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National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

Education (Wales) Bill : Stage 1

Response from : Focus Group 1

Children and Young People Committee Consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill

Registration of the Education Workforce

This document outlines the evidence gathered including the specific contributions of the focus groups and participants.

Methodology

As part of the Children and Young People Committee consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill the Outreach team has conducted two focus groups in north and south Wales on the registration aspect of the Education (Wales) Bill – namely the provisions relating to the proposed Education Workforce Council and the registration and regulation of teachers and the wider workforce.



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The following audiences were targeted:

- Members of Trade Unions who are not currently required to register but would under the Bill
- Classroom assistants
- Youth Workers
- Work based learning tutors

In order to reach the target audience the Outreach team contacted a total of 12 organisations including three Trade Unions, five local authority Youth Services, three third sector organisations and one public sector organisation. The organisations contacted were:

- **Trade Unions:** UNISON, NASUWT, Voice Union Cymru
- **Local authority Youth Services:** Wrexham Youth Service, RCT Education Service, Neath Port Talbot Youth Service, Ceredigion Youth Service, Powys Youth Service
- **Third sector organisations:** Llamau – Learning 4 Life Programme, Swansea Red Café, Llais Ni – Gwynedd ac Ynys Môn
- **Public sector organisation:** Higher Skills Wales

Unfortunately due to time-constraints on the part of our target audiences and the difficulties associated with consulting during the summer holidays a number of the organisations contacted were unable to take part in the focus group programme.

The final focus group programme involved two separate participant organisations namely: members of UNISON, and youth workers from the Wrexham Youth Service. The focus group participants encompassed a broad-range of areas contained within the wider education workforce including youth workers, classroom assistants, LSAs and tutors.

Summary

Total number of organisations contacted: 12



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Total number of participant organisations: 2

Total number of focus groups: 2

Total number of participants: 11



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Focus Group Participants

Group Name: Wrexham Youth Service

Group Summary:

The participants from Wrexham Youth Service included Youth Work Coordinators and Youth Officers.

Participants noted that the views given in this focus group were their own personal views, and not the official view of Wrexham Youth Service or Wrexham County Borough Council.

Date: 3 September 2013

Number of Participants: Four

Group Name: UNISON

Group Summary:

The group consisted of individuals involved in the UNISON trade union and included primary school workers; nursery workers and high school workers from a number of local authorities across Wales.

Date: 10 September 2013

Number of Participants: Seven



Do you identify yourself as working within the 'education workforce'?
Wrexham Youth Service All identified themselves as working within the 'education workforce'. Nature of their work – youth work is part of the education system and youth workers deliver sessions in schools as part of PSE lessons. In Wrexham Council, the Youth Workers are part of the Directorate for Lifelong Learning Service which includes schools as well - they all felt that they were seen as partners and part of a wider provision.
UNISON All identified themselves as working within the 'education workforce'.
Do you want to register with a professional registration body, the way teachers currently do?
Wrexham Youth Service All were in favour of it and they all agreed to the comments below. Recognition – the group believed that the image and role of youth workers has increased among professionals and is seen as a distinctive profession in recent years. Having the option to register would enhance that and youth work would be seen as a profession not an occupation. As the youth workers in the focus group were educated to degree level (and 1 with a post- grad in youth work) they believed that as they were qualified to the same level as teachers then they should have the same status, in terms of professional grade. Accountability – the group also felt that being registered to a professional body would give the profession more accountability much in the same way that nurses, doctors, accountants are recognised by other professions. They felt that it would also ensure that professionals stick to policies/ procedures and codes of conduct that the profession has.



Definitional ambiguity – at the moment there is a huge variation in what is classed as ‘youth worker’ - the group mentioned two examples of this - you could have a person who runs a church youth group on a weekly basis calling themselves a ‘youth worker’ as well as a professional who is educated in youth work up to degree level. This doesn’t happen with e.g. a nurse, as they are only referred to as a nurse if they are a registered nurse.

UNISON

The group agreed that the proposition had been a long time coming; it was about time that their (workers within education other than teachers) needs were recognised.

Qualifications – the group argued that if a person is working with children, they need qualifications. The group used examples of unqualified people i.e. administrative assistants, having to cover school classes, often despite resistance from the unqualified person. The group felt that there needed to be a set minimum level of qualification to their line of work recognised by the professional registration body; which would represent them in such cases. With regards to qualification in relation to registration; the group raised the issue of those working within the school with no qualifications i.e. LSAs, and could not register – who would represent these? Would a qualification criterion create a scenario of those who could or could not register? The group agreed that as a professional body, workers should be encouraged to work for qualifications, in order to then register, to prevent standards from falling.

Representation – it was argued that membership (of the professional body) might be too restricted. What about those employed outside education e.g. a youth worker employed by health authorities, should consideration be given to them having to register?

Consistency – the group argued that there were huge inconsistencies within the education system across each local authority in Wales and even from school to school within local authorities. For example what a qualified level 2 person might have responsibility for in one part of Newport might be different elsewhere in Newport. Additionally school budgets vary enormously; enabling some schools to



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offer training while other workers in different schools might not get such opportunities. Such inconsistencies have the potential to make the process of setting up a professional registration body a meaningless process and a waste of money. The Welsh Government need to fully understand these inconsistencies and address them accordingly.

How did you first hear about the proposal to register additional type of workers within the education workforce and were you aware of any consultation?

Wrexham Youth Service

None of the three participants had heard about the current proposal until they were contacted by the Outreach team.

No prior awareness – all members of the group had heard of this idea being mentioned a lot of times in the last few years but weren't aware of the current consultation (or WG consultation either). They wanted to note that they felt it was alarming that this registration body was not already in place.

UNISON

Through the Trade Union – two participants heard of the proposal and consultation within the trade union forum. Other participants were not aware of anything until they received an email from their union.

No prior awareness – one participant commented that she was unaware that the proposal covered those workers involved with Higher Education, until taking part in the focus group.

Do you agree or disagree that other professionals in the wider education workforce should register in the way that teachers currently do?

Why?

Wrexham Youth Service

All agreed.



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Recognition – the group felt that as they have similar levels of qualification and education then they should be treated the same. They also felt that it should cover the workforce across the full provision of education not just teachers- school nurses, careers advisors, youth workers as they all provide an equal level of service in contributing to the education provision of a child.

UNISON

Consistency and fairness – the group agreed that at present there is inconsistency. The Welsh Government needs to acknowledge greater consistency within the Educational system. In a recent exam on, 'reading and writing', the Welsh Government ruled that 'any competent person' could mark the tests, not only qualified teachers. Such instruction from ministers caused massive disparities across Wales. There needs to be a body to represent workers who aren't paid teachers wages, but who still do the same work as teachers.

Benefits of registering:

Recognition – finally a voice to represent them.

Consistency – the group argued that the benefits would probably be large in the early stages after initially registering with the professional body, and argued that continued support and development needed to be emphasised further down the line.

Training – further training should be encouraged, in addition to what is required within their role. Development and career progression need to be emphasised.

Equality – the focus was then moved to whether the new professional body would provide them with the same training benefits as teachers?

Confidentiality – the issue was raised whether they would be entitled to the same confidentiality as teachers in exceptional cases



when a child might make a certain accusation against them. It was argued that since the Ian Huntley trial, many workers other than teachers are 'hung out to dry' and 'named and shamed' after an accusation, where as teachers cases are often kept quiet until the official verdict. A professional body needs to represent workers and provide guidance in such circumstances.

The new registration body will have responsibilities for the provision of advice and promotion of careers for the whole education workforce, and for induction and appraisal arrangements. What do you think the potential advantages or disadvantages could be? Do you think this would have a positive or negative impact on people working in education such as yourselves?

Wrexham Youth Service

Current levels of support – as Youth Workers, all four participants did have regular appraisals as well as induction and supervision and they were happy with existing levels of support.

Benefits of the new professional body:

Career progression – they thought the benefits would include promoting youth work as a career, with more opportunities for professional development and progression (when compared with vocational jobs). They felt that having a body that could advise on these matters would be beneficial.

Consistency – another benefit would be to have consistent regulation and standards across all local authorities.

Newly-qualified teachers/youth workers – the group did also raise the possibility of having a system similar to the teaching profession for newly qualified teachers (NQT), whereby they are recognised as being newly qualified youth workers (NQYW) for the first year.

UNISON



Benefits of the new professional body:

Career progression – many are over qualified and are not paid in a way that reflects their competencies and levels of responsibilities i.e. HTLA is employed as a 'lead LSA' in order to keep costs down. Career progression often seems unattainable. The new professional body could help a shift in culture.

Negatives of the new professional body:

Cross-border issues – the group discussed whether adherence to a UK qualification system was better or whether an all-Wales system would be best. There were conflicting views across the group, those in favour of an all-Wales system drew comparisons with the Scottish system; where, if a worker from England crossed the border to work in Scotland the worker would need to show their competencies and be trained in accordance with Scottish guidelines. If an all Wales system prevailed, the issue of cross-bordering among workers would become clear depending on how successful and how cost effective the training would be. If handled properly and successfully, it's possible that many workers in England might cross over to work in Wales. If it wasn't handled correctly, it could not only repel workers from England but could also encourage existing Welsh workers to move to England.

What level of registration fee do you think it would be reasonable for people to pay?

Wrexham Youth Service

Variable registration fees – the group felt that the fee should vary depending to grade with a codified maximum amount.

Degree recognition – they felt that youth workers should be separate to youth support workers but did acknowledge that this could create a two tier system. In general they felt that if you were qualified to a degree level, then you should be acknowledged as a professionally registered youth worker.



UNISON

No registration fee – many in the group argued that there should be no fee for joining: when considering that teachers are paid £20,000 a year as soon as they're qualified, with increasing salaries from then on, and that their registration fee remains at £12.00 a year (after subsidy); to ask a worker who earns £500 a month to pay anything is unreasonable.

Parity with teachers – everyone agreed that if there was a fee, it should be subsidised in the same means as the teachers registration is currently. It was argued that teachers' subsidy was a lot and many higher up the scale could afford to contribute more.

Variable registration fees – having considered the latter point it was argued that the fee should be income based.

Expanded remit – by registering such a vast spectrum of workers, the work of the professional body would become incredibly vast, how will this be managed without increasing the fees of those registered?

Training – Teachers who pay to register, receive £800-900 in their first year (following registration) to pursue training courses, and in their 2nd year more money is awarded to encourage teachers to partake a Master's course etc. If an equivalent was to happen for all workers through the new professional body, would this have implications for registration fees?

Do you think that this registration fee should be variable and based on income, different rates for different categories of work, or a flat-rate fee for everyone?

Wrexham Youth Service

See above

UNISON

Variable registration fees – the group agreed that the fee should be income based, if there was to be a fee at all.



Subsidy – fees should be subsidised like the ones currently provided to teachers.

Flat-rate fee – an argument was put forward that a flat-rate fee would provide a consistent standard and benefits across the board. After deliberation the group agreed that a variable fee based on income would be the best means.

Categories of work – it was argued that fees based on different categories of work would not be feasible due to the fact that different categories are not recognised consistently across Wales and that the pay and conditions of TAs can vary between, and sometimes within, local authority areas.

Additional considerations raised:

Additional considerations raised.

UNISON

Appointment to the professional body – if a professional body is formed; who will be appointing the body? The group said that they'd like to see a democratic process of recruitment in contrast to the process used when Ministers elected people to the teachers' body. A democratic process would ensure that everyone's interests were represented. The group suggested that the Assembly should contribute to the recruitment process, not only the government of the day, to provide continuity and democratic control.

