

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref
Mike Hedges MS
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16 February 2021

Dear Mike,

I am writing in response to your request made during Business Questions on 9 February for further information on the employment of supply teachers.

As I set out in my previous letters to you on matters relating to supply teachers (KW/00232/21 and KW/00749/21), Welsh Government is not the employer of school staff and decisions in relation to their employment are matters for local authorities, schools or agencies.

Local authorities can choose to employ supply staff directly - and many still do so. The decision to operate and maintain local authority lists or registers is the responsibility of local authorities and there is nothing to prevent them from doing this, or from working together with regional consortia, to support a co-operative, collaborative model. The growth of commercial supply agencies in recent years is the result of local authorities choosing not to maintain their lists and employ these staff directly; thereby creating demand for agency provision.

Whilst you have referenced poor pay and conditions for supply teachers in Wales, significant improvements have been made in recent years to tackle these issues; specifically those issues linked to agency use, as highlighted by the Supply Model Taskforce in 2017. These included comparatively lower pay (to directly employed supply teachers), high agency fees and a lack of professional development.

To address these concerns and regulate this sector, the NPS Framework was established in September 2019 and provides schools with 26 approved agencies to choose from. The Framework includes a *minimum* pay rate equivalent to the teachers' main pay scale (M1). There is nothing to prevent schools from paying a higher rate, and for subject shortages I

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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.

am aware that this is often the case. This is markedly different from the agency framework in place in England, which does not mandate a minimum rate for its agency supply teachers. The NPS Framework fees are transparent and fixed, and professional development opportunities must be provided.

Compliance with the Framework terms is continuously monitored and the NPS also collates data quarterly to allow for improvements to be made. Recent NPS data shows that agency non-compliance is infrequent and that the issues lie with schools and local authorities either going 'off-Framework' or trying to undercut the minimum pay rate with agencies. My officials have discussed this with the WLGA and a commitment has recently been made by local authorities to support and comply with the Framework when using agencies. Whilst I accept that there may have been a period of transition for schools, local authorities and supply staff following the introduction of the new Framework, now that it has been in operation for 16 months, there is an expectation that schools, local authorities and supply staff use Framework agencies if this is the preferred method of cover or employment.

Over this past year the benefits of the Framework have been noticeable, and this is partly due to the continued engagement by agencies with Welsh Government and NPS officials. All Framework agencies committed to furloughing their staff last year and were pro-active in securing the support required. Whilst not all staff were eligible for the scheme, the majority of Framework staff did receive furlough payments. In comparison, some supply staff directly employed by local authorities were disadvantaged by decisions to not provide support payments. Overall, I am pleased by the agencies' response to the furlough scheme, and more generally their commitment to the Framework terms.

To provide schools with an alternative model of supply cover, the [Supply Cluster](#) model was introduced as a three year pilot from 2017. This allowed participating schools to employ supply NQTs as supernumerary cover across school clusters. The evaluations of the model reported a range of benefits to schools, learners and the supply teachers who took part and Welsh Government has promoted and encouraged schools to use this model. However, despite the benefits (including potential cost savings) it is my understanding that many schools choose not to employ supply staff this way due to the upfront costs of committing a salaried employee against their budgets over ad hoc supply costs throughout the year.

Although the project ended in July 2020, you may be aware that I provided an additional £29 million in funding for schools in September under the [accelerating learning programme](#). The programme provided additional opportunities for supply staff to gain direct employment and was advertised to the sector by both the EWC and through the Framework.

In response to your request for one model of employment for supply teachers, I would reiterate that it remains the decision of schools and local authorities to recruit and manage cover requirements. The Welsh Government does not oppose the use of any one method and supports a direct employment model if local authorities choose to do so. However, there is no 'one size fits all' in term of cover requirements, and schools and governing bodies under the regulatory framework (Staffing in Maintained Schools (Wales) Regulations 2006) and local management of schools arrangements, are able to source staff as they see fit.

My officials will continue to work with employers to ensure supply teachers are appropriately supported during this time, and that information regarding various financial support is available.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kirsty Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K' and a long, sweeping underline.

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