

Disabled Teachers' Consultation Conference

June 2015



Ability, Aspiration, Ambition, Achievement



Dr Patrick Roach, NASUWT Deputy General Secretary, addresses the Conference

The NASUWT's Deputy General Secretary has condemned the legacy of the Conservative-led Government over the last five years which has resulted in the rolling back of gains made in advancing disability equality.

In his keynote address to the NASUWT's Disabled Teachers' Consultation Conference in Birmingham, Dr Patrick Roach pointed to the Government's record on disability over the last five years which has resulted in fewer employment opportunities for disabled people, with employment rates on average 31% less than for those without a disability. He also pointed to the introduction of benefit sanctions, which have fallen disproportionately on disabled people, and employers being encouraged to disregard their equalities duties, resulting in increased discrimination and unfairness.

This attack on disability rights has also hampered the opportunities available to pupils with disabilities, Dr Roach told the Conference, pointing out that cuts to funding have led to reductions in support in schools for students with disabilities and special needs.

This, combined with the impact of the Government's reforms to education and its attacks on teachers' status, professionalism and terms and conditions, has left disabled teachers stressed and demoralised, Dr Roach said.

"All evidence shows the greater the managerial discretion over pay, the greater the potential for unfairness and discrimination."

Citing statistics from the Union's recent Big Question survey of members, he said that 81% of disabled teachers report that they have experienced more workplace stress in the last 12 months and 82% believe the job has affected their mental health and wellbeing. The result, he said, is that in the last 12 months a record 68% of disabled teachers say they have considered leaving the teaching profession altogether.

Members at the Conference, which was chaired by Junior Vice-President Fred Brown [below], were commended for their support and determination in implementing the NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions to defend their pay and conditions and service, which, Dr Roach reminded members, are inextricably linked to the provisions of high-quality education for all children and young people.

Teachers have been left thousands of pounds worse off than they were five years ago as a result of successive years of pay freezes and caps, Dr Roach stated, and the erosion of teachers' pay is set to increase as a result of the Government's pay deregulation and increased flexibilities given to schools.

This risks exacerbating the discrimination which disabled teachers experience in relation to pay and progression, with 69% of disabled teachers who responded to the Union's Big Question survey saying they do not believe they are paid at a level which is commensurate with their skills.



Fred Brown, NASUWT Junior Vice-President

Dr Roach also described the advice and support on offer for members in taking control of their performance management, an issue which is particularly important for disabled teachers, nearly a fifth of whom, the Big Question survey found, have been threatened with capability procedures in the last 12 months.

He denounced the "imposition of unrealistic data-driven performance management objectives which no teacher can ever hope to achieve" in too many schools, which he said were being used to single out teachers for redundancy, often those who are more expensive to employ or who need additional support to enable them to do their job, such as teachers with a disability.

Dr Roach urged members to continue to make their voices heard, saying: "We take seriously our responsibility to create the environment and conditions in which you and your colleagues can work effectively and be treated with dignity and professional respect."

Marcia Grant-Che, Wandsworth



What brought you to the Conference?

"This is my first time at the Conference and I came out of interest and because I wanted to know how the Union was working, especially for disabled teachers, as this is a time when we have so many issues, especially workload."

What have your experiences been working as a teacher with a disability?

"There is very little support in most schools for staff with a disability and some schools have chosen to ignore it. In terms of making reasonable adjustments, I find it does not come up unless I instigate it. I ended up going part time because of the pressure of the job but I might need to start working full time again because of finances."

Claire Gethins, Cheshire



Have you experienced any discrimination or barriers as a disabled teacher?

"I love my job and love working with children but it is frustrating that the support to enable me to do my job isn't there. I have been stopped from making my own applications to operational health and reasonable adjustments have not been in place due to staff redundancies and staffing levels. The

number of free periods I have has been reduced, meaning I now have four really heavy days with one free in the middle, and because I have a disability which is both mental and physical, this doesn't help me. If I try to change my timetable it will disrupt everyone else in the department so the pressure is on me to just cope with it."

John Forsyth, Clackmanshire

What is your experience as a disabled teacher?



"I suffer from pain when I have to stand or sit for a long time and was also recently diagnosed with diabetes. I was really bad three years ago and had to go part time, which really helped me to cope a lot better. The head at the time didn't want me to go part time and I felt he wanted me out. He has since retired, which has made things easier."

"I was told I would need a chair to help me and was taken into the staffroom and given a standard office chair which was totally useless and not adapted for my needs. I park myself on a desk or bench wherever possible, which is not a solution, but when I went part time it was easier to cope."

"I had thought I was going to get a buggy and looked at what was available, but I had another colleague who was badly disabled who was not allowed to keep their buggy in school because the head at the time thought it looked bad on the school that they had a disabled member of staff."

Disabled teacher

A real-time poll revealed disabled teachers' views on

Employers' attitudes

66%

Two thirds of those polled felt their employer does not take their disability seriously and 24% said they believe their employer does not recognise and value their abilities and contribution.

"My employer takes my disability seriously in terms of how it affects them, but they don't take my concerns about my disability seriously."

"In terms of recognising the quality of my teaching, I think my employer recognises that very much, but they don't see how much pain I am in and the sacrifices I have to make to my own health to be able to do my job and to work on the same level as everyone else."

Discrimination

81%

More than four out of five said they had been discriminated against because of their disability during their teaching career.

55%

Over half (55%) said they have experienced discrimination in relation to their pay and career progression in the last 12 months.

"I have got a mixed set of disabilities and I have told my students, because I felt I have to be honest with them, and I told my colleagues and they said they had not even known about it. They have realised I have to work twice as hard to perform as they do. I didn't tell senior management about my disability but when I got a new contract I told my manager and he said you should email HR about that, not tell me. It had taken me over a year to tell him but he was not interested, his attitude was just 'go away and do your job'."

"In my school the headteacher used the fact that he is not going to discuss my disability as the reason why he is not going to give me reasonable adjustments. I tell my pupils that I have a disability, and when I told my headteacher that I had told the pupils, he came into my class to make sure I was not 'manipulating the children's minds', his words, by telling them about my disability."

Teachers have their say

on issues affecting their careers.

Bullying and harassment

61%

More than three in five said they have experienced bullying, harassment or victimisation because of their disability during their teaching career from senior leaders. More than one in ten (11%) had experienced abuse from colleagues.

"My employer is determined to ignore my disability and determined to deny me reasonable adjustments, so they know I will have to take time off work and then they can put me on capability and get me out of the door."

"My employer uses my disability as a way to mock me and staff mimic my limp. I have to smile because I don't want them to see I am not coping and that it hurts me."

Disability awareness and equality

55%

More than half have experienced difficulties requesting reasonable adjustments in their workplace. Only just over one in five (21%) said their school or college takes active steps to ensure disability equality for staff.

75%

of schools or colleges have no disability-leave policy for medical appointments.

"You always feel you're the one letting the school down and you are often made to feel this way. Why is it that those who are able to walk get to make decisions for those that can't? Why is it that people who can see get to make decisions for those that can't? We should have a disabled person on each governing body to ensure decisions are made which support the needs of disabled staff."

"I know of a teacher who was told she had to have an urgent referral to hospital within two weeks, but the school said she either had to wait until the school holidays to go or lose a day's pay."

"We should not have to be bargaining every day of our lives just to get what we need to be able to function."

Negotiating reasonable adjustments

Teachers were given advice on negotiating reasonable adjustments for teachers with disabilities.

Dave Wilkinson, NASUWT National Negotiating Official [below], took teachers through the legal provisions designed to offer assistance and protection to people with disabilities.

However, despite the Equality Act 2010 placing a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to ensure workers with disabilities are not disadvantaged, prejudice and discrimination are all too often preventing disabled workers from getting the support they need, he said.

"The enormous problem we have is school managers justifying all practices on the basis that 'this is what Ofsted wants'," he added. "We meet regularly with Ofsted and we managed to get Ofsted to put out a myths and clarifications document which makes it clear that Ofsted is going to expect this best practice. Ofsted wants schools to apply the law in respect of the Equality Act."

Mr Wilkinson encouraged teachers to consider what reasonable adjustments they needed their employer to make and discussed how this could be achieved.

"The enormous problem we have is school managers justifying all practices on the basis that 'this is what Ofsted wants'"

He urged any member encountering resistance or barriers to accessing reasonable adjustments in their workplace to contact the NASUWT for advice and support.

He said: "If you know you are being treated less favourably and your instinct is that this is because you are disabled, then contact us. We will spend time working with you trying to get a solution, even if that is through our legal team."



These workshops were held at the Conference:

- Mindset theory
- How to negotiate reasonable adjustments
- Neurodiversity and trade union organising
- Pensions issues

Attitude change needed on disability

Teachers were urged to help change the script and promote ability, rather than disability.



Peter Purton, TUC Policy Officer [left], spoke about the need to embrace the social model of disability, which focuses on what people can do, rather than on what they can't, and which, he said, promotes a much more positive and inclusive attitude towards people with disabilities and impairments.

He criticised the traditional 'medical' model of disability which tells disabled people they are a problem and are a burden.

He told delegates: "We need an approach to disability that makes us the subject, not the object. We want something that empowers us, something that turns the world on its head, and that is what the social model does".

He added: "The disability we face is the barrier we face to participating in society, *that* is the disability. What we have are impairments; we have different needs for support. Let's change the language around disability."

Mr Purton condemned the cuts which the Government has imposed on services and support for people with disabilities since 2010, with the accompanying notion that equality provisions equate to red tape and bureaucracy. This, he said, has led to employers believing they can get away with flouting the law and refusing to make reasonable adjustments and undertake equality impact assessments.

He urged delegates to become "champions" for disabled people by promoting training for colleagues and employers, using the social model of disability to help change attitudes.

"We need to change public opinion. The social model of disability should be a win-win situation for employers and for people with disabilities, but we need to change attitudes," he said.

Celebrating neurodiversity



Attendees have been challenged to raise awareness in the workplace of neurodiversity to help challenge the prejudice and discrimination those with neurological disorders often face.

Adele Potten-Price, from the Transport Salaried Staff Association (TSSA) [left], spoke of her own personal experiences as someone with a neurological condition and encouraged members to consider what they can do to improve understanding and support for those with such disorders.

Neurological conditions include dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADHA, Tourette's syndrome, Asperger's syndrome and autism. They can cause difficulties in processing information, including sounds, smells and sight, and can cause a huge range of issues for workers with these conditions. People

can commonly experience depression, isolation, problems with time keeping and concentration and physical illnesses.

Ms Potten-Price told teachers that people with neurological conditions commonly develop coping strategies and ways to hide their neurological conditions in the workplace, often for fear that people will discriminate against them or because of encountering negative attitudes from colleagues.

She shared her own experiences, explaining how she had been made to feel she should stay silent in meetings or that her suggestions or comments were odd.

She encouraged teachers to take the fight for equality into their own hands, saying: "I really believe in the saying, 'nothing about us without us'; *you* are the best ones to generate these changes in workplaces, *you* are going to be the best ones to take this to your union representatives and to your managers to fight on this."

Mindset theory

A positive and practical workshop invited teachers to reconsider how they see themselves and their pupils in order to unlock the potential that lies in all of us.



Led by Robin Launder, founder of Behaviour Buddy, an organisation which offers training for schools on managing pupil behaviour, the workshop explored the concept of mindset theory, which explores how our assumptions and beliefs about our own and others' abilities can often hold us back from achieving our goals.

Robin explained the two mindsets – fixed

and growth. In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, such as intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits and innate qualities which we all have more or less of.

The growth mindset encourages people to believe their basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work and that intelligence and talent are just the starting point.

Robin applied this theory to education to explain how teachers can espouse the growth mindset to their students, building a motivation to learn and fostering a resilience and dedication in young people which will stand them in great stead throughout their life.

He also emphasised how the theory applies equally to teachers and that, by changing the way they think about themselves, teachers can gain confidence and unlock their potential.