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Statement from NEU on Negotiations on Pay and Industrial Action

NEU's Northern Ireland Committee meet for a full-day session on Thursday 7th December in Belfast to consider the Management Side (MS) summary paper on the progress of negotiations on pay and industrial action thus far.

NEU respects the efforts, made in good faith, by all parties at the negotiations and recognises that much important work has been done, much of which is seen as valuable, and not of nugatory value.

The Committee was tasked to consider the MS paper and whether sufficient progress had been made to recommend a ballot of members consider a halt to industrial action.

Recorded below is a record of our conclusions in respect of Pay, Workload and the five working groups considering different workload strands.

On Pay: The Northern Ireland Teachers Council pay claim for 2017-18 is for a 5% uplift. NEU endorses the NITC position and see the pay claim as a "stand-still" claim broken down

- 3.9% as the rate of inflation (RPI)
- 1.0% as recovered pay following the 0% 'award' imposed in October 2016 in respect of 2015-16
- 0.1% as a rudimentary recognition, or 'goodwill nod' towards a much needed pay restoration process in circumstances where real-term teacher's pay has reduced by 12-15% since 2010-11

The MS position, based on current Government Public Sector Pay Policy, remains limited to a 1% pay ceiling. Public Sector Pay Policy, as currently set, is not a basis through which this pay dispute can be settled. We await the outcome of the School Teachers Review Body (pending) and, in all probability, a change of government at Westminster, as more fruitful avenues and context for a process of pay restoration.

NEU remains trenchantly opposed, mainly on educational grounds, to Performance Related Pay, in principle and as set out in Public Sector Pay Policy. NEU's briefing paper¹ on PRP remains extant.

NEU cannot recommend an end to industrial action on the basis of continued adherence to below-inflation public sector pay policy. Public sector pay policy provides no basis for resolution of the pay dispute, let alone movement towards much-needed process of pay restoration.

¹ ATL: Why Performance Related Pay Doesn't Work, 2016 www.atl.org.uk

On workload, general comments: NEU is not dismissive of the efforts made within the Teachers Negotiating Committee's Joint Working Party (JWP). The MS paper, however, is light on hard, tangible, definite, 'product' that will impact positively on the working lives of teachers. Measures suggested, similar to those arising from the English Workload Challenge, would be welcome. However, the experience in England and Wales² is that awareness of the measures agreed 'on the ground' at school level is low, 'stickability' of measures uncertain and 'policing' arrangements to embed the recommendations patchy or non-existent.

NEU's conclusion is that the best means open to teachers to control spiralling workloads remains through the joint industrial action of the teachers' union. The measures proposed within the MS paper do not remotely come close to, or as efficacious as the industrial action in controlling workloads. Until better options arise, industrial action remains the 'least-worst' means to secure reasonable work-life balance for teachers.

On the recommendations within the five specific work-group stands:

Inspection: NEU is on record as being prepared to relinquish the current non co-operation action with (or boycott of) inspections when a wholly independent 'end-point' of the ETI's Complaints procedure is agreed and established. NEU recognise that MS (and ETI) has 'moved' by proposing a four-person end-panel made up of two ETI nominees and two independent nominees. However, we remain of the view that it is entirely unacceptable for ETI to be its own accountability agent.

Further, it is noteworthy that the discussions have not, as yet, encompassed inspectorate reform and movement towards the more professional (less judgemental) and developmental Scottish model of inspection as recommended by the Northern Ireland Assembly Education Committee Inquiry report of November 2013.

Assessment: NEU is on record as being prepared to relinquish current non co-operation with (or boycott of) Key Stage Assessment when an educationally sound replacement system is developed and in place. We are pleased that this work-group has been well led and has made good progress based on sound agreed principles. We are heartened by the centrality of the 2014 NITC paper, *Rising to the Challenge*³ and movement towards a solution based on best-practice Assessment for Learning principles. We support a separate and distinct 'system-check' legitimately sought by Government based on uncontentious sampling methods current used in OECD, PISA and other international benchmarking. Our view is that there is more prospect of resolution of an acceptable Assessment system in the primary phase and that the post-primary phase will require much more detailed negotiation. NEU agrees that this work-group strand should continue, and conclude its work.

Administration: The workload administration work-group undertook extensive range of issues, including post-holders time allocations. Concerns remain, including on class-sizes, notably in Practical classes where some schools have displayed a cavalier disregard of safe class-size limits. NEU considers that this work-group should continue to meet and engage. Based on

² NEU survey of over 8000 teachers, 2017

³ NITC: Rising to the Challenge, 2014

current progress, however, recommendations are vague, intangible and unlikely to impact radically on teachers' workload. Consideration of policing arrangements 'with teeth' should be considered. Pending further discussion, the Jordanstown Agreement 1987 and 1988 and the Workload Agreement 2011 remain the best means for teachers to limit unreasonable workloads.

Examinations: The examinations work-group strand has made little progress with CCEA engagement limited. NEU considers that, as a matter of routine, the time allocations normally set out by examination boards in respect of each qualification should be rigorously taken account of within teachers Time Budgets going forward.

SEN: The Special Educational Needs work-group strand has made some progress but enjoyed little engagement from the Education Authority's Children and Young Peoples Service (CYPS). NEU supports the Teacher Side perception that CYPS is developing primarily as a regulatory and accountability 'service' with little emphasis on the quality of education. The workgroup appeared to be stalled pending the implementation of new legislation. NEU considers that the continuation of the work-group strand is open to question.

Hyper-Accountability: Finally, NEU is distressed that moves to tackle the frenetic, low-trust accountability that characterises the Northern Ireland schools' system, set out in the NITC discussion paper tabled at the start of the negotiating process⁴, have barely featured in negotiations. At the heart of the workload crisis in schools are the obsessive levels of testing, assessing, monitoring, tracking, reporting, weighing and measuring that squeezes the life out of creativity, innovation and the joy of learning. The effects of narrow targets is a narrowing curriculum and an exotic range of 'gaming' tactics as the unintended consequences of the "race for stats" and league-table positions. The target-culture and low-trust managerialism ever more prevalent are seen by NEU as enemies of a genuine, thoughtful, reflective learning system.

NEU concludes that industrial action on Needless Tasks (Accountability, Scrutiny, Bureaucracy and Administration) should remain in place, giving teachers at school-level the opportunity to desist from carrying out nugatory value needless tasks to allow teachers to carve out 'professional space' to focus on learning and teaching and the exercise of professional discretion.

Conclusion: NEU considers there is no basis – in respect of the three keys strands of negotiation on Pay, Workload and Accountability – to relax the current industrial action.

⁴ NITC Discussion Paper: Measuring What Matters, Langhammer