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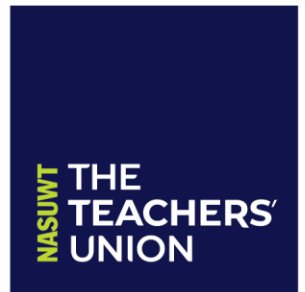
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Your Ref:

Date: 23 September 2026

Our Ref: 260923 Powell L/MW/TF



Rt Hon Lucy Powell MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

MATT WRACK
GENERAL SECRETARY

Dear Secretary of State,

School Teachers' Pay: School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) 36th Report and Government Response

I write on behalf of NASUWT, the Teacher's Union, to set out our response to the key issues raised in the STRB's 36th Report and the Government's response.

While we acknowledge the clarity provided regarding the funding of the pay award, it is abundantly clear that the 3.5 per cent increase for 2026/27 falls far short. It fails to protect educators against rising inflation, nor does it begin the urgent, long-overdue process of pay restoration. Crucially, this announcement does not translate into meaningful additional funding for individual school budgets, where the financial picture remains highly complex. Annual cost of living pay awards must be fully funded so as to avoid further cuts within schools.

We urge you to engage in urgent, structured discussions on a long-term solution to school funding and real-terms pay cuts. The Treasury must fully fund the improvements in pay and working conditions required to resolve the entrenched recruitment and retention crisis and safeguard our children's education. If the Government wishes to deliver on its promise of real change, it must provide the funding needed to back it up.

We acknowledge the announcement of 16 September and the clarity on funding the pay award. However, we also know that this does not mean that additional funding is going into school budgets, and the picture is complicated at individual school level.

Furthermore, the extensive delay in publishing the STRB Report was unacceptable. We expect the Department to ensure such delays are not repeated in future cycles.

Teacher Pay and the Recruitment and Retention Crisis

The damage inflicted on teacher and leader living standards, competitive pay, and workforce retention since 2010 is undeniable. Teachers looked to this Government to reverse years of inflation-driven pay cuts and address the workforce crisis. Instead, the significant pay correction needed to restore real-terms earnings to 2010 levels has been bypassed, leaving the recruitment and retention crisis to escalate.

While the STRB acknowledges the decline in teacher pay relative to average earnings and other professional occupations across the economy, its analysis relies on CPI inflation, which severely understates the true damage. RPI inflation is the standard, accurate measure for pay bargaining. Against RPI, teacher pay has been cut in real terms by more than a fifth since 2010.

Although the STRB's recommendation went beyond the Government's proposed evidence of 6.5 per cent over three years, a 3.5 per cent pay increase for 2026/27 remains completely insufficient. With RPI inflation forecast to reach 4.2 per cent in the fourth quarter of this year, a 3.5 per cent increase is likely to represent yet another real-terms pay cut.

Despite these clear inflationary pressures, the STRB failed to recommend a robust review mechanism with clear triggers for the 2027 pay award, which has been set at 3%. This failure should have been rejected by your department. We call on you to implement a fair, binding review mechanism in direct consultation with the education unions.

The severity of the workforce crisis is underscored by recent data:

- **Recruitment Shortfalls:** The secondary recruitment target was missed by 12 per cent in 2025-26.
- **Dwindling Entrants:** Newly qualified teacher entries have fallen to the lowest on comparable record.
- **Alarming Attrition:** One in four teachers leaves within three years of qualifying, and one in three leaves within five years. Over 35,000 teachers left the profession in the year to November 2025 for reasons other than retirement.
- **Leadership Drain:** Nearly a third (30%) of primary headteachers and almost two in five (38%) secondary headteachers leave within five years of appointment.
- **Unfilled Vacancies:** Vacancy rates remain 50 per cent above pre-pandemic levels.

To fix teacher supply and repair the profession, the Government must commit to pay increases significantly above RPI inflation to achieve full pay restoration.

Teacher Pay Structure

We do not accept the proposal enabling schools to offer non-consolidated payments or discretionary bonuses. This initiative ignores all education unions' consensus and provides a recipe for inequality, unfairness and inconsistency. Wide employer discretion will inevitably lead to arbitrary outcomes, increased conflict, and higher administrative workloads.

Instead, the Government must work with all education unions to establish a binding, national pay structure mandatory for all state-funded schools and academies. This framework must:

- Completely remove Performance-Related Pay Progression (PRPP).
- Re-establish mandatory pay points and portable pay across all schools and career breaks.
- Ensure annual pay progression is the default national standard for all those eligible for pay progression, including those on the upper pay range, rather than a discretionary employer decision.

We welcome the Government's rejection of the STRB's recommendation to reduce salary safeguarding periods. Existing safeguarding rules provide essential stability during school reorganizations and funding strains. This matter relates to the contractual protections of teachers and this proposal must be permanently excluded from future remits.

School Funding and Pension Adjustments

School spending per pupil in England fell by 10 per cent in real terms between 2010-11 and 2019-20 - the largest cut in over 40 years. The resulting harm - larger class sizes, restricted curricula, staff cuts and out-of-pocket spending by staff and parents - has not been rectified by last year's Spending Review.

Furthermore, changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) employer contribution rate (falling from 28.6 per cent to 17.6 per cent from April 2027) will save the Treasury approximately £3.3bn annually. The Department for Education (DfE) is funding £1.815bn from existing budgets to partly fund the pay award for 2026/27. These recouped pension funds should be directly reinvested into teacher pay and core school budgets. We request an immediate, transparent restatement of Core Schools Budget totals for the coming years.

Workload, Working Hours and Equality

Unacceptable workload and chronic stress remain the leading drivers of staff burnout and attrition. According to the DfE's Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders (Wave 4, 2025), full-time teachers

work an average of 50.1 hours per week, and full-time leaders work 56.5 hours. 62 per cent of staff consider their workload unacceptable, and 89 per cent of those considering leaving cite excessive workload and poor wellbeing as the primary reasons. The NFER 2026 report confirms full-time teachers work four hours more per week during term time than comparable graduates. The Teacher Wellbeing Index 2025 recorded the lowest overall wellbeing score since tracking began in 2019, with 76 per cent of education staff reporting high stress levels.

Voluntary toolkits and administrative guidance are insufficient to resolve a structural crisis. We support retaining the 1,265-hour maximum directed time framework, but stronger contractual protections are urgently required:

Reinstating Workplace Safeguards: Reintroduce mandatory consultation with staff and union representatives on teaching timetables, annual calendars, directed time, and disaggregated INSET days within the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document.

Contractual Caps: Remove or strictly cap the vague 'reasonable additional hours' clause and extend enforceable limits on working hours to school leaders.

Accountability Reform: Fundamentally reform inspection regimes (Ofsted) and accountability systems, which remain the single largest external driver of excessive workload and leader stress.

Equality and Flexible Working: Given that 76 per cent of the teaching workforce are women, excessive hours and rigid working arrangements disproportionately impact female educators and carers. Resourced flexible working - including job shares, phased retirement, and remote PPA - must be embedded as a binding contractual right across all schools.

Addressing routine, unpaid, excessive work and delivering genuine pay restoration are essential to ending the recruitment and retention crisis. We call on the Government to take immediate, decisive action in partnership with NASUWT.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Wrack

Matt Wrack
General Secretary