

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, the three national park authorities and the three fire and rescue authorities.
2. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh Local Government and the communities they serve.
3. The WLGA welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Supply Teaching. In drafting this response the WLGA is guided by a number of key principles which underpin the work of the Association. The WLGA believes that decisions about services should be taken as close point of delivery as possible and that the people and communities using those services should be as engaged as possible in their delivery. It is also our belief that local services should be provided within a democratic framework of local accountability.
4. The WLGA recognises that it is the role of the Welsh Government to set the strategic framework and policy direction for services at a national level and that it is the role of local government to deliver those services taking account of the local circumstances and pressures. It is also recognised that services must be provided within a proportionate but effective regulatory framework to ensure that public resources are used appropriately and that services are delivered effectively and efficiently.
5. The WLGA has consistently argued for an un-hypothecated revenue support grant (RSG) as the best way of funding local government and any new responsibilities or additional burdens placed on local government should be fully costed and appropriately funded.



6. The WLGA recognises that some policy initiatives or strategies need to have funding attached to them for specific periods of time to make sure that they become embedded and are delivered as intended. For this reason, the WLGA, by exception, supports the use of specific grants or the ring fencing of revenue funding for specified purposes on the understanding that funding will eventually return to the RSG.
7. The Wales Audit Office and Estyn undertook a thematic inspection of the impact of teacher absence in 2013 which resulted in a number of recommendations being made to Welsh Government, local authorities and schools. Although managing teacher absence is the responsibility of individual schools local authorities recognise that they have a role to play to support schools with this issue. Following the publication of the Esytyn and Wales Audit Office report the WLGA worked closely with Welsh Government and local authorities to highlight the issues raised in the report to ensure that local authorities and schools were aware of the recommendations.
8. The Wales Audit Office (WAO) estimated in 2013 that just under 10% of lessons were taken by staff who were not the usual class teacher. This estimate includes cover being provided for teacher absence by other teachers, or support staff within the school, as well as cover from supply teachers. The General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) has over four and half thousand teachers registered as supply teachers which represents approximately 13% of registered teachers in Wales. The use of supply teachers by schools is both necessary and effective in covering teacher absence particularly for planned or long-term absence. Since the introduction of the teachers workforce agreement teachers within a school need only provide cover where the absence is unforeseen, the 'rarely cover' agreement.
9. The report from Estyn and the WAO provided evidence that there was an impact on learners from teacher absence and that in some instances this caused disruption to lessons and problems with the behaviour of pupils. Some of these effects were mitigated in primary schools by the use of Higher Level Teachers Teaching Assistants (HLTAs). Where local authorities and schools work closely with supply agencies the effective matching of the skills and qualifications of supply teachers to particular classes and activities is possible for schools to manage. It should be considered however, that in some circumstances this is not always possible, for example, if supply cover is needed quickly. Many local authorities working with preferred providers monitor how schools are using supply teachers through regular

meetings with agencies and by seeking feedback from schools on the use of supply teachers. Working closely with providers gives the opportunity for schools and local authorities to tailor supply cover to the need, particularly when managing long term or planned absence.

10. Wherever possible schools and local authorities seek to minimise the impact on learners from teacher absence and the use of supply teaching. The Estyn and WAO report demonstrated that teacher absence did have an impact on learners at the time of their report. Since that time local authorities and schools have worked with Welsh Government to examine the recommendations in that report. A particular strand of work has been to look at monitoring the use of supply cover effectively, including seeking feedback when supply teachers have been used. Work has also been undertaken to strengthen guidance for school and local authorities on safeguarding issues when looking to use supply teachers. In addition, the provision of appropriate information for supply teachers when they enter a school for the first time has been highlighted. If supply teachers receive accurate information about where the class is and what is expected for the coming lessons before they cover a class this can help them to deliver appropriately targeted lessons.
 11. It is essential that supply teachers have access to up to date continuous professional development opportunities. There are a number of ways that this can be achieved and is the subject of discussion during the development of the new Education Workforce Council (which replaces the GTCW). Working with preferred providers local authorities and schools can include supply teachers who work regularly within their area in local CPD arrangements. This provides formal professional development and also enables supply teachers to gain more informal knowledge about the schools and teachers within that area. This approach can be augmented by enabling access for supply teachers to national training and development opportunities. Given that over a third of registered supply teachers have qualified within the last 5 years, it is essential that they take an active part in CPD opportunities.
 12. In conclusion the use of supply teachers in schools is necessary to cover teachers absence in some circumstances. The management of teacher absence is the responsibility of schools, however, local authorities in Wales are working with schools and with supply teacher providers to ensure that children and young people are not disadvantaged by teacher absence or the use of supply teachers.
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