

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Addysg a Dysgu Proffesiynol Athrawon | Inquiry into Teachers'
Professional Learning and Education

TT 17

Ymateb gan : Cymdeithas Arweinwyr Ysgolion a Cholegau (Cymru)
Response from : Association of School and College Leaders (Cymru)

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 17,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK.
ASCL Cymru represents school leaders in more than 90 per cent of the secondary schools in Wales.
- 2 We are glad that the committee has chosen to enquire into this topic, which remains a critical element of the country's aspirations to become a provider of outstanding education for all its young people.
- 3 Our members are passionate about raising standards and school improvement. We agree that the three themes of this enquiry are of great significance and need to be understood fully.
- 4 Whilst it is useful to consider the three main themes, it must be recognised that they are inter-dependent – progress in one is affected by progress in others. This inter-relationship has a significant impact on the effort our members (and others) are making to improve teaching and learning and to raise standards in schools in Wales.
- 5 ASCL Cymru looks forward to participating in the discussions, which will be necessary to inform decisions, about how the Welsh Government works with the profession to continue to develop and enable teachers to be even more effective in their professional practice. We will engage positively in these discussions.
- 6 Our response is informed by the vast collective experience of our members who are at the frontline of leading improvement in schools. Below, we summarise the main points that inform our fuller response, in the hope that this is useful to your analysis of the responses you receive.

Arrangements for continuing professional development for the current workforce

- 7 Good teaching has the single biggest impact on the progress and attainment of students. We fully support the principle that all teachers, no matter their length of service or depth of experience, need constantly to engage in continuing professional development.

- 8 Peer-to-peer support is a powerful tool to encourage best practice. We support the approach of promoting, in a number of ways, a culture of teachers assisting other teachers to raise standards.
- 9 ASCL Cymru, in its “Blueprint for a Self-Improving System in Wales”, advocates the importance of effective Professional Learning Alliances, in which groups of schools work together to provide high-quality professional education to new and experienced school staff.
- 10 There is some evidence that this concept is beginning to be adopted across Wales, whether through the “Pioneer Schools” networks, or schools that collaborated under the Schools Challenge Cymru scheme, or at the instigation of Regional Consortia. However it is clear that the implementation is patchy and there is no consistency across Wales, with some schools feeling “out of the loop” and disenfranchised.
- 11 There is a real need for a consistent approach to the use of inter-school professional development that encourages the sharing of best practice from school to school. It should not be left to chance or the determination of school leaders whether a school is able to forge appropriate links with another school.
- 12 We believe strongly that all schools have something to offer, and that it is not just the highest performing schools that are best placed to offer innovative ideas to others. Frequently schools that are facing really challenging issues have found practical solutions to problems that would benefit others who may never had to consider them.
- 13 We remain concerned that there is a real lack of financial support for continuing professional development. Whilst there is support for Regional Consortia, it is also true that schools have had to scale back significantly the opportunities they afford their staff to engage in some professional development activities.
- 14 We do not believe that taking staff out of the classroom for external professional development events necessarily represents the best use of time or financial resources, and there is clear evidence that it can disrupt students’ progress. However, we also understand that there needs to be a balance between constant expectations that teachers give up time after school and the need to ensure that all are involved in an appropriate level of CPD.
- 15 There is evidence that CPD events based in school, and shared between schools has by far the greater impact in terms of embedding improvement in practice within staff teams.
- 16 We would suggest that there is a need to increase the number of staff INSET days from the current five a year to seven, to ensure sufficient training time for staff, particularly with the imminent implementation of the new curriculum. Time taken for training now will pay dividends in the future with a better trained and motivated staff, better able to deliver the new curriculum.

The role of initial teacher education

- 17 Effective Initial teacher Education (ITE) is a critical part of maintaining a robust and motivated teacher workforce.

- 18 We remain concerned that the quality of ITE across Wales is highly variable, with some Higher Education providers offering a very poor quality of experience for potential teachers. Estyn's reports provide an alarming window into this, and highlight the extreme variability of provision.
- 19 We fully endorse the recommendations of Professor Furlong's 2015 report "Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers".
- 20 We are very concerned that the need for radical improvement is now urgent, and needs addressing.
- 21 We maintain that schools are in a very strong position to make a major contribution to the effectiveness of ITE. Time spent in the classroom with outstanding teachers is probably the most effective method of learning, and well supported teaching practice gives a clearer indication of the potential of an ITE student than anything else.
- 22 Schools that offer the highest quality of support for their ITE students almost invariably produce candidates for posts that are snapped up when they enter the market-place.
- 23 Similarly, schools that offer well-structured and well supported Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) programmes are well known, and their reputation ensures a ready supply of high quality candidates for teaching posts.
- 24 We would strongly encourage steps to promote consistency of provision both for ITE students and NQTs across all schools in Wales.

The sufficiency of the future workforce

- 25 There is a worrying shortage of high quality candidates for teacher posts across Wales, particularly in schools that face challenging circumstances.
- 26 The shortage is particularly acute for some welsh medium schools, resulting in some cases where schools have had to employ English speaking staff in order to ensure that there are sufficient staff to deliver the curriculum.
- 27 Whilst it is true that a number of years ago there was a surplus of young teachers being trained, there are now worrying figures that demonstrate a shortage in many subjects (particularly core subjects), and little sign of any increase on the horizon.
- 28 This shortage of high quality teachers have led some schools to employing teachers who, a number of years ago, would not have been considered for permanent positions. This trend has worrying implications for the future quality of the teaching workforce.
- 29 We believe that there need to be greater incentives for high quality graduates to enter the profession in Wales.
- 30 We are concerned that the devolution of teachers' Pay and Conditions could, if not handled properly, cause further issues with the supply of high quality teachers in Wales.

- 31 It is critical that teachers in Wales have pay and conditions that are at least as good as those for teachers in other parts of the United Kingdom. Wales has always benefitted from cross-border flow of teachers, attracting many high quality professionals into the country. It would be highly counter-productive if that become a one-way exodus of our best teachers to better paid jobs elsewhere.
- 32 We are also concerned that it is becoming increasingly hard for schools to fill headteacher posts. We are hearing from members that many deputy and assistant headteachers are unwilling to consider the challenge of stepping up to become a headteacher because of the ever-increasing demands on headteachers and the resultant levels of stress caused by an ever-increasing culture of data-driven accountability.

Conclusion

- 33 I hope that this is of value to your inquiry. ASCL Cymru looks forward to contributing to this effort and to further discussions.

Tim Pratt
Director of ASCL Cymru