

SUPPORTING SUPPLY TEACHERS

NEU Guidance for members in England & Wales

How can I get the most from supply teaching and avoid the worst problems facing supply teachers today? This NEU document has been published to provide some answers to this key question...

What we say

When you read through this document you may have questions about what happens in the particular schools you work in, and there may be collective issues that affect other members. In most circumstances, you should initially discuss the matter with your local secretary, as they will know whether similar concerns have been raised by other members.

Although you may sometimes feel that you are the only person affected by or concerned about a particular issue, in reality this is seldom the case. Any difficulties you may experience are likely to be shared by other supply teachers in your area and, as a member of the NEU, you have the advantage of being able to act collectively with your colleagues. This should give you the confidence of knowing that you have the weight of the Union behind you.

How can I avoid working for supply agencies?

The growth of supply agencies is the single biggest challenge facing supply teachers, as they progressively undercut the national pay rates for teachers. An NEU survey in 2018 found that more than three-quarters of supply teachers now find work solely or mainly via agencies, up from 50 per cent in 2010.

We appreciate that avoiding agencies is often not possible, but our survey showed that almost a quarter of supply teachers are still engaged directly by schools/LAs and are therefore entitled to the national pay rates (i.e. a daily pay rate of 1/195th of the annual pay for teachers employed in that post on a regular contract) and access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Some authorities still operate supply pools which offer the same terms to supply teachers employed by them. A small number of authorities operate arrangements where placements are organised by an agency - again these generally offer national pay rates and access to pensions.

If there is a local authority supply pool near you, find out more about it. If there isn't, make direct approaches to schools where you would like to work. Employing you may actually cost the school less, as well as paying you more - and establishing relationships like this may lead to a steady stream of work and offers of longer term employment.

What if I have no choice but to use an agency?

If you have to use an agency, make the most of local circumstances. If you teach a subject where specialist teachers are harder to come by, or if the school is challenging to work in, then you may have a competitive advantage over the agency in terms of what you can persuade it to pay. Moreover, bear in mind that all supply agencies must comply with the

Agency Worker Regulations 2010 (AWR) – see the further NEU guidance on the AWR available on the NEU website at <https://neu.org.uk>.

How should I choose an agency?

The NEU does not endorse individual teacher supply agencies - they all drain public money from the education service while undercutting national pay rates. However, we do advise members to consider whether agencies are members of trade bodies and whether they have sought any of the accreditations available to members of those bodies. You could, therefore, check whether your agency is a member of the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) or the similar trade body APSCO; and whether the agency holds the accreditation marks introduced by those bodies after the DfE's discontinuation of its own 'Quality Mark' for agencies in 2013.

What if anything goes wrong?

If you encounter any difficulties whilst working with an agency which cannot be resolved through initial discussion, you should seek advice and support from the NEU (see 'What should I do next?' below). You might make a complaint to the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate (EASI) – the body which oversees and regulates employment agencies - or to any trade body of which the agency is a member.

What should I do if I become aware of schools using inappropriate cover arrangements?

One major risk to supply teachers is that schools will use "cover supervisors" for short term cover. Cover supervision takes place when pupils carry out, under supervision, work which has been prepared in advance - it does not involve active teaching. Teachers may also be providing cover beyond the extent to which they should - they should only provide cover 'rarely', in circumstances which are not foreseeable.

Parents may be unaware of the time their children spend under the supervision of someone who is not a qualified teacher - so this is an issue on which it may be possible to harness their support. Making parents aware via the NEU about inappropriate cover practices will lead to greater use of qualified teachers in situations when a permanent teacher is unavailable. If you become aware any of these issues in schools where you work, speak to your local NEU secretary. If these matters are taken up, that may mean more work for supply teachers.

What should supply teachers expect from schools?

It is in the interests of all parties that a minimum level of support is provided to supply teachers in order that they are able to discharge their duties effectively. The following checklist sets out the key expectations on schools in this regard. It has been adapted from the NEU Supply Teacher Charter, which includes commitments the NEU wishes to see from agencies and Government as well as schools. See <https://neu.org.uk> for more details.

Schools should greet supply teachers and give them a welcome pack. This pack should be made available to the teacher as soon as possible, to maximise the amount of time available for its contents to be assimilated. The pack should include

- a map of the school to help a teacher find classrooms, staff room, toilets, etc.;
- clear details of main contact person(s) e.g. Head of Department/Key Stage;
- information on what is to be taught and details/location of any work set;
- a timetable with times of lesson change, breaks and lunch period;
- details of emergency contacts and telephone numbers/procedures;

- location of first aid kits;
- details of registration procedures, fire drills and security arrangements, including door codes;
- details of photocopier codes, ICT passwords and how to access technical support;
- a summary of information on :
 - school uniform policy;
 - school code of conduct, sanctions and rewards;
 - books/textbooks/equipment which pupils are expected to bring to lessons
 - if/when pupils may visit the toilet, borrow equipment, etc.;
 - class lists, brief notes on pupil ability, seating plans; assessment policy;
 - any behavioural issues to be aware of;
 - any special needs, safeguarding or medical issues to be aware of;
- details of photocopier codes, ICT passwords and how to access technical support;
- information about staff duties/meetings/parents' evenings/training days etc., expected participation in these and if such additional work is paid; and
- the name of the NEU rep.

It is important that the contents of such a pack are concise and user-friendly. Supply teachers need to be able to locate and digest important information about a school quickly and easily in order to work effectively and at short notice.

In addition to providing the above information, schools should ensure that they welcome supply teachers as key members of staff, however briefly their assignment with the school. Sometimes supply teachers find themselves isolated and left to cope, often with difficult classes, with minimal assistance. This is in no one's interests. All staff in a school, on whatever basis they work, are entitled to be treated with respect. Schools should make sure that they are organised to provide help where it is needed.

Where should I go for further advice and support?

NEU supply members with concerns or problems relating to their employment conditions should in the first instance contact the NEU AdviceLine, or the NEU Wales office instead. Their details may be found at <https://neu.org.uk/contact-us>.

Further Information

NEU supply members with concerns or problems relating to their employment conditions should contact the NEU AdviceLine, or the Wales office. Their details may be found at <https://neu.org.uk/contact-us>.

Further information and guidance for supply teachers can be found on the NEU website, <https://neu.org.uk>.

You can join the NEU on-line at <https://neu.org.uk/join> or on 0345 811 8111 (local rate) or you can complete an application form and return it to National Education Union, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9BD.

We want supply members to work together to take forward our work for supply teachers. Contact the NEU locally to find out about participating in your local association and join with other members in your area to tackle common problems. Contact details are on your membership credential and on the NEU website at <https://neu.org.uk/contact-us>.

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