

UNISON Cymru/Wales

UNISON in SCHOOLS

Spring 2020

“On the other side of a storm is the strength that comes from having navigated through it...” (Gregory S. Williams)

...and schools are fulfilling the role of a harbour - a place of safety, a welcoming and nurturing place looking after the children of those who are keeping the storm at bay; without the hard work and resilience you and your colleagues have and continue to show, we as a nation would be sunk.

On behalf of UNISON as a whole and especially on behalf of the Cymru Wales School Support Staff Forum I would like to offer our deepest gratitude for the vital work you are all doing to look after the children who attend the childcare hubs across Wales, as well as those that are directly caring for young people but also those who are working to support children in other ways, be that by photocopying work for children who have no internet access, or answering the phone in school

offices, preparing hot food for the hubs, and ensuring that the buildings are open and safe. Thank you!

Who could have imagined, at the start of this year, how 2020 would pan out? Yes, these are very strange times but please be assured that we will get through this. We will recover and move forward. We are stronger together.

Cadwch yn ddiogel – stay safe.

Jonathan Lewis
Chair, UNISON Cymru/Wales School Support Staff Forum



The Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams, has also extended her gratitude and appreciation for the work you are doing in keeping efforts going.

UNISON is here for you and continues to support you whilst you manage your professional and personal lives and keep yourselves and your pupils safe during this pandemic.

We are having frequent meetings with the Welsh Government, where we raise issues that are of concern to our members, whether they are working in a school, a hub or from home.

RESS . . . STOP PRESS . . . STOP PRESS . . . STOP PRES STOP PRESS . . . STOP PRESS . . . STOP PRESS . . . STO

Comments made by First Minister Mark Drakeford over the weekend suggested that schools could begin to enter the next phase of re-opening from the beginning of June; however he has since clarified that no decisions have been made on if schools would return in June and he was just giving an example that if schools were to be reopening in June then there would need to be at least a three week lead in time to get the staff, premises and pupils prepared.

UNISON, along with other Education unions, participates in twice weekly meetings with Welsh Government and want to assure you that any discussions have the health, safety and well being of our members and pupils as the basis for and decision making and that **the re-opening of schools is not imminent**. The Education Minister Kirsty Williams who attended the meeting with us last Thursday, was clear that there needs to be a significant lead in time and that any decision would be based on scientific and health advice, feedback from stakeholder groups who are considering her five key principles and in

discussion with the unions. At this time there has been no suggestion of a date and we will work with the Welsh Government towards a phased return when the time is right. We will of course keep you updated as necessary.

Rosie Lewis, UNISON Wales Schools Lead Organiser, wrote to the Minister for Education Kirsty Williams AM, to highlight the essential work being undertaken by school support staff, in particular ensuring that vulnerable pupils and the children of our essential workers are able to access hubs and schools.

In the letter Rosie states: "I know that it would be very much appreciated if special reference could be made in further briefings to specifically identify such roles and, when it is appropriate to do so, I would welcome an opportunity to meet with you, along with some of our key school activists, to work towards raising the profile of this vital group of staff who contribute so magnificently to the provision of education in schools and colleges in Wales."

CURRENT PROVISION FOR CHILDREN OF CRITICAL WORKERS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN HUBS AND SCHOOLS

At the moment schools and hubs are only open for vulnerable children, and those whose parents are critical to the Covid-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home. The government is clear that any children who can be safely cared for at home should not attend.

We are pleased that the great majority of schools or hubs are now operating rotas for staff attendance. Head teachers should work with their teams to ensure the minimum number of staff are on the school site. This will support the NHS in limiting the spread of COVID-19. Only staff who are working directly with pupils or those who are key to facilities opening, including providers of catering and cleaning, should be on the school site.

Staff should not be asked to be on site if they are not looking after pupils. They should not be asked to attend full staff meetings, to clean cupboards, or take down displays, for example, because this increases their exposure to the virus and endangers the NHS.

School Staff now eligible for Covid-19 Testing

From 18 April the Welsh Government extended Covid-19 testing to all critical workers, including education workers.

Although at the time of writing testing is prioritised for health and social care workers, police, fire service and prison workers, the Welsh government are rolling out the online referral and booking process to more critical workers over the coming days.

To be eligible for a test you must be a critical worker or a symptomatic household member of a critical worker showing the following symptoms:

- a high temperature 38°C or above;
- a persistent cough or shortness of breath.



Referral process and booking a test from Welsh Government guidance

For employees in South East Wales:

You should check with your employer (through your occupational health department) whether your organisation is already included as part of the new web-based booking system.

If your organisation is registered and you are displaying symptoms, your employer will provide you with full guidance on how to access the web-based booking system.

For employees in other areas of Wales

You should check with your employer (through your occupational health department) for guidance on the local referral arrangements in place.

The full guidance can be found via this link: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-testing-process-html>

If you have any problems in accessing testing, please contact your UNISON branch in the first instance - you can find it via the [Branch Finder](#) utility on the UNISON website.

"The Chancellor Rishi Sunak visits a coronavirus testing laboratory in Leeds" by HM Treasury is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Information for staff with underlying health conditions or who live with someone who has one of the conditions identified by government requiring strict social isolation:

Welsh Government guidance states that *"any member of staff who falls into the shielding category or those who fall into the stringent social distancing categories should not be expected to work in either a school or hub. Where a member of staff lives with someone who is vulnerable, we would expect employers to take account of this."*

These are *"people who are at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and should be stringent in following social distancing guidelines or are deemed as 'extremely vulnerable' and should be shielding."*



UNISON's online member learning offer gives UNISON members access to over 550 certified Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for free. We

have picked out some free online courses which may be of particular interest to schools workers.

UNISON Learning and Organising Services and education staff across the union are working hard so that we can continue to provide trade union learning and training in a safe and effective way during these unprecedented times. We've moved our courses online – but don't worry if you're not confident using a computer or the internet. You'll find some really helpful resources to get you started here: cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/sites/9/2020/04/Online-training-for-schools-teaching-assistants-and-student-support.pdf

Getting to grips with the technology

For many people, measures to deal with the coronavirus outbreak have meant a sudden change in working habits, including working from home and working remotely. If you're trying to get up to speed with IT, there are some resources that can help.

Learn My Way

If you're starting at the very beginning, or helping someone else who doesn't have much experience with

technology, Learn My Way talks you through everything, beginning with how to turn your computer on: learnmyway.com

The Inclusive Technology guide compiled for us by Diversity'N'Ability suggests several apps and tools that can make technology a little easier to use, and explains how to get the most out of the inbuilt accessibility features that already exist in the programs and systems that you may well already be using. learning.unison.org.uk/inclusive-technology-guide/



Inspiring POSITIVE CHANGE through digital skills

Digital Unite's technology guides are also really helpful: digitalunite.com/technology-guides

UNISON's Skills For Schools website also provides resources for online training to maintain your CPD: skillsforschools.org.uk/training/

skills for schools

Take a look on the Education Workforce Council (EWC) website and update your EWC Professional Learning Passport: ewc.wales/learningexchange/index.php/en/

Get the latest news or what's available on the UNISON Cymru Wales Learning Facebook page: facebook.com/unisoncymruwaleslearning/

UNISON Welfare & COVID-19

There for You is there for UNISON members who experience hard times. In the current coronavirus crisis, that's pretty much everyone. As our welfare charity, There for You is helping more and more members who find that their limited income has been hit by the crisis.

Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact our welfare charity, There for You, which provides a confidential advice and support service for members and their dependents. <https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/>



UNISON Cymru/Wales School Support Staff Forum

Regional School Support Staff Forums are usually held every term and bring together UNISON reps and members from schools throughout Wales. The forum is the voice of schools members within UNISON Cymru Wales and is where we can address issues affecting members in schools together. It's also where you can inform us of what's happening in your area which helps to feed into the responses we make to Welsh Government. We'd love to see more members get involved and this is a great way to keep communicated with the wider school workforce in Wales and get tips and hints from others as well as share your experiences, if you are interested in finding out more, please email Chris Long at c.long@unison.co.uk



The Education Support Partnership (ESP) provides support for the education workforce.

ESP has developed digital resources on their website to provide support to education staff during these challenging times.

Support is also available for all education staff by calling **08000 562561** or by visiting educationsupport.org.uk/helpline.

The ESP can also provide financial assistance through its grants service via educationsupport.org.uk/helping-you/financial-information.

The Welsh Government is running a consultation on COVID-19 and its impact on children and young people.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government's Children, Young People and Education Committee is exploring how the outbreak of COVID-19 is affecting all aspects of life for children and young people (including students in further and higher education).

Details and how to respond can be found via this link: senedd.assembly.wales/mgConsultationDisplay.aspx?id=392&RPID=1017601059&cp=yes

A child-friendly version of this call for views is available also available.

Lots more information for school support staff during the coronavirus outbreak can be found in our FAQs: <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/sites/9/2020/04/Updated-Schools-Wales-Covid-19-FAQs-22-April-1.pdf>

There is also information on our schools page on the UNISON Cymru Wales website: <https://cymru-wales.unison.org.uk/campaigns/school-support-staff-cymru-wales-corona-virus/>

You can keep up to date by following the UNISON Cymru Wales School Support Staff Facebook page. Search for **@walessupportstaff** or visit: <https://www.facebook.com/walessupportstaff>

If you need advice or support regarding a particular matter then contact your local UNISON branch – you can find it via <https://branches.unison.org.uk/>