

## **NASUWT**

The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit views to the Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee on school counselling and, in particular, on the progress of the Scottish Government's Programme for Government commitment to enable all secondary schools in Scotland to have access to at least one qualified counsellor by September 2020.

The Union recommends the Education and Skills Committee explores the following key issues:

### **1. Roles and responsibilities**

The counselling service has been promoted as a universal service which will be available to children and young people over the age of 10, giving them confidence that their needs will be heard and addressed. The aims and principles developed in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) are to provide a framework which local authorities can develop and design access to a school counselling service.

The aims and principles of the "COUNSELLING THROUGH SCHOOLS partnership approach" are very broad and therefore fail to directly address the question of what is meant by 'counselling services'.

The NASUWT welcomes recognition of the fact that counselling is something separate and distinct from the role of a teacher, which should fundamentally be to teach. However, the Union suggests that more work is needed to articulate clearly the roles and responsibilities of these newly appointed counsellors.

### **2. Ongoing funding**

The agreement set out an allocation of £60 million over four years. Of those services which were previously in existence, many had utilised Pupil Equity or Scottish Attainment funding. While a four-year commitment to funding may provide an improved level of continuity, it still does not give sufficient security and confidence in the investment long term. It will be difficult to assess and review any impact on the education system without a long-term financial commitment.

### **3. Variety of models**

Individual local authorities are responsible for the recruitment of counsellors and for determining how best to deliver the service in their local area, which will result in a variety of local provision, albeit broadly based on the aforementioned suite of aims and principles. The Scottish Government has not articulated a clear process through which a national overview can be sought on these variety of models generally, nor specifically how long it will take to recruit the counsellors or how many are currently employed.

### **4. Effective evaluation**

In an education system which has been subject to extensive fiscal restraint, there must be effective and ongoing monitoring and review procedures to assess impact and ensure the best use of funds. Any review should involve trade union representation to ensure teachers' voices are heard in the evaluation of impact on the ground.

## 5. Local services

Within the framework agreed with COSLA, it states: 'The provision of counselling through schools should align to, and/or enhance the local services to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people'. Austerity has resulted in significant cuts to other essential services. There is a need to ensure that these other services are able to respond to needs that counselling services identify, including providing specialist support.

## 6. Package of measures for pupils

School counselling can only be considered as one element of support to complement a range of whole-school and targeted approaches to help support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of children and young people.

It is important that recognition is also given that counsellors on their own will not provide a quick fix to pupil health and wellbeing, and additionally that the responsibility for this policy aim does not rest solely with schools.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of supports and measures which will also contribute to pupils' mental health and wellbeing within a school context:

- behaviour and relationships policy;
- school ethos/management practices;
- Additional Support Needs (ASN) support;
- anti-bullying policy and recording procedures;
- support for LGBT/protected characteristics/challenging racism;
- effective Personal and Social Education (PSE);
- curricular offers supporting health and wellbeing such as physical education, food and health, relationships;
- poverty proofing the school day.

## 7. Interaction with teacher health and wellbeing

Nearly half (44%) of teachers in Scotland have needed to see a doctor or medical professional in the last year as a result of the strain their job is placing on their mental and physical health, a survey by the NASUWT found. One in ten teachers say they have been prescribed antidepressants to help them cope, while 7% use or have increased their reliance on prescription drugs. Twelve per cent say they have undergone counselling and 3% of teachers have been admitted to hospital.

Nearly two thirds (64%) of teachers feel their job has adversely affected their mental health in the last 12 months. More than three quarters (78%) report that they have experienced an increase in workplace stress over the past year. The survey also found that in the last 12 months as a result of their job:

- 75% have experienced anxiety;
- 83% have suffered from loss of sleep;
- 21% have increased their use of alcohol;
- 9% have suffered a relationship breakdown;
- 2% have self-harmed.

Over half (54%) of teachers said that their job satisfaction has declined in the last 12 months and 55% have seriously considered leaving the teaching profession in the last year.

Some of the factors driving the growth in mental health problems among teachers include excessive workload, pupil indiscipline and adverse management practices. The health and wellbeing of teachers and pupils are inextricably linked and are impacted on by the school culture, ethos and management practices. Pupil health and wellbeing cannot be viewed in isolation.

The NASUWT is keen to work with the Scottish Government to strengthen child and adolescent mental health and wellbeing, and supports any review of this commitment by the Education and Skills Committee.

The NASUWT would be delighted to attend the Education and Skills Committee evidence sessions to discuss this response in more detail.

Yours sincerely

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