



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Cyfrifon Cyhoeddus **The Public Accounts Committee**

Dydd Mawrth, 15 Hydref 2013
Tuesday, 15 October 2013

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir
trawsgripiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are recorded in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In
addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jocelyn Davies	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Mike Hedges	Llafur Labour
Sandy Mewies	Llafur Labour
Darren Millar	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone	Llafur Labour
Aled Roberts	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Stephen Martin	Rheolwr Archwilio Perfformiad, Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Performance Audit Manager, Wales Audit Office
Meilyr Rowlands	Cyfarwyddwr Strategol, Estyn Strategic Director, Estyn
Huw Vaughan Thomas	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Fay Buckle	Clerc Clerk
Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Joanest Jackson	Uwch-gynghorydd Cyfreithiol Senior Legal Adviser

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:00.
The meeting began at 09:00.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Darren Millar:** Good morning, everybody, and welcome to today's meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. I remind everybody that the National Assembly for Wales is a bilingual institution and that people should feel free to contribute to this meeting in either English or Welsh, as they see fit. Headsets are available for translation for those who require them. The headsets can also be used for sound amplification, should you need it. We encourage Members and witnesses to turn off their mobile phones and other electronic equipment because they can interfere with the broadcasting and other equipment. In the event of a fire alarm, we should follow the instructions of the ushers, who, hopefully, will get us out

safely. We have not received any apologies this morning, so we will go straight into item 2 on our agenda.

09:01

**Trefniadau Cyflenwi ar gyfer Absenoldeb Athrawon: Sesiwn Frifffio gan
Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
Covering Teachers' Absence: Briefing from the Wales Audit Office**

[2] **Darren Millar:** I am very pleased to welcome the auditor general to the table, along with Stephen Martin from the Wales Audit Office, and Meilyr Rowlands from Estyn, who is joining the committee today to support this part of our meeting. So, it is over to you, Huw.

[3] **Mr Thomas:** Thank you, Chair. For this report, we examined the arrangements for covering teachers' absence in schools. There will always be a need for cover, obviously, when teachers are inevitably absent from the classroom, but we considered whether learners, schools and the public purse were well served by the present arrangements. Our overall conclusion was that arrangements for covering teachers' absence in Wales were not sufficiently well managed to support learners' progress nor provide the best use of resources. As you note from Meilyr joining us today, we carried out our field work jointly with Estyn, which is doing a remit study for the Minister on the impact of teachers' absence. The Estyn findings were published in its report 'The Impact of Teacher Absence' and it found that when the usual class teacher was absent, learners make less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding, and learners' behaviour is often worse, particularly in secondary schools. It concluded that teacher absence impacts on pupils across the ability range, and the largest negative impact is in secondary schools, particular during key stage 3—ages 11 to 14.

[4] Our report recognises this impact, but looks at the cost and value for money of the arrangement and at the factors that help, or are a barrier to, effective cover arrangements. We found that expenditure on supply cover is not always managed effectively. Spending on cover is rising, despite increased use of supply agency staff, who generally cost less to schools than supply teachers employed directly by them. Total expenditure on cover was about £54 million in 2011-12, but there is no monitoring of this expenditure by the Welsh Government nor by local authorities. The extent of cover is increasing. We estimate that the number of days covered rose by about 10% between 2008-09 and 2011-12. Around 10% of lessons were being covered because of teacher absence and we found that neither schools nor local authorities routinely monitor the number of cover lessons, nor the reasons for absence. As a result, obviously, they do not know therefore the reasons for absence and cannot identify classes experiencing lots of cover.

[5] Sickness absence by teachers accounts for about half of the absences. Sickness absence among teachers has reduced slightly in recent years, but it still averages about seven days per teacher in Wales, compared with four and a half in England. This difference equates to about 60,000 days of cover and costs of about £9 million. So, while schools are generally able to provide cover for absent teachers, most schools do not have formal policies on cover arrangements, do not monitor the quality of covered lessons, and many do not provide supply staff with sufficient support to enable them to perform well. We concluded that schools could make more effective use of recruitment, for example by paying more attention to the training and quality of staff, and that there is scope for schools to collaborate more to improve arrangements for cover.

[6] In my report are several examples of good practice and a list of features found in schools with the best approach to cover arrangements. I make a number of recommendations

to the Welsh Government, aimed at encouraging the Welsh Government, local authorities and schools to take greater account of the impact of teacher absence in policies and strategies for improvement; to reduce the need for covered lessons, including concentrating on attendance management; developing model policies on management cover and procurement cover; ensuring that supply teachers are able to complete their induction, and that they receive training in Welsh Government priorities such as literacy and numeracy; and to ensure that supply staff have the necessary information and support to keep pupils safe.

[7] Other recommendations in my report and in that of Estyn are directed at schools and local authorities, and the Welsh Government has already indicated that it accepts all the recommendations in Estyn's report to the Minister for Education and Skills. However, there are several areas that the committee may wish to explore further with the Welsh Government, and with other relevant parties, including: whether the Welsh Government accepts that the number of lessons that are covered is too high, and presents a barrier to its improvement agenda; how the Welsh Government will ensure that its own training programmes and improvement initiatives do not lead to more teacher absence from the classroom; what the Welsh Government can do to improve the management of sickness absence in schools, to bring it down to at least the level that is reported in England; what the Welsh Government can do to spread good practice in managing cover throughout Welsh schools; how the Welsh Government will monitor the effectiveness of arrangements that have been recently introduced, to enable supply teachers to complete their induction period and demonstrate that they are meeting the practising teacher standards; and what the Welsh Government will do to ensure that supply agencies provide value for money for schools, and that any future national contracts reflect quality standards and Welsh Government priorities.

[8] **Darren Millar:** Thank you for those opening remarks. I think that the one thing that struck me from the report was this correlation between absence and low levels of attainment among schoolchildren. I wonder whether there is a direct relationship in those local authorities with high levels of lessons being covered—are they the local authorities where the underachievement levels in schools appear to be higher? Is it as simple as that? Perhaps Meilyr would be able to help us with that.

[9] **Mr Rowlands:** In this particular report, we did not look at that analysis. I suspect that you are right, but we would need to go away and check that.

[10] **Darren Millar:** It would be relatively easy to get that information, I would assume.

[11] **Mr Rowlands:** Yes, I think you are right—it would be easy to do it. I think that what you are asking is whether there is a correlation between teacher absence and underachievement.

[12] **Darren Millar:** Yes—it points to it in the report, you see. However, it does not say directly, or does not paint a picture across Wales, to determine—

[13] **Mr Martin:** May I come in on this point? In the individual schools that we visited, we found specific examples where there was a link that was retrospectively being made between groups of pupils who did not achieve the expected levels and sustained teacher absence. The local authority level, of course, is an aggregation of those schools. Therefore, while we found that at some of the individual schools that we visited, there are so many other factors that relate to the local authority level attainment that we were not able to make a general point that we could relate specifically back to the level of cover, as opposed to lots of other things that might be happening in the local authority. Therefore, we found specific schools where that was the case, but the data are not really robust enough to be able to identify local authority difference in performance being down to cover arrangements.

[14] **Darren Millar:** I would assume—and you have this average of 10% of lessons being covered because of teacher absence, in one way or another—that you have that information by local authority.

[15] **Mr Martin:** No, we got it from several different routes. We did a census of the schools that we visited in the fieldwork, and we asked them to give us the actual number of lessons that were covered in a two-week period, and who covered them, and we used that as a breakdown. We also worked from the other end and looked at how much was being spent, and how that relates to the equivalent in teacher days, and compared that to the total number of days that were being taught. So, we have come at it from two ways, both of which end up with around 9.5%.

[16] **Darren Millar:** I see, but you have that data by local authority so that you can see which local authorities have the higher rates of teacher cover requirements.

[17] **Mr Martin:** No, we have the data about the expenditure by local authority. We do not have the number of covered lessons by local authority. We have their expenditure. You can extrapolate, but we do not have a cover level—

[18] **Darren Millar:** I suppose that my general point is whether attainment and achievement in those local authorities with higher costs in relation to teacher absence is worse.

[19] **Mr Martin:** We certainly believe it to be the case that covered lessons have a detrimental effect on pupil progress.

[20] **Mr Thomas:** Which we have been able to demonstrate by looking at the individual schools.

[21] **Darren Millar:** Okay. I have three members who want to come in—Jocelyn, then Mike and then Sandy.

[22] **Jocelyn Davies:** Is there evidence that having a teacher off sick and the lesson being covered affects children? Is there actual evidence? Even if there is a direct correlation, it might be caused by another factor. For example, poor leadership at school level can cause stress and sickness absence among teachers and affect attainment. So, a correlation does not mean cause and effect.

[23] **Mr Martin:** We found that pupils told us that when the lesson was covered, too often, they did not have a lesson; they were looked after.

[24] **Jocelyn Davies:** That is not covered then.

[25] **Mr Martin:** They had a teacher at the front of the class, but they were not progressing. They told us that in cases where they did progress in the lesson, they would often repeat that lesson when the regular teacher came back, so they did not give it as much attention. They told us that they would often do their work not in their usual work books and it would not be assessed and recorded in the school status system; they would do it on separate sheets of paper, which may or may not be collected and marked. Therefore, we were satisfied that, in a significant proportion of lessons, pupils did not think that they were progressing very well and that the lessons were not as satisfactory as one would like to see. That was corroborated by the supply teachers whom we spoke to, who said that while there were good schools and schools where they got lesson plans and were able to help pupils to progress, there were too many where they turned up and were not given adequate information, either about the content of the lessons that they were expected to teach, or about the pupils in

the class, so that they could tailor the teaching to the particular needs of the pupils. So, we were left with the concern that in too many of the lessons, the teaching was not helping the pupils to progress in the way in which everyone would like to see that happen.

[26] However, not all supply teaching is bad and we saw some excellent examples of some schools where they made sure that the supply teachers were well prepared. Also, high-level teaching assistants were also covering some of the lessons and doing some very good work.

[27] **Mike Hedges:** In the further education sector, where it is mostly done with internal cover, it should not be affected. My question is to Estyn: if we accept everything that is said here and if I look at the five schools that are bottom of the lowest band, will I find that they have the highest level of teacher absences?

[28] **Mr Rowlands:** Not necessarily. This is the same sort of question in a different guise. I agree with what has been said so far. In terms of individual lessons, we generally found that covered lessons were not as effective as lessons taught by the normal teacher. I think that there is very little disagreement with that finding. However, if you are asking about attainment and achievement at school level, or even local authority level, there are so many other factors involved in what makes a successful school, or a successful local authority, it is very unlikely that you can generalise from that. That is just one element of a whole number. As you say, it is difficult, even if there was a correlation, to say that there is a causal link. Nevertheless, we firmly believe that it is one factor that should be tackled and improved. That does not mean that you can say that the bottom five schools in terms of attainment are definitely going to be the bottom five schools in terms of sickness.

09:15

[29] **Darren Millar:** Okay; thank you. I now turn to Sandy, and then Aled.

[30] **Sandy Mewies:** I thought that you made a very good point, actually. Yes, there is general agreement, I think, that a covered lesson may not be as satisfactory as one where you would have the normal teacher there. However, there again you could have the normal teacher there all of the time and the attainment still not being what it should be. I think that Mr Martin made the point that you talked to the children and that you saw a lot of photocopied worksheets. Did you see a lot of those?

[31] **Mr Martin:** Yes, they were being used in some places.

[32] **Sandy Mewies:** So, they were a bit ad hoc, or not part of the progression.

[33] **Mr Martin:** We saw a whole range. I did some of the visits, but colleagues did the majority of them. Schools will regularly use the same group of supply teachers, some of whom will be very experienced teachers, and some of whom will have retired, who will have in their bag, if you like, a lot of material and a lot of experience, which means that they can occupy a class effectively in a number of subjects and they can manage behaviour. Schools like that and it is helpful, but it does not necessarily take those pupils forward in the course of learning that they were embarked on in that subject. So, we had the whole range, from classes that had videos to watch or were joined with others in an assembly hall, to those that had very good teaching, but the overall quality left a lot to be desired, we thought. I visited one school, which had a Welsh-medium part, where one of the experienced teachers would say, 'I will do any lesson in Welsh', and did all the cover, and the other person that I spoke to did any lesson in English apart from modern languages, I think. So, they were not subject specialists being used as subject specialists in a secondary school.

[34] One of the difficulties with making the correlation directly to attainment is that there

is a disproportionate effect on different cohorts of pupils, so that schools will often try to make sure that year 10 and year 11 pupils—the exam classes—are not greatly affected by absence. We found that some of the year 9 pupils—key stage 3—are likely to be more affected, but, obviously, it will be two or three years before that may have an impact on their GCSE-level attainment or published attainment. Some of the primary schools, where they have two-form entry, where you have two teachers teaching in parallel classes with the same lesson plans, often with a teaching assistant and other shared provision, have less of an issue, perhaps, because they are doing the same thing in two classes.

[35] **Mr Rowlands:** The only thing that I would add is that there is a variation in the quality of teaching of permanent and supply staff. So, these are generalisations that we are making. However, one point that we can make is that there is less self-evaluation by schools, less monitoring, and less quality assurance of the supply cover side of the school, if you like. So, although there are mechanisms in place to improve less-good permanent staff, and to spread the good practice of the better ones and so forth, there is less of that type of work going on with the supply teacher side.

[36] **Darren Millar:** Aled, you wanted to come in on this.

[37] **Aled Roberts:** Pan fyddwch yn cynnal arolwg mewn ysgol, a yw'n amlwg bod hon wedi dod yn broses weinyddol yn hytrach na phroses o ddysgu, lle mae staff gweinyddol yn gyfrifol am drefnu staff cyflenwi, lle nid oes cyfrifoldeb gan y pennaeth i sicrhau bod arbenigedd pynciau yn cael ei drafod? Efallai nad oes digon o gyfrifoldeb gan benaethiaid adrannau i sicrhau bod y gwersi'n cael eu cyflwyno yn hytrach na, fel rydym wedi clywed, fod rhyw fath o broses rheoli ymddygiad yn unig.

Aled Roberts: When you carry out an inspection in a school, is it apparent that this has become an administrative process rather than a teaching process, whereby administrative staff are responsible for arranging supply staff, where no responsibility lies with the head to ensure that expertise in the subject area is being considered? Perhaps the heads of department do not have enough responsibility for ensuring that lessons are taught rather than, as we have heard, it being a matter of behaviour management alone.

[38] **Mr Rowlands:** Mae hwnnw'n bwynt da iawn. Yr hyn y gwnaethom ei ffeindio oedd bod amrywiaeth eang iawn yn yr hyn sy'n digwydd mewn ysgolion. Mae rhai ysgolion yn sicrhau bod gwersi go iawn yn cael eu dysgu. Mewn sefyllfaoedd eraill, fel rydych yn gweud, rhywbeth hollol weinyddol yw e—dim ond gwneud yn siŵr bod y plant yn ymddwyn yn iawn. Felly, mae amrywiaeth ac un o'r pethau sy'n ein poeni yw ystod yr amrywiaeth honno.

Mr Rowlands: That is a very good point. We found that there was a very wide variety in what is happening in schools. Some schools ensure that genuine lessons are being taught. In other situations, as you say, it is a totally administrative exercise—just ensuring that the children behave properly. So, there is a variety, and one of the things that concern us is the range of those variations.

[39] Fel rydych yn gweud, mae diffyg arweiniad gan y prifathrawon mewn rhai ysgolion. Mae gordefnydd o brifathrawon mewn rhai ysgolion eraill. Maen nhw'n cymryd y gwersi eu hunain, ac mae hynny'n golygu nad oes digon o amser ganddynt i reoli'r ysgol, yn enwedig mewn ysgolion bach cynradd.

As you say, there is a lack of leadership by headteachers in some schools. There is overuse of headteachers in some other schools. They take the lessons themselves, and that means that they have insufficient time to manage the school, particularly in small primary schools.

[40] Rydych hefyd yn iawn i ddweud y You are also right to say that heads of

dylai penaethiaid adran fod yn cymryd mwy o gyfrifoldeb. Un o'r prif argymhellion sydd gennym yw y dylai gwaith go iawn gael ei osod ar gyfer y gwersi hynny. Mewn ysgol uwchradd, byddai'r prif gyfrifoldeb am hynny gan bennaeth yr adran. Mae hynny yn digwydd mewn rhai ysgolion, ond nid mewn ysgolion eraill. Weithiau, mae'n dibynnu ar ystod y gwaeledd. Os yw rhywun i ffwrdd am amser hir, efallai y byddant yn gwneud yn siŵr bod athro arbenigol yn dod mewn i ddysgu'r wers honno, ond os yw'r absenoldeb yn un byr, mae'n bosibl na fydd arbenigwr pwnc yn dysgu'r wers. Felly, mae'r pictiwr yn amrywiol iawn.

departments should be taking more responsibility. One of the main recommendations that we have is that genuine work should be set for those lessons. In secondary schools, the main responsibility for that lies with the heads of departments. That happens in some schools, but, in other schools, it does not. Sometimes, it depends on the period of sickness. If somebody is away for a long time, maybe they will make sure that a specialist teacher comes in to teach that lesson, but if the absence is a short-term one, it is possible that a specialist will not be teaching that lesson. Therefore, the picture does vary greatly.

[41] **Darren Millar:** Okay, I am keen to make some progress with the meeting. We have lots of questions that we want to ask you. So, you have already confirmed that the monitoring arrangements are not generally in place or are not sufficient either in schools, in local authorities or at Welsh Government level. I am going to call Oscar next.

[42] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. I think that it is a pretty damning report. Reading through it, I see that 30% of supply teachers do not have or rarely have any information about the schools. It is not that good. Is there any standard guidance about what should be provided for a covered lesson?

[43] **Mr Rowlands:** No, not that I am aware of. Different schools will have different policies about what should be done, and also, as I indicated in the previous answer, it might be different for the different lengths of sickness. So, for a one-off lesson, a school might just cover that lesson with a non-specialist, but as the period of teacher absence got longer, a school would make more effort to make sure that proper lessons were taught, proper work was set and that there was a subject specialist. However, there are no regulations covering this, and it will just depend on what is available and the policy of individual schools.

[44] **Darren Millar:** So, there is no guidance at all, from either local authorities or the Welsh Government, to individual schools in terms of requiring that a lesson plan is provided or anything like that.

[45] **Mr Rowlands:** These lessons are no different to any other lessons. So, the normal guidance that applies to any other lesson would apply. The national curriculum applies to the school as a whole and that sort of thing.

[46] **Mr Thomas:** I think that the point that we are trying to make is that this is happening in schools, but it seems to be happening without proper understanding or management by the local authorities or the Welsh Government of the increasing use of cover and the cost of that cover.

[47] **Darren Millar:** Julie is next and then Jenny and Mike.

[48] **Julie Morgan:** When you talk about long absences, were you looking at suspensions as well?

[49] **Mr Martin:** Suspensions would be included in some of the data. Actually, they did not feature in the schools that we visited as a significant factor. They did, obviously, in some of the local authorities, but not in individual schools.

[50] **Julie Morgan:** In Cardiff, we have had examples where teachers and headteachers have been suspended for very long periods of time, and really there is huge concern about how the education of the children has benefited—or maybe suffered—from that. So, you did not produce any evidence in that sort of situation.

[51] **Mr Martin:** No, although we heard evidence that sometimes suspensions were part of processes that were taking too long. We also heard a feeling in some cases that, where teachers had been on long-term absence, return to work arrangements and the support that they were given left their absences too long. There were a number of issues that were being raised in relation to the higher level of overall absence of teachers from the classroom, but we did not give a lot of specific attention to suspensions.

[52] **Mr Rowlands:** You are clearly right that suspensions do cause a lot of uncertainty in schools, and the result of that is people do not actually know when the suspension is coming to an end, and that sort of thing. It does create difficulties for schools to know whether to put in a permanent teacher to cover for those. So, there is ad hoc anecdotal evidence of it causing problems, yes.

[53] **Julie Morgan:** Do you think something should be done about this—that there should be guidance about these suspension issues?

[54] **Mr Rowlands:** That would be if guidance is possible. Most of those situations are one-off situations that are quite difficult, but if it were possible to produce guidance, yes, that would be helpful. I cannot imagine what the guidance would look like exactly.

[55] **Julie Morgan:** Maybe there could be a limit on the time.

[56] **Mr Rowlands:** Yes, maybe.

[57] **Darren Millar:** Thanks, Julie. I call Jenny and then Mike.

[58] **Jenny Rathbone:** I just wanted to go back to Oscar's question because there are different forms of absences, and I am thinking of the most difficult to deal with, which is where somebody becomes ill overnight. Surely, in those cases, if lesson plans are in place, then that is the lesson that will be taught by the person who is covering for the individual who is sick. Why is Estyn not ensuring that lesson plans are in place?

[59] **Mr Rowlands:** Absolutely, they should be in place, and the cover teacher should be able to deliver them, but what we have found is that that is not always the case—maybe lesson plans are not in place or maybe the school feels that the cover teacher is not able to present the lesson, for various reasons, such as their not having the subject expertise. There are a number of reasons why that might not be the case. But, it is certainly our recommendation to make sure that proper work is set.

[60] **Mike Hedges:** Even if there is not a lesson plan, there is a scheme of work, and if you look at primary schools, anybody coming in should be capable of teaching any lesson within the primary school, where you do not have subject specialists. Consequently, they should be obliged to follow a scheme of work or a lesson plan, which should exist, but may not if the teacher has been off for several weeks.

[61] **Mr Rowlands:** It is true that we found less of a problem in primary schools for that very reason—that you do not have to be a specialist. There is often more joint working amongst staff in primary schools. There might be a teaching assistant who might be able to give some guidance on how to interpret the lesson plan or the scheme of work, and therefore

there tend to be fewer problems with short-term absence in primary schools.

09:30

[62] **Aled Roberts:** Roedd marc safon hyd at 2011, a'i bwrpas oedd codi ansawdd y staff cyflenwi. Derbyniodd y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc dystiolaeth yr wythnos diwethaf oddi wrth rai o'r asiantaethau a ddywedodd na ddylai'r marc safon fod wedi cael ei ddileu. Dywedodd Llywodraeth Cymru ar y pryd fod y marc safon yn aneffeithiol a bod y safonau heb godi. Beth yw eich barn chi ar y marc safon? A oes angen i un o'r asiantaethau neu lywodraeth leol ddefnyddio'r fath system?

Aled Roberts: There was a quality mark until 2011, whose purpose was to raise the standard of supply staff. The Children and Young People Committee last week received evidence from some of the agencies, which stated that the quality mark should not have been got rid of. The Welsh Government said at the time that the quality mark was ineffective and that standards had not improved. What is your view on the quality mark? Is there a need for one of the agencies or for local government to use such a system?

[63] **Mr Martin:** On the issue of whether it had improved or not, the quality mark suffered because there was insufficient involvement from educational people in setting it up. It was not being followed through to ensure that the quality was there; it was more about the delivery on time of a teacher. It did not ensure, for instance, that the teacher had passed or had made suitable induction arrangements if they had not reached the appropriate standards. We probably felt that it needed improving as a quality mark, rather than doing away with, but, at that time, not only was it done away with, things such as bursaries that were available through the general teaching council that were helping with the training of supply teachers were also done away with. There were a number of things that, of themselves, were felt not to be very effective, but, rather than making them more effective, there was a stepping back from the process.

[64] There are some difficulties with it. Local authorities, by and large, were not requiring schools to use only agencies that had the quality mark—in Wales, most agencies do not have the quality mark and they were still being used. So, if you do use a quality mark, you need to make sure that it is being followed through and that the approach is being supported.

[65] The next phase was the establishment of a national framework contract for supply teachers—or, rather, two contracts: one for north Wales and one for south Wales, for which there was competitive tendering. However, again, the quality indicators in those were the same ones that applied to the provision of agency staff across the public sector; they were not education-specific. The opportunity was not taken to address some of the things that we are talking about this morning. So, one of our recommendations is that, in the next round of procurement under the framework, which will come late this year or early 2014, the Department for Education and Skills, and others from schools and local authorities, are involved in it to a much greater extent than they were last time.

[66] **Mr Thomas:** And also set quality standards. It is one thing to say, 'You are not reaching them', as they did, but simply getting rid of the quality mark and not leaving anything in its place was not the answer.

[67] **Aled Roberts:** That is interesting; it is a very different take to last week. It might explain why we were asking some of our questions last week but did not get those answers.

[68] **Darren Millar:** Okay. Diolch. Julie is next.

[69] **Julie Morgan:** You have referred to examples of good practice, and I notice that as one case you use Cardiff Council, which has had an above average spend but has now started

to reduce it by certain mechanisms. Did you see much good practice throughout Wales?

[70] **Mr Martin:** Some.

[71] **Julie Morgan:** Some. Right.

[72] **Mr Martin:** Yes, and of different kinds. The first step towards it is obviously an awareness of what is happening. The issues that we were just talking about, such as disciplinary action or different forms of absence, become tackled only when people are aware of how much of an impact they have. In some of the schools, it was financial straits that led to people asking, 'Well, what's really happening here?' and finding that, not only could they do better in getting better teaching for their pupils, but they could do it at a better cost than previously.

[73] It is very complex and different schools of different sizes have different capacity within their staff. So, they will have the opportunity to draw on different numbers of support staff from within the school and have different arrangements. So, it is quite hard to be too prescriptive about what they should do, but the start of it is, if you like, putting on the table what is really happening: how many lessons are being covered, what are the reasons for it and, individually, if they are about training or meetings, can we change those to in-service training days so that pupils do not have to have a cover lesson; if they are about disciplinary matters, can we do something with the local authority to speed that up; if they are about getting long-term absent teachers back to work, what can we do? So, it is a matter of getting it all out and then looking at it.

[74] **Mr Thomas:** We do identify some case studies in the report, and I will be picking those up through the good practice exchange arrangements within the Wales Audit Office. However, our report is saying that, while we can identify and spread around these examples of good practice, they can be built into a better model practice, which, I think, has to come from the Welsh Government.

[75] **Julie Morgan:** What about the fact that, in England, the sickness rate is much lower? Is there anything that you have picked up there that you think it would be useful for us to look at?

[76] **Mr Martin:** This was not a study of sickness absence per se. We looked at the rates of absence, rather than some of the reasons for it. Having said that, as has already been suggested, the incidence of stress-related absence among those sickness absences is quite high in Wales. On patterns of sickness absence, the table that we have included for sickness absence shows that many of the authorities with the higher rates of sickness absences—the table is on page 62—are in south Wales. There is a group of councils in the former Gwent area many of which are at the top of the sickness absence table. Many of the north Wales councils are much lower. Is there some difference between the expectation culture and the way in which things are being handled there that is worth looking at? There are some questions, but we did not, in this study, go into the detail of those questions.

[77] **Julie Morgan:** Did you get any inkling as to why this table is as it is?

[78] **Mr Martin:** I would not like to say that I had an inkling, but it raises some questions that are certainly worth looking at. On our good practice website we have looked at sickness absence in the public sector more generally, and there are a lot of examples of good practice and procedures. Many local authorities do have those procedures, but we are not convinced that they are necessarily followed well within schools. At an individual school level, where we did the field work, we found that there was insufficient regard paid to the procedures that they have in some schools. We found that at a school level, but I could not make a local

authority-level generalisation about that.

[79] **Darren Millar:** However, it is only the best quartile in Wales that is performing as well as England as a whole, is it not?

[80] **Mr Martin:** Yes.

[81] **Darren Millar:** That is a remarkable difference, is it not? I think that you said that the average was four-and-a-half days in England, compared to, on average, about seven days in Wales—£9 million is a lot of money that could be going back into schools to be reinvested and delivering improvements.

[82] **Mr Thomas:** As Stephen said, we do and have run with good practice exchange examples of how to manage sickness absence across the public sector. There is really no reason why some of those basic principles should not apply within schools.

[83] **Darren Millar:** Okay. Jenny is next and then Mike.

[84] **Jenny Rathbone:** In both of the schools where I am a governor, the predictable teacher absence is incorporated into the staffing structure—that is, times when teachers are preparing lessons or are doing management responsibilities, child protection or special needs, or are a member of the senior management team. Why is that not standard throughout schools, given that it is a known? Secondly, in relation to sickness absence, how effectively are schools using the occupational health services of their local authorities?

[85] **Mr Martin:** Working backwards again, we did not go into the detail of looking at the arrangements for sickness absence, but, certainly, we picked up at the schools visits, both from headteachers and from teachers, concerns that occupational health services were not always helping in the way in which they hoped they would for teachers who are able to return to work and return reasonably quickly. There are some issues there, but we were not studying that so we have not been able to make a specific recommendation about it.

[86] It is right that in the good schools the predictable absences are staffed for, where they can be. We still found that, sometimes, some of the training was at relatively short notice. There were a whole lot of things going on in terms of mentors for teachers to get a Master's and inductions. There are gatherings of subject specialists, again for mentoring in some of the universities, some of which are not done at long-term notice; they are done at relatively short-term notice. We think there are probably ways in which that can be better organised and that there are ways in which some of the meetings can be done in ways that have less impact on pupils, either at twilight or INSET days.

[87] **Jenny Rathbone:** What is the case for providing professional development courses, either in twilight hours, after 3.30 p.m., or in the school holidays?

[88] **Mr Martin:** The case for it is, certainly if you can do it on INSET days, then you do not have to have cover for your class, particularly if what you are doing is gathering across a consortium or a cluster, so you are taking staff off the school site. If you can do it on INSET days so you do not have to have that cover; it reduces the overall amount of cover.

[89] **Jenny Rathbone:** That is the purpose of INSET days. Why is it being done on days that are not INSET days?

[90] **Mr Martin:** Perhaps it depends on the planning of those days in advance, and how well that is being done by individual schools and how early the collaboration across schools, where the matter is across schools or regional, is being set up.

[91] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, this is a matter that local authorities ought to be pressing on.

[92] **Mr Martin:** I think so, and the first stage of that is to be aware of the impact that those things are having on the number of the covered lessons and then to look at what can be done about it.

[93] **Mr Rowlands:** I would add that you are perfectly right to say that most schools do have some sort of arrangement for predictable absence. What these two reports have done is highlight the issue that this is an increasing problem. You have such things as planning, preparation and assessment time and 'rarely cover' arrangements, so this has become an increasing problem. Schools are trying to tackle this, but they tend to do it in a whole variety of different ways. Some schools will employ extra higher level teaching assistants and some will have floating teachers. They will all have different sorts of arrangements. What we are saying is that this should be a higher priority for schools and they should be sharing good practice where that exists. By making this a higher profile thing, we hope that schools will start to evaluate how successful their arrangements are compared to those of other schools, and share good practice, and, therefore, the whole system improves.

[94] **Darren Millar:** I am very conscious of the time and there are many more questions we want to get through. I ask Members and witnesses to be brief with questions and answers. I will bring Sandy in, who wants to ask a short supplementary question.

[95] **Sandy Mewies:** It is. Thank you for that. What I am not clear about is the supply of supply teachers. Are there plenty of teachers for secondary schools and subject specialists? Primary may be a bit easier, perhaps. Are we using, in the main—because this was a bit of a no-no a few years ago—teachers who have retired from the school, but are being brought back? Are we using newly qualified teachers? Can you just give me some idea what pool you are pulling in because that has an impact on what you get out of it?

09.45

[96] **Mr Martin:** There are roughly 5,000 teachers registered with the general teaching council as supply teachers. Regarding their age profile, there is a bulge at the younger-age end of newly qualified and less-experienced teachers, and then there is a bulge at the older-age end. So, you have those two groups, and then you have a group in the middle of those who are reasonably settled into life as a supply teacher—it suits them, and they have a regular number of schools that they visit.

[97] **Mr Rowlands:** The shortages for supply teachers are the same as the shortages for permanent teachers—physics, mathematics, science, Welsh-medium, and rural areas.

[98] **Darren Millar:** You were going to ask about that, were you not, Mike?

[99] **Mike Hedges:** Yes, I was going to ask about that. I have two very simple questions. Do you have a figure 11 with training days taken out, and can you confirm that a lot of the training is individual teachers on courses that are specifically for them, which INSET days would not necessarily benefit? The question on my list of questions to ask is on the use of qualified teachers and direct cover supervisors: how widespread is it, is there any evidence that it is actually of benefit, and has anyone done a cost benefit analysis of it?

[100] **Darren Millar:** Just to clarify, figure 11 is just for sickness, is it not, not for other reasons for absence?

[101] **Mr Thomas:** Yes, it is. That is purely sickness absence.

[102] **Mr Martin:** We do not have the breakdown by reasons for other absences. I am sorry, what was your second question?

[103] **Darren Millar:** The other issue was the cost benefit analysis of the different approaches to cover.

[104] **Mr Martin:** Every school is different, and the make-up of the group of people providing cover is different, so it is hard to make sweeping generalisations. You have a cost profile as well. So, you have unqualified teaching assistants—some of whom will be based in the school and will understand the pupils well—who will be able to deliver a lesson that has been prepared for them, effectively, at a lower cost than a supply teacher who might be a non-subject specialist, and who may not know the pupils. However, the cost range within supply teaching staff is also large. It ranges from very low costs for some of the agencies—we took an average of around £136 as the expected day cost, of which the supply teacher is likely to be getting about £90—to those on a main scale, through a local authority list, who will be getting the daily rate of the full teachers' main scale; we took an average of about £186 for that. So, you have a range. Every school must work out individually what is the best cost benefit for that school, and must make those decisions.

[105] **Aled Roberts:** Rwyf am edrych ar ddiffyg y nifer o ran arbenigedd. Rwy'n cymryd—oherwydd eich bod wedi dweud nad yw'r ffigurau hyn ond yn sôn am afiechyd—nad oes darlun cyflawn ar gael o ran y rhesymau dros ddefnyddio staff cyflenwi. Nid ydym yn gwybod ai diffyg penodi staff yw hyn o fewn rhai meysydd yn yr ysgol, a oes galw cynyddol ar staff o ran mentora, neu a ydynt yn cael eu secondio i'r awdurdod lleol. Mae'n anodd credu nad oes darlun cyflawn os yw hyn yn cael cymaint o ddylanwad ar gyrhaeddiad plant, ac eto bod neb yn casglu'r data.

Aled Roberts: I want to look at the lack of numbers in terms of specialists. I take it—because you said that these figures are only in terms of sickness—that there is not a full picture available regarding why supply staff are being used. We do not know whether it is because of a lack of staff appointments in some fields in the school, whether there are increasing mentoring demands on staff, or whether they are being seconded to the local authority. It is difficult to believe that we do not have a full picture if this is having such an influence on children's attainment, yet no-one collects the data.

[106] **Mr Thomas:** Dyna beth rydym yn ei ddarganfod—nid oes digon o fonitro yn mynd ymlaen ar lefel llywodraeth leol o ran y defnydd cynyddol a wneir o athrawon i lenwi bylchau.

Mr Thomas: That is what we are discovering—there is insufficient monitoring at local government level in terms of why increasing use is being made of supply teachers.

[107] **Aled Roberts:** Nos Iau diwethaf, treuliais dair awr mewn ysgol yn sôn am gyrhaeddiad plant. Eto, nid wyf yn cofio—ac rwyf wedi bod yn llywodraethwr ers 25 mlynedd bellach—un adroddiad oddi wrth bennaeth, yn un o'r tair ysgol lle rwyf wedi bod yn llywodraethwr, yn sôn am faint o staff cyflenwi sydd wedi cael eu defnyddio, ac a oes problemau o fewn yr ysgol. A oes canllawiau o ran gofynion ar y pennaeth i adrodd i lywodraethwyr ar faint o ddefnydd a wneir o staff cyflenwi?

Aled Roberts: Last Thursday evening, I spent three hours in a school talking about children's attainment. Yet, I do not remember—and I have been a governor for 25 years now—one report from a headteacher at any of the three schools at which I have been a governor, mentioning how many supply teachers have been used, and whether there are problems in the school. Are there any guidelines in terms of requirements on headteachers to report to governors on how much use is made of supply teachers?

[108] **Mr Martin:** Not in Wales. Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom

where schools are required to have a policy on cover and that policy is drawn up and reported to governors and the governors are responsible for ensuring that those cover arrangements are then followed. The situation is slightly different in Northern Ireland in how it provides its supply, but that applies there, not in Wales.

[109] **Aled Roberts:** Mae'r adroddiad hefyd yn dweud bod ysgolion yn dweud bod y broblem yn fwy mewn ysgolion cyfrwng Cymraeg ac mewn ardaloedd gwledig. Rydych wedi sôn unwaith neu ddwy yn ystod eich tystiolaeth y bore yma bod hynny'n broblem. A oes angen i Lywodraeth Cymru fod yn llawer mwy gweithredol yn y maes hwn os yw'n amharu ar gyrhaeddiad plant?

Aled Roberts: The report also says that schools say that the problem is greater in Welsh-medium schools and in rural areas. You have mentioned a couple of times during your evidence this morning that that is a problem. Is there a need for the Welsh Government to be much more active in this area, if it affects the attainment of children?

[110] **Mr Rowlands:** Fel yr awgrymais o'r blaen, y brif broblem yw argaeledd arbenigedd mewn pynciau penodol a thrwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg. Byddwn yn awgrymu mai'r ateb i hynny yw ychwanegu'r *pool* cyffredinol o athrawon at y meysydd hynny. Mae nifer o bethau yn cael eu rhoi ar waith—*bursaries* ac yn y blaen—i ceisio denu mwy o bobl i'r meysydd hynny'n gyffredinol, trwy hyfforddiant cychwynnol athrawon.

Mr Rowlands: As I suggested earlier, the main problem is the availability of expertise in specific subjects and through the Welsh medium. I would suggest that the solution to that is to add the general pool of teachers to those areas. There are many things that are being attempted—bursaries and so on—to try to attract more people into those fields generally, through initial teacher training.

[111] **Sandy Mewies:** The report states that, currently, there is not a mechanism by which supply teachers can be included in training. Training for supply teachers does not seem to figure very largely on any of the agendas that you have come across. I am talking about the Welsh Government's planned training for improving schools. Is this an oversight in the Welsh Government's system or suggestions, or is it because—and there is a hint of this—a supply teacher going on training does not get paid for that? If you are a supply teacher in that middle bulge, which you talked about, who does three days of supply teaching and you might be working at four different schools, I do not know when you quite fit in having your training with everybody else. Is that a difficulty? Everybody trains in that subject on the same day, but of course, not being paid for it is a bit of a barrier to quite a lot of people.

[112] You also mention in your report, auditor general, that some teachers feel that they are not included in INSET days, school-based training, staff meetings and so on. Is that a timing issue rather than an 'us and them' culture, or is there really some sort of barrier between people, particularly if they are in school for three days a week? Is it about, 'Well, we are here all of the time, so we do the business and we tell you what to do'? Or, is there something else that is stopping this from happening, particularly for that bulge of people in the middle who are quite regular—they do turn up in schools on a regular basis, do they not?

[113] **Mr Martin:** There is a culture issue, although it will vary from school to school, of what is expected of supply teachers. There is also a finance issue; there has not been enough blunt speaking about who is to pay the cost and whether, if you contract with an agency, part of what you are paying the agency for is the training of staff, or whether it is the individual supply teacher who might have to lose a day's potential pay to go on a training course. Who should pay has not been adequately addressed and that feeds back into the system that it is up to supply teachers if they go of their own free will to something that is on the staff noticeboard, but no-one is going to push them or ask them to do it.

[114] **Sandy Mewies:** So, is there anything to incentivise someone who is a supply teacher

to go on training? You talked about this variation in the pay scales, but you would think that there must be some sort of systematic approach to say, 'If you have done this, that or the other, we will be paying you more'. I might be completely wrong on that, but it seems to work in other areas. Also, one of the problems with INSET days, I suppose, is that those are the days that you need cover for staff; so, it is a bit hard for that cover to have INSET day training on the same days as everyone else. To me, these are systems issues.

[115] **Mr Martin:** Some of the incentives related to that could have been built around the use of the quality mark and the procurement of the framework contracts; so, they could have built in a differential. More than a quarter of those 5,000 registered supply staff has not completed the induction, as recognised. Things could have been built in to give some differential expectation of pay, and to talk about who would pay the cost of the training. In fairness, the Welsh Government has opened up induction, and its Masters in Educational Practice programme can now be done by supply teachers, who keep a record of their sessions and are eligible to have mentors to help them to do that. Our feeling is that it is still not clear who is paying for the non-contact time that is expected to be a part of those processes. As that is not clear, we are not sure whether it is actually going to be taken up, and that it is going to happen. However, those developments are relatively new, so we could not reach a firm judgment.

[116] **Mr Thomas:** We also highlight in the report the different approaches in Scotland and Northern Ireland, compared with the mixed economy in which we have operated in Wales and England.

[117] **Sandy Mewies:** Finally, when we talk about regular and long-term supply provision, what sort of timescales do you mean by that? Some schools do have regular supply teachers. Many people see that as their job. They want to work two or three days a week, long term. I would like to know what that means, but have you and Estyn also come across situations of a long-term cover arrangement where, in fact, that long-term cover arrangement is not really suitable for the post that is being covered? What would be the reasons for that?

[118] **Darren Millar:** Will you be brief with the responses now? We will go to Estyn first. What is long-term and what is not?

[119] **Mr Rowlands:** It will vary from school to school. It could be 10 days or 20 days. The longer the supply cover the more likely that that supply teacher will be dealt with by the school as a permanent member of staff in terms of the normal quality assurance systems, and therefore will be visited.

[120] **Mr Martin:** There were a number of arrangements where regular supply staff would cover long-term absence for one member of staff and then another. Those regular supply staff would, effectively, have employment rights at the school that were not being recognised, because they had worked at the same school for most of the working week—for years, in some cases.

[121] **Sandy Mewies:** There is some uncertainty about that anyway, is there not?

[122] **Mr Martin:** There are some issues to be picked up.

[123] **Jocelyn Davies:** I think that most of the points that I wanted to make have been covered. You mentioned this £53.75 million spent on supply cover, but that does not include everything in relation to cover. I think that we have made that point a few times, with fixed-term contracts, maternity leave and so on. Do you have any idea what the quantum is of the complete cost of supply cover? Also, while doing the report did you find any resentment from agency staff who were earning less than half of what somebody from a local authority list was

earning?

10:00

[124] **Mr Martin:** We found it very difficult to get the financial data, and every local authority gave us a different set of caveats as to what was in them. What ended up in the report is our best guess. So, we probably cannot give you what you want there.

[125] **Jocelyn Davies:** Was there resentment from agency staff who were earning half of what staff from a local authority list might have been earning?

[126] **Mr Martin:** Yes.

[127] **Jocelyn Davies:** Could that affect the experience of the pupils?

[128] **Mr Martin:** It certainly affected the morale of some of the supply teachers, but they were in different groups. So, the group of supply teachers who want to go on to a permanent career were resentful about having to work for such a low rate, but some of the other groups were less resentful, because they were more settled and they had arrived at—

[129] **Darren Millar:** Presumably, it is that younger bulge that you described earlier on who would be on the lower rates rather than the more experienced—

[130] **Mr Martin:** They are all on the—if they are employed through an agency, the agency is usually paying a flat rate.

[131] **Darren Millar:** It is always a flat rate, is that right?

[132] **Mr Martin:** Usually.

[133] **Darren Millar:** They do not charge more for a more experienced teacher or for certain disciplines or specialities.

[134] **Mr Martin:** To a limited extent, but it is a relatively small differential.

[135] **Jocelyn Davies:** If you already have a pension, then £90 a day is probably okay, but if you have not got another income and are expected to go to training sessions, pay for the training and probably not earn any money that day, you will not be able to afford to do it. It would be unreasonable, would it not?

[136] **Darren Millar:** Okay. I call on Jenny and then Oscar.

[137] **Jenny Rathbone:** You have quoted the case study of Newport, the focus on attendance and absence and the impact that that has had since the new policy was implemented in 2011 in terms of ensuring that schools can compare each other's absence data. You have recommended that that should happen throughout all local authorities. What resistance or barriers do you envisage to that?

[138] **Mr Martin:** It is probably really just a practical and administrative barrier. Many of the local authority services are being provided under service level contracts for schools. The cost of those contracts is kept to a minimum. The number of things that they have agreed that should be covered is kept to a minimum and this has not been one of them in many areas. I do not think that there is any fundamental barrier or difficulty with the data being provided and shared to help this kind of thing.

[139] **Jenny Rathbone:** What role do regional consortia have in ensuring that local authorities are grasping this one?

[140] **Mr Martin:** The role of regional consortia is, obviously, developing. Their focus, initially, has been on school improvement services. We want them to see the cover arrangements as a factor in school improvement. They have not done so do date, but we think that it should be part of their agenda.

[141] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, thank you. Related to that, why have schools and local authorities not been assessing the cost and cost-effectiveness of different supply arrangements, given that this is a significant and growing sum of money?

[142] **Mr Martin:** What they monitor is the cost to the school budget of their arrangements. What they are not monitoring is the impact on pupils, and they are not getting comparative information to see how their basis compares with others. I do not think that there is any great barrier preventing those things from happening, other than it has not been—there are so many top priorities in the educational world on the desks of headteachers or senior staff, and this has not been one of them. So, nobody has asked them to produce or look at these things. They have gone on, in many cases, to develop the cheapest or what they think are the most cost-effective arrangements. By raising the profile, we hope that they will look at it collectively across schools now.

[143] **Jenny Rathbone:** Jocelyn Davies has already highlighted the different prices that people have been paid for the same work, whether they are in a private agency or supplied by the local authority. How might that problem be resolved? You can see why schools go to the cheaper private agency. How are local authorities going to resolve this matter?

[144] **Mr Thomas:** I am not sure whether it is necessarily just a local authority issue. It is also, in a sense, about what the Welsh Government's expectations are. If you use the proxy of the price to say, 'Well, if we're paying more for someone more like a normal teacher, we'll probably get a better outcome—they'll be trained and so on', then I would hope that that would be part of the guidance that the Welsh Government could give to local authorities, and to get that as part of the set expectation.

[145] **Darren Millar:** Aled, you have a brief supplementary question before I come to Oscar.

[146] **Aled Roberts:** Is there not then a problem with the national procurement framework, because if it is not education specific, and it is very much driven by price and employment arrangements, then we are actually going after the wrong beast anyway?

[147] **Mr Thomas:** There could be nothing wrong with the procurement service provided, as we point out—it also addresses issues of quality and other requirements. Procurement is itself effective—but you need to actually put the standards in first.

[148] **Aled Roberts:** Your evidence is suggesting that, at the moment, the current framework does not do that.

[149] **Mr Thomas:** Yes.

[150] **Mohammad Asghar:** I have a couple of questions on your graph on page 62. Blaenau Gwent is one of the poorest areas in South Wales East, and Monmouthshire is one of the most prosperous, so how come are they virtually on the same level in terms of the number of days of sick leave for teachers? That is very strange to me somehow. One of the most prosperous and one of the least prosperous—

[151] **Mr Thomas:** That reflects the figures as we have them. Certainly, graphs like this should be challenges to the authorities—as you notice, Swansea is at about 9 in terms of days of sickness, and there ought to be a challenge to try to bring that down. If they all came down to the level of, say, Ceredigion, that would be a tremendous amount of teacher contact put back into the school.

[152] **Mr Martin:** It might be worth adding that the data in here is collected by the Welsh Government but is not published—the only published data for sickness absence are on a national level, so these comparative data are not generally seen, or have not been used.

[153] **Darren Millar:** It is more geographic, is it not, rather than reflecting levels of income per head of population et cetera?

[154] **Mohammad Asghar:** My next question, and I will make it short, is this: how can greater awareness be more efficiently raised among the schools?

[155] **Mr Thomas:** I think that there is a responsibility on local authorities to ensure that schools have comparative data, and that they themselves are following up to manage this better. I hope that our report in a sense is actually casting some light into this area and leading to work that the schools themselves can address.

[156] **Mohammad Asghar:** Finally, has there been any impact on pre-employment checks as a result of the removal of the quality mark?

[157] **Mr Martin:** Given that the quality mark was not being rigorously followed or applied, I do not expect that there will have been any impact. The Welsh Government has recently issued updated guidance on safeguarding in education, with the requirement that pre-employment checks are done for supply teachers and are checked at schools. We still had some questions as to whether that was happening in all cases, so there is probably still some room to go.

[158] **Darren Millar:** So, you still have questions about whether that is happening in every case, you say.

[159] **Mr Martin:** Not with the checks. The issue that we have is that the agencies that we visited all had appropriate arrangements for doing the checks, but the school is the hirer of the staff who are working there, and the school has to satisfy itself that those checks have been done, and that anything that came out through those checks is properly attended to. It is for the school to check that the agencies have done more than say ‘yes’ on a form that they have done those things. The school should see those checks and make sure that they are in place.

[160] **Darren Millar:** Thank you very much for that. If there are no further questions, that brings us to the end of this particular evidence session. I am very grateful to you for being with us today, Meilyr, Huw and Stephen; I am very grateful indeed.

10:10

Papurau i’w Nodi Papers to Note

[161] **Darren Millar:** We have the minutes of our meetings on 3 October and 8 October to note. I take it that Members are happy to note them. I see that you are.

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd o'r
Cyfarfod**
**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public from the
Meeting**

[162] **Darren Millar:** I move that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(ix).

[163] Are there any objections? I can see that there are none, so we will go into private session.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion agreed.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 10:10.
The public part of the meeting ended at 10:10.*