

Skills for schools

SCHOOLS

UNISON has launched a new website for school support staff – Skills for Schools www.skillsforschools.org.uk. The website is the place to go for information on a wide range of roles available in schools, options for training and career development, and links to useful training resources.

Skills for Schools ensures that clear and consistent information is accessible to support those thinking about applying for school roles, current support staff and school leaders.

In our recent survey of school support staff, 64% expressed concern about access to training and development. With changes to qualification frameworks and squeezed school budgets, this is no surprise. But school support staff have a huge impact on positive outcomes for pupils, as studies and personal testimonies demonstrate. Opportunities for training and development can only support this.

Skills for Schools includes information on pupil support and welfare, teaching and learning support, facilities, specialist and technical roles and admin and management. Outlines are given of what's involved the skills and experience needed, potential training and development and links to other resources.

For those already working in a school, there's a career planner which allows users to input their current role, qualifications and skills. The planner suggests alternative roles and potential qualifications to support the journey.

The website also hosts a 'Library' section, which includes evidence and research about the role of school support staff and the difference they make at school. This helps UNISON demonstrate to the wider world that with over 350,000 members working in the education sector, we have a lot to say about the contribution of our members to our society.

School support staff play an important role within schools and are taking on more complex and challenging roles. It is essential they have clear and accurate advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about the career options available, and the training and development they need to progress. The Skills for Schools website does just that. But a website alone is not enough. We will continue in our campaigning for a national programme of funded, accessible and relevant continuing professional development for all school support staff.



Find out more



UNISON in Schools

Care for it? Vote for it

There are vital issues at stake in the forthcoming election for school support staff and their families. Many school staff have seen their pay cut in real terms by up to 18% as a direct result of this government's public sector pay freezes and the 1% limit on pay awards.

Since 2010 many schools have been forced to transfer out of their local authority and into the hands of an academy sponsor cherry picked by the Department for Education (DfE).

English schools face the prospect of a 10% real terms cut in their funding if the Conservatives win the election as funding will be frozen.

"This is the most important general election in a generation, with just under a million public sector jobs at

risk," says general secretary Dave Prentis. "It's also going to be the closest, with every vote making a difference.

"UNISON is standing-up for an education system that prepares our children for the future, an NHS that is fit for purpose and social care that protects those that need it.

"We want members across the UK to be at the heart of our work ahead of the election. We know what a difference we can all make, together, on 7 May."

See the UNISON website for details on how you can make your pledge

unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/unison-campaigns/general-election/home/

Childcare disqualification regulations

The Department for Education (DfE) has recently published advice for schools and nurseries concerning the disqualification of staff from working in childcare in England.

The regulations mean that staff working with children under five during school hours or children aged eight or under in out of school activities are now likely to be asked for further information concerning not just themselves, but also the people that they live with.

The regulations say that staff can be barred from working in a school or nursery if someone who lives or works in their household is disqualified from working with children.

This is referred to as 'disqualification by association'. Staff who are disqualified by association are able to make representations to Ofsted to seek a waiver to allow them to continue to work with young children.

The DfE view is that these regulations will help protect children from staff who may be influenced by someone who has been deemed as unsuitable to work with children.

UNISON advice

While UNISON believes the safety of children in schools and nurseries has to be the top priority, we think these new requirements go too far and will do little to enhance good safeguarding practice.

However, because it is a statutory requirement, staff have to comply with requests for information.

UNISON has published detailed advice, including a list of frequently asked questions for members on the application of these regulations.

If you would like a copy of the UNISON advice, or have any further questions about this, please email b.thomas@unison.co.uk



Care for it?
VOTE FOR IT. 

Stars in our schools



On Friday 28 November 2014, UNISON held a UK-wide celebration day in honour of the 'Stars in our Schools'. UNISON branches across the UK worked with schools to thank their support staff for the great jobs they do in keeping our schools running smoothly, keeping children safe and healthy, and helping our children learn.

UNISON branches delivered hampers full of treats, foil-covered chocolate stars and ran prize draws. Many also arranged school visits from local VIPs including MPs, councillors and mayors. Schools came up with all sorts of ideas to mark the day, from coffee, cakes and thank you cards to fancy dress, red carpet award ceremonies and even a zumba class!

At Carswell School in Abingdon, the school organised two beauty therapists to perform a 30 minute massage/manicure/facial on everyone

who wanted it, while the Parent-Teachers Association made everyone 'brunch' in the form of a bacon sandwich which was delivered to classrooms by Year 4 waiters. The headteacher told us "Thanks again for continuing to raise the profile of the important work our support staff do. Primary schools simply wouldn't be the same without them!"

UNISON Devon County tweeted "Teachers from @ HonitonPrimary in Devon celebrated #StarsInOurSchools by covering playground duty so teaching assistants could have proper tea break. Nice one!"

Monkseaton High School in Whitley Bay tweeted "Great week supporting the stars in our school. Brilliant afternoon tea yesterday with the best scones ever! Thank you! #StarsInOurSchools"

Mr Bayew, a teacher at Swindon Academy, tweeted "The Stars in our Schools prize has to go to Ali in reprographics. She keeps the whole school afloat!"

Hornsey School in London tweeted "We are very proud of our amazing support staff and it has been great to show them our appreciation today!"

While the day was full of creativity and fun, UNISON used the opportunity to highlight the challenges of low pay and ever-increasing workload faced by school support staff. UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis blogged about the issue and published a joint statement with Secretary of State for Education Tristram Hunt. There was coverage of our biggest ever school support staff survey in the Daily Mirror, which focused on the need for many school support staff to take on second jobs to keep afloat.



chools



Teaching assistants in the spotlight

UNISON has welcomed a report from the Education Endowment Foundation that aims to help school leaders to work with teaching assistants (TAs) effectively.

The report – Making best use of teaching assistants – highlights the importance of high quality training and says that teaching assistants should be seen as an effective way of complementing teachers, rather than replacing them.

UNISON, which represents more than 150,000 teaching assistants in the UK, has long argued that the vital role TAs play in boosting quality and standards should be backed up by greater investment in the workforce.

UNISON head of education Jon Richards said: “We are pleased the report highlights the importance of training for teaching assistants. They are often pushed into roles they are not trained to do, which is unfair on them and on pupils.

“Spending cuts have seen £10m axed from the training budget for school support staff, which was a blow to morale and undermined career development.

“We would welcome further research into best practice around the wide range of roles TAs can excel in, such as providing pastoral care, supporting teachers and engaging with the local community.

“But the government must properly invest in the training and development of teaching assistants.”

In a UNISON survey of more than 8,000 teaching assistants, 75% expressed concern over the lack of training and professional development, saying that the vast bulk of training budgets were reserved for teachers.

There’s more information on UNISON’s work on teaching assistants at unison.org.uk/at-work/education-services/

**Date for your diary.
Friday 27 November for this year’s celebration day.**

UNISON School Support Seminar 14 May - Cardiff

UNISON’s School Support Staff Seminar will take place on Thursday 14 May at the Mercure Cardiff Holland Hotel.

The seminar gives you the chance to discuss a wide range of issues affecting school support staff. There will be updates on national negotiations, policy developments, speakers and workshops on a range of relevant professional matters.

It is also an opportunity to meet other school reps and exchange ideas, views and build networks.

The registration fee is just £60 per delegate (payable by your UNISON branch) and the deadline for registrations is the 17 April. Contact your UNISON branch for more information. Branches can send two reps each.

Coping with Care

UNISON has produced a new resource for school staff about the new statutory guidance (England) on supporting pupils with health needs. It’s an interactive, online guide called ‘Coping with Care’ which should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. The aims of the e-note are to explain the key points from the statutory guidance and look at commonly asked questions about what UNISON members should do when asked to provide health-related support. Find out more on the Skills for Schools website: skillsforschools.org.uk/library/healthneeds

Strike brings Northern Ireland to a standstill

On Friday 13th March Northern Ireland ground to a standstill as public sector workers took strike action across all main services including public transport. The action was in response to deepest budget cuts and job loss ever proposed.

UNISON members in education, health, social services stopped work from midnight onwards and the first picket lines formed at Belfast's Mater Hospital as the night shift walked out.

In what has been described as the largest strike in Northern Ireland for more than a decade, schools closed, bus and rail services stopped, hospitals, social services and social care reduced to emergency cover, all but emergency outpatient services and elective surgery was cancelled and across the civil service the majority of government functions stopped.

UNISON, NIPSA, INTO, GMB and UNITE all took strike action. Private sector workers such as those in CWU and USDAW took annual leave or used their own time to join picket lines

and marches. By lunchtime it was estimated that over 45000 workers marched and rallied in their local towns and cities. UNISON strike leaders addressed all rallies.

Addressing the Belfast Rally, UNISON Regional Secretary, Patricia McKeown said "How did our small place become a threat. The answer is simple. The enemies of the People know that we still have a welfare state. The People still own our buses, trains and water. Our NHS is still intact. The reason we still have services that enhance people's lives is because of you – the public service workers who have fought for them for decades. Now they face their greatest threat."

In an eve of strike poll conducted by the largest newspaper in Northern Ireland, the general public voted 85% in support of the strike.

UNISON members are now considering the next form of action to save jobs and services.

News from Scotland

UNISON Scotland's Education Issues Group is busy raising the profile of the union with policymakers and in schools.

This year started with a successful conference for education support staff, hosted by Education Scotland and supported by UNISON. Workshops covered understanding behaviours; training; stress and resilience; autism and complex learning needs. The conference was a big success and UNISON is now involved in planning a further conference for school support staff in North Scotland later this year.

UNISON Scotland is focusing on three main areas – relationships and behaviour in schools, early years and the administration of medicines by school support staff.

We now have a place on the Scottish Governments Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools. We are also involved in the Scottish government's review of early years provision.

UNISON met Professor Siraj, who is leading the review and we have responded to the questionnaire that was sent to organisations. The first draft of the review was available in early March and the final report is due shortly. UNISON Scotland will convene a special meeting of its Early Years Group to consider it's response to the report.

UNISON Scotland continues to campaign for appropriate guidelines for school support staff when administering medicines. UNISON believes that this should not be a voluntary activity but should be included in job descriptions, with the appropriate grade, and proper training and support given to staff that have to administer medicines as part of their job. We are in discussions with the chair of the Scottish government's Administration of Medicines review group and have raised the issue with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, who have asked for further information. Keep on eye on the UNISON Scotland website for future updates.



UNISON campaign stops privatisation of school services

Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), the largest academy chain in England, has announced that it will not be proceeding with its plan to set up a Joint Venture Partnership with a private company

AET had intended to set up a joint venture with Price Waterhouse Cooper (PWC) to either directly provide or manage contracts for a wide range of school services. Services in this proposed joint venture included support for children with special educational needs, school finance staff, bursars, catering, IT and health and safety. Under the plan, PWC would have been able to take a share of any savings as profit.

UNISON campaigned against the plan from the start because we were concerned that it would open the door to a new kind of privatisation of support services in schools. School heads would have lost control over budgets and there would have been cuts to services that pupils rely on every day.

Members and staff in branches, regions and UNISON Labour Link were involved.

MP's Alex Cunningham and David Blunkett were vital allies. Alex Cunningham in particular raised the issue at every opportunity in Parliament. We also worked closely with governors of AET schools – including Oliver Coppard Vice Chair of AET's Firth Park School in Sheffield and Labour's Parliamentary Candidate standing against Nick Clegg in Sheffield Hallam.

As a result AET announced in December that it had decided not to go ahead with the Joint Venture and would discuss an in-house alternative with UNISON and the other unions.



Jon Richards UNISON national secretary for education and children's services said:

"We welcome the announcement by AET that it will not be proceeding with the joint venture with PWC. The AET team and board deserve credit for being prepared to listen to the concerns that UNISON and others such as parents, staff, head teachers and governors had. UNISON will now work closely with AET and our staff side colleagues to achieve an in-house solution.

"I would like to thank UNISON regions, branches, members, reps and staff across the union who worked tirelessly on this issue. I also want to say big thank you to MPs such as Alex Cunningham and David Blunkett who have been fantastically supportive, raising concerns and asking difficult questions of the government throughout."

UNISON rep on the new Education Workforce Council in Wales

UNISON Representative and TA Joanne Morgan from Torfaen Branch has been selected to sit on the Education



Workforce Council (EWC) in Wales. The EWC came into being in April 2015 taking over from the General Teaching Council for Wales – the body which previously registered teachers. The new EWC will encompass school and FE support staff involved in teaching and learning for the first time, although they won't become registered until April 2016.

Commenting on her appointment Jo said: 'As a TA for most of my working life, I've witnessed the way the role has evolved over the years. I am pleased to have been nominated and selected to sit on the Education Workforce Council. I intend to make sure that the voice of school and FE support staff is heard – I can't wait to get started!'

As the only support staff representative on the new body, Jo's appointment is a reminder to TA's and other schools members in Wales that UNISON is the main trade union representing this essential sector of the school and FE workforce. If your co-workers are not in a union, tell them not to wait until registration - now is the time to join!

Three simple ways to join UNISON today:



Join online at
joinunison.org



Call us on
0800 171 2193



Ask a colleague
for an application form