Report from Support Staff Conference 2019

We attended the Support Staff Conference at Homilton House on Saturday 5 October. Amanda Martin, NEU President welcomed everyone and Kevin Courtney, NEU Joint General Secretary gave a talk followed by Q&A. He mentioned that support staff members is due to pass 30,000 members in the next few weeks, this is approx 3% of estimated support staff in schools. The TUC agreement is due to be looked at again in September 2020, currently doesn’t allow us to actively recruit support staff members, however it was improved from the agreement held between ATL and TUC which now doesn’t allow for GMB and Unison to complain if members choose to move across to NEU.

Training for support staff issues is currently happening around the country so reps feel more able to represent support staff members if they have not before.

General Election – NEU will mount a campaign around school funding again. Will ask people to vote for education. In 2017 election ¾ million voters changed their vote based on the joint unions campaign. There has been a leaked report from Dominic Cummings saying that there will be a need to reduce TA number, to make the funding promises mean anything. There is still a huge gap in SEND, 15+ and primary funding. The school cuts website which is due to be re-opened and accurate in the next week will show that 80% of schools have less funding per pupil than in 2015, whilst this has gone down from 91% previously it is still a huge number of schools and students affected. 30% of schools are still going down, mainly in the most disadvantaged areas. 100% of school in Manchester are still heading down.

We need to encourage all 17/18 year olds to register to vote, this is no longer done by parents or universities, they need to do it themselves.

Kevin went on to say that all of the excessive workload in this country is down to the broken accountability system.

During Q&A there was some talk about pay for support staff, Kevin said we are working with GMB and Unison to look at pay.

At the end of the day after CPD sessions we had a discussion about the motion Support Staff want to send to conference. There were two proposals, one was about support staff pay and conditions and the other was about anonymity for all education professionals (as this does not currently extend to support staff), needless to say both were supported but following the vote the pay and conditions motion was agreed. The other can be put forward by districts.

We also had a vote for the 6 guaranteed seats for support staff delegates to conference. Support Staff members were asked to self-nominate if they wanted to be considered, Julie Nall was lucky to be one of the 6 voted for during the conference, so will be attending National Conference as a Support Staff delegate. This means her place to conference will be paid for centrally and not by the district.

We finished with a Q&A session. There were various questions answered, however there was quite a bit of discussion around inclusion of all sectors within the union, particularly at conference. It appears this has come up at various sector conferences recently. Delegates felt that support staff come across as second class within the NEU and at the last conference. We were told that this is already being addressed to ensure that it does not happen again. There was also some discussion about how support staff can get involved within the union. It appears that some districts are not as welcoming as Southern Derbyshire, and often refuse to allow them positions on the committee or to attend conferences etc.

During the day we were able to attend 2 out of 5 CPD sessions, we ensure we covered four of them between us.

Redundancies and Restructuring – what you need to know. 2 NEU legal officers ran this session. The information was relevant to all members in schools. It covered information we already know and had new NEU leaflets, which we have brought back with us.

Conflict resolution – this was an interesting session. We talked about signs and causes of conflict. Needing to understand and spot signs to try to resolve possible conflicts before they are too embedded. We also did a questionnaire that helped us to understand our natural ways of dealing with conflict, which was really interesting.

Behaviour for Learning – A proactive Approach. Lisa Miller who is an Education Consultant and a teacher of 25 years ran this session. The idea of the session was for us to learn about de-escalation techniques and to learn how our voice and body language can increase anger in young people

Mental health for staff. – An interesting session made for those of us who are interested in the mental health of staff and students. We spoke about the different mental health concerns that staff and students face and how we can help them in school