

NEU

Councillors

Network

**Briefing
for local
councillors**

National Education Union
Autumn term 2021



NEU Councillors Network

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Foreword from NEU joint general secretaries Kevin Courtney and Mary Bousted



Councillors,

Thank you for taking the time to read this NEU Councillors' Network autumn briefing.

Poverty has for too long been a growing epidemic within the UK. Staff in schools and colleges have worked tirelessly on the front line, supporting families pushed to the brink and fighting to break down the barriers that poverty places around a child's access to learning.

The pandemic has thrown the inequality present across the country into sharp relief. Now, like never before, the realities of growing up in poverty are very much in the public eye. Images of children unable to access Free School Meals (FSM) over the holidays, pupils struggling to complete online schoolwork with inadequate access to technology, parents waiting for long overdue food vouchers from Edenred have been burned into the nation's conscience. The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has stopped closing for the first time in a decade. Disadvantaged pupils in England are 18 months behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs.

Over the course of 2020, your dedication and hard work saw the Government make U-turn after U-turn – on FSM provision, on schools re-opening and on assessment to name just a few. In February 2021, more than 750 local councillors signed an NEU Councillors' Network letter to the Prime Minister calling for the extension of Free School Meals to all children in families in receipt of universal credit. And ahead of the local elections in May, hundreds of candidates signed our No Child Left Behind pledge. In January 2021, through the Help A Child to Learn appeal, the National Education Union (NEU) gave £1 million to provide learning materials needed for children

and young people in the most disadvantaged schools to continue to study safely at home. You and the public, stood with us and raised a staggering additional £262,000 supporting schools to provide vital learning resources for the pupils who needed them most.

This shows the vital importance and power of the NEU Councillors' Network, and the power of a union.

But the fight isn't over. Now, more than ever, we need a strong voice for education recovery – to build on the amazing work of schools and colleges and to ensure that no child is left behind.

As the UK starts to move out of the pandemic, the impact of the past year on the lives of our children cannot be underestimated. We need a period of recovery education to ensure that pupil wellbeing and potential is at the heart of their schooling experience – and to allow us to break down the barriers poverty has created for over four million young people.

We hope you find this briefing useful and please feel free to share with other councillor colleagues.

We are always happy to hear from councillors regarding education, so please do not hesitate to get in touch via cllrs@neu.org.uk

Yours sincerely

Mary W. Bousted.
Kevin Courtney

Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney
Joint general secretaries,
National Education Union

Child Poverty in 2021

Child poverty is rising. The latest research from the [Resolution Foundation](#) predicts that by the time of the next General Election in 2024, 730,000 more children and young people will be caught in poverty's grip.

Covid has shone a harsh light on the reality of child poverty in 2021 – job losses, illness and increased economic pressure have pushed too many families over the edge, limiting the life chances of millions of children and young people.

- Even before the pandemic 4.3 million children and young people were growing up trapped in poverty. This is an increase of 200,000 on the previous year (2019).
- Over the past five years an additional 500,000 children have been pushed into poverty.
- The North East of England has seen the greatest increase in child poverty. It has risen by more than a third in the last five years. Child poverty in this region has gone from below the UK average five years ago to the second highest in the UK.
- Most children and young people growing up in poverty – 75 per cent – live in a household where at least one person works. For these families, work does not provide a route out of poverty.
- A recent [NEU member survey](#) found that over half of respondents have seen an increase in child poverty at their school or college since March 2020, the start of the first national lockdown.
- Nine pupils in every classroom of 30 are officially poor.

- School census data released in June 2021 showed that an additional 300,000 children and young people have become eligible for Free School Meals during the pandemic.
- [New research](#) from Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and the Covid Realities project shows that, despite a rise in the number of children claiming FSM between March 2020 and March 2021, there are still one million school-aged children in poverty missing out because of restrictive eligibility criteria linked to household earnings.

Poverty increases inequality in education

- Poverty disproportionately impacts children and young people growing up in Black or ethnic minority families – 46 per cent of whom are trapped in poverty.
- In lone-parent families, 44 per cent of children are trapped in poverty, with many single parents working several jobs to make ends meet. Gender inequality in pay and childcare costs compound the challenges many lone-parent families face.
- The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers has stopped closing for the first time in a decade. Disadvantaged pupils in England are 18 months behind their peers by the time they finish their GCSEs. [Ofqual's report](#) on 2021 results shows:
 - ▶ for GCSEs, between 2019-21, the longstanding gap indicating lower outcomes of FSM candidates relative to prior-attainment-matched non-FSM candidates has widened by 1.31 percentage points¹.

¹ Ofqual Summer 2021 student-level equalities analysis – GCSE and A level, August 2021: GCSE probability of grade 4 and above.

- › for A-levels, between 2019-21, the longstanding gap indicating lower outcomes of FSM candidates relative to prior-attainment-matched non-FSM candidates has widened by 1.03 percentage points².
- After years of decline, the poverty rate for families with disabled family members has been increasing since 2011/12.
- Research shows that one in ten girls cannot afford menstrual products, and over 137,700 missed school because of period poverty in 2018.

Poverty creates barriers which prevent children from accessing education

- Over three-quarters of respondents to a recent NEU survey told us their students had demonstrated fatigue (78%) or poor concentration (75%) in school as a result of poverty.
- More than half of members said their students had experienced hunger (57%) or ill health (50%) as a result of poverty.
- More than a third (35%) said their students had been bullied because of poverty.

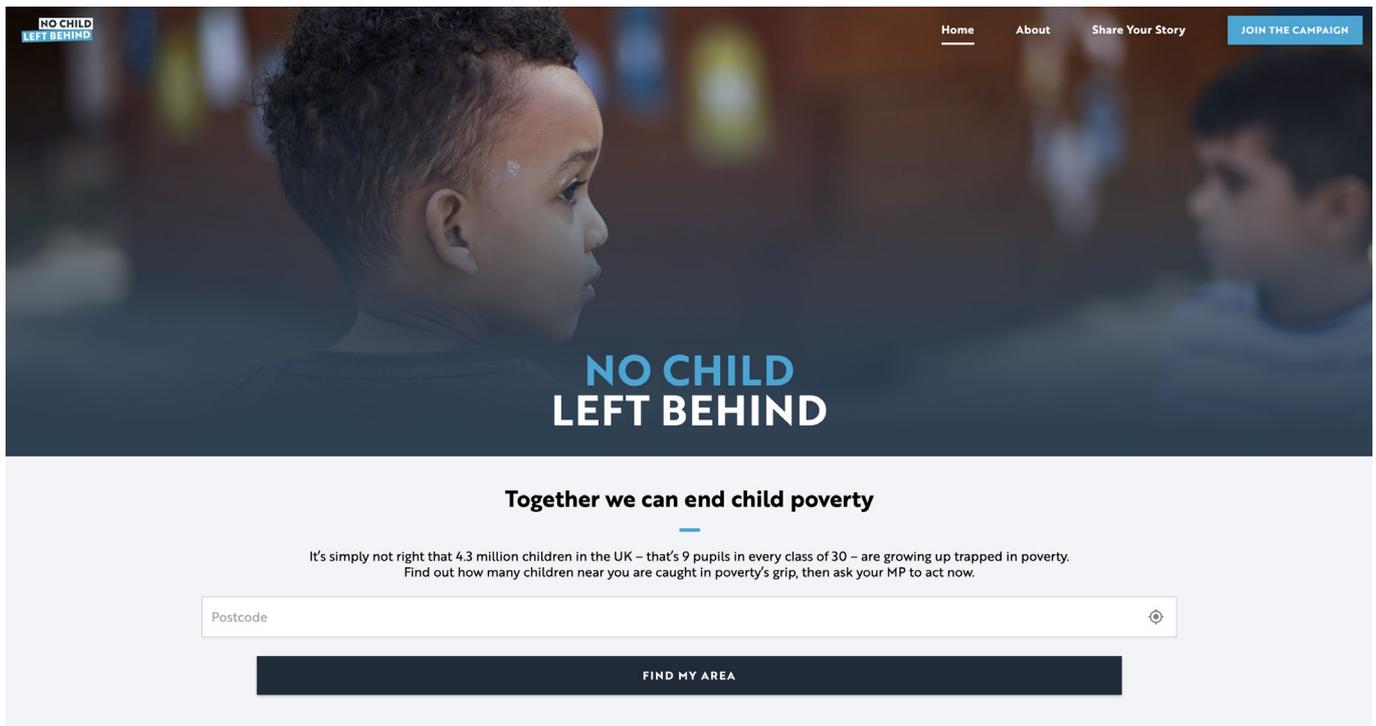
The coronavirus pandemic has increased the pressure low-income families are facing

- Almost all respondents to a recent NEU member survey reported teaching students with limited or no access to learning resources at home during the months of the pandemic:
 - › four in five members reported families turning to schools or colleges for extra support during lockdown for the provision of basic learning resources such as pens, paper and books
 - › a fifth of UK schools have set up a local food bank since March 2020, with 25 per cent of teachers reporting that they personally provide food and snacks for their pupils to ensure they have eaten during the school day
- poverty harms children's physical health and mental wellbeing and this undermines their ability to learn, in lots of different ways.

**Poverty is not inevitable.
We can – and should – right this wrong.**

² Ofqual Summer 2021 student-level equalities analysis – GCSE and A level, August 2021: A-Level probability of grade C and above.

The NEU's No Child Left Behind campaign relaunch



Earlier this year, the NEU relaunched our child poverty campaign – No Child Left Behind – with a new website that targets MPs and holds them to account for the level of child poverty in their constituency.

- We have asked our supporters to visit nochildleftbehind.org.uk to find out levels of child poverty in their area by typing in their postcode. They are then taken to a page showing the number and percentage of children growing up in poverty in their area, as well as a graph showing how levels of child poverty have risen in their constituency since 2015.

- The page also displays the details of their local MP, and whether the MP has signed up to the NEU's anti-poverty pledge. The pledge reads:

"As a member of Parliament, I pledge to do everything in my power so that no child is left behind in [constituency]:

- I call for the development of a cross-Government strategy to eradicate the poverty faced by the 4.3 million children currently growing up trapped in poverty.
- I will use my vote and voice in Parliament to try to stop an expected 730,000 more children being plunged into poverty by 2024.

We must value and invest in all our children, so they are supported to learn, succeed, and go on to have bright futures.”

- If the MP has not signed up to the pledge, the site visitor is asked to email them asking that they do, then share this action.
- If the MP has signed up to the pledge, the site visitor is asked to sign the ongoing FSM petition which demands that FSM be extended to all children growing up in families on universal credit.

- So far, 96 MPs have signed up to the NEU's child poverty pledge.
- We have been working with the End Child Poverty coalition – a group made up of around 100 charities and third sector organisations – to maintain the pressure on politicians around child poverty. We supported their virtual MP ‘drop-in’ in May to highlight the release of damning new poverty data and have since had a number of MPs show their support for our campaign on social media.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Home About Share Your Story [JOIN THE CAMPAIGN](#)

YOUR LOCATION

Year	Percentage of children in child poverty
2015	19.5%
2016	20.2%
2017	20.0%
2018	19.7%
2019	19.6%
2020	19.2%

Your constituency
Surrey Heath

4,010
Children are trapped in poverty
That's 19% of children in Surrey Heath

Your MP has NOT taken the pledge!

Your MP represents you in Parliament, but they also represent all 4,010 children living in poverty in your area. Can you send your MP a quick email asking them to sign the pledge below?

As a member of Parliament, I pledge to do everything in my power so that no child is left behind in Surrey Heath:

- I call for the development of a cross-Government strategy to eradicate the poverty faced by the 4.3 million children currently growing up trapped in poverty.
- I will use my vote and voice in Parliament to try to stop an expected 730,000 more children being plunged into poverty by 2024.

We must value and invest in all our children, so they are supported to learn, succeed, and go on to have bright futures.

EMAIL YOUR MP

Please share this site

[SHARE ON WHATSAPP](#) [SHARE ON TWITTER](#) [SHARE ON FACEBOOK](#)

High-stakes assessment and the need for change

Primary assessment

The high-stakes testing system in primary schools is not fit for purpose. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted even further the flaws in this system.

Helping learning recovery while protecting children's mental health and wellbeing needs to be the priority in primary schools in the 2021/22 school year. After two years in which SATs and other formal tests have been cancelled, the union is working with coalition More Than A Score to make the case against a return to the previous system of primary tests.

Bringing back high-stakes, high-pressure tests taken under exam conditions will harm not help learning recovery.

In fact, primary age children will face double the number of formal tests compared to before the pandemic.

The introduction of tests in English and maths for four-year-olds – Baseline assessment – when they first start school, the Times Tables Check for year 4s, and an additional Phonics Check for year 2s will take precious time away from classroom learning and needlessly pile on the pressure.

Schools and pupils need time to recover learning. Halting SATs and other statutory Government assessments for another year will give them that time.

You can find out more about the NEU's work with More Than A Score, and the case for recovery without high-stakes assessment, [here](#).

Secondary assessment

This country's over-reliance on a rigid, one-size-fits-all exam system, and Government's continued insistence on defunding BTECs and CAMTECs, in defiance of all expert opinion and evidence, is unsustainable and doesn't meet the challenges facing young people, our society and our economy in the 21st century.

The NEU has been working for the past year to support the [Independent Assessment Commission \(IAC\)](#), towards building a new, fairer and more robust assessment and qualification system.

The commission was launched in June 2021 and brings together academics, parents and students, as well as the NEU, Chartered College of Teaching, the EDGE Foundation and the CBI. The commission is chaired by Louise Hayward, professor of Educational Assessment and Innovation at the University of Glasgow.

Why the National Education Union has established the Independent Assessment Commission (IAC)

The assessment and exams system in England fail too many pupils, teachers and schools. It also fails to meet the needs of business.

It places undue demands on young people – risking their mental health – and is creating a new generation who leave school scarred by their experience of the exam system.

The IAC is not anti-exams. But an approach that assesses all young people based only on exams is one that does not take into consideration the variety of learners we have in our schools, nor how best to serve them.



Despite their wide-ranging backgrounds, the IAC commissioners all agree we need a new ERA of Equitable, Reliable Assessment. One that encourages all young people to want to learn throughout their personal and professional lives.

The work of the IAC

The IAC is working collaboratively with employers, parents, policymakers, practitioners, researchers, students, and professional organisations to develop principles that underpin a new assessment system in England, which is fit for the 21st century.

Our commissioners have conducted focus groups and discussions within their respective areas of expertise to inform our work, which will produce a final report and recommendations by the end of 2021. The IAC's interim report, published September 2021, can be accessed via the [IAC's website](#).

The IAC's work is focused on education between the ages of 14-19 and will identify characteristics of a system of qualifications that will support the realisation of a bright future for every young person, for England as a society and as a leader in the world of business and industry.

How can councillors support NEU campaigns?

Since our launch in July 2018, the union has grown a network of over 4,000 councillors. The NEU Councillors' Network is a partnership between the NEU and local government. It is free to join our network, which is open to councillors of all political parties. Becoming a member will give you access to regular e-communications, briefings and invitations to our exclusive councillor events.

[Join us today](#) and help us shape the future of education.

Supporting the No Child Left Behind campaign

- Use nochild.leftbehind.org.uk to hold your local MP to account – if they haven't signed our pledge ask that they do so and share as widely as possible on social media.
- Show your support for the campaign on social media: Add a Twibbon to your profile picture to show your support, [using this link](#). This is a small image that you can overlay onto your Twitter or Facebook profile picture in order to support a Campaign.
- Table a motion at your council on these issues. Some example text for a motion is provided below:

[NAME OF COUNCIL] notes that:

The Government published its plans for education recovery after the pandemic on 2 June. Sir Kevan Collins, appointed by the Prime Minister as the Government's Education Recovery Commissioner, had judged that some £15billion was needed to repair the damage done to the nation's pupils by Covid. The Government's offer of £1.4billion falls far short and is wholly inadequate. The Education Policy Institute has calculated that this amounts to £50 per pupil per year. This contrasts with £1,600 per pupil in the USA and £2,500 per pupil in the Netherlands. There are no quick or cheap fixes if we are to build back better from the pandemic and have an education system that supports high standards and strong mental health for everyone.

Separately, the Department for Education has changed the census used to calculate Pupil Premium funding for the most disadvantaged pupils. The move meant thousands of pupils who became eligible between the two census dates did not count towards this year's funding. This means that £132.7 million is being taken away from young people and schools most in need. We are not going to level up the country on the backs of the poorest children.

[NAME OF COUNCIL] resolves:

To lobby the Government to value and invest in all our children, so they are supported to learn, succeed, and go on to have bright futures.

To write to the Prime Minister and call on the Government to scale up its ambition for our children and young people and give our education system the resources they need to ensure that no child is left behind. The Government should show it is serious about levelling up by putting in the investment called for by its own former Education Recovery Commissioner.

To work with local schools and education unions to highlight the effect of the funding shortfall on local schools and develop joint campaigning initiatives.

[Click here](#) to find out the level of child poverty in your local area using our new No Child Left Behind website.

Supporting our assessment campaign

[Watch and share NEU Joint General Secretary Mary Bousted's film on the 2021 exam results](#)

[Find out about the NEU's work with the New ERA commission, and plans to build an alternative assessment and qualifications system](#)

[Watch and share the Commission's launch film](#)

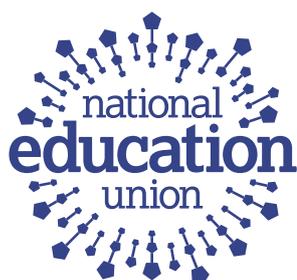
Follow the Commission's work on [twitter](#) or via [Facebook](#)

Sign and share the [More Than A Score petition](#) to help learning by halting unnecessary high-stakes tests in primary schools.

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