

# Have your say on how your pay is negotiated in future



The way school support staff's pay and employment conditions are negotiated in England is changing and we must decide how we would like to proceed in Wales. Hearing what you think is crucial and we'll be guided by UNISON members' opinions in how we lobby government.

We are holding a three-week consultation process now and you can vote on your preferred way forward.

As a union dedicated to improving your pay and working life, we must be clear that whatever the way forward, school support staff in Wales should suffer no disadvantage compared to their English colleagues and whatever eventual body covers school support staff here, UNISON (and the other existing recognised

unions), must be able to negotiate with employers on your behalf.

This means it can't simply be a pay review body, which recommends a pay increase but doesn't allow unions to negotiate. That won't deliver the improvements to pay you desperately need. It must also protect the initial good work done in Wales, driven by UNISON, to improve school support staff career development opportunities.

We look forward to hearing what you think, talk to your school colleagues and encourage them to use their voice and their vote too.

## What is happening?

The UK Labour Government's Employment Rights Bill includes setting up a School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB), with the specific aim to improve pay and employment conditions so schools can recruit and retain the staff they need. The body is for school support staff in England, and it won't negotiate pay agreements until 2027/28 at the earliest.

At present, pay negotiations for all council employees in England and Wales, including school support staff, take place in the National Joint Council for local government services (NJC). UNISON and the other trade unions play a full role in the NJC.

The School Support Staff Negotiating Body would take English school support staff out of the NJC.

We are asking school support staff in Wales how they would prefer their pay and employment conditions are negotiated in future and that will become UNISON Cymru's lobbying position with government.

You will have the chance to vote by ranking your preferred options.

## What's the history?

A School Support Staff Negotiating Body for England was originally set up in 2009 but abolished shortly afterwards by the incoming Conservative-Lib Dem Government.

There are legitimate arguments for both Wales deciding on a different path, and also for us to work more closely with our English neighbours.

## What do you want your UNISON Cymru representatives to campaign for?

There are several options to consider. We will do our best to lobby for the one you select, taking the mandate you give us, as the largest union for school support staff in Wales, to the heart of government.

As it stands, Welsh Government officials advise they have no preference and all options remain on the table, so a democratic vote of thousands of UNISON Cymru members can therefore carry a great deal of weight with them.

It is important to recognise that options 1 and 2 would require legislation or changes to legislation and that means persuading the UK and Welsh Governments of the merits of our case. We want your guidance to determine our lobbying position.

Although of course we can't offer a guarantee that the UK and Welsh Governments will implement what you decide, you can be assured UNISON will continue to do everything we can to improve your pay and employment conditions.

## The case for Wales doing things differently

### Option 1. A Wales-only School Support Staff Negotiating Body

Education is a devolved matter and there's a divergence between schooling in Wales and England. There are no academy schools in Wales, there is a different style of curriculum and the retention of alphabetical GCSE marking. Teachers' pay is devolved to Wales via an independent pay review body system (although this is not a negotiating body for unions).

We have also been working in partnership with Welsh Government to look at how the pay, training and career progression of school support staff might be improved.

Should UNISON argue for Welsh Government to set up a negotiating body for school support staff here, mirroring what is happening in England? So, UNISON Cymru and the other NJC recognised unions in Wales would meet with employers and Government to negotiate your pay.

Welsh Government argues it doesn't have as much money as it would like to invest in public services because it doesn't receive enough funding from the UK Government. This is a serious question about whether on its own Welsh Government has the money it needs, without the reform of funding, to offer higher wages to school support staff than in England.

## The case for working closely with England

### Option 2. An expanded SSSNB to cover Wales and England

Education is devolved to Wales but pay and employment legislation is not.

Currently pay bargaining is conducted at an England and Wales level for all local authority workers, including school staff.

Is it better for school support workers in both nations to continue to stand together and be represented under one SSSNB expanded to cover Wales and England?

School support staff in Wales face many of the same challenges as their English colleagues, so a Welsh SSSNB is very likely to make similar decisions and recommendations for support staff as the English SSSNB.

Over the last few years, the Welsh Government has taken a much more favourable approach to school support staff than the Westminster Government and worked closely with UNISON Cymru. If option 2, is preferred, we must ensure good work to address the very poor career development of school support staff is not lost and ensure the voice of Welsh education is not drowned out by England.

## Remain as we are

### Option 3. School support staff in Wales continue to be part of the NJC

To remain as we are, so school support staff in Wales continue to be part of the England and Wales pay bargaining for all local authority employed staff.

The implications of school support staff in Wales remaining in the NJC alongside council workers in England and Wales are unknown.

The UK's Government's initiative setting up the SSSNB for England recognises that pay and employment conditions for school staff are not attractive enough for schools to recruit and retain enough staff and it wants to do something about that.

Would the NJC be as focused on improving the working lives of school support staff?

## What's next?

We'd like you to speak to fellow UNISON members in your school to see how they feel.

We're holding an online consultation of all UNISON school support staff members in Wales. It will open on Monday 27 January and close at 5pm on Friday 14 February. We are asking you to rank the three options in order of preference, 1 being your top preferred option.

For more information on the SSSNB and UK Employment Rights Bill, [click here](#) (and be aware of the English-only focus of the SSSNB).

If you have any questions, email [cymruwalesschools@unison.co.uk](mailto:cymruwalesschools@unison.co.uk)

## Get more involved

If you would like to join a network of school support staff and receive updates you can share with colleagues about this issue, please let us know. Email [cymruwalesschools@unison.co.uk](mailto:cymruwalesschools@unison.co.uk)

