



Introduction

As the Summer Term begins, we are in an unprecedented crisis: none of us can predict how long will last, and inevitably it is dominating all that we do.

The way schools have responded has been amazing – new priorities and new ways of working have all been established quickly and effectively. The needs of pupils, and the care for the most vulnerable has been at the heart of this.

There has been much new information to absorb – and as we have gone through this period of rapid change, very often we have known the intentions of the government but detail has been lacking! We have seen advice issued, and then revised as detail has been added to it. We are involved in the London Councils network of education HR professionals which has been meeting weekly during Lockdown, and which is attended by Local Government Association representatives who are working with the DfE to represent school needs and to ensure guidance is produced. This network has been an important means of ensuring the advice we give to our customers is the most current.

For Octavo, there has been an important change as on 1 April 2020 we were acquired by Croydon Council. While this is an organisational change, there will be no change to the way in which we will be offering customer focussed HR support. You can contact us in the same way as you always have done as it is very much ‘business as usual’ – albeit that there is a slightly different norm at present.

The Schools HR Team

Coronavirus: key information

The way much of the new detail about the national response to Covid-19 is being published is via updates to advice on the government website. It is therefore important to refer back to the website for the most up to date advice as and when you need to take decisions. We are aware too that there are gaps in the advice especially about casuals and we understand that more advice about this is likely to be provided.

The key links are:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures> (covers many topics including workforce, staffing levels, supply teachers and contingent workers)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-financial-support-for-education-early-years-and-childrens-social-care> (general information on finance, includes advice about on the very limited situations where it may be appropriate to furlough staff and further advice about agency staff)

<https://www.local.gov.uk/covid-19-employment-law-faqs> (summarises information from various sources on different topics)

Agencies

As the government response to Covid-19 has developed, we have seen an increasing expectation that all contracts with agency staff will be honoured through to the assignment end date and that early termination clauses should not be invoked. The rationale for this is that the state has already provided schools with public funding for employment costs, and this should be used to fund the agency contract.

For further information see question 6 of the employment law faqs mentioned above.

Furlough

There are very limited occasions where school may be able to furlough staff as the government's working assumption is that the funding schools have already received will be able to cover salary costs and there is therefore no need to apply for additional state funding for staff salary costs.

Where particular roles are privately funded (eg by parental contribution) then furlough may be a possibility. Government and HMRC advice should be followed for schools considering this option – as this is regularly updated, schools should refer to the relevant websites when making decisions.

NQTs

The Department for Education and Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) have been working closely to develop a position on COVID-19 and its impact on statutory newly qualified teacher (NQT) induction.

The department has issued an announcement to stakeholders regarding the impact of COVID-19 on NQT induction – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers>. Please refer to this page moving forward as the department will provide updates and guidance directly to this site. We recommend returning to this page regularly to view additional information the department will release.

Workforce Planning

Schools have established new ways of working since the middle of March, but as and when Lockdown ends, careful workforce planning will be required. We are aware that there have been a variety of questions about those who are in the shielded and vulnerable groups themselves, or have family members in one of the groups. This is in some cases affecting the rotas used in schools. We are seeing a variety of questions including from those in one of the groups who do not want to isolate. Medical advice from GPs, and from Occupational Health will assist schools in managing these situations.

Partnering Croydon Schools for teacher recruitment initiatives

We recognise that recruitment has been more difficult during lockdown, and consequently links have been made with local universities proposing that Croydon schools are involved in interviewing NQTs virtually. Christine Lonsdale, Teacher Recruitment Consultant will be in touch with you shortly about this.

Mental Health

Covid-19 will be impacting on everyone's mental health in different ways and at different times. Some of course will be walking the very sad path of bereavement and will need particular support. For others there will be anxiety and frustration.

Everyone, including those who appear to be coping well, will be having to get used to changed expectations and ways of doing things.

Various organisations have tools that can help people talk about how they are feeling and which will address their mental health. Schools which have Employee Assistance Programmes can make these available to their staff, and all schools can use the telephone counselling offered by the Education Support Network (a poster advertising the Network is at the back of this newsletter).

Support with mental health during Covid-19 can be found at:

- <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/coronavirus-support> (education specific support)
- www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing, where you can find the Government's guidance on safeguarding your mental health and wellbeing;
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus, where mental health charity Mind provides tips for coping during the coronavirus outbreak, including information for emergency service staff, volunteers and their families; and
- www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak, where the Samaritans provide information and advice for anyone who is worried about their mental health during the coronavirus pandemic.

Staff surveys and wellbeing

The Ofsted framework 2019 put an increased focus on wellbeing and workload, and the current situation has heightened the importance of wellbeing. In due course, and as schools start to return to normal, it will be important for schools to understand how staff are feeling, so that appropriate interventions can be made. Surveys are a way of doing this.

Once a survey has been completed, it is important that it is discussed. One option is to do this at SLT level; another option is to create a wellbeing group with representatives from a cross section of staff at the school to lead and coordinate the work.

There are a number of frameworks that exist that could be used to take forwards this work which include:

- The DfE's School Workload Reduction Toolkit (which includes advice on setting up a wellbeing group) - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-workload-reduction-toolkit>
- The Education Support Network's 'Positive Workplace Survey' - <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/helping-your-staff/staff-engagement-wellbeing>
- The HSE's 'Education Talking Toolkit' - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/gohomehealthy/assets/docs/EducationTalkingToolkit.pdf>. This gives ideas for conversations, and to assist in prioritising them, all staff could be asked to complete the HSE's stress risk assessment as this would identify the areas that most need to be discussed - <https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/assets/docs/indicatortool.pdf>

Contracts of Employment

We have referred in previous newsletters to the requirement from 6 April 2020 for all staff, including casuals to have contracts of employment/engagement in place from the worker's first day with the school.

The recruitment cycle will inevitably be operating differently this year, but it is vital that all staff who will be starting at the beginning of the Autumn Term have their contracts in place before the first day of term. Where late appointments are made, arrangements for the production of the contract of employment must be in place.

There are some changes to the information that is required, and the minimum information required has been expanded to include extra information on variable working hours, paid leave other than sick pay, benefits, probationary periods and training. Further advice is available from your HR Provider.

Schools should also note that because there has been a change to the minimum information required, the first time after 6 April 2020 that there is a variation to someone's contract, they must receive a new contract of employment. Thereafter a variation to contract letter will again suffice.

Parental Bereavement leave

Bereaved parents of a child who dies on or after 6 April 2020 have a new right to take up to two weeks' parental bereavement leave with pay at a statutory minimum rate. The right also applies to stillbirths occurring after 24 weeks of pregnancy. The leave has to be taken either as a block of two weeks or two separate blocks of one week at different times and can be taken any time up to 56 weeks after the death of the child.

In practice we know that most schools would have used their existing discretionary leave policies for such situations. A new policy specifically for these circumstances has been written and final sign off has been delayed due to the current situation. Please contact us if you would like to see the 'final draft' version.

Tough day?

We're listening.

Sometimes work (or just life) can be tough. The Education Support Partnership is here for you. We offer a 24 hour free and confidential helpline for people working in education.



Free confidential helpline
08000 562 561

Registered charity 1161436



The charity for everyone
working in education

Octavo Partnership, 4th Floor, Croydon Clocktower,
Katharine Street, Croydon, CR9 1ET

Trust our knowledge and expertise

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