

**Impact of the Pandemic upon Children and Young  
People**

**24 November 2021**

**NASUWT evidence to the Scottish Parliament Education,  
Children and Young People Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of the impact of the pandemic upon children and young people. 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.

**For further information, parliamentarians may contact:**

Dr Patrick Roach

General Secretary

[nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)

[www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)

1. The effects on society of the COVID-19 pandemic have been deep and wide-reaching, causing long-lasting issues that will undoubtedly be felt for many years.
2. It is undeniable that the impact of the global crisis in disrupting children's education has been significant. Educational progress and achievements have been inhibited, alongside damage to the social and cultural development of children and young people, and their emotional and mental wellbeing.
3. The NASUWT recognises the urgent need for a long-term, sustainable and properly funded education recovery strategy. A comprehensive strategy that brings together the work of schools and other bodies is essential.

## **EDUCATION RECOVERY STRATEGY**

4. Although the educational implications of the pandemic have been significant, it is clear that other important dimensions of children's lives have been affected. For this reason, the NASUWT rejects recovery strategies premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up', in which the aim is little more than to fill in the gaps left by disrupted schooling. The Union also rejects an approach that asserts that the innate resilience of children means that any adverse impacts can largely be addressed simply by returning them to full-time education with limited or no additional support.
5. Recovery should be understood as a long-term process given the pandemic's far-reaching impacts. It should also be viewed as an opportunity to tackle deep-rooted structural issues affecting children and young people in all aspects of their lives that have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Other education systems, including those in the Netherlands and the United States, have developed bold and ambitious plans that reflect this reality. To be sustainable, recovery will also need to be manageable for those in the workforce with day-to-day responsibilities for children and young people. It will need to take into

**NASUWT**  
**The Teachers' Union**

account the pressures they faced before the pandemic, the increased pressures they encountered during it, and the challenges they will need to take on as it recedes.

6. For these reasons, the NASUWT advocates a holistic view of recovery, based on supporting children in all aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, those relating to formal schooling. Schools will have a critical role in securing recovery, but they cannot be expected to contribute in isolation or without working in effective partnerships with other services for children and young people that are resourced adequately and supported appropriately.
7. It is also clear that the impact of the pandemic has not been experienced uniformly. While it is likely to be the case that every child has been adversely affected by the crisis, some will have been impacted on more profoundly than others, particularly those who were more vulnerable or more disadvantaged before the pandemic.
8. There are huge disparities in educational outcomes that young people face from particular backgrounds, and this is an increasing problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Racism, racial injustice, economic disadvantage and other discriminatory factors have impacted on the education outcomes and life chances of young people well before the pandemic as a result of systemic inequalities. This situation has worsened for young black pupils, as well as those from Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) and poorer backgrounds, further compounding the socioeconomic disadvantages they face. Any education recovery plan and supportive budget must address these existing disparities and ensure that, going forwards, policies and practices focus on demonstrable positive outcomes for all pupils and communities.
9. The Scottish Government must recognise and seek to address the demonstrable disparities in experience and outcomes that particular groups of pupils have faced during the pandemic, including those that relate to race, socioeconomic status and geographical location. It must

give practical effect to provisions set out in equalities legislation, particularly the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the specific duties and responsibilities these establish in respect of those with protected characteristics.

10. Recovery will also need to reflect the aims and objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including those set out in Article 12 of the Convention on ensuring that appropriate weight is given to children's views in matters that affect them, especially since the introduction of the Convention into domestic law. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC provide the right to education, and more generally to the rights of children to have their wellbeing promoted in all respects, as the preamble to the Charter confirms. In a context where the UNCRC is incorporated into domestic legislation, these become legal requirements on the Scottish Government.

11. Given the significant scale of the recovery challenge and the need for it to be impactful, it will be essential that it is subjected to an ongoing system-level evaluation, such that it makes a difference for children and supports the workforce.

## **WORKFORCE**

12. Schools and the staff that work in them will be at the heart of any effective recovery strategy. Any strategy will require an effective focus on the workforce to ensure that it is as well placed as possible to support children's learning and development. The aspirations of the Government to achieve excellence and equity across school systems cannot be achieved without adequate funding. There are significant challenges to the recruitment and retention of teachers, including the pay levels of experienced teachers and excessive workload suffered by the profession.

## **PAY**

13. The last three-year teachers' pay award came to an end on 31 March 2021. The NASUWT is continuing to work within the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) to seek to agree a pay award for teachers.
14. Since the 2018-21 teachers' pay award was implemented in Scotland, the Westminster Government and the Welsh Government have taken action to make pay in England and Wales more competitive. The Scottish Government must take this into account when implementing the 2021 teachers' pay award. The comparably poor pay of Scottish teachers, when compared internationally, is demonstrated by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research.
15. NASUWT research indicates that 71% of teachers in Scotland do not believe that teaching is currently competitive with other professions. Moreover, only 31% of teachers feel that they are paid at a level commensurate with their skills and experience as a teacher.
16. The NASUWT believes that a substantial pay uplift for teachers in 2021 is both fair and justified, as detailed in the Union's pay submission.<sup>1</sup>

## **TEACHER SUPPLY**

17. Addressing the education-related aspects of recovery requires an adequate supply of suitably qualified teachers. Before the pandemic, the education systems in some parts of the country faced the most severe teacher recruitment and retention crisis since the Second World War. While there are indications that the impact of the pandemic on the broader graduate labour market has resulted in some improvements in key recruitment and retention indicators, it is recognised that any 'COVID-bounce' in teacher supply is likely to be extremely short-lived.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/static/uploaded/cd6c47a0-77cc-48b6-8961758cbc2f0a46.pdf>

18. Other causes of the teacher supply crisis are well established. They include: the cumulative impacts of a decade of pay restraint and suppression; poor pupil behaviour; limitations on pay and career progression prospects; low regard for staff wellbeing; uncollegiate and unsupportive working environments that do not respect teachers' professionalism; and limited access to professional development and training. Without action at national and school levels in all these respects, there is a clear risk that recruitment and retention into the profession will continue to deteriorate and jeopardise the education system's capacity to meet future challenges.

## **WORKLOAD**

19. Going into the pandemic, survey evidence collected by the NASUWT confirmed that workload was the biggest concern that teachers and school leaders had about the quality of their working lives. During the pandemic, it has become clear that many of the well-established drivers of unnecessary workload remain in place in too many schools. These poor practices have exacerbated the additional pressures created by the pandemic, such as managing arrangements for awarding qualifications and delivering remote learning.

20. As a minimum expectation, action will need to be taken to ensure that these causes of excessive workload, particularly those related to marking, planning and assessment, are tackled: more effective action will need to be taken to implement the reports of the Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy.

21. Approaches that leave individual schools free to continue with workload-intensive practices have not worked, as the fundamental causes of excessive workload remain unaddressed in too many cases. A meaningful recovery strategy will require the Government to intervene in schools where poor practice persists and ensure that the demands they make of schools do not result in excessive and unnecessary burdens for staff.

22. A key component of this element of the strategy will be to ensure that teachers' and school leaders' statutory and contractual entitlements are respected.

23. Given the extraordinary pressures that the school workforce has encountered during the pandemic, recovery strategies will not be effective or sustainable if they create additional burdens for the workforce or negatively impact on their wellbeing. It should be noted that the joint OECD/Education International (EI) report on education recovery identifies supporting staff wellbeing and mental health as core components of any effective education recovery strategy.

## **CLASS SIZES**

24. Studies indicate that limiting class size can have a powerful impact on pupils' educational experiences. The Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project in Tennessee and the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratio (CSPAR) study in the UK supported the view that class size had positive implications for pupils' learning. This impact was particularly evident for younger pupils, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with relatively lower levels of prior attainment. Other studies have pointed to the benefits for the development of pupils' non-cognitive skills (such as persistence and engagement) of smaller class sizes.

25. Evidence suggests that smaller class sizes can not only have positive benefits for all pupils, but have also been associated with particularly positive outcomes for black pupils and those for whom English is an additional language.

26. Literature reviews of teachers' reported experience confirm that reductions in class size can positively impact on teacher workload and stress levels. Evidence from other jurisdictions further suggests that reductions in class size can help address concerns relating to teacher recruitment and retention.

## **ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS**

27. Supporting children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) requires urgent renewed investment in tailored service and education settings to ensure that there is equality of opportunity and choice for all.
28. Investment in, and collaboration between, wider children's services is key. The crisis has highlighted and deepened pre-pandemic concerns about the fragmented nature of children and young people's services in some parts, particularly in the areas of special and additional needs. The Government must support action in this area through significant investment in these services, particularly in-school and out-school services focused on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children and those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The real-terms cuts in spending in the children's services sector experienced over the past decade must be reversed, with additional resources made available to meet recovery-related priorities.

## **POVERTY**

29. Before the pandemic, levels of child poverty in the UK had reached entirely unacceptable levels. Evidence confirms that in 2019/20, 4.3 million children were living in poverty in the UK, with children of lone-parent or large families and black children among those most at risk of living in the most economically disadvantaged households. Across this period, three quarters of children in poverty lived in homes where at least one adult was in employment.
30. Given that economic disadvantage is the characteristic that has the most significant impact on pupils' learning, development, wellbeing and life chances, it is profoundly concerning that the pandemic has compounded the financial pressures on many households. A study of families on low incomes undertaken by the Child Poverty Action Group in November 2020



found that nearly nine in ten families had experienced a significant deterioration in their living standards compared to before the pandemic. The same study found that almost six in ten families were experiencing difficulties covering the cost of three or more essentials, including food, utilities, rent, travel or child-related costs. These concerns are compounded by evidence that the economic prospects for many economically disadvantaged households are likely to deteriorate in the absence of meaningful action to address these risks.

31. An approach based on the continuation of a previous policy in this area will serve only to hinder rather than support the development of a recovery programme that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable children in society. In the short term, the Government must reconsider its decision to reverse the £20 per week uplift to universal credit and tax credits, enhance other child-related benefits and remove current arbitrary benefits caps. The ability of all children to access universal free school meals would also have a positive impact on addressing the food insecurity that many households with children continue to face.

32. Teachers report that many local authorities are unable to deliver their statutory duty to ensure equity irrespective of socioeconomic disadvantage. There is no question that many pupils can, for example, only pursue senior courses of study because their families can afford to pay for textbooks and resources.

33. Poverty and disadvantage can have a profound impact on pupils' educational achievement and, moving forward, the Scottish Government must adopt an intersectional approach to addressing socioeconomic disadvantage. In the UK today, children from black communities continue to be affected disproportionately by material disadvantage. The most recent official data shows that black and minority ethnic children are twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their white peers. The Union has campaigned consistently for more effective action to ensure that no child grows up in circumstances where they are deprived of the economic,

social and cultural resources they need to thrive and make the most of their potential. The right to grow up free from poverty and socioeconomic insecurity is one of the most important children's rights, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on black children must not be ignored.

## **PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY**

34. The Committee will be aware of the well-established evidence that black and minority ethnic children, young people and adults are disproportionately more likely to be affected by COVID-19 infections and deaths. It is, therefore, critical that the Government's recovery strategy ensures that every school acknowledges the specific risks that black staff, pupils and communities have faced. The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty places significant legal responsibilities on all public bodies, including the Government, when carrying out their functions. Legislation requires such bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

35. While the statutory Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) was introduced to ensure that schools and colleges play their part in advancing racial equality and tackling discrimination faced by staff and learners, independent NASUWT research shows that the majority of schools are unaware of their duties and obligations under the PSED. Without rigorous inspection and enforcement, the PSED will remain largely a tick-box exercise among many public sector employers, who only pay lip service to the legislation and whose commitment to equalities remains tokenistic at best.

36. A significant move to support black workers and pupils would be to ensure mandatory ongoing equalities training for all schools and in all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) institutions.

37. The Scottish Government must also show its commitment to equality and diversity through the education budget and by giving teachers and prospective teachers with protected characteristics the priority they deserve. It is vital that the teaching profession is inclusive and representative at all levels. The profile of the workforce in our schools sends an important message to children and young people about the kind of society we live in and who we value most. A key challenge for public education is to address the serious under-representation of black teachers at all levels. Our public education system should demonstrate that it values the contribution of all teachers, not simply regardless of age, gender, ethnic background, disability, religion and sexual orientation, but also by valuing the contribution that such professional diversity can make to children's learning and lives.

38. The Scottish Government publication, *Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision-making*, states:

*'We must take these lessons into how we recover from this crisis. The austerity-driven response to the 2008 financial crash did not work and worsened the inequality that was part of its cause; we must not repeat those mistakes. Inequality is also worsening the outcomes for those people impacted by the coronavirus. Our younger people deserve a fairer and more secure economic future.'*

39. It is critical that the Scottish Government does more than just espouse equality and that it actively seeks to address the societal inequalities, discrimination and prejudice faced by black and minority ethnic communities, building a future founded upon the trade union principles of equality and fairness.

40. A diverse teaching profession is vital to securing high educational standards for all children and young people. The Scottish Government must play its part to support increased employment and skills opportunities and deliver supportive and inclusive workplaces for people from black communities in Scotland.

**NASUWT**  
**The Teachers' Union**

## RECOVERY STRATEGY TO DATE

41. On 5 October 2021, the Scottish Government published *Coronavirus (COVID-19) education recovery: key actions and next steps*. Given the central role of teachers to securing education recovery, the strategy is disappointingly light on tangible actions to improve teachers' pay and working conditions, without which any pledge to recruit additional teachers and support staff will not be realised.
42. The education recovery strategy largely restates existing plans and policies. While there are some potentially helpful additional programmes and ideas, these seem at best to be bolt-ons to a pre-pandemic policy framework.
43. The NASUWT has consistently argued that a recovery strategy with no financial investment associated with it shows limited ambition and without which remains deeply unsatisfactory. Equally, any effective recovery strategy needed to be based on a clear assessment of the full implications of the pandemic and how these should be addressed. Without an effective assessment of the scale of the challenge, there is no way of knowing whether the amount of resource available is likely to be sufficient.
44. Recovery needs to be understood as a long-term process, given the pandemic's far-reaching effects, and the NASUWT considers that the Scottish Government's strategy to date fails to set out a holistic post-pandemic vision which would support children in all aspects of their lives, not just within formal education.

For further information, please contact:

[nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk](mailto:nasuwt@mail.nasuwt.org.uk)

[www.nasuwt.org.uk](http://www.nasuwt.org.uk)

Dr Patrick Roach

**NASUWT**  
**The Teachers' Union**

**General Secretary**

**NASUWT  
The Teachers' Union**