



Dear Rob,

Thank you for enabling the Union to make a response to the Government's responses to the Covid-19 outbreak, with respect to Education.

Firstly, I would like to compliment the Government on its general actions which, by and large, have copied and complemented that of other nations and jurisdictions. While the Union would comment that the Government did not seem to be particularly in a state of readiness for the outbreak, it has attempted to respond quickly and to cover the cracks. With Education, the Government decided, like other nations and jurisdiction to close the schools from the 20th March, at the time a wise and sensible action.

A regular conference call was set up to run daily for all unions involved with the Government despite their many differences. While initially fulfilling the claim that Government was working with the unions, it soon became apparent that the meetings were very much just to update the unions on what the Government had already decided to do. There was little opportunity to contribute to plans. Questions were asked both verbally and written but many remained unanswered or time passed before an answer was given. However, it is fair to say that at least the unions were generally kept informed of the 'new normal' rules for working. This is understandable considering the pace at which the Government were trying to work.

However the consequent plan of what the schools would do during the initial lockdown was less clearly articulated. To use that often-heard phrase they were in 'uncharted territory.' It was unclear who was making decisions at what level and who to approach for information and guidance.

It seemed much time was spent on identifying vulnerable children and those children of Essential workers (the definition of which was ambiguous and changeable). I suspect that CYPES and, in particular, the Education Department were under immense pressure to do something but without adequate resources in terms of staff and resources. Contacting HR often ended up with a referral back to the Government's FAQ page from whence the individual's issue arose.

As the lockdown unrolled Head Teachers seemed to be left to their own devices. This resulted in a large variety of ways of continuing to provide education to the Island's school children. There appeared to be little coordination or consistency, of what was expected of schools, students and teachers. Some schools were better prepared than others, largely due to unrelated attempts to make some learning available to students at home as part of homework assignments and revision lessons. Other schools would be starting almost from scratch. Unfortunately there seemed to be an unseemly haste to be an all singing, all dancing remotely electronic educating school. This left a great number of teachers under pressure to quickly adapt to new ways of doing things without the requisite training or resources. Most used their own devices to prepare, perform, and send lessons, while making daily pastoral contacts with students and receiving their work which seemed to require instant acknowledgment and marking and returning. Anecdotally some teachers reported working

more hours than normal. It seems to have been forgotten that staff working from home will also be caring for family members, teaching their own children, so they cannot be available for their whole normal school working hours.

Many teachers who were told to use software, such as Zoom, were concerned about how this was to be done safely and were uneasy about the intrusion into their homes.

The NEU has a clear view that no “live” video should take place due to safeguarding concerns. A Distance Learning Guide would be helpful if the schools remain closed or are only partially opened.

The above need for a Distance Learning Guide is also helpful to manage parental expectations as we have been made aware (informally) that concerns are raised that teachers are either setting too much work or not enough work.

Concerns regarding social distancing have been raised by members on several occasions about how this can be achieved within schools with younger pupils. We have been informed how some Headteachers required staff members to attend the school site when this was clearly not required due to the number of pupils in attendance. This of course negates the advice of staying at home and only making essential journeys. A requirement of some sort of check on this by the department will be helpful going forward.

Of concern to the NEU was the way in which Supply Teachers were dealt with. It seemed that whichever department was dealing with this issue they had little idea, or if not, then sympathy for supply teachers who mainly work on a Zero hours type basis of ad hoc hourly or daily requests for work. Neither do they have easy communication with Government communications systems. Most have been left with no work and thus no pay. It was galling to see that while the Government was prepared to offer financial assistance to private business and their non-working staff, they would deny their own loyal staff any recompense. We believe that this still needs to be addressed and if a decision is reached to offer financial support it should be back dated.

For the NEU it is now the way forward with the schools and colleges needing to prepare for reopening in the near future that is seen as important and a priority. The Education Department have taken the welcome initiative and are attempting to set up call conferencing to , hopefully exchange views and work towards a safe, manageable and productive return to ‘normal’. The NEU has emailed the department with a number of ‘tests’ that we want to be considered and actioned before schools reopen.

If you require any more information or wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Lynsey Miller

NEU - President