

We visited - You asked



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March 2016

Since September 2015 UNISON has been out in schools across Wales talking to you about the registration of support staff with the Education Workforce Council (EWC) in April 2016. During these visits we promised regular updates and to return with the answers to your questions. Here we've put together the most common queries.

For up to date information visit UNISON's site www.skillsforschools/registration-wales
Or for specific EWC queries about your registration visit www.ewc.wales

1. What is the registration fee and how will it be paid?

Learning support staff will pay £15 annually to register with the EWC. As registration takes effect on 1st April 2016, it is expected that this year's payment will be deducted from your March salary. You do not need to do anything, it will be taken automatically. If your school or local authority has decided to pay the fee on your behalf, it will still be deducted and then refunded the following month into your pay. The fee is set by Welsh Government.

2. Which councils / schools are paying the fee?

You will know from our visits that UNISON has been campaigning for local authorities to pay the fee - Especially so where they pay professional fees for other local government employees like social workers, therapists and legal staff.

So far the following councils have agreed to pay *this year*: Cardiff Council, Bridgend Council, Vale of Glamorgan Council, Torfaen Council, Neath Port Talbot Council, Swansea Council, Denbighshire Council, Gwynedd Council, Powys Council, RCT Council and Merthyr Schools. Caerphilly Council have committed to paying this year *and* beyond. We are expecting announcements from more very soon but this is only happening thanks to union pressure. You can help by talking to your local councillors about EWC registration, especially your Cabinet Member for Education.

3. Is the fee tax deductible along with other professional fees?

The EWC tell us that the registration fee is eligible for tax relief. As part of deducting the £15 fee from your March salary your employer will apply the tax relief making the actual fee equivalent to around £12 per year BUT the full £15 is still deducted.

4. What will teachers and lecturers pay – is this subsidised?

Welsh Government set the registration fee. The fee for learning support staff in schools and FE is actually £48, but this is subsidised by £33 down to £15 – which is what you pay. Teachers employed

by a Local Authority will see their actual fee rise to £78 but again, this is subsidised (by £33) so their fee is now £45. Other school teachers and FE lecturers will pay £45.

5. Who decides if I should be registered?

By now, the local authority should have already provided a list of registrants to the EWC. Your LA will have filled in a spreadsheet of names to be registered who meet the definition of a learning support worker. We've posted the guidance they should follow on our skills for schools (skillsforschools.org) website which includes a YES – NO list for registration. You should check this guidance to ensure it is being followed.

With so many different job titles and roles falling under the definition of 'learning support worker' we know that some members are concerned about whether their school should or shouldn't register them. If this is you, firstly speak to your Head Teacher or manager. If you need further support, contact your UNISON rep or local branch. Agency workers will also need to register. Your agency will be able to offer advice about this.

6. What if I don't want to register?

If you meet the definition, you have to register with the EWC in order to continue in your role. The EWC is the independent regulatory body for education practitioners in Wales and the requirement to register with the EWC is set out in law through the Education (Wales) Act 2014.

7. What if I don't think I meet the definition - Can I appeal?

UNISON would like to work with the EWC and Welsh Government to ensure that the definition for registering learning support workers is robust. We are aware of cases where staff sometimes perform the role of a learning support worker without it being their actual job title. In these cases, we think the school should do one of two things – stop using you in any learning support capacity OR with your agreement re assess your job role to ensure you have the correct job description to register along with the right rate of pay.

Contact your UNISON branch if the above applies to you. We want to highlight any cases of inappropriate registration to the EWC in our quarterly meetings with them. The EWC have assured us that they will also be keeping an eye on the roles being registered to make sure they fit appropriately into the YES list.

UNISON will be calling for a full assessment of the registered roles after April.

8. What if my school didn't register me by 1st April, do I still have a job?

As it's the LA's responsibility to register you (this year) they will be accountable for rectifying any mistakes with the EWC immediately. You should not suffer any detriment if they fail to register you on time and the EWC are expecting some residual issues around 1st April.

9. Will I need the right qualifications to register?

No. You are registered for the job you do, not the qualifications you hold. It has become a common misconception that there are 'standard' qualification requirements for learning support staff. In fact the picture is very mixed - with the exception of HLTA's who have to meet the HLTA standards in order to do the role. Your school may or may not require you have certain qualifications which support your role but at present this down to the school. One of the problems in defining qualifications for support staff is that there are so many out there. UNISON believes that this needs sorting out.

Unlike teachers, there are no standard entry qualifications for support staff roles.

10. Will I lose my job if don't have the 'right' qualifications?

See above. No. Contact UNISON if you are worried about this or if you have been told otherwise.

11. What are professional standards and have we got them?

Professional standards underpin the knowledge, skills, values and attributes you need in order to do your role. They are more than just a job description. They should be the same across Wales regardless of which school you work in so that all staff governed by the standards are expected to perform at the same level which should bring about greater consistency and clarity in your roles.

Unlike teachers, there are no professional standards for learning support staff with the exception of the HLTA standards. UNISON has long argued that professional registration and professional standards should go hand in hand.

UNISON has been working with the Welsh Government on professional standards for learning support staff. These are due to be published in autumn 2016. We will keep you updated with any progress in the meantime.

12. What is UNISON's view on registration?

We see positives and pitfalls - registration is an acknowledgment that you are a professional and deserve to be treated as such, something we have been saying for a long time. Through your union, you will be able to use it as a platform to argue for better recognition and greater consistency in the roles you undertake. Registration should bring about better access to development.

Registration also brings increased risk and responsibility – you will be far more accountable for your practise and actions as the EWC will be able to call your conduct and competency into question. In addition, UNISON has always argued that already low paid term time staff should not have to bear the cost of registration.

UNISON wants to use registration to bring about consistency and fairness in pay and roles in schools right across Wales.

13. What do I get when I register?

You will be sent a letter from the EWC in February confirming they have received your details from your LA and then a further letter confirming your registration with them in April. You will then be able to set up access to your record by logging onto the EWC website via MyEWC. Here you can check your record and access the Professional Learning Passport which is an online (personal) record of your development. The enhanced version of the Passport will be available to you from September. Search the EWC website for more information about the development of the PLP for learning support staff.

14. What can the public see on the EWC website?

The public can search the website for specific limited information about you, such as your name, registration category, whether you have any live EWC disciplinary orders and the name of the school you work at. The best way to check what the public can see is to go on the website and have a look.

You can access (and check) your full record via MyEWC.

15. Who can refer cases to the EWC?

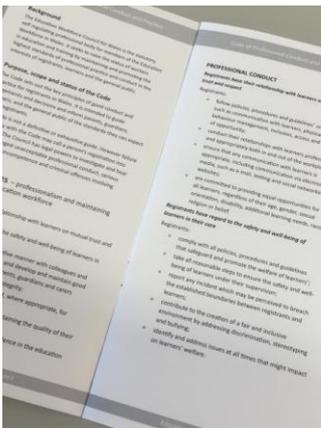
Employers and agencies employing registered people have a responsibility to refer cases which may be of interest to the EWC. The public can also refer practitioners to the EWC, but they will first check whether the issue had been raised at school level to try to eliminate malicious complaints.

16. What can UNISON do for me if I am referred to the EWC?

Registered people need to belong to a union. UNISON is the largest support staff union in the UK, we have the biggest voice and the most influence on matters affecting learning support staff. There are only three 'recognised' support staff unions. Furthermore, it is important that teachers and support staff have different unions representing their specific interests. Whilst you may work as a team in the classroom, your roles are very different so you need to keep some objectivity when it comes to union representation. Union's should be clear about who they represent so that they cannot be compromised by conflicting interests between teaching and support roles.

If you get a letter from the EWC, contact UNISON immediately. Providing you have been a member for more than four weeks, we will provide professional representation and support at all stages of the EWC Fitness to Practise process. Do not wait until you have a problem before you join as there may be little we can do for you.

17. What is the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice and where can I get it?



From April 2016 you will be governed by the EWC Code of Professional Conduct and Practice in the same way as teachers are now. It is the same code for all registrants and can be found on the EWC's website and UNISON's skills for schools site.

The code sets out standards of expected behaviour and practice that you should adhere to as a learning support assistant. Breaching the code could result in you being referred to the EWC as outlined above. In the worst case scenario, a serious breach of the code could result in your being 'struck off' from the profession and unable to work in an education setting in Wales. Less serious breaches could still result in a suspension from practicing as a learning support assistant.

Adherence to a code also affects some actions outside of work, for instance what you say on social media. You also have a greater level of accountability to the 'profession' as a whole and therefore, a duty to report wrongdoing.

UNISON can offer a short workshop on the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice. Speak to your branch or organiser if you are interested. We can also offer practical tips about your digital safety to make sure you don't get accidentally caught out.

18. What else is UNISON doing to help learning support staff?

Professional registration can be used to highlight some of the issues facing school support staff, such as inconsistency of roles, grades, access to training and recognition. UNISON is campaigning for a national body for school support staff to improve pay and conditions.

- We are offering a UNISON workshop on the EWC Code of Professional Conduct and Practice and how it affects you. This can be run in or out of school. Please speak to your branch or organiser if you are interested.

- UNISON is running a series of free Saturday learning sessions across Wales on issues you've highlighted to us as important such as behaviour management, digital literacy, closing the gap and making literacy fun. Add your name to a course list!
- Become a UNISON rep for your school. Due to high demand, we are now running bespoke UNISON schools reps courses across Wales. This a rep training course tailored just for the school environment. Being a rep is the best way to stay in touch with the union and have your voice heard. Speak to your branch or organiser for more information.
- Take part in one of the schools forum's being run in your area to have your say.
- Make sure your details are up to date and receive our regular bulletins on professional registration as well as briefings on key issues such as grade responsibilities and term time only pay.

Get ready for Professional Registration JOIN UNISON

Call 0800 171 2193 or visit
unison.org

