

Pensions latest: negotiations continue

Congratulations to the 1,000s of school members who took industrial action on 30 November. Your numbers were highly visible at rallies and marches around the country. As the new year started, UNISON activists voted to give the union's negotiators the green light to continue discussions with government ministers on changes to public sector pensions. More than 250 key elected national, regional, rank and file activists met at UNISON's headquarters to discuss the detailed proposals for the local government and health pension schemes. Committees representing the different services then agreed to continue talks with government on frameworks that have been developed since the day of action.

Pensions summit report here: http://www.unison.org.uk/efocus/news_view.asp?did=7528)

Press release here http://www.unison.org.uk/efocus/news_view.asp?did=7528

Teaching Assistants in the firing line

Professors from the Institute of Education who were involved in a five-year study on the deployment of support staff in schools have published findings which suggest that the more teaching assistant contact a pupil has, the worse they do. The conclusions are of-course more complex than this but bald statements tend to appeal to elements in the media and government. The study of 8,200 pupils found that those who spend the most time with TAs do the worst because they are often those with lower attainment who should be receiving professional teaching. It warns that these pupils are often routinely shunted out of the classroom where they most need to be and that TAs should be an additional resource to teaching and not a replacement for it. The authors suggest that there should be more planning and feedback time between teachers and TAs, training on working together and that TAs should have proper induction. UNISON issued a press release in response and warning against a crude interpretation of the academic study. Quoted in the Secondary Education magazine (12 January) UNISON replied that "it is difficult to accept the bald statement that teaching assistants should not routinely support lower attaining pupils and those with SEN. It really does depend on the child and circumstances. Ofsted found that teaching assistants were particularly successful at working with underachievers and those at risk of permanent exclusion, especially in linking with parents and carers. The important point is that teaching assistants should be deployed appropriately and professionally, are trained, graded and paid for the purpose." ***Tell us what you think*** at education@unison.co.uk

Watch this space...

Work is underway in a single status technical group looking at the school job profiles that were developed in the School Support Staff Negotiating Body, which is now abolished. Job profiles are being matched against the single status scheme used in local government to see whether the points scored reflect the true worth of the job. Members will be kept up to date with developments.

Keeping in touch with school business managers

UNISON has launched a short survey of school business managers as part of its commitment to keep in touch with the issues of different occupational groups in schools. It is only 10 questions:

- What type of school do you work in?
- Is your school primary, middle, special or secondary?
- Do you work all year or term-time only?
- Do you manage the budget, contracts, staff, multiple sites, schools, other?
- Do you have adequate training/CPD opportunities?
- When was your salary last reviewed and were you happy with the outcome?
- What is your annual salary?
- If your school has become an academy how has it affected you?
- List your top three workplace issues
- How could UNISON help you?

The survey can be completed at the address below and school business manager members can join an e list for information and discussion; email education@unison.co.uk with details. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/UNISONSBMs>

Launch of the Support Staff Essential Training (SSET) materials

The Training and Development Agency (Teaching Agency from 1 April) has revised the induction and introductory training materials for school support staff and has launched new SSET materials. They are available on the TDA website at: www.tda.gov.uk/support-staff/new-to-your-role/introductory-training/support-staff-essential-training.aspx

A National College 'hotseat' discussion on them is being held 23 January – 10 February.

Don't forget the annual school seminar!

UNISON's annual seminar for members in schools will be held on 24 May at the Holiday Inn in Harrogate. Contact your branch secretary for details.

School food campaign still cooking

The coalition government's taste for cold cuts put the school food campaign on red alert. It has continued to lobby for free school meals, protection of nutritional standards and application of them to academies. It has also been working with Sharon Hodgson, shadow children's minister, other MPs, the Jamie Oliver Foundation and the School Food Trust to establish an all-party parliamentary group on school food. The main priority is to keep the importance of the school food service in public view and to avoid a back-slide to the dark days of junk food. Several government initiatives are in play. Research on nutritional standards in academies will be published in the next few months and schools have a new right to offer price promotions and deals for families. Previously, there was a statutory requirement to charge a standard price but authorities such as Bolton, which was allowed to introduce a £1 meal deal, increased take-up of to nearly 70 per cent. The Department

for Education expects to publish the evaluation of the free school meal pilots in Durham, Newham and Wolverhampton in the summer. UNISON is fully engaged with the school meals campaign where it can ensure that workforce issues are on the agenda.

Missing the bus

UNISON is working with other campaigners to highlight the threat to school transport. The Campaign for Better Transport, using freedom of information requests, collected data from 87 councils which revealed that more than 70 per cent of them are reviewing or cutting one or more areas of school transport. Over 1,000 bus services have already been lost in England, with councils cutting the discretionary part of their provision. Sarah Osborne, a district councillor and mother in East Sussex, has been leading a campaign to save the service in her area. This included a walk to school with fellow campaigners and her MP, Norman Baker. She has set up a facebook group and is keen to hear from others about local cuts and campaigns. <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-School-Transport/234081999971713> A letter signed by UNISON and 14 other organisations was sent to the education Secretary, Michael Gove and an early day motion was tabled by Annette Brook MP <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/2283> MPs should be encouraged to sign it to show that cuts in school transport are a serious issue. There was a parliamentary debate on the issue in January and UNISON and NUT provided a joint briefing for the event.

Asbestos risks continue

The joint union asbestos committee (JUAC) was formed from the Asbestos in Schools Group in 2010. It exists to protect education workers by raising awareness of asbestos in schools and seeking its safe removal and improved management of the problem. JUAC launched its new website in January www.juac.org.uk and wrote to the Department of Education, expressing concern at the quality of evidence that has been sent to the Department of Health which is assessing the risk of asbestos to children. In December a press release was issued in response to the School Minister's announcement that the responsibility for health and safety, would rest with governing bodies. Asbestos is thought to be present in 75 per cent of schools.

Nursery World Show

The Nursery World Show is the leading exhibition dedicated to Early Years and has a mix of workshops and seminars on early years practice. It provides a unique opportunity for Early Years staff to come together to discuss issues that are relevant to the sector, learn about best practice and see displays of new ideas and the latest equipment. The show runs from 17 to 18 February 2012 at the Business Design Centre in Islington, London, and registration is free.

For more information and registration details visit the Nursery World Show website:

www.nurseryworldshow.com

Review of qualifications for the Early Years workforce

There will be a government review of qualifications for staff who work in Early Years. It will look at the range, number and suitability of qualifications currently available and how well they prepare staff to work with children and families. The review will also look at career progression for Early Years staff. UNISON is keen for as many practitioners as possible to

get involved in the review to ensure that the voice of the workforce is heard. The review is being led by Professor Kathy Nutbrown. She will be undertaking a call for evidence, followed by a full review in the summer.

For more information please see <http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview> or contact education@unison.co.uk

Save our Sure Start

UNISON is launching a campaign with the children's charity Daycare Trust to protect services run by children's centres. A range of materials will be available shortly for UNISON branches and parent campaign groups to use in fighting cuts. There will also be some funds available to support local campaigns.

For more information please go to: <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/> or contact education@unison.co.uk