

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

ST 39

Inquiry into Supply Teaching

Evidence from : Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL Cymru)

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?

It is not possible to ask a class of children to go home or look after themselves when a school finds itself short of teachers to cover classes for any reason. Like a hospital that needs to provide care will resort to agency cover, a school will need on occasion to resort to supply or other types of cover.

This essential requirement will inevitably lead to a significant amount of class time or teacher days when a supply teacher or an in-house alternative is replacing the teacher that would normally be leading the provision.

Given the very clear terms and conditions of employment that govern teacher time, contact and non-contact, it is highly usual for planned or longer-term absence to be filled by a supply teacher e.g. maternity cover, sabbatical. This planned supply cover may be more viable and more efficient than recruiting on a short-term contract.

All secondary schools will have in place a cover supervisor who's role is to work with the teaching staff that are present in a school to try and cover short-term absence e.g. paternity leave, compassionate leave or short-term sickness.

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

ASCL Cymru broadly welcomed Estyn's September 2013 report, 'The Impact of Teacher Absence'. It raised some matters of concern that merit the attention of the Committee and all who have a responsibility for delivering high quality learning to our young people.

In general terms, there are three major concerns, and all relate to the use of supply cover (that is, planned absences):

1. Managing the quality of what is supplied
2. Managing the quality of what is delivered by the individual
3. Managing the cost of supply

By working with supply agencies, the quality of what is supplied and its cost could be enhanced. National or regional procurement contracts could be brokered, and these contracts might require agencies to meet exacting quality assurance and cost control expectations.

School leaders might be helped to adopt strategies that would better secure the quality of what is actually delivered by the individual attending their school. There is a role for representative organisations, consortia, local authorities and perhaps Welsh Government in assisting in this.

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

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

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 a secondary school, and for a planned absence, a supply teacher would normally be expected to be a ‘like-for-like’ replacement to the teacher being covered.

It is worth noting that a good number of teachers that are on the books with supply agencies make a conscious choice to work as supply teachers. In many cases, these supply teachers are making the choice to separate themselves from the extracurricular and ‘over and above’ activity that many teachers contribute, for instance the hours spent in additional interventions that are key to raising the achievement of some young people.

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

x

4 - Not a problem.

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)?

Classes covered extensively by supply teachers will challenge all school leaders who are responsible for raising achievement. By definition, supply teachers are unlikely to engage fully with a school’s ethos and understand the processes in place to identify and intervene with underachievement, poor engagement and poor attendance

patterns. This can be particularly challenging when one class has had several periods of time being covered or when cover for a longer term absence is not covered by one teacher.

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

Wherever possible, in-house alternatives are preferable to externally sourced supply.

A brokered national contracting service that requires supply agencies to drive up quality assurance whilst driving down costs would be a significant contribution to resolving any concern about what is supplied.

It is worth exploring if performance management within a school could be better used for longer term contracts. This could be beneficial for learner outcomes but also support the supply teacher's professional development.

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

CPD should be delivered by supply agencies where teachers are employed through them. This should be open to scrutiny. There is cost associated with this. If supply agencies could be assured economies of scale, say by having a short list of quality assured preferred suppliers endorsed or adopted by key agencies such as Welsh Government, it might be possible to avoid passing on such a

cost directly onto schools at a time of great strain on public finances.

Schools who use long term supply staff will presumably invite supply teachers to their in-house session. Often supply teachers are reluctant to attend these because they are unpaid. Perhaps a supply agency should manage the CPD portfolio of their teachers' and record engagement (whether development is provided in-school or by the agency) and that this is red against a minimum expectation of x number of hours of CPD per year.

The issue of supporting NQT supply teachers is worth looking at separately. These individuals need particular support to establish themselves at the start of their career. It would be worthwhile getting some broad stakeholder agreement on how supply agencies, schools and others might work together to make a positive contribution to our future workforce, on the proviso that it is the agencies that retain primary employer responsibility.

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

This is a confused area. Performance management is conducted in schools on the basis that there is a direct relationship between an individual teacher's objectives, their department's and the school's. This is problematical if the supply teacher is only at the school for a relatively short period.

Supply agencies should be aware of the professional development needs of their staff and set personal targets as a result of this.

If you think 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.

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 primary and most critical relationship in the management of supply teaching should remain that between the school leader and the service provider.

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 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?

Outside of particular local arrangements between local authorities and certain suppliers that are meant to exact cost benefits, no.

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

A national procurement model that raises quality demands and secures efficiencies that bring costs down is desirable.

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 8 – Do you have any views on supply agencies and their quality assurance arrangements?

Currently, in the absence of a commonly understood quality mark or procurement model, the quality assurance provided by supply agencies varies. But this is largely understood through ‘word of mouth’ shared by one headteacher to another as there is little transparency in the sector.

ASCL has working relationships with a number of agencies, notably New Directions. This allows an exchange of views to be had and improves mutual understanding.

It is essential that there is transparency between supply agency and school because every school, despite its best efforts, will need to call on the service provided by these agencies at some time.

If agencies were to take on fuller and more detailed responsibility for the performance management of their teachers, it might involve arrangements to observe some actual teaching. Despite the challenge involved in making it happen, the entire sector might benefit from the extra reflection and discussion on the theme of ‘what does good teaching look like’.

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

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

All issues described above apply to the Welsh-medium sector also.

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

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

Supply agencies should have a duty to ensure that teachers they use are well trained and supported through CPD and PM arrangements, including teacher entitlement to lesson observation and support for their professional development.

T should be recognised that additional high expectations being placed upon supply agencies will have a cost implication and will require auditing. A properly brokered national procurement arrangement could achieve a great deal and allow the successful agencies access to economies of scale that should dampen costs.

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

A thorough examination of the causes for what appears to be a high usage rate for supply teaching needs to be conducted. Rising teacher workload, poor human resource management practice, unwieldy agreements with teacher unions imposing possibly unrealistic demands and a number of other factors may be at the root of the matter. Our efforts to raise the standards of what we provide our young people, and the dire projections for school financing, should be sufficient to encourage all relevant stakeholders to rethink how we consider this matter and the possible solutions for taking things forward.