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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mark Isherwood MS
Chair of the Public Accounts and Public
Administration Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
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05 February 2025

Dear Mark,

I would like to thank you and the Committee for your report on Supply Teaching in Wales. I value the important role supply teachers' play in our workforce and welcome the opportunity to consider the recommendations you have provided. Please find attached our response to the report. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne Neagle".

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.



Welsh Government response to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (PAPAC) 'Supply and Demand: Covering Teachers Absence' report.

JANUARY 2024

I thank the members of the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee (PAPAC) for their comprehensive report

It is important to highlight that several of the recommendations will require close working with WLGA and Unions to progress. I hope the responses provided are informative and helpful.

The Welsh Government welcomes the findings of the Committee's report and offers the following response to the recommendations contained within it.

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Responses to the Committee's Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government should as a matter of priority address the lack of monitoring and reporting on the extent of teacher's absence from the classroom for reasons other than sickness.

Response: Accept

Under the 'Effective management of school workforce attendance' guidance local authorities are responsible for collating and disseminating individual and benchmarked absence data (including the financial impact), on an annual basis, to support schools and Welsh Government in monitoring workforce absence.

The Welsh Government will work closely with local authorities and other stakeholders to explore how best to monitor teachers' absences from the classroom as part of the development of the Strategic Education Workforce Plan.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Welsh Government should rapidly review and assess the impact of all incentives to aid recruitment of students into Initial Teacher Education, including the Iaith Athrawon Yfory scheme to ensure that these are adequate and competitive, and report annually on their longer-term impact.

Response: Accept in principle

Welsh Government and EWC have entered into a data sharing agreement to review the retention rates of those that did and did not receive an incentive. Work on this project is ongoing. The Welsh Government and EWC will review the success of the data matching process and therefore the robustness of the results before determining whether an annual output should be agreed; there would be an ongoing financial implication to producing annual reports.

The Welsh Government will be commissioning an evaluation of policy supporting initial teacher education in Wales, which will include specific research questions into the use of Initial Teacher Education incentives.

Financial Implications: Funding for the evaluation of the policy supporting initial teacher education in Wales and the incentive data matching project with EWC has been allocated in the Teacher Development and Support BEL for 2025-26. Funding for future data matching reports will be considered once the robustness of the results are known.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government should set out how the costs of managing the contract compare with the amount it receives through the 0.5 percent fee that it levies on agencies.

Response: Accept

The supply teacher agency framework is one of a programme of thirty collaborative agreements let on behalf of the Welsh public sector. The costs of managing the framework therefore cannot be viewed in isolation.

The rebate from the supply teacher agency agreement generates approximately £500,000 per annum and total cost of the contract management of the supply agency agreement is calculated to be approximately £280,000 per annum (using 2024/25 annual costs).

The rebate of 0.5% applied to the Welsh Government's supply teacher agency agreement is significantly less than the 1% rebate within the UK Government Supply Teacher framework. However, the implementation of recommendations from previous committee and audit reports have had a significant impact on the growth for this framework and in turn, the rebate received. Most notably, the introduction and annual increase of the minimum supply teacher pay rate and the expansion from a single supplier to multi-supplier model have both seen framework spend grow considerably, along with the associated framework management duties.

Although the rebate from the supply teacher agency agreement is more than the estimated contract management, the overall rebate income from suppliers across the whole programme of managing thirty collaborative agreements only accounts for approximately 50% of the overall costs of managing the programme. The outstanding balance is directly funded by the Welsh Government.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should take steps to monitor and understand the reasons why some schools are not choosing to use the supply teacher agency framework.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government Commercial Delivery (WGCD) team already monitor framework spend versus non-framework spend on an annual basis. Where spend is identified with non-framework agencies, WGCD write to the local authorities who have responsibility for managing the schools making bookings with agencies outside of the framework to advise them of this. The WGCD team ask the local authorities to gather and share feedback from their schools as to why non-framework agencies have been used, and to make recommendations to their schools regarding the benefits of using the framework that are aligned to their local management processes in this area.

WGCD do not currently have the power to mandate the use of any of their frameworks, but by continued promotion of the benefits of the framework, robust contract management and proactively highlighting non-framework spend to those that set direction for their schools, we have seen compliant framework spend in this area grow in recent years. 98% of the spend in Wales in for the provision of temporary workers in an education setting is now through teaching agencies appointed to the framework

We will continue with the activity outlined above to meet this recommendation, working in collaboration with the Education Directorate.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should put in place arrangements to provide assurance that supply teachers, cover supervisors and learning support workers are working within their role description.

Response: Accept in principle

The decision on what role an agency staff member is allocated to them once placed in a school is made by the hiring school themselves. There are significant challenges in providing a national approach to supply teaching and cover arrangements given the need for local authorities to maintain autonomy on how

they source teaching staff, including supply teachers. Under the regulatory framework and local management of schools' arrangements, schools and governing bodies in Wales can source staff as they see fit. This includes making decisions in relation to the type of cover required. The Welsh Government has guidance in place to support schools when making these decisions, and to clarify how supply staff should be engaged and supported. The guidance confirms that schools should collect and analyse data on planned and unplanned absence levels and the subsequent cover costs that are incurred. Schools should monitor and report to Governors on the use and cost of supply cover. The Welsh Government has ongoing engagement with partners on supply issues

On 13 January 2025, I announced my commitment to work with all partners to develop a strategic education workforce plan. As part of the development of this plan we will work with schools and employers to understand what more can be done with partners to support this recommendation.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should monitor carefully the application, justification and variation in agency fees in order to secure the best possible value for money.

Response: Accept

Agency costs and fees can vary for a number of reasons outside our control, and over recent years costs have typically increased following a number of recommendations which have been imposed onto agencies to strengthen the framework specification in areas such as safeguarding requirements and the delivery of training and support for newly qualified teachers.

Prior to 2019 the framework was operated on a commercially competitive single supplier model, where suppliers competed on price (amongst other metrics) to be appointed to the framework. However, from 2019, the model was developed to include a far wider supply base, and to act almost as a quality mark for the marketplace, thus ensuring as much spend in this area was captured under the framework and that contract management of the marketplace could improve.

As a result of this, reviewing and assessing the best value agency fees has moved from evaluation at framework level by Welsh Government officials to schools making best value decisions on which agency to use for each booking they make, by having full visibility of all agency fees provided to them

From our contract management data, we believe that schools are undertaking this behaviour to the best of their ability and as such, no further action needs to be taken. To add some relevant context to this area, during 2023/24:

- agencies with an agency fee of over £50 accounted for only 6.5% of total framework spend
- of the above, agencies with an agency fee of over £55 accounted for only 2.6% of total framework spend
- of the above, agencies with an agency fee of over £60 accounted for only 1.5% of total framework spend
- agencies with an agency fee of under £40 accounted for 70% of total framework spend.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should conclude and publish its evaluation of the supply teacher booking platform and set out its proposals to implement this on a nationwide basis. This should include an assessment of the critical mass of teachers needed on the booking platform, details of any consideration and findings arising from the initial assessment of the platform and experiences of the rollout following the transition to this system by Ynys Môn County Council. Following this, the Welsh Government should ensure that it reports regularly on progress.

Response: Accept in part

Under the regulatory framework and local management of schools' arrangements, schools and governing bodies can source staff as they see fit, either through agencies or by using their own supply lists. The majority of local authorities in Wales use agencies to source supply teachers due to resourcing and budget implications.

We have taken a staged approach to roll out of the National Supply Pool. The platform, provided by Teacher Booker, went live in the Ynys Môn County Council in November 2023. Ynys Môn were chosen for the initial roll out because they already run a supply list and were able to remain the employer and manage pension contributions.

Officials will provide an update on the National Supply Pool progress in due course.

Financial Implications: None at this stage.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should establish clear measures of success against which progress in improving the quality and sufficiency of supply teachers can be judged.

Response: Accept in principle

Schools have performance development review cycles for which the professional standards provide a backdrop for all practitioners, including supply teachers, to discuss performance and professional growth. This process should lead to the development of an individual professional learning journey for every practitioner. It is the responsibility of schools to ensure that the professional learning entitlement of all teachers, including supply teachers, is fulfilled.

The strategic education workforce plan will embed our vision and values for leaders, teachers and support staff for the future recognising that there are a range of important roles across the school workforce and recognising that supply teaching is an essential part of school life. My aim is that the plan will ensure we are focusing clearly on delivery and improvement for the whole of our education workforce.

As part of the development of this workforce plan, the Welsh Government will work closely with stakeholders and practitioners to explore how supply teachers can be better supported.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government, having put in place measures to provide continuing professional development and training opportunities to supply teachers and cover staff, should establish meaningful monitoring arrangements on take up, and report on the success of these arrangements.

Response: Accept in principle

Supply staff are entitled to access support through a variety of professional learning opportunities and a range of networks to assist their teaching and to support their work.

All practitioners should be driven by the overarching set of values and dispositions included in the professional standards. These values and dispositions

as well as the five professional standards themselves are central to how we want all our practitioners to develop. A career-long requirement to engage in professional learning is set out in the professional standards.

As part of the National Professional Learning Entitlement, we want to further develop reflective, enquiring and collaborative education professionals and a culture of mutual responsibility in relation to professional learning for all teachers, including supply teachers.

The Welsh Government is actively promoting a range of professional learning to all practitioners through the Professional Learning Resources Area on Hwb. All supply teachers are able to access the resources on this repository to support their professional learning.

The Welsh Government is also in the process of establishing a National Professional Learning and Leadership Support Body. We will be asking the National Body to develop a mechanism to monitor supply teachers' take up of professional learning that will be offered nationally.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 10

Not included in the PAPAC report.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Government should respond to the Independent Wales Pay Review Body (IWPRB) review on supply teachers' pay and conditions, including pension arrangements, as soon as possible and set a timetable for doing so in the meantime.

Response: Accept

We will be working closely with the Pay Partnership Forum over the coming months to develop a timeline and implementation plan for the key issues that the IWPRB and related reports have raised on pay and conditions, and ensure we are clear and transparent on the timeline and work needed to progress these. The recommendations on supply teachers' pay and conditions, including pension arrangements will be included within these discussions.

Financial Implications: None

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Government should set out how it intends to ensure that relevant recommendations proposed for supply teachers employed through local authorities or directly by schools are reviewed for their applicability to supply teachers employed through agencies. Following this, the Welsh Government should set a timetable for implementation and report back on progress.

Response: Accept

Welsh Government Commercial Delivery (WGCD) team will continue to work with colleagues across Welsh Government to ensure all relevant recommendations and policy proposed for supply teachers employed through local authorities or directly by schools is encapsulated within the supply teacher framework.

Financial Implications: None