

NASUWT Annual Conference 2022

General Secretary's Address

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President. Conference.

It is with the utmost pride that I stand to address Conference today.

Proud of the tremendous action that you and our members have taken in the most challenging and difficult of times.

Nothing is more important for our members than being part of a strong union that is committed and determined to stand up for teachers and to do whatever it takes to secure decent work, safe working conditions and a better deal for our members.

And, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to you all for the amazing work that you do every day to ensure that our members – the teaching profession – can continue to be there for children and young people.

No one should be in any doubt that it is our trade union action, the work that our lay representatives and staff give tirelessly each and every day, that secures the working conditions that enable teachers to put children first and that let teachers teach.

The progress we make is down to every action you take. Thank you.

We stand together - the voice of the teaching profession

And today we stand united with our fellow trade unionists from around the world – united in our shared determination to speak out against injustice and to stand up for the rights of working people.

We are proud that our colleagues around the world are here standing with us – as we stand with you.

You remind us every day what it means to fight for freedom, for human rights and for the rights of teachers.

And, I know that colleagues here today will also join me in showing our solidarity with our trade union sisters and brothers in Ukraine and

around the world who are working for peace and security and for the rights of children and young people

We stand united in our conviction that education is the most powerful weapon in the fight for peace.

And, we reaffirm our determination to end the unjust treatment of children, teachers and others who have been forcibly displaced as a result of violence and war.

Those fleeing war and persecution around the world should know that in the UK, we stand with them.

So, we call on the Government once again to do better: stop demonising migrants and refugees, respect international human rights, scrap the discriminatory and divisive Nationality and Borders Bill, and follow the lead of other countries in welcoming refugees and those seeking asylum and treat them with dignity.

Conference - our fight for education and for the rights of working people begins right here right now.

It starts with the priorities that you are setting for us this weekend – on workload, pay, the wellbeing of teachers and pupils, and on equalities – and the fight against racism and misogyny.

Together, we will take forward the Campaign Plan from this Conference into workplaces – into our local associations, regions and nationally – to secure a better deal for teachers

We will stand up for equality and fairness at work.

And, we will take on bad employers

Employers who believe they can get away with playing fast and loose with our members' terms and conditions of service

Employers who fail to uphold the standards we should expect

Bad bosses who believe it's OK to threaten teachers with the sack in order to drive down their wages and living standards

Independent school employers – and the growing list of shame that in the last few months has included the Girls Day School Trust at Bromley High School, Norwich High School for Girls, Oxford High School and

Newcastle High School for Girls; and other employers including the Loughborough Foundation, the Ipswich School, Packwood Haugh in Shropshire, Prior's Field in Surrey, St Francis School in Wiltshire, Mount Kelly in Devon, Abbots Hill in Hertfordshire, Forest School in London, King Edward VI Hampshire, Pocklington School in East Yorkshire

Schools the length and breadth of the country vying to strip teachers of their pension rights, without the slightest justification for doing so.

Treating teachers with contempt, intimidation and the threat of fire and rehire

So, we, today, applaud our independent school members who have taken a stand, fought back and won

Often, keeping their pension rights and also winning the right to collective bargaining on our members' terms and conditions.

And, I want to be clear with all teachers in independent schools – the NASUWT is on your side.

We have asked the DfE to:

- issue guidance to schools advising against the use of dismissal and re-engagement
- ensure that HR and legal advisors to schools apply the existing framework of guidance from ACAS on good employment practice
- to insist that school and college employers engage meaningfully in consultation with employees and engage in negotiation with trade unions representatives in accordance with ACAS guidance
- remind education employers of their statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act
- publish information on those school and college employers where dismissal and re-engagement has been used.

But, Ministers have refused to do any of this.

It's not good enough for Boris Johnson to say that the use of fire and rehire is unacceptable - whether in independent schools or the shameful actions by bosses at P&O Ferries.

The Prime Minister should do something or get off the pot.

Come forward with the Employment Bill he promised – level up by providing a level playing field for workers, and take action to stop bad bosses who think they can act with impunity.

And, once again we ask the Independent Schools Council to demonstrate its integrity – to work with us to deal with the problem of ‘gun to the head’ employment practices used by their members which are damaging teacher morale and children’s education.

But, if they won’t, and if these schools continue their shoddy treatment of the workforce, then the public seriously needs to question whether these schools should continue to benefit from public contracts or tax subsidies.

The events of the last two years have turbo-charged the pressures on teachers and headteachers.

But, if the latest Schools White Paper and the SEND Green Paper are anything to go by – it’s clear that the Westminster Government

continues to expect teachers and headteachers to deliver more with less.

In Wales, we have the First Minister publicly committing to extending the school day and to radical changes to the school year – but he's been silent on the question of whether he will end the wasteful system of LMS and deliver the additional investment that is urgently needed to lift Wales from the bottom of the UK's league table of education funding per pupil.

Mark Drakeford, if you're listening - hands off our members' holidays; think twice before you ask the profession to do more for nothing, and show us that Labour in Wales can do better.

In Scotland, we've seen months and months of dither and delay over the teachers' pay award. The outcome, which our members led the way in firmly rejecting, was another slap in the face for teachers.

No justification and no excuses.

We will call time on the negotiating machinery if it fails once again to deliver for our members.

Together if we can, but alone if we must.

And, in Northern Ireland, where we are just days away from elections to the Assembly, the Minister has reneged on her agreement with unions over pay and workload – forcing us to ballot our members for industrial action across all schools in Northern Ireland commencing this summer.

If Michelle McIlveen is relying on the elections on 5 May to get her out of a hole – she should think again.

Because, our members in Northern Ireland, as in the Isle of Man, are now set to deliver a clear vote for industrial action.

Ministers should be clear that we are not going away. We have proven, time and again, that we can deliver action for our members.

United we must stand, colleagues.

Whilst Ministers broke the rules, throughout the pandemic our members worked around the clock

And, I would be more than happy to take one for the team by meeting with Michael Fabricant – any time, any place anywhere

How dare he suggest that teachers spent their time drinking and socialising during lockdown?!

His is meant to be the party of law and order

But his privileged pals were happy to party whilst the rest of us obeyed the law.

Mr Fabricant is the latest Conservative MP willing to act as a lightning rod to detract attention from the Prime Minister's antics.

And, from the comments I've read on social media, I know where many would like to stick that lightning rod!

He should apologise immediately to the profession.

Stop attacking our teachers and our nurses who put their lives on the line whilst those in Number 10 and Number 11 Downing Street put themselves first.

And, if his party can't lead by example, then it's clear they aren't fit to lead the country.

But, colleagues, I say this – of course we should be angry about those who try to denigrate teachers, but we and our members must also use every opportunity to demonstrate that anger and to demand better.

To demand:

- A Government that is on the side of teachers
- A contractual working time limit for teachers that will be enforced
- The right for teachers to switch off and disconnect from work at the end of the day and at weekends
- Trust for teacher professionalism and ending the culture of micromanagement and surveillance
- Ending the licence to bully, discriminate and abuse teachers and scrapping the link between teacher performance and pay
- A real pay rise for every teacher

- Respect, security and dignity at work
- The ending of fire and rehire
- Banning of zero hours contracts
- Decent sick pay rights for all
- An end to racism and all forms of discrimination at work
- More help for families struggling with the cost of living crisis

You know, it's a pity the Education Secretary has chosen not to be with teachers at our Conference today

If you're listening, Nadhim - we heard your video message

But, you need to understand that it's not more training that teachers need – the quality of our teachers isn't the problem

Your Government is the problem.

Under this Government, teachers have seen – not only in the last 2 years – but over the last 12 years, the education system they prize and cherish undermined to its very foundations.

The government's record is one of siding with callous and greedy employers instead of acting in the best interests of children's education.

The recent House of Commons Public Accounts Committee report gives a damning indictment of the Government's record.

It found that after 12 long years, the Government is still continuing to play a lottery with children's education.

Wasting millions in propping up failing academy trusts.

And, still, refusing to require academy trusts to be properly inspected

In 2019/20, the DfE gave away £31 million to 81 academy trusts – writing off millions of pounds of unrecoverable debts arising from incompetent management within these trusts.

These are Trusts that are not fit to do the job.

But, rather than rooting out this incompetence, these Trust leaders have been allowed to help themselves

The problem is getting worse rather than better.

As classroom teachers' salaries have been cut, the number of academy trusts paying at least one individual above £150,000 increased by 71% in just one year.

Now, Ministers say they want a school system based on fewer, stronger Trusts.

But, the Government is still failing to take the action needed to properly regulate these Trusts and ensure they act in the public interest rather than their own self-interest

We have told the Government what they need to do.

Call time on those Trust boards and supply agencies who are on the take and who believe they can get away with it

Name, shame and regulate – including by requiring the salaries and benefits received by all leaders and trustees of Academies to be published to parents and on the public record.

Do what it takes to ensure that every pound - every penny - of public money is used to keep children safe, to ensure we have the teachers we need, and to ensure that no child is left behind.

The Prime Minister says he wants to build back better.

The government talks about levelling up.

But, the reality is they think that they can get away with delivering education recovery on the cheap, without the substantial investment their own Education Recovery Commissioner said was needed.

Despite their promises to protect education spending, in the last decade, education spending has fallen by 10%.

Last month, the Chancellor's spring statement signalled yet more pressure to come on public spending right across the UK

This isn't building back better.

This isn't levelling up.

Conference - we need a better deal that works for all children and young people

We need real terms investment in education and in the teaching profession.

And, we need a better deal for all teachers.

Because, you can't build a great education system without teachers.

But, the reality is that Ministers are presiding over a system where teachers and headteachers are at breaking point.

Ministers know it but they are failing to deal with it.

Already, 1 in 3 student teachers choose not to enter the profession after they have qualified because of the stress of the job.

40% of new teachers leave within 5 years.

The latest data from our own longitudinal 'Big Question' survey found that two-thirds of teachers are seriously considering quitting the profession – citing workload, wellbeing and pay as key reasons.

More and more teachers are bringing forward their plans for retirement.

The Government is fiddling in the wake of an epic recruitment and retention crisis and a crisis in relation to leadership succession – more headteachers leaving and fewer and fewer teachers wanting to take their place.

91% of teachers report that their job has adversely impacted their mental health in the last 12 months

3% - 20,000 teachers - have self-harmed and are experiencing a severe mental health crisis because of the job.

In addition, we have the problem of Long Covid - a "ticking time-bomb" in our schools.

And, regardless of what the Prime Minister tries to claim, the pandemic is still with us – continuing to disrupt children's education because of the Government's business as usual approach

One in 10 teachers are off work due to Covid

Our latest survey found half of teachers – often triple-jabbed - reporting they had caught Covid last term

And, we're hearing of many teachers getting Covid not just once, but multiple times as they face workplaces with few if any Covid safety measures in place and no access to free tests.

And, according to the Office for National Statistics, Long Covid has increased fastest among teachers and education staff compared with other professions.

60% of teachers say they are bullied to return to work when they are ill.

Older teachers, disabled teachers threatened disproportionately with capability and disciplinary procedures

Ministers need to understand that this is not how to treat a profession that we profess to value.

The charity, Education Support, found that three-quarters of school staff reported behavioural, physical or psychological symptoms due to work

And, analysis suggests that 11% of these teachers say they have felt suicidal.

The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale developed in 2007 is widely used nationally and internationally to monitor mental wellbeing across the general population.

Across all categories, the teaching profession is characterised as suffering probable clinical depression.

And, the situation is more marked for classroom teachers, for disabled teachers and for teachers working in schools with higher rates of socio-economic deprivation

One headteacher told us of:

“Panic attacks and stress” she had experienced, caused by “bullying from governors and from a toxic inspection.”

Another classroom teacher reported that she had been:

“diagnosed with PTSD.”

Another said:

“I have had to restart private counselling at great expense.”

And, the added stress and pressures on teachers are also impacting on children.

One teacher told us:

“We have had numerous children who have attempted suicide who are still waiting more than a year for input from CAMHS; they are sent back to school for schools to support and we just don't have the personnel, training, capacity to do so.”

These stories are increasingly typical, and parents around the country should be as concerned as we are that these are the realities of schooling for their children.

Ministers need to wake up to these facts.

The Prime Minister promised that workplaces would be Covid-safe. This must remain a priority.

Restoring the morale and health of the profession must be the Government's number one priority if they want the best for children and young people.

Delivering world-class education for every child requires that our schools and colleges are world-class workplaces, too.

And, we will always work with good employers including through our Valued Workers Scheme.

But, let me also be clear: we will always take appropriate action against any employer – industrially or legally if necessary - when our members suffer harm, injury, bullying or discrimination at work.

And, we expect and demand that regulatory bodies like the HSE and EHRC also exercise in full their duty of care to teachers and headteachers.

It was the NASUWT and the wider trade union movement that fought for these bodies to exist.

But, they have been missing in action – allowing unsafe employment practices and workplace discrimination to go unchecked.

All we say is: step up and do your job.

But, it's not just excessive workload that is impacting on teacher wellbeing.

Across the board, teachers' pay has been slashed by at least 19% since 2010.

Supply teachers have been pushed to the brink of extinction after decades of assault on their pay and the failure of governments

properly to regulate the profiteering agencies that now dominate the education landscape.

Many teachers are relying on credit cards, overdrafts and even food banks.

12% have taken a second job to make ends meet.

Two out of every three teachers report that they are worried about their financial situation and 22% are very worried.

And the cost of living crisis is still set to get even worse.

But, the response from the Government in Westminster has been pitiful.

Once again, they intend to break a general election promise – this time, their promise to raise teachers' starting salaries to £30,000 from this September.

And, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, teachers are also being taken for granted - losing out with below inflation or zero awards.

So, it is right that from this Conference, we put Ministers on notice - as we demand a programme of pay restoration for all teachers – starting with our calls for a minimum 12% pay award from this September.

Nothing less will do.

If they can find the money to write off £8.7bn of debt from dodgy PPE procurement during the pandemic

If they can find the money to bail out failing academies to the tune of millions with no hope of ever seeing that money returned

If they can give lucrative contracts to companies like Randstad, and leave them to walk away without any penalty when they fail to deliver

Then, they can find more money for teachers and for education

Conference – you have delivered a clear message that Ministers must be held responsible for any disruption caused by their failure to deliver an immediate programme of restorative pay awards for teachers.

And, we won't cease until we secure a better deal for all of our members. And, if that means supporting our members with industrial action then so it will be.

Conference - ours is not the struggle of one day, one week, or one year.

Ours is the struggle for fairness, decency and a better deal for teachers.

And, change will come when, together, we Organise to Win; when we:

- Collectivise;
- Speak out against unfairness and injustice at work.
- Take action to protect jobs, to defend our members' rights and to safeguard your wellbeing at work.
- Challenge discrimination and abuse by bad employers
- Stand to demand a decent standard of living, and the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work.

So, more than ever, now is the time to join us, join in, and win a better deal for teachers.

This is what it means to be NASUWT

Always – putting teachers first

Proud to be the teachers' union.

Stay safe. Stay active. And, thank you.