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REVIEW OF INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING IN WALES

**National Assembly for Wales, Education and Lifelong Learning Committee
26 January 2006**

Submission from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

INTRODUCTION

1. Under the Education Act 1994, HEFCW is responsible for funding teacher training, accrediting providers of initial teaching training (ITT) for school teachers and commissioning research to improve the standards of teachers and teacher training. We allocate Welsh Assembly Government ITT intake targets to individual institutions. We work closely with Estyn on accreditation and other matters related to the quality and standards of ITT and the enhancement of provision. We also work closely with ITT providers and representative bodies on all these matters. Our strategic aim with regard to ITT is to deliver newly qualified teachers of high quality.
2. HEFCW welcomes the Furlong report as an important contribution to a subject that has been of growing concern in recent years. The report offers a valuable analysis and a wealth of background detail.
3. We trust the Committee will recognise that our evidence on 26th January comes in advance of Welsh Assembly Government responses to the issues raised in the report (particularly on the proposed move to wholly postgraduate training, and on the proposed student numbers) or on the role that the report suggests HEFCW should be asked to play in taking the discussion forward. Nor has HEFCW's Council yet had a chance to discuss the report. What follows, therefore, are simply some key issues that strike HEFCW officers on first reading as requiring further consideration.

TIMETABLE

4. The timetable for action outlined in the report would need revision. Even if the Assembly Government were to provide indicative ITT numbers for a restructured sector by April 2006, HEFCW would find it difficult to draw up a plan for their distribution by June. This is because the new structure of the sector would not be clear by then; nor, we imagine, would guidance be available (as proposed in the report) on the regional distribution within Wales of demand for trainee teachers
5. That said, it would not be unrealistic to develop a revised timetable that would enable tapering, and redistribution, of numbers with a view to achieving a restructured sector by September 2010.

TRAINEE NUMBERS AND QUALIFICATIONS

6. The determination of the number of trainee teachers needed in Wales is not for HEFCW. Nor is the question of whether the future of the teaching profession should no longer include staff trained via the BA (Education) route.
7. We do, however, wish to note the need for care over the manner in which, if the recommendation were accepted, future trainee numbers would be pitched solely at the currently projected needs of Wales. There is a risk that it might be difficult to increase provision flexibly in the future if, for example, significant numbers of trained teachers chose to work outside Wales, or potential applicants from England were deterred from applying to Wales-focused provision.

A RESTRUCTURED SECTOR

8. If the argument is accepted for a reduction in numbers on the scale proposed, then it seems to us that it would be sensible to look hard at the existing structure of ITT provision in Welsh HEIs. All ITT institutions would be likely to be affected, and especially those with BA (Education) provision. The current number of providers would be difficult to justify.
9. We note the proposal to restructure into "three main Schools of Education", geographically distributed so as to address the need for regional planning in supply". Whether three is precisely the right number, what "main" might mean, whether any of the Schools might be multi-site, what range of provision each might offer, and where exactly they would be best located, are questions that seem to us would require more detailed consideration. So too would be the matters of how to retain sufficient flexibility and resilience to be able to vary supply upwards as well as downwards; how to remain attractive to a broad range of applicants (and avoid any sense that anyone not already committed to teach in Wales would be unwelcome, since that could significantly affect recruitment and longer term sustainability); and how to create conditions that would attract and retain the very best staff to the Schools. Care would need to be taken to ensure the maintenance of accredited status during any period of transition.
10. An important dimension of such further consideration must be the references in the report to better alignment of provision to supply needs at regional level. There appears to be an implication that each proposed School should serve its region, with its numbers tied to regional need. However, we are not clear what analysis exists showing that currently trainees end up working in the region of Wales in which they were trained. It would be important to be clear that this was indeed the predominant employment pattern before fine tuning the distribution of student numbers as proposed. We are also not aware of any current analysis of demand for newly qualified teachers at a regional level that would provide an evidence base for such a distribution, though perhaps this might emerge from the strengthened analytical capacity that is proposed in

the report. As the report recognises, the same lack of analysis also applies to projections of demand for Welsh Medium teachers, in general, and by subject, and for teachers of Welsh as a first and second language.

MANAGING RESTRUCTURING

11. We welcome the recommendation that the funding of the changes be cost neutral. This reflects the historical position that variations in ITT numbers have been managed within the overall allocation of all funded numbers to the HE sector in Wales. That is to say, previous, incremental, annual variations have simply been absorbed within or met from the overall HE student numbers in Wales, and not via alterations to the overall scale of the Grant in Aid for HE.
12. We take the recommendation, however, to refer to the costs of the proposed eventual new steady state, compared to the current state, rather than to the transition costs that are implied by such a major restructuring. HEFCW has considerable experience of managing restructuring in a cost-effective way, and sees no particularly novel issues raised by the present proposals, save one. This is that, whereas in other cases of restructuring the proposals have arisen from institutions' initiatives, this case if adopted would arise from a potential intervention by the Assembly itself in the scale of provision. It therefore follows, in our view, that there would need to be a discussion about where the transition costs should fall. There would also need to be clarity about the process by which agreement would be reached over restructuring, who would lead it, on what timetable, and so on.

THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL DEGREE

13. We note the proposal for a new pre-professional degree, which would help to offset for institutions any loss of ITT resource by funding, to be offered by (we assume is meant) the current schools or departments of education. This is an interesting proposal. We recognise the underlying intention to redeploy some of the skilled staff currently devoted to teacher training.
14. The recommendation acknowledges the role that BA (Education) provision plays in widening access to higher education more generally. It also offers scope to maintain Welsh Medium HE provision at current levels. Because undergraduate ITT provision accounts for about 31% of all Welsh Medium provision, and total ITT for about 51%, reductions on the scale proposed would have significant consequences.
15. If the Welsh Assembly Government was minded to pursue this proposal, however, before it could be implemented there would need to be detailed discussion with various professional bodies, to establish whether or not they would value such a degree. If they could not integrate it into their existing training pathways, there would be a difficulty. We are not clear how far the idea has been tested in this way, or what other market testing has been done.

16. Whether or not the current providers would see value in this approach, and/or would prefer to use in different ways any resources that might be made available by reducing ITT activity, is also a question which would require further exploration.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

17. It is for the Assembly to determine the planning framework for setting ITT numbers. From HEFCW's perspective, we would welcome a strengthened framework, with better analytical capacity for projecting future demand – by region, by subject, by level, and in terms of Welsh Medium.