

Impact of Covid-19 on Equalities and Human Rights
1 January 2021

**NASUWT evidence to the Scottish Parliament Equalities and
Human Rights Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its inquiry in to the impact of COVID-19 on Equalities and Human Rights. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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Introduction

1. The Union welcomes the Equalities and Human Rights Committee's inquiry in to the impact of Covid-19 on equalities and human rights.
2. The NASUWT is fully committed to tackling inequality, prejudice, discrimination and intolerance not only within education, but also within the wider society. The Union has a long and proud history of challenging inequalities and championing equality and social justice throughout all of its policies and practices.
3. The NASUWT hosts an annual programme of consultation conferences for teachers who face disadvantage, unfair treatment and discrimination in the workplace. These Conferences are predominantly made up of people with protected characteristics and include women, black and minority ethnic (BME), disabled, LGBTI and young teachers aged 30 and under.
4. This submission reflects the experiences of these representative groups in the workplace as well as case work conducted by the NASUWT on behalf of members since the outbreak of the coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Specific Impact of Covid-19 on people with protected characteristics

5. Coronavirus, and the emergency restrictions introduced to tackle it, have affected specific sections of society differently and disproportionately. There is growing awareness that older people, those with disabilities, black and minority ethnic people as well as those from lower-socio economic groups are most vulnerable to the transmission of the virus and have also been impacted by the scope and adequacy of the measures implemented to tackle the Coronavirus.

6. The NASUWT believes that any equalities impact assessment of the coronavirus must be cognisant of the cumulative intersectional effect of disadvantage experienced by people with protected characteristics. Therefore all issues should also be considered through gendered lens, particularly as women make up the majority of those working in schools and colleges.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) people

7. At the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic, the NASUWT received reports from teachers of abuse, prejudice and xenophobia targeted at predominantly Chinese and other East Asian teachers and pupils, and those perceived to be from those communities, in schools. The NASUWT wrote to all UK ministers urging them to communicate with schools their legal obligations to tackle racial discrimination and all forms of hate crimes.
8. The NASUWT has extensive data from research and casework involving teachers which indicates that:
 - few school and college employers considered race equality impacts as part of their plans and arrangements for the reopening of schools in the Autumn of 2020;
 - BME teachers faced significant pressures to return to the workplace in the absence of racial equality impact assessments;
 - risk assessments in schools have not been equality impact assessed and few employers have published their risk assessments;
 - Government guidance for schools and colleges includes no specific advice on how to mitigate adverse racial equality impacts from COVID-19 in the reopening of schools and colleges;
 - BME teachers are around 50% more likely to say they do not feel safe about plans for the reopening of schools compared to their white peers;
 - BME teachers are significantly more likely to report being threatened by their employer with disciplinary proceedings or job loss when expressing concerns about returning to the workplace, when compared with their white peers;

- BME teachers report feeling less supported by their employer overall and they are also more likely to report being denied access to personal protective equipment (PPE) when compared with their white peers;
 - BME teachers report experiencing systemic racism, with nearly two thirds (66%) reporting that in the last year levels of racism in the workplace had increased or remained the same.
9. The NASUWT has consistently reported that unjust treatment, harassment and victimisation is a daily reality for BME teachers in schools and colleges. Seventy per cent of BME teachers believe that BME people living in the UK are rarely or never treated fairly.
10. BME teachers are more likely than their white peers to be found at the lower end of the pay structure. They are more likely to be engaged in short-term supply work and employed on temporary contracts. The 2019 NASUWT Big Question Survey revealed that 79% of BME teachers do not believe that they are paid at a pay level commensurate with their skills and experiences.
11. The experiences of teachers today reflect deeper concerns about the experiences and treatment of BME workers in general. These include factors such as institutional racism and a public policy framework which is at best weak in terms of addressing racial prejudice and discrimination, if not hostile towards those from minority backgrounds. Whilst there is a duty on employers to promote community cohesion, there is no effective mechanism in place to hold schools to account in terms of their work and contribution to racial equality.

Women

12. As reported by the Women's Budget Group for a number of factors, women are the majority of workers with highest exposure to Covid-19. Of the 3,200,000 workers in 'high risk' roles, 77% are women. Whilst men are

at a higher risk of Covid-19 fatalities, women are the majority providing paid and unpaid care and health work.

13. The National Domestic Abuse Hotline reported an increase of 25% in calls during the coronavirus lockdown. Domestic violence and abuse is predominately affected by women. Self-isolation confines many women and children in homes with their abusers threatening their emotional and physical health and putting them in danger of further abuse. Access to specialist support services for women has become further limited as a result of the social distancing rules and rapidly reduced funding. The NASUWT supports the call of the UK Women's Budget Group for an increase in funding for women's organisations such as refuges to respond to this increasing demand for safety from violence and abuse.
14. Women make up 70% of the teaching profession and this percentage is reflected within the NASUWT membership. The NASUWT has embarked on a comprehensive campaign focusing on tackling gender inequalities in the workplace and beyond. This has included a widespread campaign on tackling sexual harassment. A survey conducted by the Union in 2018 showed that a fifth of respondents had been sexually harassed during their time as a school teacher and/or school leader. Of those, more than a third had been harassed by a colleague, almost a third by a manager, 8% by a parent and 42% said they had been sexually harassed by a pupil.
15. Regrettably, the last few months have seen a resurgence of sex discrimination in the workplace, including appalling treatment of pregnant teachers who have faced escalated workplace discrimination during the pandemic
16. The impact of emergency measures and restrictions has also seen women teachers facing a disproportionate burden of unpaid care during the crisis. The majority of teachers are women who have kept children's education going throughout this crisis, often trying to juggle the demands of remote education with the demands of looking after their own children and

families. And, as social care services have been brought to the brink or closed, it is often women who have been left to provide unpaid care for those who are required to shield at home

17. The impact of coronavirus has shone a light on the multiple areas of institutional sexism and the systemic discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women in the workplace.

Disability and severe health conditions

18. The impact of the coronavirus on people with underlying health conditions and existing disabilities is stark and sadly resulted in many deaths. Older people and younger disabled people with serious health conditions, including respiratory conditions and diabetes are the most vulnerable to severe health impacts if they contract Covid-19.

19. The Union has sought to work with the Scottish Government to provide the necessary support to schools for ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of all its staff and pupils. However, the Union has expressed concern at the practices of some employers who have not ensured that their staff are adequately protected from the risks of Covid-19 by requiring them to attend work, even if they are deemed vulnerable themselves.

20. Supply members with underlying health conditions and disabilities have also been placed in an increasingly precarious employment position, often finding it difficult secure work or when employment is offered insufficient protections are in place to ensure a safe working environment. The NASUWT will continue to challenge those employers who attempt to flout equalities legislation and support its members through casework and other employment support.

21. The NASUWT would be happy to meet with the Committee to discuss all of these issues in more detail.