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AUGUST 2021

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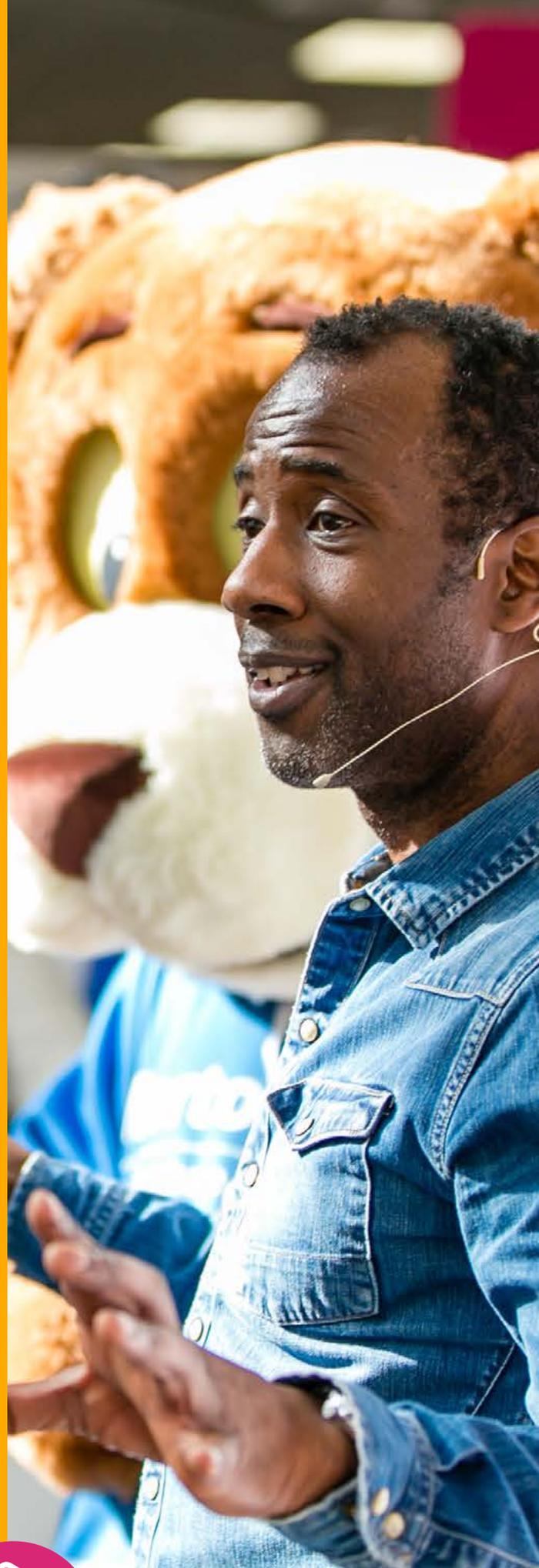
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email: edupressoffice@community-tu.org

Editorial Board: Richard Fraser (Editor), Dougie Atkinson, Melantha Chittenden, Sue Cornish, Urtha Felda, Deborah Lawson, Catherine Scrivens, Steve Straw (Design) and Jack Wholey.

Contributors: Terry Anderson, Dougie Atkinson, Laura Barbour, Melantha Chittenden, Sue Cornish, Education Support, Urtha Felda, Richard Fraser, Bob Gale, Martin Hodge, Deborah Lawson, Letitia McCalla, Cameron Mitchell, Parliament Hill, Roy Rickhuss CBE, Janine Sansom, Catherine Scrivens, Craig Thomson, Jack Wholey and Chris Wilson.
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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/covid-19-faqs).



Social media

Our **Facebook** pages are currently being reviewed. In the meantime, follow us at www.facebook.com/CommunityUnion for updates, news, events and more!

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.)

TACKLING RACISM IN THE EARLY YEARS



Celebrating respect, kindness and difference is a step towards tackling racism. Voice Community is working with the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation to support teachers and early years professionals to promote racial equality. Read Deborah Lawson's article for *Early Years Educator* (EYE) Magazine, July 2021:

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/tackling-racism-early-years

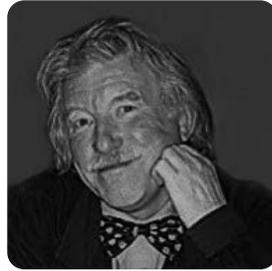
VOICE COMMUNITY NEWS & VIEWS

JULIAN CORBELL, CHAIRMAN EMERITUS, 1939-2020

By Bob Gale, Federation Secretary and
Field Officer for Leicestershire

My involvement with our trade union and 40 years of fond memories were triggered by Julian Bell (Corbell).

I already knew Julian through exam board meetings, where I was the Secretary. Shortly after joining PAT, as Voice was then, I went to my first trade union meeting, only to discover that Julian was the Chair. At the end of the meeting, he pinned me in a corner and persuaded me to be the local Federation Secretary. He



assured me it would just be a matter of sending out agendas and writing the minutes. I often reminded him of that in subsequent years!

Julian was hard-working, with strong views on education and totally committed to what PAT/Voice has always stood for – putting children first. He believed in the force of argument, not the argument of force.

Julian was National Chairman when PAT conferences attracted big audiences. He always appeared calm, but when he spoke

you listened – he didn't speak unless he had something important to say.

Soon after my taking up the role of Federation Secretary, Julian moved to Suffolk, but we never lost touch, meeting up every year at conference and exchanging Christmas cards, where he always delighted in telling me the latest news and achievements of his growing family – of which he was justifiably proud.

Julian loved his job, he loved his retirement, he loved his hobbies – tennis was a particular passion – and he lived life to the full. We will miss him.

Julian was the author of *Encounters With Strangers* (2012) and *Unreliable Memoir – Keele and Vendome from 1958 to 1962* (2010):
www.amazon.co.uk/Julian-Corbell/e/B009W5BDLE

STEPHEN LAWRENCE DAY FOUNDATION

As we reported in the last issue, Community partnered with the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation earlier this year, and as a result we promoted resources and invitations to join in with events on Stephen Lawrence Day in April. Resources remain available online (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/sldf-partnership).



VOICE SECTION ELECTION UPDATE

Wales Executive Committee (WEC)

At the close of nominations, the following were elected to WEC, taking up office in June:

May Castrey

Lyn Schoen

Michael Hopkins

COMMUNITY EQUALITIES TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

To find out more about these events, or to register, please email us at equalities@community-tu.org

Voice Community events: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/events

VOICE COMMUNITY NEWS & VIEWS

COMMUNITY NEWS & VIEWS



A better deal for LGBT+ workers

Melantha Chittenden: The trade union movement has an active role in continuing the fight for LGBT+ rights. As a union, Community prides itself in being there for our members, both at work and in their communities, recognising that something that impacts you outside of work can easily carry over into the workplace: <https://community-tu.org/a-better-deal-for-lgbt-workers>



A guide to long COVID

In May 2021, Community members shared their experiences of long COVID, which included fatigue and exhaustion, breathlessness, brain fog and memory issues, headaches, muscle pains and more. With that in mind, we're sharing some tips for what to do if you are suffering from long COVID: <https://community-tu.org/a-guide-to-long-covid>

Creating more equal workplaces

Lauren Crowley: The business need to demonstrate inclusivity has never been higher. A vital role for unions and equalities reps is holding employers' feet to the fire on values statements, commitments around gender pay gap and targets to improve diversity: <https://community-tu.org/creating-more-equal-workplaces>



We must all be mental health champions

Eluned Anderson: Over three-quarters of young workers have experienced mental health challenges, with nearly half having experienced suicidal thoughts. This crisis has been exacerbated by the pandemic. It's vital that we realise how important it is to make mental health a priority. When it's made a priority, it makes a workforce stronger and healthier: <https://community-tu.org/we-must-all-be-mental-health-champions>



Protecting workers' safety more important than ever

Paul McKenna: No one should have to work in an unsafe environment. That doesn't just mean physical safety, but also protection from bullying, harassment, stress and substance misuse. There are multiple ways your union can support you with your health and safety at work: <https://community-tu.org/protecting-the-safety-of-workers-is-more-important-now-than-ever>



Supporting me working with young people

Heather A: I made the transition to work in education nine years ago. Colleagues stressed how important it would be to have union representation, and encouraged me to look into their union, which led me to join Voice Community.

I felt immediately reassured by the highly professional, calm and reliable manner of the representative I spoke to. I felt I had a safety blanket, an insurance policy, should the worst happen. Because I work part-time, I was also impressed with the 'pro rata' membership fee.

I remember reading about all the extra benefits you got from being a union member but still, believed it's something I would never need.... 'What if?' springs to mind. We insure our homes, our cars, our pets but do we insure our jobs?

Last September, a situation at work led me to reach out to Community and I was assigned the most wonderful, caring and professional representative I could have wished for. I'm confident I have the support and expertise in my adviser to guide me through. I can't thank her and her colleagues enough.

We never know when that 'what if' moment might happen: <https://community-tu.org/supporting-me-working-with-young-people>

Teacher Mental Health Digital Conference (Westminster Insight event)

On **Tuesday 21 September**, Martin Hodge, Voice Community's Senior Professional Officer for Policy, will be one of the speakers at this virtual event, looking at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher mental health, and lessons learnt that can be taken forward to improve the way we support all educational staff.

Find out more and register: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/events/teacher-mental-health-conference

ASSISTANT GENERAL SECRETARY'S VOICE



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

From the 2021 Annual Report by Deborah Lawson, Assistant General Secretary (Voice Section) (DLawson@community-tu.org)

Change has certainly been the theme of the last year. The pandemic was not the only significant change. Voice changed too.

Members were balloted on whether they wanted Voice to transfer to Community Union and become its education section. The answer was a resounding 'Yes', with 78.5% of those who voted voting in favour of the transfer, which took place in October 2020.

Although most of the changes so far are 'behind the scenes', we have incorporated the Voice brand with Community and there are additional benefits available to paying members.

Modernisation and engagement

We continue with our modernisation, benefitting from the infrastructure that comes with being a section of a larger union. We have also increased engagement with members, which in turn supports our ongoing organising agenda.

In the last year, we have not only introduced regular COVID updates for members, but we also now have a monthly education policy podcast: <https://ctueducationpolicy.podbean.com>.

Other initiatives to increase engagement with members include sector-specific newsletters and webinars.

We continue to survey members on key issues and, as a result, we are recruiting workplace reps and learning reps, and identifying local and national issues on which to campaign and organise.

Members and reps have also been able to participate in training as part of Community's education programme.

During the pandemic, we have also seen a rise in interaction on social media, through Facebook and Twitter, and the 'click throughs' to important information have also been higher, demonstrating members' need for up-to-date information.

Community National Executive Council (NEC)

While Voice Section of Community retains its Section Council and country executive committees, governance is the responsibility of Community's NEC.

The NEC is committed to reviewing the union's rules every five years, and that process has just been completed. Voice President (now Immediate Past President) Joy Rowley represented the Section on the rules revision committee. All Community members will be balloted during the summer on the proposed rule changes.

While NEC is responsible for governance, Section Council retains responsibility for education policy and management of the Section Council itself. It will, following the ballot rules revision, review the byelaws of the

Section to ensure consistency with Community rules.

At its meeting in March 2021, the Section Council voted to extend the length of term of National Officers to co-ordinate with Community's biennial terms of office. The incoming Voice Vice President, Teresa Bottomley, has therefore been elected to hold the office of President for two years, starting in June 2022, and other officers, when elected, will also hold office for two years.

Casework

While absence management, sickness and return to work have previously made up the majority of casework, redundancy and restructure have generated the highest amount of casework in the last year, together accounting for 38% of casework, up from 24% in 2019/20.

Education recovery

The widely criticised paltry funding announced by the Westminster Government for education recovery is an insult to pupils and staff (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/news/education-recovery-tutoring).

The new Education Secretary in Scotland announced more ambitious plans for recovery, including £1 billion to close the poverty attainment gap and a review of Education Scotland and SQA.

In Wales, £150 million has been pledged to education recovery, and only initiatives with proven evidence of improvement will be funded.

See page 16 for our report, *The Future of Education*.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

‘The recovery period cannot mean a return to how things were.... It must mark the start of a brighter future.’



FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

By Roy Rickhuss CBE, General Secretary

I hope all those who attended the Voice Section Conference in June (see page 7) found it as informative and interesting as I did.

It was brilliant to come together to talk about the work being undertaken within the Voice Section, and to be joined by wonderful speakers like Baroness Doreen Lawrence and Peter Kyle MP, the new Shadow Minister for Schools, both of whom are proud Community members.

When you were taking the decision to join forces with us, it was always our promise to you that, together, we could have a stronger voice on the issues that matter and around the things you care about. The conference and *The Future of Education* report (see page 16) serve as a clear demonstration that we are putting that promise into practice already.

The future

When asked about your experiences and your vision for the future for the report, the results were overwhelming. There are clear challenges facing education and the early years in both the short and long term.

I have no doubt that, for those of you who get a summer holiday, there will inevitably be concerns about what the return to your setting will look like. Whatever happens, know that we will be pushing for you to be as safe as possible at work, valued for the work you do, and not pushed beyond your limits.

Long-term challenges

Outside of the immediate issue of the return to work and the safety of every person working in an education or early years setting, it is clear that there are long-term challenges ahead.

Many of these challenges have been caused – or made worse by – the pandemic: issues like the widening gap in attainment between the most and least advantaged students, and the dramatic effect on students’ social skills.

However, many of the challenges you face have been bubbling for years, like the extreme administrative burden placed on those working in education, and the low pay faced by those working in early years.

Recovery for a brighter future

The recovery period cannot mean a return to how things were and allowing these issues to continue. It must mark the start of a brighter future.

The results of the member survey showed the importance of facing these challenges head on because, if things stay as they are, 22 per cent of people are likely to leave the sector in the next three years. Evidence like this needs urgent action, and the Government must wake up quickly to this reality.

We know that you hold many of the answers. Over the coming months, we will be taking *The Future of Education* report, including all of your experiences and ideas that are held within it, to decision makers.

We’ll use it to make the case for your vision for the future. Every step of the way there will be opportunities to get involved and to shape the campaign.

The lessons we learnt during the pandemic provide us with the opportunity to do things differently, to create that brighter future.

By working together, I believe that we can shape the future of education and early years education in this country for the better.

VOICE OF THE PRESIDENT



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

By Rev Chris Wilson (chriswilson@voiceactivists.org.uk) who became Voice Section President on 19 June 2021, with Teresa Bottomley becoming Vice President and Joy Rowley Immediate Past President



It is an exciting time for Voice Community. We have an exciting and bright future ahead of us, but there are challenges as well.

Joy Rowley

However, first it is only right to acknowledge the work and service to our union of our out-going Voice President, Joy Rowley, and to thank her for all of her work on our behalf over the last year. The role of Section President can be demanding, and it is worth remembering that all of our activists are volunteers – the days of ‘facility time’ for trade union work are largely gone.

Joy discharged her duties with diligence and commitment. She has worked very hard – not only chairing Voice Section meetings, but also representing Voice on the National Executive Council of Community.

Challenges

We must continue her work in meeting the unprecedented challenges we face as education and early years professionals. The biggest of these is education recovery.

The pandemic caused tremendous disruption to education provision. Our members have stepped-up, working – sometimes at personal risk – at the height of the pandemic, meeting the challenge of first virtual and then ‘blended’ learning, and now having to deal with the abject failure of government to properly fund the much-needed education recovery plan,

Simply put, extra tutorial provision, whilst welcome, is not sufficient to get us where we need to be. (See page 16.)

It is to be hoped that all the UK nations’ governments might yet listen, but we need to understand that political leverage will be needed if education unions – and all those they represent – are ignored. We must become more assertive in making the case for fair, long-term funding, including for the much-neglected early years sector.

Voice Community

To meet these external challenges, we need also to complete our modernisation. This means becoming a full part of Community, equipping our Section to play its part within the wider union, and in turn, drawing-down the extensive and additional support that Community offers.

We need to re-establish branches, and to do so at pace. I remain open-minded as to what final form these may take, but I am convinced that we cannot move from a servicing to an organising model for our members without this question being addressed.

Finally, **we must put recruitment front and centre of all we do.**

Community represents a fresh start for us all, **but now is the time to recruit.**

Encourage colleagues to join Voice Community: (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/join-voice-community). Remember that every new member strengthens your voice and enhances our distinctive approach – that we put children, students and education first in all that we do. That is surely the best of reasons to grow our union.

Stay safe, and spread the word. **Voice Community is the union for education professionals.**

VOICE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE 2021

CREATIVITY, DIVERSITY AND EARLY YEARS CRUCIAL

The virtual Voice Section Conference – ‘The Future of Education’ – took place on 19 June.

After incoming Voice President **Chris Wilson’s** speech, Community General Secretary **Roy Rickhuss** introduced keynote speaker **Baroness Doreen Lawrence**.

Key points of Baroness Lawrence’s speech

- > Attitudes to race and diversity will only change when education includes more of our diverse history and literature.
- > A ‘level playing field’ with ‘no one left behind’ – it’s down to all of us to achieve that.
- > We need to encourage more black teachers, sometimes through non-traditional routes.
- > Black teachers are leaving because they don’t feel valued.
- > New BAME teachers need to be given the confidence to talk about their experiences.
- > Creativity must be developed and encouraged because it helps across the curriculum.
- > We need to promote diversity and equality throughout the curriculum, not just on special months or days.
- > Stephen Lawrence wanted to be an architect, to follow **his** ambition, not what other people thought black students should do.
- > Political education is important. Children should speak up.

Members’ questions (summarised) to the expert panel

What can we do to support creative subjects?

- > **Martin Hodge**, Senior Professional Officer (Education Policy): We need to encourage students for what they can do, leading by example.
- > **Dr Noel Purdy**, Director for research in educational underachievement, Stranmillis University College: Play is important. Children have been disadvantaged by lack of peer interaction.
- > **Kaisra Khan**, Chair of England Executive Committee: Creative subjects are essential.
- > **Peter Kyle MP**, Shadow Schools Minister: The Government has squeezed the curriculum and ‘injected myopia’ into it. Creativity and social skills are important too.

What policies can government introduce for staff wellbeing?

- > **Dr Noel Purdy**: We need to do more to prepare trainees for the stresses of the job.
- > **Peter Kyle MP**: Teachers need more time to reflect, prepare, communicate, listen, get advice.

How can we solve the problem of schools having to fill the gap left by other agencies?

- > **Martin Hodge**: We’re urging government to fund education and support services.
- > **Dr Noel Purdy**: Additional funding is needed for support services, working with families, rather than imposing a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model.

What about support staff?

- > **Peter Kyle MP**: The team makes education work – creating the environment to unlock a passion for learning.
- > **Dr Noel Purdy**: Professionals like TAs have a key role.
- > **Martin Hodge**: Voice Community espouses the development of the whole professional workforce.

Is our examinations and qualifications system outdated?

- > **Peter Kyle MP**: Exams are important, but we also need creativity and broader judgements.
- > **Kaisra Khan**: Not all children thrive with exams. Special educational needs must be identified more quickly. We need to be intelligent about appropriate assessment.
- > **Dr Noel Purdy**: The pandemic is an opportunity to do things differently.
- > **Martin Hodge**: We have a right-or-wrong culture. We see this when children ask if their art is ‘right’. They need reassurance. Education shouldn’t be about ‘shoe-horning’ children but recognising what they can do.

Asked about education recovery, Peter Kyle MP responded:

- > There’s an urgent need for support, especially in the early years, and in areas like Leicester affected by a longer lockdown.
- > The Chancellor needs to invest in education.
- > Students are competing with others around the world and need help to acquire essential skills.
- > ‘Education and the economy are not separate.’

Summing up, Voice President Chris Wilson said the key conference lessons were:

1. Voice Community is passionate about education.
2. The breadth of our membership.
3. Equity and fairness: education for all.
4. ‘Get the early years right to get the rest of education right.’

Watch online

Watch the conference and all the responses in full: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/Voice-Conference-2021



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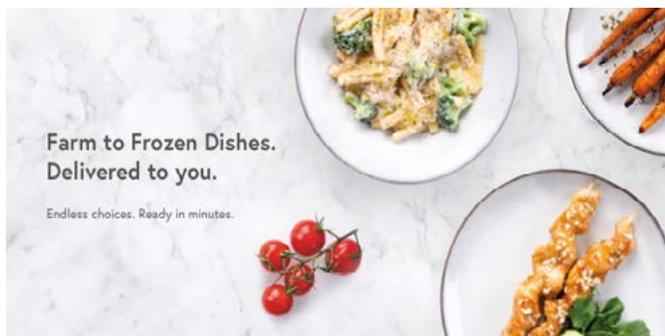
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LEGAL FOCUS:



TRANSGENDER RIGHTS – AND RESTRICTIONS?

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

Following Pride Month in June, it's timely to explore transgender legal protections.

Legal protections for those undergoing gender reassignment preceded the legal protections for the remainder of the LGBT community, as a result of a 1992 Employment Tribunal claim, *P v S and Cornwall County Council*.

'P', born a male, announced she was going to undergo gender reassignment, and had to undergo a year-long 'life test' living as a woman. She wrote to her employer, 'S' – the principal, chief executive and financial director of the unit – to notify him. S informed the educational establishment's governors.

During summer 1992, P had surgical treatment while on sick leave. In September 1992, P was dismissed and given three months' notice. However, she was not prohibited from working in her 'female gender role'.

P's final gender reassignment surgery was completed before the three months' notice of dismissal expired. P brought a claim of sex discrimination under the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1974 (SDA) (now contained within the Equality Act 2010).

Under those provisions, the claim would have failed, but the tribunal made a reference to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) because the provisions of the Equal Treatment Directive went further than the SDA.

The ECJ found for P: *'To tolerate such discrimination would be tantamount, as regards such a person, to a failure to respect the dignity and freedom to*

which he or she is entitled, and which the Court has a duty to safeguard. Therefore, dismissal of a transsexual for a reason related to a gender reassignment must be regarded as contrary to Article 5(1) of the Directive.'

As a result of that case, the Government enacted the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 (now contained within the Equality Act 2010) which provided protection for a person *'who intends to undergo, is undergoing or has undergone gender reassignment'*.

Gender Recognition Act 2004

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 – which came into effect on 4 April 2005 – allows people who have **gender dysphoria** to change their legal gender.

If an individual wants to legally change their gender, they have to:

- > get a letter from their doctor saying they have gender dysphoria;
- > show the report about the medical treatment they are receiving;
- > prove they have lived as the new gender for at least two years;
- > sign a statement before a solicitor confirming that they agree to stay in the new gender for the rest of their life;
- > pay £140 to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate; and
- > if married, get agreement from their husband or wife.

In 2018, the Government consulted on reforming the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The consultation analysis was published in 2020, but the proposed reforms were largely administrative.

Case law

Taylor v Jaguar Land Rover was a decision of the Birmingham Employment Tribunal. Even though not binding on other tribunals or courts, being a first instance judgment, it was important because of its radical development of the law, bringing 'non-binary' or 'gender-fluid' individuals within the scope of the gender reassignment protected characteristic of the Equality Act.

The claimant, Ms Taylor, worked as an engineer for Jaguar Land Rover Ltd. She claimed direct discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of gender reassignment.

Having initially presented as male, in 2017 the claimant began identifying as gender fluid and started to dress in women's clothing. As a result, she was subjected to insults and abusive jokes at work.

Ms Taylor had little support from management regarding her transition in the workplace or any action about the insults she was subjected to, including references to her as 'it' and having 'her bits chopped off'. The employer sought to defend the claim on the basis that she described herself at times as 'non-binary' or 'gender fluid'.

The tribunal held that it was *'clear ... that gender is a spectrum'* and that it is *'beyond any doubt'* that Ms Taylor fell within the definition of s.7. The claimant succeeded in her claims.

Many transgender and other LGBT cases often arise from the conflict between



the protected characteristic of gender reassignment and/or sexual orientation and that of religion and belief, including the recent Employment Appeal Tribunal judgment **Maya Forstater v CDG Europe & Others**.

Ms Forstater was a Visiting Fellow with the Centre for Global Development (the 'employer') from January 2015. She worked under a series of consultancy agreements until 31 December 2018, when her contract came to an end.

Ms Forstater claimed her contract was not renewed because of her philosophical belief that it was not possible for a person

to change their gender as defined at birth. Ms Forstater held 'gender-critical' beliefs that a person's sex remains the same regardless of a person's stated gender identity, and made a number of transphobic comments, about which some of her colleagues complained.

At a preliminary hearing, the Employment Tribunal found, when considering it in light of the five steps set out in *Grainger plc v Nicholson 2010*, that:

- > the belief was genuinely held;
- > it was a belief, not merely an opinion based on the present state of

information; and

- > was a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.

The judge recognised that the threshold of coherence required was 'modest' and held that the belief attained the necessary level of cogency and cohesion. But he held that it necessarily involved 'misgendering' and was therefore incompatible with human dignity and the fundamental rights of others. He therefore held that it could not be a protected belief under the Equality Act 2010.

Ms Forstater appealed to the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT), where the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Index on Censorship appeared as 'interveners'. The EAT disagreed with the Employment Tribunal on the basis that, *'a philosophical belief would only be excluded for failing to satisfy Grainger v if it was the kind of belief the expression of which would be akin to Nazism or totalitarianism and thereby liable to be excluded from the protection of rights under Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) by virtue of Article 17 thereof.'*

The EAT based its finding on the *'Claimant's gender-critical beliefs, which were widely shared, and which did not seek to destroy the rights of trans persons, clearly did not fall into that category.'*

It is not yet known whether the Forstater judgment will be appealed.

In 2021, the Court of Appeal, in **Page v NHS Trust Development Authority Trust**, dismissed the appeal. The claim arose out of disciplinary action taken against Mr Page, a Non-Executive Director of the Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust.

The action followed TV and other media interviews in which he expressed views, rooted in his Christian faith, about adoption by same-sex couples.

The Employment Tribunal dismissed his claim of unlawful discrimination and harassment, a decision upheld by the EAT. The appellant appealed to the Court of Appeal, which dismissed the claim, holding that the tribunal was entitled to find that the authority did not infringe the appellant's Convention rights and there was no error of law.



THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE ENTERING THE WORKPLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME

Contact Cameron Mitchell, Professional Officer (cmitchell@community-tu.org)

First, congratulations to those of you who have finished your qualification and secured your new role. For those who have not yet secured a position, there are useful tips for securing that first job at www.voicetheunion.org.uk/who-we-support/students/interview-advice

For the next few months, you may feel excited that you have secured your first job, but also nervous about the upcoming year as a newly qualified professional. However, if you have some time over the summer to prepare yourself for your first day, make the most of it by getting the essentials prepared. These could include supplies, designing a bulletin board or display for your class and learning your schedule. However, there are many other things to consider before you enter the workplace.

Making the most of your summer break

Although you're about to enter the world of work, and may be thinking about your upcoming year in the workplace and that you need to spend the next few weeks preparing, you should still take the time to relax and unwind.

If you're moving to a new area, it may be a good idea to check out the local attractions. This time off may also be a good opportunity to brush up on skills for both your personal and your professional life.

The break is a great opportunity to catch up with friends and family before starting your new job. You should also make the most of the lie-ins while you can as you may not have the opportunity to indulge in them as much when you start the job.

Don't forget, however, to make sure you're all ready for the start of your new job. Here are some things you might want to think about in advance.

Emergency supplies

Even though we're sure you will have the basics covered, you will also have to consider supplies for certain occasions. We would recommend getting all your supplies ready in a box for you to take on your first day:

- > **pain killers** – not because of the pupils/children, of course!;
- > **lip balm** – you will be talking for a large portion of the day, which may chap your lips, so this will come in useful;
- > **snacks** – your working day can be a long one, and there may be days where you work through your lunch or are too busy to prepare lunch for the day;
- > **spare money** – if you need to go to the shop or coffee/vending machine;



STUDENT FOCUS



- > **spare clothes/waterproof coat** – with the British weather, you never know when there will be a rainy spell;
- > **hand sanitiser** – with the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a necessity, especially if you are interacting with a lot of different children or students throughout the day;
- > **tissues** – being in an environment with children, you or a child are bound to get the sniffles; and
- > **mug** – make sure to have a mug, as you will need it for those ever-so-important breaks to get you through the day!

Get your uniform organised

Your workplace may have a specific dress code, so it will be worth checking that out first. You can get this from the workplace administrator.

For teaching in a classroom, we would recommend getting items of clothing which are smart but also comfy that can be mixed to vary your outfits, such as a collared or dress shirt (long sleeved or short sleeved) along with trousers/a knee-length skirt and smart shoes. You may also want to get some blazers or jumpers for those colder days. Complementing your outfit with a tie or bowtie will give you a more formal look, or go without for a more casual look, depending on the dress code.

For those working in early years and childcare, if you're not provided with a uniform, a polo shirt along with trousers is the best bet, but ensure that the trousers are suitable and comfortable for bending down/crouching. We would also recommend getting a zip-up fleece or a cardigan for those cold days.

Make sure to look at the labels to ensure that your clothing is machine washable and dryer compatible, to ensure that you can get your uniform cleaned and dried easily on those busy days.

Get familiar with the curriculum

For classroom-based staff, your workplace should provide a staff handbook, curriculum plan or scheme of work that will detail the curriculum and standards for the year. Early years settings follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum. You should grab this as soon as you can, and even if you can't bring yourself to read the whole thing, just skimming through will give you an idea of what is expected of you.

First day activities

You will not be the only nervous one on your first day – the pupils/children will be too. Use this as an opportunity to get to know them. Think of fun but informative activities to use for this – for example, a 'show-and-tell' or an activity that will get discussion going between you and them.

Keep on top of emails/post

You may receive a lot of emails and letters during the beginning of your new job, so make sure to keep on top of them. This will also help you to keep up to date with news in your workplace.

Maintain a work-life balance

Your first year may be the most difficult of your career, as you will be coming to terms with a lot of aspects of the profession, but do not let this affect your mental health.

Make sure to put aside time to sleep, eat and relax. You will then enter the workplace in a healthier mindset than you would after a night of no sleep. We understand that it will be next to impossible not to bring work home, but try to put yourself first.

Stay up to date in the workplace

You are the new face, and there will be an expectation for you to know about current trends, topics, and issues in education or childcare, so:

- > sign up for newsletters from education or early years websites;
- > follow important figures in education/early years on Twitter; and
- > of course, as a member of Voice Community, you will receive your quarterly digital magazine, *Your Voice*, as well as **monthly emails to keep you updated.**

Communication with parents/carers

It's vital that you communicate with your pupils'/children's parents/carers so you can work together, not only to further the children's education, but also to get an understanding of them when the parents or carers aren't there.

This will also help to show the parents that you are reliable and happy to communicate with them if needs be.

Hints and tips

In the previous issue of *Your Voice*, we featured members' advice and tips for students to consider before entering the workplace for the first time, so it may be worth having a look at that if you have not already! You can view this online at: **with www.voicetheunion.org.uk/sites/default/files/Member-Insights-April-2021.pdf**

Don't forget

As your union, Voice Community is here to help you and offer advice throughout your career. If you have any queries before or during your first year, contact us (**www.voicetheunion.org.uk/contact-us**) and we'll be happy to help. We'd love to hear from you!

STUDENT/YOUNG MEMBER FOCUS

LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

By Cameron Mitchell, Professional Officer (cmitchell@community-tu.org)

According to mental health charity Mind, around one in every six of the UK workforce is experiencing some form of common mental health problem such as anxiety or depression.

Statistics also show that mental health problems have a greater impact on women. Around 10% of male workers have some form of mental health problem, whilst women are twice as likely, with around 20% of female workers having a common mental health problem.

The problem of mental ill-health is a further concern for young people who are in work or studying. Half of workers between the age of 18-30 in a recent survey said they have experienced suicidal thoughts or feelings (www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/young-workers-suicidal-thoughts-mental-health-talking-a9217911.html) and over 15,000 first-year students in UK universities reported that they had a mental health problem, compared to approximately 3,000 in 2006 (www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/declining-state-student-mental-health-universities-and-what-can-be-done).

Why?

The most obvious reason for why so many young people are experiencing mental health difficulties is down to the increasingly complex pressures of being a young worker or student. However, there are many different reasons why young people in work or at university struggle with mental ill-health.

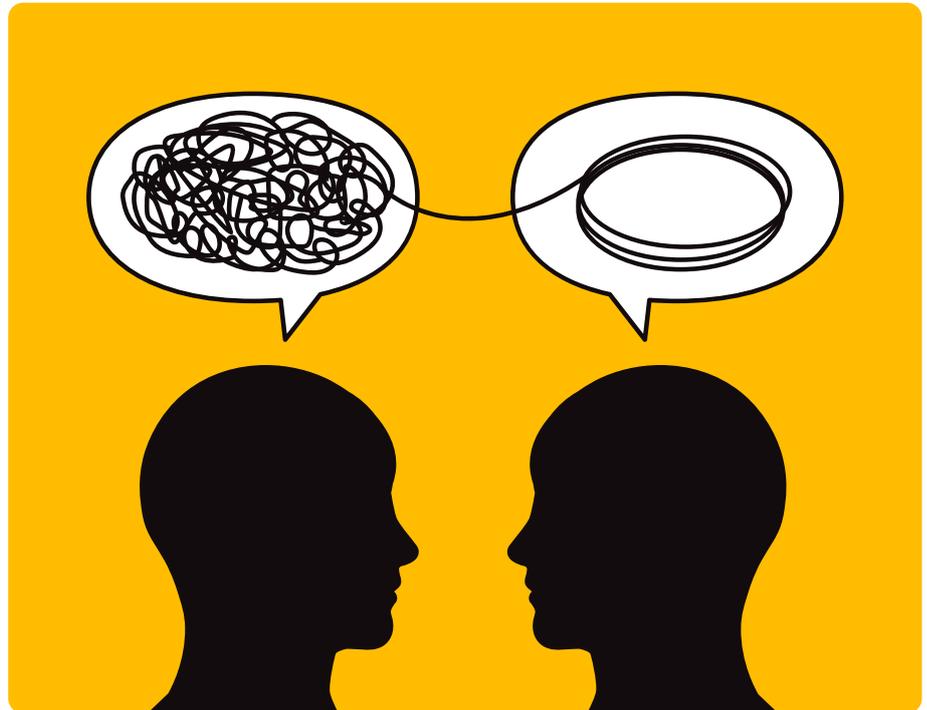
Working environment, conditions and culture can all affect the way a person feels whilst at work. If a person's work environment is poor, then it may cause them to experience a work-related mental health problem. Other common reasons, such as a bereavement, trauma or personal circumstances, are unlikely to be work-related, but the feelings that these issues bring may also affect you at work.

STUDENT/YOUNG MEMBER FOCUS

It is important to remember that **your employer has a duty of care towards you as an employee.** This means that they must take any mental health condition you may have seriously and must do all they can to support you with this in work.

An employer also has the responsibility to ensure that the working environment and conditions experienced by their employees are positive and not negatively impacting on employees' mental health.

If you are concerned about your working environment or there are things within work that are causing you to experience stress, depression or anxiety, it is a good idea to **speak to your employer** about this. If you feel that your employer is not taking their duty of care seriously, remember, **we can help you as your union.**



Important things to remember

- 1. Look after yourself** – Working and studying can be a very stressful and fast-paced lifestyle, but it's also important that you don't burn yourself out, as this could make your mental health worse in the long term. Staying active, sleeping well, learning to relax and finding time for more 'fun activities' are some recommended ways of ensuring good mental health. For more useful tips, see Mind's **'Five ways to wellbeing'**: www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing
- 2. Protecting yourself in work** – If you do have a mental health condition, you may be protected under the 2010 Equality Act. Mental health conditions such as depression and bipolar affective disorder are covered under this Act, meaning that your employer must support your condition in work and put any necessary provisions in place.
- 3. We're here to help** – If you're struggling to overcome an issue at work which is impacting on your mental health, you can call us for free employment workplace advice: **01332 372 337**.

You can also access Voice Community's free courses on:
 - > Mental health (www.staffskillstraining.co.uk/?s=mental+health);
 - > stress (www.staffskillstraining.co.uk/?s=stress); and
 - > anxiety (www.staffskillstraining.co.uk/?s=anxiety).

Further information

Mind: Taking care of yourself: www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself

EARLY YEARS



A FAIR START?

By Laura Barbour, Early Years Lead, the Sutton Trust

The Sutton Trust, together with the Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust, have launched a new campaign, **A Fair Start?**, (www.suttontrust.com/a-fair-start-equity-in-access-to-early-years-education) to look at options for reform to early years provision. We want to ensure all children can access high quality early years provision, regardless of their background. In the aftermath of the pandemic, this fair access will be more important than ever.

The COVID-19 crisis has had considerable impacts on the youngest children, with Sutton Trust research (www.suttontrust.com/our-research/social-mobility-covid-education-recovery-plan-catch-up) finding that 64% of pre-school parents have been worried about their child's development or wellbeing during the pandemic.

Children who will soon be eligible for early years funded entitlements at ages two, three and four are going to need the highest quality support more than ever, to ensure that the life opportunities they have already missed do not lead to inequality becoming even more entrenched going forward.

The early years sector needs to be ready to support the children and families who have missed out. Yet the sector, which was in crisis before the pandemic, has been particularly badly

affected during the last year. Sutton Trust research last summer (www.suttontrust.com/our-research/coronavirus-impacts-early-years) found that many settings were at risk of closure and redundancies, especially in the most deprived areas.

Building back better

It is now time to 'build back better' from the pandemic, and this must start in the early years.

There are many actions needed to begin this work. The Trust would like to see an increase to Early Years Pupil Premium funding, and an upskilling of the workforce through CPD. These would be a great start, but bigger reforms are also needed to make a real difference for children from the poorest backgrounds. This is why we are working with the Sylvia Adams Charitable Trust to look at ways to level up access to early years provision for all children.

The current system in England is hard to navigate for settings and families, and there is a real tension between different policies.

Whilst the two-year-old offer of 15 hours a week is targeted at disadvantaged children, at ages three and four, that focus is reversed. At this age, while there is a universal offer for 15 hours a week for all children, there is also an additional 15 hour 'childcare' offer (30 hours in total) just for the children of working parents, thus largely excluding the disadvantaged children who are likely to particularly benefit from additional, high quality hours.

Our new campaign, **A Fair Start?**, will look in depth at the 30 hours policy and assess the possible options for reform, prioritising access to high-quality early education for disadvantaged children, to reduce the early years attainment gap before it takes hold. We are exploring how provision can be extended to the children who need it most, and what the costs, benefits and challenges of reform are.

We are keen to hear from a wide range of voices as we develop this work. **If you have ideas on how best to reform the policy, or you would like to support the campaign**, please get in touch with the Sutton Trust at www.suttontrust.com/contact-us.

EDUCATION RECOVERY



LONG-TERM RECOVERY, NOT SHORT-TERM CATCH-UP

The future of education must focus on long-term recovery and students' mental health, not short-term catch-up, according to a new report from Voice Community. **The Future of Education** report is based on a survey of education and early years members across the UK.

Assistant General Secretary Deborah Lawson said: 'Members shared many of their concerns with us about the pandemic and about education and the early years post-pandemic. The members who took part were from a wide range of different settings, but from their responses came through the clear consensus that we cannot return to how things were. We need to move forward differently.'

'The aftermath of the pandemic represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change education and early years education – what we learn, how we learn it and how we assess it – and ensure it meets the needs of children, parents and the economy.'

'This opportunity must be about long-term recovery and progress – not short-term "catch-up".'

'There's no quick-fix solution for politicians to make headlines with, tick some boxes and pretend it's "job done". Adding some hours to the school day here, shaving a week off the summer holidays there, in an attempt to return to the old ways of a system that needs to be reformed, will not work.'

'The new system must meet the needs of learners, not learners the needs of the system.'

Summary of findings

Experiences during the pandemic

1. Online learning has not been as effective as in-person-learning.
2. Staff in the sector have worked incredibly hard under challenging circumstances.
3. The gap between the most and least advantaged students has widened. Students' social skills as well as their academic abilities have been dramatically affected.
4. Many staff haven't been supported to manage online learning.

Recovery

1. The mental health of students is members' overwhelming concern.
2. The challenge of recovery will be broader than academic catch-up.
3. The burden of administration and standardised achievements are hampering the ability of staff to focus on supporting and educating children.

Staff retention

1. As a result of the pandemic, and as part of long-term trends, there is a retention crisis facing the sector.
2. 22% of Voice Community members plan to leave education within the next three years.
3. Staff want to leave the sector primarily because of the pressures of the role and workload.
4. Low pay is a specific problem in early years settings, and for classroom/teaching assistants.
5. Career development has taken a backseat during the pandemic.

This word cloud illustrates members' biggest concerns, with mental health, education recovery and the attainment gap top of the list.

Early Years

1. Staff in the early years sector do not feel valued.
2. Pay in the early years sector is too low.
3. Funding in the sector is inadequate and inconsistent.
4. Young children have lost social skills during the pandemic.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendations to support recovery

1. Recovery, not catch-up, through dialogue, funding and expectations.
2. Mental health support needs to be provided for students and staff.
3. More support staff in the classroom combined with effective use of support staff.
4. Increase in funding targeted towards disadvantaged learners.
5. Increase the pupil premium and special needs funding. Make both sets of funding more reactive.
6. Value the creative subjects.
7. Support in-person learning with digital technology.
8. Encourage greater engagement with parents/carers and the local community to embed and enrich learning.
9. Any additional or extended hours must not come at the expense of teachers' workloads and must be either paid or avoided.



Recommendations to support staff to stay in education and early years

1. Increased PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time for all school staff and added flexibility, including the ability to take it at home.
2. Value support staff through pay, conditions, and career development.
3. Regular personal development time for staff and a personal training allowance.
4. Increased numbers of health and

safety reps in schools as well as added rights and protections for those reps

5. Protection for staff raising health and safety concerns across the sector
6. A reduction in workload, especially in relation to data demands.

Recommendations to the early years sector

1. Value the sector with appropriate training, qualifications, and funding.

2. Ensure a fair wage is paid to every worker in the sector.
3. Fix the 'free entitlement' so it is truly free and works for both early years settings and parents.
4. Career development for workers in the early years.
5. Focus on social skills and mental wellbeing.
6. Return to learning through play.

Members said

Staff are 'being put under increasing scrutiny for results to tackle declining achievement without the resources to get it right for the children concerned.'

'Unrealistic expectations... regarding targets to catch up academically when social skills and wellbeing are just as, if not more, important.'

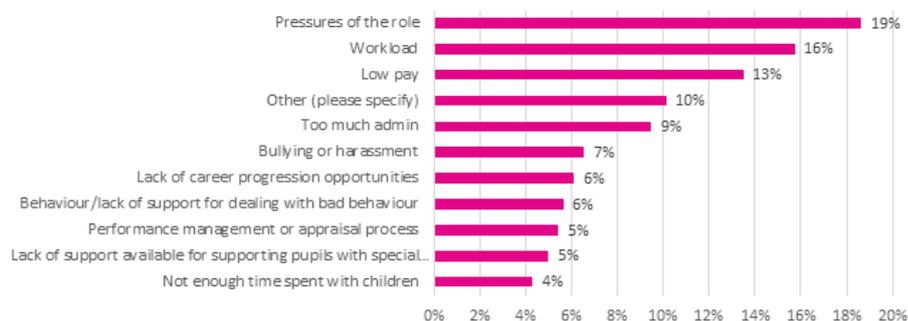
'Early years staff will leave the sector in droves. We are unsupported, unprotected and furious.'

'The fact that the majority of children have been at home for so long means that it is not just educational or academic catch-up that is needed, it is also re-conditioning them into the stable routine of the class environment and disciplined focus, that they will find hard both in terms of behaviour and mental health. These two aspects will contribute to what the future holds for school staff, as well as impact on learning levels.'

Today's education system is 'an outdated Victorian based education system' characterised by 'obsession with exams, obsession with academic excellence and defunding of SEN support, defunding of the arts and dehumanisation of the children.'

'We (early years) are an undervalued, underpaid sector that clearly no-one cares about.'

If you plan to leave the sector, what are your reasons?



The survey

The survey ran during February 2021, with the interim findings published in April.

The 607 respondents came from:

- > England, 84.65%;
 - > Scotland, 10.4%;
 - > Wales, 4.46%; and
 - > Northern Ireland, 0.5%;
- They included:
- > classroom teachers: 25.42%;
 - > early years practitioners: 21.1%;
 - > teaching assistants and classroom support: 26.08%;
 - > supply teachers/tutors/peripatetic teachers: 3.82%; and
 - > head teachers/school leaders/heads of Department: 5.98%.

Read the interim findings and full report: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/future-education

FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION



MAKE YOUR WELLBEING A PRIORITY

Article supplied by Education Support

Education Support was set up by teachers, for teachers. We believe that better staff mental health and wellbeing results in better teaching and learning.

There's a huge amount of emotional content in your work in further and higher education. Your role involves close contact with young people who need support at a time in their lives that can be demanding and uncertain, as well as formative and inspiring. This part of your work is significant and can affect your own resilience and wellbeing, but it's not always understood or acknowledged.

We know that during the pandemic you have adapted to constantly shifting goal posts, and unfailingly prioritised the young people you're responsible for guiding and inspiring. We know this has come at great personal cost to many.

Make your wellbeing a priority with these simple tips:

Nourish yourself – it's not selfish

Don't forget that you're a person with passions and interests. Invest time in what makes you, you. It might feel impossible, but making time for our passions gives our lives meaning, energises us and helps prevent burnout.

Know your priorities – it's ok to say no

Practise holding healthy boundaries at work that stop you from taking on too much, or committing yourself to work that doesn't align with your own priorities. It can make a real difference to your levels of stress and exhaustion.

Get support – it's a sign of strength

Ask for support at the right time. Don't suffer alone if you feel like you're heading for burnout. In an ideal world, you'd raise issues with your line manager, and co-create a plan for tackling what's affecting you. But life isn't always ideal. Talking to a trusted friend or colleague can be an important first step towards finding solutions.

Don't forget that Education Support is always here for you. Our helpline is free, confidential and available 24/7 on **08000 562 561**. It's open to anyone working in education, and you'll talk to a qualified counsellor straight away.

Call us, we'll listen.

Our confidential **grants programme** helps thousands of people working in education every year to manage money worries, including those on short-term contracts. Find out if you can claim: www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-you/apply-grant

Your institution can also invest in staff wellbeing through our **Employee Assistance Programme** (www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-your-staff/employee-assistance-programme), which provides emotional support, line management coaching and counselling, as well as practical support on legal and financial matters for staff.

TEACHERS: ENGLAND

Voice Community dismayed by ongoing teacher pay freeze

Voice Community reacted with dismay to the recommendations of the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) report, which the Government accepted in full.

The Education Secretary had instructed the STRB to only consider pay uplifts for those earning less than £24,000 a year. The STRB therefore recommended a 'consolidated award' of £250 for teachers:

- > outside London whose full-time equivalent basic annual earnings are below £24,000;
- > in the London fringe on less than £25,194;
- > in outer London on less than £27,419; and
- > in inner London on less than £28,681.

Those earning more than these annual amounts will have their pay frozen in 2021-22.

The STRB also recommended that advisory pay points be 'reintroduced on the unqualified teachers' pay range' for 2021-22, in line with the main and upper pay ranges.

Academies 'have the freedom to set their own pay policies.'

Deborah Lawson, Assistant General Secretary (Voice Community), said: 'This meagre reward for being critical workers is a body blow for an already demoralised and exhausted profession crushed by the ongoing weight of workload and the huge demands made of them during the pandemic and to deliver education recovery.'

Further information

www.voicetheunion.org.uk/response-strb-report-2021



ADJUSTMENTS TO PUBLIC SERVICE PENSION SCHEMES

By Craig Thomson, Professional Officer
(CThomson@community-tu.org)

Recent adjustments to public service pension schemes have resulted in much discussion. Employers, human resource departments, trade unions, employees, private businesses, local government and government departments have distributed information about what these changes may mean. Unfortunately, some of the information shared has been subject to misinterpretation.

Over the last couple of months, we have been liaising with Teachers' Pensions to tackle some of the misinformation, speculation, and fake news that are being spread about the scheme in relation to transitional protection and independent schools withdrawing from the scheme.

A **myth busting fact sheet** is available at www.teacherspensions.co.uk/-/media/documents/employer/factsheets/transitional-protection/myth-busting-factsheet-v1.ashx with answers to the following questions and more:

- > **Is the career average scheme illegal?**
- > **Will a member be worse off?**
- > **So, can't a member retire now until they're 67 or 68?**
- > **Does this mean that the employer contribution will be going up?**

- > **Are exit payments being introduced for independent schools?**
- > **Are all independent schools moving away from the Scheme?**

Thinking about retirement?

Retirement is an important part of our lives and all too often, people do not plan for their retirement until they reach retirement age. You do not have to be at retirement age to start planning for it.

There are different types of retirement including:

- > early retirement;
- > normal age retirement;
- > phased retirement;
- > premature retirement; and
- > ill-health retirement.

Every pension scheme has different regulations and so, prior to retiring, you should check your scheme rules to help determine which type of retirement suits your circumstances.

Scheme rules will also determine such things as how much of a lump sum you can take and when you can access your benefits.

It may be possible for you to draw your pension before state retirement age, but you will not be able to access your state pension until you reach this age. To find when you will reach state retirement age, go to www.gov.uk/state-pension-age. Nowadays, state pension age is a 'moveable feast' dependent on your date of birth.

Employees can usually draw their occupational pension from the age of 55, however, there may be tax implications and actuarial adjustment factors that should be considered.

When considering retirement, you may wish to seek financial advice. This type of advice can only legally be given by a qualified Financial Advisor.

Are your records up to date?

Much of the union casework on pensions concerns members who discover that their record of pension contributions is inaccurate. This can be very difficult to rectify if a lot of time has passed or if you have worked for multiple employers. Therefore, it is very important to check annual statements and retain payslips.

Tracing a lost pension

If you have a lost pension from a former employment, you can use the Pension Tracing Service's online form at www.gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details to obtain contact details of the pension scheme you may have paid into. Alternatively, telephone the Pension Tracing Service on **0800 731 0193**. You will need the employer's name.

The service only provides details of who to contact; it cannot confirm if you have a pension or what the value is.

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

VOICE COMMUNITY CYMRU

WALES UPDATE

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

Voice Community Cymru responds to IWRPB report

The Independent Welsh Pay Review Body (IWRPB) determines teachers' pay and conditions in Wales. The IWRPB's third report in June 2021 included a series of recommendations – some for immediate action, others for further consultation and/or research – to clarify the existing terms and conditions. Cabinet Minister for Education Jeremy Miles accepted in principle all 12 recommendations.

Voice Community had called for a pay rise fully funded by the Welsh Government, but the Minister rejected this, laying this burden within local authorities' existing budgets. This is very disappointing, as a fully funded increase would lessen local authorities' post-COVID budgetary burden.

1.75% pay increase

Voice Community had asked for an across-the-board pay rise of 2.75%, which was a reflection of the predicted end of year RPI (Retail Price Index), in recognition of the current economic situation of pay freezes and job losses for many.

The IWRPB recommended an across-the-board rise of 1.75%, which they described as addressing inflation at CPI (Consumer Prices Index). This was very disappointing, as it does not address cost of living increases, compensate for the years of pay cuts, or acknowledge teachers' hard work through the pandemic.

Voice Community welcomes the across-the-board approach, but this low award does not motivate or build the morale of the committed teaching profession in Wales.

Recommendation for research

We had called for further consultation and research, so welcomed the report's numerous recommendations for this, and hope this will lead to solid evidence in time for next year's submission.

Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs)

For a second year, Voice Community called for a review of the current TLR award system, which is unclear, lacks transparency and contributes to the gender pay gap.

The IWRPB recommended the Welsh Government consult on a change in the provision within the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document (STPC(WD)) to allow part-time teachers to receive full-time TLR1 and TLR2 payments.

Monitoring of equality legislation

Voice Community called for the application of Equality Impact Assessments on the implementation of pay policies, and noted a distinct lack of equalities monitoring taking place at school and local authority level.

The IWRPB recommended the Welsh Government review the monitoring and reporting of equalities legislation at school and local authority level.

Planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time

Voice Community called for an increase in the PPA rate to 20%. We quoted the OECD's 2020 report, which states that in 25 OECD countries and economies with data for both teaching and working time, 44% of teachers' working time at lower secondary school level is spent on teaching, ranging from 35% or less in five countries, to at least 50% in six countries.

The IWRPB's response was that the evidence is not clear. The IWRPB made (Recommendation 8) proposals to examine workload issues for teachers and head teachers, and research comparable professionals' salaries.

This has been phrased as needed in the light of the ambitions for education in Wales, the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales, the lessons learned from the pandemic, and the need to ensure that the structure of teachers' and leaders' pay and conditions embraces aspirations for the future.

Full details: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/iwrpb-2021

Estyn inspections

The Education Minister and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector have agreed to suspend Estyn's core inspection programme for Autumn 2021.

In Spring 2022, specific pilot schools will be trialling new inspection arrangements. Most schools will not be inspected before Easter 2022.

www.gov.wales/written-statement-school-information-improvement-and-inspection-arrangements-supporting-renewal-and

VOICE COMMUNITY CYMRU

WALES EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (WEC)

WEC meets four times a year and its remit is to form a conduit between members, Voice Section Council and Community's National Executive Council. This structure ensures we are run by members for members, and so WEC needs to be as diverse as possible to represent everyone.

If you're a working member, why not join us at our next (Zoom) meeting? You'll see what a friendly group we are, and explore how you can help us communicate the issues members are facing in Wales to the Welsh Government Education Directorate and Minister for Education. Contact me (ufelda@community-tu.org) for more information.

This is also an opportunity to thank long-standing member **May Castrey** for her work and support on WEC. Thank you, May, we will miss your wise counsel.

We've recently welcomed two new WEC members:



Lyn Schoen

I work in a Bridgend special school as a special support officer with students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). I have been there for five years. Before that, I worked in a community college for 13 years in an area of high poverty, high unemployment and social deprivation.

I'm passionate about allowing students to meet their full potential and strongly believe that children are more than test scores.

I've been a Voice member for several years, joining from another union after strike action was called. This is something I do not personally agree with, and Voice's ethos and commitment to negotiation and campaigning, in preference to industrial action, appealed to me.

I'm the proud mum of 21-year-old twins and two mad Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. I volunteer for the Cinnamon Trust Animal Charity and am Welfare Officer for Vale Fencing Club.

lynschoen@voiceactivists.org.uk



Mike Hopkins

I'm currently an assistant teacher in a specialist teaching facility key stage 2 class in South Wales.

I'm a firm believer that all children and students should be able to access education, which is why I hope the New Curriculum for Wales will offer a tailored education to include those who have a range of learning styles.

An area I feel has been overshadowed has been the supply teacher and support staff sectors, with regards to pay, conditions, training and proper recognition as education professionals.

Having taken on a number of roles, from supply, to support staff, to teaching, this 15 years' experience has allowed me to see where education can evolve and what support is still needed within the system. I'm an out-of-the-box thinker and open to ideas.

I have recently been campaigning for supply teachers to be given at least the minimum pay on the teacher pay scale, and I also campaign for support staff to have better access to training and pay, and to be deployed correctly within schools.

mikehopkins@voiceactivists.org.uk

Free training through Welsh Union Learning Fund

WEC and Lisa Francis from Community's Cardiff office have been working together to offer relevant training for school support staff. We've identified training on suicide prevention and therapies as possible options. If you have any other ideas for training, please contact me, Mike or Lyn.

Qualifications Wales consultation results

The Qualifications Wales consultation, *Qualified for the future*, on how the New Curriculum and traditional qualifications will work together, is now being reviewed and the results will be published shortly.

Further information:

- > www.qualificationswales.org/media/6997/qualified-for-the-future-the-right-choice-for-wales-consultation.pdf
- > **Qualified for the future webinar:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y78x8Ut4GN8>

Curriculum for Wales update

Recognising the challenges faced by secondary schools, including managing the new assessment and qualifications system during the pandemic, Education Minister Jeremy Miles has announced a package of support measures, including the option for secondaries to continue with their existing plans to start the New Curriculum in 2022 with Year 7, or start in 2023 with Years 7 and 8 together:

- > www.gov.wales/more-support-press-curriculum-reform
- > www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6FEJZRnqhs

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND



NEW OECD REPORT AND NEW EDUCATION SECRETARY

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

Now we're in the Summer of 2021, we find ourselves with a new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, as John Swinney has been moved to a new Cabinet position to lead the COVID recovery programme. In his place, we have Shirley-Anne Somerville (www.voicetheunion.org.uk/blog/voice-community-scotland-welcomes-new-education-secretary).

She had hardly got her feet under the table before being faced with a report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which backed Scotland's school curriculum in its independent review.

Ms Somerville announced that all 12 of the review's recommendations would be accepted in full, including recommendations on curriculum, assessment and qualifications, which will see the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) replaced and Education Scotland substantially reformed.

The Scottish Government will actively consider what changes are required to our qualifications and assessment system. This work will be heavily informed by the next OECD report, expected in the autumn, and by consultation with young people, parents, teachers and the wider education system.

Education Scotland will no longer undertake inspections, with this work becoming a separate, independent role. The Scottish Government will engage widely on the options for the future of inspection.

The OECD also suggests that the curriculum work currently undertaken by Education Scotland might best sit with any new curriculum and assessment body which will replace the SQA.



Ms Somerville said:

'The last few years have accelerated a debate about the future of Curriculum for Excellence and senior phase education in particular.

'The OECD report is crystal clear – Curriculum for Excellence is the right approach for Scotland. In fact, despite all the criticism here at home, the OECD tells us it is viewed internationally as an inspiring example of curriculum practice.

'However, 10 years on from CfE being introduced, it is right and proper that we review how it is being implemented.

'We accept in full all 12 recommendations from the OECD.

'We will replace the SQA. We will talk to young people, parents and teachers to build a system that works in line with CfE – exactly as the OECD recommends.

'Responsibility for inspection will no longer sit with Education Scotland, and we will look at what further reform of the agency's functions is required.

'Everyone across the education system, including at the SQA and Education Scotland, has worked tirelessly this year under very challenging circumstances. They are owed a debt of gratitude.

'What comes next is a period of change. But it is change in order to improve, to achieve more and to deliver for Scotland's pupils. Our commitment is to do exactly that and we will work with everyone and anyone willing to help to make that a reality.'

We have seen Cabinet Secretaries come and go, and Voice Community will, as always, engage constructively with the latest incumbent.

We met with her for a short introductory session in early July and will meet properly later in the year. We wish her well in her new role and are pleased to see her accept all of the OECD report's recommendations. We look forward to working with Ms Somerville and her officials to give effect to those recommendations.

Further details:
www.voicetheunion.org.uk/scotland-oecd

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND

New Mental Health resource

Voice Community has been involved in the development of a new online learning resource, **Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Professional Learning Resource For All School Staff** (www.cypmh.co.uk).

The Mental Health Foundation Scotland, Digital Bricks Learning and Children's Health Scotland created the open access resource for the Scottish Government.

Designed for school staff in Scotland, it takes a whole school approach, centred around prevention and early intervention, to promote positive mental health and wellbeing for everyone in the school community.

It aims to provide staff with knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing in schools, and a range of opportunities to learn about experiences and advice from practitioners and young people.

The four main sections are split into bitesize topics. The core content should take six to seven hours to complete, and there are suggestions for further learning. Learners can move through the topics at their own pace:

- > An Overview of Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- > Factors Influencing Mental Health and Wellbeing;
- > Applying Prevention Based Approaches to Mental Health and Wellbeing in Schools; and
- > School Staff Wellbeing.

After living and working through the pandemic, members may well find this useful.



PER-PUPIL ASN FUNDING FALL

Funding for children with additional support needs (ASN) has fallen by more than £1,000 per pupil since 2012, according to Scottish Government figures published in response to a written question to Education Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville.

While funding rose by £200 million, the number of pupils identified as having ASN increased by 97,886.

The average spend per pupil on extra support for ASN pupils in primary and secondary schools and special education facilities across 32 local authorities dropped by 24.6%, from £4,276 in 2012 to £3,224 in 2020.

Spending in cash terms per pupil ranged from £1,737 in Edinburgh to £5,849 in Shetland.

Last year there were 215,897 ASN pupils – 30.9% of children at Scotland's schools – up from 118,011 at the start of the 2012 school year.

Full-time equivalent ASN teachers at publicly funded schools fell by 553, from 3,389 to a record low of 2,836.

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'All teachers provide support to pupils with additional support needs – not just "support for learning" staff – and teacher numbers are at their highest since 2008.'

'Councils are responsible for identifying and meeting [their pupils'] additional support needs.... We provide councils with an additional £15 million each year to further enhance capacity to help meet the individual needs of children and young people.'

'This year, 1,354 extra pupil support assistants were recruited.'

'Statistics for 2018-19 showed that local authorities spent £5.6 billion on education... £661 million was on additional support for learning – increasing from £633 million in 2017-18 – a 2.2% increase in real terms (4.3% in cash terms).'

Voice Community's Senior Professional Officer (Scotland) Dougie Atkinson commented: 'Providing young people with the additional support they need to be all they can be relies on the skill and dedication of an army of additional needs support staff.'

'These staff, many of whom are our members, are amongst the lowest paid in education. Yet the job they do is supporting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in Scottish schools.'

'We know there aren't enough of them to make a real mark on the attainment gap – a gap which is only set to increase in the aftermath of the pandemic.'

'We will continue to work with local government employers and Scottish Government to tackle the challenges that the huge increase in demand will require.'

VOICE COMMUNITY SCOTLAND

UNIONS INTO SCHOOLS

By Terry Anderson, Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) Community Development Officer



All across Scotland, trained union reps are working with classes and teachers to ensure that young people have an improved knowledge of both their rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

Their work, along with the input of teachers and pupils, has ensured that we have a resource which can be used both by teachers and by trade union school visitors, or by both together, to provide flexible teaching suitable for a range of ages and abilities as part of aspects of the curriculum dealing with enterprise, careers and citizenship.

The emphasis of this resource is on participative learning, involving classes in discussion, negotiation and the forming of opinions. We believe that by providing an enhanced understanding of the workplace we can play a part in equipping young people to be successful, not just in their working lives, but in wider society.

UIS

STUC's Unions into Schools (UIS) was originally launched as part of the Enterprise in Education, Determined to Succeed Agenda in 2005/6. The programme of school visits is co-ordinated and managed by the STUC with support from Scottish Union Learning (SUL).



Unions into Schools is supported by a flexible reps learning/training programme delivered by the STUC, with varied options available depending on reps' experience and confidence. With the assistance of our trained union reps' Unions into Schools has delivered over 1,700 classroom sessions to school students throughout Scotland.

These reps and STUC officials have also delivered awareness sessions to teaching staff on how best to utilise the STUC **Better Way to Work in Scotland** Pack, which has relevance in the Modern Studies, Personal and Social Education (PSE), Religious, Moral and Citizenship Education (RMCE) and Business Studies curricula. (The STUC **Better Way to Work** schools pack is currently being updated for August 2021 delivery for school sessions – when physical school sessions are planned to re-start.)

The coronavirus crisis has forced UIS to adapt to delivering sessions online and develop an entirely digital session plan, as physical visits to schools are prohibited whilst schools settle back to some form of normality.

This is an opportunity for reps who are usually bound geographically to have a chance to deliver sessions, and for schools to have more flexibility with dates as there are no travel commitments for reps.

Planning time with schools and reps has increased, but reps/affiliate unions have continued to participate in STUC Unions into Schools and reps are adapting skills with STUC mentoring to enable continued support for Scottish school pupils. We are hopeful that physical school class sessions may resume after August 2021.

Further information

STUC Unions into Schools Video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1leeWWgrYY

A Better Way to Work in Scotland:

www.stuc.org.uk/files/PackDraft.pdf

www.stuc.org.uk/fair-work-organising/unions-into-schools

Welcome EY reassurance

In February, Community General Secretary Roy Rickhuss wrote to the Minister for Children and Young People (then Maree Todd) raising concerns about COVID-19 testing in early years settings.

Senior Professional Officer Dougie Atkinson welcomed Scottish Government's reply in May, and the introduction of testing in early years settings, as 'welcome reassurance to staff': www.voicetheunion.org.uk/letter-minister-cyp.

Teachers' Pay Claim 2021: update

For the latest update on the pay claim from the Teachers' Side of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), which includes Voice Community Scotland, see: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/snct-pay2021

VOICE COMMUNITY NORTHERN IRELAND



STORMONT SURVIVES AND PROBLEMS BECKON

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

To begin with the good news. After a further period of political instability, caused by the DUP forcing the resignation of Arlene Foster, it now seems that Stormont may survive after all.

For a while, it looked like we might have been facing an early election; not least as both the DUP and Sinn Féin were at odds over the timing of legislation to support the Irish (and Ulster Scots) language. It now looks like Westminster will intervene to do the necessary, allowing both parties to begin anew the ritual on governmental nominations.

Michelle McIlveen is the new DUP Education Minister. Her in-tray has continued to grow whilst the political comings and goings occurred.

Two issues demand her immediate attention. The first is the consequence of the transfer test difficulties. For the first time in decades, grammar schools did not use the tests to decide which pupils to admit. The tests run by Association for Quality Education (AQE) and Post-Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC) were cancelled as a consequence of coronavirus disruption. At the time of writing in June, 85% of pupils had secured places, but many decisions were questioned by parents, while 15% were still waiting to hear. No wonder that some feel the school transfer process 'totally fails' pupils.

Challenge number two is the ongoing consequences of the virus. To be fair, twice-weekly COVID-19 testing has now been extended to all post-primary schools and to cover years 8 to 11. The intention is to break the 'chains of transmission', but with the new 'Delta' variant now also in Northern Ireland, it remains to be seen how successful this will be. We are certainly not out of the woods yet.

Education recovery

Both these challenges show the need for an informed and funded approach to education recovery. Our union has rightly chastised the Westminster Government for not taking seriously its responsibilities in this regard; noting with concern not just the failure to fund recovery in England over the longer term, but also by pointing out how early years seem to be never more than an after-thought.

Short-termism, and narrow political calculations, continue to make the job of education professionals harder, as we all seek to do more and more with less and less. One thing is for certain – Peter Weir's departure has not reduced the challenges before us. Michelle McIlveen needs to advocate a properly funded, genuinely inclusive education sector for Northern Ireland. If she does so, she will find Voice Community to be a willing and constructive partner.

NIEC

It's also good to end on a positive note. The Northern Ireland Executive Committee (NIEC) continues to grow in influence and in strength.

We were delighted that our Vice Chair, Dr Noel Purdy, has been leading the debate here on home schooling. Noel is the Director of the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement at Stranmillis University College. I warmly commend his work in this area, not least as it highlights the impact of both a digital and class divide.

He identified four improvements which should be made:

- > practical guidance for parents;
- > bespoke CPD for teachers;
- > free iPads for pupils (as per New York); and
- > research to inform improved practice going forward.

(See also the Voice Conference report on page 7.)

Well done Noel! A good example of Voice Community members making a real difference. Politicians note!



Latest COVID-19 updates:

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



Young children aged 4-9 years old from all backgrounds can learn to embrace Afro hair and change negative views. Schools receive an engaging assembly format, which they can host themselves and adapt to their own learners.

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New Turning Heads & Teachers podcast gets the Education sector talking like never before! Three Head teachers, share the impact of changing Afro hair rules at their schools. Podcast is available now on all platforms.