

NEU Left Zoom Call Organising to Win - 25.03.2020

Comments arising from the discussion including Questions & Answers

Health & safety:

Please refer to the new advice on NEU website regarding working safely:

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/coronavirus-keeping-yourself-safe>

Comments from the chat:

Unless the risk assessment can guarantee the H&S of all our members, then there is no safe limit of pupils. This includes staff having PPE and also a guarantee that there is no risk of transmission.

Schools need to follow stringent safety guidelines if any staff/students are in.

Testing should be made available according to necessity and urgency

We can't just follow the government science advice as it is highly politically driven and so we need to use the strongest government as leverage but go much further based on a better safe than sorry model.

As the virus spreads schools will become even less safe, we need at least a temperature test on arrival

NEU Left's advice: Members' in the workplace are the best ones to decide on whether they feel schools are taking appropriate measures to safeguard employees and pupils. Use the advice on the NEU website to keep yourselves and your members safe, and challenge your Senior Leaders where you do not feel the appropriate measures are in place:

<https://neu.org.uk/advice/coronavirus-keeping-yourself-safe>

Ratios and Rotas

Q:

Has anyone managed to agree a minimum number of students to teacher ratio?

A:

The Government advice appears to be 1:10

Q:

Is 1-10 too high?

A:

The ratio goes out of the window as soon as we talk about HS. That's why I think we should risk assess based on our knowledge of children- age/Send/co etc

Think there has to be a minimum number of staff to enable people to have breaks and to cover all eventualities. So there should be a core base of staff, So 1 SLT, then maybe max of 2-4 other staff (teaching/support)

We have a minimum of 3 staff in (one SLT, one classroom teacher, one admin staff) and then one SLT and one teacher on call. Haven't exceeded that yet

Teachers should only be seeing the same group of students to limit the total number of people they are in contact with.

Q:

Is there any NEU guidance on minimum staff-student ratio?

A:

Think HQ are working on that

NEU Left's advice: Members' in the workplace are the best ones to decide on appropriate ratios in conjunction with SLT. We advise that there should be a minimum of one adult for every ten children, however if members feel strongly that smaller ratios of children would be more appropriate, then they should challenge SLT and fight for this collectively.

Vulnerable Groups:

Q:

What about staff who are classed as Vulnerable, or care for someone who is vulnerable? The latest guidance talks about 'Very High Risk' and schools/authorities are using this to say that staff who are 'vulnerable' but not high risk should come into school.

A:

The advice for social distancing remains the same, and includes working from home if you are in a vulnerable group or care for someone in a vulnerable group.

We should encourage the NEU to continue to advise these members to work from home.

Shielding is for those who are now classed as 'very high risk' and this is a step up from social distancing, and those in the high risk group should be self-isolating and not leaving the house.

Latest Govt advice regarding vulnerable adults and social distancing:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults> this is the guidance

NEU Left's advice: Continue to advise any members in vulnerable groups, or living with those in vulnerable groups to work from home.

Public Transport

Q:

What is the position on asking staff to come into work when they have to use public transport?

A:

We are telling members in [District] not to come in if it means travelling on the tube/crowded public transport - huge danger. Have other Districts done this?

NEU Left's advice: Don't use public transport, members should work from home if they would be relying on public transport to safely get to and from work.

Special Schools/EHCPs

Q:

What about special schools? We are struggling to achieve basic health and safety measures and policies. Social distancing is IMPOSSIBLE in our setting... No risk assessment in place. We are trying to demand it.

A:

HQ are working on special school advice. They are ringing a bunch of our special school members this evening to try and get it tailored for as many types of setting as possible

In response to the question on EHCPs: we had a massive issue with a special school where the head thought the guidance meant that she had to keep the students in (they all had EHCPs) therefore she needed all staff in. Between the rep and myself we managed to change her mind by emphasising the part of the Govt guidance that said **most pupils with EHCPs would be fine at home**. Part of the problem was a lack of firm guidance from the LA - the head was actually relieved to have someone reassure her that she was doing the safest thing by sending them home. The staff there are now on a volunteer rota.

I work in a PRU all kids are on the vulnerable list but can't get in as they get taxis and they are refusing to drive. All work is either being sent home via post or online. Staff doing welfare checks via phone

NEU Left's advice: seek to work with Senior Leaders, SENCos and families to ensure that where children would be safer cared for at home, that this is the case.

Working from Home Guidance:

Q:

Have we got official advice on working at home?

Does anyone have a model policy for home working? Heard of a few issues with excessive demands

A:

Executive are working on advice to cover working at home

NEU Left's advice: Don't wait to be told what (or what not to do). Organise with your members and agree in advance what you think are reasonable requests when working from home. Then present these to SLT.

Curriculum

The experience of being able to teach child centred lessons and small classes has been really great for members at my school this week. My head teacher emailed me today to say she can't ever go back to how it used to be. This is what we will have to fight to continue in the future.

Completely agree about having cross-curricular projects for students to do. As an example, at my secondary school, the MFL department has offered students this week:

Research a famous recipe from a TL (target language) country, cook it and send a photo of the result
Find a popular song in the TL, learn the lyrics (or read them) and film yourself singing or lip-syncing to it. Find out about a famous monument in a TL country and recreate it - draw it, build from pasta, straws, Lego etc. Watch a film in TL and produce a poster to advertise it. I believe the Palace of Versailles has a free online tour at the moment - they could write about it (in TL or English) - I'm sure there are lots more like this.

Comments from a Primary School: 'So today was a great day- such fun. We danced, played tennis, rode trikes all around the school playground, had sorbet outside, planted beans, made fish pictures and visited the nature garden... wish school was like that everyday!!

NEU Left's advice: Members' in the workplace are the best ones to decide on appropriate learning and curriculum, both during this crisis and in the future once all of this is over.

Use this time to reflect on the curriculum in your school and look for ways that it could be improved so that we don't go back to the narrow curriculum that has been on offer for too long.

Look for ways to make home learning opportunities meaningful to children and manageable in a home learning environment.

Agency Workers

Hi everyone, Vik mentioned what we're doing as agency Teaching Assistants, and thank you for that! But just wanted to ask all reps if they can look out for agency workers in their schools. Vik has my number if NEU Left could direct people to him, and then I can add them to our WhatsApp group. We're already on minimum wage - not living - and have been suddenly dropped from schools. Thanks to amazing reps like Vik and everyone!

NEU Left's advice: Look out for any agency workers you know and fight for them to be paid reasonably throughout this crisis.

Easter Holidays/Hubs:

Easter holidays are the next big thing to organise around - let's meet up again soon to discuss!

Agency supply including TA's to be paid as expected, fit and willing volunteers to sign up on rota, paid overtime for volunteers supporting over Easter

Some councils may be switching to a hub model by Easter, hub model will be a whole different set of issues.

We need to take an NEU line on hubs as soon as possible to give members a position to organise around.

I'm very concerned about hubs as a source of infection. Worried they will be snuck in over Easter

There are issues with hubs - they thought about doing this in Berlin but changed after scientists said it was unsafe to mix like that. We should find out some medical advice before agreeing hubs.

The hubs and rota ideas have many problems. It is safer if there are less people involved even if it seems less fair. Hubs the same. Isolation is the only way to give the NHS a chance of defeating the severity of the virus. When people get infected, the NHS cannot currently cope. Our bit is definitely to avoid mixing to prevent the spread.

NEU Left's advice: Don't wait to be told what your working pattern should be. Discuss with your members and agree on what is acceptable and what is not acceptable based on your school's circumstances.

Exams/GCSEs/A Levels:

Good to hear you are meeting with Ofqual (Amanda). I think our students are getting very anxious.

Be really good to get that advice - lots of members at my school are very uneasy about the whole process.

Have already heard parents on the phone to Teachers regarding GCSE grades. I don't think schools are going to be prepared for the parental pressure I think will ensue. The 'robust appeals system' Gavin Williamson spoke of will not cope at all.

I'm sure our staff know this and will point it out, but it's a massive concern that working class and black students are routinely predicted lower grades than they actually get.

NEU Left's advice: We agree that this is an uncertain time for many students, we await further advice on this from HQ.

Questions with no answer at the moment

We ran out of time so the following questions were left unanswered, we hope to address these during next week's zoom call, see you there!

Q:

How do we push branch secretaries to be more active and get a picture of what is happening across the district? It would be useful to have a list of strategies that district and branch secretaries have mentioned on here so those of us who aren't in those positions can push for it.

Q:

FSM vouchers - when can we expect them. Our council is being disgracefully slow and our school is making up food parcels for vulnerable families in the community. We are considering just carrying this on instead of using the voucher system as not convinced it will be enough.

Q:

How are Districts organising in Independent Schools?

Successes:

At my school we have negotiated: 1) a rota with staff only in 1 day every two weeks, 2) Easter break entirely voluntary and paid overtime, 3) no expectation to work from home when you are off.

If you or someone you know has a success story to share and you would like to be one of our speakers during next week's zoom call, please email neuleftstatement@gmail.com

You can also send success stories directly to the NEU via the webform on www.neu.org.uk/making-difference

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Resources:

Updated Reps guidance at www.neu.org.uk/coronavirus-reps

Resources from NEU Left activists: <https://neuleft.org/coronavirus-advice/>

Including a model letter to members, example survey and WhatsApp rules.

We will be updating resources regularly, if you have any resources you would like to share, please send to: neuleftstatement@gmail.com