

P-05-805 Fair Deal For Supply Teachers, Correspondence – E-Equal to Chair, 08.08.19

Bore da,

Thank you very much for your email and letter dated Wednesday, 7th August.

Please note the following points which summarise our views (upon which I am happy to elaborate in a further meeting with Ms Finch-Saunders, AM, if that's possible):

1. We provide free professional development/training opportunities to all of our teaching and support staff at least every half term. We also provide support and mentorship in particular to Newly Qualified Teachers and those returning to teaching;
2. We are in full agreement that supply teachers in Wales need a better deal than they have been provided to date - Equal was established in 2011 in order to achieve this;
3. We are fully supportive of the new minimum pay rate for supply teachers of £121.64 per day and we are encouraged by the steps taken by the Minister for Education to bring this minimum pay rate into effect;
4. We see the new minimum pay rate for supply teachers as crucial to the recruitment and retention of supply teachers, and also to the retention of all teachers throughout their careers - making supply teaching a financially viable option is crucial to keeping teachers in the profession and available for long-term and permanent roles also.
5. We are presently extremely concerned about the number of other education recruitment companies who have been awarded a place on the NPS (National Procurement Service) framework and yet have refused to their teachers to pay the new minimum pay rate for supply teachers from September 2019 as required by the NPS and Welsh Government. These agencies include New Directions (the sole preferred supplier until April 2019 who has approx. 50% market share in our sector and is essentially using the monopoly power it has amassed as a result of their previous contract in order to keep supply teachers' pay down);
6. We are deeply concerned that the new minimum pay rate has not been made mandatory by the Minister for Education and the Welsh Government. Instead, the onus is being left on education recruitment companies like ourselves to promote it to schools (who have very little money left), while being undercut by other commercial agencies who do not have the welfare of their staff in mind;
7. We believe that the new framework agreement will fail unless the minimum pay rate is mandated with effective measures in place to reprimand agencies and schools who are failing to ensure that supply teachers working in their organisations are paid at least the minimum pay rate (£121.64/day via PAYE or the equivalent rate via any other payment method - please note that Equal does not use any other payment methods such as umbrella companies);
8. If the new minimum pay rate is not mandated, an unfair advantage will be given to non-framework agencies (who are not audited and do not have obligations to report to the NPS or Welsh Government, thus putting child safety at risk in many cases) and other agencies on the framework who want to profit further by pushing teachers' pay back down. This will have the impact of severely hindering the work of education recruitment companies like Equal who are ethical employers and

want to do the best for their teaching staff (and see sustainability as the way forward in terms of recruitment, retention and therefore our commercial objectives); and

9. Equal is one of only a handful of education recruitment companies on the new NPS & Welsh Government framework to have signed up to the Welsh Government's Code of Practice on Ethical Employment. We have also recently pioneered the Welsh Government's Ethical Ratings Cymru accreditation pilot with ESC International and gained accreditation by the Living Wage Foundation, in recognition of the fact that all employees working with Equal, including all office based staff, teaching assistants, admin staff, exam invigilators are paid at least in line with the Living Wage Foundation's living wage (substantially above the statutory national minimum wage).

I would like to request a meeting with Janet Finch-Saunders, AM, Chair of the Petitions Committee. Would this be possible please? I'm based in Swansea and travel often to Cardiff, Newtown, Wrexham and Llandudno so could meet Ms Finch-Saunders AM in a location that's convenient for her to discuss how we can work together to ensure that supply teachers do benefit from the new minimum pay rate for supply teachers requested by the Minister for Education, Kirsty Williams AM.

Thank you very much for your attention. Diolch yn fawr.

Please also note the following:

While we agree with the overall request of the petition and its sentiment (that supply teachers should be paid better), we do not agree with all statements made in the petition. We do not agree that there is no role to play by education recruitment companies in the recruitment and administration of supply teaching in Wales, as is suggested by the petition. We certainly do not reduce teachers' pay by 40-60% (a substantially over-stated figure if referring to agency margins in our case). We deliver an important and valuable service to teachers to be able to find work in a wide range of schools (without having to apply directly to, be vetted by and maintain availability information with every single school) and to schools to be able to access a wide range of staff at short notice as their needs require it (without having to market to, vet and check and maintain availability information for every single teacher/staff member).

We would encourage all supply teachers to critically evaluate the various education recruitment companies / agencies available to them and to opt only to work with those who are committed to ethical employment, fair pay (at least in line with the new minimum pay rates for supply teachers), who invest in their training/development to enable their career progression and who encourage them to access long-term and permanent roles where they want these roles for more consistency/stability/further career progression.

To expand upon this, Equal plays a crucial role in meeting staff shortages in schools, especially given that local authority supply pools have been reduced due to inefficiencies and poor effectiveness in many cases:

1. We invest heavily in marketing to recruit people into supply teaching roles, as well as learning support assistant roles.

2. We contribute to employees' pensions through pension contributions of 3% above gross pay (this is a statutory requirement but many companies avoid this and employers' NI by paying staff through umbrella companies, which Equal does not).
3. We pay all of our employees via PAYE thus generating thousands every month for the taxpayer in PAYE tax and both employers' & employees' national insurance (again these are statutory requirements but many companies avoid employers' NI and pension contributions by paying staff through umbrella companies, which Equal does not).
4. We ensure continuity of high standards of teaching & learning in cases where schools otherwise can not do so.
5. We keep people in the teaching profession when they would otherwise leave entirely by enabling them to work flexibly as their life circumstances change, keeping them available for long-term & permanent positions.
6. We recruit for long-term and permanent roles for hard-to-fill vacancies e.g. science & maths and welsh-medium education.
7. We support people in getting in to teaching - many of our graduate teaching assistants gain valuable experience with Equal and subsequently go on to qualify as teachers following a PGCE course where they would not have otherwise done so. We encourage and support this.
8. We support newly-qualified teacher who have not yet completed their induction process to do so. This is critical to retention of teachers in the years immediately following qualification (where EWC data shows the highest number of teachers leave the profession).
9. We work extensively in rural communities and over 65% of our partner schools are Welsh-medium schools who often find it hardest to recruit.
10. We work extensively with additional learning needs (ALN) schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) for which more expertise is required of us as recruiters and of our teaching and learning support staff - these are specialist roles.
11. We deliver free training to our staff, which they as supply teachers are currently not offered by schools, Local Education Authorities or the school improvement consortia despite calls for those bodies to include supply teachers in training opportunities.
12. We deliver additional support to our schools through community benefits initiatives, advice & guidance talks and mentoring for pupils.
13. We are fully audited by the Recruitment & Employment Confederation, having three times been awarded and always maintained their gold standard accreditation, recognising that our vetting and compliance procedures are always in line with best practice. This is critical to ensuring child safeguarding is a priority in our recruitment process.
14. We employ over 100 people in local communities across Wales as a Wales-based company.

Thank you very much for your attention.