

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05- 727
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/00364/17

Mike Hedges AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales

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7 March 2017

Dear Mike

P-05-727 Funding for the Education Workforce Council Registration Fee for Learning Support Workers

Thank you for your letter dated 27 February, regarding concerns and questions raised by Unison in their recent correspondence to your Committee.

Can I begin by stating that I do firmly believe that the registration of learning support workers will ensure they are part of a credible and valued workforce. Registration will also raise the status and recognition of these practitioners and that of youth workers and work based learning practitioners (from April 2017).

Another important factor which appears to have been missed is that registration of learning support workers and the wider workforce provides reassurance to parents, learners, employers and the general public that staff, are deemed suitable for registration. I am sure all members of the Petitions Committee will agree that is a very important element of registration.

The development of professional standards for those who directly support teaching and learning is underway. A workshop was held on 13 February, led by Professor Mick Waters, which was well attended by support staff practitioners and by representatives of UNISON. A further workshop is scheduled for 13 March to maintain momentum. It is envisaged this work will result in professional standards that reflect the valuable role learning support staff play in securing high quality teaching and learning. This will also provide an opportunity to review the Higher Level Teaching Assistant Standards which have been in place, with minor amendment, since 2005 and so better support career progression for this sector of the workforce.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In addition, the development of the Professional Learning Passport will also be beneficial to all Education Workforce Council (EWC) registrants; providing practitioners with a tool to empower them to reflect and identify their own professional learning needs and record this in one place, in continuing to develop and deepen their practice at every stage of their career. This will be to the benefit of our learners, practitioners and the wider workforce.

The Education Workforce Council is responsible for and sets its own Code of Conduct and Practice for all registrants. The Education (Wales) Act 2014 states that the EWC will make such revisions to Code of Conduct and Practice when they consider appropriate within 3 years of each date of its publication, and when a new category of registration is added. UNISON should be aware of the fact that the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice was developed by the EWC Independent Reference Group, which included representatives of the learning support sector. A draft code of conduct was also presented to the Union Partnership Group for comment, for which Jess Turner is a member.

Turning to the fee level, I am baffled by the UNISON statement that the fee level for learning support workers has already increased, as this is simply not the case. Their fee level contribution from April 2017 will remain at the same level as it was set in April 2016, when their registration requirement was first put in place. This is something I made clear during the debate on the 2017 Fees Regulations on 31st January.

In setting the fee models for the 'Registration fees for the education workforce in Wales 2017' consultation, there was clear recognition that during these times of austerity and on-going pay freezes in the public sector, the Welsh Government had a duty to protect the education workforce from unnecessarily high fee levels or increases.

The fee models proposed were developed with three key principles in mind; sustainability, proportionality and cost effectiveness. Creating a model with differentiated fees based on salary scales was considered in the development of the Education (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). However, further analysis suggested that this method would be extremely complex to administer, and consequently more costly. Higher administration costs would lead to higher fees for all registrants.

It is for these reasons the General Teaching Council for Wales did not have a differential system for teachers, despite there being some 5000 supply teachers on the register who do not work full time; and why the Welsh Government does not intend to differentiate between those working full and part time, as is the case with the regulatory bodies in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, and the Care Council for Wales - the only other regulatory body specific to Wales.

However, the Government has endeavoured to ensure that fees associated with registration are fair and comparable to practitioners' potential earnings within their categories of registration (as set out in Schedule 2 of the Act).

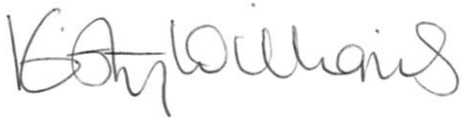
Furthermore, the transfer of £1million from the Revenue Support Grant to support the registration subsidy for all practitioners will not be in place until April 2017, therefore concerns over its removal are slightly premature. I can, however, assure you that there are no plans to take such action.

The requirement for registration with the EWC is the same as those within any other regulatory body, such as the General Medical Council; Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Health and Care Professionals Council. Professionals in these sectors are also required to fund their own registration as a requirement of employment, with fees averaging between £80-120 per year. By comparison, registration with the EWC is considerably lower.

Finally, it is a matter for each individual local authority to determine whether the cost of registration is met by them as the employer.

I trust you find this response satisfactory.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

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