



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

TEL
01332 372 337
EMAIL
contact@voicetheunion.org.uk
WEB
www.voicetheunion.org.uk

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Dear Secretary of State

30th Report of the STRB and Government Response

Introduction

Following receipt of the 30th report of the School Teachers Pay Review Body, Voice the Union had hoped that the government would fully adopt the recommendations made. The evidence presented to the STRB from Voice and other stakeholders suggests consensus in the profession on the key issues relating to teacher pay and it is worth drawing your attention to the fact that the STRB agreed with much of our position.

Whilst we are thankful that you have chosen to adopt the STRB proposals in full, it will be essential, that any future consideration of teacher pay seeks to address the outstanding concerns of the sector including recognition of their ongoing role as key workers, who have proved essential to supporting the nation and the economy during the Coronavirus pandemic.

It is disappointing to note that again, there was delay in the publication of the STRB Report until the end of the summer term. This causes significant problems for schools in undertaking their own consultations and planning for the new academic year and we would appeal to you that steps be taken to avoid this delay over the coming year.

Workforce

We note that once again the STRB expresses its serious concerns about teacher recruitment and retention stating that there are "severe and persistent problems with teacher supply" (STRB, page x). In addition, as Voice pointed out in our supplementary evidence (Voice, para 6) poor retention is an increasing cause of reduction in the available workforce and leaving rates have increased for teachers in the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups (STRB, *ibid*).

Voice revealed in its analysis of the graduate labour market (Voice supplementary evidence, para 4) that teachers have suffered real-terms losses since 2010. The STRB concurs that "for the majority of teachers and school leaders, including those in London, there continues to be a significant gap between the earnings of teachers and the levels of pay in other comparable graduate professions" (STRB, page x).

Pay Levels

The Government announcement of 21 July described the teacher pay award as “affordable”. Voice understands the cost implications of any increase in teacher pay, however we continue to argue that pay restraint and affordability are not wholly appropriate aspects of an independent pay body and we urge the government to facilitate a report which permits a remarkable increase in teacher pay and school funding, restoring them to pre-austerity levels.

The STRB has confirmed that, it too has serious concerns about teacher pay and noted that experienced teachers and school leaders “should receive a significant real-terms uplift to avoid damage to morale and motivation, which would have possible consequences for teacher retention” (STRB, page xi).

The headline 5.5% increase to starting pay which has been widely reported in the media is not the reality for most teachers, and as previously reported, this continues to drive a wedge through the workforce. This is further impacted by the public perception that all teachers will receive an “inflation-busting pay rise” which, whilst above the current RPI, is inflammatory and undermines the truth. Not only this but it fails to restore teacher pay to appropriate graduate levels and address the real term losses of the past decade.

Pay Points and Performance Related Pay

Since 2013 Voice has been campaigning for the return of mandatory pay points and for the decoupling of teacher performance from teacher pay. The STRB notes the consensus from the joint teacher unions on the advantages of national pay points. Voice believes it is essential to support all teachers and school leaders with a clear pay structure that supports their whole career, retaining the best, and not simply “frontloading” at the beginning. We are cautiously optimistic of the restoration of advisory pay points and believe this is a move in the right direction towards the reintroduction of mandatory pay points.

As noted in our evidence (Voice, para 3.18) we can see some merit in a wider discussion of the pay points including the removal of the “threshold” and possible merger of the upper pay scale with the main scale and would support the STRB to consider evidence in support of this.

Research carried out by Voice and David Marsden of the London School of Economics found that the majority of teachers are sceptical about the benefits of linking pay directly to performance. They do not feel that it recognises or rewards good teaching. Indeed, many are sceptical because they think that even if they do perform well, their schools will not have the resources to pay them an increased salary. Therefore, we support further consideration of the decoupling of pay from performance.

Impact of COVID-19

Voice was very disappointed to note that this year the treasury announced the headlines of the STRB report before the document was made public. We were concerned that the announcement of the pay settlement for teachers (as well as some other publicly funded roles) was billed by Chancellor Rishi Sunak as recognition for their “vital contribution” during the coronavirus pandemic. However, Voice and other union evidence was submitted before March and the STRB report itself makes clear that the recommendations are based on evidence submitted prior to the pandemic.

We agree with the STRB's statement that the Coronavirus pandemic will lead to an increase in teacher recruitment, but that this will be short-lived and therefore, we urge the government to view this as nothing more than a temporary reprieve, buying time to secure "a significant improvement in the competitiveness of the teacher pay framework over the next two to three years" (STRB, *ibid*).

Conclusion

Voice is and always has been prepared to engage with government to discuss these issues. We implore the government to support teachers by addressing the issues of supply and demand, teacher pay which is decoupled from performance, and fully funded, reducing the burden on schools and support staff and ensuring schools are fit for the 21st Century.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Lawson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Deborah Lawson
General Secretary | Voice the Union