



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

Ref: SF/HL/0263/15

25 February 2015

Dear Darren,

As the Committee requested here is an update on the actions that have been undertaken since my responses in June and August 2014 to your report on Covering Teachers' Absence. The following responses take into account only those recommendations where we stated further activity would be undertaken.

Recommendation 1 and 13

As previously advised the Welsh Government collect and publish data on teacher absence annually. The responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the reasons for absence rests with the schools and employers. We have approached local authorities to ascertain how they monitor teachers' absence, how frequently they report and how they utilise the data in the management of absences in school and these responses are being considered as part of the development of the guidance referred to in the response to recommendation 7 below.

WG officials are also working closely with local authority HR Directors and the WLGA in developing a people management framework for the delivery of some specialist HR functions. This will support the National Model for Regional Working and absence data will help inform consortia intelligence for school improvement plans and activities. This framework will be implemented from April 2015.

Recommendation 2

On June 10 2014 I announced a 'New Deal' which set out the vision for the professional learning of all school based practitioners in Wales. The New Deal is supported by the development of the National Professional Learning Model (NPLM) which provides practitioners with a clear, coherent model setting out the approaches to professional learning that have the most positive and sustained impact on teaching standards.

It is intended that this approach to professional learning will place less of a reliance on the traditional approach of one off training days, which are a significant cause of teacher

absence. Embedding professional learning activities within the school, whilst not eradicating absence, will provide a more flexible and effective approach.

The principles of the NPLM are based on evidence of effective approaches to professional development and we are continuing to draw on international evidence as we develop the model, as well as from schools in Wales who are already using these approaches.

I will shortly announce further details regarding the New Deal for the education workforce but the principle of this approach will be to ensure that what is announced will be available to the entire workforce including supply teachers.

Recommendation 5

In responding to your recommendation regarding the strengthening of HR support for head teachers and governors in dealing with absence issues, we are progressing work with relevant partners at local authority and consortia level to produce a people management framework for implementation by April 2015. This is being developed as an integral part of the National Model for Regional Working. Within this framework local authority HR services will offer head teachers and governing bodies assistance with their people management function and this will include supporting schools in addressing absence issues.

Recommendation 6

Further to my response in June a proposal to conduct a thematic review into cover arrangements and how the guidance (in recommendation 7) was being adopted has been considered by the bid evaluation panel (comprising of Welsh Government officials and Estyn). It was determined that the guidance would not be sufficiently implemented for a review to be undertaken in 2015/16. It was suggested that this proposal be resubmitted for consideration in 2016/17 as it was concluded that deferring this study by a year would provide opportunity for the new guidance on cover arrangements to be fully developed and embedded 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.

Recommendation 7

Work has commenced on co-constructing guidance for effective management of workforce absence with local authority partners and the timetable for its development, consultation (informal) and publication is;

March 2015	Draft Guidance Document
March/April 2015	Key Stakeholder Consultation, e.g; School Practitioners Panel (23/3) Union Partners (April) HR Directors Network (21/4) ADEW (date tbc)
May 2015	Communication campaign re guidance e.g. DYSG
June 2015	Document published

The evaluation of the guidance will form part of Estyn's inspection of schools and how they use the guidance. We will also work with the WLGA and the HR Directors' network and the ADEW HR Officers network to monitor its effectiveness on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 8

Further to my response in June a review has been carried out of training and professional learning instigated by the Welsh Government during the period January to July 2014. The report is attached at annex 1 and identifies both external and in house training. There does appear to be more focus on external events and as such it is important that in moving forward my officials consider a range of approaches when they want to engage with the education workforce and that the option and impact of bringing teachers and support staff out of schools is considered carefully. Therefore, we will produce a short guidance document on the best practice approaches that should be considered once details of the New Deal are announced.

Recommendation 9

With regards to your recommendation regarding CPD for supply teachers, 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 takes account of how supply teachers can access the model and benefit from CPD in the same way as all other teachers.

Regulations also came into force on the 27 October 2014 regarding the requirement for schools to produce School Development Plans (SDP). Schools are required to meet the regulations in full by September 2015 to allow time for transitional arrangements to be made. From this date all schools must set out in their SDP how they intend to develop their staff including those temporarily placed at the school.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommended that CPD was a requirement in any future specification for the retendering of the Framework contract. The National Procurement Service has recently issued a new tender to the supply market. This has included a specific evaluation question on how the supplier will ensure training and CPD is provided to their temporary workforce. Supplier responses will be evaluated and scored accordingly. The tender process is currently underway.

Recommendation 11 and 12

Both of these recommendations concerned evaluating elements of the Masters programme. However, since my response to you in June I have made announcements regarding a refocus of the MEP and officials are currently working on proposals for a revised programme that will widen access to Masters-level professional learning for practitioners at different career points. In doing so, officials will be taking account of feedback and comments from partners and participants who have been involved in the current Masters programme. When developing the requirements for the revised scheme consideration will be given to establishing arrangements that support programme participants whilst delivering improved value for money.

The discontinuation of the existing MEP means that undertaking the form of evaluation originally envisaged in recommendation 11 of your report is therefore no longer appropriate.

Recommendation 14


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 makes 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.

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.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for considering the issue of absence and cover in schools. If you require any further clarification then please let me know.

If we are to raise standards in education in Wales it is important that we manage our workforce effectively and ensure that our teaching and support staff are given the best opportunity to focus on teaching and learning.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis', is written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

Huw Lewis AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills

Review of training and professional learning carried out by or on behalf of the Welsh Government during January and July 2014

1. Background

1.1 In recommendation 8, the Public Accounts Committee recommended that the Welsh Government evaluate its policies; such as the development of different forms of training and Continuing Professional Development that relied less on teachers being absent from the classroom and the demands of the regional consortia on schools, and considered the impact these have had on cover requirements.

1.2 In response the Welsh Government has undertaken a review of training and professional learning instigated by the Welsh Government using a sample of activities delivered between 1 January 2014 and July 2014.

1.3 The purpose of the review was to:

- a) identify the type and frequency of face to face training and professional learning activity, undertaken with teachers for that period and the impact on teacher absence.
- b) considered the strengths and weaknesses of approaches
- c) identify key factors and alternative approaches from policy colleagues that could be considered when developing programmes in the future.
- d) identify a range of approaches that could be used in the future.

2. Methodology

2.1 Policy officials were contacted across the Department for Education and Skills to ascertain if they had delivered or commissioned any type of training for teachers.

2.2 Semi structured interviews were undertaken with policy officials who had delivered or commissioned activities within the identified remit of the study.

3. Findings

3.1 The following face to face training and professional learning activity was undertaken with teachers.

The Digital Learning Branch held a series of 21 roadshow events in early 2014 for school and college leaders to introduce the changes being implemented to qualifications in Wales following the Review of Qualifications. 1,482 schools attended and 2,021 teachers were trained. All further training will be offered and delivered in smaller modular sessions of maximum 2.5 hours.

Regional workshops for NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) candidates which were run by the Professional PCs/Consortia in each of the four regions on behalf of the Welsh Government. There were 4 events, one in each consortium with a total of 100 teachers attending.

The Leadership Branch held two full day workshops for participants in the Programme Evaluation Project. Individuals and schools or groups of schools were funded to undertake leadership programmes in exchange for them helping to evaluate the programmes in question.

One workshop was for the opening of the programme and one for the closing. Both events were held in Llandrindod Wells and 70 delegates attended.

The Digital Learning Division held non compulsory two day CPD training sessions for teachers to roll out Hwb and to set up their own learning platform. 1,482 schools attended and 2,021 teachers were trained.

A series of three events to roll out the second tranche of the Lead & Emerging Practitioner Schools Project. The Lead and Emerging Practitioner Schools project enables strong performing secondary and primary schools (the Lead Practitioner School) to be matched with a school that has already begun its improvement journey (the Emerging Practitioner School) to offer support in delivering improvements in standards and performance.

Head teachers were directly invited and they could select the staff they felt appropriate to ensure minimal impact on schools.

The Teaching and Learning Improvement Branch run training events throughout the year for External mentors who mentor NQTs during statutory induction and for those who opt to study the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP). External mentors are required to attend 6 events over the academic year and we currently have 113 school based mentors.

The National Support Programme: Literacy and Numeracy (NSP) was designed to support all schools in Wales to implement the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) by improving the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy, across all subjects from Reception through to year 9. In total 1600 schools were involved.

A wide range of mechanisms were used to deliver the support to schools, including face to face meetings, workshops on specific issues, on-line resources such as film clips and the development of School to School Networks. The NSP also used coaching and mentoring approaches with school staff to embed the variety of approaches being used.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The findings of the interviews suggest that the strengths of face to face approaches to training include:

- more consistent messages are received when delivering key information, opportunities to open up discussions and encourage collaborative and collective sharing,
- a chance for people who do not normally get to go outside of their own school to network with other professionals and colleagues.
- build ongoing peer networks on the subject being delivered as of a result of meeting other teachers

4.2 It is clear that schools and practitioners do find it valuable to network and work with each other face to face but this does put pressure on the school to cover the absent teachers.

4.3 Weaknesses of face to face training and professional learning activity included:

- Allocating adequate cover for released practitioners can be an issue.

Travel across Wales for national events means long travel time for some practitioners, which can be unfair.

Some practitioners are not released because of school commitments and cover issues.

- 4.4 Policy officials all said that ways to improve future events would be to look into innovative ways to use technology to provide CPD such as online forums, webinars, Hwb and learning platforms.
- 4.5 Other options suggested included peer to peer training, training 'experts' to deliver across the profession and splitting training into smaller modules of bespoke training that target direct needs of individuals.
- 4.6 Further improvements including looking into ways to join up regionally and 'piggy back' onto other events to reduce the number of days practitioners need to travel and be away from classrooms.
- 4.7 The Digital Learning Division who held training to roll out Hwb are currently developing a module approach to training and future sessions will be 2 hours and teachers can choose modules relevant to their own CPD.
- 4.8 The Leadership Policy Branch plan to look at options to remove the NPQH training and have sessions with individuals directly.
- 4.9 The Teaching and Learning Improvement Branch are developing a new Masters in Continuing Educational Practice to build on the success of the current programme. The new Masters provision will be flexible and accessible to all practitioners at any stage of their career. It will be delivered in bespoke modules and enable practitioners to take responsibility for their own professional learning and to contribute to the development of a self-sustaining school improvement system.

5. Outcome

- 5.1 The findings of the review will be used to provide guidance to officials so that they can consider a range of delivery options when wanting to provide learning opportunities to the school workforce. This guidance will ensure that a range of approaches can be considered so that the impact of teacher absence from the classroom forms part of the decision making process.