



ULSTER TEACHERS' UNION

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FAO Rt. Hon Chris Heaton Harris
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Erskine House
20-32 Chichester St
Belfast BT1 4GF

26th April 2023

Dear Secretary of State

Letter of Protest RE: School Funding and Pay & Request for Meeting

The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), the National Association of Schoolmaster and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), the National Education Union (NEU), the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Ulster Teachers Union (UTU) are the five recognised teaching unions that make up the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC).

Today all five unions took part in a Northern Ireland wide strike in relation to teacher and school leader pay. We are disappointed that it has come to this but we have been left with no alternative.

The Education Authority (EA), which is responsible for spending the bulk of the £2.5bn education budget, has been asked to model cuts of up to 10% of its 2023/24 budget. Cuts of up to 10% could mean it has to find hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of savings.

Our best guess is to prepare for cuts in the order of £0.5 billion (£500 million). This will mean cuts to teaching and ancillary staff and savage cuts to many vital areas of non-statutory education. Recent examples have included cutting Baby Books¹, cuts to Extended Schools, cuts to mental health services and cuts to youth services for the most disadvantaged of our young people².

The extent of projected school funding cuts, we say, will have a damaging effect on the region, its economy and society.

Our dispute is about pay but is about a lot more. Bluntly, schools are under-funded in Northern Ireland (as compared to Wales, Scotland, England and in countries across Europe) and have been for some time. The result is increased class sizes, increased pupil to teacher ratios, decreased subject choice, narrowed curriculum and an acute shortage of available supply teachers. Ask any Principal – they'll tell you it is nearly impossible to source supply teachers.

Teaching and education generally appear to be seen by Government only as a cost, not as a **necessary investment** to take full advantage of the unique economic and trading position of Northern Ireland in the wake of the Windsor Agreement. A well-educated and skilled workforce is a requirement for the future economy as well as for the good of society.

The value of a teacher's job has decreased by nearly a quarter in real terms (23-24%) in the 'lost decade' since Chancellor Osborne's 2010/11 pay freeze. Teachers' pay (along with the pay of social workers) has decreased by more than in any other sector of the economy.

Pay losses of that order lead to the degradation of the profession, coupled with increased job intensity³ and decreased job satisfaction. Job satisfaction comes from a sense of purpose and vocation; an involvement in shaping the job you do; a sense of ownership; a level of task-discretion; a feeling of professional pride and autonomy. The CBI is not wrong in citing that schools are too often "exam factories". Spoon-fed education, teaching to the test, narrowed curriculum all combine to "Taylorise"⁴ working tasks and undermine professionalism.

Astonishingly, in a region that over-produces teachers, our system has managed to create teacher shortages in all sciences, technology, English and even in Home Economics.

This is the first time that all five unions (INTO, NAHT, NASUWT, NEU and UTU) will be taking strike action together. Our members have waited for far too long for a satisfactory offer from the employers. We are now stepping up our campaign for a fair deal for all teachers. Our members have watched governments in other jurisdictions make offers that will lead to pay levels far in excess of what is available in Northern Ireland. Collectively the five recognised unions are saying 'enough is enough' and that government and employers must act now to deliver a pay settlement that recognises the real terms loss suffered by teachers for more than a decade.

The last pay rise for teachers in Northern Ireland was 2% in Sept 2020. On the next page we have set out a table comparing pay across the jurisdictions of the UK and Republic of Ireland, the table demonstrates just how far teachers in Northern Ireland have fallen behind.

We urge you to address the funding crisis within education in Northern Ireland, including teachers' pay, and seek a meeting with you at the earliest opportunity to discuss these issues.

Yours sincerely

Jacquie White (Chair, NITC)
Justin McCamphill (Secretary, NITC)
Mark McTaggart (INTO)
Mark Langhammer, Pauline Buchanan (NEU)
Graham Gault (NAHT)

Comparison Table: Northern Ireland with England, Wales, Scotland and Republic of Ireland

	England (outside London) Govt Offer	Wales (negotiated Agreement)	Scotland (negotiated Agreement)	Rep of Ireland (£ equivalent)	Northern Ireland (September 2020)
Year 1	£30,000	£30,742	£32,217	£36,334	£24,137
Year 2	£31,680	£33,210	£38,655	£37,736	£26,045
Year 3	£33,455	£35,769	£40,848	£39,336	£28,139
Year 4	£35,328	£38,586	£43,218	£40,066	£30,305
Year 5	£37,538	£42,464	£45,960	£41,095	£32,693
Year 6	£40,479	£44,023	£48,516	£42,337	£36,277

These comparisons show just how far behind teacher pay has fallen - that is why we are escalating our action.

