

Supply teacher provider responds to ITV exposé on recruitment in schools

Submitted by: BlueSky Public Relations Ltd

Thursday, 6 October 2016

Responding to claims that recruitment agencies are putting 'profits before pupils' following an investigation by ITV's Good Morning Britain, former education recruiter, Baljinder Kuller, has spoken out about the 'unethical' nature of some agencies which prey on the desperation of schools looking for teachers at short notice.

ITV's investigation found that recruitment agencies are sending teachers on assignment who are not suitably qualified for particular roles and that take-home pay has dropped by £100 a week in just five years. Meanwhile, agencies are raking in millions of pounds in commission. Whistleblowers revealed to ITV how profit-driven agencies encourage them to lie about their experience and pay them as little as £10 pounds per hour. One anonymous supply teacher recalled how she had been sent on an assignment to a school for pupils with specialist educational needs despite the fact she was not qualified in this area. She was unable to communicate with the students, who had severe disabilities, because she was not familiar with sign language.

According to the Government Department for Education, £1.26 billion was spent on supply teachers in England alone last year. This represents a 38% increase in three years.

Kuller is now Managing Director of online supply teacher portal, The Supply Register (<https://www.supplyregister.uk/>), which enables schools to take back control of managing supply staff while offering fair pay for teachers. Commenting on the revelations, he said;

"There is no doubt that recruitment agencies play an important role in ensuring that no classroom is left without a teacher. However the aggressive, manipulative and unscrupulous way in which some agencies engage with both schools and jobseekers is wreaking havoc on the availability of talent through any other means.

"It's a vicious circle. Newly qualified teachers are snapped up by agencies which, thanks to bumper profits, have healthy advertising budgets. Where schools once relied on a 'black book' of local bank staff and only called on agencies occasionally, now up to 80% of all supply staff come through the agency route. These professionals are increasingly underpaid and so often drop out of the sector. According to the National Audit Office, the number of teachers leaving the profession has increased by 11% over three years. Ultimately, the 'solution' to the acute teacher shortage is actually part of the problem.

"Of course, there are many shining examples of agency best practice. The majority are businesses which provide a professional and highly valuable service to the education sector. Their fees cover not only wages and utilities, but also in many cases the cost of compliance and even a training provision. I'm focusing on the significant minority.

"I recruited teachers for over a decade, both on behalf of local authorities and as an agency recruiter. When I started out, agencies were working with £35 a day margins. Now it's not unheard of for recruiters to be banking £100 per day for each individual assignment. Agencies know that if faced

with a choice between a classroom with no teacher or spiralling budgets, a compassionate head will be forced to choose the latter. Unethical agencies capitalise on this.

“Furthermore, I’m also concerned about the way some supply agencies are moving into permanent recruitment as the report highlighted. Many are head hunting talent, knowing the fees they could pick up and without consideration of the gaps being left in the class they cherry-pick talent from.

“Schools are at the mercy of agencies and, sadly, the stories shared by supply teachers during ITV’s investigation are not unique. At the end of the day, it’s the child in the classroom who’s losing out – the excessive fees that these agencies are charging could be better spent on equipment and materials to enhance learning and improve attainment.”

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Carly Smith
BlueSky PR
T: +44 (0)1582 790 708
E: carly@bluesky-pr.com
W: www.bluesky-pr.com