

School re-opening doomed if supply teachers ignored now

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The Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo) has welcomed the updated guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) that schools should pay agency staff on live assignments at 80% of their pay, but has warned that the furlough of these professionals is still up in the air.

Tania Bowers, Legal Counsel and Head of Public Policy at APSCo, commented:

“We welcome the greater clarity from the DfE regarding paying those on live assignments while unable to work. However, it is not a compulsory requirement, which leaves an element of uncertainty for supply teachers, agency workers and recruitment businesses alike.”

“There are also still concerns around furloughing those not on active assignments. Currently, agency worker furlough is a ‘grey’ area, with recruitment businesses being asked to support the NICs and pensions contributions of supply teachers where they are not being paid by schools. While it is at the discretion of the school to decide where budgets can be allocated, there does need to be special treatment for the furlough of supply teachers and agency workers to ensure NICs and pensions contributions are being reallocated fairly and not placed on already struggling staffing companies. With the Chancellor reviewing finances this month ahead of the March Budget, we ask that the payment of these teachers and their NICs and pensions contributions be factored into his considerations.”

Katy Rees, Managing Director of education recruitment firm, Smile Education, added:

“There’s a lot of uncertainty for our supply teachers at the moment – I’ve had teaching professionals on the phone in floods of tears as they have been caught in limbo and are unsure where to turn. While we’re doing everything we can to ensure our agency workers are being paid, small recruitment businesses cannot continue to foot the bill for supply teacher NICS and pensions contributions without the necessary intervention from the Government. We’re already seeing teachers looking outside their profession for work and my concern is that the loss of agency workers from teaching will create a resourcing vacuum that will hinder the re-opening of schools in the longer term, particularly with Covid testing being rolled out in schools.”

“It’s highly likely that we’ll see more teachers without symptoms facing quarantine as regular testing makes it much easier to identify asymptomatic infections. As a result, there will be a greater need for supply teachers which schools will be unable to fill if we can’t support and retain supply teachers now.”

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