

## **UNISON CYMRU WALES RESPONSE TO CURRICULUM CONSULTATIONS**

UNISON is the main trade union representing Teaching Assistants (TAs). We have thousands of TA members across primaries, secondaries, special schools and nurseries across Wales.

Teaching Assistants will be fully engaged in the delivery of the new curriculum and are critical to its success, though they are unlikely to have a role in its design. For this reason, UNISON Cymru Wales has chosen to respond with one general statement covering all eight consultations.

### **Summary**

- The value of Teaching Assistants in delivering education and the new curriculum to Welsh learners must be explicitly acknowledged in curriculum guidance.
- Teaching Assistants should be provided with all the support and training they need to help implement the new curriculum.
- More broadly, Welsh Government must urgently address the unfair employment conditions of Teaching Assistants.
- Discussion of the value of Trade Unions and the gains Trade Unions have secured for society must be included in the design and delivery of curriculum. Trade Unions should be listed as an expert partner organisation for schools.
- Trade Unions have been overlooked on the response forms and there is concern that the views of Trade Unions and the members they represent are not being properly accounted for in planning for the new curriculum.
- The role of Careers Wales as an expert partner organisation is detailed in the consultation, but this service is inhibited by long-term Welsh government underfunding.

### **Value of teaching assistants**

Lessons could not run effectively without Teaching Assistants. Teaching Assistants regularly go way beyond their duties to help pupils and teachers every day.

UK Government evidence shows when Teaching Assistants are deployed appropriately, the educational attainment of pupils improves (Deployment of teaching assistants in schools, Skipp and Hopwood, June 2019).

There were many instances pre-Covid, where Teaching Assistants were asked to cover and take lessons for the teacher. A UCL Institute of Education study found over half of Teaching Assistants managed classes on their own during the winter lockdown to ensure vulnerable and key worker children could attend lessons (An IOE April 2021 study, funded by UNISON, analysed data from 9,055 teaching and classroom assistants across the UK).

Across the eight consultations, many different words are used for those involved in the delivery of the new curriculum: practitioners; enabling adults and teachers. Teaching Assistants is not among them.

Teaching Assistants undertake vital but unheralded jobs which make schools the success they are. They assist children with additional learning needs and those in need of extra support; help teachers to cope with big classes; release teachers for preparation time and help those with English as an Additional Language. As part of the whole school team, they played their part in keeping learning going during the pandemic.

The vital role of Teaching Assistants must be acknowledged throughout the guidance on the new curriculum.

UNISON Cymru/Wales echoes the following sentiments throughout the various guidance that training staff on the new curriculum is essential. Teaching Assistants must be included in this training and it must be provided during the working day. If offered outside the working day, many Teaching Assistants would not be able to benefit. The following points of guidance could be amended to explicitly mention the provision of training to Teaching Assistants: -

- RSE p.11 “RSE should be part of a whole school approach... all practitioners should contribute to the school’s RSE priorities and professional learning is a key requirement for delivery of high quality RSE. Schools ...should enable all practitioners to access learning”
- CWRE p.16 “Practitioners are also encouraged to undertake training opportunities offered by employers and other organisations to help them learn about the latest developments in the world of work.”
- Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, p.49 “Effective leaders... should be committed to continued professional development, both for themselves and other practitioners...”
- RVE response form Q.6. is additional support (e.g. professional learning) need to ensure successful implementation?

It is essential for the curriculum, its teaching and the school environment to be as culturally and racially inclusive as possible. It is recommended the whole school workforce is able to access training in this area.

#### *Unfair employment conditions*

Given the importance of Teaching Assistants to our children’s education, reference must be made to the broader point of the need to improve their employment conditions.

Welsh government must urgently address the culture of low pay, lack of career opportunities and precarious contracts and recognise Teaching Assistants for the professionals they are.

### **Incorporation of trade unions in curriculum**

A glaring omission from guidance about the design of curriculum content on being an ethical citizen, aware of employment rights and able to challenge inequality, is any mention of the role of Trade Unions.

It was Trade Unions which fought for and won a minimum wage, maternity and paternity rights, pension provision, holiday and sickness entitlements. These Union successes have benefited every single worker in Wales and the UK. Welsh Government recognises that Trade Union representation helps individuals make a valuable and essential contribution to Welsh society, challenging poor employment practices, tackling discrimination, and working to ensure healthy and safe workplaces for all. Trade Unions stand up for the vulnerable.

The following extracts from the guidance in the eight consultations listed here would suggest a natural link to teaching on Trade Unions and their historic achievements which have benefitted the whole of society. The fact that none mention Trade Unions seems perverse.

- Religion, Value and Ethics, p.20 “Identify unfairness and inequality in ...wider society and suggest appropriate challenges”
- Careers and work-related experience (CWRE), p.7 “CWRE should inspire learners to develop an understanding of the purpose of work in life for themselves and society as a whole.”
- CWRE, fig.1 schools should consider following in designing CWRE in their curriculum – political factors and historical factors
- CWRE, p.11 Equalities and unions “Through a broad range of authentic experiences, learners develop an understanding of the importance employers place on a diverse and inclusive workforce. Learning about stereotypes and being able to challenge them enhances awareness of the learners’ rights in the world of work.”
- CWRE, p.11 history of the world of work
- CWRE, p.11 “Develop an understanding of employment rights”
- CWRE, p.12 “As learners’ communications skills mature, they can become more aware of their rights in the world of work and more confident in challenging negative behaviour.”
- What Matters Code, Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action. P.18, discussion of helping learners become ethical citizens, social justice and awareness of their own rights

Not only should discussion of the value of Trade Union membership and the history of gains of Trade Unions, in particular tackling inequality, be included in design and delivery of curriculum, but Trade Unions should be listed as an expert partner organisation for schools to call on.

More broadly, it is disappointing Trade Unions have been overlooked on five of the response forms. Even ‘lobbyist’ is listed under the description of respondent, but not ‘Trade Union’ on the response forms for the RSE; CWRE; Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings; Draft Progression Code and What

Matters Code consultations. The respondent question is not asked on the RVE response form.

Sadly, on the two response forms which do mention Unions, under respondent type they list 'Teaching Union'. Listing like this is depriving the biggest group of workers in schools of a voice – the support staff, many of whom are represented by UNISON Cymru/Wales. A reference to 'Teacher Unions' also appears in the RVE guidance, p.6. 'Education' Union would be a better description.

The omission of Unions or misunderstanding which Unions should be included is concerning and it is not the first time a Welsh Government consultation has not grasped the concept and value of Unions. This is despite the work currently being undertaken to develop a Social Partnership Act.

### **Careers Wales as an expert partner**

It is pleasing to see the acknowledgment of Careers Wales as an expert partner throughout the Careers and Work-Related Experience guidance (CWRE). As the Trade Union representing careers advisors, we are aware of their professionalism and the important role they can play in supporting young people making decisions at a key point in their lives.

Careers Wales staff have worked through lockdown to support people; young school leavers into education and training; unemployed people, people furloughed and those made redundant.

However, Welsh Government has not significantly increased the Careers Wales budget since 2013 and this places an incredible strain on the service. Minimal pay rises over the last decade mean wages have nosedived and there is a risk well-qualified advisors could leave the service.

Careers advisors have been caught in a repeated funding debate between Careers Wales and Welsh Government. Careers Wales suggests that the responsibility for the funding gap lies with the Welsh Government and the outcome is that the employer maintains that there is no more money for a higher pay rise. Welsh Government says the matter is for Careers Wales to resolve.

If Careers Wales is to be an expert partner and to continue its excellent work in the uncertain economic climate, helping young people and thousands of people made redundant and into work, it must be properly funding by Welsh Government.