

## It's Time to Get Involved with Your Union

As school support staff, we are on the frontline in the struggle against Covid-19. From teaching assistants, caretakers and administrators to cleaners, technicians and caterers, we are putting ourselves at risk to keep our children safe.

Over the coming weeks, we will continue to go above and beyond to protect, support and educate our children—but we expect the same support and protection from the government and our employers.

Sadly, the support we have received from the government has been unclear, confused and completely inadequate. As school support staff, we are being put at risk to satisfy the govern-

ment's aim to get pupils back to school and parents back to work.

We support getting our children back to school, but this should be done safely and sensibly.

In the absence of proper government support, we need to build our collective voice at work through our trade union UNISON to guarantee our health and safety, protect our normal pay when we are absent due to COVID-19 and to ensure that our children are safe. We all play a vital role in school life—but we need all members to get active to strengthen our collective voice at work.

**Pam Howard and Cath Baggaley, UNISON  
North West Regional School Convenors**

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### HERE'S HOW YOU CAN GET MORE INVOLVED...

- **Ask a colleague to join UNISON**— The more members we have, the stronger our voice is. Ask your colleagues if they are members of UNISON, particularly any new starters, and ask them to join. They can even join [online](#).
- **Become a workplace contact**— You can help pass information from the union to your colleagues and visa-versa. Let us know about workplace issues, so we can support you and your colleagues to resolve your issues at work.
- **Become a trained Health and Safety Rep**— The ongoing pandemic has shown how important the role of a Health and Safety rep is and working with UNISON and the employer to ensure a safe working environment. As a H&S Rep, you will help review and develop risk assessments to ensure the safety of your colleagues and children.
- **Nominate a Steward**— Workplace stewards are the backbone of the union. They are the main link between the union and the workplace and undertake training to be able to support, represent and stand up for better working conditions in your workplace—Who do people listen to in your workplace? They would make an excellent steward.

**Want to find out more about getting involved?** If you or any of your colleagues are interested in getting more involved and would like to know more about the role and the training involved, please get in touch with Anne Madden at [a.madden@unison.co.uk](mailto:a.madden@unison.co.uk). All necessary training is provided and you will receive time off from work to attend. You are the union and we need your support to strengthen our voice at work.

## Support staff forced to choose between their own health and hardship

UNISON has heard disturbing reports from members employed within contracted cleaning and catering providers that staff are only receiving statutory sick pay if they are absent or self-isolating due to COVID-19.

As a result, many staff have indicated that they may have to attend work when they should not, because they cannot afford to live off £96 per week. This poses a serious health risk to staff and to children.

Support staff should not have to choose between their own health or hardship and no staff should be penalised for following government advice. Normal wages should be maintained for all COVID-19 absence to help prevent the risk of infection.

**If you been absent from work due to COVID-19, please get in touch with your local branch for further advice. If you don't have contact details for your local branch, you can find them here:**

[www.unisonnw.org/branches](http://www.unisonnw.org/branches)



## Does your school have a proper risk assessment?

All employers must risk assess workplaces to ensure they have minimised the risk of spreading COVID-19.

All employees are entitled to see risk assessments and UNISON advise that you should request these from your manager.

Employees should also be consulted on risk assessments, which means if there is something in the risk assessment which you believe is incorrect, unlawful or is not being implemented, you should raise this with your employer.

Risk assessments should also cover PPE and appropriate training. Employers have a legal obligation to ensure they are minimising risks to staff in the workplace under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

**Have you seen your school's risk assessment? If not, request a copy and contact your local UNISON branch if you feel your school isn't doing enough to protect your health and safety.**

## How has your return to work been?

Keep your eyes on your email. In the next few days, UNISON will be emailing out an important survey to all our members in schools.

We want to hear from you about your return to work and what the difficulties and challenges have been, so please do complete the survey to have your say.



## UNISON Advice and Guidance for School Support Staff

From bubbles and social distancing to cleaning and PPE. From vulnerable and high risk groups to risk assessments and local outbreaks. Whatever information you may need, make sure you keep up-to-date with UNISON's comprehensive COVID guidance for school support staff [here](#).

## More cleaners are needed to make schools safe

8,000 employees working in primary, nursery and special schools in England responded to a recent UNISON survey and the findings are concerning given schools have re-opened this month.

Instead of specialist 'deep-clean' teams, regular cleaning staff have been expected to carry out this potentially hazardous work, according to nearly two thirds of school workers. A fifth who took part in the survey said cleaners at their school had no access to the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Government guidance states that more rigorous and regular cleaning of classrooms, washrooms and items touched regularly, such as chairs, should be undertaken to limit the infection risk from coronavirus.

UNISON says there is an urgent need for cleaners to be specially trained in how to disinfect buildings properly and handle potentially harmful cleaning materials correctly. Without it, premises might not meet safety standards and staff could be put in danger if asked to use products without knowing the hazards, says the union.



**Keith Bradley Regional Schools Lead** “Many English schools have not hired more cleaners despite the extra demands created by COVID-19. This means other employees such as teaching assistants are having to help clean toilets and sanitise toys, according to the survey. This is time that should be spent helping pupils.

Any staff who are being asked to take on cleaning duties must refuse to do this and report these instances straight to your union.”

**UNISON’s Head of Education Jon Richards** said: “Everyone wants to see children back in the classroom, but this must be done safely. Given the extra cleaning needed, the government must give schools the money to employ cleaners with the necessary training and protective kit to keep the whole school safe.”

**Do you receive regular updates from UNISON?** If not, it could be because we have incorrect

KEEP YOUR INFORMATION

UP TO  
DATE

WE DON'T WANT YOU  
TO MISS OUT!



contact details.

To update your details you can:

- Update your own contact information at [my.unison.org.uk](https://my.unison.org.uk) You will need your membership number to do so. If you don't know your membership number, call UNISONdirect on 0800 0 857 857;
- Contact your UNISON local branch to update your details

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY AGREEMENT REACHED FOR 2020-21



Agreement has been reached between the National Employers and the NJC Trade Union Side on rates of pay applicable from 1 April 2020.

UNISON and GMB both voted to

accept whilst Unite voted to reject. However, in line with the Constitution of the NJC, Unite accepts the collective majority decision of the other unions that the pay award of an increase of 2.75% will now be implemented.

The NJC has also agreed to enter into discussions on examining all options for ensuring the sector—and the NJC pay spine—can meet the challenge of the Government's

target for the National Living Wage in the coming years.

### Annual Leave

The NJC has also agreed that from 1 April 2020, minimum annual leave will increase from 21 to 22 days for employees with less than five years' service.

## Free online learning for UNISON members



### Beginners Makaton Taster, 26th October, 10am—12pm

The Makaton Charity will be running a webinar Makaton taster for UNISON members. The taster will give you a general introduction into what Makaton is and who uses it, with the opportunity to learn some signs and symbols.

To book on this course, please copy and paste the link in to your browser and RSVP to the event:

[https://www.unisonnw.org/makaton\\_taster\\_webinar\\_monday\\_26th\\_october\\_2020\\_10am\\_12pm](https://www.unisonnw.org/makaton_taster_webinar_monday_26th_october_2020_10am_12pm)

### Supporting Transgender Children, 27th October, 4—6pm

Understanding gender identity and gender diversity: what it means to be trans or gender non-conforming  
Challenges faced by LGBT young people

Transition pathways, including healthcare

Legal responsibilities: The Equality Act, hate crime incidents, transphobia, managing single-sex spaces

Improving LGBT+ equality and diversity: policies, guidance, recommended resources

To book on this course, please copy and paste the link in to your browser and RSVP to the event:

[https://www.unisonnw.org/supporting\\_transgender\\_children\\_webinar\\_tuesday\\_27th\\_october\\_2020\\_4\\_6\\_00pm](https://www.unisonnw.org/supporting_transgender_children_webinar_tuesday_27th_october_2020_4_6_00pm)

See the full list of available courses at: [https://www.unisonnw.org/member\\_learning](https://www.unisonnw.org/member_learning)

inclusive  
learning  
project

Ask a colleague  
to join UNISON today



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](https://www.joinunison.org)



Call us on  
0800 171 2193



Ask your UNISON rep  
for an application form