

National Assembly for Wales
Children, Young People and Education Committee
ST 29
Inquiry into Supply Teaching
Evidence from : Estyn

Consultation questions

Question 1 – What are your views on whether there is a prevalence in the use of supply teachers on a planned and unplanned basis?

In 2013, Estyn carried out a thematic survey evaluating the impact of teacher absence. This work was undertaken in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter. The report was written in collaboration with the Wales Audit Office.

Estyn noted in its report that:

'The introduction of rarely cover (and the workforce agreement) has led to an increased complexity in the provision of supply cover as schools make arrangements for covering teacher absence that no longer involve their own teaching staff. As well as supply teachers, these arrangements now include cover supervisors and other support staff employed in schools who do not have qualified teacher status (QTS).' Therefore when a teacher is absent, lessons are covered by supply teachers but also unqualified (do not hold Qualified Teacher Status) cover supervisors and/or teaching assistants.

These consultation questions relate to supply teachers but during our thematic inspection, we found that many of the issues related to the use of supply teachers also apply to supervisors and teaching assistant as well.

In our thematic report, Estyn noted *'It is estimated that just under 10% of all lessons are now covered by staff who are not the usual class teacher'*. This figure indicates that the use of a supply teacher, cover supervisor or teaching assistant to cover when the normal class teacher is absent is a significant issue in schools in Wales in general, although the severity and complexity of the issue varies from school

to school. Overall, inspectors report that there is a higher than average use of supply teachers in secondary schools in more deprived areas, where headteacher have difficulty recruiting teachers, particularly in mathematics and physics. Schools that are in a statutory category of follow-up (significant improvement or special measures) often have a higher proportion of lessons covered by supply teachers and cover supervisors.

Estyn reported that 'A few schools, particularly Welsh-medium schools and those located in rural or economically deprived areas, have difficulty finding suitable supply teachers. The majority of secondary schools have difficulty sourcing teachers of shortage subjects, such as mathematics and physics'.

If you believe that this results in problems (for example, for schools, pupils or teachers), how do you think they could be resolved?

Many of the issues leading to a prevalence of supply teachers are complex and cannot be resolved quickly. The issues include the following:

- difficulty in recruiting staff in key subject areas, in particular, mathematics, physics and English in Welsh-medium schools;
- higher levels of staff absence in schools where leadership is less effective;
- higher levels of staff absence in schools where the behaviour of a minority of pupils is problematic;
- long-term absence in primary schools; and
- difficulty recruiting headteachers and deputy headteacher in small rural schools.

Estyn included the following recommendations in its 2013 report:

Schools should:

- R1 manage teacher absence more efficiently;
- R2 improve the quality of teaching and learning in covered lessons by making sure that the work set is at an appropriate level and staff receive enough information on the individual needs of learners;

- R3 support supply and cover staff to improve their classroom behaviour management techniques;
- R4 evaluate the impact of teacher absence on learners, especially more able pupils and those in key stage 3, and monitor the quality of teaching and learning when teachers are absent;
- R5 ensure that supply staff are included in performance management arrangements;
- R6 provide more professional development opportunities for supply staff; and
- R7 make sure that supply staff receive essential information on health and safety and safeguarding, including the contact details of the named child-protection officer at the school.

Local authorities and supply agencies should:

- R8 provide schools with comparative data on teacher absence rates; and
- R9 seek feedback on and record the quality of supply staff they register and use the information for quality control.

The Welsh Government should:

- R10 provide better access for supply staff to those national training programmes that are available to permanently-employed teachers.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

X

Question 2 – What are your views on the circumstances in which supply teachers are used for example, the types of classes they cover; the types of learning activities which take place under the supervision of supply teachers; whether they are qualified to teach relevant subjects?

In its 2013 report, Estyn reported that '*The greatest negative impact of teacher absence on pupils' learning occurs in secondary schools.*

Supply staff who do not normally work at the school do not know the needs of the learners as well as their usual classroom teachers and the work set is often too undemanding and does not engage learners. This is particularly the case in key stage 3, as schools often make an effort to secure better arrangements for examination classes. Secondary schools often do not cover sixth form lessons for short-term absences, but make up missed work later. They may also re-deploy subject teachers from key stage 3 classes to cover key stage 4, leaving supply staff to cover a disproportionate number of key stage 3 lessons.'

'The greatest disruption in primary schools occurs as a result of not having a strategy to minimise the impact of unplanned, but potentially long-term, teacher absences. In complex situations, such as those arising from staff suspensions or frequent but non-continuous staff illness, schools do not manage or evaluate the impact of having multiple staff cover for the same year group. Too often, this affects pupils' behaviour as well as their learning.'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Please see response to Question 1.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

X

Question 3 – What are your views on the impact of the use of supply teachers on the outcomes for pupils (including any impact on pupil behaviour)?

Estyn's report found that 'Due to the short-term nature of their work, it is difficult for supply staff to establish effective working

relationships with learners. Learners often do not have the same regard for supply staff as they do for their usual teachers.'

'Most learners in secondary schools do not feel that they make enough progress in lessons when their usual teacher is absent. Often this is because the cover lessons do not engage all learners well enough, or the supply teacher does not know the needs of the group as well as the usual teacher. Often, the work that is left by the teacher or that is organised at short notice by the head of department is undemanding and, in a minority of instances, includes activities such as watching a video, completing wordsearches or crosswords, and producing posters.'

'The negative impact of teacher absence is often greater in some subjects, such as modern foreign languages, Welsh second language, physical education and design and technology. This is because non-specialists often cover the lessons and learners are not able to undertake practical activities. The teachers or cover supervisors who are covering the Welsh second language lesson will not have the subject-specific language skills to support and develop their learning. Often learners will be moved to other classrooms when their teacher is absent and consequently they will not have access to the resources that would normally be available to them. Moving from class to class also gives the impression that the lesson is less important to the teacher and the pupil. In the majority of instances, learners note that supply teachers or cover supervisors tend to ask them to write on sheets of paper rather than in their normal workbooks and, in most instances, it does not get marked or followed up. This is time-filling activity rather than real learning.'

'As a result of this undemanding work, learners demonstrate behaviour that is more challenging. They are more likely to engage in low-level disruption and this has a further negative impact on their achievement and progress in lessons. Nearly all pupils who took part in our survey indicate that they do not behave as well in a class with a supply teacher or cover supervisor when compared with their usual teacher. Secondary school learners across the ability range often demonstrate negative attitudes towards supply teachers and cover

supervisors who are not employed by the school. This often means that pupils make less progress in these lessons and their learning is more limited. Their attitudes are more positive towards full-time teachers who undertake cover or cover supervisors who are employed directly by the school.'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Please see response to Question 1

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	X
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	

Question 4 – What are your views on the Continuous Professional Development of supply teachers and the potential impact of the National Professional Learning Model?

Estyn noted that support for supply staff was variable but overall, supply staff do not receive enough training and development. The majority of supply teachers and cover supervisors access some training, although this has a relatively narrow focus and does not meet all their needs. This training is usually focused particularly on dealing with challenging behaviour and on general teaching skills, but there is little about national priorities or initiatives.

'Nearly all supply teachers and cover supervisors state that they would like better access to a wider range of professional development activities. Unlike most teachers, the professional development of supply teachers is not supported well by their employer even if they have signed a contract and are employed by a supply agency. Most are able to arrange their own training or access courses offered by private companies, although this would mean losing a day's pay.'

They feel that they are missing out on opportunities offered to colleagues with permanent contracts.

Supply teachers who have recently joined the profession feel particularly disadvantaged because they are not always able to complete their NQT induction period. If they are employed for at least 0.4 for a whole term, they can join the recently introduced masters in education programme (MEP). Even so, their knowledge and understanding of national policies and priorities may decline over time, and make it harder for them to secure a permanent post. These newly-qualified teachers feel that they will become less competitive in the market for full-time teaching posts.

Most cover supervisors and HLTAs employed directly by schools have access to training as part of their school's annual in-service training programme. This training focuses on a range of topics relevant to classroom teachers and other support staff. A majority of cover supervisors and HLTAs in primary schools also have access to additional training as part of the school's performance management arrangements. However, the majority of cover supervisors in secondary schools do not take part in formal performance management arrangements, even though most say they would welcome it.'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Please see response to Question 1.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

X

Question 5 – What are your views on performance management arrangements for supply teachers?

Many primary schools employ HLTAs as cover supervisors to provide cover when teachers receive statutory PPA time or cover when the teacher is absent for other reasons. The roles and responsibilities of cover supervisors, HLTAs and supply teachers vary too much both within and between schools. Most HLTAs are included in schools' performance management arrangements and have suitable performance management objectives, but the nature of their work and job descriptions varies significantly within and between schools and this has an impact on learners and the amount of progress that they make when their usual teacher is absent.

However, in the 2013 survey, Estyn noted that *'Most schools do not provide enough feedback to supply teachers. Schools sometimes share feedback with the supply agency but the quality of this feedback is too variable and often not robust enough. A few agencies contact schools at the end of each week to discuss the performance of supply staff although very little information is recorded formally by the school. This feedback is more detailed when there are concerns about teaching or classroom management and so feedback to supply teachers tends to focus on the negative aspects of their work. Local authorities who provide lists of supply teachers do not request feedback on performance.'*

'Nearly all schools have at one time or another raised concerns about the quality of a few supply teachers. Many schools have had to ask a supply teacher or cover supervisor to leave the school before their contract deadline because of unsatisfactory performance. There are no arrangements for supply agencies to share this information with Welsh Government or the GTCW unless performance gives significant cause for concern.'

'The majority of cover supervisors in secondary schools do not take part in formal performance management arrangements, even though most say they would welcome it.'

If you think there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Please see comments relating to Question 1.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - *This is a key, urgent problem.*

2 - *This is a problem that needs to be addressed.*

X

3 - *This is a minor problem*

4 - *Not a problem.*

Question 6 – Do you consider that local authorities and regional consortia have sufficient oversight of the use of supply teachers?

The role of local authorities and regional consortia in the procurement, monitoring and training of supply teachers varies considerably but is generally insufficient and current arrangements are ineffective.

Estyn noted in its 2013 report that '*Local authorities across Wales have different arrangements for the procurement and provision of supply teachers to schools. The majority provide schools with a list of supply teachers who are eligible to work in the authority and have been through their own pre-employment checks. Providing this list is sometimes outsourced to recruitment agencies. A minority of other local authorities liaise with supply agencies to provide schools with a list of supply teachers or cover supervisors who are eligible to work within the local authority.*'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Estyn's recommendations for local authorities and supply agencies encompassed the following areas:

Local authorities and supply agencies should:

- R8 provide schools with comparative data on teacher absence rates; and
- R9 seek feedback on and record the quality of supply staff they register and use the information for quality control.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - *This is a key, urgent problem.*

2 - *This is a problem that needs to be addressed.*

X

3 - *This is a minor problem*

4 - *Not a problem.*

Question 7 – Are you aware of any local and regional variation in the use of supply teachers and if so, are there any reasons for this?

In Estyn's 2013 report we noted that 'Local authorities across Wales have different arrangements for the procurement and provision of supply teachers to schools. The majority provide schools with a list of supply teachers who are eligible to work in the authority and have been through their own pre-employment checks. Providing this list is sometimes outsourced to recruitment agencies. A minority of other local authorities liaise with supply agencies to provide schools with a list of supply teachers or cover supervisors who are eligible to work within the local authority.'

As school's use staff other than supply teachers to cover during teacher absence and that local authorities hold different types and amounts of data about the use of supply teachers, we are unable to provide a more detailed response. However, many of our comments outlined in response to Question 1 are also relevant to this particular question.

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	
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<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	X
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<i>3 - This is a minor problem</i>	
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<i>4 - Not a problem.</i>	
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Question 8 – Do you have any views on supply agencies and their quality assurance arrangements?

Our survey found that *‘Most schools have a preferred supply teacher agency and use the lowest price as the determining factor rather than quality. A few schools prefer not to use supply agencies and a very few have been advised by their local authority not to use supply agencies. Eighteen local authorities and five further education colleges and other public bodies have signed a ‘Value Wales’ agreement for supply cover. New Directions Education, a private limited company, won the contract for north and south Wales. However, schools are not compelled to use the contract to procure supply cover.’*

‘A few schools, particularly those who use supply agencies located in England, have discovered, when the supply teacher has arrived at the school, that they are not registered with the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) and cannot teach in Wales. This has become apparent when staff have checked GTCW registration documents. In these instances, the supply teacher or cover supervisor has not been able to undertake the supply work at the school’.

‘Most schools do not provide enough feedback to supply teachers. Schools sometimes share feedback with the supply agency but the quality of this feedback is too variable and often not robust enough. A few agencies contact schools at the end of each week to discuss the

performance of supply staff although very little information is recorded formally by the school. This feedback is more detailed when there are concerns about teaching or classroom management and so feedback to supply teachers tends to focus on the negative aspects of their work. Local authorities who provide lists of supply teachers do not request feedback on performance.'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

Please view Estyn's response to Question 1.

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

X

Question 9 – Are you aware of any specific issues relating to Welsh medium education? If so, what are they?

Estyn noted that 'The negative impact of teacher absence is often greater in some subjects, such as modern foreign languages, Welsh second language, physical education and design and technology. This is because non-specialists often cover the lessons and learners are not able to undertake practical activities. The teachers or cover supervisors who are covering the Welsh second language lesson will not have the subject-specific language skills to support and develop their learning. Often learners will be moved to other classrooms when their teacher is absent and consequently they will not have access to the resources that would normally be available to them. Moving from class to class also gives the impression that the lesson is less important to the teacher and the pupil. In the majority of instances, learners note that supply teachers or cover supervisors tend to ask them to write on sheets of paper rather than in their

normal workbooks and, in most instances, it does not get marked or followed up. This is time-filling activity rather than real learning.'

We also reported that 'Where teachers are absent for a significant period of time (longer than two or three days), many schools make considerable efforts to find teachers with the relevant subject or phase-specific skills. Secondary schools often have great difficulty finding teachers of shortage subjects, such as mathematics and science. When secondary schools are unable to find subject specialist supply teachers, a few subject leaders re-arrange teaching groups so that specialist teachers teach examination classes. This problem is made worse when departments already lack a full complement of specialist teachers. Welsh-medium schools and those located in rural or economically deprived areas have the greatest difficulty finding suitable supply teachers, particularly when they also require teachers with expertise in shortage subjects.'

If you believe there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?

How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

X

Question 10 – If you had to make one recommendation to the Welsh Government from all the points you have made, what would that recommendation be?

Estyn outlined the recommendations listed below in its 2013 survey. Recommendation 10 relates to Welsh Government in particular.

Schools should:

- R1 manage teacher absence more efficiently;
- R2 improve the quality of teaching and learning in covered lessons by making sure that the work set is at an appropriate level and staff receive enough information on the individual needs of learners;
- R3 support supply and cover staff to improve their classroom behaviour management techniques;
- R4 evaluate the impact of teacher absence on learners, especially more able pupils and those in key stage 3, and monitor the quality of teaching and learning when teachers are absent;
- R5 ensure that supply staff are included in performance management arrangements;
- R6 provide more professional development opportunities for supply staff; and
- R7 make sure that supply staff receive essential information on health and safety and safeguarding, including the contact details of the named child-protection officer at the school.

Local authorities and supply agencies should:

- R8 provide schools with comparative data on teacher absence rates; and
- R9 seek feedback on and record the quality of supply staff they register and use the information for quality control.

The Welsh Government should:

- R10 provide better access for supply staff to those national training programmes that are available to permanently-employed teachers.

Question 11 – Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions?

