



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

Anas Sarwar - Scottish Labour Party

LF/KN/Sarwar010321
1 March 2021

By email

Dear Anas

Firstly, may I congratulate you on your election as Leader of the Scottish Labour Party. I hope you enjoy the challenge.

You will be aware that the Scottish Government has declined to support prioritisation of occupational groups as part of Phase 2 of the vaccine rollout and has signalled it will comply with the declared interim policy of the UK JCVI.

The EIS is calling for reconsideration of this position and is seeking your party's support for this in the Scottish Parliament.

It is within the power of the Parliament to deploy a different strategy as, indeed, the Scottish Government did in Phase 1 by prioritising care homes.

The EIS very deliberately did not call for education staff priority within Phase 1 of the programme as that was very clearly predicated on those most at risk of death. However, 99% of that group will have been covered in the first phase.

The main argument advanced by the JCVI for its recent recommendation was organisational expediency.

Scotland is a small country, however, and it is in charge of its own vaccine programme – it can vary this to suit its own priorities and keeping schools open is a declared aim of Scottish Government. Vaccinating teachers and other school staff is a straightforward way of achieving that aim.

Scotland has capacity for 400,000 vaccinations per week; as around 35% of teachers will have been vaccinated under Phase 1 the "organisational challenge" around vaccinating the rest is not huge – it would take literally a few days to achieve.

There has been debate about the level of risk within schools but only last week an ONS survey indicated teaching as the fourth highest "at risk" occupational group. A recent PHS study has shown that teachers are more likely to have tested positive for Covid in

Scotland than the general working population. It has also been reported that the new Covid variant is around 40% more transmissible for pupils than the original.

Even if it is true that the risk to teachers of serious illness and death is lower, you should consider the impact of Covid related teacher absence on the education of young people.

In secondary schools, for example, staff absence over the next period through Covid related reasons could seriously impact on the SQA qualifications. On average, staff absences in schools has been around 1,500 per week, at one stage last September peaking at over 2,500.

Clearly this is disruptive to education continuity especially for senior phase secondary pupils, already facing a tight timeline around accreditation processes.

Frankly, it seems short-sighted of the Scottish Government not to utilise the vaccination tool to ensure continuity of education – an action at odds with the political rhetoric about the importance of education to the lives of our young people, which no doubt we will hear more of tomorrow when the First Minister announces the intention of Government around the next phase of a return to face to face teaching.

Aside from this, vaccination of teachers as a professional group would help assuage the very real fears that teachers have about their safety and that of their families. The negative wellbeing impacts of prolonged stress and anxiety arising from being the only occupational group required to work indoors in relatively small rooms, many poorly ventilated, often with more than thirty people from different households at once, most of whom are not physically distancing from one another, should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, given the caring role that teachers and other education staff undertake, particularly Early Years, Primary and ASN staff, and the difficulties that there are in maintaining physical distance between staff and pupils in these contexts, the Scottish Government has failed to take appropriate mitigating action of the kind that it has undertaken for other frontline care workers.

I would ask that you consider raising this matter within the Parliament in order to shift the current planning assumption on vaccination to achieve the inclusion of education staff as an occupational priority group.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Flanagan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Larry Flanagan
General Secretary



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Ruth Davidson - Scottish Conservatives

LF/KN/Davidson010321
1 March 2021

By email

Dear Ruth

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Larry Flanagan
General Secretary



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Patrick Harvie - Scottish Green Party

LF/KN/Harvie010321
1 March 2021

By email

Dear Patrick

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Willie Rennie - Scottish Lib Dems

LF/KN/Rennie010321
1 March 2021

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