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Dear Minister

School Teachers' Pay: IWPRB's 2nd Report and Welsh Government Response

Introduction

This NEU Cymru response to the IWPRB's 2nd Report and your proposals for implementation of the IWPRB's recommendations underlines the key issues relating to school teacher pay in Wales.

It is noteworthy that key IWPRB findings support the main points in the evidence we submitted to them earlier this year. The IWPRB has added its voice to the broad consensus on teacher pay issues. We urge you to engage with that consensus, so that we can work together on effective and lasting solutions to the problems faced by the teaching profession in Wales.

Recruitment and Retention

Consistent with its 1st report the IWPRB highlights serious and entrenched teacher supply problems and states that “the trends in teacher vacancies and applications for each post advertised continue to give cause for concern, particularly given the demographic trends which are resulting in an increase in pupil numbers” (IWPRB page 64).

Recruitment targets within the primary sector have been missed every year since 2014-2015 whilst in the secondary sector the position is worse having missed targets every year since 2013-2014. Further, the targets have been missed by considerable margins, up to 10% in primary and 40% in secondary for the year 2017-2018 (page 26).

Whilst the report does suggest a “slightly improving trend in retention across education sectors” (Page 64) it still recognizes that “the largest proportion of leavers do so within their first five years, closely followed by teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience” which is a worrying position especially having identified that “pay is a contributory factor affecting retention” (page 65). serious concerns about teacher recruitment and retention.

Impact of COVID-19

The IWPRB states that it may be difficult to evaluate the effect of COVID-19 on the labour market context for recruitment and retention but suggests that the post Covid-19 recession may increase the numbers of students entering ITE so marginally improve retention rates (page ix) though we cannot be sure about that nor whether it would be long term. Although the COVID-19 crisis may produce improvements in teacher recruitment and retention, any such improvements are likely to be short-lived. The demand for graduates is likely to recover fully in the medium term. We have consistently argued that teaching cannot compete effectively with other graduate

employers until the key problems on teacher pay are effectively addressed. In that context, we draw your attention to the IWPRB's statement that teacher "starting salaries and early career stage salaries need to become more competitive within the graduate market" (page x).

The current crisis provides an opportunity to secure a significant improvement in the competitiveness of the teacher pay framework over the next two to three years. Such a "significant improvement" must in our view include restoration of the significant pay losses against inflation, as well as provision of a fair and transparent national pay structure permitting clear career paths without PRP. The contribution of teachers and school leaders in the current crisis has been immense. The Welsh Government must act to ensure that this contribution is properly rewarded.

We therefore note the IWPRB's support for the introduction of national pay scales (page 67) and the recommendation that "performance is no longer used as a criterion for assessing salaries within pay ranges and that teachers move up one point of their newly introduced national pay ranges" (page 69). These recommendations are welcome.

Pay Levels

Like us, the IWPRB has serious concerns about teacher pay and is clear that pay problems make a major contribution to the recruitment and retention issues. In addition to the real terms losses teachers have suffered since 2010 and low teacher starting pay, the IWPRB highlights graduate starting salaries in the wider labour market. The IWPRB concludes that "the actual starting salary for teachers in Wales in 2019 was £652 (2.6%) lower than the median starting salary reported in High Fliers for Wales and £5095 (20%) lower than for High Fliers in England" (page 15).

Having considered the report we note that that you are recommending that starting salaries for new teachers in Wales will increase to over £27k which is welcome and starts to redress the imbalance identified when compared with other graduate professions. Most teachers pay on the MPR will increase by 3.75%, whilst teachers on the UPS will receive at least a 2.75% rise. We note also the introduction of a new

5 point pay scale accelerating the time it will take a NQT to advance to the maximum of the MPR by one year.

NEU Cymru welcomes the removal of M1 as it means that those who join in future will earn more and progress more quickly making the profession more attractive to graduates. However, this alone gives nothing to those in early career, at points M2 – M5 who will continue to earn less than in England (in breach of the former FM undertaking) directly as a result of the decision taken in 2017 to apply a 2% award to those at M1 and M6 only. This issue was recognised in the 2019 IWPRB report at Recommendation 4 where, for scale points M2 – M5 on the MPR they stated that they “be increased to remove the detrimental effect of the 1% differential relative to points M1 & M6 that was introduced through the implementation of the 2017 pay award.”

The IWPRB’s pay recommendations, which you have accepted, need to be assessed in the context of the long period of real terms pay cuts, including pay freezes and pay caps, imposed since 2010. The IWPRB have recognized “the need to reward experienced teachers and maintain their position in the labour market” (page 66) but these awards, welcome though they are, do not go far enough to achieve that recognition. The increase for most teachers of 2.75% is likely to be above RPI for September 2020. Nevertheless, with the latest data showing RPI at 1.6% for July 2020 and inflation prospects over the next year uncertain we are clear that the pay increases recommended by the IWPRB are not enough to make the urgent and significant restoration in the value of teacher pay needed to properly reward teachers and to tackle the deep-rooted recruitment and retention problems.

Your announcement of 29 July states that “the overall increase in costs for the pay award largely equates to funding previously estimated for this purpose” but we are clear that improvements to school funding are needed to ensure that the real terms cuts of recent years are fully restored and that teacher pay is significantly improved. A clear indication and confirmation that the pay award will be fully funded will help remove any uncertainty or concerns that have arisen in this regard.

Pay Structure

The IWPRB notes the consensus amongst unions on the advantages of national pay points. This recommendation, accepted by you, would provide greater clarity on pay and career progression. This is essential if we are to effectively tackle recruitment and retention problems. Potential and serving teachers need to know that they will be supported in mapping out a clear career path. The removal of unfair PRP, with factors outside of teacher and school leader control used to deny pay progression, means that the profession in Wales can offer clear career pathways.

We do however note that, as in previous years, there was a delay in the publication of the IWPRB Report until the end of the summer term as well as delays throughout the whole process of setting the remit and receiving evidence. This causes significant problems for schools in undertaking their own consultations and planning for the new academic year. We have to ensure going forward that such delays in the process are eradicated.

Conclusion

NEU Cymru is the largest trade union representing teachers and school leaders in Wales and we call on you to apply a significantly higher increase than recommended by the IWPRB with the same increase applied to all teacher pay points and allowances. We further call on you to engage with us in urgent discussions on the full restoration of pay lost since 2010, the establishment of a fair national pay structure without PRP as accepted by you and the availability and allocation of additional resources needed if we are to secure a teacher pay structure capable of appropriately valuing, retaining and attracting and retaining teachers in Wales.

Yours sincerely

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