

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg ar Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

CYPE SP 92

Ymateb gan: Amber Courtney, UNSAIN Cymru

Response from: Amber Courtney, UNISON Cymru Wales

Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education

Many school support staff are on term-time only contracts, unlike their teaching counterparts, and so will be taking on additional and often insecure work to make ends meet. There are wide discrepancies in how teaching assistants are paid and deployed across local authorities in Wales, leading to inequities across Wales.

School support staff make up the majority of the schools workforce in terms of education delivery. There are more registered learning support assistants than teaching staff. However, this group of workers are a largely unregulated workforce by comparison with teachers.

There is a legal obligation to backfill teaching staff where positions become vacant or where there is absence. There is not the same onus on Teaching Assistants (TAs), meaning a burden on other members of the education team where posts aren't backfilled. Because of inadequate funding, the TA role is often the first to be cut or schools spread their TA staff thinly, so pupils are not getting the support they need. Furthermore, where backfilling does occur for TA roles, it is not always done on the basis of need, but on the basis of cost. There is a minimum daily pay rate set for supply teaching staff, but this does not translate for teaching assistants other than the national minimum wage. Where backfilling of teaching assistants does occur, it is



more likely supply TAs will be brought in on the basis of cost, so as a Level 1 TA irrespective of the original postholders level or needs of the school.

There is also an increase in the numbers of supply TAs being registered compared to supply teachers and an increased use of supply TAs. UNISON is questioning why this is the case and we have concerns over whether TAs are being properly deployed and whether the workforce is being properly managed.

UNISON has long called for consistency across local authorities. TAs were registered with the promise that it would professionalise standards. UNISON was cautious that registration would be costly with little benefit to TAs. UNISON believes the job descriptions and pay needs to be standardised across Wales. UNISON is also opposed to term-time only contracts. Consistency across the sector would undoubtedly benefit the delivery of education – it would promote a more stable workforce and create a level playing field across the sector. It would also encourage workers into the sector and would enhance clear progression routes for members of the workforce. Overall, this can only have a positive impact on the delivery of education and the pupil experience.

Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education

Based on experience to date, universities in Wales are going to avoid working in social partnership. The committee needs to hold Welsh Government account over how they intend to make partnership working effective in higher education.

Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)

The health and wellbeing of children and young people must clearly be a priority as we move forward through the COVID crisis and beyond. However, it is important to recognise the pandemic has also negatively impacted the mental health and wellbeing of the schools workforce. Unless the workforce is properly supported, they in turn will be unable to provide that support and wellbeing for children and young people in education. Such support must not be limited to teaching staff alone. Many schools support staff, such as teaching assistants, provide pastoral care and support in the education environment and can often be the first port of call for pupils.



One in four of us will experience mental health problems at some stage in our working lives. At any one time one in six of us are estimated to be experiencing depression, anxiety, or problems relating to stress. 15% of employees attribute their condition to work alone, 65% to both work and non-work factors, and just 20% entirely to non-work issues.

COVID has undoubtedly exacerbated factors that can lead to poor mental health. Many school support staff worked throughout the pandemic in school Hubs, ensuring care and education was provided for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers. However, workplace factors prior to the pandemic will also have had a detrimental impact. Many of these issues have been outlined above.

Mental health and wellbeing are workplace issues. The benefits of good health and wellbeing policies are clear – reduced sickness absence, reduced staff turnover, less management time, raised productivity, and improved morale. Of course, this in turn allows support staff to more effectively support children and young people in their care.

Workplace policies and practices in schools, further education, higher education, and social care must support mental health and wellbeing. A clear, public commitment to ensuring good mental health and wellbeing practices is essential. The CYPE committee should scrutinise the work of the Welsh Government to ensure this work is being undertaken, and evidence should be gathered about the range of workplace policies or lack of policies that are available across the 22 authorities, and that all staff working in school must have the same opportunities for support regardless of their role.

UNISON believes consistency is key to ensuring school support staff are well equipped to maintain their own mental health and wellbeing, as well as offer support to those children and young people in the education and social care environment.

Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people

Youth services – no child should be left behind. Almost one in three in Wales live in relative income poverty – a figure likely to worsen as a result of welfare reform and the pandemic. The combination of over a decade of cuts to youth services and the pandemic has been devastating to youth service provision.

This is undoubtedly impacting the mental health, wellbeing, and prospects for Wales' young people. Current rules allow youth service provision to be merged and



provided as part of a broad package of education and social care measures. As a result, real youth work is being lost.

When youth services go, benefits to young people and communities are lost – along with resulting savings in intervention services further down the line. Local authorities must have a genuine duty to provide universal, open access youth services, backed up by the necessary resources.

Children's services are a lifeline for many families, and this must not be forgotten.

