



A charter for supply teachers

This NEU Charter for Supply Teachers sets out the Union’s aspirations for its supply teacher members and the steps which the Union believes necessary to achieve them.

The NEU believes supply teachers are educational professionals with a specialised skill set. They are a vital piece of the education jigsaw, providing a trained and capable reserve when schools need additional teachers. This document sets out the NEU’s position, provides a checklist for supply teachers and includes a charter for schools to adopt.

The NEU supply teachers’ charter

Able to quickly adapt to new situations, experienced supply teachers ensure a high level of teaching and learning is maintained in the classroom when permanent staff are absent. The NEU believes all pupils should be taught by qualified staff and that supply teachers can provide this continuity of learning in the absence of the regular class teacher. Implementing the NEU’s supply teacher charter will ensure the continued availability of high-calibre supply teachers who can provide qualified support to schools.

There are two key principles underlying the proposals in this charter. The first is that all qualified teachers, whether employed temporarily or permanently, are professionals who should be treated fairly and equally. The second is that school funding should be spent on students’ education, not paid to agencies which profit at the expense of supply teachers and schools. The achievement of the key objectives set out below will be good for students and schools as well as for teachers.

The NEU therefore urges the government and employers to:

- establish a new system for supply teacher employment which does not involve employment agencies or other commercial intermediaries;
- ensure that supply teachers are paid in accordance with the national pay arrangements for teachers in regular employment and at a rate appropriate to their level of experience and the demands of the role;
- enable supply teachers to have equal access to the Teachers’ Pension Scheme and other statutory and contractual entitlements for school teachers;
- ensure that suitably qualified teachers are employed to cover absences and vacancies, while using support staff appropriately;
- ensure that supply teachers are offered access to CPD opportunities; and
- treat supply teachers with respect and recognise their professionalism at all times.

This Charter defines “supply teachers” as qualified teachers who are not permanently employed in a school but are engaged on a temporary short-term basis to teach in the absence of a permanent teacher whether due to illness, vacancy or some other reason, and irrespective of the duration of the placement. Whether hired directly by a school or LA or via an agency or intermediary, the supply teacher should teach to the same standard, and be entitled to the same professional respect and consideration, as a permanent member of staff.

The NEU encourages all schools and academies to adopt and apply this charter.

The NEU's Aspirations

Pay

Supply teachers employed through agencies are paid too little and need to be paid more. An alternative mode of employment is needed which offers better pay in line with national STPCD arrangements as well as access to the Teachers' Pensions Scheme. Supply teachers should be paid in accordance with the STPCD arrangements and the school's pay policy for its permanently employed teachers. Although schools now have the power to determine for themselves each newly appointed teacher's rate of pay, the NEU believes that all teachers' previous experience should be taken into account when determining pay.

Contractual arrangements

Most supply teachers are employed via agencies on a day-to-day basis without the security of a longer term contract. Where it is clear a substitute teacher is needed for a longer period of time (for example to cover a long-term absence or maternity cover) then the school should consider employing a teacher on a fixed term contract (which gives the teacher additional rights) rather than a day-to-day contract and, if using an agency teacher, fully respect the teacher's rights under the Agency Worker Regulations. Where employment is on a day-to-day basis, the NEU expects schools to honour agreements with teachers and not end assignments mid-way through the day or make short-notice cancellations.

Appropriate use of supply teachers

Supply teachers are professionals who can ensure a high standard of teaching and learning continues in the absence of a class's assigned teacher. The NEU recognises that there may be occasions when a teacher's absence is covered by a member of the school support staff but there is no substitute for the added value a qualified supply teacher can bring to the school. Support staff should only ever be used on a short-term basis until a qualified supply teacher is secured. Pupils deserve to be taught by qualified teachers, and schools should cover absences with appropriately qualified staff.

Teacher supply agencies

The NEU believes that an alternative to agencies in the form of a nationally or regionally administered supply register system should be established along the lines of the Northern Ireland system. Such a system should allow teachers to be paid according to STPCD arrangements and have access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme. In the meantime, the NEU prefers schools to engage supply teachers directly or through local authority supply pools, rather than through agencies. This helps to build a relationship between the teacher and the school from which both ultimately benefit, and also removes the additional cost of payments to an agency. Schools using agencies should refer to the DfE procurement framework with regard to agency fees; and check the pay rates for teachers and agency fees before deciding to use it.

Pensions

The NEU continues to press for the coverage of the TPS to be extended to all supply teachers, including those working for agencies. In the meantime, the NEU expects supply agencies to meet their obligations to offer a workplace pension scheme to supply teachers and to make a meaningful employer contribution.

Respect and professionalism

NEU surveys show that some supply teachers feel that they are sometimes poorly treated by school leaders, teachers, support staff and pupils. Supply teachers are professionals who should be afforded the same respect and courtesy as permanent members of staff. They have often worked in a broad range of educational environments and they bring that knowledge to each assignment. Schools should ensure supply teachers are welcomed and given as much information as they need to fit into the routine of the school through a supply teacher support pack (see below).

Support for supply teachers – the school support pack

Schools should ensure that supply teachers are always greeted on arrival and given a welcome and support pack which should include:

1. The basics – what is the relevant timetable(s), where are the staff toilets and staffroom, and a staff list with full names, and the fire alarm procedures.
2. Information on classes to be taught, including class registers, brief notes on seating plans and ability levels, and specific information on known behavioural issues and any special needs, safeguarding or medical issues of which the teacher will need to be aware;
3. Information on lessons to be taught and details/location of any lesson plans or other work to be set and teaching resources to be used. Details of where necessary books/equipment/spare paper for students may be found.
4. An information handbook so the supply teacher can familiarise himself or herself with the relevant school policies and procedures. Ideally, this should include a one- or two-page brief guide to the most important points.
5. Details of who the NEU rep at the school is, so the supply teacher can contact him or her if necessary.
6. Contact details for the headteacher, other members of the SMT and head of department / year / key stage.
7. Any information the supply teacher should know on vulnerable children.
8. Emergency contacts and telephone numbers.
9. Registration procedures and arrangements for first aid, fire drills and security (including door codes);
10. Information about staff duties, scheduled meetings/parents' evenings/ training days etc and expectations re participation in these;
11. Photocopier codes, door entry cards/codes, ICT passwords and access to technical support;
12. A school map.

A framework for schools

All schools employing supply teachers, whether through agencies or directly, should:

- declare that supply teachers are an essential part of the workforce and deserve to be recognised as such;
- declare an intention to employ suitably qualified supply teachers for all absences where teaching and learning is expected to continue, and to employ supply teachers directly wherever possible;
- ensure that supply teachers are paid at a rate appropriate to their experience and the work they are undertaking;
- ensure that supply teachers know what they are expected to teach, and provide them with the necessary resources, including the necessary time to prepare lessons or mark pupils' work if they are required to do this;

- ensure that supply teachers are afforded the same respect as all other members of staff, greeted on arrival and given access to the same facilities, resources and support as permanent staff and the information needed to do the job;
- ensure that supply teachers who have an ongoing relationship with the school are included in professional development and appraisal and considered for pay progression each year;
- honour any commitment made either verbally or in writing for the length of any supply engagement and, where an ongoing need arises to cover a vacancy or absence, discuss the options of retaining the teacher on a supply or fixed-term contract basis;
- inform supply teachers of all vacancies and take decisions on employment uninfluenced by any 'finder's fee' required by an agency for recruitment into a permanent role;
- provide supply teachers with honest references when requested by prospective employers; and
- recruit the most appropriate person for every role, regardless of gender, age, race, religion or sexuality.

A framework for agencies:

Agencies should:

- ensure that all supply teachers are paid at rates which are consistent with the national pay arrangements and reflect their qualifications and experience, rather than at any lower rate;
- allow all teachers a free choice to be paid on a PAYE basis by the agency and not require teachers to work via umbrella company or limited company arrangements;
- ensure that hiring schools and supply teachers are aware of the provisions of the Agency Workers Regulations and ensure that all supply teachers receive the appropriate pay entitlements after the 12 week qualifying period;
- provide free professional development and training on matters such as safeguarding and on curricular/subject/key stage issues;
- pay supply teachers at their normal pay rate when they attend professional development and training, whether provided by the agency or the hiring school;
- provide a confidential and impartial complaints procedure about poor or unequal treatment by hiring schools or agency staff; and
- reduce to a minimum the "finders' fees" applying when schools wish to employ a supply teacher on a permanent basis

A framework for the government:

The Department for Education should:

- extend the coverage of the national school teachers' pay arrangements and the Teachers' Pension Scheme to all teachers working in state funded schools, including supply teachers working in local authority maintained schools and academies;
- investigate and support the development of a register-based system for engaging day-to-day and long term supply teachers which allows direct employment without the involvement of commercial supply teacher agencies, in preference to its procurement framework for schools which offers little or nothing for supply teachers themselves; and
- pending the achievement of these first two objectives, publish guidance which advises all hiring schools and all agencies to pay supply teachers on the same basis as teachers in regular employment and to conform to the same employment standards in all other respects when employing supply teachers.