

Delivery of INSET (in-service education and training) days in Wales

Consultation response form

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Responses should be returned by 4 February 2026 to:

Leadership Branch
School Practitioner Division
Education, Culture and Welsh Language Directorate
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

or completed electronically and sent to:

email: INSETConsultation2025@gov.wales

Summary of UNISON's position

UNISON Cymru represents thousands of school support staff and is the largest education union in Wales. This consultation response is shaped by their experience.

The changes Welsh government proposes to tidy up the planning of INSET days are sensible and well-thought out.

Not all staff however currently benefit from training on those days.

Training is very much geared towards teachers and school support staff are typically an afterthought. By not including support staff, schools are missing out on utilising and developing the talents of all the school team which would better serve learners' educational and welfare needs.

Access to training opportunities for school support staff are so rare if they don't receive training during INSET days, they may not receive any training in an entire school year.

As we have said in our response to the recent Welsh government consultation on professional standards, these workers are committed professionals. They want to be included in decisions about how the school is run. They want to contribute ideas and to have their voices heard.

Understandably, support staff feel undervalued by the current operation of INSET days and morale is further damaged if they are asked instead to clean classrooms when teachers are training next door or told not come into work because they are not needed and therefore not be paid for those days.

The lack of training for school support staff is so great, UNISON has stepped into the breach to provide professional development training courses, like behavioural management, outside of school hours and at weekends, to allow support staff to attend in their own time. Unlike other professions, this time cannot be claimed back.

If we want an education system that delivers the best for young people, we need to ensure school support staff are treated and rewarded fairly. That means that they are engaged as valued team members on INSET days and provided with the appropriate training.

Consultation questions

Question 1

Do you agree that 6 INSET days should be provided every year from 2026 to 2027 by changing the school teachers' pay and conditions (Wales) document?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

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Question 2

Do you agree that INSET days should be used mainly or wholly for training, planning and preparation in relation to the purposes outlined (which relate to ALN, curriculum and assessment, qualifications and national priorities)?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

Yes, they should be used for these things and there should be appropriate, meaningful training for *all* staff.

However, support staff in many schools would describe themselves as the forgotten group of workers where senior leaders make no effort to engage them about their training needs or sponsor appropriate training for them on INSET days.

It's common for them to not be included at all and be forced to undertake tasks not appropriate for an In-Service Training Day; or for them to be included in teachers' training as an afterthought.

No care is taken that the training is relevant to them or what they might be interested in. They might follow and enjoy the teachers' training in the morning but be directed by the head to do something else after lunch, such as change wall displays so miss the second half.

Support staff who are not teaching assistants (such as reception staff, caretakers, cooks and midday supervisors), are often told not to come into work and therefore are not paid on INSET days.

School support work is already a very low paying sector and many school support staff suffer in-work poverty and are forced to use food banks and benefits to make ends meet.

UNISON Cymru surveyed 409 teaching assistants between May and September 2023 on professional learning. The survey revealed teaching assistants are not

provided with adequate or relevant continuing professional development (CPD) in a career that is ever evolving and becoming more complex.

24% said that on INSET days they had been asked to clean classrooms and do photocopying or carry out unpaid school maintenance work. A total of 48% did not participate in relevant training or activities.

Cleaning and photocopying is not adding to professional development and goes against the idea of what INSET days should be used for.

Many heads completely fail to grasp INSET days are an ideal opportunity to develop the skills of all their staff.

A number of unfortunate episodes reported to UNISON, further illustrate how support staff might be excluded: food has been provided for teachers on INSET days but not for all staff present, and reception staff have been prevented from participating in all-staff briefings because they must be available to answer the phone (even though it is not a normal working day).

Question 3

We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools engage with other schools and local authorities to coordinate the timing of INSET days across groups, clusters or local authorities. This is to reduce disruption for families with children in multiple schools and to enable better collaboration between schools where possible. This will be coordinated between headteachers and local authorities. Do you agree?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

Sensible change for the reasons outlined and there is already much good practice in certain counties.

Question 4

We propose to change the guidance to ask schools to communicate the purpose and timing of their training with local authorities and parents or carers at the beginning of the academic year. Do you agree?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

Sensible change that allows everyone to plan.

Question 5

We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools do not group more than 2 INSET days together in a block. Do you agree?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

Sensible change.

Question 6

We propose to change the guidance to advise that schools do not arrange more than 2 INSET days as twilight sessions within the academic year. Do you agree?

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

As the consultation document says, twilight sessions ought to be limited so teachers and teaching assistants have the space and time to develop their learning in the most effective way possible. They may be particularly inconvenient for support staff because they would be forced to stay outside of their contracted hours.

Unlike teachers and heads, support staff are paid term time only pay and should not be further discriminated against with twilight sessions.

Question 7

Do you agree that the guidance should emphasise that at least 4 INSET days are used wholly or mainly to deliver professional learning relating to learning and teaching, in line with the proposed purposes of INSET days in schools? (This will mean no more than 2 INSET days will be used on training not related to learning and teaching.)

(Insert an x under the relevant heading.)

Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree
X		

Supporting comments

Please see response to Q.2 on why support staff must benefit from appropriate training opportunities on INSET days.

Question 8

What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposal on the Welsh language?

We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?

Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

Supporting comments

N/A

Question 9

In your opinion how could the proposed policy be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

Supporting comments

N/A

Question 10

We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Supporting comments

Anonymity

Responses to consultations may be made public. Your response will be anonymous. However, if you would like your name to be published alongside your response, tick the box.

I agree to my name being published alongside my response to this consultation.