

ERS0001

**Written evidence submitted by National Association of
Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, The Teachers' Union**

The NASUWT's submission sets out the Union's views on the key issues identified by the Committee in the terms of reference for the Inquiry. 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.

Executive Summary

- The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to children's education, as well as the damage to their development and their emotional and mental wellbeing, has been widely reported. While evidence shows all children have been negatively impacted, those from disadvantaged backgrounds now face increasing challenges as the attainment gap between them and their peers has grown.
- Although the NASUWT sees the value in some elements of the Government's catch-up strategy, the plans are premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up'. The strategy does not take into consideration the wider implications of the pandemic on children's lives, nor does it offer specific support to address these.
- Without a more holistic view, children will not be supported in all aspects of their lives through the current strategy. Yet this is what is required to truly recover from the effects of the pandemic.
- For education recovery to be meaningful, it must be explored alongside other societal issues and corresponding policy areas, such as mental health support and financial assistance for disadvantaged families.

Introduction

1. It is undeniable that the impact of the COVID-19 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, as well as their emotional and mental wellbeing.
2. Teachers and school leaders have demonstrated their unwavering commitment, dedication and professionalism during this challenging time, continuing to deliver high-quality learning throughout the unprecedented situation.
3. A report from the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) reviewing the evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on learning found pandemic-related disruption had negatively impacted the attainment of all pupils.¹ This was particularly true for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The evidence also shows the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates has grown. While the report focuses on attainment, it additionally highlights that teachers have frequently reported concerns around the effect on pupil wellbeing.
4. This was further reflected in the recent National Audit Office report, *Education recovery in schools in England*.² This review of education recovery showed that disadvantaged pupils remain further behind the expected level of attainment than other pupils.
5. 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 now essential.

Is the DfE managing the programme for education recovery in schools in an effective way?

¹ Education Endowment Foundation (2022), [The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence](#)

² National Audit Office (2023), [Education Recovery in England](#)

An effective and sustainable recovery strategy

6. The NASUWT has been very forthright in sharing its concerns over the current education recovery strategy. Given that important dimensions of children's lives have been affected alongside the educational implications of the pandemic, the Union rejects recovery strategies premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up'. The Government's education recovery strategy does little more than fill the gaps left by disrupted schooling, which is ineffective and unsustainable.
7. 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 further 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.³
8. 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. It is hard to see how the Government's programme aligns with this.
9. The DfE's plan for recovery rests principally on the provision of tutoring support for pupils. The NASUWT does not dispute that tutoring can play an important role in this respect. However, it is clear that other measures are necessary to address the ongoing impact of the pandemic on children and young people's learning and wellbeing.
10. For example, Ofsted's latest annual report states that recovery in schools has been impeded by the difficulties schools have faced in accessing support to external services and pressures on staffing.⁴ As

³ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/news/education-recovery-can-england-learn-lessons-from-abroad>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

the Union has continued to make clear, education recovery will only be secured through the development of a more comprehensive and holistic strategy than that in place currently.

11. Outlined below are a number of key areas that are integral in a successful and meaningful education recovery strategy.

Action to tackle excessive and unnecessary workload

12. Excessive workload has a huge impact on teachers' health, safety and wellbeing, and undermines teachers' ability to teach effectively.
13. In the NASUWT's 2022 annual state-of-the-profession survey, the Big Question, eight in ten teachers (81%) cited workload as one of the most worrying aspects of their job, making it the number one issue of concern.
14. 59% of teachers reported their workload had increased significantly over the last 12 months. An additional 29% said their workload had increased slightly. More than half (52%) cited workload as the biggest factor causing poor mental health.
15. Whilst the job of teaching has always been demanding, the Government has a responsibility to intervene, and schools have a duty to take action to tackle excessive workload and to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of their staff.
16. Education recovery cannot be advanced effectively if teachers' and school leaders' statutory and contractual entitlements are not respected, including those which support the achievement of manageable workloads and their right to a work/life balance which should not be encroached upon.
17. 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.

18. There are many more advocates of this vision for education recovery that align with the NASUWT. The joint report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Education International (EI) on education recovery identifies supporting staff wellbeing and mental health as core components of any effective education recovery strategy.⁵

Maintaining adequate teacher supply and employment

19. 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 UK faced the most severe teacher recruitment and retention crisis since the Second World War. While the impact of the pandemic on the broader graduate labour market resulted in some improvements in key recruitment and retention indicators, this was short-lived.
20. The DfE's 2022/23 Initial Teacher Training Census showed there were 29% fewer new entrants to postgraduate initial teacher training (PGITT) than needed this year (2022-23).⁶
21. 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 prospects;
 - low regard for staff wellbeing;
 - non-collegiate and unsupportive working environments that do not respect teachers' professionalism; and

⁵ OECD/EI (2021) [Ten Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from COVID](#)

⁶ <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/initial-teacher-training-census>

- limited access to professional development and training.
22. The NASUWT is not alone in recognising the links between the education workforce and recovery. Ofsted's 2021/22 Annual Report highlighted the issue of children's recovery from the pandemic being held back by the workforce crisis in schools, colleges and early years settings. Children with special education needs are among the worst affected.⁷
 23. Without action at national and school levels in all these respects, there is a clear risk that teacher recruitment and retention will continue to deteriorate and jeopardise the education system's capacity to meet future challenges.
 24. There is a growing body of evidence that shows a connection between flexible working opportunities for teachers and increased recruitment and retention. This is demonstrated in a DfE report exploring flexible working that was carried out by CooperGibson Research.⁸ This research found that enabling flexible working could help schools to retain teachers who would otherwise leave the role, or retire early.
 25. The link is further corroborated in a study conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).⁹ To inform the report, the NFER conducted school leader interviews to explore their experiences of part-time and flexible working. The interviewees identified several benefits including increased teacher retention and recruitment.

Assessment, qualifications and accountability

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills>

⁸ CooperGibson Research (2019), [Exploring flexible working practice in schools Interim report](#)

⁹ Sharp, C, Smith, R, Worth, J, and Van den Brande, J. (2019). [Part-Time Teaching and Flexible Working in Secondary Schools](#).

26. The NASUWT is concerned that no lessons seem to have been learned from the process for examinations and national assessments following the ongoing disruption caused by the pandemic.
27. While the Union believes national assessments and qualifications still need to play a role in the system long-term, the reliance on performance tables based on examination and test data to assess schools should be discontinued. This will enable teachers to focus on delivering a broad and balanced offer that is capable of recognising and meeting the needs of learners, whilst avoiding inappropriate teaching to the test.
28. As part of an effective and sustainable education recovery programme, the NASUWT is calling for the introduction of an intelligent accountability system. It should be developmental and supportive, and encourage collaboration rather than competition between schools, while reflecting more accurately the full scope of the contribution they make to children's lives.
29. Such a strategy will be key to ensuring that schools are incentivised to provide the broad and balanced curriculum that is not only central to the educational entitlements of children and young people, but that is also critical to recovery. An approach to recovery in schools that marginalises particular subjects, including artistic and creative subjects, from core curricular time cannot be regarded as acceptable.
30. While the DfE did publish *Teaching a broad and balanced curriculum for education recovery* in 2021, it is non-statutory guidance, with no clear mechanisms for schools to access support to fulfil these expectations.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-a-broad-and-balanced-curriculum-for-education-recovery>

31. Inspectorates should play a central role in supporting the development of effective national and school-level policy and practice, particularly regarding vulnerable pupils and those with protected characteristics.

Investment in and collaboration between wider children's services

32. The crisis has highlighted and deepened pre-pandemic concerns about the fragmented nature of children and young people's services in some parts of the UK, particularly in the areas of special and additional needs. Meaningful and holistic recovery will not be possible unless frameworks are re-established to support co-operation and partnership working between all these services, including schools.
33. An effective recovery strategy must enable local authorities to co-ordinate provision in every child's interests and ensure that none are left behind. This has not been considered in the current programme.
34. A statutory duty to co-operate with local education, health and care planning services for children and young people would ensure that children do not fall through the gap, schools are able to draw upon the resources and expertise they require, and families have access to the help and support they need.
35. 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.
36. 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.
37. This urgent requirement has been echoed by the Local Government Association (LGA). In response to the education recovery strategy, the LGA outlined the need for the Government to properly fund councils to

deliver the effective, holistic and responsive services needed to put children and young people at the heart of recovery.¹¹

Tackling child poverty

38. Before the pandemic, levels of child poverty in the UK had reached entirely unacceptable levels. Evidence from the Children Poverty Action Group (CPAG) 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.¹² Across this period, three quarters of children in poverty lived in homes where at least one adult was in employment.
39. 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.
40. An additional study of families on low incomes undertaken by CPAG in November 2020 found that nearly nine in ten families had experienced a significant deterioration in their living standards compared to before the pandemic.¹³ 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.
41. These concerns are compounded by evidence from an Institute of Fiscal Studies report which shows the economic prospects for many economically disadvantaged households are likely to deteriorate in the absence of meaningful action to address these risks.¹⁴

¹¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/child-centred-recovery-where-all-young-people-can-thrive>

¹² <https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures>

¹³ <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/poverty-pandemic-update-impact-coronavirus-low-income-families-and>

¹⁴ IFS (2021), [Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

42. An approach based on the continuation of 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.
43. 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. Key NASUWT campaigns and research have focused on the costs families face in providing education to their children and the implications for young people of financial hardship.
44. In the short term, the Government must reverse 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.
45. Encouraging evidence has emerged on the effectiveness of Children North East's work on action to Poverty Proof the School Day through interventions and strategies designed to remove barriers to learning that exist for children as a result of living in poverty.¹⁵
46. The Government should work with schools to implement these strategies to support pupils from the most disadvantaged families.

Proposals to lengthen the school week

47. As part of the wider sphere around education recovery, the Government's Schools White Paper, *Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child*, is proposing the introduction of a minimum

¹⁵ Mazzoli-Smith L, Todd L (2016), [Poverty Proofing the School Day: Evaluation and development report](#).

expectation on the length of the school week of 32.5 hours. This would apply to all mainstream state-funded schools.¹⁶

48. While this remains an expectation rather than a legal obligation, the NASUWT is troubled by reports from members working in schools where this has caused confusion and, in some cases, a change in working practices without any consultation with teaching staff.
49. Without significant investment in additional staff and resources, such proposals create significant workload and wellbeing risks.
50. Furthermore, there is no confirmation that increasing the quantity of formal taught time in this way would secure meaningful educational or other benefits for children and young people. Evidence from the OECD is clear that relative to the nature and quality of provision in existing school time, the length of the school day or year is of limited importance.¹⁷

Summary

51. Given the current education recovery strategy's shortcomings in these areas, the NASUWT is of the view that it is not effective, sustainable or fit for purpose.

Is the DfE achieving value for money from the National Tutoring Programme?

52. The NASUWT was broadly supportive of the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) at its inception, and engaged in meaningful discussions about its development with the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) during their time as the NTP's delivery partner.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/opportunity-for-all-strong-schools-with-great-teachers-for-your-child>

¹⁷ OECD (2016), [How is learning time organised in primary and secondary education?](#)

53. The NASUWT has long sought to see addressed by successive Governments the well-documented, substantial attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. This is particularly pertinent given the aforementioned evidence from a range of sources, including EEF,¹⁸ that following the necessary restrictions placed on on-site education provision during periods of the pandemic, this is likely to have grown significantly, despite the substantial efforts made by schools in augmenting learning through remote and blending provision.
54. The NASUWT recognises the extensive evidence that underpinned the development of the NTP, showing the impact of tutoring to support pupils who have fallen behind, as well as the potential of one-to-one and small-group tuition as a cost-effective way to support these pupils.¹⁹ Yet tutoring is often limited to the schools and parents who are able to afford it, which the NTP aimed to help schools to address.
55. For the NASUWT, a union that puts teachers and pupils at the heart of education recovery, the issue of value for money of the NTP can only be evaluated with regard to how it is supporting schools, the education workforce and pupils. This is explored in the following sections.

Randstad's management of the NTP

56. The NASUWT was vocal in its criticism of Randstad's management of the NTP. The biggest failing during its management was the lack of courses undertaken through the Tuition Partners and Academic Mentors schemes, which Randstad was responsible for coordinating. These figures were overshadowed by the significantly higher number of tutoring courses that began through the school-led tutoring route.

¹⁸ Education Endowment Foundation (2022), [The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition)

¹⁹ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition>

57. Given this underperformance, having been handed huge amounts of taxpayers' money, the Union was supportive of the decision taken to remove Randstad from its role in managing and overseeing the NTP.

Involvement of supply teachers

58. Looking specifically at the school-led tutoring route, the NASUWT welcomed the ability for schools to engage their own tutoring partners, rather than being restricted by the approved list collated by the NTP provider.
59. While the DfE suggested that schools and academies should consider sourcing supply staff to deliver tutoring, the NASUWT was disappointed this was not explored fully by the Department. The Union asserted that supply teachers, with their wealth of experience and knowledge, would be particularly appropriate for this work. The Union has publicly warned that the Government is falling short of its promised investment in education recovery by squeezing out and undermining skilled and qualified supply teachers.

Funding and disadvantaged pupils

60. The NTP stated from its inception that while the funding will significantly increase the amount of tutoring available to disadvantaged children, it is not enough to provide support to every disadvantaged pupil in England. While the NASUWT recognises the pressures on funding, this was a troubling position given the proven gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers with regards to attainment.²⁰

²⁰ Education Endowment Foundation (2022), [The Impact of COVID-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence](#)

61. Compounding this, the NASUWT was disappointed that during the second year of the programme the decision was taken to remove a target that specifically engaged disadvantaged pupils. Originally, tuition partners had been required to ensure that 65% of their support was provided to pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding. This was then withdrawn to 'remove complexities' from the NTP.
62. The NASUWT would argue this was an unnecessary change to the programme, especially as the target was put in place to help the children affected disproportionately by the pandemic, and the necessary associated restrictions placed on on-site educational provision during periods of the pandemic. If the perceived complexities were seen as a reason for schools not engaging with the scheme, and ultimately affecting Randstad's performance, this should have been fully explored rather than the reactive removal of an important target.
63. Furthermore, the level of subsidy has dropped year on year for schools wishing to engage a tutor. As a result, schools need to find 40% of the cost of tutoring for the academic year 2022/23, which may present challenges, particularly given the funding pressures that schools face currently.
64. Important issues can also be identified in respect of the ways in which the programme secures value for money. The NASUWT would welcome the opportunity to explore these issues in more detail with the Committee in oral evidence.

Is the DfE achieving value for money from the other funding it has provided to support education recovery in schools?

65. While the recovery premium grant has been welcomed by the NASUWT as a source of additional funding for schools, it does not go far enough to address the real-terms funding gap that schools and college budgets have been subjected to for many years. While the approved approaches that the recovery premium grant can be spent on

will no doubt support some pupils, including those who have been affected most as a result of the pandemic, a short-term funding boost is not a sustainable approach to improving the lives of children and young people.

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