

EB 32
National Assembly for Wales
Children and Young People Committee
Education (Wales) Bill : Stage 1
Response from : GMB

Our ref: MJP/RG

29 August 2013

Dear Colleague

Re: Response to the Hill Review on behalf of the GMB

It is the view of the GMB that the current structure of Education in Wales is no longer fit for purpose. It has become fragmented with too many anomalies and competing elements pulling in different directions. Currently the Welsh Government provides the Policy and Curriculum direction and, in our view, this should remain the case.

Below this 4 Education Consortia have been set up to provide an overall Schools Improvement Service that should in theory standardise the implementation of Education in Wales. However, these Consortia have not been set up using the same model, this has led to some being more effective than others and instead of a consistent approach, we currently have four different directions of travel.

It is our view also that these Consortia are in danger of becoming an alternative power base to the democratically elected Local Education Authorities. It is the view of the GMB that democratic control should be retained by the LEA's who are better placed to provide the leadership and more importantly, the resources needed for schools in their areas to improve.

Having made this point, however, the GMB believes that the number of LEA's/Councils in Wales need to reduce to 7 or 8, thereby allowing for economies of scale to be realised more efficiently and for high quality educationalists to be concentrated into fewer Local Authorities. We believe that this will lead to a higher quality of education in each area and lead to financial savings.

With regard to schools, greater autonomy over the past few years has not necessarily led to an improvement in educational standards. It is our view that schools must have the flexibility to work with Governors and parents to implement the curriculum in such a way that reflects parental choice and local circumstances. However, there are also areas that need to be more centrally controlled. It cannot be right, for example, that issues relating to employment are different in the 22 Local Authorities following Job Evaluation. That casual and temporary employment is widespread with

staff being given termly or annual contracts and where they face redundancy or cuts in hours, as a common occurrence.

It is the GMB's view that there remains a need for a common structure for School support Staff across Wales and for employment terms and conditions to be more consistent e.g. Redeployment rather than Redundancy would lead to more security of employment and a saving to the public purse.

In addition to the above, the Education legislation which is due for implementation from September has two elements on which we would also like to comment:-

1. Continuous Professional Development.

We fully support this development. However, we would suggest that there is a need for a phased implementation so as to take into account the stage that a member finds themselves in their career. We would also recommend that the Welsh Government needs to allocate sufficient funds to cover the costs of training that will lead to an up-skilling of the professional group of staff and provide career paths for promotion. Potentially a training needs analysis to ensure that we have sufficient numbers of TA's, HLTA's and Admin Staff employed across all Local Authorities and Schools in Wales.

Perhaps the Welsh Government could undertake this analysis in conjunction with FE/HE Sector and Trade Unions in Wales thereby leading to a consistent qualification for all School Support Staff to attain.

2. Registration

The GMB again has no problem in principle with School Support Staff becoming registered. However, we would wish to become involved in the details of how this will be implemented and how the registration body in Wales will operate.

We do not support the principle of School Support Staff paying for registration, especially whilst the terms and conditions of School Support Staff remain as dispirit as is the case currently.

We would also recommend that the body be renamed so to reflect the fact that School Support Staff now make up approximately 50% of the workforce. Perhaps we could suggest the General Teaching Council for Wales be renamed the Education Staffs and Teaching Council for Wales.

Finally, we would also recommend that the terms of reference for any misconduct Committees be discussed and agreed. We also recommend that these Committees be made up of the relevant groups of staff dependent upon the appellant e.g. School Support Staff members to hear cases relating to School Support Staff.

I trust that these comments are of assistance? If needed, the GMB would be more than prepared to attend meetings of the Education Committee of the Assembly to expand upon our views if felt appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Mike Payne

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On behalf of the
GMB Wales and South West Region