

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Waith Ieuenctid | Inquiry into Youth Work

YW 75

Ymateb gan : UNSAIN Cymru

Response from : UNISON Wales

Question 1 – Within the remit set out above: what do you consider to be the priorities or issues that the Children, Young People and Education Committee should consider during the Fifth Assembly?

UNISON Cymru/Wales represents workers across the education sector. Education members include employees from schools, further education colleges, universities, early years and children's services, career services and more.

Our members work in a variety of roles, including: teaching and classroom assistants; school business managers; catering, cleaning and facilities maintenance; IT, HR, administration and finance staff; librarians, technicians, caretakers, facilities and maintenance staff; secretaries and administrators; early years and nursery staff; nursery managers; family support workers; technical and laboratory services; security; sports centre services; student union services; specialist learning support, curriculum support; health visitors; midwives; and more.

UNISON Cymru/Wales represents more education staff than any other trade union. We are the biggest public sector trade union.

World class education is not as simple as employing good teachers and lecturers. Instead, a range of professionals, administrative, technical and support staff all have a crucial role to play.

Schools

UNISON is the biggest trade union in schools. We have experienced an influx of members from the schools workforce and this is an area

of continued growth for us. UNISON Cymru/Wales has made hundreds of schools visits over the last year alone and much of our focus has been on the introduction of the Education Workforce Council (EWC).

Through our visits we have spoken directly to thousands of school support workers. We can therefore speak with authority on the experiences of our members.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) perform a vital role in schools in Wales but they need training and ongoing support to be able to do it. Too many TAs are thrown in the deep end without proper professional development or workplace support. Shamefully some TAs are forced to pay for their own training with claims the school cannot afford to send them on courses or to increase pay when training is successfully completed. Yet the school directly benefits from the new skills and the Heads will willingly ask TAs to undertake additional duties in school above their job description.

The majority of TAs are women; they suffer low pay, a lack of career opportunities and institutional discrimination that belittles their role. Part-time, casual and term time working, dominate. UNISON embraced the Welsh Assembly Government's professional registration of TAs as a first step though raising standards depends on investment in the professional development of TAs, a proper career structure with transparent fair pay and conditions, uniformly applied across the whole of the country and a spirit of inclusiveness in schools that recognises their contribution.

It is wholly unacceptable that professional standards for school support staff, which should come as a direct result of registration, are yet to be published. As noted, we welcomed the notion of the EWC, but it is in danger of becoming pointless and insignificant without the standards in place.

The EWC claims to enhance the status of the workforce by promoting high standards of professional conduct and competence and by ensuring these standards are maintained. Yet for school support staff, these standards are non-existent and so the current EWC

arrangements are failing them. Without these standards in place, the process of registration is meaningless as there is no benchmark.

UNISON has advocated for a national structure for school support staff so there is consistency of levels and roles across Wales. This is to ensure that everyone in the school, whatever their role, is working to an agreed standard.

The 'one public sector Wales' agenda cannot be pursued without national structures and role profiles being developed. There are currently in excess of 3000 job titles for school support staff across Wales - this is clearly unworkable. Teachers have nationally agreed, uniform rates of pay, but the salaries of Wales' tens of thousands of TAs vary depending on where they work; pay is set by each of the 22 local authorities and their experience and responsibility are not always recognised in the pay structure. For example, every day UNISON members in schools provide medicine and administer personal care to students, yet training provision is haphazard and there is no financial recognition of this responsibility. This is another clear example of the inconsistency of school support staff roles across Wales.

The remit of the EWC has so far been concerned with teaching staff, an approach which is typical of the education sector generally. However, we would argue that teaching staff are already clear about their boundaries and expectations. They are also already clear about their professional standards.

The development of the EWC was to allow for these standards to be applied across the entire workforce in order to reap the wider benefits of a professional, consistent, and competent workforce. Instead, school support workers are being expected to register with the EWC, for a cost, yet receive very little value in return and are now faced with the possible consequence of being struck off from the profession should they not uphold these standards.

Part of this value comes in the form of acknowledging the integral work that school support staff undertake as a part of the education

team, which includes instilling fairness across the board and providing opportunities for staff to develop.

The EWC and Welsh Government need to refocus away from the current teacher-centred approach to a more balanced method which recognises the entire education workforce.

The current focus on teachers is indicative of the culture across the schools workforce. In reality, a two-tier workforce exists in schools with the teachers being treated more favourably than the rest of the workforce.

The success of schools is dependent on the entire schools workforce and so school support staff should be levelled up to receive the same conditions as teachers – this includes full pay for 52 weeks of the year, as opposed to the term-time arrangements currently in place for the majority of school support staff.

Higher Education

Funding in higher education remains a challenge, particularly when we consider the rates of pay amongst the lower earners within the workforce.

The proportion of University's income allocated to staffing has consistently dropped for years, yet the income being generated by, for example international students, is increasing. This is in stark contrast to the pay inflations experienced by Vice-Chancellors at Universities. In our understanding it is often those Universities paying the highest wages to Vice-Chancellors that have the largest number of low paid or casualised staff and many experience poverty despite being at work.

University coffers have swollen by millions. Since 2010, the amount spent on staff by UK universities has decreased by 3 per cent but their reserves stand at £21 billion. Since 2009, we estimate that below inflation rises have cost our members at least £1,600. Many more have lost thousands of pounds in real terms.

The average salary for a vice chancellor in Wales is £228,401. 210 Welsh university executives are now paid over £100,000 a year. Employers are choosing to reward the highest earners rather than the majority of their staff.

Against this, our request that no employee in Higher Education should be paid less than the Foundation Living Wage of £8.25 per hour, is very modest. We are concerned too, about the shameful gender pay gap in universities, prevalence of exploitative zero-hours contracts and out of control spending on agency workers.

Low pay and casualisation is bad for the workforce and is bad for the delivery of education.

Where services have been outsourced, work should be undertaken to bring them back in-house. The Cabinet Secretary for Education recently called for universities to recapture their civic responsibilities and strengthen links to communities. UNISON is in agreement with these principles, but they must become a reality. For example, the Swansea University campus in Swansea Bay, made possible through European funding, welcomes students from across the world and state of the art campus. However, the security at the campus is provided by a private company which employs staff on zero hour contracts. This is not acceptable.

Marketisation in both higher and further education is a false economy; when serious problems materialise later in the contract it is the public sector left to sort out the mess. All forms of marketisation should be resisted as harmful to the quality or services for students and the pay and working conditions of staff. As a minimum, all our universities should be Living Wage employers and registered with the Living Wage Foundation.

Furthermore, we have seen a trend of higher education institutions closing defined benefit pension schemes. This is unacceptable, particularly when we take into consideration the fact that spend on staffing, as a proportion of income, continues to decline.

Further Education

Colleges are as important as schools and universities: further education offers vital second chances to adult returning to education and those from more deprived communities; the majority of learners in further education are women and further education also supports students with learning difficulties. Despite this, further education has suffered budget cuts and lacks the prestige of schools and higher education. Further education needs to be provided with adequate funding and held in equal esteem with higher education and schools. The Welsh Government education policies need to reflect this.

There are significant public monies being invested in apprenticeships but there is a question on how that money then supports other Welsh Government policy objectives such as tackling poverty and economic development.

Good quality apprenticeships helping people move from education to work and into quality jobs is essential. We encourage publically accessible and accountable education in Wales across the board, except with regard to apprenticeships. Delivering apprenticeships funded by the public purse through further education could help revitalise the sector as well as delivering better value for money by reinvesting money currently siphoned off as private profit.

Further education institutions have well-trained, monitored and accountable staff. There are no guarantees on the levels of delivery for training apprentices in the private sector.

The Government agenda has been to increase the number of higher level apprenticeships and to encourage this to be seen as a vocational alternative to higher education. However, if it is to be held in the same esteem by learners and employers, then there needs to be a high standard of provision. To ensure this standard there should be a similar level of monitoring and accountability as exists in higher and further education.

A qualification framework should be implemented for further education support staff, guaranteeing training and career development. In the context of public spending cuts the distinction between the roles in further education is becoming increasingly blurred. A qualification framework would help address this and would ensure that workers are being paid appropriately for the work they are undertaking.

Furthermore, as with higher education, the proportion of income allocated to staffing costs in further education is falling. Improving the conditions, pay and incentives for all staff must be a priority.

Workforce casualisation

The casualisation of the workforce has a detrimental effect on the quality of education and has a negative impact on workers. Poor working conditions will result in a high staff turnover, low morale, instability, and a lack of consistency.

The issue of a casualised workforce, along with term-time only pay, pension provisions, and clarity around expectations and boundaries is a theme for support staff across the education sector. It is predominantly education support staff who suffer from these issues, and we have growing concerns about the issue of a two-tier workforce in education when we compare teaching and lecturing staff to support staff.

World class education relies on the whole education workforce, not just teachers and lecturers. The entire workforce should be valued and appropriately rewarded for the essential contribution they make to education in Wales.

Child Protection

It is our view that the Welsh Government should immediately review the Child Protection Risk Register. At present councils lack sufficient staff, have heavy workloads and do not provide a universal service. In

order for risk registers to work effectively, a review must be undertaken to decide the most beneficial system for the child and council worker.

Question 2 – From the list of priorities or issues you have identified, what do you consider to be the key areas that should be considered during the next 12 months (please identify up to three areas or issues)? Please outline why these should be considered as key priorities.

We consider all the issues identified above to be key priorities.