

Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill

Response to the CYPE Committee's further questioning resulting from the Education Workforce Council's (EWC) oral evidence provided on 9 October 2024.

The EWC thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide additional evidence as part of its inquiry into the Welsh Language Education Bill. As requested, this note discusses some of the key factors that we believe are significant in influencing prospective teachers considering joining the profession. Our evidence is informed by intelligence from a range of sources, including the unique data we hold on the Register of Education Practitioners and the regular engagement that we undertake with registrants, stakeholders, and prospective teachers.

Key factors influencing individuals to join the profession:

Intrinsic motivation/passion to teach

Many teachers join the profession on the basis of a passion to make a positive impact upon society and the future of children in particular. A love for their subject and for inspiring children in education, can also be key motivators. For many entering the profession, teaching is a rewarding career, offering job satisfaction, where they feel they can 'make a difference'.

Job security

Teaching is widely perceived as a stable and secure profession. There will always be a need for teachers and there are clear and well-established career pathways for those wanting to progress to formal leadership roles. In the 2021 National Education Workforce Survey (conducted by the EWC in partnership with Welsh Government, trade unions, employers and key bodies representing education professionals), when school teachers were asked where they saw themselves in three years' time, 62.6% answered that they saw themselves continuing to develop and strengthen their practice whilst 20.9% stated that they intended to progress to a more senior role and 16.1% would like to mentor or support less experienced colleagues. This indicates that the majority of those entering the profession are seeking longevity in their career choice.

Welsh Government initiatives

It is important to note the number of positive initiatives that Welsh Government has put in place to attract prospective teachers in recent years, notably:

- the reform of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales stemming from Professor John Furlong's report Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers. The reform which sought to provide

consistent, high quality ITE, has included regulatory changes for the accreditation of ITE programmes and the introduction of Criteria for accreditation. The Criteria set out the vision for ITE in Wales, a vision for student teacher learning, the requirement for joint ownership and accountability of programmes of ITE with a central role for schools and a clear role for universities, and the necessary structures, processes and inputs

- the replacement of the requirement for individuals to have achieved a GCSE B grade in English or Welsh and in Mathematics to study a PGCE (now grade C)
- a marked increase in the number of salaried PGCE places available within Primary/Secondary education
- the introduction of part-time routes into teaching
- the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Priority Subject Incentive Scheme (providing a grant of £15,000 to study an ITE programme in specific priority subjects)
- the Ethnic Minority Incentive Scheme (aiming to increase the number of ethnic minority teachers through providing a £5000 grant)
- the Iaith Athrawon Yfory Scheme (providing a £5000 incentive to students studying to teach through the medium of Welsh or to teach Welsh as a subject)
- the inception of Educators Wales in 2019, capitalising on the EWC's legislative function to promote careers in education

Potential constraints to teacher recruitment:

Employer competition for graduates

University graduates, especially those specialising in ITE priority subjects, have a range of choice when deciding which career path to take, with salary and benefits being factors in their decisions. Many organisations employing graduates are able to offer significant benefits not available in teaching, including (sometimes substantial) monetary bonuses, flexible working, rapid pay progression, company cars and overseas working opportunities.

The CIBYL Graduate Research UK survey lists technology companies Google, Amazon, and Microsoft within the top five most popular employers in the UK, as voted for by students and graduates. These companies are able to attract graduates by offering inclusive flexibility, creativity freedom and a non-bureaucratic work environment where ideas are embraced and nurtured. They also offer a range of employee 'perks' such as hybrid car subsidies, company-based shares, access to free health, dental and wellbeing treatment, games areas and 'nap pods'. Furthermore, salaries within these companies are also attractive with clear pay progression aimed at retaining and developing staff.

Workload

70.4% of school teachers responding to the 2021 National Education Workforce Survey, either disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workload was manageable within their agreed working hours. The survey indicated that during a working week, a full-time school teacher worked, on average, 56 hours.

Responding to the 2021 National Education Workforce Survey, 38.7% disagreed and 11.9% strongly disagreed that they usually had enough time to cover the curriculum content and ensure learners were fully supported. Since this survey was undertaken, the introduction of other priorities will have likely impacted these perceptions further, notably the rollout of the new Curriculum for Wales and the introduction of the ALN system.

Flexibility/work-life balance

Many graduates favour professions in which they will be able to maintain a healthy work-life balance, including a manageable workload and reasonable expectations for working outside normal 'office hours'. More flexible working offers significant benefits in relation to those with other commitments, such as caring responsibilities. Although there may be options for teachers to compress their hours or explore part-time working, other professions are able to attract graduates with benefits such as flexible hours, accrual of flexi leave and (particularly post-COVID 19) the option to work from home. Teachers benefit from generous holiday allowances but many argue that they are required to spend a significant amount of time during holiday periods undertaking planning, marking and other paperwork. This allows only limited time to undertake reflection, evaluation, research, and professional development which in turn affects job satisfaction.

Accountability

Teachers face high levels of expectation in relation to educational standards, student outcomes, maintaining parents' and the public's confidence, and adhering to the curriculum. They also face frequent evaluations, inspections, and other forms of scrutiny such as the publication of exam results. Such scrutiny can be stressful and time consuming, adding to teacher workload and limiting individual autonomy. This culture may deter potential teachers from entering what is perceived as a high-pressure environment in which success is sometimes narrowly defined and often linked to factors beyond the control of teachers, such as the socio-economic background of pupils and resource issues. Such stress factors can also impact on the motivation to progress into leadership roles or seek additional professional responsibilities.

Behaviour

School teachers have a right to a safe working environment, but numerous research studies and surveys by teaching unions have indicated that teachers regularly experience physical and verbal abuse within the classroom and are increasingly needing to allocate more time on targeting disruptive behaviour amongst pupils. Due to budgetary pressures, the resource available and pressure on teachers to target such behaviour is further exasperated by the increase in class sizes which continues to steadily grow (674 pupils (0.7%) were in unlawfully large infant classes of over 30 pupils in January 2024, up from 302 pupils (0.3%) in January 2023).

Often linked to behavioural issues, pupil absenteeism continues to be a challenge faced by schools affecting teachers' abilities to adopt and maintain effective classroom management

techniques. During the period between September 2023 and January 2024, 10.3% of pupils met the persistent absence threshold of 10% of sessions missed for the academic year. OECD research states “Students’ motivation and self-beliefs affect the quality of learning, the degree and continuity of engagement and the depth of understanding reached. It is only when students are physically present, and are mentally ready and willing to learn, that they can make the most of the opportunities that schools provide...Student truancy not only hurts the individual student, but when it is pervasive, it contributes to a disruptive learning environment and hurts the entire class.”

These challenges and high-profile examples of bad behaviour in schools are widely publicised in the press, thereby affecting the perception of the teaching profession, with one of the most prominent examples being the recent stabbing incident in Ysgol Dyffryn Aman in Carmarthenshire.

Salary and benefits

The recently announced 5.5% uplift took the starting salary for new teachers, in Wales, up to £32,433 (from September 2024 from £30,742 in 2023-24). Teachers also benefit from membership of a competitive pension scheme (TPS). This is competitive with many other graduate salaries, with the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) Student Recruitment Survey (2024) reporting that the median starting salary for graduates in Wales of £28,000 (£32,000 for the UK as a whole). However, starting salaries for teachers are still significantly lower than those on offer in many other graduate professions (such as law, engineering, financial services, and IT).

Pay progression

The rate of pay progression for teachers with between one and five years of experience can lag behind that of graduates employed in other professions, with the pay of mid-career teachers sometimes significantly lower than that of professionals in areas such as law and accounting. Teachers can earn more by taking on roles such as TLR positions, which come with added responsibilities and workload. However, there are limited numbers of these positions within a school and some teachers may not be interested in taking on managerial roles (preferring to concentrate on teaching). It is also challenging for school teachers to secure permanent teaching contracts, limiting opportunities for pay progression at the beginning of their career. EWC data indicates that, of those who disclosed details of their employment contract, only 22% of current NQTs are undertaking their induction period with a permanent employment contract in place.

Portrayal of teaching

Media coverage of teaching/teachers is often negative. Key themes that are frequently highlighted include workload, stress, long hours, and administrative burdens. Behaviour and safety challenges are also increasingly being highlighted (particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic). Coverage also often focusses on discontent over pay and school funding. The recent consultation regarding plans to change the school holidays, although

not progressed, may have also negatively impacted perceptions of the workforce, reinforcing the myth that the primary motivator to becoming a teacher is to benefit from the school holidays (without recognition of the additional stressors and pressures faced by the workforce).

Negative experiences within the existing teaching workforce often translate into discouraging messages for prospective teachers, which permeate through the media, friends and family, and even through teachers speaking negatively about the profession to their students.