



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

The Educational Institute of Scotland: School-based Member Survey Results

NOVEMBER 2020



Introduction

Since returning to full time, face-to-face teaching in schools, members have highlighted their safety concerns around the continued spread of the Covid-19 virus. Many have highlighted their fears of catching the virus, or indeed of passing it on to loved ones.

In light of the recent upsurge in Covid-19 cases in Scotland, and the introduction of the Strategic Framework, the EIS Executive carried out a survey of member opinion on the current situation, including the appetite for potential industrial action.

The survey opened on the afternoon of 10th November and was closed on the evening of 22nd November. During this time 18,733 responses were collected from school-based members working in the Primary, Secondary, Special and Nursery education sectors.

To ensure that responses were gathered only from eligible EIS members, the survey questions were hosted on the EIS website which required members to log in, and to confirm their membership numbers.

All responses gathered have been anonymised before analysis to ensure that no individual member could be identified. Any duplicate responses logged to the same EIS number were amalgamated to avoid any double counting.

This report outlines the key findings from this survey, as well as showcasing the concerns that thousands of members have raised about their working environments. All percentages have been calculated to one decimal place, with the total responses logged for each question detailed underneath each graph.

Where statistically significant, cross analysis by region and sector have been included in this paper.

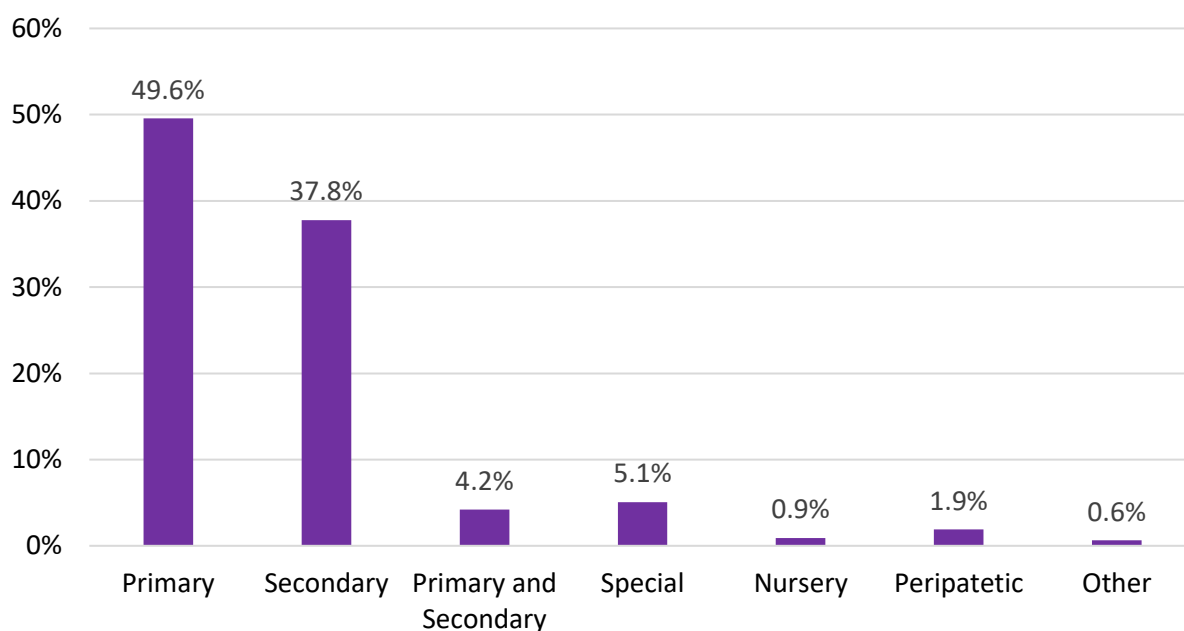
Member Information

The first questions within the survey asked members to identify what sector, and local authority area they worked in. Where appropriate results have been broken down by Primary, Secondary, Special and Nursery responses, or by geographical areas.

Members were also asked to identify which school they worked in; however, this information has not been included in this paper, to ensure that individual members cannot be identified.

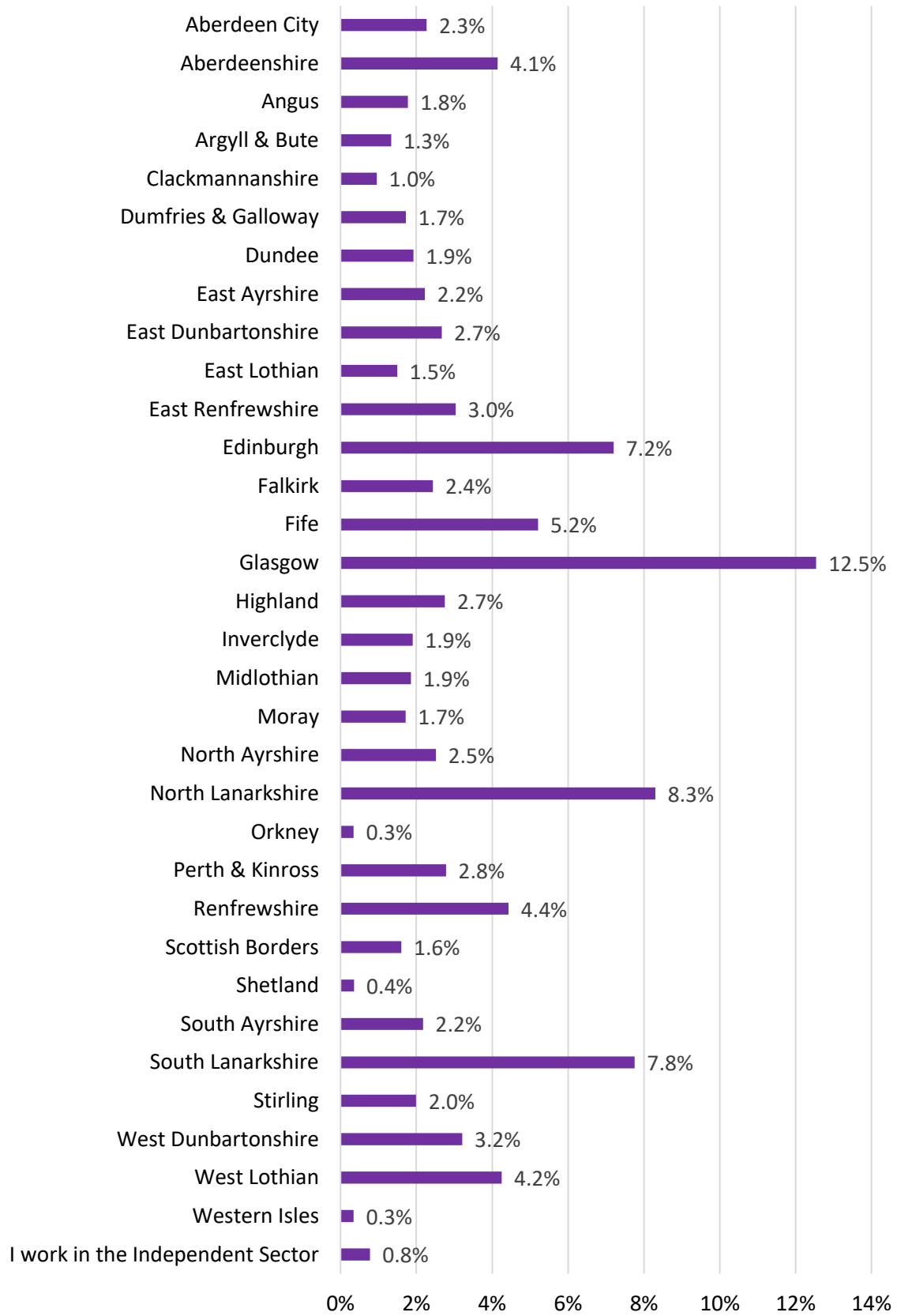
Tables 1 and 2 below show the sector and geographical breakdown of responses.

Table 1: "Which sector do you work in?" responses



Total responses: 18,733

Table 2: “Which local authority area do you work in? (If more than one, please highlight one for the purposes of this questionnaire)” responses



Total responses: 18,733

Survey Analysis

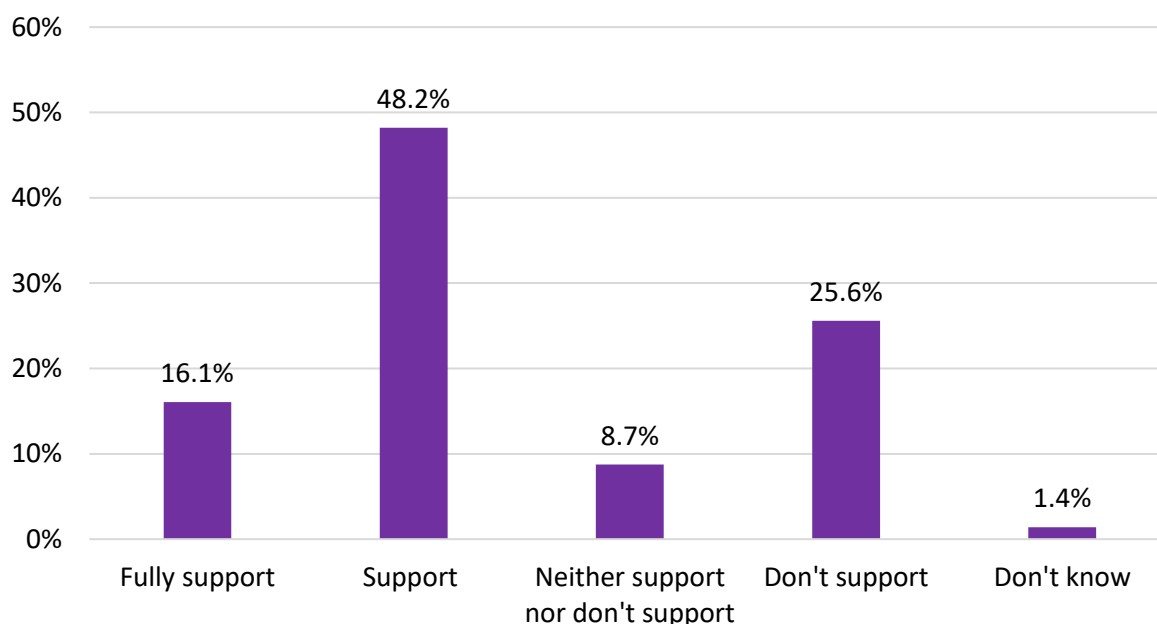
The following questions show member responses to questions on the implementation of Covid-19 within their schools, their views on how safe they think their working environment is, and what contingencies should be in place at levels 3 and 4 of Scotland's Strategic Framework.¹

It should be noted that when this survey opened on the 10th November, no local authority area was in a protection level greater than 3. In a statement made to Parliament on 17th November the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon announced that 11 local authority areas were to move to protection level 4.

Analysis to some of the questions below has been broken down by protection level. Whilst the majority of responses to this survey were gathered before the 17th November announcement, the areas that have moved into the higher tiers, are also the areas with the highest level of infections per population density. Therefore, it is important to distinguish the views of these members against those working in low infection areas.

Table 3 below shows that members are generally supportive of the schools remaining open where possible.

Table 3: "The Scottish Government has prioritised schools remaining open where possible. To what extent do you support this objective?" responses

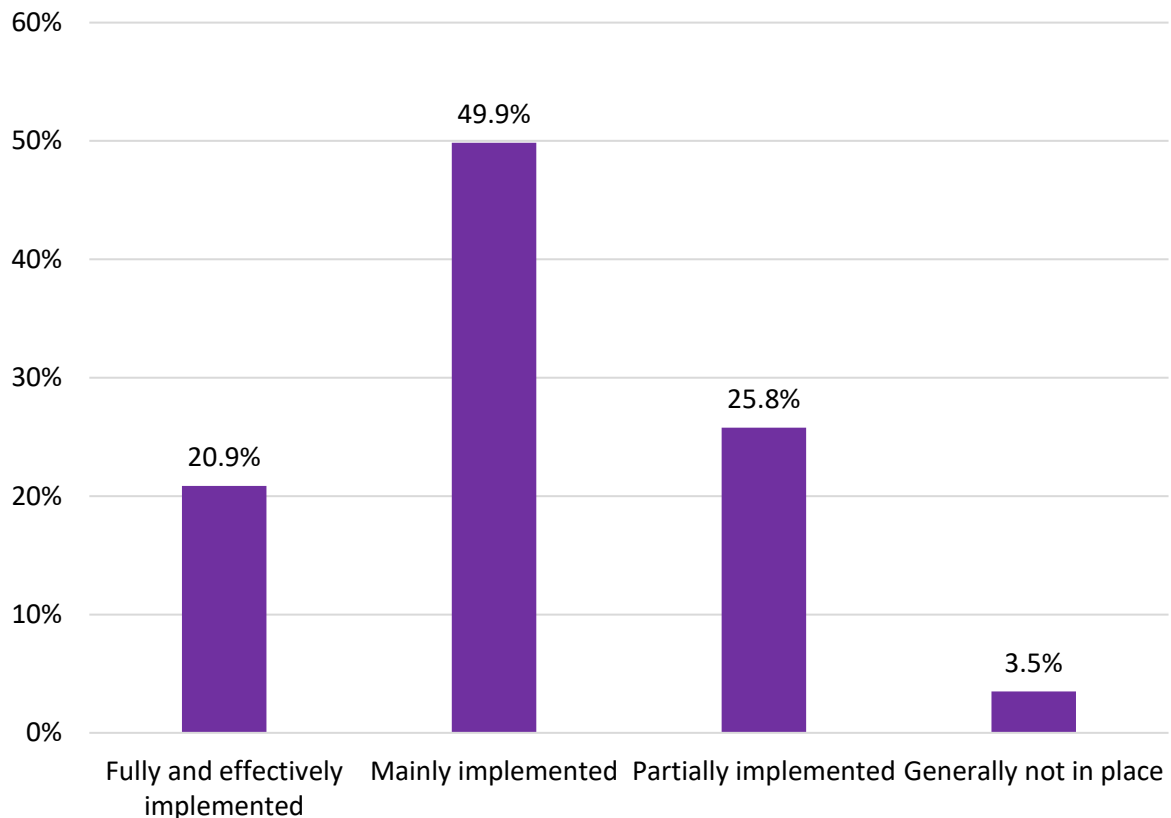


Total responses: 18,733

¹ Scottish Government, "Coronavirus (COVID-19): Scotland's Strategic Framework" (last accessed 27/11/10 at 21:47) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/covid-19-scotlands-strategic-framework/>

When members were asked how effectively the guidance, that supports pupil and staff safety, had been implemented, the majority stated it has been fully, or mainly, implemented within their school. This shows that there are high levels of compliance with the regulations across Scotland, as shown in table 4.

Table 4: “Guidance has been in place about what must be done to keep staff, pupils and visitors safe in schools following their reopening in August. What is your assessment of the implementation of the mitigations in your school?” responses



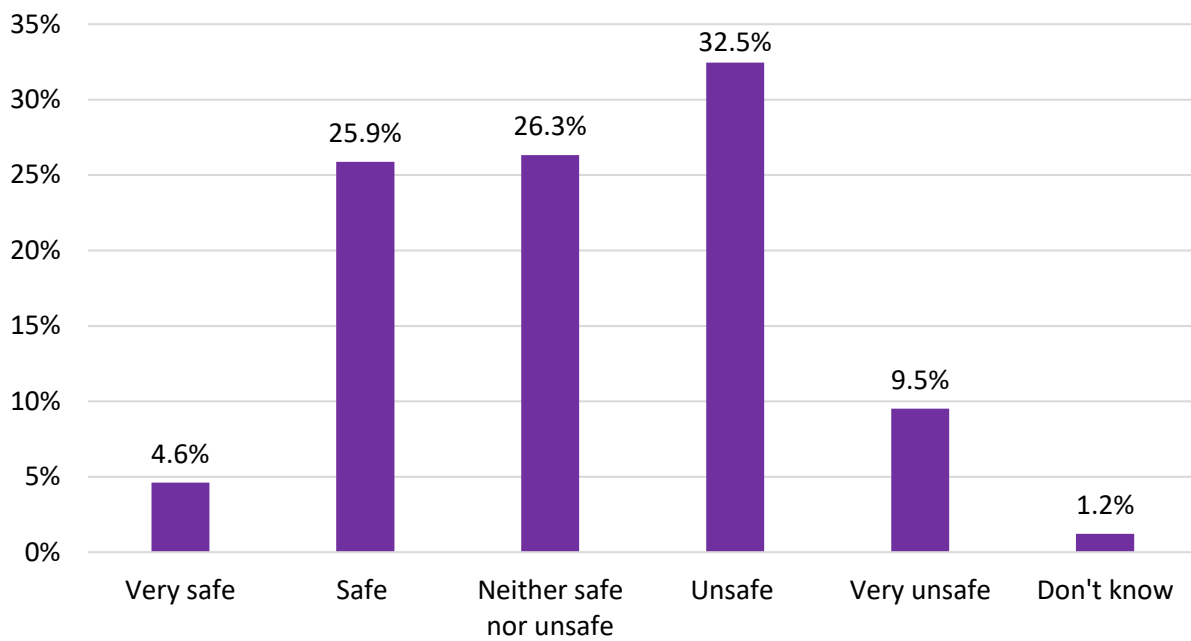
Total responses: 18,733

Despite members reporting high levels of compliance with the safety guidelines, the majority of respondents said that they did not feel safe at school even with these procedures in place. Table 5 shows that less than a third of members said they felt safe, or very safe with these procedures in place, with almost half (43%) saying they felt unsafe, or very unsafe at work.

Table 6 shows the breakdown of responses to this question by sector. Those working in the nursery sector were the most likely to state that they felt safe or very safe at work, and those working in secondary schools being the least likely to report feeling safe or very safe.

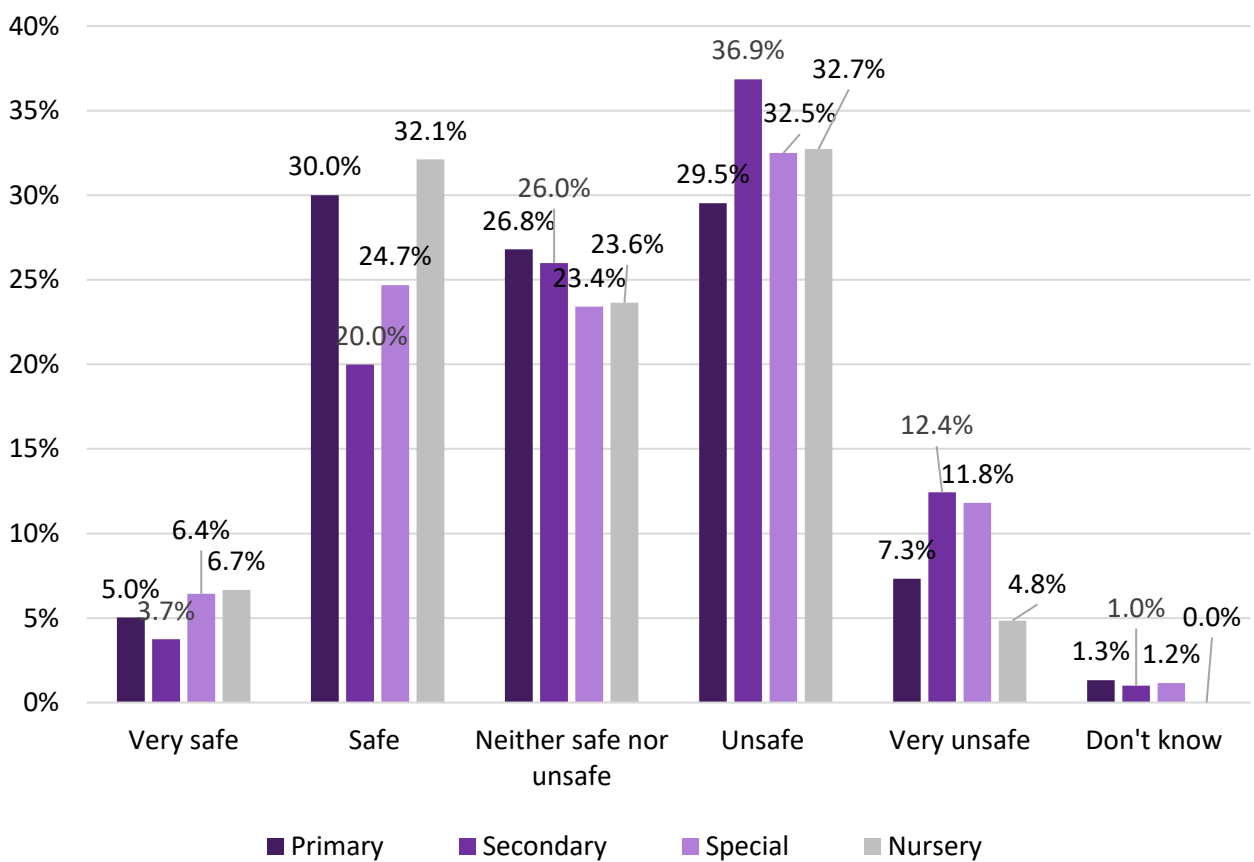
When these results are cross analysed by protection level it is clear that members working in the areas of the highest infection levels reported are far more likely to report feeling unsafe, compared to their counterparts in lower levels, as shown in table 7.

Table 5: “How safe do you feel with these mitigations procedures in place?” responses



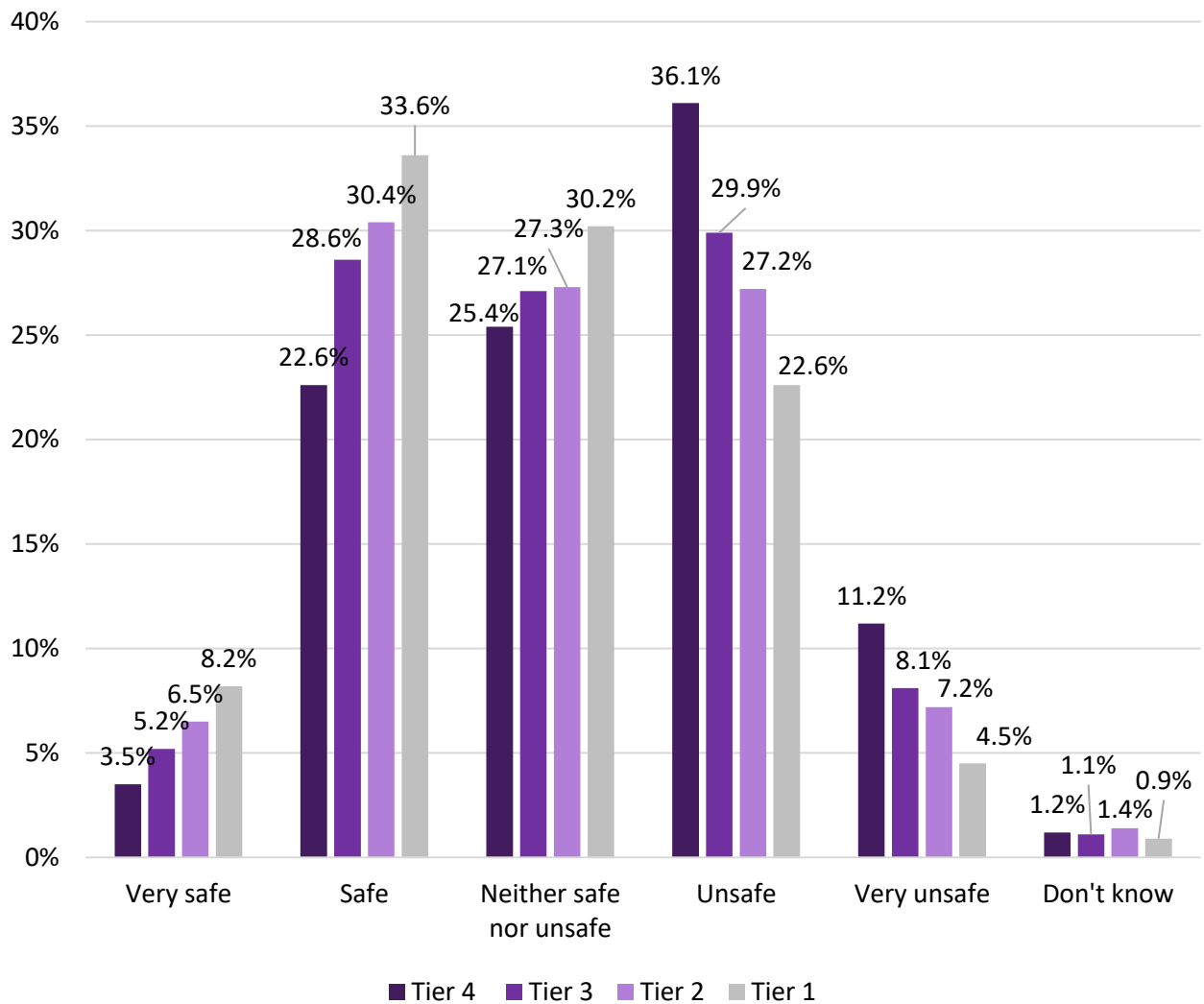
Total responses: 18,703

Table 6: “How safe do you feel with these mitigations procedures in place?” responses by sector



Total responses: 17,471

Table 7: “How safe do you feel with these mitigations procedures in place?” responses by local authority level²



Total responses: 18,557

Table 7 above shows that 39% of members working in Level 1 said they felt safe, or very safe in their school, yet only a quarter (26%) of those working in level 4 areas said they felt safe or very safe at work. These findings reinforce the EIS calls for stronger measures to be in place in higher areas of infection.

² Level 4: East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling, West Dunbartonshire, West Lothian
 Level 3: Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Lothian, City of Edinburgh, Falkirk, Fife, Inverclyde, Midlothian, North Ayrshire, Perth and Kinross
 Level 2: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders
 Level 1: Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Western Islands

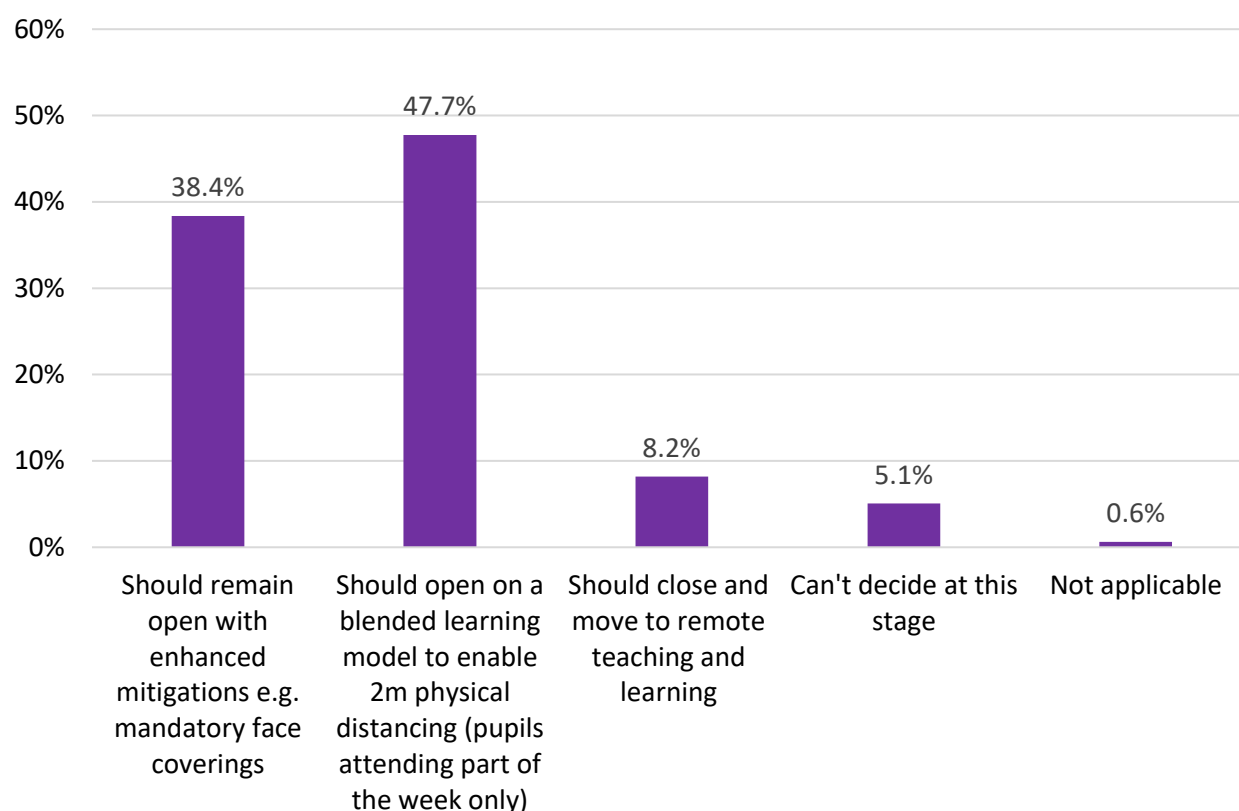
Members were then asked if their council area was to be at level 3, if they would like the school to close and move to remote teaching and learning. Only 8% of members said that at level 3 they would like to move to remote teaching, with 38% saying that they would like schools to remain open, with enhanced mitigations, and 48% on a blended learning model.

When members were asked the same question, but this time in regard to their council area moving to level 4, half (51%) said they would prefer the school to close and move to remote teaching and learning, with a further 34% saying they would like to move to blended learning to enable 2m physical distancing of pupils. Only 11% of respondents said they would like their school to remain open in level 4 with enhanced mitigations, for example mandatory face coverings.

Table 8: Level 3

“Contingencies of blended or remote learning can be applied at any level on a school by school basis. At Level 3 of the Strategic Framework there is clearly a heightened level of community infection.

“If your Council area is, or was to rise to Level 3, which option would be your preferred course of action for your school?” responses

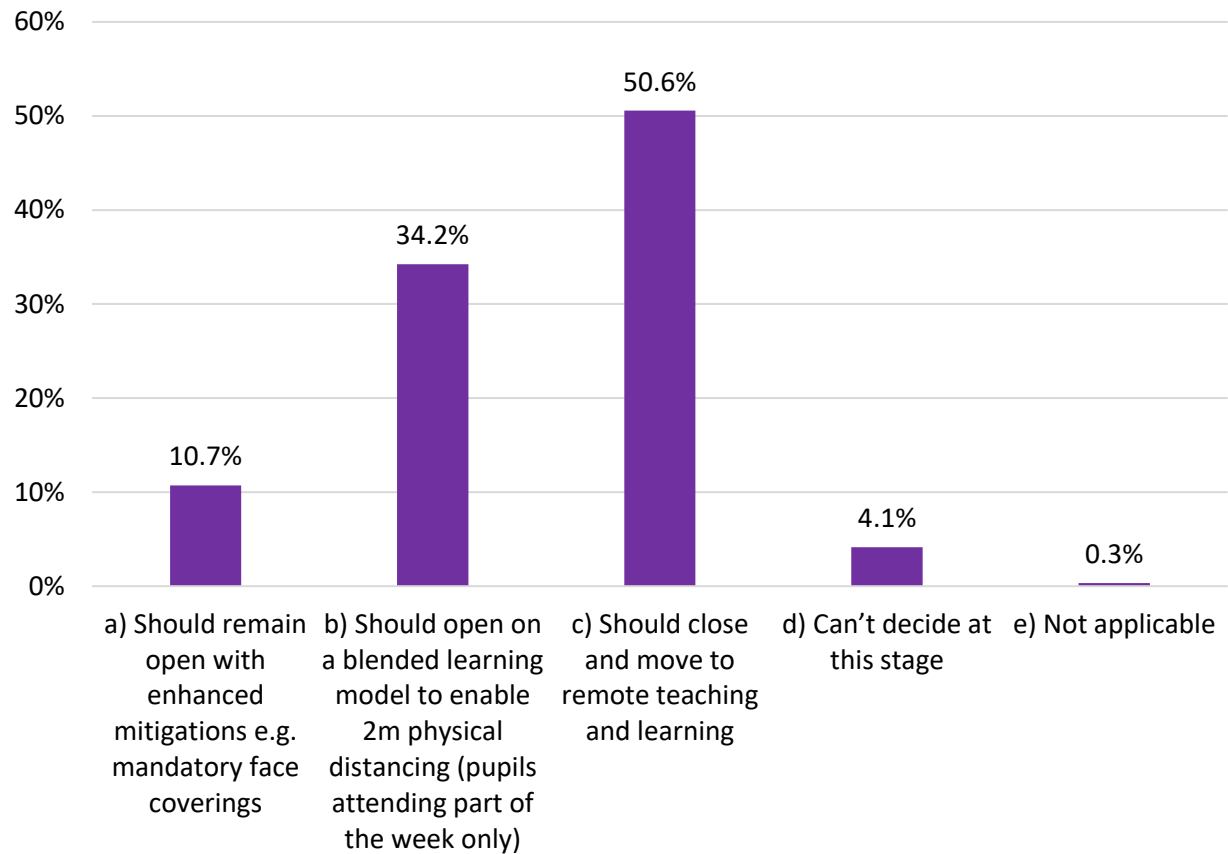


Total responses: 18,728

Table 9: Level 4

“In the event of any Council area moving to Level 4, the EIS has called for schools to move to either blended or remote learning, based on teacher perception of the risk in their workplaces.

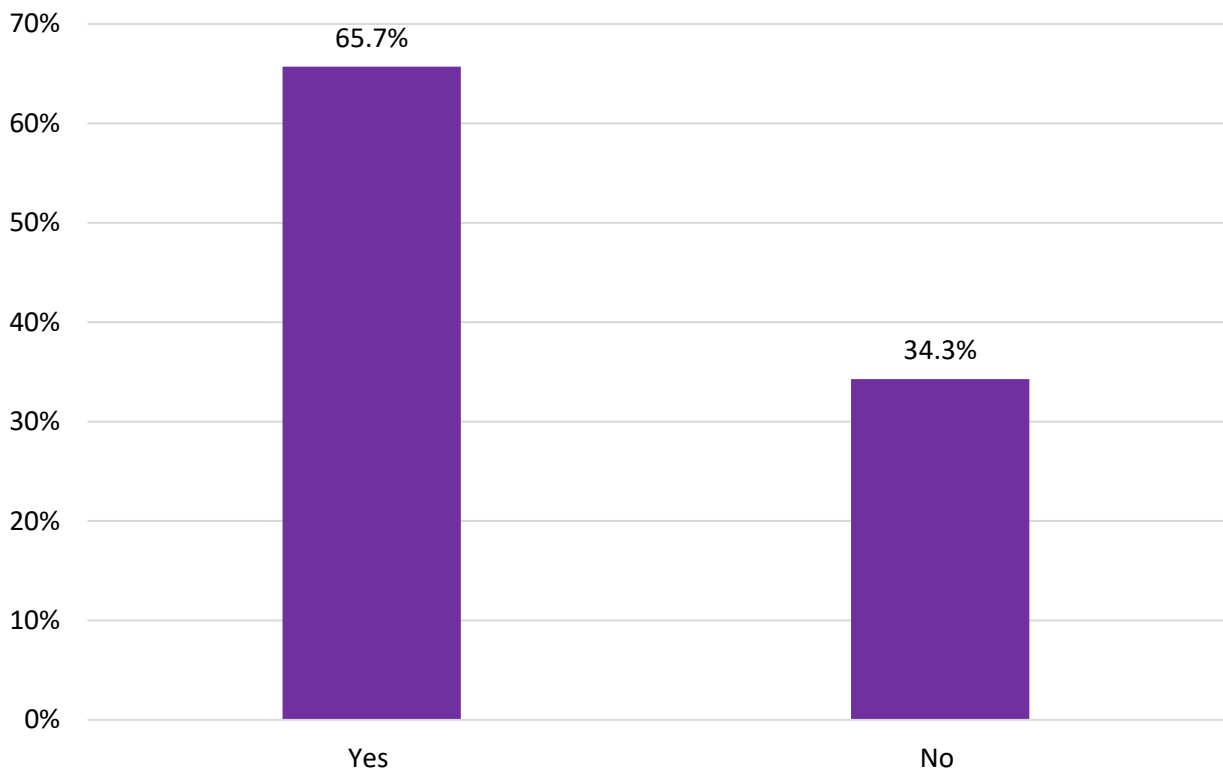
“If your Council area was Level 4, which option would be your preferred course of action for your school?” responses



Total responses: 18,733

From the table above it is clear the majority of members want options b (blended learning) or c (remote teaching) to be in place in level 4 areas. Members were then asked that should the majority of members wish to move to blended or remote teaching and learning (and this claim was rejected by their local authority or Public Health Scotland) would they be willing to support industrial action, including strike action in protest. Almost two thirds of members said they would be supportive of such action, as shown in table 10.

Table 10: “If there is a majority staff view that option (b) or (c) is the preferred option but this is rejected by the Local Authority/Public Health Scotland, would you be willing to support industrial action, including strike action, to protest any such decision?” responses



Total responses: 18,733

Members were also asked how they travel to work. 89%³ said they travelled by private transport, 5% by public transport, and 6% ticked “other” which may include cycling or walking.

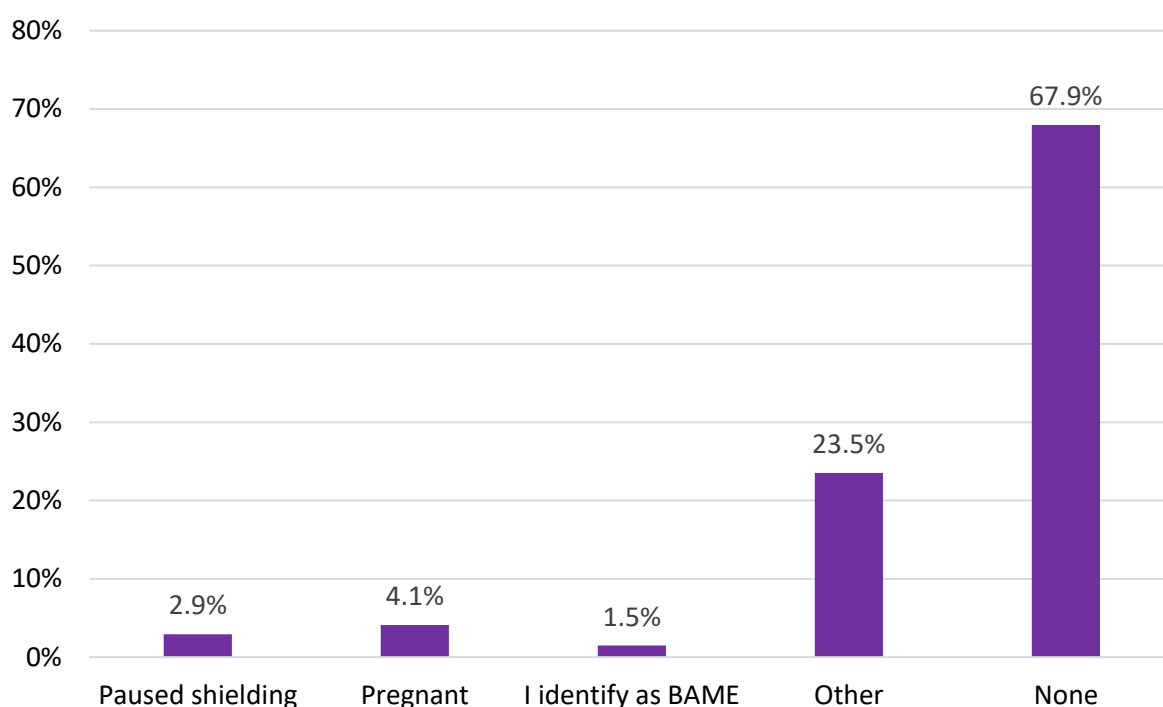
The findings from these questions show that teachers do not feel safe working in schools during the pandemic, with those working in areas of higher levels of infection are more likely to feel unsafe. The vast majority of members would like to see a move to blended or remote learning in level 4 areas.

³ A total of 18,695 members responded to this question.

Additional Questions: Members with additional vulnerabilities

As certain groups within society are more at risk than others, the next questions asked members to detail if they belonged to a vulnerable group. Table 11 below shows that just over a third of members belong to a vulnerable group.

Table 11: Which category of additional vulnerability to the Covid-19 virus applies to you? (if more than one, please prioritise your main concern)



Total responses: 13,750

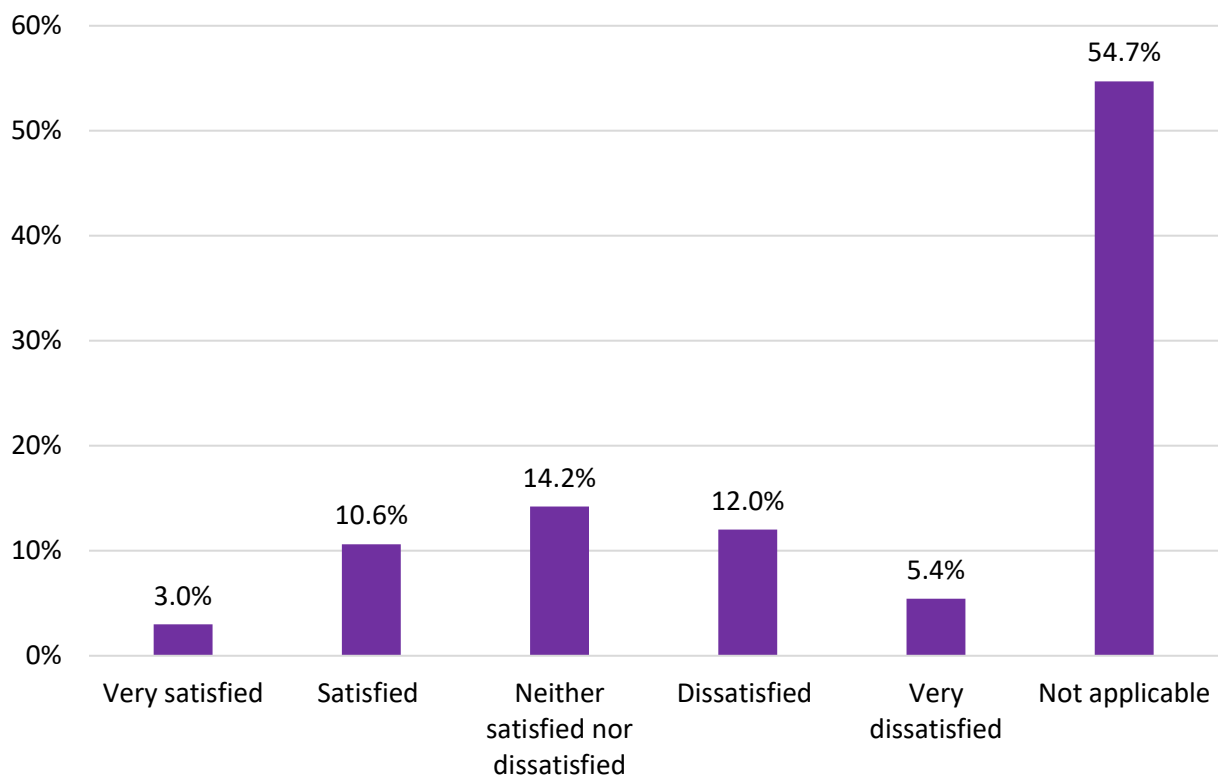
Underneath this question, there was an opportunity for members to share their comments about their concerns in relation to their health. Of the 2,314 comments that were left by members, the majority outlined their health concerns in more detail. Some of the comments were left by members who do not belong to a vulnerable group, but live with, or care for, someone who does. Within these comments, members highlighted their anxiety about potentially exposing their vulnerable loved ones to the virus. Below are a small number of the comments left by members.

- “Guidance for pregnant staff members is too open to interpretation. Different schools within local authority are doing different things which I feel is totally unfair! There should be a universal decision made over staff working from home.”

- “I had Covid 8 weeks ago and still very ill and off work. Even if you are not at risk the virus can still effect you for months later.”
- “I am trying for a baby at the moment and will hopefully be pregnant soon. I worry about this impacting my job, but I don’t want to stop myself from having a baby just because of this.”
- “I am a supply teacher without a contract, therefore am nervous about shut down of schools which would cause me harm to my income. I have found that each school I teach in has a different approach to management of both staff and students with sanitation and room spacing. Many staff feel lack of set direction.”
- “I am not in a vulnerable group, but my husband is. This means that while schools are open and the mitigations are not fully protecting us, I could potentially pass Covid to him. This worries me and isn’t being taken into consideration at any level.”

Members with additional vulnerabilities were asked how satisfied they were with the mitigations put in place following their risk assessment. Table 12 shows the total number of responses to this question, with just over half of these responses saying the question was not applicable to them.

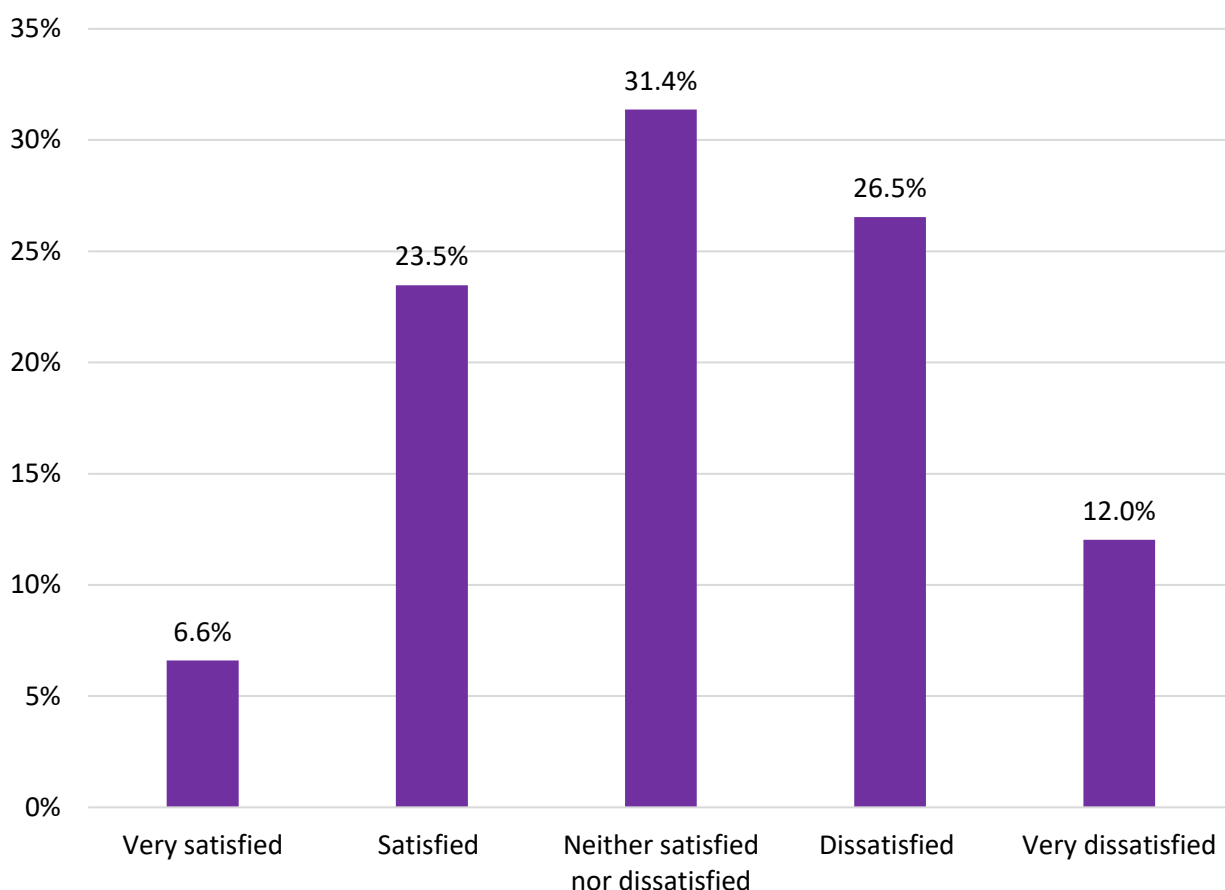
Table 12: “As you indicated that you belong to a vulnerable group, how satisfied are you with the mitigations in place following your risk assessment?” responses



Total responses: 10,009

When these “not applicable” responses are removed we can see that just under a third of members who identified themselves as belonging to a vulnerable group are either satisfied or very satisfied with the mitigations put in place following their risk assessment, as detailed in table 13.

Table 13: “As you indicated that you belong to a vulnerable group, how satisfied are you with the mitigations in place following your risk assessment?” responses



Total responses: 4,533

Members were again given the opportunity to highlight any specific concerns they had around their health since returning to work. 4,163 comments were received in response to question 8: “Do you have specific concerns about your health in relation to the Covid-19 virus since returning to work?”.

Within these comments members highlighted a lack of confidence within the system, either because guidelines were not being followed, or because they did not have faith in the track and trace system. Many commented that even though they are not in vulnerable groups they had grave concerns about contracting the virus, and the lasting effects of ‘long-Covid’.

There was also greater levels of stress and anxiety reported when working with children with complex additional support needs, as teachers had to approach pupils who may spit at or bite them. Some of the comments suggested that the stress caused by working during the pandemic has caused

underlying health conditions to be exacerbated, and some highlighted that it had triggered anxiety and other mental health issues – sometimes for the first time.

- “A high percentage of pupils not wearing masks and confrontational when asked about it.”
- “A little nervous when managing our more challenging pupils who can spit and bite in an escalated situation.”
- “A staff member at my school who tested positive has been off sick with fatigue and exhaustion for 6 weeks now. She is similar age to me healthy etc so I don't feel safe because I cannot guarantee what I would potentially suffer with if I had coronavirus.”
- “A staff member had tested positive, she compiled a list of people she had been in contact with and the school decided who on the list should be reported to track and trace. She was discouraged from telling staff or discussing her positive test and she was told to let the school handle track and trace despite it being believed she contracted the virus outside of school. In addition she was notified by text on Thursday by the person who had tested positive but as it wasn't an official track and trace text the depute head (line manger) encouraged her to go into school on Friday. She refused. And tested positive on Saturday.”
- “Although not officially classed as vulnerable as a long-term sufferer of depression and chronic pain I feel my welfare over-looked by the council, though not by my school. I experience increased anxiety of going to work and sleep problems therefore tiredness at work. This anxiety increases the amount of pain flare up I experience.”
- “As a practical subject I cannot ensure pupil safety and maintain 2m's social distancing - it's not safe!”

When asked: “Have you had a clinically supported (e.g from a GP) request to work remotely refused by the council?” 106⁴ members answered yes, that they had a clinically supported request to work remotely refused.

In response to this question many members highlighted that their council or their school had not acted upon the personal medical advice that they were given. Some members also went on to say that because of the stress that they were under working, in what they believe to be an unsafe environment, some have been signed off with stress or poor mental health.

In addition to this, the EIS received a number of emails from members who said that they had taken early retirement, or had not returned to work after the summer holidays because they had concerns for their health if they were to return to working in their school.

- “Did not ask GP but have had sickness absence due to anxiety related to Covid issues”
- “Council have told me I'm not vulnerable being pregnant and I've to either come in the same as everyone else or go off sick. I've had to go off sick due to the current situation and the anxiety that it has caused. I've felt that they have ignored my other health issues as well as being over 28 weeks pregnant where there is an increased risk of premature labour or being admitted to intensive care if I catch the virus. Have not felt supported at all by the Local Authority.”
- “Hasn't been required yet, but often feel close to point of not coping and either having to ask to be signed off for stress, to go back on anti-depressants or leave profession altogether.”

⁴ 10,419 responses in total were collected for this question.

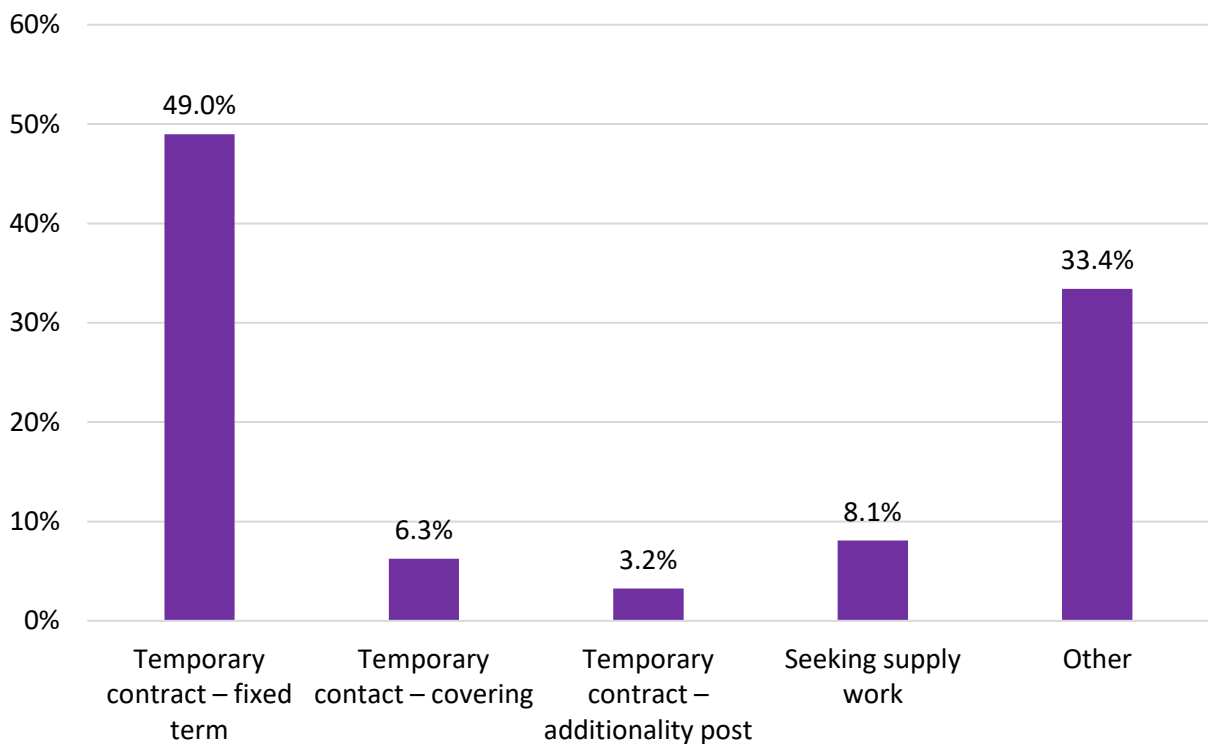
- “Having completed a (very poorly worded) NLC risk assessment on return to work, the outcome was that it is apparently safe for me to be at work so long as I was only teaching in the 1 room and everyone else was adhering to the guidance advised i.e. cleaning, 2m distance, mask wearing - unfortunately this is not always the case.”
- “I have a GP letter suggesting that I am sent home if there is a positive case at my school. This was refused.”
- “I have submitted a WFH request from 28 weeks and my HT has agreed but she has been told by council that they will not provide cover till my maternity leave begins.”

The responses to these questions show the strain that working within schools has put on members’ physical and mental health. Whilst those who have additional vulnerabilities to the virus have concerns, even seemingly healthy teachers without underlying conditions fear becoming ill and being off work with the longer-term effects of Covid-19.

Additional Questions: Members without permanent contracts

Just over 3,000 members indicated that they were working without a permanent contract. Table 14 below shows the employment status of members without permanent contracts.

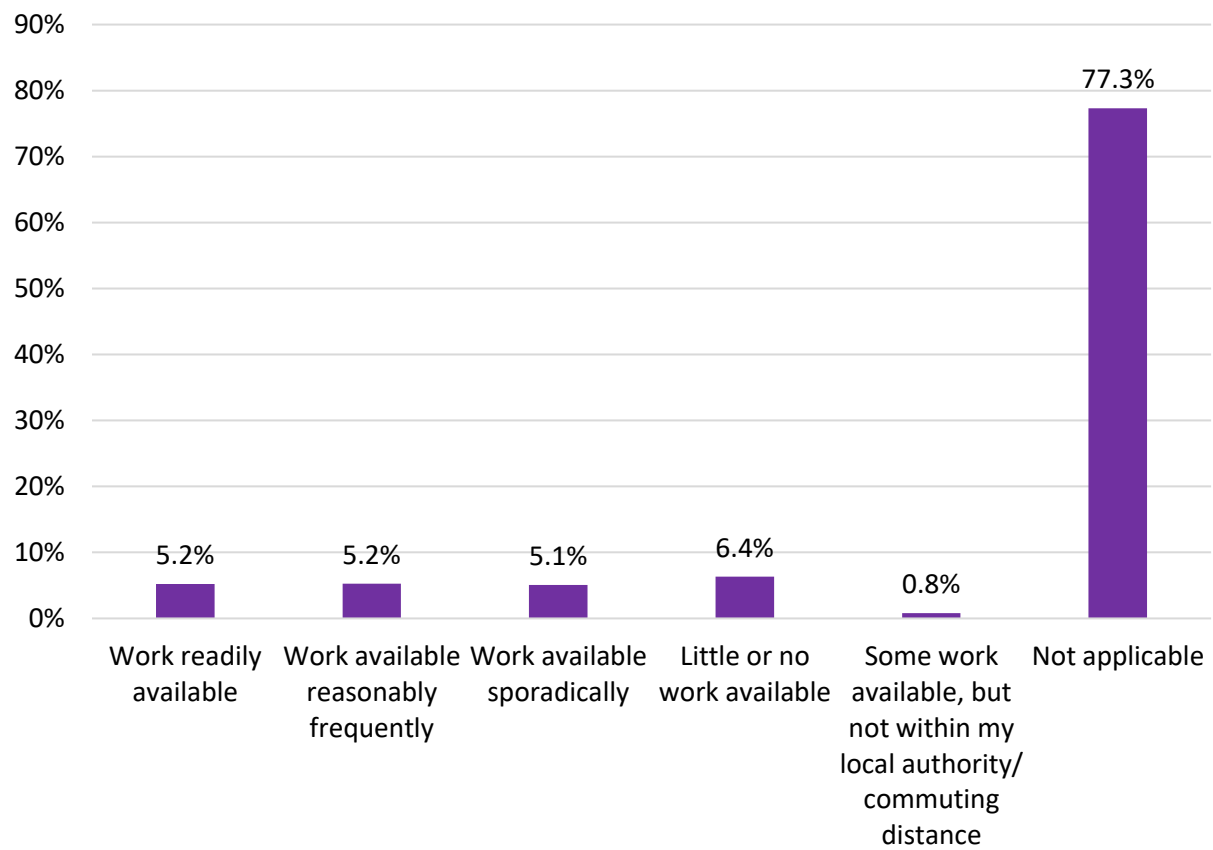
Table 14: “What is your current employment status?” responses



Total responses: 3,087

Of those who said they were seeking work, around 6% said there was little or no work available, and a further 1% said there was some work available but not with their local authority or commuting distance, as detailed in table 15.

Table 15: “If you are seeking supply work, what has been your recent experience?” responses



Total responses: 2,801

An extrapolation from these responses would suggest that more than 350 teachers are searching for work, at a time when schools need every teacher they can get. Given the survey size this figure could double when factored across the full workforce.

Closing remarks

At the end of the survey there was an opportunity for members to highlight any further concerns that they would like the EIS to consider.

These additional comments that members left at the end of the survey illustrate the strain that working during this pandemic is putting on teaching staff. Many highlight the poor wellbeing or mental health deterioration that they are experiencing as a direct result of not feeling safe at work. Some members wrote into EIS directly to say they have deliberately taken early retirement because they did not feel safe returning to school.

Members also highlighted repeatedly, that even if they did not belong to a vulnerable group themselves, they feared bringing home the virus to people that they lived with or cared for. There is widespread frustration at the lack of compliance within their school environments, either because pupils were not following the safety guidelines, or because they were impossible to implement due to the school size or layout.

It should be noted that whilst members expressed support for the priority of schools remaining open, significant concerns were expressed about safety factors and in some areas, weak mitigations being place. These concerns are accentuated in Level 4 areas where a clear majority of respondents indicated a willingness to support industrial action to protest any continued rejection of their safety concerns.

The EIS will now analyse the survey data on a Local Authority and school basis, to inform the Union's next steps.

- “My fear is that I am bringing in hundreds of potential contacts into my home. My children attend a different secondary school, and they are also bringing hundreds of contacts into the home every day. Despite the mitigations, pupils are not wearing face coverings as recommended in the guidance and this has the potential to infect others as social distancing between pupils is impossible in schools. The added stress that this is causing is not sustainable to deal with.”
- “It seems that the council is not keen to let the staff, pupils and parents know what the prevalence is in the school. At one point I felt it was statistically 10 times more prevalent in school than in the local authority. If this information was shared it would help staff to assess their own risk to themselves and their dependents and also to help increase measures in school when prevalence is high. The absence of information leads to rumour and a less trusting environment, and less goodwill.”
- “Work is more stressful, need to be on the ball 100% of the time, some push back from pupils regarding sanitising and face coverings which is stressful to deal with.”
- “Why has our employer not been offering face masks which are mandatory for staff yet are having to be provided at staff cost? Why has our employer not funded the flu vaccination, for the first time in years? It is not available via NHS for most teachers? Due to waiting for other priority groups. This is short sighted. My son, thanks to his employer has had a flu jab, he is in his twenties and has never taken it before.”

- “Whilst I have a full-time post I hate my current position, and this has impacted my mental health severely - I detest going to work in an unsafe environment, where I don't see my colleagues and get extremely poor support from SMT. The lack of available positions has made it impossible for me to apply/interview for any positions as there are hundreds of applicants for any one job.”
- “Whilst I fully recognise the concerns with regard to Covid, I believe schools should stay open as the harm done for children of all ages whilst out of school for five months were huge and are too significant to overlook, and would magnify further, if there were to be any future blended model or lockdown.”
- “While staff and pupils are all trying their best to comply with wearing face coverings and regular hand washing and sanitizing, the idea that staff and pupils can always remain at a 2m distance is unrealistic and at times practically impossible.”
- “I would like to see us campaigning to be held on an equal footing to NHS staff as regards priority for flu vaccines. If we are expected to be working on the frontline, the least the government can do is to ensure that there are supplies of flu vaccine available for teachers. Equally, if a Covid vaccine becomes available, teachers must be prioritised. I would like to see our union campaigning for this.”
- “It appears like we don't matter and are totally replaceable within our school roles which is granted. However, the stress COVID has caused and the extreme preparation I do for my class before arriving, whilst there and once home is getting ridiculous! My young family is suffering because of it as I'm so tired! The government forget that we are not replaceable to our own kids and families.”
- “I am feeling increasing anxiety with the amount of pressure on us to both 'continue as normal' and at the same time implement all the restrictions. We cannot do everything, and at times are being asked to teach online and teach in class as well as keep track of kids who are isolating on top of massive pressure from SQA. In these uncertain times I feel that teachers are being asked to step outside of our jobs, put our health (mental and physical) on the line with little to no consideration. We have no say in the risks we are being forced to take and yet the workload continues to pile up- even more than usual.”
- “I am extremely concerned about the lack of communication and openness in regards to the many Covid cases amongst staff and pupils. It all seems very secretive and staff are expected to carry on at all cost.”

Further Information

For more information on any of the themes within this report please contact:

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Member advice and support can be found here:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/Advice>

For more information on the health and wellbeing support available:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/HWRResource>

Professional Learning Opportunities:

<https://www.eis.org.uk/Meetings-And-Events/Courses>

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