have identified and categorised

skills, competences, qualifications and occupations relevant for our labour market, education and training. Members will be able to search for their current job role and be presented with the essential skills they use in their role. By deciding how confident members feel against each of the essential and optional skills for their roles, they will then be able to assess themselves against each skill.



The skills assessment will then ask members about their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and where there are gaps, we will signpost members to our brilliant learning team who will be able to provide resources and further support on learning and training opportunities. Getting union members new skills has always been at the heart of trade unionism.

Once members have completed the skills assessment, members will be sent a record of their assessment, so they can access a passport of their current skills whenever they need them.

We want to empower our members to take ownership of their skills and be able to confidently recognise the skills they currently have in their work and beyond. If members need to upskill and retrain, we're here to help our members transition in their careers and with change.

Online courses

If you're a Voice Community member, no matter where you work or what you do, make sure you get involved and take part in our skills assessment to identify and take ownership of your skills.

Get in touch with us at skillsgroup@community-tu.org to be sent a link to the assessment.

Community Learn has a number of online courses you can take to help you progress at work or reskill for new opportunities:

- > **Digital skills:** <https://community-tu.org/our-services/community-learn/digital-skills>
- > **Equality and diversity:** <https://community-tu.org/our-services/community-learn/equality-diversity-training-opportunities>
- > **Health and wellbeing:** <https://community-tu.org/our-services/community-learn/health-well-being>



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DISCOUNTS

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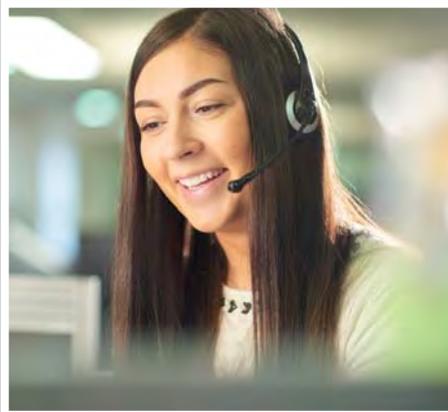
[CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT MORE!](#)

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LEGAL SERVICE FOR MEMBERS

Pattinson & Brewer provide legal support and representation to Voice members and their families for non-workplace related issues.



Established in 1890, Pattinson & Brewer have always been firmly on the side of working people, helping them to fight for justice. With an ethos that access to justice is a basic human right, Pattinson & Brewer are proud to defend it.

Their teams of lawyers are leaders in their field supporting members with:

- > personal injury, union members keep 100% of their personal injury compensation;
- > clinical negligence;
- > wills, probate and elderly client issues;
- > conveyancing and matrimonial problems; and
- > 24/7 free non-employment free legal advice.

Pattinson & Brewer's lawyers want to work with trade unions and help people like Voice members and their families, and are ready to 'go the extra mile' to help.

As a matter of fundamental principle, Pattinson & Brewer do not act for employers or their insurers and are 100% committed to being on the side of working people. With offices in London, York and Bristol, and close partnerships in Scotland, they provide a truly national service.

They promise that everyone who needs help will be treated as a valued individual, each one a personal client not a file name or number.



To contact Pattinson & Brewer today



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For wills



VoiceWills@pattinsonbrewer.co.uk



CHANGING FACES – TRANSFERS OF UNDERTAKINGS

By Catherine Scrivens, Solicitor and
Head of Legal Services, Community
(CScrivens@community-tu.org)

In these uncertain times many organisations are struggling financially. In education and early years settings this is also the case, and many employers will be looking at ways to maintain the service they offer and avoid redundancies.

One option that an employer may consider is joining another organisation by way of a 'transfer of undertakings'. The two organisations may become an entirely new entity or one of the organisations may become part of the organisation that it is joining.

This can arise in an education or early years setting in a number of ways, for example:

- > a school might join another or a group of schools to become a multi academy trust (MAT);
- > an independent school could join a larger independent school and take its name;
- > a small private nursery may join with another to become a nursery with the same or an entirely different name for both; or
- > a nursery or group of nurseries could join a larger national chain.

Whatever the circumstances that give rise to the transfer, employees have certain protections which are provided for by the **Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006** and other amending legislation, which is collectively referred to as TUPE. The UK legislation derives from a European Directive.

So, what are those protections?

Information and consultation with affected employees

The employer must inform appropriate representatives of the affected employees of the transfer and any measures proposed, and must consult on any proposed measures.

If the union is recognised, the appropriate representative will usually be at least one of the representatives, but where the union is not recognised, the employer must arrange elections of employee representatives (unless there are fewer than 10 employees).

Certain specified information must be provided to the representatives long enough before the transfer to enable the outgoing employer to consult with them about it.

If there are any changes or proposals for changes following the transfer, these 'measures' will have to be discussed with the representatives of the affected employees. The incoming employer is required to provide the outgoing employer with information on proposed measures to allow the outgoing employer to comply with its duty to inform and consult.

The legislation does not set a timetable for consultation, but it must be in 'good time' before the transfer, and the larger the transaction and the more staff affected, the longer the timetable will likely to be.

A failure to inform and consult could give rise to a complaint to the employment tribunal. If successful, the tribunal can award whatever compensation it considers just and equitable, having regard to the seriousness of the employer's failure, up to a maximum of 13 weeks' pay per affected employee.

Disclosure of information by the outgoing employer to the new employer

The outgoing employer must provide information about transferring employees to the incoming employer.

The following information must be provided:

- > the identity and age of the employees who will transfer;
- > information contained in the written statement of those employees;
- > details of any disciplinary action taken against an employee in the last two years;
- > details of grievances raised by an employee in the last two years;
- > instances of legal actions taken by employees against the outgoing employer in the last two years (any court or employment tribunal claims); and
- > information regarding any collective agreements.



The information must be accurate, up to date and secure, and the information must be provided not less than 28 days before the transfer.

Terms and conditions

Employees have a legal right to transfer to the new employer (transferee) on their existing terms and conditions of employment and with all their existing employment rights and liabilities intact, although there are special provisions relating to pensions under occupational pension schemes. This will include continuous service with their previous employer (transferor).

An employee can refuse to transfer to the new employer. This is known as 'objecting to the transfer', in which case they will be deemed to have resigned.

Dismissal and redundancy

Where an employee is dismissed immediately before the transfer for a reason related to the transfer, they may claim that they have been unfairly dismissed and complain to an employment tribunal.

In addition, transferred employees who find there has been a fundamental change for the worse in their terms and conditions of employment as a result of the transfer generally have the right to terminate their contract and claim constructive unfair dismissal before an employment tribunal.

In all cases, **employees should speak to their union before resigning.**

The circumstances of an individual employee's terms and conditions must have changed, and that change must be significant and to the employee's detriment.

In both cases, **dismissal because of a relevant transfer will be unfair unless the employer can show:**

- > there has been an economic, technical or organisational (ETO) reason entailing changes in the workforce;
- > the ETO was the main cause of the dismissal; and
- > they acted reasonably in the circumstances in treating that reason as sufficient to justify dismissal.

Even if the dismissal is considered fair, employees may still be entitled to a redundancy payment.

Where a potential redundancy situation arises as a result of a transfer, employers must consult directly with affected employees, and indirectly through representatives when the incoming employer is making (or intending to make) 20 or more redundancies within a 90-day period.

Where there are fewer than 20 employees being made redundant, there is still a legal requirement to consult with employees individually but there are no prescribed time limits in which to do so.

Collective agreements

Collective agreements in place at the time of the transfer also transfer to the incoming employer. These include terms and conditions of employment negotiated through collective bargaining as well as the other employment relations arrangements.

Service provision changes

A service provision change occurs where:

- > a service that has previously been carried out by the client is contracted out to a third party;
- > a contract to provide a service is awarded to a different contractor following tendering; or
- > a service that has previously been carried out by a contractor is brought back in-house by the client.

For a service provision change to be covered by the TUPE Regulations 2006, there must be an organised grouping of employees with the principal purpose of carrying out the activities on behalf of the client. The activities must not consist wholly or mainly of the supply of goods for the client's use.

An example of a service provision change would be instead of directly employing the school cleaners, this provision is contracted out to the third party provider.

STUDENT FOCUS



TEACHING'S DIFFERENT IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND

This might be the United Kingdom, but there are many differences between the education systems in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Although they all follow a similar structure, there are many significant differences, ranging from ages of pupils through to the way they are taught. Since devolution, education in each country of the United Kingdom has diverged even more, with England focusing on diversity of school types and parental choice, whereas Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have their own curriculums, still focus on the concept of the community-based comprehensive school system.

Primary and Secondary Education

The age at which children start school varies between the countries.

- > In **England**, children usually start primary school in the year when they turn five.
- > In **Wales**, children start in reception in the September before they turn five.
- > In **Scotland**, children who have birthdays between March and August start school in the August after they have turned five, but children with birthdays between September and February start school in the August before they turn five (although this can be deferred until the following year).
- > In **Northern Ireland**, children can start in pre-school from the ages of three to four, and then begin their primary foundation stage at age four.

In **England and Wales**, children in **primary schools** are organised into groups from reception, then years one through to six. **Secondary schools** are years seven through to 11, with years 12 and 13 in sixth form.

Northern Ireland follows a similar structure, however, students begin **secondary school** in year 8 (equivalent of year 7 in England and Wales) as well as finishing secondary school in year 12. Pupils may continue education for a further two years (Key Stage 5), after they become 16, although this is not compulsory.

In **Scotland**, children in primary school are organised into years one through to seven, then when they attend secondary school, they are in secondary one through to four, then five and six if attending the senior phase.

Stages

In each country, school years are grouped together into larger stages, with each having a different curriculum.

In England, there are five phases:

- > foundation (including pre-school, nursery and reception);
- > key stage 1, which covers year one and two;
- > key stage 2, which covers years three through to six;
- > key stage 3, which covers years seven through to nine; then
- > key stage 4, which covers years ten and 11.

In Wales:

- > foundation covers children from age three to year two (this was amalgamated with key stage 1);
- > key stage 2 ranges from years three through to six;
- > key stage 3 covers years seven through to nine; and
- > key stage 4 covers year ten and 11.

In Northern Ireland:

- > pre-school age covers childcare from age three to four;
- > foundation stage covers years one through to two;
- > key stage 1 covers years three through to four;
- > key stage 2 covers years five, six and seven;
- > key stage 3 covers years eight, nine and ten; and
- > key stage 4 covers years 11 through to 12.

In **Scotland**, there are no stages as **Curriculum for Excellence** runs from the age of three all the way through to 18. Curriculum for Excellence aims to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum, focused on the needs of young people and is structured to enable them to develop the four capacities of being:

- > successful learners;
- > confident individuals;
- > effective contributors; and
- > responsible citizens.

STUDENT FOCUS

Curriculum

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own curriculum, and despite most of the content being the same, there are many differences in the programmes taught throughout primary and secondary school settings.

In England, the National Curriculum applies to pupils within key stage 1 through to key stage 4. This includes English, maths, science, art and design, IT, design and technology, geography, history, music and PE.

Once in key stage 2, pupils must also learn a language, which was introduced in 2014 as studies showed that children are able to comprehend learning languages better at a younger age. These same subjects then carry on through to key stage 3, along with citizenship. However, on reaching key stage 4, design and technology, geography, history, languages and music do not have to be taught, unless specifically chosen by the pupil to be studied at GCSE level.

In Wales, a new curriculum will be introduced from 2022 (see below).

At the moment, schools follow the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (NLF), which focuses on applying literacy and numeracy across the entire curriculum. It also highlights different areas of learning personal and social skills, with a focus on personal and social development, diversity, communication skills, knowledge about the world and creative development.

Pupils must also learn the Welsh language, whether it be a first language in the school or learning it as a secondary language.

Pupils are taught the same subjects that are taught at English schools (excluding Welsh) and, on reaching key stage 3, are taught a foreign language. At key stage 4, the same lessons are taught as in secondary schools in England, with the exception of IT unless it is chosen to be studied at GCSE level. However, pupils must still learn the Welsh language through key stage 4.

Following Professor Graham Donaldson's 2016 report, *Successful Futures*, the Welsh Government and education stakeholders are currently

working to introduce incrementally the new **Curriculum for Wales** from 2022 to 2027, based on six cross-cutting areas of learning and experience.

The four purposes of the new curriculum are:

- > ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- > enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- > ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world, ready to be citizens of Wales and the world; and
- > healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

In Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence focuses on expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, maths, religious education, science, social studies and technologies.

This curriculum runs from the beginning of primary school all the way through to upper secondary school. However, unlike in England and Wales – where GCSEs are studied for a pupil's final two years in key stage 4, which will be used to help them into further and higher education – in Scotland, the final three years are used to determine whether they can qualify for further and higher education. These areas of study may differ between each school, depending on what type of school they are.

In Northern Ireland, the curriculum focuses on empowering learners to achieve their highest potential and to make informed decisions throughout their lives. The objectives of Northern Ireland's curriculum are to develop each pupil as:

- > an individual in order for them to achieve personal fulfilment and well-being throughout life;
- > a contributor to society who is concerned for the wellbeing of others; and
- > a contributor to the economy and environment, appreciating how employment impacts economic choices and their individual impact on the environment.

Northern Ireland's **primary curriculum** includes religious education, language and literacy, maths, arts, the world around us, personal development, and mutual understanding as well as physical education.

The **post-primary curriculum** includes learning for life and work (employability, personal development, local and global citizenship, and home economics). Pupils will then learn alongside this, religious education, language and literacy, maths, modern languages, arts, environment and society, physical education as well as science.

Once pupils move onto their GCSEs, mandatory lessons include Learning for Life and Work, physical education, religious education and developing skills and capabilities.

One major difference between Northern Ireland and the other nations is that religious education is a mandatory part of the curriculum in accordance with the core syllabus that was drawn by the four main churches. This syllabus includes Christianity, morality, world religions and a requirement at KS4 to study Christianity from both a Protestant and a Roman Catholic perspective. Although religious education is mandatory, parents do have a right to withdraw their child from the lesson.

See the Student Focus section of the October 2020 *Your Voice* for more information on the different types of schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/sites/default/files/Your-Voice-October2020-student.pdf).

Terms

Term dates also vary between countries. In **England, Wales and Northern Ireland**, the school year begins at the start of September and ends in late July (early July for in Northern Ireland). In **Scotland**, the school year begins in late August and ends mid to late June. Please note that specific dates vary between areas in each country.

Inspections

Schools in each country are inspected regularly to judge if the school is operating effectively. *(Formal inspections are currently suspended because of COVID-19 restrictions.)*

In **England**, schools are inspected by **Ofsted** – usually once every five years. However, if a school is highlighted as having issues, it may be inspected more often. Schools are rated by Ofsted as:

- > outstanding;
- > good;
- > requires improvement; or
- > inadequate.

In **Wales**, schools are inspected by **Estyn** around every six years and are graded on a four-point scale, from 'excellent' to 'unsatisfactory' and 'needs urgent improvement'. It will also provide support to those schools judged to be unsatisfactory and/or placed in special measures. A new inspection regime will be introduced in 2021, focusing on school self-evaluation.

Estyn will not be carrying out formal inspections in the academic year, 2020 – 2021, in order for schools to prepare for implementing the new curriculum. During that year, Estyn will continue to provide support to schools, particularly with regard to the new inspection regime.

In **Scotland**, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education (HMIE) is part of **Education Scotland**. Unlike in England and Wales, schools aren't graded on a scale of good to poor, but are given a letter post-inspection highlighting what is strong and less strong about the school and what it can do to improve on any weaknesses through targets that should be met before a follow-up inspection.

In **Northern Ireland**, the **Education Training Inspectorate** follows defined inspection processes to improve how a workplace is operating. After the inspection, ETI will provide a report to the school with guidance for them to follow, depending on what is found during the inspection. You can find these gradings online here. (www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/what-happens-after-inspection-nursery-schools-primary-post-primary-special-2019.pdf).



STUDENT FOCUS

TEACHER REGULATION ACROSS THE UK NATIONS

Like most professions, teachers are a regulated profession. The general duty of a regulatory body is to serve and protect the public interest with respect to the exercise of a profession, professional governance and the conduct of registrants – essentially upholding the standards of the profession.

Education is a devolved power, so there are separate regulators for the teaching profession across the UK. Registers of teachers are maintained by the:

- > **Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) in England;**
- > **Education Workforce Council (EWCW) in Wales;**
- > **General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS);** and
- > **General Teaching Council Northern Ireland (GTCNI).**

Teaching Regulation Agency – England

The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) was the professional body between 2000 and 2012. In 2013, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) took on responsibility for teacher regulation, before the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) took over from April 2018.

The Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) (www.gov.uk/teaching-regulation-agency) regulates everyone employed to do teaching work in a school in England. If it finds that a teacher has been 'convicted of a Relevant Offence', is 'guilty of Unacceptable Professional Conduct' or has 'behaved in a manner that may bring the teaching profession into disrepute', it can make a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Education as to whether the teacher is prohibited from teaching.

The Secretary of State does not have to follow TRA's recommendation, but if it decides to prohibit a teacher, a period is set after which the teacher may apply to be allowed to teach again. The minimum period is two years, the maximum is for life.

Most teachers are covered by the regulatory system, including those who teach in any type of school setting (including independent schools), sixth form colleges, children's homes and youth accommodation. Those who teach outside these settings (such as home tutors) may not be covered.

Cyngor y Gweithlu Addysg / Education Workforce Council – Wales

The EWC (www.ewc.wales) was established by the Education (Wales) Act 2014, which reconfigured the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) as the Education Workforce Council (EWC) from 1 April 2015.

The EWC regulates and registers a much wider group than the other regulators, including: teaching assistants, classroom assistants, learning support assistants, HLTAs, special/additional needs assistants, pastoral/welfare assistants, bilingual support assistants, support assistants, instructor cover supervisors, foundation stage assistants, technicians, learning coaches, private sports and music contractors, and GTP/Teach First (first year) and overseas trained teachers.



EWC deals with issues of conduct and serious competence issues and can impose reprimands, conditions of practice and suspension orders as well as the ultimate sanction of prohibition or 'striking off'.

General Teaching Council (Scotland)

Set up in 1965, the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (www.gtcs.org.uk) was one of the first teaching councils in the world. Legislation passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2012 made GTCS the world's first independent, self-regulating body for teaching.

GTCS deals with issues of conduct and serious competence issues and can impose reprimands, conditions of practice and suspension orders, as well as the ultimate sanction of prohibition or 'striking off'. See also page 24.



General Teaching Council (Northern Ireland)

GTCNI (www.gtcni.org.uk) was established by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998. GTCNI's remit includes:

- > maintaining a register of teachers;
- > approving qualifications for the purposes of registration; and
- > regulating the teaching profession.

If a GTCNI panel finds an allegation of misconduct is proven or a teacher is convicted of a relevant criminal offence, and a Conduct Committee finds that the behaviour is fundamentally incompatible with being a teacher, the only sanction available to GTCNI is removal from the Register.

STUDENT FOCUS



TEACHING POST INTERVIEW TIPS

By Voice Council Members and teachers Kat Bottomley and Teresa Bottomley

This article reflects normal practice but currently may be different in some schools because of coronavirus restrictions.

Schools will interview each candidate, sometimes with three people on the panel. They could include a governor as well as senior teaching staff.

Other tasks are often added to this process, either at a specific time or at a time in the day of the candidate's choosing. These extra tasks could be:

- > mark a piece of work;
- > explain how you would deal with a specific situation;
- > plan a topic;
- > write a model of what you would expect from a particular year group for a specific area of learning; or
- > assess a piece of work.

The school will also observe the candidates teach and although all the elements of the interview day will be assessed separately, the most important is the teaching observation. It is difficult to envisage

what to expect on your very first one, which makes it even more daunting.

Learning from experience helps, so here are some tips from a recent NQT.

- > Whilst planning for your interview, **check if you will be able to use a USB stick**, as some schools do not allow them due to GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).
- > Remember that you will never have taught the children before so **you will not be aware of their previous learning or achievements.**
- > You may not be told about the **children's behaviour or those who have special educational needs (SEN).**
- > **DO NOT plan a whole lesson.** There will be limited time so instead teach only ONE activity. This means there is teacher input but also that the children are actively involved in their learning for most of the time.
- > **Make your activity easy to explain and without too many resources** so you don't become flustered in a stressful situation.
- > **Teach to your learning objective and list some possible misconceptions before you attend the interview** so that you can address them when you see them.

- > **Ensure that you can easily adapt your lesson so that there is time for a short plenary**, referring to the learning objective.
- > You may be asked to teach a particular subject in the afternoon, but some of the candidates may have taught the same class in the morning, so **be prepared for the class to be less attentive than they would have been in the morning!**



STUDENT FOCUS

VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS

If you haven't finished your CV yet, visit our tips on CV writing (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/who-we-support/students/cv-writing)

It is never too early to think about applying for your first job, however the impact of COVID-19 has changed a lot how we operate, including interviews. The education and childcare sectors still require teachers and childcarers, and so may have to rely on virtual means to interview potential candidates.

The most important thing is to find out what software you will be interviewed on – the most popular choices would be Zoom or Skype. Make sure to download and set up an account on these platforms if you have not done so already.

Things to consider

With this all set up, ready for your interview, here are a few things for you to consider. We would recommend that you organise all of this a few days before the interview so that there are no issues on the day.

- > **Clothing** – it is often said that when people are in virtual meetings, they only dress the top half of their body, but then accidentally stand up and reveal limited or non-formal clothing – which you'd want to avoid! We recommend treating this like an in-person interview and dressing professionally from head-to-toe!
- > **Finding the perfect location for the interview** – before your interview, we would recommend moving your laptop around the house and testing your surroundings for the perfect virtual interview location. With lighting, ensure the light source is in front of you, and not behind you. Consider what is in the background of you as the interviewer will most likely see this.

- > **Avoiding interruptions** – find a quiet location where you can conduct the interview uninterrupted! We have all seen the funny videos of cats interrupting virtual meetings by jumping in front of the webcam! Also, ensure your phone is on silent to avoid any unnecessary interruptions.
- > **Test your Internet connection and speed** – the last thing you want to happen is your Internet not working on that all important day!
- > **Test your audio and what source your computer or laptop will pick sound up from** – we've all been there on a virtual call where we're talking and no one can hear us! We would also recommend using headphones during the interview so that you can hear the interviewer clearly.
- > **Test your webcam** – test your webcam works and try it with the aforementioned lighting and background, as well as the perfect position for you to sit in for your face and shoulders to be visible.
- > **Ensure all other apps on your laptop are closed** – keep your focus on the interview and avoid any unnecessary distractions or pop-ups.
- > **Keep notes** – make sure to have a notepad and pen to make notes.
- > **Keep a drink on hand**, as you will be doing a lot of talking!
- > **Remain engaged** – it can be difficult to keep engaged with a virtual interview, so we would recommend using visual keys to the interviewer to show them that you are engaged and interested in what they are saying (nodding, smiling and hand gestures).
- > **Practise a virtual meeting** with a friend

Make sure you go into your interviews confident that you will get the job. Voice Community is here to provide advice on the interview process after you have qualified to help you secure your first job.

For further advice on interviews, visit: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/who-we-support/students/interview-advice



EARLY YEARS (ENGLAND)



PACKAGE OF CHANGES NEEDED FOR THE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE

A new report on the crisis in the early years workforce has revealed that without immediate intervention and drastic action, the sector is at risk of becoming unsustainable. An underpaid and undervalued workforce, combined with issues around funding, training, recruitment and retention, has resulted in a sector that is now in danger of becoming untenable.

The report was produced by the **Early Years Workforce Commission**, a steering group made up of representatives from key organisations including **Voice Community**.

Many of the challenges facing the sector's workforce have been exacerbated by COVID-19, and weakened provision that was already experiencing challenging circumstances.

Evidence from the report shows that only 23% of the workforce felt that their job was safe following the outbreak of the virus.

Key findings:

- > 44% of the early years workforce respondents feel their learning and development has been negatively impacted during the pandemic.
- > More than 50% of the early years workforce respondents said low pay was the main factor resulting in people leaving the sector.



- > 64% of early years workforce respondents have not had a pay rise in the last one to two years or more.

Key recommendations include:

- > The Government should provide **additional resources** for settings.
- > An **awareness campaign** should focus on the critical importance of **early childhood education** on a child's development and life chances and portray the crucial role early years professionals play in supporting this. It should emphasise that this is a skilled role, equivalent to teaching in other phases of education.
- > There must be a **shift away from the 'childcare' terminology** so frequently used to **'early childhood education'**, in order to position the sector as a phase within the education journey rather than only a means of enabling parents to work.
- > There should be an urgent exploration and extension of **accessible and flexibly offered continuing professional development (CPD)**, with online and face-to-face options, coupled with more high-quality workplace placements and action research projects, with mentoring support across the sector.
- > **Early Years staff must be recognised and rewarded with a level of pay that**

reflects their essential role, and which allows them to focus their time and energy into just one job, rather than two or more to make ends meet, as so many who work in the early years have reported having to do.

The report's recommendations on the pay, status and training of the early years workforce echo issues and concerns highlighted by Voice Community.

Community Assistant General Secretary (Voice) Deborah Lawson said:

'The report confirms that the early years sector is under enormous pressure, and that urgent action is required.'

'Safeguarding the early years sector is vital for the future of society and economic recovery from COVID-19, as the early years sector plays a critical role in providing support for families.'

'The report's recommendations are crucial to support the workforce going forward, and we will be taking them to the Government and strongly suggesting that it takes them on board.'

Read the report and join the debate:

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/package-changes-needed-early-years-workforce

SECONDARY, FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION

FORECASTING THE FUTURE

By Martin Hodge, Senior Professional Officer (Policy) and Deborah Lawson, Assistant General Secretary, from an article in *SecEd*

Where do you see yourself in ten years' time? None of us foresaw a year like 2020, but educators spend their working lives preparing learners for the future and developing the skills they'll need in a world that doesn't yet exist.

We need to investigate the curriculum, syllabus and format of examinations, and ask three key questions.

1. What do learners need to learn?

Does the school curriculum meet the needs of modern learners? Should it all be about 'core' subjects or about STEM?

How should we deliver this curriculum – through discrete subjects, topics or project work, or in a completely different way?

2. How can we assess and measure learning?

Exam specifications form the basis of the KS4 and KS5 curriculum, and all learning time ends up being dedicated to this, so **do we measure what we value or value what we measure?**

Can we truly measure the learning of our learners? What does that mean for

knowledge and skills that are difficult to assess?

Last summer's exam debacle starkly exposed the problems with a system based wholly on terminal examination. A system built on a range of assessment would have been more robust and provided a wider data base on which to calculate any outcome much more reliably than centre assessed grades.

This could include a wide variety of assessment methods – online, coursework and practical assessment – rather than just written exams. It's unlikely in their future careers that candidates will have to handwrite a document in exam conditions, and it's undoubtedly better to allow candidates to demonstrate all their learning rather than just be tested on a narrow selection.

Maybe now is the time to consider a huge change. **What is the purpose, when education or training must continue until 18, of subject exams at 16? What does that tell us as educators, and what is the value for the learner?**

3. Does this prepare people for the future?

It's often said we educate children for jobs that don't yet exist. A foreign language is increasingly useful in a global economy, and learners need good spoken and written communication skills. Computing skills

and those which imbue confidence are certainly increasingly attractive to employers, and we will always need practical numeracy. There's a need for designers and artists, web engineers, and games, TV, film and music creators. A green economy mustn't be just about employability; what about the curriculum itself?

Is theoretical study more useful than practical and applied? What skills do we need learners to have? Can we appreciate the practical skills of plumbing, electrical engineering, horticulture and farming, and those relating to trades? How do we validate the skills agenda? **If the GCSE is obsolete, what are the alternatives?**

The shape and design of the curriculum and assessment has to involve those in the classrooms as well as employers, colleges and universities, and might have a more holistic approach rather like the international baccalaureate that looks at students' intellectual, emotional, personal and social skills across a range of subjects. Could this provide a route map for the future?

We need a curriculum of opportunity for all, and assessment that accurately reflects achievements – existing for learners' benefit and recognising their knowledge and ability, decoupled from school attainment tables.

The time is ripe for forecasting the future, and we mustn't squander this opportunity to ask questions and pursue change – join the debate – in the blog: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/forecasting-future

PENSIONS UK & TEACHERS' PAY (ENGLAND)

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS TO BE ALLOWED 'PHASED WITHDRAWAL' FROM TPS

Independent schools in England and Wales will be allowed to opt out of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) for future staff members, following a consultation by the Department for Education (DfE).

Under the previous rules, private schools were able to seek permission to leave TPS, but only for all of their staff.

The DfE intends to adopt a 'phased withdrawal' approach by Spring 2021, with schools being able to enrol new staff members into alternative schemes while incumbent staff can remain as members of TPS.

The DfE will liaise with the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and member and employer representatives to develop this proposed change, and will draft and consult on the necessary regulations.

Consultation outcome: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/teachers-pension-scheme-independent-schools-proposal



Voice Community's view

Although allowing existing members to remain in TPS is good news for them, it does create a two-tier pensions system.

Unfortunately, alternative schemes do not have to be of the same type or standard as Teachers' Pensions. They range from the basic compulsory auto enrolment pension to defined contribution pensions with some additional benefits, which – unlike TPS – are subject to the fluctuations of the market.

We would prefer independent schools to remain in the Teachers' Pension Scheme. Ideally, we would hope that any alternative schemes offer at least a similar level of benefits. It is unfair that hard working staff who dedicate their professional lives to the service of a school should have an impoverished retirement.

Do contact us if you need advice or further information.

Teachers' pay (England) STRB remit for 2021

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, the Secretary of State's remit letter to the School Teachers' Review Body, asking for recommendations on teachers' pay and conditions for 2021, restates the Government's policy, set out in the Spending Review, to 'temporarily pause' headline public sector pay awards for the 2021/22 pay round, although payments such as progression pay and allowances will continue.

However, whilst not seeking a recommendation for pay uplifts for the majority of teachers, the Secretary of State asks for the STRB's views on uplifts for those on less than £24,000. He also states his priorities as including 'improving recruitment and retention' and 'raising pay for new entrants'.

Voice Community criticised the pay freeze announced in the Spending Review as a 'kick in the teeth' for staff who have been 'working under extreme pressure during the pandemic' (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/Spending-Review-2020).

The DfE, Voice Community and other unions are due to submit evidence to the STRB in February.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-teachers-review-body-strb-remit-letter-for-2021

PENSIONS (UK)

ACCESSING YOUR PENSION SCHEME INFORMATION ONLINE

Most pension schemes now have a secure member area on their website, enabling members to undertake simple tasks such as changing their personal details, securely contacting the scheme, nominating a beneficiary and viewing benefits online, among other things.

The link on the website will be named along the lines of My Pension Online, Member Hub or Member Portal and members would first need to register to access the area.

If you have any pension issues or queries, please contact Technical Officer (Pensions) **Janine Sansom** (JSansom@community-tu.org).



VOICE COMMUNITY CYMRU

CROESO, URTHA, UWCH SWYDDOG PROFFESIYNOL CYMRU!



Voice Community Cymru has welcomed Urtha Felda as our new Senior Professional Officer Wales.

Urtha Felda is a skilled professional with a background in the education and third sectors and policy development across Wales for many years. She has experience of further and higher education and teaching in the community.

Her third sector work includes programme management and policy development in criminal justice, housing and homelessness, and health and disability. Urtha has experience of managing and delivering advocacy, and has studied law to master's level, employment law to BTEC Level 7, and civil and commercial mediation CPD.

She holds a BA in politics, a PGCE from the University of Newport, a post-graduate diploma in leadership in healthcare from Bangor University, and a master's in criminology and social policy from the Open University. She has taught at Priysgol Bangor (Bangor University) and Prifysgol Agored (Open University in Wales) and Coleg Llandrillo. In community education, she has delivered to third sector managers, as well as to clients at OCN levels 1 – 3, and entry level (literacy, life skills, etc).

Urtha sits as Chair of the Social Care Wales Fitness to Practice Panel.



WALES UPDATE

By Urtha Felda, Senior Professional Officer (UFelda@community-tu.org or 07972 482 931)

All Wales Practitioner Panel

My role requires social partnership working with statutory bodies and other education unions in co-producing policies, procedures and solutions for the working environment in education.

I meet with the Welsh Government Education Directorate, Public Health Wales and local authorities. It really makes a difference to contributions I can make when I learn about your direct experiences and difficulties in the day-to-day life in your workplace.

There have been questions on:

- > mass testing for special schools;
- > requirement for support staff to attend hubs if there are no children present; and

IWPRB Submission 2021/22

A major part of my work since my appointment has been preparing the submission for the next academic year's pay award. This has been a real learning curve!

The focus has been on advocating for a policy direction which supports a resilient, secure and stable teaching profession.

The next stage is the supplementary evidence, with a deadline of 8 February

- > requirements to attend work in person if the risks are too high.

These questions have all been shared at these strategic meeting to guide their decision making and also preparation of their information and FAQs.

I have three members who have shared their experiences, which I have taken directly to these meetings at which the Minister for Education has been present. It is a way of bringing reality back to strategic planning.

I am hoping more members will come forward from different geographical areas, and from different roles within the service.

I would really value the opportunity to meet via phone, e mail, or zoom.

Please get in touch if you feel this is something you could contribute to.

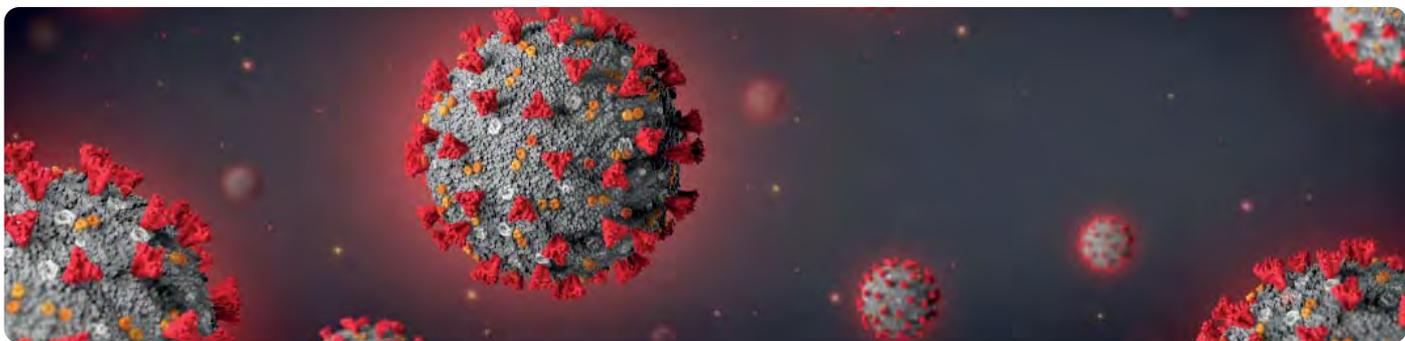
It's especially important at this time, as the detail of information you need is often not clear from broad policy statements.

2021. If anyone would like to learn more about this, please contact me.

Schools and teachers are particularly facing the impact of the COVID crisis, as well as implementing a new approach to assessment, and a new transformational curriculum for Wales, so Voice is calling for a pay increase of 2.7% across the board and immediate steps to address the main driver of attrition named by teachers leaving the profession – an increasing and unsustainable workload.

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/iwprb-2021

VOICE COMMUNITY CYMRU



Impact of COVID

Voice welcomed the Minister for Education's comments when she noted the impact on our children of the COVID crisis. In *The Welsh Agenda* (IWA Publication Autumn/Winter 2020) she focused on the need to plan for their futures by citing health professionals in Wales who 'pointed to the collateral damage children had suffered since lockdown, with more referrals for children experiencing mental health and eating disorders, and fewer children being seen for safeguarding assessments'.

The Minister also highlighted the disproportionate impact of lockdown on those disadvantaged children who

'could have fallen up to 75% behind their more affluent peers' (*The Welsh Agenda*, Autumn/Winter 2020). This impact requires a response from Welsh Government that supports our dedicated teachers to work to the highest standards in repairing this damage.

Since compensation and working conditions are important for attracting, developing and retaining high-quality skilled teachers and headteachers, it is important for policy makers to carefully consider teachers' salaries and career prospects as they try to secure both high quality teaching and education budgets.

Voice advocates a policy direction of supporting a resilient, stable and secure teaching profession.

Voice, whilst acknowledging the pressure on budgets, recognises it is most important for the future of our school children, and the nation, that the pivotal role of education in economic recovery is kept as a priority in financial decision making as we go ahead. Human capital plays a central role in a country's economic development. Education is a pre-condition of economic growth. Ignoring this would endanger the prosperity of future generations with widespread repercussions for poverty, social exclusion and sustainability of social security systems.

School closures

The Welsh Education unions are in close contact with the Minister for Education, meeting regularly with her and her team, plus Public Health Wales, to discuss how the Welsh Government will be managing hubs and special schools (that remain open) to keep everyone safe.

The key messaging from the Government is that the prevention measures are the same for the new strain as for the old one – with a real focus on using masks, social distancing, ventilation and hand washing.

They confirmed that the new variant transmits more quickly, but that it does not lead to a worsening of the symptoms. The stats from Public Health stated that teachers as a group were not demonstrating a higher risk than any other professional group.

Questions have been raised as to how staff should manage environments in which they did not feel safe, and clarification was given that if you cannot social distance, and you feel personally vulnerable, you are able to speak with your manager and ask that the risks are managed, or make arrangement to work remotely.

This mirrors information recently shared by Voice Community about if you don't feel safe in your workplace. Again, please make contact with us if this is a concern for you.

Discussions were also raised on prioritising the education profession for vaccination. Anyone working in special schools giving personal care are in the priority group 2 for health care workers. Neither Public Health Wales or the Welsh Government felt they could go against the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation which prioritises the vulnerable.

Community General Secretary Roy Rickhuss has now written to the Welsh Government to ask that education and early years staff be prioritised for the vaccine: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news/vaccine-letters

For the latest COVID updates, see www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news-media-issues/coronavirus-information-updated#Welsh

Wellbeing helpline for education staff

Education Support provides a free, confidential helpline, 24/7, to everyone working in education: **08000 562 561**.

There's also a grants service to help with financial issues and training costs: www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-you/apply-grant

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND



COVID AND SCOTTISH EDUCATION: A HAPPY NEW YEAR?

By Dougie Atkinson, Senior Professional Officer (Scotland) (DAtkinson@community-tu.org)

Mainland Scotland was put back into lockdown from midnight on 4 January, with a new legal requirement introduced forbidding anyone from leaving their home except for essential purposes.

In a statement to Parliament, the First Minister said a steep increase in coronavirus (COVID-19) infections and the intensity of pressure on the NHS had created a race between the virus and the vaccines now coming online.

As a result, she said it was imperative that everyone should comply with the message to 'Stay at Home' for the duration of January.

This means that all schools were asked to continue to use remote learning until the end of January, except in the case of vulnerable children and those of key workers. At the time of going to press, schools and early years centres remained closed.

Exams

It had already been announced that exams would not go ahead in Scotland and that, again, teacher assessment would be used to determine grades. Schools are having to resort to remote teaching and assessment and that brings added burdens to the workloads of teachers and other school staff involved in delivering the learning. SQA and Education Scotland are expected to support schools in that effort.

Protecting members

Many members contacted us before the Christmas break concerned about the risk of transmission by asymptomatic pupils, particularly older children in secondary schools. The scientific advisers have consistently maintained that schools are not significant vectors for transmission, but that is not consistent with the experience of some of our members.

When Assistant General Secretary (Voice Community) Deborah Lawson and I met with John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Education, on 10 December 2020, we specifically sought an assurance that staff working in schools should be considered for early access to the vaccine that is now being rolled out.

Mr Swinney said he would consider that request as part of the work of the Education Recovery Group that he chairs.

The First Minister indicated on 4 January that she was considering whether school staff could be given the COVID-19 vaccine as a priority, and Community General Secretary Roy Rickhuss has now written to John Swinney to ask that all education and early years staff should be given that priority (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news/vaccine-letters).

See page 4 for Mr Swinney's reply or [click here](#) for the letter and reply.

Further guidance has been added to the suite of coronavirus guidance for schools and early years settings, which can be found on the Scottish Government website or via the Voice website (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news-media-issues/coronavirus-information-updated#Scottish).

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND



NEW SUPPORT FOR AUTISM ANNOUNCED

Voice Community Scotland has welcomed new measures developed in partnership with the Scottish Government (SG), the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), Education Scotland (ES) and the Scottish Council of Deans of Education (SCDE) to improve autism awareness and training within schools and educational settings. The measures are a direct outcome of the findings from the ground-breaking *Not Included, Not Engaged, Not Involved* report, published in 2018.

Children in Scotland, the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism worked with the Scottish Government and stakeholders to agree a number of changes that will ensure new teachers receive a common baseline of content on autism during their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. This will form part of the most comprehensive set of measures anywhere in the UK to ensure all teachers have access to the most up-to-date information on how to support autistic learners.

The announcement by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney

MSP, came following research that found a third of parents surveyed had their child unlawfully excluded from school in the last two years. A lack of knowledge in how to best support and include autistic children in education was given as the primary reason for these exclusions.

The measures agreed with the Scottish Government, GTCS, ES, SCDE and the three charities include:

- > **Revisions to the framework used by the GTCS** to accredit programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Accreditation will require an outline of how a programme is designed to develop and promote equality and diversity, with a specific reference to a range of neuro-development differences, including autism.
- > **Inclusion of reference to the key areas of additional support needs**, including autism, within the revised GTCS Professional Standards for Teachers, which are to be used from summer 2021. These Standards set the benchmark for what is expected of teachers and which support their professional learning. GTCS has recently published a Professional Guide for registrants on autism to support its revised Professional Standards.
- > **Development of a common baseline of content on autism** during the delivery of **initial teacher education (ITE)** programmes.
- > **HM inspectors** continuing to consider how well the needs of all children and young people with additional

support needs, which includes autistic learners and their specific needs, are being met.

- > Ongoing development of the '**Autism toolbox**' (www.autismtoolbox.co.uk) for new and more experienced teachers.
- > **Creation of a community of good practice** sharing in autism across the country for education professionals.
- > **Creation of an implementation group** to support embedding these changes.

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, said: 'Despite the challenges of the pandemic, a significant amount of work has already been undertaken by our partner organisations and I thank them for their exceptional efforts in recent months.'

'Through this collaborative working, we will ensure that our autistic learners have the right support in place at the right time to improve their educational experiences.'

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND

NEW PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS LAUNCHED

Ten years after the publication of *Teaching Scotland's Future – Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*, Professor Graham Donaldson has revisited his seminal report looking at the changes and challenges in Scottish education.

Because of COVID restrictions, Professor Donaldson delivered the GTC Scotland Lecture 2021 virtually, addressing the turbulent year the education sector has experienced, along with what the future might hold for our young people.

Professor Donaldson identified three areas for immediate change:

- > enhancing digital pedagogies;
- > teaching ethics and global citizenship; and
- > the role and types of assessment.

The lecture took place on 13 January 2021 and is available at: www.gtcs.org.uk/News/news/news-january-lecture-2021.aspx



Professional Standards 2021

The refreshed and restructured Professional Standards 2021 were launched at the lecture, with Professor Donaldson highlighting the importance of values and Professional Standards in the teaching profession.

Voice Community was involved, with other stakeholders, in the early development of the new standards. There will now be engagement with the profession over the coming months, allowing teachers and others to explore and understand the context and relevance of the Professional Standards before they formally come into force on 2 August 2021.

Commenting on the GTC Scotland Lecture 2021, Ken Muir, Chief Executive and Registrar of GTC Scotland, said: 'Much work has been done to address the findings and recommendations in Professor Donaldson's report over the last decade. However, much has also changed in Scottish education, especially within the last year.

'Professor Donaldson's review of the last decade since the report has offered much for the teaching profession and Scottish education sector to think about in this rapidly changing world.'

Professor Donaldson said: 'Scotland's teachers are the key asset to Scotland's education system. The quality of teachers is essential to the wellbeing and success of pupils.

'The challenge for education systems is to remain relevant in such a volatile context. The world in which our young people will live and earn a living in will be very different from today. Teachers must be given the opportunity and support to build confidence and knowledge in their practice.'

John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, said: 'We know that we are going to be living in constantly changing times. Therefore, the profession needs to have the confidence and sense of professional capacity and capability to be able to exercise their role in shaping the education system.

'I would also like to congratulate the General Teaching Council for Scotland on the launch of the new suite of Professional Standards. The Standards are vital in maintaining and enhancing teacher professionalism and I want to acknowledge the work required to develop such important documents.'

The refreshed and restructured Professional Standards are available at: www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-standards/professional-standards-2021-engagement.aspx

VOICE COMMUNITY NORTHERN IRELAND

LISTEN TO THE PROFESSIONALS

By Chris Wilson, Field Officer,
Voice Community Northern Ireland,
Chair of the Northern Ireland
Executive Committee
(chriswilson@voiceactivists.org.uk)

2020 was a challenging year. Who can doubt that? COVID placed unforeseen demands upon the profession, which responded magnificently in the most trying circumstances.

Our members were, of course, concerned not just with their own wellbeing when confronted with the virus, but also with the wellbeing of those in their care or charge. It is understood that disrupting education risks damaging, perhaps permanently, the life chances of pupils and students.

But what of our politicians here in Northern Ireland? It remains debatable as to whether they stepped-up in the way circumstances demanded. Speaking with colleagues, there is a real weariness with the time taken by those in charge to take decisions as well as with the continuing impact of tribal politics, which talks too much of the past and not enough of the future.

Two examples will suffice.

Exams

The DUP Education Minister, Peter Weir, reaffirmed his view that GCSE, AS and A level exams will not be cancelled next year. This contrasts with the decision taken in Scotland that grades there would instead be determined by schools. The debate, inevitably, divided here on the usual lines and failed (again) to recognize the disruptive impact of COVID upon pupils and students.

Some schools were forced to move to fully remote learning in consequence of the virus. Then there is the impact of the digital deficit. Who has access to the necessary IT? Is that access fair for all schools? Bearing this in mind, is it too much to ask for a consistent position on assessment across the UK?



Teacher training

There are also challenges in relation to teacher training in Northern Ireland. The University of Ulster recently argued that current arrangements reinforced the 'sectarian divide'. It has called for a radical overhaul of how teachers are trained.

There are currently four providers in Northern Ireland: Stranmillis University College, St.Mary's University College, and the Schools of Education at Queen's University and Ulster University. These institutions provide both BEd degrees and PGCEs. It is true that this provision has led to more teachers than vacancies in Northern Ireland, with many qualified professionals seeking positions across the water.

Still, care should be taken before politicians embark on change. There must be a recognition of the existing efforts by providers to modernise. All institutions are already open to applications from all sections of the community. Stranmillis is already working with St.Mary's to deliver the

Certificate in Religious Education, which is required to secure employment in Catholic schools.

That is not to say that more cannot be done to promote integrated and rationalised provision. Communal division in education remains problematic. However, rushed reform is rarely successful, and the professionals in each of these institutions must be consulted and involved in any proposal for change, if it is to be successful.

Politicians note!

It is sometimes forgotten that education professionals are already implementing changes that others suggest.

Listen to the professionals! Good advice for all our politicians in 2021....



Latest COVID-19 updates:

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news-media-issues/coronavirusinformation-updated#Northern



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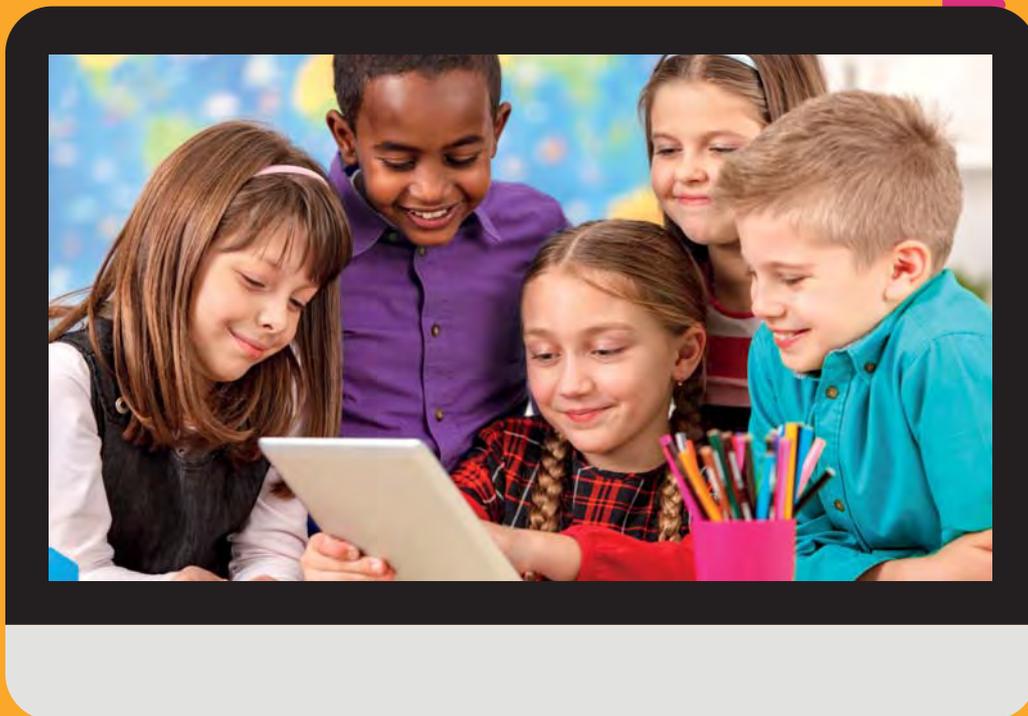
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