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Mr Darren Millar AM  
Chair of the Public Accounts Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff CF99 1NA

Date: 9 July 2014  
Our ref: HVT/2180/fgb  
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Dear Darren

**ADVICE ON THE WELSH GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO *COVERING TEACHERS' ABSENCE***

The Clerk's letter of 24 June 2014 requested my advice on the Welsh Government's response to the Public Accounts Committee report entitled *Covering Teachers' Absence* (May 2014).

The Welsh Government has indicated that it accepts six of the Committee's 14 recommendations, accepting seven in principle and rejecting one recommendation. Where accepted in principle, this is largely because the Welsh Government notes that responsibility lies with others including local authorities, consortia, schools and supply agencies. The Welsh Government agrees to provide an update in January 2015, as requested, but notes that some actions will take a longer time frame.

Overall, I consider that the Welsh Government has responded satisfactorily to the majority of recommendations. However, the Committee may wish to consider whether, taken together, the responses will meet the Committee's overall concern about the lack of monitoring and evaluation of the extent of lessons being covered and the impact on the education of pupils. I have also made some comments and observations against specific recommendations for your consideration.

**Recommendation 1** - The recommendation that the Welsh Government captures and disseminates relevant and reliable data on teachers' absence from the classroom is accepted in principle but the response places the onus on consortia, schools and local authorities to identify what to collect and how it is to be used. Consequently, it will not necessarily address the Committee's intention that '*the Welsh Government should capture and disseminate*' the information. This is a similar response to recommendation 13 about monitoring the cost and value for money of cover arrangements. The Committee may wish to request additional information about whether and how the Welsh Government expects to be able to know the extent of covered lessons, the reasons for absence, and the extent of expenditure on the arrangements.

**Recommendation 2** – Whilst the response to this recommendation appears to not accept the need to evaluate the effectiveness of training delivery, including the impact on classroom absence, the response to recommendation 8 confirms the Welsh Government will review training and professional development it instigates including the impact of different activities on teacher absence. The review will be used to provide guidance to officials and consortia to help ensure that approaches are used that minimise the impact of teacher absence. This is likely to meet the intentions of the Committee.

**Recommendation 3** – The Welsh Government says the recommendation to designate a lead governor on HR matters is rejected because regulation cannot require such a designation. This seems reasonable. The response helpfully notes that the forthcoming guidance will make it clear that headteachers should report to governors on teacher absence, the use of supply cover and the impact on learners.

**Recommendation 6** - This is accepted in principle because it is for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to decide how inspectors inspect, although the Welsh Government will discuss the recommendation with Estyn. The Welsh Government will also propose a remit study for 2015/16 which will potentially identify the impact of the proposed guidance to be published this autumn.

**Recommendation 10** - The Welsh Government has 'accepted in principle' because the Framework contracts for supply school supply staff are not binding on all supply agencies, local authorities and school. However, the response meets the recommendation in full.

**Recommendation 13** - This recommendation is accepted in principle because, whilst supporting the need to monitor and evaluate the value for money of supply teachers arrangements, the Welsh Government considers this to be the responsibility of schools and employers. The Welsh Government guidance this autumn will set out how schools should consider value for money issues and will expect schools and governing bodies monitor absences and ensure cover is used effectively. As noted above under recommendation 1, the Committee may wish to request information on how the Welsh Government expects to know whether cover arrangements are being managed well to ensure that learners make good progress.

As the Committee has asked for an update in January 2015, any additional information requested could be incorporated in the update. The Committee could revisit at that point in time the merits of a follow-up evidence session to examine the overall progress that is being made in response to its recommendations and the recommendations in my report.

I hope that this advice is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of the Welsh Government response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'H. Vaughan Thomas'.

**HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS**  
**AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES**