

Update for ECS Members on Autumn Term return 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I wanted to send a brief note to members to let you know that following interventions, including a meeting with the Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson MP that Prospect's Education and Children's Services Group is playing as full a part as we can in the Department for Education Covid 19 Response Stakeholder Advisory Group. The focus of this group is on extending schools opening in England in the autumn term, and it includes key stakeholders as well as officials and ministerial input from the DfE.

It is disappointing that the group was not set up earlier, and like our members it feels that we are catching up with announcements, leaks and policy that can feel that it is made 'on the hoof' rather than through good consultation with the shared of supporting the needs of children and young people.

There has been speculation about announcements coming this week and I wanted to make sure that our members knew that we were fully participating in these stakeholder briefings, seeking the publication of guidance where we think it is needed, asking for specific changes to policy on issues of particular relevance to our members, for example in considering what resources and guidance may be necessary to meet statutory obligations on school transport and school attendance for an autumn term return. To be clear we have raised concerns about the need to have additional support to encourage mandatory attendance rather than sanctions and penalties as has been widely reported.

In addition we have expressed our view directly and in writing on the importance of understanding that a return will not simply be a case of turning the curriculum and assessments back on, the importance of mental health and wellbeing as well as stressing practical steps to avoid an increase in formal exclusion or disadvantage.

In all of our conversations, stakeholders have been keen to stress the need for the intangible confidence to be created and sustained. We appreciate that our members have a role to play in that too and on our recent Risk Assessment webinar for members we had plenty of good questions that we have reflected in our comments.

That confidence should also include clear control measures and risk assessments protect all, including visitors as well as a clear hierarchy of decision-making if there are further outbreaks of the virus either in schools or local authorities.

Like you, we will be closely watching for an update from the DfE on this shortly. We remain hopeful that the guidance will include changes based on the work that we and our colleagues especially through the TUC education unions group have done however there is no guarantee.

It is vital that the views of education non-teaching professionals is heard in this debate, and we know from surveys that members value the work we are doing, so if you know a colleague who is not a member of the union and could or should be ask them to visit www.prospect.org.uk/join and become part of our Education and Children's Services sector.