



Department
for Education

Improving Education Together Agreement

January 2025

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary | 3 |
| The aim of the agreement | 4 |
| The government's goal: the opportunity mission | 4 |
| The ambitions of all those signing up to this agreement | 5 |
| Benefits for each organisation | 6 |
| Members' behaviour | 7 |
| Roles and responsibilities | 8 |
| Communications and engagement | 9 |
| Confidentiality | 10 |
| Co-determining goals and the scope of the IET boards | 11 |
| Reaching consensus and working through disagreement | 12 |
| Resolving tensions | 13 |
| Intractable disagreements | 13 |
| Tensions arising from outside the IET context | 13 |
| Breaches of the agreement | 13 |
| Members concerned about remaining part of Improving Education Together | 14 |
| Evaluation and review | 15 |
| Annex 1: Membership of the Schools & Colleges IET Board | 16 |
| Union representatives | 16 |
| Representatives of employer organisations | 16 |
| Department for Education (DfE) | 16 |
| Annex 2: Areas of focus for the Schools & Colleges IET Board | 17 |

Summary

A joint agreement between government, organisations representing employers, and unions to propose, develop and implement policy that improves education, values the education professions, and boosts opportunity for all.

The aim of the agreement

This agreement brings together unions, employer representative organisations, and the Department for Education to co-create the design and implementation of education policy.

The aim of our work will be to break the link between young people's background and future success to build opportunity for all, ensuring every child and young person is achieving and thriving, and supporting the recruitment, retention and development of the school and college workforce to be able to support every child and young person.

The government recognises that the perspectives of unions representing the workforce and organisations representing employers are essential to shaping effective education policy, and that those organisations and the individuals they represent are key to implementing policy decisions in practice. Supporting the education workforce is therefore also a central purpose of this agreement.

We will come together to agree policy proposals that will draw on all of our disparate perspectives to improve education for all.

Responsibility for making decisions in relation to national education policy rests with DfE's Secretary of State and ministers, who are held accountable to Parliament, taking into account all relevant factors and the public sector equality duty. The Secretary of State for Education's common law and statutory powers can only be delegated to junior ministers and officials.

The government's Plan for Change: the opportunity mission

The government is committed to its five missions to deliver its Plan for Change through a decade of national renewal. At the heart of DfE's work is delivery of the opportunity mission and supporting the success of the other four missions, most notably the growth mission.

The opportunity mission will break the link between a child's background and their future success, delivering across 4 key areas:

- Set every child up for the best start in life. This means delivering accessible, integrated maternity, baby and family support services through the first 1,001 days of life; and high-quality early education and childcare to set every child up for success.

- Help every child to achieve and thrive at school, through excellent teaching and high standards. This will include a focus on disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Impact will be measured through attainment at the end of secondary school. The mission will also tackle the generational challenge of school absence, including by bolstering young people's sense of belonging.

- Build skills for opportunity and growth so that every young person can follow the pathway that is right for them. Whether through high-quality apprenticeships, colleges or universities, skills give people the power to seize opportunity.

We will measure progress through the proportion of young people in education or employment with training, and through the number achieving higher level qualifications.

- Underpinning all of these, build family security – ensuring every child has a safe loving home, and tackling the barriers that mean too many families struggle to afford the essentials.

Critically this means tackling the scar of child poverty, which limits opportunities and holds back life chances.

The Secretary of State for Education sees this agreement as central to ensuring our education and care systems are supporting delivery of the government's missions.

The ambitions of all those signing up to this agreement

The four themes of the opportunity mission form the government's overarching aims for this agreement, but each organisation signing up also has its responsibilities to shape the discussion.

Drawing on the tradition of tripartite arrangements between government, unions, and organisations representing employers, we will form sector-specific boards that negotiate collaboratively to articulate shared priorities within the opportunity mission themes. The concrete policy goals we agree will lead to progress against the government's missions and against the values and objectives of all those signing up to this agreement.

As boards are established annexes will be added to this document stating which sector(s) they cover, listing their membership, and summarising their areas of policy focus.

Together we will agree and recommend approaches, policies, and practical steps with the primary purpose of benefitting the children, learners and all the adults we serve in the education sector.

Benefits for each organisation

All those who sign up to this agreement believe that working together is in their best interest, the interests of those they represent, and the interests of children, young people, and learners across England.

Building trust between unions, employer representative organisations, and the DfE is part of ensuring that we can work together effectively.

Ministers and the DfE recognise that every member of the education workforce, including support staff, teachers, and leaders, is essential to securing opportunity for children and young people. Working together with unions and employer representative organisations enables Ministers and the DfE to understand the impact of policies at the front line, bringing together views and supporting evidence and reflecting those insights from an early stage of policy development.

Unions see the opportunity to represent the interests of the education workforce from an early stage in policy development. This helps create workable policy that incorporates the perspectives of the workforce. It supports them to act in the best interests of their members, of the workforce more broadly, and for the wider benefit of children and young people.

Employer representative organisations see the benefit in working together on both the substance and the implementation of education policy, informing strategy and developing a shared understanding of professional practice. The IET model allows for further communication between employer representative groups and unions, making it easier to agree and implement policies that change the English education sectors for the better and for the wider benefit of children and young people.

For context, within the employer representative organisations the LGA and the two church organisations support delivery of voluntary alongside statutory provision in education, which has been part of the education landscape since 1870.

Members' behaviour

For this agreement to be successful, all parties commit to:

- Trust and respect for each other's roles and responsibilities, and for all types of education organisations in all structures,
- Invest sufficient time and energy to support the work of their IET board(s), reinforced by senior-level representation and active engagement,
- Facilitate open, honest, and transparent communications and engagement, ensuring equity of access to information wherever possible,
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of what is shared under the terms of the agreement, while supporting transparency and engagement,
- Take collaborative, constructive, and consensual approach to co-determine goals that all members of their IET board can support and promote,
- Achieve consensus wherever possible in making recommendations and implementing policies that further those goals in order that all members of their IET board can support and promote the outcomes,
- Take responsibility for ensuring that consensus positions have regard to empirical evidence wherever possible, and
- Agree to disagree where necessary and seek to resolve tensions without undermining the work of their IET board(s).

Roles and responsibilities

All parties to this agreement recognise and respect each other's roles and responsibilities, which are distinct but complementary.

We recognise that:

- Secretary of State and Ministers are democratically elected and have formal accountability to Parliament and the public as leaders of the education system and for developing, determining and implementing the government's policies through DfE and its arm's length bodies (ALBs). The Secretary of State's common law and statutory powers can only be delegated to junior ministers or officials and not to a body such as an IET board.
- Trade Unions have a responsibility to represent the interests of their members and to deliver meaningful benefits for them. Such benefits should see improved outcomes for children and learners, and improve conditions for the education workforce. They are recognised by employers for the purpose of bargaining and reaching agreement on matters affecting their members and can take legitimate action in pursuit of their members' aims.
- Organisations representing education employers have a responsibility to those members. They come together to advance the views and interests of education employers in order to benefit the entire education system, including their employees, to make efficient use of public resources, to enable children and learners to flourish, and to provide conditions for workers to meet the needs of learners.

Together we share a responsibility to all children and learners, to one another and to all those we represent to propose, test and agree sound policy recommendations and, where a recommended approach has been taken forward, to support its effective implementation.

Within IET boards and subgroups, we work together collaboratively to co-create policy. This is an environment where each perspective is equally valuable so that consensus may be achieved.

We take this approach because we believe that working together where our ambition overlaps will lead to better, richer policy development that benefits children and learners.

Communications and engagement

The principle of equity of access to information recognises that policy discussions can only be constructive when all parties are working from a shared understanding.

Organisations signed up to this agreement will seek to establish a shared understanding of the realities of the education, skills and care systems through ongoing information-sharing through and between IET board and subgroup meetings.

We commit to a no-surprises culture, in which:

- every effort will be made to provide information in good time for discussion and/or consultation,
- all parties will undertake to provide a considered and timely response to issues on which their views are sought/on which they are consulted,
- all parties will respect confidentiality requests to protect sensitive discussions but commit to enabling one another to share information as necessary to observe constitutional processes, canvas for views, or obtain agreement to support a recommendation, and
- all parties will respect that each organisation will have established mechanisms for the consultation and engagement of their constituents, and that these will be factored into IET considerations/work planning.

IET boards and subgroups will agree terms of reference that establish procedures in support of these principles.

Confidentiality

When sharing materials with an IET board or subgroup, all members should distinguish between material that other members can share onwards for views within their respective organisations, material that should be restricted to a small group of trusted colleagues, and material that is shared for the eyes of IET board and/or subgroup members only.

Where material is shared without a request for confidentiality, our presumption should be for confidentiality unless otherwise specified. In particular:

- Policy discussions (verbal and written) that take place in IET board and subgroup meetings, or otherwise under the aegis of this agreement, should be kept confidential unless and until participants agree to disclose. This protects a safe environment for attendees to explore new and potentially uncomfortable ideas and to share unguarded reflections.
- The contents of shared working documents or drafts, and any comments made on them, should also be kept in confidence within member organisations unless and until members of the relevant IET board or subgroup agree they can be shared in a public context. This gives contributors confidence that unfinished work will not reach a wider audience until the group has agreed it is ready.

Co-determining goals and the scope of the IET boards

The primary focus of the IET boards will be education policy specific to their sectors, informed by the government's opportunity mission and by the intersecting ambitions of all board members. Boards will agree their own areas of focus, agendas, and goals, setting these out in their terms of reference and reviewing them on a regular basis.

They will operate in the context of wider cross-government engagement on every mission, subject to the Secretary of State's power to determine education policy, taking into account the wider balance of relevant interests and responsibilities across government.

The boards' remit will **not** include staff pay and conditions determined through the statutory consultation process managed by the School Teachers' Review Body (STRB); support staff pay (currently negotiated via the NJC process, but in future to be delivered through the School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)); the College NJF; or the Sixth Form College NJC. Similarly the remit will not include the national agreement between teacher unions and the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST) that created the Burgundy Book on the conditions of service for school teachers in England and Wales), the Lilac Book on conditions of service for sixth form colleges staff, or the Blue Book on salary scales and service conditions of educational improvement professionals, educational psychologists and young people's/community service managers.

Note that discussions and recommendations at an IET board may as part of a wider discussion have reference to matters negotiated through those other processes.

The boards will **not** be the only mechanism for DfE to engage with these sectors. Secretary of State, Ministers, and officials will continue to engage in other contexts with members of IET boards and subgroups, and to work with and through advisory boards, reference groups, public events, visits to educational settings, consultations, and information-gathering exercises such as surveys and panels. New approaches to citizen and sector engagement may also be developed over time.

Where relevant, findings and insights from these other groups will be shared and tested with IET boards and subgroups, in line with the principle of equity of access to information.

Where the government has a duty or chooses to consult on an issue, trade unions and employer organisations should respond to that consultation as they deem appropriate. The recommendations of a IET board or subgroup may be taken into account as part of that consultation but cannot replace it unless input from board or subgroup members alone is sufficient to render the consultation fair and/or meet the statutory requirements in terms of the duty which applies.

Reaching consensus and working through disagreement

IET boards and subgroups are venues for representatives of organisations with different but overlapping goals to design policy and support its effective implementation.

We recognise the need for mutual challenge and constructive criticism and for a willingness from every member of an IET board or subgroup to think imaginatively and work to find mutually beneficial compromises.

When seeking agreement within IET groups, for example on goals, policy recommendations, or actions to support implementation, we use a consensus model. There is no voting.

Members of the group share proposals and others provide responses, identifying what they can agree with. Where there are points of disagreement or difficulty we work through them, individually and as a group, to find a compromise. Together, through collaborative negotiation, we refine the proposal into a consensus position that the whole board can support. This includes making space as needed for board members to gain support for a position from their respective structures.

Where the IET group has not yet reached consensus or expressed a recommendation on an issue, members are free to represent the views of their constituents or members publicly on that issue and to share their views on what the IET's position should be.

Once they are party to an agreement, however, members commit to supporting that consensus in the spirit of this agreement, even if it is a compromise from their ideal outcome.

It is reasonable for an organisation that is part of IET to explain to their members and the wider public where they have compromised on their views and why, but it is essential that they do so without publicly undermining the compromise that they have reached. The presumption is always that the compromise was agreed for a reason and leads to a better outcome than the existing status quo.

If a consensus is reached but a member feels as though the board should go further, they must support the compromise position that they have agreed to in the spirit of working together but are free to share their view that there is further space the IET could move into, and advocate for that change.

Resolving tensions

Intractable disagreements

If an IET board has an intractable disagreement on an issue, the readout will state that the subject was discussed but no consensus will be recorded.

The matter may be referred to a future meeting or, if necessary, IET members with differing views may be invited to make their cases respectively to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State may refer the matter back to the board if it appears that a consensus is possible.

Members of an IET board are not committed to support a decision taken by Secretary of State when their board has reached no consensus and therefore made no recommendation. They can continue to make their own views clear and advocate for their preferred outcome, as long as they do not act to undermine the agreement.

Tensions arising from outside the IET context

We recognise that in rare circumstances there might be a dispute between IET member organisations (such as a directly related legal action), which complicates their ability to contribute fully to a discussion.

In that event, all members commit to supporting the principles of the IET agreement. This includes leaving aside other matters to focus on the policy areas under discussion in meetings and maintaining confidentiality as agreed around views and materials shared.

If a member feels unable to contribute, they should raise with DfE officials to discuss if an abstention or mitigating action (e.g. rescheduling meetings/agenda items) is appropriate. This would only be for genuine legal reasons and is not a replacement for difficult conversations taking place between IET members. Any decisions arising from such discussions would be reported to the wider IET board.

Breaches of the agreement

Members commit to not breaching this agreement. A breach might consist of, for example:

- publicly disclaiming or opposing a consensus view and recommendation that they have agreed, or
- sharing confidential materials or details with those outside the agreement.

Each board has a panel of five members with responsibility for resolving concerns. The membership includes representatives of two union organisations and two organisations representing employers, selected at random from the board, and the panel is chaired by a DfE official nominated by Secretary of State.

If a breach is alleged the relevant secretariat will review the situation and update the IET board affected. The relevant resolution panel will consider whether to take action and will make a recommendation to the chair of the board.

Members who have breached the IET agreement may be excluded from one or more following meetings. It may also be necessary to suspend participation in between meetings pending the board taking a view. They may be asked to provide a written apology and/or retraction to support a return to effective collaborative working.

Following a breach of the IET agreement, a board may, on recommendation of its resolution group, consider whether to permanently exclude a member organisation.

Every effort will be made to reach a consensus between the remainder of the board. If no agreement can be reached, the decision reverts to the Secretary of State for Education in her role as chair of the board.

Members concerned about remaining part of Improving Education Together

Member organisations commit to sending their representative or a named deputy to meetings of their core IET sector board, and to following the principles set out in this agreement and the arrangements agreed within the terms of reference of that board.

If a member feels that they can no longer maintain their commitment to working together under the terms of this agreement, we expect them to notify senior officials at DfE of their concerns before making any decision. The relevant IET board(s) will make every effort to resolve their concerns and identify a workable solution.

If the only solution is for the member to leave the IET board either temporarily or indefinitely, this will be taken forward with mutual respect and agreement. Readmission as a board member will only take place with the agreement of the remaining members.

Evaluation and review

Improving Education Together is a developing framework for working together with an emergent strategy. We will take a pragmatic approach to adapting as we gain experience or expand to focus on different sectors and policy areas.

We anticipate the arrangements set out in this agreement and developed in the terms of reference of each IET board being amended as the collaborative model develops in the education sectors.

They will therefore be subject to annual evaluation and review by the IET boards, to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose.

Once a year each IET board will also discuss a formal agenda item on its priorities, focus, and forward look. This will allow members to review the nature and remit of the subgroups and consider whether the priority areas of focus should change.

Annex 1: Membership of the Schools & Colleges IET Board

Union representatives

- Pepe Di'Iasio representing the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
- Helen Osgood representing Community
- Stacey Booth representing GMB Union
- Paul Whiteman representing NAHT, The School Leaders' Union
- Patrick Roach representing NASUWT, The Teachers' Union
- Daniel Kebede representing the National Education Union (NEU)
- Jo Grady representing the University and College Union (UCU)
- Clare Keogh representing Unite
- Mike Short representing Unison

Representatives of employer organisations

- David Hughes representing the Association of Colleges (AoC)
- Paul Barber representing the Catholic Education Service
- Nigel Genders representing the Church of England National Society for Education
- Leora Cruddas representing the Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
- Cllr Arooj Shah representing the Local Government Association (LGA)
- Cllr Roger Philips representing the National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST)
- Bill Watkin representing the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA)

Department for Education (DfE)

- Juliet Chua representing the Department for Education
- Board Secretary: Gita Dean-Andrews
- Chair: The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education

Annex 2: Areas of focus for the Schools & Colleges IET Board

The core IET board will develop an agenda with input from all members.

The initial three subgroups will focus on the following topics:

- Accountability systems
- SEND and inclusion, and
- Workforce.

Further subgroups (with an ongoing remit to engage on an area of policy) and ad hoc task and finish groups (established for a limited period to tackle a specific issue) may be established by the board as required.

This agreement has been signed by

Members





Chair



The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

© Crown copyright 2025

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0, except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3.

Where we have identified any third-party copyright information, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

About this publication:

enquiries <https://www.gov.uk/contact-dfe>

download www.gov.uk/government/publications

Follow us on X: [@educationgovuk](https://twitter.com/educationgovuk)

Connect with us on Facebook: facebook.com/educationgovuk



Department
for Education