

National Assembly for Wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee

ST 20

Inquiry into Supply Teaching

Evidence from : NUT 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?

Every school will have a need to call upon the assistance of supply teachers at some time.

Planned use may include securing cover for staff whilst on maternity leave, secondments, CPD courses or school trips. Unplanned cover will typically involve sudden absences due to illness or requests for leave of absence.

Clearly the demand for use of supply teachers is demonstrated by the proliferation of supply teacher agencies that now exist, though it remains NUT policy that it is preferable that supply teachers should ideally be resourced through local authority maintained supply lists. Indeed the practices of supply agencies, and their impact on the motivation, morale and professional development of those who act as supply teachers is arguably the biggest issue with the entire provision.

There is significant variation in the use of supply teachers. The provisions of the workload agreement (in particular rarely cover) have led to increased demands for external cover in schools, many of these at relatively short notice. Given the limited SEG funding for many schools, access to INSET and CPD has declined compared with the situation in the 1990's and the first few years of the last decade.

There is evidence of increased sickness absence in a number of schools which increases the demand for supply cover in these institutions.

Many schools, in the primary sector in particular, are using unqualified staff (LSA's and HLTA's) to provide cover for absences and PPA classes. This results either in child minding or specified work being undertaken by persons unqualified to do it. There should always be a qualified teacher leading a class.

Supply teachers are a common sight in medium to large schools with anecdotal evidence suggesting that in larger secondary schools, the engagement of between three and ten on several days per week is not uncommon.

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

It is not a problem that there is a need for supply teachers. Indeed, utilising supply in order to allow permanent teachers to be released to access professional development and to share best practice within their schools, and with other schools as part of collaboration working, is a real success for the system. It could also be the case that schools may utilise supply cover to address a shortage in subject specialism in their timetables or to enhance their compliment of teachers in a certain field if they are aiming to improve results in those subjects.

However, it very much remains a problem that supply agencies have become increasingly more powerful in controlling this staffing provision and the impact their practices are having, not only on schools and pupils but also on the individual teachers who are registered, often due to having no other alternative, with them.

Further to this the NUT believes that staff absence levels are exacerbated by the pressure caused by excessive workload. These workload issues are resulting in more and more teachers being forced into taking sick leave due to mental health and stress related illnesses.

There is a serious shortage of supply teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh and in some areas specific secondary subjects

are in short supply. In rural Welsh-speaking areas, a body in front of a KS4 class is an achievement. We know of examples where an absent teacher's timetable is being split between at least three staff as no one supply teacher is available in that area for that subject for a full working week.

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

<i>1 - This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	X
<i>2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<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?

Ultimately it is incumbent on a school to ensure that the supply cover they access matches the requirements they have in terms of the gaps in their teaching compliment. Of course this will prove more challenging depending on the nature of the cover. Finding the appropriate supply cover for a pre-planned absence, i.e maternity leave or for training, will be far easier than if it is necessary to find cover for a short-notice unplanned absence due to illness.

One issue that does cause even greater problems for schools is the way in which supply agencies operate. In some areas of Wales for example certain supply agencies will have been given a monopoly to provide cover for schools. This has a very concerning impact on the sorts of relationships schools can build with individuals as well as the way in which they can access cover. Schools, and indeed individual teachers, are very much at the mercy of those supply agencies and so being selective about the criteria of teacher and skill set they require can be outside the gift of the school.

Longer term absences are often managed by rejigging staffing to ensure that target, or vulnerable groups, are taught by teachers employed at the school. Otherwise, it will depend on who is absent.

There is often a mismatch between the subject or key stage required and that in which the supply teacher has experience. Secondary schools often do not cover sixth form classes unless the absence is prolonged – they are unlikely to secure a suitably qualified candidate for a number of A level subjects.

Demand can often be seasonal – transition arrangements, INSET and (in the secondary sector) requirements of external examinations increase demand from April and illness either side of Christmas.

Some NUT members working in the supply sector have reported that they have been asked to cover more than one class at a time, on occasions resulting in them overseeing classes of close to 50 pupils. This is of course unacceptable.

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

NUT Cymru have long argued that it would be more appropriate for local authorities to run their own supply pools which would extend access and make the process far easier to navigate. The benefit of this would be to allow schools to plan more appropriately; to be able to have greater familiarity with the individuals they are employing on supply terms – which would also increase the familiarity of those individuals with the schools and pupils with which they are interacting, as well as map out a better system in terms of matching skills and knowledge with teaching gaps in the council areas they serve.

This would help adequately match the right individuals to the right schools based on the specialisms they require, and the ethos and relationships that have been established at the schools. It would also address the issues of supply agencies having a monopoly on the

professional capital in the system.

Alternatively, if additional funding were available, schools could employ sufficient teachers to act as internal supply teachers. In the current financial climate, this is a pipe dream with many schools facing making existing staff redundant.

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

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

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)?

Where we can ensure that there is a motivated, respected and supported pool of supply teachers there should be no noticeable impact on pupil outcomes.

It has to be accepted that building relationships with pupils is a key factor in how a teacher ensures their students reach their potentials. There is anecdotal evidence that in some schools supply teachers face issues of disruptive behaviour because they are not familiar with the school, its pupils and procedures.

For a supply teacher it can be difficult if they do not know the school setting. However, there is no reason that if those working in supply roles are empowered correctly and provided with access to training as an ongoing issue, they cannot manage pupil behaviour effectively and continue to maintain standards for pupil outcomes when they are in charge of lessons.

The reality at present however is that many supply teachers do not feel they are valued professionals. They are paid a fraction of the agreed rate for a teacher in a fully contracted role; they are denied

adequate pension contributions and, worryingly in terms of standards, the access they are given to professional development when working with supply agencies is virtually non-existent. Where it does take place is rarely focused on developing classroom skills. While some supply teachers may access professional development through their union membership, even this is difficult to take up due to the zero hour contract nature of being associated with a supply agency.

One impact of workload on pupil outcomes in the supply sector, is that teachers hard pressed for time are sometimes tempted to leave work prior to a planned absence which can be easily done by a supply teacher who is not an expert in the subject, rather than work which will extend the pupils but with which the supply teacher might be unfamiliar.

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

Again, NUT Cymru's view is that there should be a supply system that is run by local authorities. This would allow individual teachers to have a greater sense of partnership in the education system; it would address issues around pay and pensions and could create a better system for ensuring that those working through the supply chain can access proper training on new schemes of work, initiatives and specialisms. This would greatly enhance the self-worth of those supply teachers which will have a major impact on motivation and morale and lead to a more empowered supply workforce supporting pupil outcomes, as well as a profession who have a greater consistency of knowledge and skills in relation to what is being taught and how it is being taught in our schools. This will eliminate a large proportion of the variation that can sometimes be seen in teaching quality if a supply teacher without access to ongoing professional development covers lessons on a sporadic basis.

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

<i>1 – This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	X
<i>2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 – This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 – Not a problem.</i>	
Question 4 – What are your views on the Continuous Professional Development of supply teachers and the potential impact of the National Professional Learning Model?	
<p>The sad reality is that for the vast majority of teachers with permanent contracts in schools, access to continuous professional development is almost non-existent. For those working in the supply sector, particularly those fully reliant on supply agencies, this provision does not exist. There may be some training from supply agencies around their priorities. However, not only is this very rare where it does exist it does not focus on the national priorities of the Welsh Government; it does not have a good reputation amongst those who undertake it for developing professional skills, it is not focused on new initiatives or schemes of work and very rarely will help supply teachers maintain let alone enhance their professional capabilities.</p> <p>Some schools will allow supply teachers to attend INSET sessions but cannot afford to pay them unless they are on medium to long term cover and would have been in work anyway. Even in these cases, some schools instruct supply teachers to stay home to save money.</p> <p>The ERW consortium has sought to introduce a pay policy via its LA's which would cap supply teachers' salaries.</p> <p>It should not be underestimated that those individuals who are supply teachers are very capable teachers. They are highly trained and a credit to the profession. However, working through supply agencies leave them increasingly marginalised from the changes that are taking place to policies on an almost daily basis by the Welsh Government and far removed from any high quality industry recognised professional development.</p> <p>The national learning model has thus far not been effective. It has</p>	

sound and laudable ambitions but in an age of shrinking school budgets it is becoming increasingly harder to see how schools will ensure a full complement of staff can be maintained, let alone enhance their professional development. However, where this does happen of course, it is even more difficult to envisage how supply teachers will benefit. If anything the more successful the national learning model, and the new deal CPD that has been suggested more recently by the Minister, the more supply teachers will be left behind due to the restricted access to CPD they get working through supply agencies. Essentially supply agencies are creating a skills gap, particularly in regards to ensuring familiarity and knowledge of new initiatives and frameworks that need to be embedded into the system.

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

Ensuring funding is set aside to allow supply teachers to be able to access CPD as an ongoing entitlement is essential. This could either be done through a central pot that supply teachers could access or through providing the funding for schools who could then make provisions for supply teachers to join their staff, thus improving the economies of scale of the CPD purchase.

Regional consortia should have access to specific funding (not top-sliced from schools' budgets) to provide CPD for supply teachers on a structured regional or sub-regional basis.

Ultimately of course the big barrier to making progress in this field is the fact that many supply teachers, in order to have any access to work, are forced into contracts with agencies who have a monopoly, including preferred supply status, to deliver supply cover for schools. This massively restricts individual's freedom to access CPD and build unilateral relationships with schools.

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

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

X

<i>2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 – This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 – Not a problem.</i>	
Question 5 – What are your views on performance management arrangements for supply teachers?	
<p>What performance management arrangements? Some supply teachers have been eligible for progression for up to six years but have been unable to progress up the incremental scale. Given that some schools try to hold back their own staff on the basis of affordability, this should come as no surprise.</p>	
<p>If you think there are problems in this area, how do you think they could be resolved?</p>	
<p>The new pay policy introduced by Michael Gove was seriously disadvantageous to supply teachers. Problems will continue unless this is reversed. We've already seen this with the ERW consortia's attempt to cut supply teacher's pay via their draft pay policies.</p> <p>In terms of performance management if, as has been argued by NUT Cymru, there was a responsibility for local authorities to run the supply services rather than delegating that role to supply agencies, there would be a clearer approach.</p> <p>NUT Cymru also believe the Welsh Government should work with trade unions and supply teachers to establish a supply teachers charter to maintain quality of training and employment.</p>	
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 6 – Do you consider that local authorities and regional consortia have sufficient oversight of the use of supply teachers?

No. In some areas they have none. In LA's where a pool system still exists, it is little more than a list of available people but is often out of date. LA's lack the capacity (and in some cases the will) to maintain them.

However in many areas it is the case that local authorities and regional consortia have essentially washed their hands of the situation, having simply delegated, and indeed instructed, supply agencies to deliver this provision in full. In some areas, Newport for example, a single supply agency has been given a contract to act as a monopoly on the supply cover. This has not only resulted in the fact that those local authorities have lost all insight into the development and delivery of the supply pool but it has completely undermined the professionalism and professional development of the teachers that are forced to sign restrictive commitments with those agencies.

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

Local authorities would have a far greater understanding of the nature of supply teaching; both in regards to the requirements and use from a schools and individuals perspective, if they took a responsibility for the delivery of this workforce. Re-establishing local authority maintained supply pools would help resolve many of the existing concerns.

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?

Yes. Agencies are more prevalent in some areas than others, in some cases, promoted by LA's. Shortages of supply teachers are worse in some areas and in the Welsh-medium schools. There are serious shortages in some secondary subjects. Some schools make little use of supply teachers for short term absences, preferring to rely on unqualified internal staff.

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

A more uniformed, public sector driven, approach would resolve this inconsistency. However, there is no short-term fix available. This will require the will of tackling the practices, and the dominance, of supply agencies.

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

The practices of supply agencies have caused no end of damage to the morale, motivation, professionalism and standards of supply teaching.

The NUT is fundamentally opposed to the way in which agencies siphon off public money which should be spent on children's education, and is campaigning vigorously to halt the diversion of public funds away from schools and supply teachers into the hands of private businesses

Supply teachers who work via agencies are increasingly employed under inappropriate 'umbrella company' arrangements, under which the employer seeks to avoid UK taxation and the employee is required to pay both employers' and employees' NI contributions to be entitled to state benefits

NQTs, who are in their first year of teaching after qualifying, often struggle to get work and end up being held over a barrel by agencies. Many suffer far lower pay and conditions than their qualifications deserve, not to mention an inability to access pensions or training. They cannot oppose the system as it's the only way they can access work to complete their induction period. It sadly leads to some enthusiastic and promising young teachers simply leaving the profession.

Supply agency teachers are not entitled to membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme, not least because agencies themselves are unable to offer their teachers membership of the TPS. The NUT continues to campaign to allow agency supply teachers access to the TPS in common with other teachers.

Supply agencies have led to teachers who work in this field receiving limited or no access to professional development. This is a significant failing in the ambition to ensure Wales has a leading education workforce.

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

In regards to the issues with NQTs, and as a short-term measure, NUT Cymru have in the past proposed that the Welsh Government delivers a very positive policy that will guarantee an offer of work for 12 months in a maintained school for individuals to complete their induction. This will reduce class sizes and help to raise standards while in the process reducing the reliance on supply agencies amongst new practitioners. This is a policy the Welsh Government

can bring into action relatively quickly which will have a noticeable impact on the profession.

In the medium-term phasing out the exclusivity contracts afforded to supply agencies which restrict the ability of schools and teachers to find sustainable working relationships at fair and equitable conditions of service should be examined.

In the long-term there should be a return to in-house supply services run by the public sector for the good of teachers and pupils rather than for huge profits at the public expense.

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

1 - This is a key, urgent problem.

X

2 - This is a problem that needs to be addressed.

3 - This is a minor problem

4 - Not a problem.

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

As stated above there is a serious shortage of supply teachers able to teach through the medium of Welsh and in some areas specific secondary subjects are in short supply. In rural Welsh-speaking areas, a body in front of a KS4 class is an achievement.

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

There is a sabbatical scheme for improving language skill and creating access to this, in its proper form with a funding commitment for it, should be more readily available. We would question how many, if any, supply teachers are able to take advantage of the scheme to ensure they are proficient at teaching Welsh or through the medium of Welsh. Allowing practitioners that wish to learn Welsh or improve their Welsh to immerse themselves in the language for a

defined period of time would be hugely beneficial to ensuring proficiency exists across institutions	
How significant is this issue? (Please select one option)	
<i>1 – This is a key, urgent problem.</i>	X
<i>2 – This is a problem that needs to be addressed.</i>	
<i>3 – This is a minor problem</i>	
<i>4 – Not a problem.</i>	
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?	
<p>We cannot separate the following in importance: take steps to reduce workload-related absence and, therefore, the demand for supply teachers, and deal with the pay and employment issues facing supply teachers (often but not exclusively employed by agencies) to increase availability.</p>	
Question 11 – Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered by the specific questions?	
<p>We would highly recommend that you visit this survey conducted by the NUT into the issue for supply with our members.</p> <p>https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/supply-teacher-survey-aug-14-am_0.pdf</p> <p>While it is not strictly an exclusive survey of only Welsh members many respondents do work, and have worked, in Wales and the concerns that are highlighted are evident in both nations.</p>	