

UNISON EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

SUMMER BULLETIN 2023



THE CHALLENGES

As schools close for the summer period, UNISON regional shop stewards will be putting plans in place for an Autumn fightback.

The shock waves across schools and education support services are continuing as the reality of the 2023 Education budget cuts are rolled out.

A scalpel has been applied across a range of crucial services and the cuts will hurt the vulnerable the most. Removal of holiday hunger funding as well as funding for after schools clubs, sport and recreational activity, special needs provisions, youth services across the board has sent shock waves into every community and working family. At a time when workers in the public and private sector are reaching for pay improvement, the removal of this crucial funding will have a profound and detrimental impact across Northern Ireland.

We have been landed in this disastrous situation because of the absence of an Assembly and devolved government. There is a reality that education services have been underfunded for years. A local Minister could at least begin steps to tackle the issues. A UK appointed Secretary of State has no such direct NI pressures to resist. Far removed from the realities and impact of such cuts, the call on the Education Authority last December from the Northern Ireland Office for 200 million pounds savings was the first sign of what was to follow. The cuts strategy was continued in the recent Secretary of State's budget imposed while our devolved government remains suspended.

OUR FIGHT BACK!

Pay improvements for education workers on the NJC pay agreement are due since April 2023.

Many workers in England and Wales believe the offer of £1,925 pounds on each spinal point should be improved. They are best placed via their local councils to bring pressure to bear on the employers side. These UNISON members are now voting on taking strike action.

Northern Ireland on the employers side (via councils in Northern Ireland) has the smallest vote. The EA is not at that negotiating table. The application of the NJC pay agreement is a follow through arrangement. So UNISON in Northern Ireland will await developments following the England and Wales ballot to see if the employers side will improve the offer.

In the meantime we have been vigorously pursuing pay improvement in how the NJC pay spine is applied to Education workers in Northern Ireland. That is what we mean when we speak of the pay and grading review. The funding for this uplift comes from the Department of Education budget. And here we have another logjam as the Department has been stalling on approving a business case for release of funding to make these pay improvements. Department officials argue affordability is not guaranteed at a time of severe cuts.

However, our UNISON members have told us in a recent survey that you are not prepared to be fobbed off and will vote in an industrial action ballot. We have heard you. Plans are being prepared for a ballot which should reach you towards the end of August. A yes vote for industrial will mean striking in September and October. By that time we may have a return of the Assembly and a Minister to engage with and secure funding.

In the meantime, UNISON Northern Ireland will be stepping out and standing up for Education workers against the cuts.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

During the course of your working career, it may be necessary for you to be asked to attend for an independent medical assessment. This is called an **Occupational Health Referral**. The EA have created a leaflet to provide you with some information about the referral process and what this may mean for you and your employment.

To read the full leaflet go to: <https://shorturl.at/mopOU>

RETAINER PAYMENTS

The EA has made proposals to trade union side which they state will improve payments as the school year ends. These will be discussed with your branch reps to ensure we get feedback from members.

An update will be circulated once this consultation is complete.

JOIN UNISON

Not a member? Join UNISON online now: <https://join.unison.org.uk/> or call the Regional Office on 028 90270190.

UNISON COLLEGE

Did you know? We offer free training courses for ALL UNISON members. To see all our courses for 2023 go to: <https://www.unison-ni.org.uk/education-and-training>

GET INVOLVED

Interested in becoming a workplace rep? Call us on 028 90270190.

GREEN UNISON

Green UNISON is a new campaign calling on employers across the public sector to decarbonise public services. Members and activists have a crucial role to play in greening our public services and ensuring a just transition to a low carbon and sustainable economy. Members in Education are especially encouraged to get involved. Sign up to our Green UNISON Network [here](#).



STARS IN OUR SCHOOLS

Stars in Our Schools is an annual celebration of school support staff. This year the event will take place at the end of November – but we encourage schools to join in whenever suits them! Look out for activity from your branch.

RAISING KEY ISSUES

Our regional and local bargaining teams are raising a number of key issues and will keep you updated on any developments.

- Members awaiting permanent appointment contracts and getting the right start date
- Fulltime and term-time contracts
- Cleaning and Catering services retention and expansion
- Classroom assistants -impact of SEN developments.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE SURVEY

UNISON recently conducted a survey on workplace violence experienced by support staff working in a classroom setting. Out of responses received 66% report being worried about violent behaviour from pupils, with 57% experiencing or observing violent incidents towards staff on a daily or weekly basis. Respondents reported a lack of support from management and a feeling of normalisation of violence.

UNISON Northern Ireland plans to use these survey findings and feedback to campaign to make the workplace safer and more sustainable for support staff. If you're currently working in a similar role and would like to get involved in a campaign please either contact your local branch reps or email Marianne Buick on m.buick@unison.co.uk.