

UNISON Cymru/Wales submission to Welsh Government consultation on Additional National Professional Learning INSET days 2019 to 2022

1. UNISON Cymru/Wales represents roughly 22,000 members of staff across all sectors of education, principally learning support workers, and notes Welsh Government's proposal to give schools additional time to prepare for the new curriculum before it is introduced in 2022.
2. As the main trade union representing Teaching Assistants (TAs) in Wales, UNISON Cymru/Wales is pleased to be able to respond to this consultation and welcomes the opportunity to highlight the necessity of TAs being able to participate fully in INSET days – both those additional days proposed in the consultation and those that already exist in the school calendar.
3. The main challenge our members face, discussed at every meeting we have with TAs, is the absence of a consistent approach to the deployment of TAs and their responsibilities at each level. This means some TAs suffer a 'role drift', taking on ever greater tasks for which they are not paid or trained to do. To achieve standards of substance, there is an onus on Welsh government to consult all parties, NJC trade unions and local government employers, at the outset on how consistency can be achieved.
4. Schools cannot survive without Teaching Assistants; they help to support Special Educational Needs children and those underperforming, help teachers to cope with big classes, release teachers for preparation time and help those with English as an Additional Language – but this can only be done with a commitment on the behalf of the employer to both training and ongoing support. Too many TAs are thrown in the deep end without proper professional development and left to get on with it.

5. The majority of TAs are women; they suffer low pay, a lack of career opportunities and institutional discrimination that belittles their role. Part-time, casual and term time working, dominate. Previously, UNISON Cymru/Wales has embraced Welsh Government's professional registration of TAs as a first step.
6. However, to have continued improvement in standards, there must be further investment in the professional development of TAs, a proper career structure with transparent fair pay and conditions, uniformly applied across the whole of the country and a spirit of inclusiveness in schools that recognises their contribution.
7. Teachers have nationally agreed, uniform rates of pay, but the salaries of Wales' tens of thousands of TAs vary depending on where they work; pay is set by each of the 22 local authorities and their experience and responsibility are not always recognised in the pay structure. Some TAs work without a proper written and agreed job description; you can have the same job title doing very different duties, receiving vastly different pay across Wales.
8. Whilst UNISON Cymru/Wales welcomes the suggestion of additional INSET days during 2019-2022, it is vital that it is not only teachers who are included in this training to bring them up to date with the new curriculum. TAs and support staff, as an essential part of school life, must also be included.
9. UNISON Cymru/Wales believes that although this consultation focuses on a specific set of INSET days during a defined period, it would also be appropriate for Welsh Government and schools themselves to look at the way their existing INSET days are run.
10. It is vital that INSET days must be inclusive of all staff who work in the school, and provide them all with improved opportunities to learn. It is important that this time be recognised as 'working time' for support staff, as it is for teachers, to improve personal development. It is

imperative that for any additional INSET days, TAs and support staff must be appropriately remunerated.

11. Many of our members feel that INSET days as they currently exist can be a wasted opportunity for TAs and support staff. Whilst teachers do have the benefit of training and professional development on these days. Many TAs end up doing menial tasks in the classroom, such as tidying or organising rather than using the time to benefit their professional development. INSET days for TAs and support staff must be focused on either training that compliments their job description or more focused on their compulsory personal development activities, such as work on their professional learning passport.

12. Making INSET days meaningful for TAs and support staff is essential. Our members feel it is important not only that TAs and support staff be included, but also the training provided on these INSET days must be relevant to the roles that they are carrying out.

13. Schools across Wales must take advantage of the proposed additional INSET days and ensure that during these days there are non-teaching streams available for TAs and support staff.

14. Attention must also be paid to non-classroom support and technical staff. Whilst these members of staff are included in certain activities in school life, for the large majority an INSET day is simply a normal working day, as the attendance of pupils does not affect their workload. It is important that these staff can also benefit from INSET days, and should be provided with adequate and appropriate training at the same time as teachers.

15. There is great concern amongst our members that the existing number of INSET days are sufficient for the needs as they currently stand. Whilst UNISON Cymru/Wales cautiously

supports these additional INSET days due to the fact that the consultation states that they will be for a limited amount of time, we urge Welsh Government and schools themselves to look at extending the scope of the proposed INSET days to include whatever additional training support staff may need with a view to improving the experience for support staff of standard INSET days moving forward.