

Leading by example
'David personifies the unique qualities of a great teacher.'

Post-pandemic plan
What next as we emerge from a year of Covid?

Guiding the Government
Education is key for whoever is in charge from 6 May.

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'Every one of you are heroes'

THE NEU in Wales made a real impact during the coronavirus pandemic, thanks to the hard work of members.

Opening the third NEU Cymru conference, held digitally on 6 and 7 March, joint general secretary **Kevin Courtney** said reps and members could take great pride in the way the profession had risen to the challenges faced.

"There'll be a lot more for the union to do to fight for education recovery," said Kevin, who was born and educated in Pontypridd before leaving for university in London.

He said levels of poverty had grown since the start of the Westminster Government's austerity drive in 2010. Covid had thrown it into sharp relief, and the NEU would be at the forefront of bearing down on childhood poverty and inequality.

Guest speaker **Shavanah Taj**, the first Black general secretary of the TUC in Wales, praised the "hybrid" way educators had been working, teaching digitally and/or physically going into school. "It saddens me, and angers me actually, when people look at the sector and this profession as if their only job is simply to provide a service. To me, every one of you are heroes because I've had my kids at home, and they are a nightmare. I don't know how you deal with them all day long."

She said there were real opportunities to keep building the trade union movement in Wales and thanked members for making sure people were protected in the workplace and knew how to access and exercise their rights.

NEU president **Robin Bevan**, who chaired the conference, said: "You can't educate a child who is in poverty, who is more concerned about what they face at home than what school might bring them." He said it was time for the wider public to understand that a unionised workforce was in the best interests of the communities they served.



(From left) Shavanah Taj, Daniel Kebede and Ceinwen Davies

Other guest speakers were **Daniel Kebede**, NEU senior vice-president, and **Avis Gilmore**, deputy general secretary of the union.

The conference was attended by more than 100 delegates from all 22 districts representing almost 19,000 members in Wales. All 14 policy motions put forward were agreed.

Policy motions in brief

■ **TEACHERS** should be afforded the professional trust and responsibility to work from home during PPA sessions in the future, conference agreed.

John Griffiths from Newport district said: "Prior to March 2020, health and safety was often quoted as the main reason staff were not permitted to work from home." Teachers did not need to be constantly micromanaged, he said, joking: "Of course, there may still be some teachers who cannot be trusted to keep their fingers out of the toaster if there isn't a member of senior management to keep an eye on them."

Conference also agreed, in the light of increased workloads, to press for PPA time to be increased from ten per cent of contract time to 15 per cent.

■ NEU senior vice-president, **Daniel Kebede** said members wanted to see a fundamental shift in the direction of education: "We will be in our second academic year without high-stakes primary assessment driving the mental health of our children into the ground and narrowing our curriculum, so let's make sure that never returns."

He said schools had continued to be the heartbeats of their communities throughout the pandemic without inspections – and the inspectors had not been missed. GCSE grades were being awarded by educators for a second year so why return to a secondary assessment system dependent on performance in exams, he asked.

Welsh executive member **Mairead Canavan** said it was time to acknowledge the harm done due to the "exam factories" children are taught in. "We need to be vigilant that the new curriculum in Wales does turn out to be a change for the better. The worst scenario is that the exam system will continue to run alongside it."

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Policy motions in brief

■ SOME staff who work with children with additional learning needs (ALN) and carry out intimate procedures with their pupils have been offered the coronavirus vaccination. But conference agreed that all educators working in ALN provisions should be treated as a priority group and offered the job.

■ “WE all know the research that shows that being in a room with fresh air can reduce your risk of coronavirus infection,” said science teacher **Daniel Wilson** from Blaenau Gwent.

“As a scientist and as somebody from an ethnic minority, it frustrates me when people who don’t work in classrooms don’t appreciate what lack of ventilation can mean.”

■ A MINUTE’S silence was held during the conference to remember family and friends of members who have died during the previous 12 months. Particular mention was made of NEU Welsh activists **Steffan ap Dafydd** and **Marilyn Bater**, in whose memory Billy Bragg’s song Power in a Union was played.

■ MEMBERS demanded that the statutory pay and conditions for schools should be extended to the post-16 sector. NEU Cymru will work with other teaching unions to campaign for parity and for a funding uplift to restore money lost to FE colleges since 2010.

■ WOMEN teachers over the age of 45 are being increasingly subjected to discrimination and bullying, conference was told. Flintshire delegate **Cheryl Latham** said: “Older female teachers have years of professional experience, skills, wisdom and expertise, but are often denied jobs in favour of younger teachers who earn much less than they do and are an attractive proposition to cash-strapped schools.”

She said many workplaces were also unsuitable for women with menopause issues. “Older female teachers should not be offered early retirement or an exit deal as a solution to the situation they find themselves in. They should have fair and equal working conditions and protective legislation to stop inequality related to age and gender bias.”

Building capable and resilient citizens

THE health and wellbeing of pupils and staff was high on the agenda at the conference with several motions reflecting members’ concerns.

Dai Edwards from Flintshire said that, with the wider opening of schools, it would be important to continue to push for adequate PPE for all staff and for the deployment of adequately trained professional cleaning staff.

Lateral flow tests must be administered properly if they are to be effective and risk assessments must be kept updated, he said.

“We need to protect people, we need to protect our senior leaders whose stress levels, I can assure you, are going through the roof at the moment,” Dai told conference.

Delegates agreed that staff wellbeing should become a priority campaign and that the union should call for the funding of a post of a staff wellbeing/mental health ambassador

in every local authority.

The conference also agreed to put pressure on the Welsh Government to ensure that all young people and families in need of mental health support should have immediate access to it to prevent long-term consequences.

Kathleen Steelandt from Denbighshire said many children had witnessed domestic violence, had lost loved ones, had not seen their friends and may not have had fresh air for long periods during the pandemic. Teachers will need access to training linked to surviving trauma and developing mental wellbeing, “so that we can give our children the recovery they deserve to become mentally healthy adults.”

“It’s up to us to build capable and resilient citizens. As a union we play a key part in making wise decisions on the journey ahead,” Kathleen said.

Curriculum needs urgent equality overhaul

AS teachers across Wales prepare to embrace the new curriculum from next year, members had an ethical duty to ensure it reflects all the pupils they teach and tells the successful and unsung stories of their ancestors.

Speaking on a motion on decolonising the curriculum, **Julian Konten** from Cardiff said the Black Lives Matter movement had once again highlighted the importance of equality and of inclusion.

“More importantly, it highlighted the lack of representation or under-representation of Black people in different institutions and sectors, especially education,” he said.

“If we are to raise the aspirations of those in the Black community and those

from disadvantaged backgrounds, we need more visual role models in schools. We need more Black teachers who can help break the stereotypes and unconscious bias that exist within society and within schools.”

Earlier, **Roxanne Beckles** from the Vale of Glamorgan had listed the names of many successful but largely unknown Black men and women including inventors, scientists and war heroes. She said the curriculum needed an urgent overhaul to make sure they and others like them were represented.

Conference agreed that change should start within the union by promoting and continuing to take into account Black members’ concerns and support them into shaping NEU policy.

Campaign to save rural Welsh schools

NEU Cymru is to actively campaign to save rural schools across Wales as concern mounts about the effect of closures on pupils’ mental health and educators’ jobs.

Several small schools across Ynys Môn, Powys, Gwynedd, Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot are facing the threat of closure, with councils of different political persuasions ignoring pleas from communities to put consultation exercises on hold during the pandemic.

Ceinwen Davies from Brecon district in Powys said many speakers had alluded to the effect of the pandemic on the mental health of children and teachers. “Imagine how these anxieties will escalate for pupils and staff

members who return to face-to-face education with their school under threat of being reduced or completely closed,” she said.

Some of the schools are at the heart of communities with a high proportion of Welsh speakers. Ceinwen said that in one case, if the school closes, alternative options include sending children to school in England: “Not a great move when the Welsh Government wants one million Welsh speakers by 2050.”

Caroline Butchers from Carmarthenshire added: “Cost savings and cuts are the main drivers for these closures and as a union we must stand firmly against the continual push to perceive all schools as businesses.”

Wales regional winners were Pamela Ireland from Caerphilly in the officers' category and Caroline Butchers from Carmarthenshire in the reps' category.

Simply the best

DAVID Church teaches in a school in one of the old mining communities of south Wales, in an area where a third of pupils receive free school meals.

But it is with great pride that he says: "Our wonderful children will give you their very last penny for charity."

He has been teaching at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School since he started working there as a newly qualified teacher 23 years ago and in that time he and his pupils have raised an incredible £32,000 for different charitable causes.

Head of religious studies for 20 years, he believes the subject is about instilling values and leading by example. David co-ordinates many fundraising and social action programmes, which have led to unique opportunities and experiences that pupils and colleagues might never have imagined possible.

Nominated by past and present pupils

So it was no surprise – to his pupils and colleagues at least – that he won the Pupils' Award for Best Teacher at the Professional Teaching Awards Cymru 2020. He received multiple nominations from past and present pupils and 97 people spoke on his behalf to the judging panel.

David told Educate: "The fact that this inaugural award came from the pupils themselves makes it a truly prestigious accolade."

The judges described David as "a role model to many" who "has made a significant impact on their learning and wellbeing and takes great pride in their achievements".

They added: "He cares deeply about equality for all and instils a real sense of good moral values and social conscience in all his pupils. He is more than 'just' a teacher; he is also a friend to all, and he personifies the unique qualities of a great teacher."

David is the co-ordinator of his school's First Give, WE and Ambassadors to Auschwitz programmes. He is also a co-lead on their BOTAWA project which has been running for five years, linking schools in



David Church, winner of the Pupils' Award for Best Teacher at the Professional Teaching Awards Cymru 2020

Botswana, Tanzania and Wales for mutual teaching and learning benefits. In just three years working with First Give, his year 9 pupils have raised more than £17,700 for 21 local charities. His involvement with the WE programme has enabled five pupils to win scholarships worth £17,500 to help build a school in Rajasthan, India.

Celebrity interaction a massive boost

Through such projects, pupils have privately met the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as well as an assortment of celebrities, politicians, worldwide campaigners and a Nobel laureate.

David believes this sort of interaction with high-profile people acts as a massive boost for his pupils and makes them feel "extra special", as well as encouraging their social consciences and determination to succeed.

He persuaded the actor Michael Sheen to send a congratulatory video message to pupils, and last year TV's Carol Vorderman sent a moving video message to one of his pupils who, at age 15, became the youngest Welsh winner of the Diana Award 2020.

"I passionately believe in learning outside of the classroom. You only need to provide children with opportunities to flourish and excel."

David's next charity programme is with his year 7 pupils, to raise money and awareness for the Wales Ape and Monkey Sanctuary as the children study the moral issues of animal rights this summer term.

He is hoping by then the pressures caused by the coronavirus pandemic will continue to ease and he will be back in school with his pupils. His own inspiration to teach came from several people, including his religious studies teacher who gave up her lunch breaks and after-school hours to enable him to take the subject at GCSE. Academics at the universities of Aberystwyth and Oxford, where he studied, encouraged his progress and "helped instil my sense of equality for all". He says his Christian faith underpins his approach to life and work.

But he was not the archetypal religious studies teacher when he started out: "I have 13 tattoos, six piercings and I used to have very long hair." The hair went, typically, in a fundraising event to raise money for a children's cancer charity but the tattoos remain, including one of a biblical quotation.

David says: "Since I was 15 I knew that teaching was my vocation and it was always going to be very full-on. The children are my priority and always come first."

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Dates for your diary

Training for reps

The union's one- and three-day training courses for new and existing reps have been temporarily replaced with virtual courses. Email cymru.wales@neu.org.uk

Find out more about national NEU courses at neu.org.uk/learning

More courses through WULF

Courses are also available through the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) project and a regularly updated list of topics can be found at bit.ly/36PD1jP with information on how to register.

Post-pandemic recovery plan

NEU Cymru is calling for the introduction of the new curriculum for Wales to be delayed as part of an education recovery plan outlining the way forward from the lockdowns of the past year.

As well as setting out a safe and sustainable way of keeping schools open, the union's plan outlines the challenges facing the education system to enable pupils to regain their confidence and make progress.

Vaccines, rotas and more

The first part of the recovery plan focuses on the challenge of creating safer educational workplaces and continuing remote learning where necessary. This includes vaccinations for all educators, a rota system in schools to reduce overcrowding and specific support for special needs and alternative provision.

It then puts forward proposals for a better education system for the future, which would include delaying the introduction of the new curriculum and concentrating instead on a "recovery curriculum".

More support should also be provided for children moving from primary to secondary schools, and national reading and numeracy tests should not go ahead.

The plan asks if education should be made compulsory over the age of 16 to help ensure that young people have a guaranteed college place to continue their learning and prevent them from being "lost" from education.



Child poverty and wellbeing support

The final part of the plan demands an end to child poverty: "There are too many young people living in poverty in Wales and living in households with people who could face more significant impacts from Covid-19," it says.

The union calls for pupils to be guaranteed access to broadband and laptops, and for the expansion of free school meals provision. A fully resourced national plan for children's wellbeing to support those who have suffered trauma during the pandemic should also be launched.

It concludes: "NEU Cymru wants to work with the Welsh Government to make sure we have a plan in place to help children and young people to learn as we recover from the pandemic."

Union manifesto for next Government

A FAIR education for all must be at the heart of the next Welsh Government after the elections on 6 May, says NEU Cymru.

The union has set out key demands in its post-pandemic manifesto for the incoming administration, whatever its politics.

"If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it is the importance of education in supporting our children, young people and their families and communities," the manifesto states. "We believe that #FairEducationForAllWales must be the cornerstone of the next Welsh Government – ensuring all children and young people have access to an education which will support their wellbeing and help them flourish as Wales' citizens of the future."

The union outlines three key areas for future policy-makers.

■ Make learning fair and equitable

This would include a fully funded education

system with its new curriculum due to be introduced in 2022; ending national testing; and supporting mental wellbeing for all children and young people.

■ Reduce the cost of going to school and college

Provide appropriate IT equipment and wi-fi; ensure everyone on Universal Credit has access to free school meals in term-time and the school holidays; make school uniform affordable; and increase the education maintenance allowance for FE students from £30 to £45 a week.

■ Support the education workforce

The union asks for mental health support, collective bargaining, fair pay across the sector and protection for the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF).

More details at neu.org.uk/neu-cymru