

12 May 2020

**JS/20/79**

**SNCT Advice on Working Time Agreements Session 2020-21**

**CORONAVIRUS - COVID-19**

Dear Colleague

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Scottish Government announced that schools and ELC premises would close on 20 March for an indefinite period. Only a small number of settings are open and only for vulnerable children and children of key workers.

The decision to close schools has had dramatic effects on the provision of education throughout Scotland and these effects will be experienced in the months to come. There has also been an impact on local and national decision-making as face-to-face meetings have been suspended and we have all had to learn to adapt by working remotely and away from our normal network of colleagues.

A Covid-19 Education Recovery Group has been convened to ensure that appropriate structures are in place as we move towards the recovery phase where schools begin to re-open. Both the nature and the duration of any recovery period is currently unknown. Accordingly, the Joint Secretaries recommend that LNCTs consider deferring negotiations on WTAs at this time, pending strategic advice from the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group and in light of the practical restrictions created by the current Covid-19 crisis.

It is the further advice of the Joint Secretaries that should working time agreements for next session be agreed in May/June 2020, all sides should recognise that the current situation is far from normal and that such agreements must be considered indicative at this stage since the work of the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group is not yet overtaken.

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It is essential, therefore, that any advice issued by Local Negotiating Committees for Teachers (LNCTs) setting out mechanisms to assist and to manage workload in working time agreements (WTAs) for session 2020-21 should provide that WTAs agreed in May/June 2020 must have the ability to be reviewed as session 2020-21 develops.

The Joint Secretaries recommend that timescales within WTA processes should be reviewed by LNCTs and that LNCTs should consider extending these as part of broader discussions around issues of timing and flexibility in respect of the additional demands and practical restrictions created by the current Covid-19 crisis.

A starting point for discussions at school level should be a systematic review of the 2019-20 school improvement plan and an evaluation of the WTA for 2019-20 in order that arrangements can be adjusted to take into account the effects of Covid-19 and consideration of the impact of Covid-19 on operational parameters likely to operate for most of next session e.g. enforcing physical distancing, operating a blended teaching and learning model etc.

Covid-19 has and will impact on schools' improvement plans and WTAs, and this will result in a recalibration of time allocations in the WTA.

At its meeting on 28 February 2020, the SNCT agreed to draw to your attention the existing key provisions already contained within the SNCT Handbook which should be considered as part of your LNCT's ongoing work on tackling teacher workload and excessive bureaucracy.

This was outlined in the letter of advice from the Joint Secretaries JS/20/77 SNCT Workload Review – SNCT Circulars and Handbook Provisions.

The advice outlined in that letter should also be considered by the LNCTs in each Council when advice on the formulation of Working Time Agreements for session 2020-21 is issued.

Yours sincerely

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Louise Wilson (Teachers' Panel)  
Stephanie Walsh (Scottish Government)

**Joint Secretaries**