
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries
National Education Union
(by email)

2 December 2020

Dear Mary and Kevin

Thank you for raising your concerns about the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) ad hoc analysis of *the number of school workers, key workers and other professions in England who had COVID-19*, which was included in the [6 November Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Infection Survey bulletin](#), and the teacher attendance statistics produced by the Department for Education (DfE). We have considered the concerns you raised and respond to them below.

ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey ad hoc analysis

As you are aware, we published our [response](#) to Dr Sarah Rasmussen's similar concerns about the ONS ad hoc analysis on 26 November. We think that it is important to acknowledge the speed with which ONS is making analysis available, but it could have made some of its decisions clearer for those reading the bulletin. ONS has published a [statement](#) which explains some of these decisions and updates the ad hoc analysis to include "all teachers" in one category – the breakdown suggested in your letter. We understand that presenting infection rates as they change over time would require additional work which ONS is currently unable to carry out.

There is a wide range of data sources available on COVID-19. We consider ONS's COVID-19 Infection Survey to be the best available source of data on infection rates, and the recommended source for making comparisons between occupations.

You may be aware that we are undertaking a review of the COVID-19 Infection Survey as a follow up to the [Rapid Review](#) of the survey we completed in May 2020. We will consider some of the points you raised in more detail through this review, which we expect to publish in early 2021.

DfE teacher attendance statistics

My team have spoken to statisticians in DfE to understand more about the quality issue relating to DfE's teacher attendance statistics that you highlighted in your letter. These are important statistics with a clear user need.

DfE explained that data about teachers are more complex than those about pupils, since staff can be part time, job share or undertake multiple roles within a school or even across multiple schools. Furthermore, the wider context is more complicated now than at the end of the previous school term. When schools were only open to key worker children and limited year groups full teacher attendance was not expected. At this time DfE simply reported the number of teachers attending schools. However, from September schools have been expected to operate in a more normal way and therefore the proportion of the workforce attending is the measure of interest. As a result of this more complex data, DfE is taking time to thoroughly assure itself of the quality of the teacher attendance data and properly contextualise the findings.

DfE told us that it has prioritised publication of other analyses, such as that on the status of schools (whether they are open or closed) and attendance of pupils, as it considers there is greater user need for this information. However, we are pleased that DfE confirmed to us its intention to publish the teacher attendance data in early 2021, and that it will also publish local estimates of pupil absence from mid-December.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation