

To: All GMB members in schools and academies

Date: 20th March 2020

Dear Colleague,

Re Important advice regarding the current situation

As you are aware, we are currently in the middle of a situation unprecedented in modern history. The result of this is that things are changing quickly and as a result many members are confused as to what they can expect over the coming weeks and months. In order to provide some reassurance, we thought it best to write to you with a view to answering some basic questions and to ensure that you know that your Union will continue to be here for you throughout this busy time.

School closures/reduced working

You will no doubt have seen the news with regards to schools continuing to open on a reduced basis over the coming weeks. At the moment, we are still trying to gauge exactly what level of cover will be necessary and this is largely being worked out on a school by school basis.

In most cases we expect schools to be partially open during the crisis, meaning that some cover will be necessary. It is anticipated that what cover is needed will be spread fairly amongst staff although for obvious reasons some staff classed as high risk may be told to stay away.

Key workers

After intense lobbying, we have just had confirmation that schools support staff are classed as key workers and, as such, should your children need to stay in school then they will be allowed to do so.

Pay for staff

All members on permanent or fixed term contracts should continue to receive their pay as usual during this crisis as long as you remain available for work or are either sick or have been advised to isolate yourself as a result of the Covid-19 virus by either your GP or the 111 service. If you have run out of sick leave, please let us know as we are putting pressure on the Government to make special arrangements in this regard. It is also the case whereby time taken off as a result of the virus should not be counted towards sick procedures.

If members are on zero hours contracts, then you should speak to your employer about whether they will continue to pay you. If they refuse, please let us know and we will see what we can do to help you. Currently we are working hard with the government to ensure that wages continue to get paid and jobs are protected. As such, this position is moving and we are doing all we can to ensure that your livelihoods are protected during the difficult time.

Working during the holidays

Members on term time only contracts are not contracted to work during the holidays. However, discussions are on-going about schools continuing to remain open during the holidays in order to provide cover for key workers. Needless to say, although staff members cannot be made to work during these times, as this is a national emergency, we would encourage those able to do so to give serious consideration to being able to help out. Where you can, you should be recompensed for all

hours you do, either by being paid or by be given time off in lieu at a later date. The important thing to remember is that such arrangements are voluntary and that no members of staff on a term time contract can be treated less favourably if they are unable to work.

Making up hours

There is no requirement for any member to make up hours lost as a result of a schools closure as long as you remained available to work during this time.

Duties

Your duties remain those specified under your job description. However, it is possible that some flexibility may be required due the nature of the situation. As such, when appropriate PPE and training has been given, and when full risk assessments have been undertaken, we would encourage members to be flexible when such requests are fair and reasonable. We can provide advice to members on these issues should you require any.

Union support

GMB will remain open and will continue to support you throughout this situation. However in order to reduce the risk to both staff and members, offices will be shut to visitors and the high volume of calls and e-mails may lead to short delays in responding. Members are encouraged where possible to continue to contact branches and reps for advice. However, should you be unsure of who to speak to, or in need some advice or support, you should where possible e-mail one of the offices below. If you are not able to e-mail, an answering service is available at the number below and we will ensure that calls are returned as quickly as possible.

Chessington Office	0208 397 8881	info@gmb.org.uk
Hove Office	01424 420580	infohove@gmb.org.uk
Reading Office	01189 505745	inforeading@gmb.org.uk
Rochester Office	01634 471472	inforochester@gmb.org.uk
South Coast Office	01489 578 665	infosouthcoast@gmb.org.uk
Swindon Office	01793 818 005	infoswindon@gmb.org.uk
Welling Office	0208 3033407	infowelling@gmb.org.uk

It's times like this when people recognise the true value of the work you do and we hope that when this crisis ends, people will remember that it was people like you who kept our country going, who kept our kids safe and who kept those who were needed on the front lines. We will make sure your efforts are not forgotten and we will continue to fight to ensure that you are given the recognition and respect you deserve. These are difficult times but we value every single thing you do and we, as your Union, will be here for you throughout.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Prendergast

Senior Organiser