

ORGANISE TO WIN A NATIONAL CONTRACT FOR EDUCATION

School staff will start 2020 fearing yet more attacks on education from a Johnson Government.

The Tories have already shown us that they can't be trusted – certainly not on school funding, nor on teacher workload.

Despite all their promises, staff cuts continue, leaving even more student needs unmet and further increasing the workload of remaining staff.

It's a scandal that 10% of teachers are leaving the profession every year – but it also exposes the failure of education unions to take advantage of the shortage of experienced staff to organise to win real gains for members.

It's good that a debate is opening up in the NEU about what needs to change. Yes, unions need to refocus on building strength in the workplace, organising and recruiting reps and winning victories.

Battles will have to be fought against further academisation and to oppose more job cuts. Staff should call on schools to refuse to cut posts but instead join unions in demanding that politicians deliver on their funding promises.

Well organised school groups and branches can also negotiate for policies that reduce workload and disapply performance pay.

However, real gains that cover all our members require national action.

Lessons can be learned from the two national indicative ballots held by the NEU over the last year – and how other unions have reached ballot thresholds successfully.

Absolutely the wrong conclusion to draw would be that a national ballot can't be won. The depth of the crisis in schools - for both staff and the students we teach - is too great for unions to just pursue local battles alone.

Yes, the right preparation is required but, as US teachers have shown, a clear and unifying set of demands is also vital. A National Contract for Education provides that.

So, let's build in schools but make clear from the start that we are building for national action to win contractual conditions binding on all employers that guarantee better pay and conditions for staff – and better learning conditions for school students.

Six NEU Districts have put forward a motion for 2020 NEU Conference calling on the Executive to commence negotiations with the Government around the following demands:

PAY SCHOOL STAFF PROPERLY

- i. A pay rise of 10% for all school staff;
- ii. Guaranteed pay progression. End performance-related pay;
- iii. Trade-union negotiated pay scales for all points plus additional London and Fringe allowances that properly meet the additional cost of living.

AN END TO EXCESSIVE TEACHER WORKLOAD

- iv. A minimum 20% planning, preparation and assessment time for all within the timetabled week;
- v. A maximum working week, with a legal limit to working hours over 195 days of directed time;
- vi. Trade-union negotiated policies that ensure teachers can complete their planning, preparation and assessment and other responsibilities within this limit.

SUFFICIENT STAFFING TO MEET NEEDS

- vii. A trade-union negotiated class size and staffing policy.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- viii. Trade union negotiating structures between elected reps and management to be set up with every school and employer.

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HOW DO WE LIMIT EXCESSIVE WORKLOAD?

Trade union attempts to appeal to successive Tory Education Ministers to 'see sense' and act on workload have failed to deliver meaningful change for most members. A campaign for a National Contract for Education can change that.

Government promises have inevitably proved to be empty because the Tories are wedded to austerity. That means imposing funding cuts and using Ofsted, 'support plans', performance pay and all the rest of the accountability regime to bully remaining staff to do more work for less pay.

It's been made worse by academisation and the fragmentation that allows different schools and employers to apply different policies on pay and also on key workload drivers like marking.

Union negotiators have also failed to seriously challenge a Pay and Conditions Document that gives employers such free rein, particularly the open-ended requirement on teachers to "work such reasonable additional hours as may be necessary to enable the effective discharge of the teacher's professional duties".

We need a new Contract for Education that replaces that clause with a clear limit on weekly working hours. In other words, not just the 32½ hours of 'directed' duties a week but

limiting all the work expected on top of that in preparing and assessing – which for many teachers is another 30 hours!

For now, many teachers feel they have no choice but to work long hours in order to be ready for their classes and to meet management demands. So a contractual limit is not sufficient alone. A national contract must also include a minimum 20% PPA time for all and trade union negotiation structures that ensure that all policies are adjusted so that the work can be done in the time available. Then, teachers could finally get back their evenings and weekends!

There is scope to try and win elements of an improved Contract through campaigns aimed at individual employers too. Some Headteachers and employers, in order to act on teacher retention, have already introduced improvements such as the 'Workload Charters' in Nottingham and Coventry. But national change is needed to solve a national crisis.

The NEU should replicate some of the work carried out by US unions in building awareness and pressure from below in advance of annual contract negotiations. In our case, the call for a New Contract should be placed on the Review Body, Government and all employers.

NEU members should also make

clear that they expect their Executive members to give such a lead – or to stand aside for those who will.

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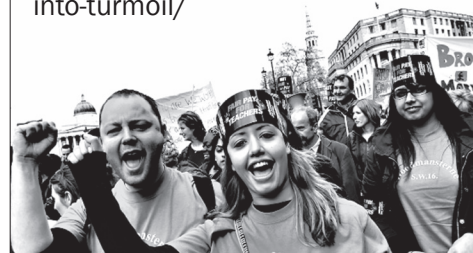
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