

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

ST 23

Inquiry into Supply Teaching

Evidence from : Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Introduction

UCAC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this study. Supply teachers play an important role in education. Maintaining a relationship with quality supply teachers can be crucially important to a school's success when problems arise due to long-term illness.

Losing a teacher for a time can affect a pupil's education, and it is extremely important to be able to fill the vacancy in a professional manner with a teacher who is quickly able to establish a working relationship with pupils so that their education is not interrupted.

It is equally as important to ensure that short-term absences are treated carefully. By using quality supply teachers, uninterrupted education is ensured during periods of absence.

The work of a supply teacher can be very difficult, and supply teachers' working conditions have deteriorated during the past 10 years, especially as supply agencies have come into force in Wales.

UCAC is very aware that there is a severe lack of supply teachers in some parts of Wales. A situation of this kind may lead to schools failing to fill in the gaps when there are absences among the workforce.

This situation comes to the fore when professional development courses are held and there is heavy demand for supply teachers on the same day. There are several examples that UCAC is aware of where a school has failed to find a supply teacher. A situation of this kind is totally unacceptable and puts pressure on schools to maintain services in very difficult circumstances. This is especially true in areas where there are Welsh-medium schools, because the pool of supply teachers who are able to teach through the medium of Welsh is more restricted.

Consultation Questions

1. Supply teachers are frequently used by schools. Often, when there is illness, or in special circumstances, it is not possible to plan for the deployment of a supply teacher. As a rule, the arrangement is that schools will contact either the education authority or supply agency, or get in touch with a teacher directly, to arrange cover on the first day of absence.

1.1. If the period of absence continues, the school will then be able to make arrangements whereby a supply teacher is deployed for the duration of that absence.

1.2. Schools often plan the deployment of supply teachers. An example of this is the deployment of supply teachers during teachers' continuous professional development courses.

Schools also use supply teachers to release teachers on particular pre-planned occasions. These can include training courses, strategic or planning meetings, teachers' assessment moderation days, periods of anticipated long-term leave (for example, maternity leave, surgery and so on).

2. Supply teachers are used during the following periods of different absence:

- Periods of unexpected sudden illness
- Longer-term periods of illness
- Periods of maternity / adoption / paternity leave
- Periods of compassionate leave
- Periods of continuous professional development
- NQT Preparation period
- When a teacher attends an in-service training session
- When a teacher is called for jury service
- To release the workforce for various internal/external meetings
- To provide cover at a school during educational visits

2.1. Some teachers are content to provide occasional cover for a time, with no desire for a permanent post, while others wish to return to the workforce on a permanent basis.

2.2. Government statistics show that there will be a greater need for 're-entrants' to the profession in future as the pupil population increases. See the Welsh Government's evidence to the STRB 2014: *A baseline projection from the TPSM (Teacher Planning and Supply Model) for the period 2013/14 – 2022/23 using updated data shows that without any change to numbers there would be no over supply of primary ITT entrants, but a sustained and significant reliance on large numbers of re-entrants to fill vacant positions.*

2.3. The learning activities undertaken under the supervision of a supply teacher can vary significantly.

2.4. There are praiseworthy examples of teachers having undertaken joint planning with the supply teacher. Often, teachers at a school will plan a series of activities for the supply teacher during an absence. A teacher will often arrange for a supply teacher to cover certain aspects of a syllabus during their absence. Of course, there are examples of the opposite happening, where there has been no opportunity for sufficient planning to be undertaken beforehand, and this can have a detrimental impact on continuity.

2.5. Workforce absences can lead to problems in secondary schools where the supply teacher does not have expertise in a particular subject. UCAC is aware of many examples where it was not possible to teach some specialist subjects (music, design and technology, art and some of the core subjects) because it was not possible to employ supply teachers who specialised in these areas. Of course, such a situation can be a cause of concern to parents, especially when children are preparing for exams, and, unfortunately, it can lead, on occasion, to a decline in standards.

3. It is very difficult to measure empirically any effect that the use of supply teachers has on results.

3.1. Training (or lack of training) is a crucial point in terms of raising standards. Agencies, on the whole, do not offer appropriate training opportunities. Developing skills, maintaining and expanding subject expertise, becoming familiar with important national developments and receiving training on the use of ICT in the classroom are crucial. Agencies do not invest in training their teachers. Why should they? They do not have anything to gain.

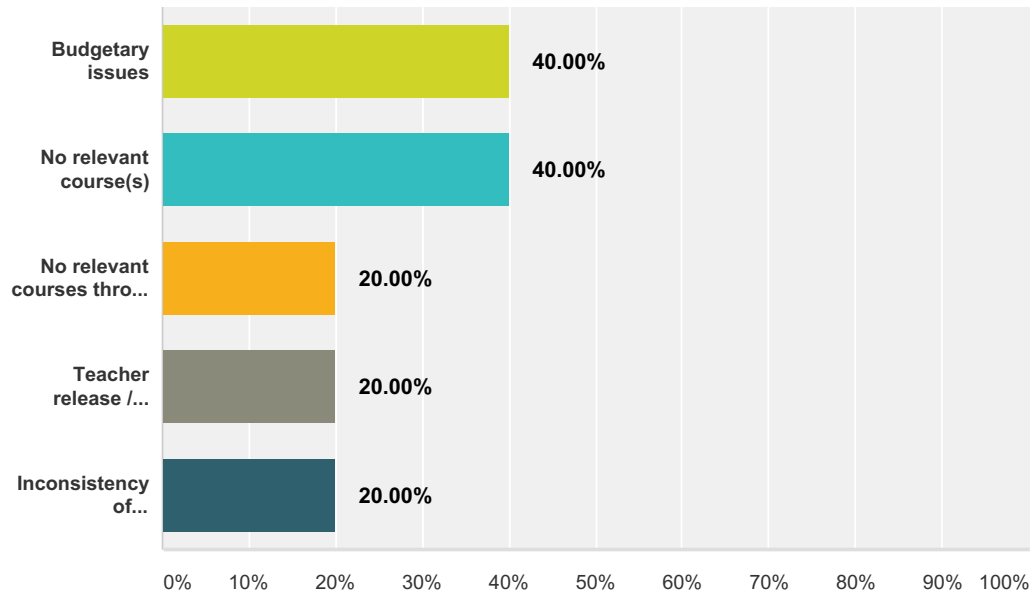
3.2. The results of the UCAC Survey for 2014 show that supply teachers working on a day-to-day basis and supply teachers who have short-term contracts are eager to receive training in specific fields.

3.3. During 2014, UCAC undertook a study of Teacher Workloads. Supply teachers working on a day-to-day basis and those with contracts highlighted the need for training.

The following graph displays the various reasons why Supply Teachers did not receive training:

Q17 If you haven't had access to training in the past two years, give the reason(s)? (tick one or more of the boxes)

Answered: 5 Skipped: 5



Answer Choices	Responses
Budgetary issues	40.00% 2
No relevant course(s)	40.00% 2
No relevant courses through the medium of Welsh	20.00% 1
Teacher release / supply issues	20.00% 1
Inconsistency of opportunities across the workforce	20.00% 1
Total Respondents: 5	

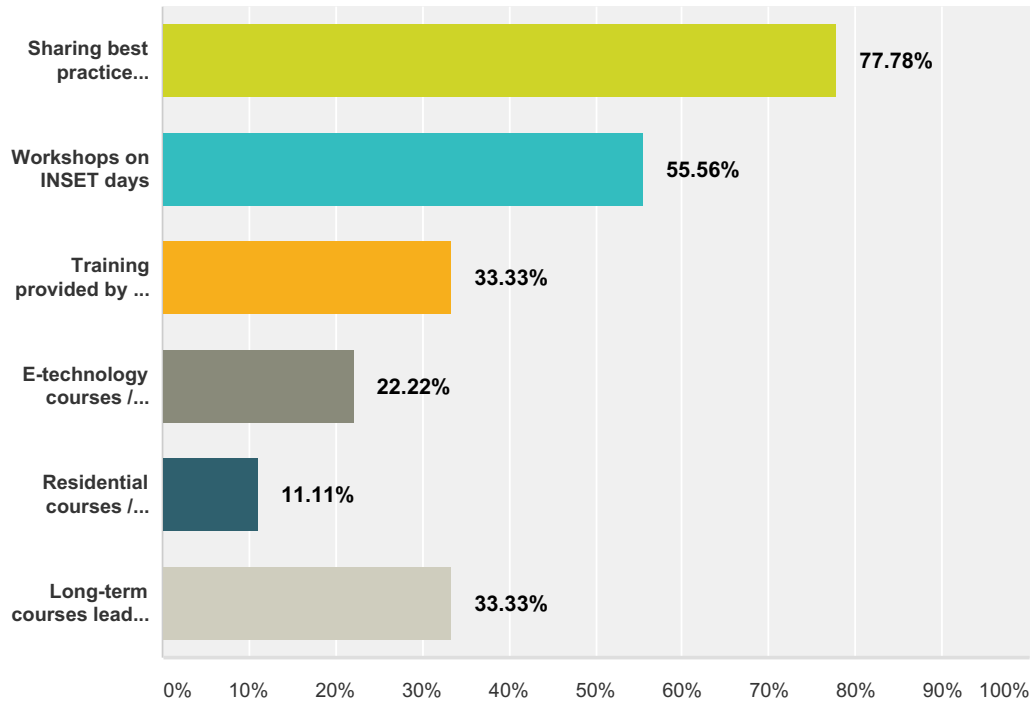
In the study, Supply Teachers listed their priorities with regard to training. Supply Teachers with a Short-term Contract considered training on behaviour management to be their main priority (57.14%), with curriculum planning, literacy and numeracy and additional learning needs in second place (14.29%).

Supply teachers providing cover on a day-to-day basis saw curriculum planning and literacy and numeracy as joint priorities (33.3%).

Supply teachers' responses when asked how they would wish to receive this training are outlined below:

Q16 How would you wish to receive training? (tick one or more of the boxes)

Answered: 9 Skipped: 1



Answer Choices	Responses
Sharing best practice (within the establishment / between establishments)	77.78% 7
Workshops on INSET days	55.56% 5
Training provided by the Local Authority / other agency	33.33% 3
E-technology courses / distance learning	22.22% 2
Residential courses / conferences	11.11% 1
Long-term courses leading to accredited qualifications	33.33% 3
Total Respondents: 9	

3.4. Insufficient training for supply teachers inevitably leads to a deterioration in pupils' behaviour. Situations arise where the supply teacher is not wholly aware of current developments and, as a result, their ability to prepare is impaired and behaviour can deteriorate as pupils take advantage.

3.5. Widespread use of teaching assistants, rather than supply teachers, is now made in our schools, and this can certainly be a factor where there is a decline in standards.

3.6. UCAC believes that only qualified teachers should lead entire classes, and that arrangements to use supply supervisors and classroom assistants for lessons where a teacher is absent may undermine standards, particularly where no specific training has been given regarding matters such as behaviour management. It is also highly likely, in situations of this kind, where work has, perhaps, been set, that it will not be possible to offer additional support for specific tasks to those pupils who need it.

3.7. Pupils become accustomed to the way that they are taught by a particular teacher; a change in these 'ways and means' under a supply teacher can lead to tensions between teacher and pupil and a deterioration in behaviour. Where this is possible, it is vital that the supply teacher discusses the matter with the teacher who is going to be absent—beforehand, if possible. In the busy school environment, there are scant opportunities to arrange a meeting with a short-notice supply teacher before they have to take a class.

4. At present, the education system in Wales does not treat supply teachers as professional people. All supply teachers need to be fully supported to ensure that this happens.

4.1. There have been so many changes to the education system in Wales over the past few years that the workforce in our schools is having difficulties in keeping up with every change. This situation makes supply teachers' work nigh on impossible.

4.2. Two of the Welsh Government's flagship policies, namely the Foundation Phase and the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, have been introduced with next to no training for the permanent workforce. There has been no training worth mentioning for supply teachers, yet they are expected to implement these policies in schools.

4.3. UCAC believes that this situation is wholly unacceptable, and that sufficient training should be ensured for our workforce, so that these progressive policies can be established and developed in our schools even when there are absences among the workforce.

4.4. UCAC believes that it is vital that supply teachers in the secondary sector are fully aware of what is expected of them in terms of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, where teachers are required to introduce and

assess literacy and numeracy as part of every subject on the curriculum. There are major training implications for this Government if these strategies are to succeed.

4.5. Often, supply teachers search and pay for training opportunities themselves. There are now several parts of Wales where supply teachers work for Teaching Agencies. They are poorly paid and do not have the same status as other teachers, nor do they have the status of an employee—they are agency staff, and do not, therefore, have the same status under the law.

5. UCAC believes that including teachers who provide cover for longer than a term in the performance management process is an important development from the point of view of managing an individual's performance. There is a severe lack of training for supply teachers, and the performance-management process offers valuable training and updates for supply teachers.

5.1. If a supply teacher is at a school for more than a term, it is vital that they are part of all school-improvement processes, including performance management.

5.2. UCAC believes that performance management can be a means of ensuring that every teacher is treated fairly. A supply teacher who is at a school for an extended period of time must not be treated differently to other members of the workforce.

5.3. The Government has outlined schools' responsibilities with regard to Performance Management for Supply Teachers, but UCAC believes that these arrangements are yet to be implemented widely. These arrangements are relatively recent, but have received a positive response where implemented.

6. The situation regarding local authorities and supply teachers tends to vary a great deal across Wales. While some authorities continue to keep a list of supply teachers, an increasing number of schools are contacting teachers directly. It stands to reason that the development of this practice has implications, particularly in terms of verification by the Disclosure and Barring Service.

6.1. There are linguistic implications when schools contact agencies or an individual directly. Is the supply teacher able to teach through the medium of Welsh? UCAC would be very concerned if this essential skill were to be ignored in order to engage a supply teacher.

7. There is a concern that there are local and national variations in the responsibilities given to supply teachers. It is a matter of concern that some supply teachers have to shoulder the same responsibilities as a school's permanent workforce.

8. An increasing number of Local Authorities have failed to keep a list of supply teachers to facilitate the process of finding appropriate cover. As a result, it has become harder for schools to find and arrange cover at short notice and to find teachers to provide long-term cover. The Agencies have been able to exploit this opportunity to become established in Wales and make a substantial profit from the Public Education Service. UCAC believes that over 40 agencies are operating in Wales at present.

8.1. UCAC is concerned about the increasing use of Agencies. Even though the practice is more common in the south, it is spreading across Wales. Agencies are businesses that exist to make a profit. They undermine the status and rights of teachers as individuals and as a profession, and create a second-class tier of teachers. In order to compete, they sell teachers' services as cheaply as possible—some contact schools to offer teachers at a cheaper rate, and we have even heard of offering “two for the price of one”. This is not the way to create a dedicated and professional education workforce in Wales.

8.2. Whereas the relationship between a school, Local Authority and supply teacher used to mean some level of stability for the teacher, the school and pupils, engendering a feeling of being employed by the County and school, many supply teachers now feel increasingly isolated, and certainly receive a significantly smaller amount of money.

8.3. The Salary and Conditions Document for School Teachers does not set terms for teachers who are not directly employed by a Local Authority or by maintained schools. A teacher employed by an agency does not have the same safety net as other teachers.

8.4. Agencies do not invest in education, and the majority are businesses from England that have spotted an opportunity to exploit education in Wales, even though we now see businesses being established in Wales as well.

8.5. Agencies do not have to follow the rules of the education system. If a parent complains about a teacher supplied by an agency, there is no expectation that the agency will investigate the matter as a headteacher would be expected to do if the same complaint were made against a member of school staff. UCAC has experience of teachers being referred by an agency directly to the General Teaching Council for Wales, without investigation, with their names immediately removed from the agency's books. Teachers cannot be given supply work as they await the results of a General Teaching Council for Wales inquiry. Agencies do not pay teachers who are subject to a complaint while an investigation is underway, and there is a possibility that a teacher subject to a baseless complaint will be without an income for a long period of time without any possibility of being employed by another school or agency.

8.6. This is a time of deep concern for the teacher, and it is also a waste of the General Teaching Council for Wales's money (Education Workforce Council

from April 2015); all of this because the agencies do not shoulder their responsibilities as employers.

8.7. There is a lack of investigative procedures, but also a lack of support processes for teachers. This has become evident on more than one occasion, leaving teachers feeling extremely vulnerable. There are several additional concerns here, namely:

- the detrimental effect on teachers' health;
- a lack of understanding of the processes by the school itself;
- a lack of awareness by the local authority of what is happening;
- difficulty in establishing a dialogue with the teaching agency;
- the possibility that the matter will be passed to the General Teaching Council for Wales (Education Workforce Council);
- inconsistency in the way that the General Teaching Council for Wales (Education Workforce Council) considers the matter.

8.8. Many schools are now turning to Teaching Agencies to seek supply teachers, not only because they are able to save some money, but out of convenience—one phone call and the arrangements are made.

8.9. More often than not, headteachers are not aware of these teachers' salaries and terms and conditions. They have no idea of the “cut” taken by these companies from the fees paid by the school.

9. UCAC is concerned that Welsh-medium education suffers when supply teachers are in the classroom. Often, and again due to a lack of training, a lesson may turn from Welsh to English when a teacher faces an unfamiliar situation, because the supply teacher is not fully fluent in Welsh and their Welsh is not of a sufficient standard for the classroom. This can influence pupils' standards.

9.1. It is a concern that there are major implications in terms of training and improving the language skills of some supply teachers.

9.2. There is concern that there has been insufficient training for supply teachers to implement the Literacy Framework regarding the Welsh language in our schools. The UCAC 2014 Survey shows this to be the case.

UCAC
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