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Department for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

13 April 2015

Mr Darren Millar AM
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
National Assembly for Wales

Dear Darren,

In response to your letter dated 16 March 2015 please see below further information on the implementation of the Welsh Government's commitments/actions following the publication of the Public Accounts Committee report *Covering Teachers' Absence*.

I would like to reiterate that the quality of supply teachers and how they are effectively utilised in supporting the education of our young people is important to the department. As such, we have set stretching but realistic targets to address the Committee's concerns and recommendations that align with our reform programme under Qualified for Life, including: the New Deal; Professor Donaldson's recommendations on Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in *Successful Futures*; and Professor Furlong's report on the Future of Initial Teacher Education and Training in Wales – *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers*.

In raising standards in education in Wales it is vital that our expectations for improvement extend to the entire teaching workforce. We will expect those who provide cover to be able to deliver against our priorities and ambitions for our young children and to be able to access development opportunities. There is a responsibility on the part of the employer and the employee themselves to ensure that they keep up to speed with good classroom practice.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government captures and disseminates relevant and reliable data on teachers' absence from the classroom to enable a more robust monitoring of occurrences of, and the reasons for, absence.

The responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the reasons for absence, and associated costs, rests with the schools and employers.

The Welsh Government does, however, collect and publish data at an all Wales level on teacher absence annually and from June 2016, to help enable any potential issues or trends to be identified, we will publish this data at local authority level. This data will be available to form part of the people management monitoring, reviewing and challenge process within local authorities and consortia.

The *National Model for Regional Working – Revitalising People Management in Schools* published in April 2015 provides a people management framework for the delivery of specialist HR functions. This document builds on the requirements set out in the *National Model for Regional Working (Guidance document 126/2014)* and underlines the responsibilities on schools, local authorities and consortia to collect, analyse and report on data to improve school performance.

To further support this and as recommended by the Committee, guidance will be published (*Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance*) in July 2015 for September 2015 implementation (see recommendation 7 for detailed timescales for delivery). The guidance will set out the responsibilities of local authorities and consortia in relation to school data collection, dissemination and analysis as well as the responsibilities for head teachers and governors in providing data and responding to issues.

Additionally from September 2015 all schools are legally required to have a School Development Plan (SDP)¹ in place. The Guidance on School Development Plans (Guidance document 155/2014) refers to the importance of performance and contextual data to inform the plan and to set targets for the school. School workforce absence information is an example of the ‘quantitative data’ to be utilised for schools to identify and address their strengths and needs. The guidance also refers to schools accessing benchmarking data so that they can compare themselves against both the best performing schools and those within their family of schools. This will be reiterated in the guidance document *Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance*. The SDP will provide a focus for engagement within schools and challenge advisers will advise and support schools in identifying and implementing the actions necessary to bring about improvements on a range of data, including teacher absence data.

Welsh Government will regularly review this data with the HR Directors Network and the WLGA.

Target date: Stakeholder engagement underway; guidance to be published in July 2015 and implemented in schools in September 2015.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government conducts an evaluation of the effectiveness of training delivery and reports back to the Committee by January 2015. This evaluation should include the impact of different forms of training delivery on teacher absences from the classroom.

A review of training and professional learning instigated by the Welsh Government during the period January to July 2014 has been carried out (a copy of the report was provided in our correspondence dated 23 February 2015). In addition, an analysis of the evaluation forms collated at these training events show that the majority have been rated good or excellent.

Guidance on the best practice approaches that should be considered when organising training events for teachers will be included in the *Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance* document to be published for all key stakeholders in July 2015 (being developed as part of recommendation 7). This will include ensuring the Welsh Government and its partners considers the range of delivery options when providing learning opportunities to the school workforce to ensure that the impact of teacher absence from the classroom forms part of the decision making process.

¹ Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014

On the 18th March 2014 the Minister for Education Skills announced a 'New Deal for the Education Workforce' which offers all education practitioners, including supply teachers, in Wales an entitlement to access world class professional learning opportunities to develop their practice through their career. Underpinning *New Deal* is embedding professional learning activities within schools but also providing access to learning opportunities through online professional learning materials and resources. This provides a more flexible and effective approach for all teachers to develop and will contribute to improving teacher standards whilst reducing teacher absence from the classroom for training purposes.

Target date: Initial analysis complete; guidance to be published in July 2015 and implemented in schools in September 2015.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government amend regulations to make it a requirement for at least one member of each governing body to be designated to lead on HR matters and that such members are suitably trained to fulfil this role.

This recommendation was rejected in the Welsh Government's response to the Committee (June 2014) as the regulations (The Government of Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2005) specify that an individual governor cannot be required to be a designated lead for a specific issue.

Additionally, as the Minister explained in his follow up response (August 2014), governors are volunteers and HR and staffing matters are a significant responsibility, often of a statutory nature and as such are normally delegated to committees rather than an individual governor. Given the complexity often involved in HR and staffing matters a single governor, in our view, would be unlikely to want to be responsible for dealing with such sensitive matters as they would not have the confidence, knowledge and experience. There are also risks in attaching such responsibilities to a single person.

However, there is already existing provision within the regulations for governing bodies to delegate functions to a committee or to decide by choice to delegate certain functions to an individual.

Target date: Not applicable.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government reviews the training (eg: through the National Professional Qualification for Headship/ first year mentoring) provided to head teachers to ensure that there is a greater emphasis on managing classroom absences. This focus on managing absence should also be incorporated into the Continuing Professional Development for head teachers.

It may be helpful to note that the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), which is provided as an example in the Committee's recommendation, is not a training course – it is an assessment process to judge whether or not a practitioner is able to demonstrate that they meet the Leadership Standards in full. It is therefore the Leadership Standards that form the basis of the assessment and I can confirm they already include standards related to managing the school, which include managing staffing issues.

However this is an area where further policy development is underway. The professional standards frameworks for education practitioners in schools and further education institutions are currently being reviewed to reflect the findings of a number of independent

reports commissioned by the Welsh Government, including the Donaldson Report and the Furlong Review. A timetable for delivery is set out below:

Revised standards developed, supported by programme of engagement with stakeholders	March – August 2015
Formal 12 week public consultation commences	September 2015
Revised standards published	January 2016
Schools and colleges build familiarity with new standards	February – August 2016
Standards become mandatory for existing practitioners	September 2016
ITET Centres re-validate courses based on new standards	February 2016 – August 2017
New standards become mandatory for entrants to ITET courses	September 2017

These new standards will therefore influence training provision for all levels of teachers and managing school staffing will need to be effectively captured in the revised standards.

Target date: To be complete by September 2017 (as per above timetable)

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government, in collaboration with local authorities, ensures that when HR services are procured by schools from local authorities, service level agreements are strengthened to ensure that head teachers and governors receive sufficient HR support as well as appropriate training and guidance, to enable HR matters related to supply staff to be managed appropriately.

The *National Model for Regional Working – Revitalising People Management in Schools* published in April 2015 provides a people management framework for the delivery of specialist HR functions. This document builds on the requirements set out in the *National Model for Regional Working (Guidance document 126/2014)*. The document sets out the requirement for consortia business plans to detail how local authority HR support will be provided to schools. It also outlines the responsibilities of local authorities and consortia in delivering HR support and services. The document explicitly references the requirement for local authorities to deliver HR support and advisory services to schools under a Service Level Agreement. The guidance sets out the requirement for schools, and governing bodies, to take part in training and development programmes to assist them to meet their people management responsibilities.

Business plans in relation to HR provision for schools will be monitored through the annual Ministerial review and challenge events with each consortium. Where HR issues have an adverse effect on school improvement we will collectively analyse causes and identify suitable interventions.

Target date: First round of consortia review and challenge events autumn 2015

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government:

- a) Outlines how it expects Estyn to inspect and report on cover arrangements**
- b) Alters the guidance for Estyn inspections by September 2014 to explicitly require inspectors to examine cover arrangements**
- c) Provides the Committee with clear evidence that this approach is working and any actions they intend to take to address and shortcomings in this approach by September 2015**

We request that an update on the details of the changes to guidance and early indications of how the revised approach is working be provided to the Committee by January 2015.

As outlined in the Minister's letter a proposal to conduct a thematic review into cover arrangements and how the guidance (in recommendation 7) was being adopted went forward for consideration by an evaluation panel in October 2014. A number of competitive bids were submitted and it was determined that the guidance would not have had time to bed in sufficiently for a review to be valuable on this timescale (2015/16). This is not, however, to say that we do not agree with the need to investigate the impact. It was concluded that to defer this thematic review by at least one year would provide opportunity for the new guidance to be fully developed and embedded (for a whole academic year) before the study takes place. It was further suggested that the study should have a focus and that it may specifically consider the effect of long term absence on primary schools.

As for altering the guidance for school inspections this would be a function for Estyn, an independent body, to undertake. However, their process of risk based school inspections would lead them to follow such lines of enquiry if their pre-inspection preparation identified this as an issue.

Target date: October 2015 for a thematic review bid to be considered for 2016/17

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable for disseminating guidance on the effective management of cover and a plan for evaluating this guidance. The Committee would expect an update on this work by January 2015

The draft guidance for effective management of workforce absence, which is being developed with local authority partners and school practitioners, has been discussed at the School Practitioners Panel and further discussions are due to take place with trade union partners and employers this month. The timetable for its development, consultation (informal) and publication is:

March 2015	Commenced drafting guidance document
March/April 2015	Key Stakeholder Consultation e.g. School Practitioners Panel (23/3 and 8/6) Union Partners (14/4) HR Directors Network (21/4) ADEW (date tbc)
June/July 2015	Document agreed and published
July 2015	Communication campaign to publicise new guidance
September 2015	Implemented in schools

The plan for evaluating the guidance has been set out above in recommendation 6. A thematic review to evaluate the guidance will be considered for the Estyn remit in 2016/17. If, however, absence is identified as an issue by Estyn within their pre inspection

preparation for a school they will, as stated above, follow up this issue in their inspection visit.

We will also work with the WLGA and the HR Directors' network and the ADEW HR Officers network to informally monitor its effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

Target date: Guidance published in July 2015, implemented in schools in September 2015 and evaluated in 2016/17.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government evaluates its policies such as the development of different forms of training and Continuing Professional Development that rely less on teachers being absent from the classroom and the demands of the regional consortia on schools, and considers the impact these have had on cover requirements. We request that the outcome of the evaluation be reported to the Committee by January 2015.

The Welsh Government accepts and supports the principle that teachers need to be present in the classroom more often, even when undertaking professional development. It cannot however, guarantee that all such development can be delivered in this way. The move towards a self improving system, which started with the refocussing of the Regional Consortia just over a year ago, advocates sharing best practice within the classroom and teachers learning and developing 'on the job' supported by each other. Additionally Estyn supports this process of peer to peer support, review and learning from each other and looks favourably upon this practice in its inspections.

Guidance on the best practice approaches that should be considered when organising training events for teachers will be included in the *Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance* document to be published for all key stakeholders in July 2015 (being developed as part of recommendation 7). This will include ensuring that the Welsh Government and its partners considers the range of delivery options when providing learning opportunities to the school workforce, to ensure that the impact of teacher absence from the classroom forms part of the decision making process.

As previously mentioned *New Deal* aims to embed professional learning activities within all schools, providing a more flexible and effective approach for all teachers to develop. It will contribute to improving teacher standards whilst reducing teacher absence from the classroom for training purposes.

Target date: Guidance to be published in July 2015, implemented in schools in September 2015.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government takes steps to ensure that school and local authority Continuing Professional Development be available to supply teachers, and ensures it develops an effective mechanism for communication these opportunities to supply teachers.

New regulations for School Development Plans, introduced in September 2014, specify that schools set out in their development plans how they intend to develop their staff including those temporarily placed at the school. These plans were voluntary for the first year but will be compulsory from September 2015.

The *Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance* document (recommendation 7) will set out the requirements on schools, local authorities and consortia to ensure that, where possible, their training sessions will involve supply teachers working in their school.

The guidance document will also include exemplar material on information to be provided to supply teachers working in a school, this will recommend providing information on *Dysg* and the *New Deal* to improve dissemination of information on training opportunities to supply teachers. Currently, we have been able to identify over 1,400 supply teachers who now as a result of our contact with them receive the *Dysg* newsletter. It includes a range of information regarding Welsh Government policies, training and development events and other relevant information for the education workforce and is distributed fortnightly.

We want to ensure that the Professional Learning Model which is being developed as part of the *New Deal* takes account of how all teachers, including supply teachers, can access the model and benefit from CPD in the same way.

Target date: Regulations introduced September 2014, compulsory from September 2015 with ongoing monitoring

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government works with representatives from WLGA, Supply Agencies and schools in developing the specification for retendering of the Framework contract for school supply staff, to include a requirement for supply staff to have access to Continuing Professional Development and to determine arrangements to recover from the supply agencies any additional costs for Continuing Professional Development for supply staff.

The National Procurement Service recently retendered for the Framework contract for school supply staff. The specification included a requirement for bidders to provide an explanation on how they would ensure 'training and Continuous Professional Development is provided to their temporary workforce'. The successful supplier, New Directions, was announced on 8 April. Within their tender documentation New Directions outlined how they would ensure all temporary workers receive relevant training and CPD, and how they will monitor this. The successful tenderer provided specific evidence in their bid on training it provides for its members on safeguarding, classroom management and conflict and behaviour management, through the Team Teach programmes.

Target date: Tender process complete and the new contract will come in to effect from 1st August 2015.

Recommendation 11 and 12

11 - The Committee recommends that the Welsh government includes the costs and take up of the Masters in Educational Practice in its evaluation of the programmes
12 – We also recommend that an evaluation of the mentor element of the Masters in Education Practice programme is undertaken before the end of 2014 to address concerns that it may not be delivering value for money. The evaluation should include consideration of the utilisation of retired teachers as mentors and the impact of the extraction of experienced teachers from the classrooms to be engaged as mentors.

The discontinuation of the existing Masters in Educational Practice (MEP) means that undertaking the form of evaluation originally envisaged in recommendation 11 and 12 of your report is no longer appropriate.

A new MEP is currently in development. Having taken into consideration a range of comments from the cohort of trainees on the initial programme and from senior practitioners, including those who were supporting the trainees, the new MEP will be available to a wider audience and over a less restrictive timescale. The final specification and model of delivery is being finalised and will be implemented in September 2016. The new MEP will be open to any practitioner who is registered with the Education Workforce Council.

Target date: Not applicable.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government collects further information on the extent and cost of covering teachers' absence. We recommend that the Welsh Government publishes a timetable and plan for gathering this information and provides detail on how value for money will be monitored and evaluated.

In response to recommendations 1, 8 and 10 we have outlined activity that the Welsh Government will undertake to monitor when and why teachers are absent from the classroom. To fully monitor the cost and value for money of the use of supply teachers to cover teacher absence across all schools in Wales (approx. 1580) would be an onerous burden requiring significant resource. However, the Welsh Government is exploring proportionate mechanisms and processes to be able to evaluate and monitor value for money and to explore potential efficiencies with Regional Consortia and local authorities.

Target date; Collect and publish sickness absence data by local authority by June 2016

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Welsh Government's proposed guidance clearly addresses the identified safeguarding issues for temporary staff and that the Welsh Government develops an effective mechanism to check that the guidance is being followed. The Commission should be provided with an update on this by January 2015.

New statutory guidance on arrangements for keeping children safe in education, *Keeping learners safe*, was published in January 2015. This guidance sets out the requirements for the local authority and the governing body of a school to operate safe recruitment procedures and make sure that appropriate checks are carried out on new staff working with children.

The Welsh Government expects all local authorities and schools in Wales to comply with statutory arrangements, including those put in place through the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Effective Management of School Workforce Attendance (recommendation 7) will refer to *Keeping Learners Safe* and set out the safeguarding requirements for schools, local authorities and supply agencies, re-enforcing the messages to supply teachers. Schools will be advised to provide information to supply teachers before they enter the school which will include details on the schools safeguarding policy and individual contacts for these issues.

The Welsh Government will continue to support all education providers to ensure that they have effective systems in place to promote safe practice. Central monitoring arrangements covering individual aspects of the guidance would be prohibitive.

Target date: Complete January 2015

I hope the above information provides the Committee with the clarification required and we again thank you for your consideration of this significant area of education.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Owen', followed by a period.

Owen Evans