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# Covering Teachers' Absence



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I have prepared this report for presentation to the National Assembly under the Government of Wales Act 2006.

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**Report presented by the Auditor General for Wales to the  
National Assembly for Wales on 17 September 2013**



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## Summary

- 1** In 2011-12, maintained schools in Wales spent an estimated £54 million on classroom supply cover for teachers who were absent. Reasons for absence vary and include sickness, training, attending meetings and work associated with curriculum development. Expenditure on supply cover has risen by seven per cent since 2008-09.
- 2** Expenditure on supply cover does not include the cost of cover provided by staff on fixed terms contracts or permanent staff (Box 1). The employment of permanent cover staff has increased in recent years to enable schools to meet the requirements of the 2003 National Workload Agreement<sup>1</sup>. The Agreement requires that at least 10 per cent of teachers' time should be allocated for planning, preparation and assessment, and that teachers, including headteachers, should cover for absent colleagues 'rarely' and only in circumstances that are not foreseeable. This second requirement - known as 'rarely cover' - was implemented in 2009.
- 3** The arrangements for providing cover have become more complex as schools have employed a wider range of staff to undertake this role. Much short-term absence is covered by staff who are not qualified teachers. The 2003 National Workload Agreement stated that medium and long-term absence should be covered by a qualified teacher.
- 4** Supply cover staff may be employed directly by the school, or be sourced from a local authority list of registered teachers or through a private recruitment agency. In 2011-12, 41 per cent of total expenditure was on agency supply cover. This proportion has increased as schools have switched in recent years to using supply agencies rather than employing supply teachers directly.
- 5** There is a risk that learners will not make sufficient progress in covered lessons. Partly because schools do not do enough to monitor the quality of teaching in covered classes or the impact on learners' progress, we found no robust evidence to show that supply teachers are of lower ability than permanent staff. However, the support that supply teachers receive, including training, and the circumstances in which they work can mitigate against optimum performance. For example, short-notice appointments and a lack of familiarity with a school and its learners can make supply teaching more difficult, and increases the risk that learners make less than adequate progress.
- 6** We examined the arrangements for covering teachers' absence in schools in partnership with Estyn - HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. Estyn's report<sup>2</sup> focuses on the impact of teachers' absence on learners' progress. In this report, drawing on Estyn's findings, we seek to answer the broader question of whether learners, schools and the public purse are well served by arrangements to cover teacher absence.

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<sup>1</sup> Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: a National Agreement (2003).

<sup>2</sup> *The impact of teacher absence*, Estyn, September 2013.



## Box 1 – A range of staff may cover for teachers' absence

### Supply teachers

A qualified teacher who covers a class when the regular teacher is absent for a period of time. Supply teachers should be expected to teach rather than simply supervise pupils. On longer placements, they can plan and prepare lesson activities and assess pupils' progress and attainment. In secondary schools they will usually have a subject specialism but may be required to cover any lesson. Similarly in primary schools, a supply teacher may be required to work anywhere between reception class and the end of Key Stage 2, regardless of age specialism or subject specialism. Supply teachers may be employed directly by the school (usually drawn from a local authority list of registered teachers) or sourced through a recruitment agency.

On occasion, teachers are appointed on fixed term contracts to cover longer periods of known absence, including maternity or special leave. We have not included these fixed term appointments in our analysis because these are salaried posts. Our analysis is focused on supply staff paid on daily rates and arranged through local authority lists or recruitment agencies.

### Cover supervisors

Cover supervisors are mainly permanent staff employed by secondary schools, and are not usually qualified teachers. They supervise pupils in a class when their usual teacher is not available, and undertake exercises and activities already prepared by the class teacher or another teacher. Cover supervisors may undertake other roles within the school, including administration, depending on their qualifications and experience. In practice, some cover supervisors are qualified teachers but they undertake duties commensurate with the cover supervisor role while being paid as such. Almost all secondary schools in Wales employ at least one cover supervisor to cover short term absence but other cover supervisors may be recruited on a temporary basis by the school or through a recruitment agency to provide additional cover.

### Teaching assistants/Higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs)

Teaching assistants provide support to a teacher in the classroom but their specific duties vary greatly both between schools and within schools depending on their experience and qualification level. A teaching assistant may provide supervision when the teacher is absent for a short time as long as the head teacher is satisfied that he or she possesses the necessary skills, experience and expertise. In practice, many primary schools have employed HLTAs (teaching assistants who have to be assessed against the HLTA Professional Standards) to deliver lessons when a class teacher is doing planning, preparation and assessment. Higher level teaching assistants may also supervise a class to cover other short-term absence. Most schools do not deploy less qualified teaching assistants to provide absence cover.

The number of HLTAs employed in schools has increased in recent years but the proportion of their time spent providing absence cover rather than other duties is not monitored.

- 7 In conjunction with Estyn, we visited 23 schools across Wales, and met with learners and supply teachers. We also carried out a survey of supply teachers, analysed attendance statistics and interviewed Welsh Government officials. Our methodology is set out in full at [Appendix 1](#).
- 8 Our overall conclusion is that **arrangements for covering teachers' absence in Wales are not sufficiently well managed to support learners' progress or provide the best use of resources.**



## **Expenditure on supply cover is rising and learner progress is being hampered by an increasing number of lessons being covered**

- 9 Teacher absence has an impact on learner progress.** In primary and secondary schools, learners make less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding when the usual class teacher is absent, and learners' behaviour is often worse, particularly in secondary schools. Teacher absence impacts on pupils across the ability range. Less able pupils are less likely to receive the support they need, and middle ability and more able pupils make less progress than they should because the work set is not challenging enough. The largest negative impact of teacher absence on pupils' learning occurs in secondary schools, particularly during Key Stage 3 (age 11-14) whilst the impact was smaller in larger primary schools.
- 10 The spending on supply cover is rising and an increasing number of lessons are being covered.** Maintained schools in Wales increased their spend on supply cover by seven per cent between 2008-09 and 2011-12. The increase in expenditure masks a larger increase in the number of lessons covered by external supply cover. There has also been a shift from supply staff from local authority lists to greater use of supply agency teachers who are less expensive. We estimate that the number of days of supply cover purchased rose by 10 per cent between 2008-09 and 2011-12, and that just under 10 per cent of all lessons are covered.

- 11 Neither schools nor local authorities routinely monitor adequately the reasons for teachers' absence, and therefore do not always understand the reasons why cover is required.** Schools record the reasons for each teacher absence. But, few schools and local authorities aggregate and use this information to monitor the reasons for absence in ways that enable them to see the extent of absence for different causes and to inform actions that could be taken to reduce classroom absence. We found that a half of teacher absences were due to sickness, a fifth were due to teacher training and development and 10 per cent were due to teachers attending meetings.
- 12 There is scope to reduce teachers' sickness absence.** The extent of sickness absence by teachers has reduced slightly in recent years, but it varies considerably between individual schools, and across local authorities; in 2011 it ranged from an average of four days to nine days. The average of seven days sickness absence per teacher in Wales compares to an average of 4.5 days in England. If the level in Wales could be reduced to that in England, we estimate that Welsh schools could reduce the number of days requiring cover by around 60,000, saving over £9 million a year in cover costs.
- 13 Schools' approaches to managing teachers' attendance varied too much.** While all of the schools that we visited had clear attendance management policies, schools varied in the rigour with which they implemented the policies. Return to work interviews were not always conducted and documented, and trigger points where a teacher was absent for a certain period of time were not always actioned.





## Cover arrangements are not managed well enough to ensure that learners make good progress and are safeguarded

- 14 Most schools do not have formal policies on cover arrangements in the event of teacher absence.** There is considerable variation in the approaches taken to providing cover, with different use made of agency supply teachers, HLTAs, cover supervisors and other cover staff. The period of time that a teacher could be absent before a qualified teacher was brought in as cover varied between one day and 10 days. None of the schools we visited had a formal policy on cover that focused on reducing the impact of teacher absence on learners.
- 15 Cover is mostly delivered when needed although it does not always match exact requirements.** Most teacher absence was covered without the need to use other teachers in the school, although schools in rural areas and Welsh medium schools generally reported more difficulty sourcing cover than others. Some schools had difficulty sourcing cover that met their exact requirements in terms of subject or specialism. Secondary schools in particular found difficulty in recruiting supply teachers specialising in mathematics and physics.
- 16 Schools do not do enough to monitor the quality of teaching in covered classes or the impact on learners' progress.** In many schools there is little formal monitoring or observation of supply teachers' work, even where the supply teacher is on a long placement or works regularly in the school. Although many schools reported giving some feedback to supply agency on their staffs' performance, the lack of formal monitoring means that the feedback is often not based on a meaningful assessment of performance.
- 17 Schools do not always provide supply teachers with sufficient support.** Supply teachers told us that the quality of information provided for them when they first attend a new school varied significantly. A third of supply teachers said that they were rarely given basic information, such as the daily timetable, and more than a half never or rarely received information about the school's safeguarding procedures. Many supply teachers were unable to access their schools intranet system to see pupil information or classroom materials.
- 18 Most schools have employed HLTAs and cover supervisors to meet workload agreement requirements, but they generally do not evaluate the effectiveness of the posts.** In recent years, schools have increasingly employed cover supervisors and HLTAs to provide cover, although a minority of schools chose to cover all absence with qualified teachers. Although most schools were able to explain the rationale for their decisions, they rarely evaluated the effectiveness of their cover workforce mix in terms of the impact on learners.
- 19 Not all schools ensure that safeguarding procedures are in place for temporary staff.** Where supply staff are recruited from a local authority pool or a recruitment agency, in most instances schools rely on the local authority or the agency concerned to carry out pre-employment checks. However, not all schools are aware of all the checks that should be carried out, and schools do not always keep records that checks have been completed before a supply teacher starts for work.

## **The Welsh Government and local authorities do not take sufficient account of the impact of teachers' absence in their measures to help schools achieve improved outcomes for learners**

- 20** **The Welsh Government's policies for school improvement do not recognise the extent to which classes are covered and the needs of supply teachers.** Many supply teachers are not encouraged to participate in the training in respect of national priority areas and new initiatives that is available for permanent teachers. The Welsh Government has introduced new arrangements for the performance management of teachers, but the arrangements do not extend to supply teachers regardless of the length of their placement or how frequently they teach in a school unless they are appointed on a fixed term contract. Also, the arrangements may not be effective for cover supervisors and HLTAs in their cover role. The Welsh Government's Quality Mark for recruitment agencies and local authorities was ineffective in improving the quality of supply teaching before it was withdrawn in 2010, but it has not been replaced with other measures to achieve the stated aim. New arrangements were introduced in September 2012 to allow newly-qualified teachers to complete their statutory induction while working as supply cover and to access the new Masters degree in Educational Practice but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these arrangements.
- 21** **Local authorities' work to help schools improve outcomes has generally not addressed the effectiveness of their cover arrangements.** Many schools would welcome more support in managing attendance. In particular, most schools did not receive any feedback from their local authority that allowed

them to compare their staff absence levels with those of other schools. Local authorities provide support to help schools find cover, and 16 local authorities maintain registers or lists of available supply teachers for their schools to use. However, the local authorities concerned had not evaluated the effectiveness of their support and, in some, the lists of supply teachers were rarely used by schools.

## **The resources spent on supply cover are not always managed effectively**

- 22** **The costs of supply cover can vary considerably, and schools and local authorities do little to monitor the cost effectiveness of their arrangements.** Cover supplied through an agency is generally cheaper than staff supplied from a local authority list who are paid on the teachers' main scale. However, we found no evidence to suggest that the quality of cover supplied from a local authority list was any better or worse than the quality of cover supplied through an agency. Different schools use supply teachers in different ways. But we found no examples of schools or local authorities assessing the cost effectiveness of cover arrangements to ensure that they deliver the best progress for pupils at minimum cost.
- 23** **Many schools and local authorities do not routinely monitor and control expenditure on supply cover.** Although most schools monitor their spending on cover against their budgets very closely, they have little information to compare the cost of their supply arrangements with that of other schools. Local authorities have access to expenditure on cover, but we found little evidence that they were routinely monitoring expenditure trends over time, or benchmarking expenditure across schools in the area or between similar schools, in a way that would have



enabled them to identify whether schools were acquiring cover in a cost efficient way. Absence insurance and mutual funds provide certainty of expenditure, but they do not always incentivise schools to minimise expenditure.

**24 There are weaknesses in schools' arrangements for procuring cover staff.** Schools could make more effective use of recruitment agencies and of the framework contracts for supply staff agreed in 2012. The 2010 Agency Worker Regulations, which aimed to give agency staff employed for more than 12 weeks equal treatment to those recruited directly, has had less of an impact in schools than may have been anticipated. However schools were generally unaware of their obligations under the regulations. In addition, schools were not always clear about the implications of some employment arrangements where teachers were employed directly and, as a result, risk unknowingly incurring liabilities.

**25 There is scope for schools to collaborate more to achieve improved cover arrangements.** We found some examples of schools collaborating with each other in the acquisition of cover, but there is scope for schools to collaborate more in the procurement of agency cover than they currently do.

## Recommendations

**26** Estyn have made recommendations in their separately published report and these are included in [Appendix 2](#). We endorse these and make the further recommendations below.

### Minimising the detrimental impact of covered lessons on learners' progress

**1** Teacher absence results in an average of just under 10 per cent of lessons being covered and can have a significant impact on learners' progress, particularly during Key Stage 3. To support its work to raise standards and attainment, **we recommend that the Welsh Government takes greater account of the impact of cover in its policies and strategies including setting out clearly in grant and other guidance that it expects schools, local authorities and regional consortia to seek to minimise the need for covered lessons.**

### Improving the management of cover arrangements in schools

**2** Few schools have formal policies on cover arrangements, there is insufficient monitoring of the extent of and reasons for teacher classroom absence, and few schools evaluate the impact of their cover arrangements on learning and progress. Teachers and other staff providing cover are often given insufficient information about the school and pupils, and the quality of lessons and teaching is not monitored effectively. **We recommend that:**

**a** **The Welsh Government and local authorities encourage schools to develop policies on managing cover that focus on ensuring that learners' progress is maintained and resources are used effectively.**

- b** The Welsh Government should identify or develop model policies on managing cover, and disseminate these to schools as good practice guidance.
- c** To assess and minimise teacher absence through sickness or other reasons:
  - the Welsh Government, regional school improvement consortia and local authorities should monitor the extent to which their school improvement programmes and training initiatives contribute to the need for cover;
  - schools should apply their attendance management policies rigorously, particularly in the management of long-term absence; and
  - local authorities should collect and analyse absence-related data for all the schools in their area, and disseminate information that would enable its schools to compare absence levels with those of other schools in the local authority or within their family of schools.
- d** Schools should ensure that they provide sufficient information and support to supply teachers (for example daily timetable, lessons plans and material, school policies such as approach to behaviour management and access to ICT) so that they can work effectively.

### Improving the training and development of supply teachers

- 3** Supply teachers have difficulty accessing training that is more easily available to permanent teachers. A significant barrier to their attendance is that they lose the opportunity to work by attending training events. Some supply agencies provide opportunities for teachers registered with them to continue their professional development, but local authorities do not generally offer training to supply teachers registered with them. To support the professional development of supply teachers we recommend that:
  - a** the Welsh Government monitors the impact on supply teachers of their developing arrangements for induction and access to the Masters in Educational Practice, to ensure that teachers who work as supply teachers on a long term basis are not disadvantaged; and
  - b** schools should include supply teachers who have either regular or long-term involvement with a school in their in-service training and performance management arrangements and include the requirement to participate in these contracts with supply teachers and agencies.



## Ensuring that resources spent on supply cover are managed more effectively

**4** Schools spent more than £50 million on cover in 2011-12, an increase of seven per cent since 2008-09. Some of the measures adopted to manage budgets, such as insurance for long-term absence, do not always incentivise schools to minimise expenditure on cover, and the cost effectiveness of the different approaches adopted by schools to sourcing cover is unclear. Whilst the Welsh Purchasing Consortium helped agree framework contracts for agency cover for local authorities, we found little evidence of schools collaborating locally to achieve better value for money.

### We recommend that:

- a** The Welsh Government, regional school improvement consortia and local authorities should agree guidance for schools on the procurement of supply teachers. This guidance should set out the different arrangements available or otherwise possible, including the two framework contracts for supply teachers, the legal and human resources implications of different arrangements, and the potential for collaboration to result in better value for money.
- b** The Welsh Government and local authorities, as appropriate, should ensure that appropriate quality standards and the Welsh Government's policies are reflected in any future framework agreements for supply agencies.
- c** Schools and local authorities should strengthen their monitoring and evaluation of expenditure on cover arrangements by:
  - routinely monitoring trends in cover expenditure and comparing with others to highlight areas of inconsistency for further investigation and action;
  - evaluating if arrangements for managing supply cover budgets (such as by opting into the local authority's mutual fund or purchasing private absence insurance) provide value for money for the school and across the local authority;
  - regularly reviewing the cost effectiveness of the skill mix of the staff employed in schools to provide cover, including an assessment of the relative costs of employing cover supervisors, HLTAs, floating teachers, temporary staff recruited through an agency and temporary staff recruited from the local authority list;
  - reviewing that arrangements with supply agencies, where these exist, continue to provide good value for money; and
  - exploring opportunities to achieve savings and/or an improved service by collaborating with local schools to source cover or procure supply agency services.



## Keeping pupils safe

- 5** Schools are responsible for ensuring the safety of pupils and they need to be certain that those working in school do not present an unmanaged risk. Most schools rely on either their local authority or supply agencies to undertake pre-employment and Disclosure and Barring Service checks on supply teachers. However, many schools do not take steps to ensure that such checks have been undertaken and do not keep appropriate records. **We recommend that:**
- a** the Welsh Government issues guidance to schools to ensure that they are clear about the appropriate pre-employment and safeguarding checks required for teachers and other school staff, understand that the checks need to be completed before a supply teacher commences work in a school, and retain records of the pre-employment checks that have been undertaken for all supply teachers and other staff employed within the school; and
  - b** schools, local authorities, the Welsh Government and the General Teaching Council for Wales and its successor body should develop clearer mechanisms for reporting concerns about unsatisfactory performance in addition to the reporting of any child protection concerns.



## Part 1 – Expenditure on supply cover is rising and learner progress is being hampered by an increasing number of lessons being covered

### Teacher absence has an impact on learner progress

- 1.1** We carried out our examination in partnership with Estyn. Estyn's work was in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2012-13. Estyn's remit was to examine the impact on learner progress of schools' strategies to cover the absence of teachers, and the effective and efficient employment, training and deployment of supply teachers.
- 1.2** Estyn's report found that in primary and secondary schools, learners make less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding when the usual class teacher is absent, and learners' behaviour is often worse, particularly in secondary schools. Teacher absence impacts on pupils across the ability range. Less able pupils are less likely to receive the support they need, and middle ability and more able pupils make less progress than they should because the work set is not challenging enough. The largest negative impact of teacher absence on pupils' learning occurs in secondary schools, particularly during key stage 3 (age 11-14) whilst the impact was smaller in larger primary schools. Estyn's main findings are at [Appendix 2](#).

### The spending on supply cover is rising and an increasing number of lessons are being covered

#### Schools spent £54 million on supply cover in 2011-12 and expenditure is rising

- 1.3** In 2011-12, we estimate that schools spent £53.75 million on supply cover provided by supply teachers and other temporary staff. This figure is drawn from information from local authorities<sup>3</sup>, and it includes the cost of supply cover for sickness absence, training and continuing professional development, to allow staff to attend appointments, special leave, staff suspension and paternity leave. Expenditure on supply cover does not include the cost of cover provided by staff employed on fixed term contracts, for example to cover maternity leave, or permanent staff (such as cover supervisors and HLTAs<sup>4</sup> employed specifically to provide cover, as these costs fall on the general payroll. It also does not include the cost of cover provided by other teachers.
- 1.4** Expenditure on supply cover represents around 4.4 per cent of schools staffing budgets. Primary schools spent an average of five per cent of their staffing budgets on supply cover (£135 per pupil), compared to 2.3 per cent in secondary schools (£77 per pupil). Supply expenditure by special schools is comparatively high, at an average of seven per cent of the staffing budget (£599 per pupil).

<sup>3</sup> Data was available for all 22 local authorities in Wales for 2011-12. However not all local authorities were able to exclude expenditure on other temporary staff (e.g. administrative or maintenance staff) employed within schools. Local authorities do not hold a detailed breakdown of expenditure where schools manage their own payments ('cheque book' schools).

<sup>4</sup> Most primary schools have employed HLTAs to deliver lessons during teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time. As this is a regular and planned part of the timetable, we would expect HLTAs to be school employees. However, we found that a few schools (two out of 12 primary schools visited) employed supply HLTAs/teachers to fulfil this requirement, and in these circumstances the cost would be included in cover expenditure.

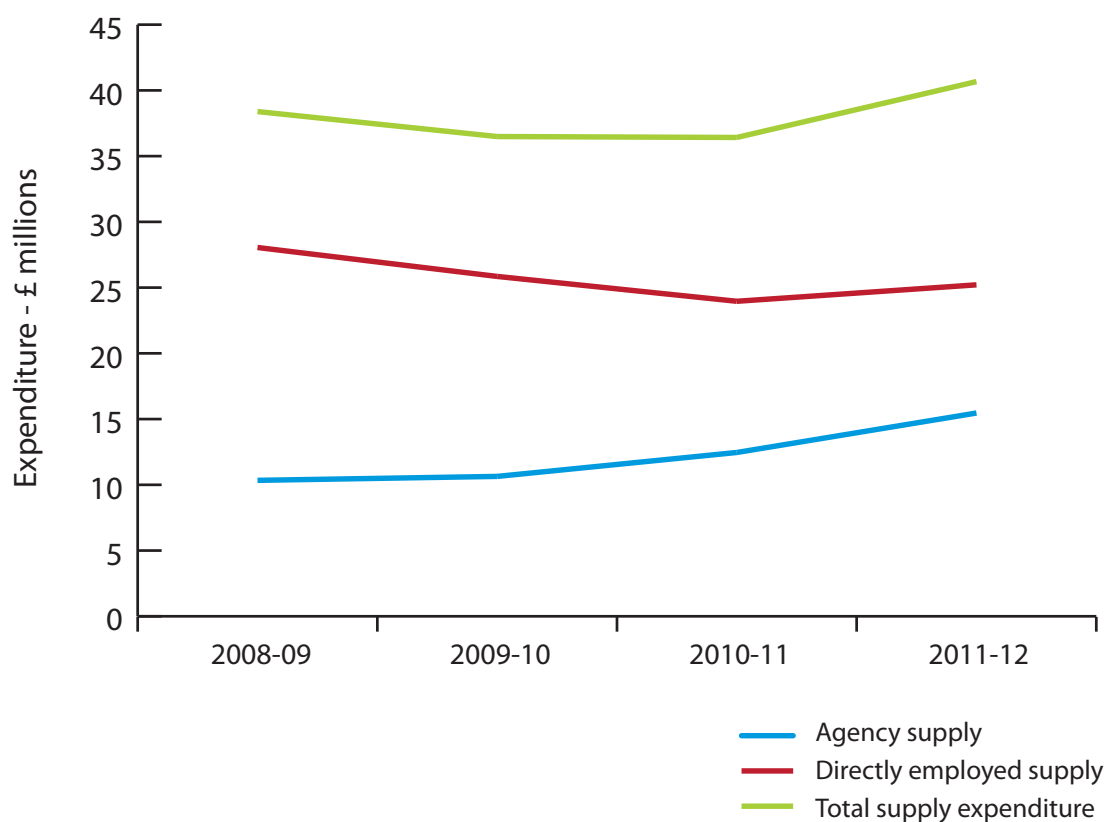


**1.5** Expenditure on external cover varies considerably between schools. Reasons include the extent of teacher absence, the extent to which a school has capacity to cover lessons from within its permanent staff, and the mix of external cover supply teachers and other staff it uses. In general, cover teachers recruited through a local authority list (and paid on the main teacher pay scale) cost schools more than those recruited through agencies.

**1.6** Expenditure on supply cover per pupil also varied significantly when aggregated to local authority level. In 2011-12, expenditure ranged

from an average of £86 to £276 per pupil. The variations at local authority level reflect the level of absence across the schools in the authority, which may be influenced by the effectiveness of schools and the local authority in managing sickness absence, and the approach taken in some authorities to the use of local authority registered lists of supply teachers and to the use of agencies. Understanding the reasons behind different levels of expenditure between schools is important to enable schools and authorities to assess the value for money of arrangements in place.

**Figure 1 – Expenditure on supply cover in 18 local authorities in Wales that were able to provide information has increased overall by seven per cent since 2008-09**



Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of data provided by 18 local authorities. Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Flintshire and Neath Port Talbot Councils were unable to provide data for all four years.



**1.7** To understand patterns of supply cover expenditure more fully, we asked local authorities to provide data on expenditure for the four years since 2008-09. Eighteen local authorities were able to provide this data and, across these authorities, total expenditure increased by almost 12 per cent between 2010-11 and 2011-12. Despite a small fall in total expenditure in 2008-09 and 2009-10, overall, supply cover expenditure had increased by seven per cent between 2008-09 and 2011-12 (**Figure 1** and **Appendix 3**).

**There is evidence that the number of days covered by supply staff is increasing and we estimate that, on average, just under 10 per cent of lessons are covered**

**1.8** **Figure 1** shows a significant change in patterns of expenditure across the 18 local authorities between 2008-09 and 2011-12, with a switch to recruiting supply teachers from agencies rather than directly employing staff. Over the four years, the amount spent on supply cover from agencies has increased by 50 per cent, from £10.3 million to £15.5 million. In 2008-09, agencies received 27 per cent of all supply expenditure compared to 38 per cent in 2011-12. By contrast, over the same period the amount spent by schools on directly employed supply cover fell by 10 per cent.

**1.9** Generally schools pay less for supply staff sourced through agencies than employing directly. Even after employers' national insurance contributions, other additions and agencies fees are taken into account, the amount paid by a school to an agency is usually less than the full cost of employing the same teacher directly. Teachers employed through agencies are generally paid a flat pay

rate set by the agency which is usually lower than the pay scale that schools and local authorities are required to use for teachers who they directly employ. This difference is particularly marked if the school directly employs teachers with a lot of experience or retired ex-teachers who make up a significant proportion of the supply teacher workforce<sup>5</sup> as they will be paid at or towards the top of the teachers' pay scale.

**1.10** Given the increase in the use of agency staff and the decrease in the use of directly employed supply, it is likely that the seven per cent increase in total expenditure represents a larger increase in the number of days of supply cover purchased by schools in the 18 authorities between 2008-09 and 2011-12. Our broad estimate is that the number of days covered by external supply teachers across the 18 local authorities has increased by approximately 23,000 days, from 224,000 in 2008-09 to 247,000 in 2011-12, an increase of 10 per cent.<sup>6</sup> During this period the proportion of teachers taking a period of sickness absence reduced from 64 per cent in 2008 to 59 per cent in 2011 and the average recorded sickness per teacher reduced from nine days to seven days. The increase in the use of supply cover is likely to be related to other changes such as: increased use of cover whilst teachers are attending training, professional development and meetings; increased external cover of vacancies; and a possible shift in some schools to external cover instead of using teachers and other permanent school staff.

**1.11** Our best estimate is that pupils are likely to have just under 10 per cent of lessons led not by their permanent teacher but covered by other teachers or staff. Based on an average cost of supply of £186 a day for directly

<sup>5</sup> Figures provided by the General Teaching Council for Wales in 2012 suggest that 20 per cent of supply teachers are aged over 60 compared to five per cent of other teachers (**Appendix 4**).

<sup>6</sup> This estimate assumes that 41 per cent of cover is provided by agency supply teachers and 59 per cent by directly employed teachers. We also assume that all cover is by supply teachers rather than cover supervisors or HLTAs.

employed teachers and £135 for agency supply teachers, the £54 million expenditure on external supply cover equates to approximately 333,000 days or 6.3 per cent of the days of all teaching staff. Our analysis of 595 covered lessons in seven of the schools we visited suggests that a further 3.1 per cent of cover (equivalent to an additional 165,000 days) is provided by other means, including cover by HLTA and other teachers and staff employed by schools and by re-arranging classes.

### **Partly because of cost pressures, schools are increasingly using recruitment agencies to source supply teachers and other cover staff**

- 1.12** Some schools we visited had clearly switched to using agency supply cover to save money. In other schools, the switch to using agency staff followed the local authority's decision to stop providing a supply list or to mandate that schools must use agencies. Others appreciated the other benefits of agencies' services, including the ability to source an individual quickly.
- 1.13** Expenditure on agency supply cover staff represented 41 per cent of total expenditure in 2011-12 in the 22 local authorities in Wales (Figure 2)<sup>7</sup>. Secondary schools made proportionally more use of agency staff (43 per cent of expenditure on supply) than primary schools (38 per cent of expenditure on supply).

## **Neither schools nor local authorities routinely monitor adequately the reasons for teachers' absence, and therefore do not always understand the reasons why cover is required**

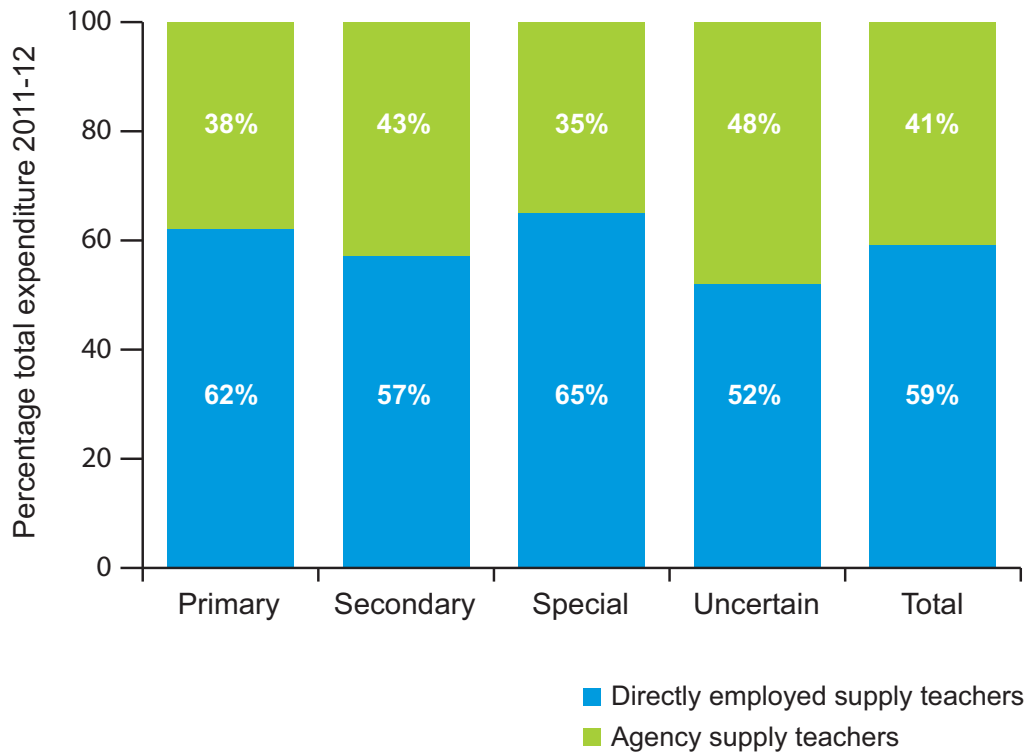
- 1.14** During our visits, we found that schools usually record the reasons why teachers were absent from the classroom in order to charge the supply cover correctly and, if appropriate, to reclaim costs. Some schools had a clear policy for requesting absence and monitored the amount of time and the reasons why teachers were not in the classroom. As a result, information was available that could help them make judgements about granting requests for absence and plan for future cover. However, this information was not generally used within the schools to enable managers understand the drivers of cover. Similarly, local authorities do not analyse the reasons why supply cover is required in order to understand better expenditure levels and take action where cover expenditure is high.
- 1.15** We asked seven schools (three primaries and four secondaries) to provide us with a detailed breakdown of the reasons for cover in every class which was covered over a two-week period. Of the 595 classes covered, just under half were covered due to sickness absence<sup>8</sup>, just over a fifth were covered for training or continuing professional development, and a further 10 per cent were covered to allow teachers to attend meetings.

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of total expenditure spent on agency supply staff varied between local authorities from zero to 100 per cent depending on the options available to schools within the local authority.

<sup>8</sup> Research in England found that sickness absence accounted for between 41 per cent of all absence in nursery schools and 50 per cent of absence in secondary schools. Source: Hutchings, M., James, J., Maylor, U., Menter, I. and Smart, S. (2006) *The recruitment, deployment and management of Supply Teachers in England* Department for Education report.



**Figure 2 – Expenditure on agency supply cover staff represented 41 per cent of total expenditure in 2011-12**



**Note**

There were occasions where local authorities were unable to assign the supply expenditure breakdown to different types of school. In particular, two local authorities (Swansea and Caerphilly) did not record expenditure in a way that allowed this. These authorities accounted for the majority (£7.2 million) of the total expenditure categorised as 'uncertain'.

*Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of data provided by 22 local authorities*

## There is scope to reduce teachers' sickness absence

- 1.16** Welsh Government statistics show that teachers took an average of seven days of sickness absence in 2011 (Appendix 5). Allowing for the working patterns of teachers in the maintained sector, this translates to a sickness absence rate of 3.5 per cent, similar to the average for local authority staff. As an occupational group, teachers' sickness absence rates are lower than those of nurses (six per cent) but higher than medical and dental staff in the Welsh NHS (1.4 per cent)<sup>9</sup>.
- 1.17** There has been a downward trend in rates of teacher sickness absence, from nine days in 2008 to seven days in 2011 and 2012<sup>10</sup>. Across local authorities in Wales, rates of teacher sickness absence in 2011 varied between four days in Ceredigion and over nine days in Swansea which suggests that there is scope to reduce sickness absence further in some areas (Appendix 5, Figure 11). The causes of this variation are not fully understood but we found the approach of schools to managing attendance varied too much.
- 1.18** The rate of teachers' sickness absence in Wales is comparable to that in Northern Ireland<sup>11</sup> but is substantially higher than that in England<sup>12</sup> (Figure 3). The proportion of teachers taking at least one day off was slightly lower in England (55 per cent) than Wales (59 per cent) and teachers who took sickness absence in England were absent for an average of eight days compared to 11 days in Wales. By reducing the level of sickness absence in Wales to that in England,

we estimate that Welsh schools could reduce the number of days requiring cover by around 60,000, saving over £9 million a year in cover costs<sup>13</sup>.

## Schools' approaches to managing teachers' attendance varied too much

- 1.19** All of the schools we visited had clear attendance management policies, which had been adapted from model policies provided by their local authority. These attendance management policies set out reporting arrangements and trigger points for management action such as criteria for referral to occupational health services, or for taking informal and formal action in relation to non-attendance. However, schools varied in the rigour with which they followed their procedures.
- 1.20** Return-to-work interviews are an important aspect of managing staff attendance and feature in the sickness absence policies adopted by local authorities and most schools. They offer the opportunity to explore reasons for absence and its impact on the individual concerned, and allow managers and staff to discuss how missed work will be made up without overloading the individual. Sensitively handled, return-to-work interviews allow line managers to probe for work-related issues that affect health, such as stress or workload. Line managers should document all return-to-work interviews and will need to rely on this written record if subsequent non-attendance triggers formal action at a later point.

<sup>9</sup> Welsh Government, *Sickness absence in the NHS, by staff group for 2011*.

<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government, *Teachers in service, vacancies and sickness absence: January 2012*, SDR 101/2013 Table 7.

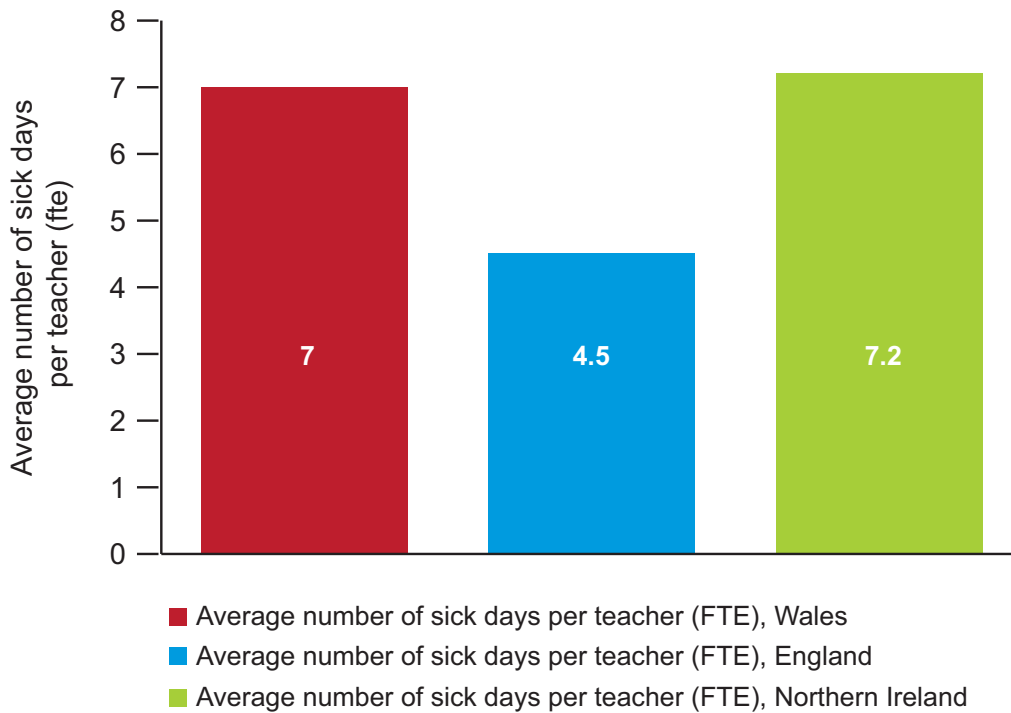
<sup>11</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, *Teacher workforce statistics in grant aided schools in Northern Ireland 2011/12 June 2012*, Table 1.

<sup>12</sup> *School workforce in England: November 2010*, SFR 15/2013 Table 18.

<sup>13</sup> Estimate is based on the assumption that the 187,377 days sickness leave in 2012 is reduced by 59,619 days through 55 per cent not 60 per cent taking an average of 8.1 days not 10.89 days and 80 per cent of sickness absence is covered with 41 per cent of cover provided by agency staff at an average daily cost of £135 and 59 per cent is provided by directly employed staff at an average cost of £186 a day.



**Figure 3 – The average number of days of sick leave per teacher in Wales is similar to Northern Ireland but significantly higher than in England**



**Note**  
There are no comparable figures available for Scotland.

*Source: Welsh Government, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, UK Government Department for Education.*

**1.21** In many of the schools we visited return-to-work interviews were very informal and were not documented routinely. Some headteachers told us that they deliberately kept these meetings low key so as not to ‘come over heavy’ on the teacher or cause unnecessary stress. However, by not documenting these conversations, managers risked jeopardising their ability to enforce attendance procedures if absence subsequently reached the trigger points for actions set out in the schools attendance policy. This was especially the case where policies were applied

inconsistently across staff within the school (such as by only documenting return-to-work interviews with staff seen as poor attenders).

**1.22** Some schools had introduced more formal approaches to managing staff’s return to work, for example by setting aside a time each week for a senior teacher to see all staff who had been absent during the previous week. In one primary school we visited, the headteacher employed one of a variety of attendance management tools to highlight problematic absence which was used in return to work interviews (**Case study 1**).



## Case study 1 – One primary school has introduced a variety of methods to manage attendance more effectively

Since its formation following the merger of an infants and junior school, the new primary school has adopted the Council's standard attendance policy for schools. The headteacher with the support of the school's governors and the local authority has taken a robust approach in implementing the attendance policy and supporting the management of staff with ill-health. This has included:

- conducting return to work interviews after each episode of absence;
- monitoring absence to ensure that action is taken if the appropriate trigger points are met;
- making referrals to occupational health services where appropriate; and
- including information on staff attendance in quarterly reports to the governors.

The school uses information produced by the Council on absence history and absence monitoring tools, including the Bradford Index (further information on the Index is available in the Wales Audit Office Good Practice Exchange [www.wao.gov.uk/goodpractice/](http://www.wao.gov.uk/goodpractice/)) to support attendance management, particularly for short periods of absence. The tool is one of a number that distinguishes clearly between short and long term absence, on the basis that short term absence is very disruptive to the school. Essentially, the Bradford Index calculates a score for each staff's attendance over a period: repeated short term absences will give a higher score than one long period of absence.

The headteacher carries out a return to work interview for any absence by teaching and administrative staff and, prior to the meeting, will review absence history and note the individual's Bradford Index score based on their attendance in the previous year. The headteacher reported that using the scores generated by the Bradford Index is helpful, partly because it emphasises the disruptive effect of repeated short term absences, and provide a useful steer in conversations with staff.

**1.23** Many schools that we visited did not analyse information on teacher attendance, to help them monitor overall patterns and to identify when an individual's attendance had reached a trigger point for action. One of the smaller primary schools that we visited depended on the local authority to inform the administrator if staff had reached a trigger point for action under the school's attendance policy, but this notification could take several weeks and caused significant delays.

**1.24** Some schools analysed their staff attendance statistics in detail and used the data to highlight staffing groups or departments with higher levels of absence and which, therefore, merited closer management scrutiny. The information was reported regularly to governors on the staffing committee or, if necessary, more widely. However, few schools received information to enable them to compare overall sickness

levels with those of other schools in the local authority or within their family of schools, or with publicly available information such as average sickness absence figures for Wales or elsewhere in the UK.

**1.25** Welsh Government statistics show that long term sickness absence (absence over 20 days) accounts for about half (49 per cent) of all days lost through sickness absence<sup>14</sup>. Several of the schools we visited had members of staff who were on long-term sickness absence. Some of the headteachers reported that they were very happy with the support that they were receiving from the local authority and its occupational health service in supporting their management of these individuals. In one primary school, the headteacher worked closely with the local authority's Human Resources officer and occupational health nurse to manage the return to work of a staff member who had a

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Wales *SDR 101/2013 Teachers in service, Vacancies and Sickness Absence*, Table 5, Welsh Government.





history of repeated absence. However, some other headteachers felt that occupational health services were not sufficiently pro-active in encouraging staff members back into work.

- 1.26** Stress-related illness can be a significant contributory factor in long-term absence. In recognition of this, and of their responsibilities as employers in relation to work-related stress, the attendance policies of many schools stated that staff citing stress as the cause of absence should be referred to occupational health on the first occasion of absence. However, this requirement was not being implemented routinely in the schools that we visited despite some having members of staff absent for a long time with stress-related ill-health.

## Part 2 – Cover arrangements are not managed well enough to ensure that learners make good progress and are safeguarded

### Most schools do not have formal policies on cover arrangements in the event of teacher absence

**2.1** A formal, documented policy on cover arrangements enables school governors, teachers and other staff, and parents to understand the approach to cover being used in a school and how it minimises the risk to learner progress. However, none of the schools that we visited had a formal policy

on cover available that focused on reducing the impact of teacher absence on learners. In practice, the schools had many different approaches to providing cover (Figure 4). As schools vary considerably and their circumstances, including the availability of cover teachers, also vary, it is to be expected that schools will have different approaches to providing cover. However, schools do not give sufficient attention to ensuring their chosen approach effectively meets learners' needs and provides value for money.

**Figure 4 – Schools had different approaches to providing cover**

Examples of cover arrangements
<p><b>Primary – different approaches</b></p> <p>All cover provided by four HLTAs.            All cover provided by qualified teachers from the local authority list.            All cover provided by qualified teachers through a preferred recruitment agency.            HLTAs and two part-time teachers cover the first two days, then supply teachers.            HLTA and cover supervisor plus three long-term agency supply teachers provide most cover.</p>
<p><b>Secondary – different approaches</b></p> <p>Most short-term cover by (seven) HLTAs, then two regular directly-employed supply teachers (paid on main scale), then agency teachers from one agency.            Cover manager and cover supervisors provide short-term cover, then supply teacher from the school's preferred agency.            Most cover provided by cover supervisors and employed part-time teachers. Limited use of supply teachers through a local agency.            Full-time cover supervisor works across a cluster of schools and arranges cover with the cluster business manager. Supply staff never used for planned absence. Where necessary, supply teachers are sought from several agencies.            Short and long term cover by three teachers with cover as part of their contract, two HLTAs and also by a group of three (ex-senior) teachers employed through the local authority list.</p>

Source: Wales Audit Office



**2.2** Responsibility for obtaining cover usually fell to a member of the office staff, supervised by a senior teacher or sometimes the school business manager of a secondary school. In some primary schools, headteachers were often involved in arranging cover. Where a school could not provide cover from its own staff, including any HLTAs or cover supervisors employed, it tended to obtain cover from supply teachers or teaching assistants who were familiar to them. For many schools, using a reliable and known individual was the key factor in sourcing cover and, for short term absence, was more important than trying to obtain a subject/age group match.

**2.3** There was no consistency about when schools would seek to provide a qualified teacher to provide cover. Secondary schools would usually try to obtain a subject specialist, if possible, after between three and five days absence, while primary schools would usually bring in a teacher rather than an HLTA at this point. In some schools, however, the period before bringing a qualified teacher in was sometimes significantly longer, and in one primary school HLTAs provided cover for up to 10 days of consecutive absence.

## Cover is mostly delivered when needed although it does not always match exact requirements

### Cover arrangements ensure that school teachers rarely need to cover for absent colleagues

**2.4** In the schools that we visited most teacher absence was covered without resorting to cover by colleagues, members of the senior management team or by combining classes (Figure 5). Seven of the schools that we visited provided a detailed breakdown of the lessons covered in a two week period (a total of 595 lessons in three primary and four secondary schools). In this sample, only one per cent of covered lessons were covered by a member of the senior management team. Although this suggests that the situation has improved since 2008, when research undertaken for the Welsh Government found that senior managers were undertaking a substantial amount of cover<sup>15</sup>, some secondary headteachers told us that they and other senior teachers in the school now spend more time covering classes than prior to 2009.

**2.5** The most recent survey of teachers' workload in England and Wales (2010) found that classroom teachers spent an average of 0.1 hour a week covering for absent colleagues, an equivalent of 3.9 hours a year<sup>16</sup>.

**2.6** Many of the schools we visited maintained records of cover undertaken by teaching staff members for the purpose of demonstrating that teachers only provide cover for absent colleagues rarely and in circumstances that are not foreseeable. This requirement – known as 'rarely cover' has been a feature of teachers' contracts since 2009. We found

<sup>15</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research (2010), *Research into the National Agreement on Raising Standards and Tackling Workloads*.

<sup>16</sup> Gemma Deakin, Nicola James, Mike Tickner & Jane Tidswell (2010) *Teachers workload diary survey 2010*, Department for Education.

that 'rarely cover' was interpreted strictly with a low incidence of teachers being asked to cover for colleagues. All but one of the schools that we visited told us that they were able to meet the requirement that staff 'rarely cover' for absent colleagues. Particularly challenging circumstances caused by a relatively large number of staff redundancies in one school made it difficult to meet the requirement, but the school was working towards this goal. Six per cent of the sample of 595 lessons requiring cover were covered by a member of the school's teaching staff (Figure 5) although this includes 'floating teachers' who are employed to provide cover for all or part of their time.

**2.7** Schools can reduce the need for external cover by employing 'floating' teachers (sometimes called 'cover teachers') or cover supervisors where it is cost-effective to do so. This may be a desirable option for some schools, where they have significant levels and predictable patterns of staff absence, but there are less obvious benefits for those experiencing sporadic absence. It will also be less relevant where secondary schools require covering staff to have the relevant subject expertise. At least three of the 10 secondary schools that we visited employed a floating teacher to provide cover throughout the school, although none had evaluated the cost effectiveness of the post.

**Figure 5 – Most classes were covered without using teacher colleagues or members of the senior management team**

Mode of cover	Percentage
An external supply teacher sourced through an agency	43.0
An external supply teacher directly employed by the school	24.2
HLTA/cover supervisor employed by the school	15.0
Another member of the school's regular teaching staff (this may include teachers who have part of their time as 'floating' cover)	5.9
A member of the school's teaching staff employed as a cover supervisor	4.4
Another member of the school's regular support staff	3.4
Splitting, doubling or otherwise rearranging the class to avoid using cover	3.2
A member of the school's senior management team	1.0
<b>Total number of sessions covered</b>	<b>595</b>

Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of a sample of teaching sessions/classes that were covered provided by seven schools for a two week period, Autumn 2012.



**2.8** During our visits we found that some of the schools employed qualified teachers as cover supervisors, some of whom had part-time teaching contracts and were employed as cover supervisors for the remainder of sessions in a week. We interviewed several teachers in this position who were newly qualified and were prepared to take on the cover supervisor role rather than do general supply teaching for an agency. In practice, there was relatively little difference in their pay as a cover supervisor employed by the school and the rate of pay offered for supply teaching by agencies. However, although this arrangement may seem attractive for both parties, unless the roles of a teacher and a cover supervisor are very clearly defined, there can be difficulty managing individuals carrying out two roles with different terms and conditions.

### **Some schools had difficulty sourcing cover that met their exact requirements**

**2.9** Although the negative impact of cover on learner progress was particularly significant during key stage 3 (see Estyn main findings in [Appendix 2 para 1](#)), we found that long-term teacher absence can also have a significant impact on learners during key stage 4 and in sixth forms if a school is unable to source a replacement specialist teacher or is already struggling to recruit in the speciality. In one secondary school we visited, for example, a dip in outcomes in mathematics was attributed at least in part to the long term absence of a specialist mathematics teacher. The absence exacerbated problems faced by a department where a lot of teaching was by non-subject specialists because of previous difficulties in recruiting specialist mathematics teachers. In another secondary school, the long term absence of four members of staff in core subjects was believed to have contributed to a decline in outcomes in 2010-11.

**2.10** While secondary schools would use cover supervisors or supply teachers without seeking to achieve a subject match for short-term absence, they generally tried to recruit a teacher qualified in the relevant subject as cover for medium and long-term absences. Some of the schools we visited told us that they sometimes had difficulty recruiting cover that matched their exact requirements in terms of subject or specialism. Secondary schools in particular reported difficulties in recruiting supply teachers in mathematics and physics.

**2.11** Primary and secondary schools located in rural areas and Welsh medium and bilingual schools generally had greater difficulty sourcing cover, regardless of subject or age group match. This was either because they did not believe that there were many suitable supply teachers able to attend at short notice given the distances travelled to work in some rural areas, or because there is a shortage of teachers who are able to work in the medium of Welsh in some parts of the country. Some of these schools have developed an informal 'pool' of known teachers within their area to cover absence, which did not extend to every subject and age range. For example, a headteacher in a Welsh-medium secondary school in North East Wales described how she had identified a pool of experienced teachers, including former staff members, who could teach in Welsh and provided almost all of the cover required by the school. However, the difficulty of obtaining teachers able to work in the medium of Welsh and at short notice meant that it was not always possible to achieve a subject match.

**2.12** Special schools reported similar problems in recruiting supply cover staff with the required skills. In the special school we visited the headteacher sourced supply from former members of staff and recommendations made by other special schools and care settings.

The school was aiming to develop a pool of known supply teachers and support staff because of the particular skills required and the importance of providing continuity for the pupils. In a primary school that had a special unit, the headteacher gave priority to minimising 'strangers' working with the pupils with special needs by using teaching assistants in the main school to cover absence in the special needs unit, rather than using outside staff, and backfilling if necessary.

## **Schools do not do enough to monitor the quality of teaching in covered classes or the impact on learners' progress**

### **Schools do not routinely assess the impact of their cover arrangements on learners' progress**

**2.13** Schools should monitor their cover arrangements to ensure that particular groups of pupils are not disproportionately affected, that the mix of cover by qualified teachers and other staff was enabling pupils to make good progress in covered lessons, and that the pupils and staff involved believed the arrangements to be as effective as possible. However, only a few of the schools we visited routinely monitored the impact of their arrangements on learners closely enough.

**2.14** Most schools that had taken action to change their approach to cover arrangements did so in response to long-term sickness or other absence in a core subject or an exam class (**Case study 2**), rather than as a consequence of the results of routine monitoring. On occasion, the trigger for action seemed to be complaints from learners or parents about the impact of absence on progress. Estyn found

that only a few schools monitor the impact of teacher absence on pupils' learning closely enough. In these schools, senior staff or business managers:

- a** keep a detailed record of teacher absence, track patterns of staff absence and initiate follow-up activity where necessary;
- b** record how many and how often specific classes are affected by staff absence;
- c** collect first-hand evidence about the quality of work that is set; and
- d** meet learners to gather their views about the effectiveness of supply cover arrangements.

### **Many schools do not adequately monitor the quality of lesson planning or the quality of teaching in covered lessons**

**2.15** During our visits, senior teachers made clear that, where they planned to be absent, the teacher concerned should provide lesson plans and material for each class requiring cover. In the best instances, cover supervisors or HLTAs would be able to discuss the material in advance of the lesson with the class teacher. However, we found that schools did not always monitor either whether material had been left or the quality of that material. Only six per cent of the supply teachers who responded to our on-line survey said that clear lesson plans and instructions were always left for them. Three-quarters said that they were 'sometimes' given clear lesson plans. In interviews, many cover supervisors, HLTAs and supply teachers told us that the work that is set is often not sufficiently challenging and does not always meet the needs of the learners. The learners we spoke to echoed this view.





## Case study 2 – One comprehensive school took action to mitigate the impact of teacher absence on learners and reviewed the actions to assess their effectiveness

In recent years the school has experienced a number of long-term absences. The cost of supply cover for sickness absence was a significant contributory factor to the school facing a substantial deficit budget. The school and its Governors, as well as learners and parents, were concerned about the impact of absence on learning.

The school reviewed the impact of absence on departments, classes and individual learners over a six month period. This revealed the areas of the curriculum, key stages and classes most affected by absence and enabled the school to take action to limit the amount of cover experienced by some classes. The school brought in specialist teachers from other schools to teach the exam classes most affected by teacher absence. It was able to call on some experienced retired teachers who were already employed as learning coaches to supplement these specialist teachers.

The school's current strategy for cover aims to minimise the impact of teacher absence on learners' progress. It employs two fractional floating teachers (i.e. teachers with part-teaching, part cover contracts) and two cover supervisors to provide a substantial proportion of the cover required. The school has also taken steps to manage attendance effectively using its attendance policy and benchmarks staff absence rates against similar schools.

The above arrangements have been in place for two years, but it is too early to see the full impact. However, improved management of staff absence alongside other improvements in the school has led to improved performance at key stage 4. Performance in indicators at key stage 4 has increased since 2009 and the school achieved its best ever results in Summer 2012.

- 2.16** In secondary schools, the head of department is usually responsible for preparing materials or instructions for lessons if a teacher is absent at short notice because of illness or another unforeseen circumstance. In primary schools, this responsibility usually falls to a senior teacher, often with the support of a parallel class teacher if available. Most headteachers in the primary schools we visited reported that, because teachers plan on a weekly basis, material should be available even if the teacher is absent unexpectedly. However, some HLTAs employed by primary schools and supply teachers reported that material was not always available to them. A minority of schools reported that they had asked cover staff for feedback on the adequacy of work or instructions left for pupils, but only a few schools routinely used this feedback to influence their policies or practices in this regard.
- 2.17** We found that most supply teachers are not included in the performance management systems applied to permanent teachers. Permanent school staff providing cover, including teachers, cover supervisors, and HLTAs were more likely to be included in performance management arrangements. Other than for long-term cover, the monitoring of the performance of the cover teacher was often limited. The lack of monitoring of the quality of many covered lessons means that many schools are not sufficiently aware of the educational experience their pupils receive and are less likely to be able to make improvements or to provide feedback that might enable the staff involved to develop.
- 2.18** Headteachers told us during our visits that they used a variety of informal methods to monitor the quality of learning in lessons covered by supply teachers. For example, they or other senior teachers may pay more attention to a class taught by a supply teacher when they undertake learning walks in the school and may 'look in' on the lesson. More



formally, the head of department in secondary schools or a senior teacher in primary schools will usually look at the books or material completed by the learners at the end of the day or after the lesson. The class teacher may also assess the learners' work on their return. However, the schools we visited provided little formal feedback to supply teachers who are not permanent employees, regardless of the length of their placement or whether they work regularly in the school. And supply teachers told us that their performance was often not monitored and they received little feedback on their performance.

### **Schools provide little reliable feedback on the performance of supply teachers to the supply agency or the local authority**

**2.19** Agencies often request feedback on the performance of staff they provide to a school. The agency may use this to identify issues to discuss with the supply teachers individually, inform training and to manage their supply teacher pool. We found that some schools routinely provided feedback to agencies whilst other schools only sometimes did so. However, the lack of formal supervision and feedback on supply teachers in many schools meant that there was not always a firm basis on which to provide meaningful feedback to agencies. Feedback tended to be detailed only when there were particular concerns about teaching or other aspects of performance. Schools did not usually keep a record of feedback given to an agency unless there was a serious concern.

**2.20** Sixteen of the 22 local authorities in Wales maintain supply registers but these authorities do not solicit feedback from schools about the performance of teachers on their registers. Schools may experience unsatisfactory teaching or classroom management by permanent or supply staff, and we found no

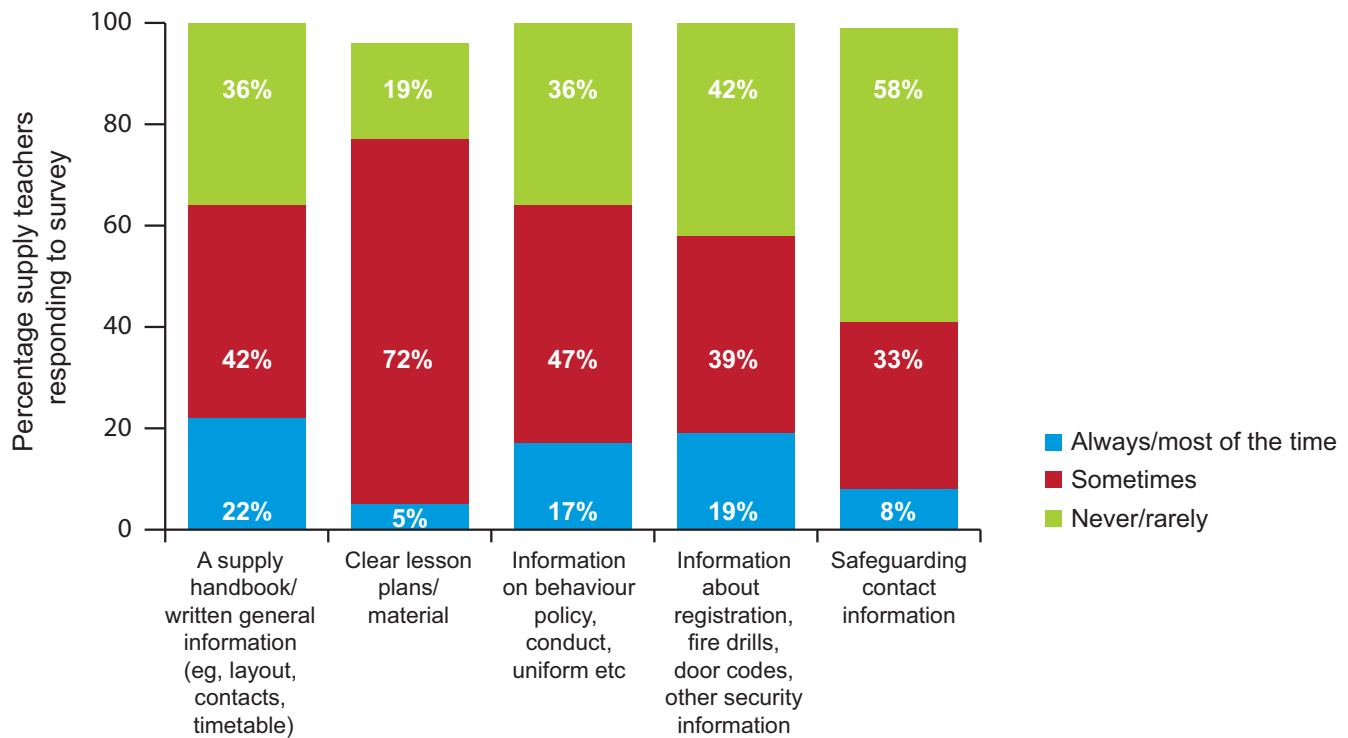
evidence to suggest that the performance of supply teachers is any better or worse than the performance of permanent staff. However, nearly all schools that we visited told us that, at one time or another, they had raised concerns about the performance of a supply teacher. Many of the schools we visited and six of 13 schools surveyed said that they had asked a supply teacher to leave before the end of their contract or placement because of concerns about their unsatisfactory performance. The Education (Supply of Information) (Wales) Regulations 2009 place legal requirements on agencies, schools and local authorities to refer certain matters involving the conduct or competence of a supply teacher to the General Teaching Council for Wales. In addition, any parent, pupil, fellow teacher or member of the public may refer a concern about a teacher's conduct to the General Teaching Council for Wales. None of the schools that we visited said they had made such a report. The lack of supervision, monitoring and feedback of supply teachers in the majority of schools that we visited makes it unlikely that a school would be able to provide sufficient evidence to sustain such a complaint to the Council. This leads to the risk that other schools could unknowingly employ an unsuitable cover teacher.

### **Schools do not always provide supply teachers with sufficient support**

**2.21** Supply teachers that we met during our visits and those that responded to our on-line survey told us that they do not always have the support and resources that they need to do their jobs effectively. Those with experience of teaching in several schools commented that the quality of information provided for them when they first attended a new school varied.



**Figure 6 – Supply teachers do not always have the information that they need to perform their role effectively**



Source: Wales Audit Office survey of supply teachers, November 2012 – January 2013

**2.22** Almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of the supply teachers we surveyed said that they were generally provided with enough information to fulfil their role in a new class or school. The remaining third said that they were rarely or never given a handbook with general information about the school, including staff details and the daily timetable (Figure 6). Only some of the schools that we visited had a handbook for supply teachers, although in some cases this was not seen as a priority because the approach to sourcing supply meant that temporary cover from outside the school was rarely engaged.

**2.23** Where provided, schools' handbooks varied in their coverage and level of detail. More than half of the supply teachers that replied to our survey said that they rarely or never received information about the school's safeguarding procedures and contacts. More than a third of supply teachers said that they were rarely or never given information about safety measures, including registration, fire procedures or door codes. In interviews, many supply teachers said that they had difficulty accessing the school's intranet, which in many schools limited access to the electronic register and classroom materials.

**2.24** Supply teachers commented on the reception that they received from teachers and other school staff, both during interviews and in their responses to our survey. Even when they worked at a school regularly, some reported feeling isolated in the staffroom and often being unclear who to ask for support, advice and help during their placement. Some respondents reported they would like other teachers to treat supply teachers more respectfully than was sometimes their experience.

## **Most schools have employed HLTAs and cover supervisors to meet national workload agreement requirements, but they generally do not evaluate the effectiveness of the posts**

**2.25** In recent years, schools have increasingly employed cover supervisors and HLTAs to provide cover, both for planned and unplanned absence. Their employment was encouraged by the 2003 National Workload Agreement to enable schools to meet the requirements for planning, preparation and assessment time and ensure that teachers 'rarely cover'. Almost all secondary schools we visited employed at least one cover supervisor to cover planned absence and, depending on their availability, some short-term sickness absence. In most primary schools HLTAs employed within the school to deliver lessons during teachers planning, preparation and assessment time are often the first port of call for covering absence for a short period. Two secondary schools told us that they wanted to recruit additional cover supervisors, but were unable to do so either because of financial constraints and/or restrictions because they had recently made teachers redundant.

**2.26** A minority of schools made little or no use of unqualified staff and preferred to employ qualified teachers to cover all absence. Two of the 12 primary schools we visited routinely deployed agency supply teachers during the time that permanent teachers were undertaking planning, preparation and assessment activities, although in one this practice had emerged because the school did not employ any teaching assistants qualified to the appropriate level. Three of the 10 secondary schools that we visited employed a floating teacher to provide cover rather than cover supervisors.

**2.27** The senior teachers that we spoke to were able to explain the rationale for the decisions that they had made with regard to employing cover supervisors and HLTAs. However, they had rarely evaluated the effectiveness of the posts in terms of their impact on learners, or examined the proportion of time spent by the post-holders undertaking cover in order to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the posts.

## **Not all schools ensure that safeguarding procedures are in place for temporary staff**

**2.28** Where schools employ external staff from a local authority pool or a recruitment agency, they normally rely on either the local authority or the agency to undertake pre-employment checks. However, legal responsibility to employ appropriate staff ultimately lies with the school. Pre-employment checks would usually include an enhanced disclosure check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly a Criminal Records Bureau check), a check on registration with the General Teaching Council for Wales, employment references and a health check. However, there is no clear instruction for schools in Wales setting out the enquiries that schools should undertake



before employment commences. Further, not all of the schools we visited had procedures in place to ensure that pre-employment checks have been completed before an individual is employed. Some, but not all, asked to see Disclosure and Barring Service checks when a supply teacher first came to the school, but only a few schools retained records of this being done.

**2.29** Prior to 2010, the Quality Mark for supply agencies placed the requirement for some pre-employment checks on qualifying agencies<sup>17</sup>. However, since the abolition of the Quality Mark in Wales in 2010, only the

agency that holds the two national contracts for supply teachers has had to meet any specific requirements for pre-employment checks. Despite this, the schools we visited did not generally enquire about the nature of pre-employment checks carried out by the recruitment agencies they used. In response to concerns about the level of checks being carried out by agencies, Caerphilly County Borough Council has included guidance for its headteachers on the checks that schools should expect to have been completed prior to the employment of supply teachers although this is currently under review ([Case study 3](#)).

### Case study 3 – Caerphilly County Borough Council has improved its support for schools recruiting supply cover

Caerphilly Council has introduced a range of measures to support its schools in the recruitment of supply cover.

In addition to strengthening its own supply list arrangements, the Council has negotiated with recruitment agencies to appoint a preferred supplier for supply teachers.

The Council's Human Resources Department included the hiring of supply teachers in its training on recruitment offered to headteachers, bursars and school governors within the county. Training included relations with agencies; information about the pre-employment checks that schools should require; and data protection issues, including record keeping and the storage of information.

Prior to the abolition of the supply agencies Quality Mark in 2010, Caerphilly Council required its schools to only use agencies that had achieved the Quality Mark. This ensured some consistency in the pre-employment checks undertaken. Schools within the Authority have identified instances where appropriate pre-employment checks have not been carried out, with some agencies not undertaking new Criminal Records Bureau checks for each employment but supplying checks undertaken for employment in other Authorities. Recently, Caerphilly's Education Human Resources Department wrote on behalf of its schools to all of the agencies used by its schools detailing the checks that it expected them to make. This has included providing guidance on the Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

<sup>17</sup> The Quality Mark for Supply teachers was introduced by the Welsh Government in 2007, mirroring a scheme in England. Agencies and local authorities were accredited if they met specified standards for recruitment and training of supply teachers. The Quality Mark was withdrawn in 2010.

## Part 3 - The Welsh Government and local authorities do not take sufficient account of the impact of teachers' absence in their measures to help schools achieve improved outcomes for learners

**3.1** Schools make decisions about how they deploy and manage their workforce. However, the overarching framework within which schools operate is set by the Welsh Government, and councils have a responsibility to promote improvement in their schools.

### **The Welsh Government's policies for school improvement do not recognise the extent to which classes are covered and the needs of supply teachers**

#### **The Welsh Government's policies and initiatives for education in schools are one of the significant drivers of classes requiring cover**

**3.2** Given the scale of cover provided, the effectiveness of cover arrangements in schools will have an impact on the implementation of the Welsh Government's policies for improving the educational attainment of children and young people in Wales. However, there is no Welsh Government strategy directly focused on cover arrangements.

**3.3** One reason for teacher absence from the classroom (and a driver of the need for cover) is to enable teacher participation in events linked to government policies and initiatives. The Welsh Government pays grants for supply cover to encourage schools to release teachers to attend relevant training, meetings and conferences, and for non-teaching time. Fourteen local authorities provided information

about how much expenditure on cover was reimbursed from grants. The information suggests that about one sixth of expenditure on cover is re-imbursed by Welsh Government Grants.

#### **Supply teachers are not always included in training for national priorities and new initiatives**

**3.4** The Welsh Government's current policies for improving educational outcomes are summarised in the plan 'Improving Schools', published in October 2012. The Welsh Government is introducing a requirement for schools to train staff in the national priority areas set out in the plan, which are improving levels of literacy and numeracy and reducing the impact of deprivation. However there is no mechanism currently in place to routinely include supply teachers in this training.

**3.5** Cover supervisors, HLTAs and floating teachers employed directly by schools have access to training as part of their school's in-service training programme. They will generally attend training deemed to be relevant to their role(s) within the school. A minority of cover supervisors also reported attending training provided by the Council or by private companies that was specifically tailored to their role.

**3.6** Other supply teachers had limited access to training, especially on general teaching priorities as opposed to classroom management. Some, but not all, agencies provide training for supply teachers, cover supervisors and teaching assistants registered with them, although the training is not always





free and attendance is not compulsory. In our survey of supply teachers, only 42 per cent had accessed any training in the previous year. In interviews, teachers who had been working as supply teachers for several years described struggling to keep up with major changes in education in Wales, such as the introduction of the foundation phase in primary schools. They reported often missing out on training opportunities offered to colleagues with permanent contracts. Even when a supply teacher was working in a school on a long placement or had worked regularly for several years, they were sometimes not invited to staff meetings, school-based training or INSET days.

**3.7** Pay can be a significant barrier to supply teachers attending training: supply teachers were rarely paid to attend school-based training and, if they did attend, they lost the opportunity to work elsewhere. Schools that invited teachers to training events said that few attended unless they were working on a long contract. Some agencies that provided training told us that some supply teachers were keen to attend training events delivered during the school holidays or after school. However, these events are only available to teachers registered with the agency concerned and are not compulsory.

**3.8** Until March 2010, the General Teaching Council for Wales administered a professional development bursary programme provided by the Welsh Government for all teachers.<sup>18</sup> The bursaries were open to supply teachers but the General Teaching Council for Wales told us that very few supply teachers applied for funding under the programme. A significant disincentive for supply teachers was that the bursary only met the cost of training and,

for permanent teachers, any cover required for their absence. It did not extend to paying for the supply teacher's time. The Welsh Government ended the bursary programme after April 2010.

**Performance management for teachers does not extend to supply teachers, regardless of the length of their placement, and may not be effective for cover supervisors and HLTAs in their cover role**

**3.9** The Welsh Government introduced a new performance management system for teachers and headteachers from 1 January 2012<sup>19</sup>. The system provides for objectives to be set for teachers and headteachers, practice observed and achievements to be recorded. It requires a discussion about how an individual's objectives and professional development activities support the wider school priorities. We found that, although teachers employed on fixed term contract are appraised, and others undertaking a placement (such as maternity cover) lasting half a term or more may be formally observed, other supply teachers are not involved in the performance management system. As a result, schools could be placing supply teachers into their classes on a regular basis without ever observing their practice formally.

**3.10** We found that floating teachers and HLTAs are often able to attend the training provided through a school's INSET training programme. This may include training in national priority areas and other topics, such as behaviour management. They are also subject to performance management within the school. However, HLTAs who undertake cover as one of several roles within the school may not have objectives set in relation to their

<sup>18</sup> The GTCW administered professional development bursaries for teachers working in maintained schools on behalf of the Welsh Government. In 2009-10, £9 million was available through the fund to support teachers undertaking a range of training and other development opportunities. Approximately one in 10 teachers was able to access the professional training funds each year.

<sup>19</sup> Welsh Government Performance management for teachers: *Revised performance management arrangements 2012*, May 2012.

cover role. While staff in cover supervisors posts usually have access to training within the school, in secondary schools the majority do not take part in any formal performance management arrangements, even though most of those we spoke to commented that this is something that they would find valuable.

### **The Welsh Government's Quality Mark for recruitment agencies and local authorities was ineffective in improving the quality of supply teaching**

**3.11** In 2007 the Welsh Government introduced a Quality Mark for supply agencies and local authorities that mirrored a similar programme in England. The aim was to improve the quality of supply teachers by requiring agencies and local authorities that managed a supply pool or register to demonstrate robust pre-employment procedures, and to provide training and continuing professional development for supply staff on their books. By the time it was withdrawn in March 2011, only five agencies operating in Wales and no local authority had achieved the Quality Mark for supply teachers.

**3.12** Prior to the Quality Mark's abolition, Caerphilly Council had advised its schools to only use agencies that had achieved the Quality Mark. Although some other local authorities had preferred agency agreements with Quality Marked agencies, some of these agreements had pre-dated the introduction of the Quality Mark.

**3.13** The Welsh Government told us that the Quality Mark was ineffective in achieving its aim of improving the quality of supply teaching, as those agencies that achieved it already had good practices in place and the prospect of a Quality Mark had not encouraged other agencies to improve. However, the Quality Mark has not been replaced by any other measures to achieve its stated aim<sup>20</sup>.

### **New arrangements for the induction of newly qualified supply teachers have been introduced**

**3.14** Teachers who qualified after 1 April 2003 are required to satisfactorily complete an induction period. During induction they are entitled to a reduced workload and additional support, and are subject to regular observation and assessment to ensure that they are meeting the Practising Teacher Standards<sup>21</sup>. Since September 2012, the induction period consists of three school terms or the equivalent which is 380 half-day sessions. Induction provides a bridge from initial teacher training to effective professional practice. Figures provided by the General Teaching Council for Wales in October 2012 showed that 66 per cent of those working as supply teachers who were required to complete induction had not yet done so, compared to 25 per cent of all registered teachers (including supply teachers). This difference was mainly due to supply teachers being unable to secure a permanent teaching position since qualifying.

<sup>20</sup> The Quality Mark for recruitment agencies and local authorities in England was withdrawn on 31 March 2013. The Recruitment and Employment Confederation has recently launched a quality programme - REC Audited Education – that builds on the Quality Mark to set standards for recruitment in education. REC Audited Education is overseen by an independent panel of organisations from the education sector.

<sup>21</sup> The Practising Teacher Standards set out the professional values and attributes, knowledge and understanding, and skills that teachers are expected to demonstrate and maintain by the end of their induction period and throughout their teaching career. Welsh Government: *Revised professional standards for education practitioners in Wales*, circular 020/2011.





**3.15** Supply teachers who have recently joined the profession feel particularly disadvantaged by their relative lack of training and development, and until recently, they were unable to meet the qualifying criteria of the induction period unless they were able to obtain a long-term placement and were supported by the school. Under new induction arrangements introduced by the Welsh Government, from 1 September 2012, all teachers taking up their first teaching post and working as short term supply teachers are expected to complete an 'induction as a short-term supply teacher notification form' and submit this to the GTCW. Supply teachers will be expected to log every teaching supply session as part of their induction period. Headteachers will be expected to provide them with day to day support and they will be assigned an external mentor who will provide support, advice and coaching after they have completed 190 verified sessions. Schools, agencies and the teachers involved will have to ensure that the teachers are able to participate in mentoring and other induction-related activities. Supply teachers will also be able to undertake the new Masters in Educational Practice introduced in 2012 if they are able to meet the initial eligibility requirements, which specify a minimum teaching commitment and length of contract. It is not known what proportion of newly qualified teachers working as supply will meet the eligibility criteria.

**3.16** The induction arrangements are similar to those operating in Scotland, but not in England where newly qualified teachers can only count periods of a half-term or more towards their induction ([Appendix 6](#)). The change in regulations in Wales came into force on 1 September 2012 but most of the supply teachers that we spoke to in Autumn 2012 as part of this study were unaware of

the changes despite a consultation process in Spring 2012. It is too soon to assess whether the arrangements will achieve their intended purpose of preparing all newly qualified teachers, including supply teachers, with the skills and behaviours they need and to ensure that they are assessed against the prescribed national standards.

## **Local authorities' work to help schools improve outcomes has generally not addressed the effectiveness of their cover arrangements**

### **Many schools would welcome more support in managing attendance**

**3.17** Legally, teachers in community schools are employed by the local authority, although the management of staff and cover arrangements are delegated to schools.<sup>22</sup> Almost all schools in Wales purchase human resources support from their local authority through a service level agreement. All of the schools we visited had adopted their local authority's attendance management policy albeit slightly modified, for example to include an earlier time by which staff must notify the school of absence to reflect a school's early start times and the need to identify cover. In practice, therefore, we found little variation between schools' formal attendance management policies.

**3.18** While headteachers in four of the schools that we visited expressed concerns about the level of support in managing staff attendance they received from their local authority's human resources departments, all the schools valued having access to human resources officers who were familiar with the terms

<sup>22</sup> Community schools make up the majority of schools in Wales. Teachers are employed by the school's governors in foundation and voluntary aided schools (such as those run by Diocese or church authorities).

and conditions of the teachers' contract. One headteacher told us that local authority support had declined when education human resources staff had moved into a local authority wide human resources service, because she found that staff did not always appreciate the differences between the terms and conditions of teachers and those of other local authority employees. There has been no widespread move by schools in Wales to purchase human resources services from alternative providers.

**3.19** Schools are required to report sickness absence to the local authority. However, most of the schools that we visited did not receive any feedback from the local authority that allowed them to compare their staff absence levels against other schools in the authority. Newport Council has recently reviewed its support for schools in managing sickness absence. The human resources officer at Newport reported that an initiative to share information about attendance rates with schools seemed to be successful in alerting school senior managers to potential problems, and was also informative for staff ([Case Study 4](#)).

#### Case study 4 - Newport Council has revised its attendance policy and has introduced measures aimed at improving staff attendance

Newport Council revised its attendance policy for schools in 2011. The new policy was agreed by Council in January 2011 and recommended to schools with effect from April 2011.

All Newport's schools have adopted the policy which contains clear trigger points for action on attendance and a framework for action. The policy will be reviewed during the 2012/13 academic year but the Council's human resources department has already noticed an increase in the number of formal actions (such as warnings) issued to staff as a result of the introduction of standardised trigger points for action following non-attendance. The department organised training and learning exchanges on attendance management for all of its headteachers through their cluster groups, and offers the same training to other senior teachers and line managers on the request of headteachers. The department also attends individual schools to deliver bite-size sessions to senior leaders on specific topics, such as conducting effective return-to-work discussions.

Through this and other actions, Newport's schools have reduced their absence rates from an average of 6.65 days per FTE in 2011-12 to 5.82 days in 2012-13 and achieving a 12.5 per cent reduction.

The Council did not set targets for individual schools but its officers offer to give headteachers data on their school's attendance and comparisons with both the local authority average and average attendance at schools within their local cluster or similar size schools. Headteachers are then able to cascade this information through their teams. The link officers from the Council's human resources department offer headteachers the opportunity to meet them once per academic term to discuss their employee data.

Headteachers at the Authority's schools received information about the attendance of each member of staff in Autumn 2012 which, for the first time, allocated the staff member to one of a number of bands, ranging from 'excellent' to 'poor'. This information was in the form of a letter to each staff member. Not all heads chose to share this with the staff member. The headteacher of one of the schools that we visited told us that, while the majority of staff had been in the 'excellent' or 'good' categories, some had been surprised to see the total number of days that they were not present in the previous year and how their rating compared to others. He expected that this relatively simple measure might result in higher rates of attendance in the coming 12 months. He said that he would also appreciate some further information about the number of teachers across the authority falling into each category so that he could put the performance of staff in his school into context.



**Local authorities provide a range of services to help schools find cover, but most have not evaluated the effectiveness of this support**

**3.20** While all local authorities provide human resources services for their schools, some authorities provide specific support for cover.

This includes maintaining lists of registered supply teachers that schools can access, or negotiating with agencies or insurers to identify preferred suppliers (Figure 7). However, few local authorities provide any guidance or advice on cover arrangements at a more strategic level.

**Figure 7 – Local authorities support schools’ management of attendance and provision of cover in several ways**

Attendance management policies	Model attendance management policies set out the procedure for managing attendance, including reporting arrangements and trigger points for action, such as referral to occupational health service. They will also set out the process for managing long-term ill-health. Although schools are free to adapt the policy, there is a strong incentive to follow the local authority’s wording and approach to ensure local authority human resources support if required.
Human resources support, including occupational health services	Occupational health services support attendance management by assessing fitness for work and providing advice, for example on phased and supported returns to work. Some schools that purchase absence insurance had access to services such as counselling and private physiotherapy as part of the package in addition to that available through Council occupational health arrangements.
Preferred supplier for recruitment agency staff	At least four local authorities have negotiated with supply agencies to identify a preferred agency supplier for their schools. This is in addition to the 2012 All-Wales framework contract for supply agency services let by Cardiff Council on behalf of 17 local authorities. However no school is obliged to use the preferred supplier.
Maintain a list of supply teachers	Sixteen of the 22 local authorities currently maintain lists of supply teachers who have had pre-employment checks and can be directly employed by their schools. Teachers on the lists are paid on the main teachers’ scale, have their service recognised and can access the teachers’ pension scheme. At least five local authorities have purchased licensed software to enable them to better manage their registers of supply teachers.
Mutual funding pool for absence cover	Fourteen local authorities operate mutual pools for funding absence cover for some or all of their schools. The cost of absence is effectively underwritten by all the participating schools. Eligibility for funding cover differs between local authorities, and sometimes between the schools within an authority (for example, primary schools and special schools, which have legally binding staff: pupil ratios, will sometimes be able to access funding more easily than secondary schools).
Preferred supplier for absence insurance	Some local authorities have negotiated with providers of absence insurance to identify a preferred supplier on behalf of their schools. However, schools are not obliged to use the provider and can choose to purchase insurance from another provider or manage the cost of absence from within their budgets.

Source: Wales Audit Office

**3.21** In 2012, 16 local authorities reported that they maintain lists of supply teachers for their schools. Under the arrangements, potential supply teachers register with the local authority, which then carries out pre-employment checks, including obtaining Disclosure and Barring Service checks (formerly Criminal Record Bureau checks), health checks, registration with the General Teaching Council for Wales and references. Once teachers are registered on the authority's list, schools may then contact them directly. The information available to schools about the teachers on the list varied, and in some cases the information was limited to names, contact numbers and sectors of experience (such as the primary sector). One authority, Caerphilly, told us that it had recently begun to provide more information about the teachers on its list (such as on subject specialisms) to enable schools to more easily identify suitable teachers with whom they were not already familiar. None of the local authority lists provided real-time availability information, which meant that schools may have to ring several names to find anyone available to teach on a particular day. Creating and maintaining an up-to-date register involves a lot of transactional human resources work, although at least five local authorities have licensed software to enable them to manage their supply registers more efficiently.

**3.22** Local authorities that maintain a list of supply teachers had not evaluated the impact of their arrangements, although officials in three authorities told us that the authority was considering withdrawing the service due to the volume of transactional human resources work involved. In two authorities, Merthyr and Swansea, officials told us that despite schools paying for the service annually through the human resources service level agreement and strongly supporting the service in principle, schools rarely used the local authorities' list. In both of these authorities, recruitment agencies provided the bulk of supply teachers and were the first port of call for schools looking for supply cover.



## Part 4 – The resources spent on supply cover are not always managed effectively

### The costs of supply cover can vary considerably, and schools and local authorities do little to monitor the cost effectiveness of their arrangements

- 4.1** Most supply teachers are either paid on the teachers' main scale or at rates set by supply agencies. A relatively newly qualified teacher employed through a local authority list and on the teachers' main scale may cost a school between £137 and £150 per day (including national insurance and pensions contributions), or between £120 and £135 per day if employed through an agency. A more experienced teacher on the main scale may cost £200 or more per day, whilst a similarly experienced teacher employed through an agency may cost the school between £120 and £150 per day. We found no evidence to suggest that the quality of cover supplied through a local authority list and paid on the teachers' main scale was any better or worse than the quality of cover supplied through an agency.
- 4.2** Different schools use supply teachers in different ways, regardless of whether they are employed from a local authority list or through an agency. For example, at one school a supply teacher may teach their specialist subject, follow a lesson plan and mark pupils work; whereas at another school the same teacher may be required to teach a different subject and provide their own lesson plan or activities, but not be required to assess pupils' work.

- 4.3** Assessing the cost effectiveness of cover arrangements requires careful monitoring and analysis to ensure that the extent of cover is minimised, and that supply arrangements deliver the best progress for pupils at minimum cost. However, we did not find any examples of schools or local authorities where this type of analysis is routinely taking place.

### Many schools and local authorities do not routinely monitor and control expenditure on supply cover

#### Schools and local authorities do not monitor or benchmark expenditure on cover effectively enough to help schools understand whether they are making the best use of resources

- 4.4** Most schools monitor their spending on cover against their budgets very closely, in particular expenditure on cover that is not 'reimbursed' from grants or paid from pool funds and insurance. We found that some local authorities and schools had taken actions to reduce the costs of cover, including:
- a** negotiating lower rates for agency cover;
  - b** switching cover from the local authority list (on teachers' main scale) to cheaper agency cover; and
  - c** making greater use of HLTA and non-teaching cover.



**4.5** A small proportion of schools were more actively seeking to make the best use of resources. We found that these schools were also doing some of the following:

- a** actively managing teacher sickness absence;
- b** minimising absence for meetings and training, through careful planning and effective use of 'inset' days;
- c** ensuring supply teaching was actively supported through ensuring the teacher could deliver the subject, good lesson plans were available, and supply teachers have access to school systems and mark pupils work;
- d** monitoring the quality of supply teaching and facilitating training of regular supply teachers;
- e** using non-teaching cover appropriately for short-term absence;
- f** adjusting teaching timetables to maximise productive teaching;
- g** reviewing the value of mutual pool or insurance arrangements and seeking the best arrangement to fit the needs of the school; and
- h** giving a senior teacher responsibility for quality assurance and oversight of cover across the school.

**4.6** We also found many schools where these actions were largely absent. Some secondary schools relied on a regular small group of experienced supply teachers. These arrangements were often relatively expensive but the schools considered that the experience of the teachers was sufficient to ensure lessons were covered effectively. However, in many cases the supply teachers were not

covering their subject specialism, and there was little active management of their quality and performance.

**4.7** Schools have little information to compare the cost of their arrangements with that of other schools. Although local authorities have access to expenditure on cover, we found little evidence that they were routinely monitoring expenditure trends over time, or benchmarking expenditure across schools in the area or between similar schools, in a way that would have enabled them to identify whether schools were acquiring cover in a cost efficient way. Therefore, in addition to the weaknesses we found in monitoring the quality of covered lessons and the lack of attention paid to the impact of cover on learners' progress, we concluded that in most cases schools did not have a good understanding of whether they were acquiring cover in the most cost efficient manner.

**Absence insurance and mutual funds provide certainty of expenditure but do not always incentivise schools to minimise expenditure**

**4.8** Teachers account for about half of total education expenditure by local authorities and the cost of covering unexpected absence is one of the key risks facing any school's financial management. The schools we visited closely monitored their expenditure on supply against the projected budget. Many schools also looked to make some provision to reduce the risk of the cost of unexpected absence, either through opting to join a local authority administered mutual fund or by purchasing one of a range of absence insurance products.

**4.9** We found that 14 of the 22 local authorities administer some kind of mutual fund. Four local authorities operated this fund only or primarily for primary schools, because their generally smaller budgets make it very difficult





for primary schools to manage the cost of absence effectively. Where the option was available, fewer secondary schools opted to join mutual funds for absence supply cover, often because school business managers felt that the school was either able to manage the cost of absence from their budget or chose to purchase absence insurance. Two of the 10 secondary schools that we visited were part of their local authority's mutual fund, five purchased absence insurance and three managed the cost of absence entirely from within their own budgets.

**4.10** The arrangements for mutual funds vary: some schools charge the cost of the supply cover to the mutual fund; in others they charge the cost of the absent staff member while bearing the cost of the cover themselves. There are risks with either approach. In the first scenario, the school is not incentivised to minimise the cost of cover because they do not bear it directly; and in the second, the school may make a surplus if, for example, an experienced and more costly teacher is replaced by a newly qualified teacher. One Council has introduced changes to the operation of its mutual fund in recognition of these risks ([Case Study 5](#)).

**4.11** Local authority mutual funds varied in the type of absence included: some focused exclusively on sickness while others included a range of absence including maternity leave, paternity leave, special leave and suspensions. Some will include all of the schools employees as well as teachers. There were also significant differences between local authorities in the timing of the cover funded by the mutual funds. In some local authorities, funding was available from day one for primary and special schools with legal obligations to achieve specified staff–pupil ratios, but in most local authorities absence was funded from a later point, often after

between 10 and 15 days of absence. One of the schools that we visited contributed to a local authority mutual fund that provided cover only from day 36 of absence (not including school holidays). Effectively, this meant that the school funded most absence from its own budget.

**4.12** Any school may choose to purchase absence insurance, but in eight of 22 local authorities that do not operate a mutual fund it is the only option for schools that wish to reduce the risk of funding absence directly from their own budgets. Where there was a choice, secondary schools were more likely to take out absence insurance, reflecting their larger budgets and their greater capacity to undertake the work involved in procuring insurance. There is a risk in participating in a mutual fund that schools that manage attendance well and have low staff absence rates are effectively subsidising schools with poor attendance management. Although some school managers recognised this risk, few schools regularly evaluated whether the mutual fund provided good value for money for them.

**4.13** For most schools, the generally wider coverage of Councils' mutual funds is a significant advantage over absence insurance: mutual funds will generally include all teachers and often other school staff regardless of sickness history, whereas those with long histories of absence and pre-existing health conditions are often excluded from absence insurance or attract high premiums. In one secondary school, the schools business manager told us that the school did not have absence insurance because a history of long-term absence meant that premiums would be very high and would potentially exclude the staff most likely to be absent. Two local authorities, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf, operated a 'mini'-mutual fund

in primary schools for these 'high risk' staff for whom schools could not obtain private insurance at an affordable rate, but otherwise the cost of these individuals' absence fell directly on the school. In Rhondda Cynon Taff, no secondary schools have private insurance, the cost all sickness cover is picked up after 36 days in secondary schools and after 18 days in special schools. There are weaknesses in schools' arrangements for procuring cover staff.

#### Case Study 5 – Cardiff Council has introduced some changes to better control expenditure from the mutual fund it administers on behalf of its schools

Cardiff Council has operated a mutual fund for absence cover since 1996-97. Currently 100 out of 101 primary and nursery schools, all seven special schools and all but one of the 21 secondary schools participate in the arrangements. Schools pay into the fund a charge related to their staffing numbers, but no account is taken of absence history. Any overspend is clawed back by a charge on all schools at the end of the year.

Cardiff Council's mutual fund covers absence for a wide range of causes, including cover for maternity leave, paternity leave, sickness absence from working day 11 and suspensions. Cover from day one of absence is available for nursery schools and specialist resource bases where high pupil:staff ratios are required. All staff paid from the schools' revenue budget - including caretakers, lunch-time supervisors and administrative staff – are covered by the arrangements, including staff with poor attendance records. The schools in Cardiff that we visited told us that private insurers would be unlikely to be able to offer to fund such wide-ranging cover.

From April 2012, schools pay the cost of supply staff as well as the costs of the absent staff member from the delegated budget. Schools periodically make claims to the fund and the cost of supply cover is reimbursed to the school after the eligibility of the claim has been confirmed by the Council's finance officer, who works with the school. Arrangements are slightly different in respect of cover for maternity and paternity leave, whereby the fund reimburses the cost of the absent staff member.

This change to the administration of the fund was introduced in consultation with schools, as part of an extensive review of the fund.

The review was initiated because the Council and its schools have been concerned at the escalating cost of the fund in recent years and in response to a Cardiff Council report which examined the potential for improving the Council's management of attendance. The report included Cardiff schools' approach to managing attendance, the mutual supply fund and the need for schools to be incentivised to better manage sickness absence.

The review examined all aspects of the fund – range of cover, management and administration, including a time limit on cover for the period of suspensions and the introduction of the charge for membership of the fund reflecting the school's previous claims history. Cardiff schools will individually receive data on the previous three years claims on the fund and how this will impact on the future years charge.

Ongoing, the fund will be managed and monitored by a management board, comprising of headteachers, governors and officers who will feed back to schools and the Schools Budget Forum on the level of claims made by Cardiff schools and staff absence figures.

Cardiff schools have an above average sickness absence level. In 2012-13, the fund's overspend was half that in 2011-12 and officials expect that changes implemented in relation to the fund and to the administration and the management of the fund, together with a generally greater emphasis on controlling costs within schools, is likely to result in further reductions in spend on cover.



## Schools could make more effective use of recruitment agencies

### The approach of schools in procuring supply cover from agencies varies, and the lower rates paid for agency staff did not have a significant impact on the quality of supply teachers and on learners

- 4.14** Currently, there are about 40 recruitment agencies known to provide supply teachers in Wales. Some agencies are very small, with just a few teachers registered, and operate in limited geographical areas. Some of the larger agencies, comprising both education recruitment specialists and more general recruitment companies, operate across most or all of Wales. Although all schools are able to make their own arrangements with agencies, several local authorities have negotiated ‘preferred supplier’ arrangements with a supply agency or agencies for the schools in their area. These negotiations usually focused on reducing costs to schools.
- 4.15** Almost all of the schools we visited made at least occasional use of agencies to source supply cover and, for some schools, agencies were the first choice where cover could not be provided by the schools’ own staff. However, we found differences in the degree of engagement with supply agencies: some schools had developed informal relationships with a number of agencies operating in their area, while others had developed a formal ‘preferred supplier’ agreement with one agency. This arrangement usually resulted in the school paying a reduced fee, but our visits to schools and discussions with agencies suggested that schools rarely, if ever, negotiated on aspects of the contract affecting quality, for example by requesting teachers with certain experience or training.
- 4.16** Where local authorities have not negotiated for cover staff with agencies on behalf of their schools, there is no central guidance for schools about conducting negotiations, for example on issues to consider other than costs, or on the potential to increase purchasing power by collaborating with other schools.
- 4.17** Many teachers and administrative staff we talked to, as well as supply teachers, expressed concern at what they saw as the low pay rates for agency supply teachers, which they believed undervalued agency supply staff and reflected poorly on the profession. However, although they may be concerned about perceived low pay, senior teachers and business managers negotiating with supply agencies focused discussions on minimising the total cost to the school; they generally did not use the negotiations to influence the relative amounts paid to supply teachers and the agency fees. Only one headteacher in the 23 schools we visited told us that he considered the amount paid to the supply teacher in his decision-making about which agency to use.
- 4.18** It is appropriate for supply teachers’ pay to vary, for example to reflect the level of responsibility undertaken during the placement. But we found few examples of schools paying above the lowest level for agency supply teachers, regardless of the teacher’s experience or to reflect any additional responsibilities being undertaken in longer placements, such as planning lessons, marking or assessment. Research in England (2002) found that schools in disadvantaged areas generally had to pay more to obtain supply teachers,<sup>23</sup> but we found no evidence that schools in disadvantaged areas of Wales faced higher costs.

<sup>23</sup> *The recruitment, deployment and management of supply teachers in England*, Hutchings, M., James, K., Maylor, U., Menter, I. and Smart, S., 2002.

**4.19** Many agency supply teachers and trades unions told us they were unhappy about the rates of agency pay. One union said ‘At both ends of the career spectrum teachers are choosing to leave front line teaching as a result of the unfavourable treatment they have had in dealing with supply agencies. Experienced teachers, who still have much to offer schools, are choosing to retire rather than confine themselves to working with supply agencies. At the same time young, enthusiastic and innovative teachers entering the profession are choosing to become classroom assistants as they are able to access more work than going through supply agencies, who tie them up in long term contracts with pay and conditions far below those expected for their qualifications and training. This is having a seriously detrimental impact on the quality of teachers available to cover supply’. We did not examine the reasons for teachers leaving the profession. However, there appears to be a surplus of teachers willing to offer their services through agencies, and we did not find evidence that the rates of agency pay had a significant impact on the quality of supply teachers and on learners.

#### **All-Wales framework contracts for recruiting supply staff from agencies are not yet providing significant benefits**

**4.20** In April 2012, Cardiff Council, on behalf of the Welsh Purchasing Consortium representing 16 local authorities and seven further education colleges, awarded two framework contracts (one for South Wales and one for North Wales) for the provision of supply teachers and other school agency workers. The contracts formed part of a group of contracts for the procurement of agency staff for local authorities and other public bodies. The Welsh Government’s Department for Education and Skills and individual councils and schools

were not directly involved in the development of the contract, although Value Wales, a separate division of the Welsh Government, was involved in the tender process. The exercise was part of a wider programme of collaboration between local authorities to reduce areas of repetitive spend<sup>24</sup>. The invitation to tender set out some general quality criteria, including the provision of initial training for agency workers and the nature of pre-employment checks required. Following a competitive process, the contracts were awarded to New Directions Education Limited, one of the larger supply agencies operating in Wales and already the preferred supplier of cover for several local authorities and schools.

**4.21** The lack of involvement of representatives of the Department for Education and Skills, local authority education departments and schools led to a broad specification which covers agency staff working across a wide range of public sector organisations and occupations. As a result, the opportunity to specify some of the elements of the Welsh Quality Mark for supply agencies, or to clarify expectations regarding training supply teachers in priority areas, such as literacy and numeracy, was missed.

**4.22** It will be difficult to identify any savings resulting from the two framework contracts. This is partly because of the lack of firm evidence of expenditure prior to the contracts being let. Although, we did not collect information on average supply costs per teacher for the schools that we visited, it was clear that many schools were paying no more, and sometimes less, than the cost per day set out in the framework contracts. This would suggest that the contract will not necessarily deliver cheaper day rates and is likely to have little or no impact on reducing costs for schools.

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<sup>24</sup> Welsh Government (2011) *Buying Smarter in Tougher Times: conclusions and recommendations of the EIB procurement taskforce*, Para 13.19.





**4.23** However, there are elements of the contracts that have the potential to benefit both schools and agency staff. In particular, the contract makes clear the separate elements of the payment to the worker, additions such as holiday pay, and employer National Insurance contributions. The contract also stipulates a maximum agency fee which reduces over the life of the contract. It is likely, therefore, that the framework contracts will have the effect of limiting agency costs to schools over the period of the contract, because other agencies will find it difficult to significantly exceed the costs set out in the contracts and remain competitive.

**4.24** No school is obliged to make use of the framework contracts for supply teachers and other cover staff. We found that headteachers and administrative staff in the schools that we visited in local authorities that had signed up to the contracts had limited, if any, knowledge of the existence of the contracts. They have not received any advice on how to use the contracts effectively.

**4.25** Under the framework contracts the supplier is required to provide information on the performance of its staff in placements to the Welsh Purchasing Consortium each month, although currently the information is not shared more widely with local authorities or schools. There is a no clear mechanism in place for reviewing the effectiveness of the current contract, which lasts until January 2015 with an option to extend for a further year.

### The Agency Workers Regulations 2010 have not had a significant impact on schools or supply staff

**4.26** The 2010 Agency Workers Regulations gave agency workers in the UK who have been working for the same hirer for 12 or more weeks the same employment rights as if they had been recruited directly<sup>25</sup>. Under the Regulations, which came into force on 1 October 2011, hirers<sup>26</sup> must also ensure that all agency workers can access their facilities and view job vacancies from the first day of their assignment. The Regulations could have been expected to have a significant impact on schools if the cost of hiring supply teachers increased as result of their gaining the right to equal pay by accumulating qualifying service.

**4.27** We found that schools and local authorities did not always fully understand the potential impact of the Regulations. However, in practice, the impact of the Regulations has been much less than anticipated, and we found only a few instances where schools have seen agency teachers' pay increase as a result of qualifying for equal pay under the Regulations. This is because some agencies have offered the majority of their workforce permanent contracts that include a minimum level of payment on the days that they do not work<sup>27</sup> and other benefits, including statutory holiday pay. This practice is widely used by recruitment agencies across a range of employment areas. Where applied, it means that workers are exempt from equal treatment considerations as regards pay, although they are entitled to the other provisions under the Act (such as annual leave, rest breaks).

<sup>25</sup> The UK Agency Worker regulations passed by the UK government in 2010 and came into effect from 1 October 2011. Under the regulations, all service for the same hirer counts towards the 12 week qualifying period which means that many supply teachers could accumulate rights under the Regulations without completing a long placement. The Department for Education produced supplementary guidance on the implications of the regulations for agency staff working as supply teachers in November 2011.

<sup>26</sup> In foundation schools, voluntary aided schools and foundation special schools, the 'hirer' is the school's governing body. In a community school, the 'hirer' is either the Governing Body or the local authority, to be decided on a case by case basis depending on to whom the agency worker has been supplied.

<sup>27</sup> Under the 2010 Agency Workers Regulations, minimum pay must be no less than 50 per cent of the highest pay in the previous 12 weeks of assignment, or the minimum wage if the minimum wage is higher than minimum pay.



**4.28** The schools and supply teachers that we spoke to during the course of our work were generally unaware of their other responsibilities and entitlements under the Regulations. These included rights of access to facilities and vacancies from day one, and entitlement to equal treatment in relation to the duration of working time, night work, rest periods and rest breaks, and annual leave after 12 weeks.

### Schools were not always clear about the implications of some employment arrangements where supply teachers are directly employed

**4.29** Although local authorities provide human resources advice, guidance and support to schools on request, staffing employment matters are delegated to schools under arrangements for the local management of schools. When we visited schools we found some instances of schools directly employing supply teachers using employment practices that were either likely to provide poor value or posed a reputational risk to the school:

**a** **Employing supply teachers on a self-employed basis, without satisfying themselves that the employee met the HMRC criteria for self-employment.**<sup>28</sup>

Employers must determine the employment status of an individual. This status affects tax and national insurance contributions, as well as determining whether the employer must operate PAYE (pay as you earn) on a supply teacher's behalf. We identified supply teachers who were classed as self-employed, but where the length of employment and the responsibilities undertaken led us to question their employment status. It is an area where schools should seek human resources advice, because the risk of getting an individual's employment status

wrong is that schools incur unwarranted tax and national insurance liabilities and possible penalties.

**b** **Employing supply teachers on a daily basis to cover long-term absence such as maternity leave.**

Where the length of absence can be anticipated (such as maternity leave), a fixed term contract, though often more expensive than paying on a daily basis, will usually be better employment practice for a school. Teachers on fixed term contracts are subject to performance management procedures for the period of the contract. They are also required to give a longer period of notice which provides some protection against the risk of the supply teacher leaving suddenly. A fixed term contract usually offers better terms and conditions for the supply teacher, compared to daily arrangements through an agency, because they are paid on the teachers' main scale with employment benefits, including pension contributions. Fixed term appointments are made following an interview process and tend to be highly prized by supply teachers because they offer more stable employment, better pay and conditions than agency placements and, for newly qualified teachers, the opportunity to complete substantial parts of their induction period in the same school.

**c** **Employing friends and relations** – in

several of the schools that we visited it was apparent that regular supply teachers were relatives or friends of permanent teachers employed in the school or governors. Although their initial appointment often came as a result of the school needing to find cover at short notice, the introduction sometimes led to significantly more work

<sup>28</sup> The HMRC provides guidance on determining employment status, but responsibility for determining if an individual is employed or self-employed lies with employer.



within the school. Schools did not generally require staff to declare these relationships in a register of interests or to report these appointments to the governors. Unless proper selection procedures are followed, the appointment of family or friends to any position within a school represents poor governance and poses a reputational risk to the school if it is perceived as providing unequal access to employment opportunities.

### Support for schools in procuring absence insurance varies

- 4.30** Some local authorities have negotiated with private insurers to identify a preferred supplier for absence insurance products. For example Carmarthenshire Council does not provide a mutual fund for its schools, but it has negotiated with a preferred supplier for absence insurance with a range of levels of cover. Our survey found similar arrangements in four other local authorities.
- 4.31** Schools in authorities that do not provide this service or that do not want to use the local authority's preferred supplier do not currently have any support or guidance on procuring absence insurance. In England, the Department for Education provides some guidance for schools purchasing absence insurance. The guidance suggests buying through the local authority if possible, and offers tips for schools to match insurance cover to their requirements and avoid excessive premiums. The guidance also emphasises the potential of collaborating with other schools to achieve savings<sup>29</sup>.

## There is scope for schools to collaborate more to achieve improved cover arrangements

- 4.32** We found examples of schools collaborating with each other in the acquisition of cover, other than through local authority arrangements. For example, we visited Ysgol Dewi Sant primary school which is part of a cluster of schools in Denbighshire that share a school business manager. The cluster has had some success covering absence of support staff, such as caretakers, by moving staff between schools within the cluster. However, another primary school told us that previous attempts to share support staff across two schools to be deployed as part of arrangements for planning, preparation and assessment had been abandoned because it was very difficult to timetable lessons across two schools. Peaks in sickness and common attendance at meetings also meant that the schools tended to want short-notice cover at the same time, thereby reducing the potential to appoint staff jointly where demand in each school was insufficient to support a full-time employee.
- 4.33** Three of the 10 secondary schools that we visited had combined with other schools in their local clusters to purchase absence insurance. In one example the negotiations had reduced costs by 15 per cent compared to the school's previous individual arrangements.
- 4.34** There is scope for schools to collaborate more in the procurement of agency cover than they currently do. Schools have negotiated a variety of arrangements with recruitment agencies, including preferred agency arrangements, pre-purchasing blocks of supply cover, and 'book to cancel' cover

<sup>29</sup> Department for Education, 'Buying specific goods and services: supply teacher insurance', March 2012.

whereby a dedicated supply teacher was on-call every day. In each case, the school had been able to negotiate with the supply agency concerned a lower rate than paid previously. However, we did not identify any schools that were collaborating with others to use their joint purchasing power to negotiate better arrangements and rates with agencies.



## Appendix 1 – Methodology

We used a range of methods to gain evidence for our review.

### Literature review

We reviewed a number of other reports on teacher absence and cover arrangements from other audit bodies and Inspectorates as well as research with supply teachers:

- Audit Commission *'Managing staff absence and cover: better value for money in Schools'*, March 2011 [www.archive.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.archive.audit-commission.gov.uk)
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (2002) *The management of substitution cover for teachers* [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk).
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (2010) *The management of substitution cover for teachers: follow-up report* [www.niauditoffice.gov.uk](http://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk).
- Ofsted (2002) *Schools' use of temporary teachers* [www.education.gov.uk/publications/](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/)
- Hutchings, M., James, K., Maylor, U., Menter, I. and Smart, S. (2002) *The recruitment, deployment and management of supply teachers in England* [www.education.gov.uk/publications/](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/)

### Official statistics and other data analysis

We have used a number of data sources in the review:

- The Welsh Government provided statistics on teacher attendance that underlie its annual publication 'Teachers in service, vacancies and sickness absence'. We were therefore able to provide more detailed analysis than the published figures. This analysis forms the basis of [Appendix 5](#).
- We also examined education expenditure data for 2011-12 for local authorities in Wales. [www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue](http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue)
- There are no national figures for expenditure on supply staff. Therefore we asked Education Finance Directors to supply expenditure figures for individual authorities across Wales for the four years from 2008-09 ([Appendix 3](#)). In the absence of a common approach to financial reporting, the types of cover included under the supply cover heading varies but, nevertheless, this represents the best current estimate of expenditure on supply cover. It was not possible to identify expenditure on cover supervisors and HLTAs providing cover partly, because these fall on to the general payroll and also because we do not know what proportion of their role is made up by providing cover.
- We conducted telephone interviews with officials in all 22 Welsh local authorities to the arrangements in place to support schools' cover strategies (eg, whether there was a supply list, mutual cover fund) and also gain information on human resources issues and policies for schools.
- We conducted an electronic survey of schools which covered expenditure on cover staff, expectations of and support for supply staff and experience of supply staff. Thirteen schools responded, a response rate of around 15 percent.
- We were keen to represent the views of supply teachers. We were able to interview supply teachers and other cover staff working in the majority of schools that we visited. However we also conducted an electronic survey of supply teachers which included their experience of

working in schools. Thirty five supply teachers working in Wales participated in the survey.

those with financial management responsibility, including the school business manager where available.

### Visits to schools

We visited 23 schools across Wales (12 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and one special school) with our colleagues from Estyn (Figure 8). During these visits we spoke to senior teachers responsible for cover arrangements and managing teacher absence. We also spoke to other staff responsible for making cover arrangements and

During the visits we spoke to staff employed who provided cover – cover supervisors, HLTAs and floating teachers – and agency supply teachers who were present in school and were free to talk to us. We also held meetings with groups of 5-10 learners selected by the school in each school. The learners varied in age.

**Figure 8 – Schools visited for the study, October – December 2012**

Primary schools	Local authority
Bryn Awel	Caerphilly
Comins Coch CP school	Ceredigion
Croescyceillog Primary school	Torfaen
Ninian Park	Cardiff
Overmannow CP School	Monmouthshire
New Inn Primary	Torfaen
Pentre's Graig primary	Swansea
Pen-y-Bryn primary	Cardiff
Ysgol Bryn Coch	Flintshire
Ysgol Dewi Sant	Denbighshire
Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Tirdeunaw	Swansea
Ysgol Gynradd Tangrsiau	Gwynedd





**Figure 8 – Schools visited for the study, October – December 2012**

Secondary schools	Local authority
Birchgrove Comprehensive School	Swansea
Brynmawr Foundation School	Blaenau Gwent
Builth Wells High School	Powys
Caldicott School	Monmouthshire
Holywell School	Flintshire
Llanwern High School	Newport
Rhyl High School	Denbighshire
Ysgol David Hughes	Anglesey
Ysgol Gyfun Cymer Rhondda	Rhondda Cynon Taff
Ysgol Maes Gamon	Flintshire

Special Schools	Local authority
St Christopher’s School	Wrexham

**Other interviews**

During the course of the study we have spoken to officials from the Welsh Government with responsibility for school improvement and workforce planning.

We have also held meetings with:

- Chair, National Association of School Business Management, Wales.
- Directors of two of Wales’s largest recruitment agencies providing supply teachers.

- Chief Executive and Director of a company supplying supply cover management software to several local authorities.
- Purchasing and contracts manager, Cardiff Council with responsibility for the procurement and monitoring of the two framework contracts for supply teachers.

We received written submissions from five trades unions whose members work in schools in Wales: ATL Cymru, NASUWT, NUT, UCAC and Unison.

## Appendix 2 – Main findings and recommendations from the Estyn report on the impact of teacher absence

Estyn undertook work in response to a request from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter for 2012-13. The report examined the impact on learner progress of schools' strategies to cover the absence of teachers and the effective and efficient employment, training and deployment of supply teachers. The report, *The Impact of Teacher Absence*, based on the visits to school carried out with the Welsh Audit Office and other shared evidence, has been published together with this report and is available from [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk).

### Main findings

Teachers should cover the absence of colleagues only under unforeseeable circumstances. One outcome of this 'rarely cover' agreement has been an increasing involvement of support and cover staff in the delivery of pupils' education. It is estimated that just under 10 per cent of all lessons are now covered by staff who are not the usual class teacher.

In primary and secondary schools, learners make less progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding when the usual class teacher is absent, and learners' behaviour is often worse, particularly in secondary schools. Teacher absence impacts on pupils across the ability range. Less able pupils are less likely to receive the support they need, and middle ability and more able pupils make less progress than they should because the work set is not challenging enough.

In most schools visited, the teaching by supply staff not employed by the school is often ineffective, mainly because they do not know enough about the needs of the pupils they teach. It is difficult for these staff to match the work and the level of support to the individual needs and abilities of pupils. Even when cover supervisors are employed directly by

the school, the pace of lessons is often too slow and expectations are too low. Much of the work can be time filling activity that is not marked or included in normal work books.

In most primary schools, the adverse effects of short-term teacher absence on pupils' learning are reduced mainly through providing cover by staff who are employed at the school and are familiar with the learners and with school processes. Pupils in primary schools normally see only one 'cover' staff member in a day, because the staff member is covering for a class teacher who would normally spend their time with the class, which also limits the disruption to their learning. Primary pupils are generally positive about the progress they make in 'covered' lessons.

The greatest negative impact of teacher absence on pupils' learning occurs in secondary schools. Supply staff who do not normally work at the school do not know the needs of the learners as well as their usual classroom teachers and the work set is often too undemanding and does not engage learners. This is particularly the case in key stage 3, as schools often make an effort to secure better arrangements for examination classes. Secondary schools often do not cover sixth form lessons for short-term absences, but make up missed work later. They may also re-deploy subject teachers from key stage 3 classes to cover key stage 4, leaving supply staff to cover a disproportionate number of key stage 3 lessons.

Due to the short-term nature of their work, it is difficult for supply staff to establish effective working relationships with learners. Learners often do not have the same regard for supply staff as they do for their usual teachers. Most learners in secondary schools feel that they make little progress when they



do not know the person who is covering lessons. Learners in secondary schools tend to misbehave or engage in low-level disruption when taught by supply staff. In the majority of schools, supply staff receive information from the school about behaviour management and get assistance to deal with challenging behaviour when it occurs. However, in the majority of instances, classroom misbehaviour or low-level disruption remains an issue.

In primary schools where there are two or more classes in each year group, joint planning helps to reduce the impact of teacher absence further. Staff covering for teacher absence normally work well alongside the other staff from the year group and benefit from their support and guidance. However, progress in learning is slow, because cover staff do not have enough time to take account of information about pupils when covering lessons or do not pay sufficient attention to this information.

The greatest disruption in primary schools occurs as a result of not having a strategy to minimise the impact of unplanned, but potentially long-term, teacher absences. In complex situations, such as those arising from staff suspensions or frequent but non continuous staff illness, schools do not manage or evaluate the impact of having multiple staff cover for the same year group. Too often, this affects pupils' behaviour as well as their learning.

Most schools have suitable arrangements to provide cover for absent teachers by using internal cover staff (HLTAs or cover supervisors employed by the school) or by sourcing external supply teachers.

Many primary and secondary schools have appropriate administrative arrangements to support cover staff. The majority of schools provide supply staff new to the school with a guidance handbook or document. However, supply staff do not always receive the necessary information regarding health and safety or safeguarding, including contact details for the named child protection officer at the school.

A few schools, particularly Welsh-medium schools and those located in rural or economically deprived areas, have difficulty finding suitable supply teachers. The majority of secondary schools have difficulty sourcing teachers of shortage subjects, such as mathematics and physics.

Most schools do not give enough priority to managing the effect of teacher absences or to evaluating its impact on the quality of learners' experiences. Only a few schools analyse teacher absence or compare patterns of absence with other schools. Many schools monitor the work of supply staff informally, but few formally observe lessons, scrutinise the work learners have produced, or ask learners' opinions, to evaluate the impact of cover arrangements.

Most schools and teaching agencies provide limited feedback to supply staff about their performance and little information is recorded. Feedback is more detailed when there are concerns about teaching or classroom management. Nearly all schools have on occasion raised concerns about the quality of a few supply teachers. A few agencies ask for feedback on placements, although in many instances the collection of this information is not robust. Local authorities who provide lists of supply teachers do not usually request feedback on performance.

In the majority of schools, headteachers and other senior leaders now spend more time covering classes than previously. This is because they sometimes nominate themselves as cover, as they have difficulty sourcing supply staff. This is an inefficient use of their time, although there was the benefit that pupils tend not to misbehave in these circumstances. This arrangement also conflicts with 'rarely cover' provisions which should also apply to headteachers and senior staff.

Generally, morale among supply staff working through recruitment agencies is low. They work in challenging circumstances and in many cases are not paid in line with the teachers' main pay scale.

A minority of schools say that cost is the most important factor when covering for teacher absence. They compare prices between recruitment agencies and negotiate a price where the supply teacher may earn less than half the equivalent teachers' daily rate. In a few secondary schools, cover supervisors are recruited to cover short-term absence rather than supply teachers, as this is cheaper.

Most cover supervisors and HLTAs employed permanently by schools have access to appropriate training as part of their school's in-service training programme. But other supply staff do not have access to a wide range of professional development opportunities. In most cases, arranging their own training or accessing courses offered by private companies would result in losing a day's pay. Supply staff seeking a permanent post are badly affected by the lack of appropriate professional development. Their knowledge and understanding of national policies and priorities can decline over time, making it harder for them to secure a permanent post.

## Recommendations

### Schools should:

- 1 Manage teacher absence more efficiently.
- 2 Improve the quality of teaching and learning in covered lessons by making sure that the work set is at an appropriate level and staff receive enough information on the individual needs of learners.
- 3 Support supply and cover staff to improve their classroom behaviour management techniques.
- 4 Evaluate the impact of teacher absence on learners, especially more able pupils and those in key stage 3, and monitor the quality of teaching and learning when teachers are absent.
- 5 Ensure that supply staff are included in performance management arrangements.
- 6 Provide more professional development opportunities for supply staff.
- 7 Make sure that supply staff receive essential information on health and safety and safeguarding, including the contact details of the named child-protection officer at the school.

### Local authorities and supply agencies should:

- 8 Provide schools with comparative data on teacher absence rates.
- 9 Seek feedback on and record the quality of supply staff they register and use the information for quality control.

### The Welsh Government should:

- 10 Provide better access for supply staff to those national training programmes that are available to permanently-employed teachers.



## Appendix 3 – Financial expenditure

Local authorities provided us with data on expenditure on supply cover by their schools for the four years from 2008-09 where available. Only 18 of the 22 Authorities were able to provide data for all four years but all were able to provide figures for expenditure in 2011-12 (Figure 9).

There were differences between the authorities in the cover collected under the budget heading, in particular whether the cover budget included cover for maternity leave. Where maternity leave was covered by a daily paid supply teacher, the cost was included in the supply cover budget but not if maternity leave was covered by a fixed term appointment.

The total does not include any cover by cover supervisors or HLTAs specifically employed to provide cover, by floating teachers where providing cover formed all or part of their contract of employment or by teachers employed by the school providing cover under the 'rarely cover' provisions. It also does not include any cover provided by senior teachers. It may include some expenditure on temporary staff other than teachers or teaching assistants (for example lunchtime supervisors, caretakers and office staff) as local authorities were not always able to disaggregate expenditure on these staff. In most primary schools, staff deployed to provide lessons when teachers are undertaking planning, preparation and assessment are permanent members of staff. However, if schools use supply staff for this purpose, these costs will be included in the expenditure data provided to us.

Despite these caveats, this exercise has provided the best estimate to date of expenditure on cover by maintained schools in Wales. It found that in total, maintained schools spent a total of £53.75 million on cover in 2011-12.

Of this total, £22.0 million (41 per cent of total) was spent on cover supplied by recruitment agencies and £31.75 million (59 per cent of total) on cover employed otherwise, usually by the school or through a local authority pool where one existed.

There were differences in the amount paid to agencies by local authorities as a result of local policies including whether or not the local authority provided a supply pool or register. The proportion of total expenditure paid to agencies varied between local authorities from 100 per cent of expenditure to zero.

Across Wales, average spend on supply cover per pupil was £118 although this varied between local authorities from £43 to £226 per pupil.

Primary schools spent £28.8 million on supply cover in 2011-12, equivalent to £129 per pupil in 2011-12. Expenditure on supply cover in secondary schools was less, £13.3 million or £77 per pupil. Total expenditure on supply cover in special schools was £2.4 million, an average of £607 per pupil.

**Figure 9 – Expenditure on supply cover by sector 2011-12**

	Total expenditure (£)	% spent with supply agencies	Expenditure per pupil <sup>2</sup>
Primary	28,812,292	38.3%	£135
Secondary	13,276,090	42.8%	£77
Special schools	2,406,543	35.0%	£599
Uncertain <sup>1</sup>	9,255,434.14	47.9%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>53,750,359</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>£119</b>

Notes

- 1 Some expenditure could not be assigned to a sector because of the way it was recorded. The majority of this expenditure was in Swansea CBC and Caerphilly CBC which could not assign any of their expenditure to a sector. This total £7.22 million of the total expenditure.
- 2 Figures exclude Swansea and Caerphilly local authorities that could not assign supply cover expenditure.

Eighteen of the 22 local authorities in Wales<sup>30</sup> provided data on expenditure for the four years since 2008-09. Overall, expenditure on supply cover increased by nearly seven per cent from 2008-09. However this masks significant variation between local authorities: Ten of the 18 local authorities that provided data had seen an increase in the amount of money spent on supply cover since 2008-09 while eight have seen the amount fall in the same period.

During this period, local authorities spent a greater proportion of their total expenditure on agency supply cover: just considering the 18 local authorities who provided data for four years, agencies received 27 per cent of all expenditure in 2008-09 compared to 38 per cent in 2011-12.

Fourteen of the authorities provided information about how much of the expenditure was reimbursed from grants. This suggested that in 2011-12, 17.4 per cent of £32.8 million expenditure was reimbursed, equivalent to £9.2 million of grant income being used. Most of the authorities supplied information for previous years and this suggested the level of reimbursement from grants was approximately 16 per cent in 2010-11, 20 per cent in 2009-10 and 21 per cent in 2008-09.

<sup>30</sup> Cardiff, Flintshire, Neath Port Talbot and Merthyr Tydfil councils were unable to provide comparable data for all four years.





## Appendix 4 – The supply teacher workforce

Figures provided by the General Teaching Council for Wales in October 2012 provide a picture of the supply teacher workforce:

- overall 13.2 per cent of teachers registered with the GTCW were working primarily as supply teachers;
- female teachers are slightly more likely to work as supply teachers: 13.7 per cent women teachers were working as supply teachers compared to 11.6 per cent of male teachers;
- just over a third (34 per cent) of registered teachers working as supply teachers have been qualified less than five years; and
- just over a fifth (21.1 per cent) of registered teachers qualified for less than five years were working as supply teachers.

For this study, we asked supply teachers who responded to our survey about their work and their ambitions for the future:

- Fifty eight per cent of supply teachers said that they were able to get the amount of work that they wanted.
- The majority of supply teachers said that they usually undertook supervision and marked books in their placements ([Figure 10](#)). Almost half reported that they planned lessons, rising to almost 90 per cent of supply teachers on placements of more than a week. Conversely supply teachers rarely took learners on trips and almost half reported rarely attending parents meetings, staff meetings, updating records or writing reports. Those undertaking placements of more than one month in length were more likely to undertake these duties.
- Supply teachers said that in their current or most recent placement 40 per cent had access to a pension scheme; 17 per cent to paid holidays; 11 per cent sick pay; and 11 per cent received travel expenses.
- Just under half (47 per cent) wanted to have a permanent job within two years. However 42 per cent said that they planned to be doing supply teaching in two years time. We termed these 'career supply teachers'.

**Figure 10 – The work undertaken by supply teachers varied according to the length of placement undertaken**

	Always/Mostly	Only on placements of more than one week	Only on placements of more than one month	Never/rarely
Undertake supervision at break times	74.2%	3.2%	3.2%	19.4%
Mark work	66.7%	21.2%	3.0%	9.1%
Plan lessons	45.5%	33.3%	9.1%	12.1%
Take learners on visits	20.0%	10.0%	10.0%	60.0%
Attend parents meetings	9.7%	0.0%	48.4%	41.9%
Attend staff meetings	9.7%	9.7%	32.3%	45.2%
Update learners' records	19.4%	9.7%	29.0%	41.9%
Write learners' reports	9.7%	6.5%	32.3%	48.4%
Take part in CPD	13.3%	3.3%	20.0%	63.3%

Source: Wales Audit Office survey of supply teachers November 2012 – January 2013



## Appendix 5 – Sickness absence statistics

Welsh Government figures for sickness absence show that in 2011, the year on which the financial data in this report is based, teachers took 213,317 days off sick, an average of seven days per employee<sup>31</sup>. Based on working 195 days a year, this translates to a sickness absence rate of 3.5 per cent. Full-time teachers took more days off (eight days) on average than those working less than full-time (six).

Overall, 59 per cent of teachers took at least one day off. The average number of days for those who took a day off was 13. Just over half (51 per cent) of absences were for more than 20 days. Short-term absence (less than five consecutive days) accounted for just over a quarter (27 per cent) of absence.

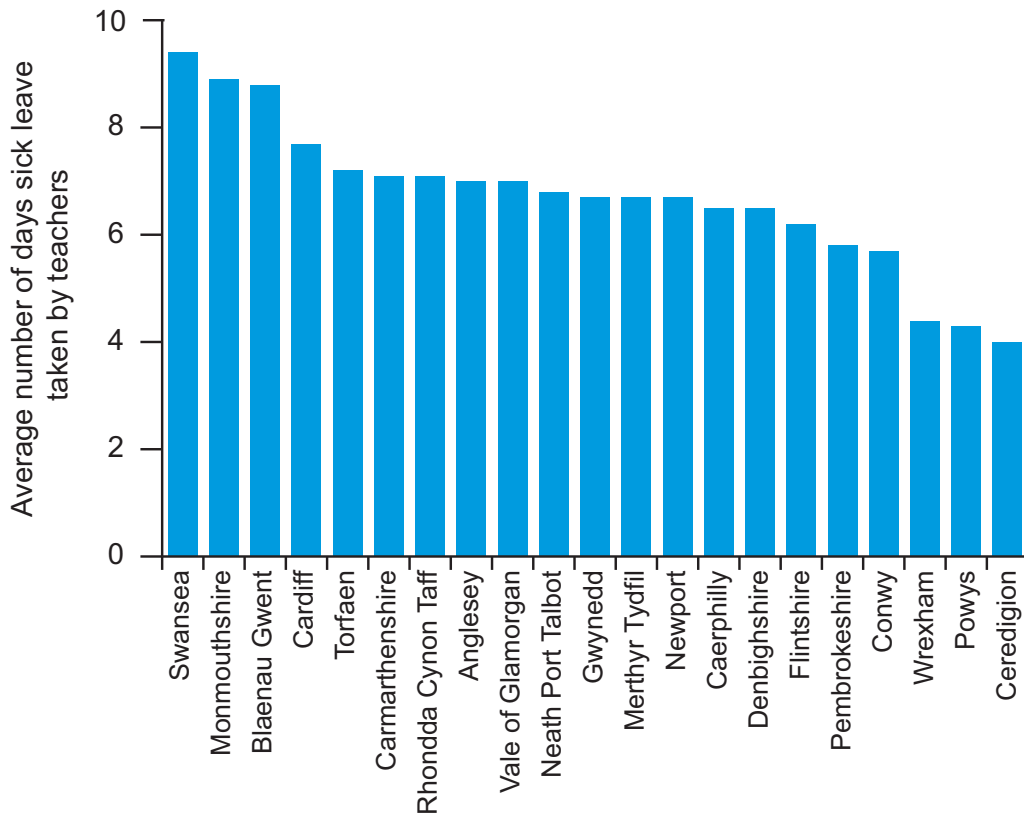
There was substantial variation in absence between authorities in average sick days, ranging between 4.0 and 9.4 (Figure 11).

In 2012, the average number of days lost due to sickness for all teachers remained seven days but a reduction in the duration of absences by full-time teachers resulted in a reduction in the total days sickness absence from 213,317 to 187,377 days.

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<sup>31</sup> Statistics for Wales (June 2013) *Teachers in service, vacancies and sickness absence: January 2013*, SDR 101/2013, Table 7

**Figure 11 – There was significant variation in the average number of days of teachers sickness absence between local authorities in Wales in 2011<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>**



**Notes**

- 1 Teachers with permanent contracts employed for more than one month. Figures are calculated on the basis of headcount, not full-time equivalent staff numbers.
- 2 Figures exclude returns from Bridgend Council due to our identifying errors in their calculations.
- 3 Rhondda Cynon Taff Council identified an error in their calculations which wrongly inflated their statistics. The figures shown here are revised.



## Appendix 6 – Cover arrangements in the other nations within the UK

Other nations of the UK have taken different approaches to the management of cover arrangements. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the governments have been actively involved in developing new cover arrangements whilst arrangements in England are more similar to Wales with a mixed economy of provision including both supply agencies and local authority registers.

### Scotland

In Scotland<sup>32</sup>, the Scottish Parliament legislation requires all supply teaching staff to be employed by local authorities. This maintains their entitlements to terms and conditions similar to permanent staff.

However, the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) (which represents the Scottish Government, local authorities and teacher unions) agreed that all supply teaching contracts of five days or less will be paid at Point 1 of the main grade scale (£25,716 pro rata, which is £15.63 per hour) regardless of the teacher's experience. Such contracts comprise 22.5 hours class contact time and 2.5 hours non-class contact time per week (i.e. a working week of 25 hours) compared to a normal working week for teachers of 35 hours<sup>33</sup>. This equates to a rate of £78.15 per day. Each separate agreement of five days or less is treated as a separate contract. In situations where the supply period exceeds the initial five days, then the teacher should be issued with a fixed term temporary contract. From day six onwards, payment, working hours and duties are in accordance with the SNCT Handbook. Many supply teachers have opposed this change. The SNCT is monitoring the impact the change has on the availability of supply teachers.

### Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education advised schools and employing authorities that as from 1 September 2006 only substitute teachers who are on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) should be employed to work in schools<sup>34</sup> supported by the Department of Education and endorsed by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland. All supply teachers are paid on the same terms and conditions as permanent staff and the NISTR maintains all employment checks on staff. The NISTR provides schools with a centrally funded booking service 24 hours a day, seven days per week.

All schools in Northern Ireland are required to develop a cover policy for the arrangements for cover during periods of teacher absence. A model policy has been drawn up to assist schools. The policy should cover arrangements for planned and unplanned absence. The school's board of governors is responsible for ensuring that appropriate arrangements for providing cover are in place. The School Principal (headteacher) is responsible for providing and operating a school cover policy, in consultation with staff and their trade union representatives and ensuring that the distribution of cover is managed fairly and equitably.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office has twice reviewed the arrangements for substitute teachers (2003 and 2010). In its later report, the Comptroller and Auditor General observed that although the rates of teacher sickness absence had declined, there was scope to reduce these further with associated potential savings.

<sup>32</sup> Kidner, C (2012) SPICe briefing: teacher employment Scottish Parliament Information Centre 12/73.

<sup>33</sup> Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) Changes to Pay and Conditions [www.snct.org.uk](http://www.snct.org.uk)

<sup>34</sup> Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register - [www.nistr.org.uk](http://www.nistr.org.uk)



An on-going issue in Northern Ireland has been employment by schools of recently retired teachers to provide substitute cover. This increased costs to the schools in comparison with employing less experienced - and hence cheaper - teachers and reduced opportunities for newly qualified teachers.

In 1999-00 reimbursement for payments to substitute teachers were capped at Level 4 of the teachers' salary scale with the aim of containing costs and encouraging schools to employ newly qualified teachers. However, schools were still able to employ more expensive teachers at a cost to their own budgets and the 2010 NIAO report found that prematurely retired teachers still provided a significant amount of substitution cover. In 2008-09 prematurely retired teachers provided 13 per cent of total substitution cover days, the same as in 2000-01. The Department has made legislation making employing authorities liable for the full cost of teachers' premature retirement compensation with effect from April 2010. It anticipated that this will limit the granting of premature retirement benefits and reduce over time the number of prematurely retired teachers available to provide substitution cover.

## England

In England, arrangements are similar to Wales and in recent years there has been a growth in the use of supply agencies and a reduction in local authorities maintaining lists of registered supply staff.

Until the arrangements ceased in March 2013, supply agencies and local authorities in England were able to attain the same Quality Mark as operated in Wales until 2010.

Although some local authorities continue to support supply registers where supply teachers are paid on the main teachers scale, free schools and

academies are not bound by the standard terms and pay conditions document and are able to set their own rates of pay, including for supply teachers. From August 2012, academies like free schools are able to employ teachers who do not have Qualified Teacher Status which may increase their cover options<sup>35</sup>.

Newly qualified teachers can only count supply work towards their induction period if it is in a block lasting at least one term. The Government does not believe that shorter periods offer the full range of experience, support and assessment to demonstrate satisfactory performance against the relevant criteria<sup>36</sup>.

In 2011, the Audit Commission produced a guide to managing attendance and cover as part of its 'better value for money in schools' programme<sup>37</sup>. Their analysis suggested that, although national sickness rates are falling, many schools could do more to boost efficiency by reducing absence rates. The analysis shows that 37 councils have sickness absence rates above the upper quartile level. If schools in these areas reduced sickness absence to the level of the rest, they could release productive teacher time worth £14 million annually. The report highlighted steps that schools can generally adopt to manage attendance better and highlighted the role that local authorities have in supporting the schools leaders.

The report also examines options for cover including use of the schools own staff and employing cover supervisors and HLTAs. The authors suggested a number of questions that schools leaders, Governors and Councils could ask to assess the effectiveness of their in-house cover provision:

- What scope does the school have to make use of existing teachers to cover?

<sup>35</sup> In September 2012, 54 per cent of secondary schools in England were academies or had applied to become academies although the proportion of primary schools that have become or plan to become academies is much smaller.

<sup>36</sup> Department for Education (2013) Induction for newly qualified teachers (England) paras 1.5 and 2.17-2.18 [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk).

<sup>37</sup> Audit Commission (2011) *Managing staff absence and cover: better value for money in schools*.



- What are the financial and educational implications of employing a floating teacher to cover absence?
- What use is the school making of qualified support staff to cover short-term absence?
- Do you support training for these designated roles?
- What options have you explored (for example revised timetabling or collaboration with other schools) for ensuring you have in-house cover?
- How have you assessed the relative costs of direct contracts with supply teachers and using agency staff?
- Have you conducted a financial analysis of the viability of supply teacher insurance?

The Audit Commission estimated that in 2009/10 total spending on supply teachers was £875 million, equating to £123 per pupil. However there was significant variation with a quarter of schools spending more than £185 per pupil. Nearly 20 per cent of schools were spending over 10 per cent of their teaching budgets on supply teachers. Over three-quarters of schools had absence insurance to help them manage the cost of absence and the report recommended that before considering insurance, schools should consider the likelihood of the costs of premiums outweighing those of covering absence, and explore ways of mitigating the risk of staff absence.

The Report's authors also suggested questions that school leaders, Governors and Councils should ask about the costs of cover:

- How do you monitor and report on the use and costs of supply teachers? How have these changed over time?
- How have you benchmarked expenditure on supply teachers locally and with similar schools? How do you justify your spend - by need or supply teacher quality?