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Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr [ymchwiliad i recriwtio a chadw athrawon](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Inquiry into Teacher recruitment and retention](#)

Ymateb gan: Partneriaeth Ysgolion Prifysgol Abertawe

Response from: Swansea University Schools Partnership (SUSP)

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## **Senedd Inquiry into Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

### **Written evidence submission Swansea University Schools Partnership (SUSP)**

#### **1.1 Overview**

SUSP has been a provider of post-graduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) since 2020. Our Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Secondary Programme commenced in September 2020, with our Primary Programme starting in 2022. The SUSP programmes offer high quality pathways into the profession, as evidenced in our recent ESTYN inspection ([ESTYN, 2024](#)). Our model supports the entry to the profession of well-prepared new teachers across each of our programmes. Our PGCE Secondary Programme was set up to offer pathways in shortage subjects (MFL, Welsh, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Maths, Design & Technology, ICT and English -for clarity, English is not classified as a shortage subject but remains under target nationally (SRRP. 2025). In line with the brief, this submission focuses primarily on the information and understanding we have gathered about the secondary sector and, more specifically, within the subjects delivered by SUSP.

We work within a collaborative model with our Partnership schools and gather information regularly as part of our strategic and operational planning and evaluation. As such, this submission draws from a range of sources that form part of our routine programme and Partnership work where we capture the views, experiences and understanding of students, alumni, and staff across our Partnership. We have also drawn upon the views of our current students, our alumni, and others (including regional partners) in collating this specific submission. This is not presented as a piece of generalisable research but rather offers a narrative that has emerged in the surveys, focus groups, working parties and so on that form part of our everyday work. This submission seeks to identify concerns and limitations to teacher recruitment and retention in Wales and focuses on, as noted in the consultation brief, priority subjects, Welsh medium, and secondary schools. It will also provide some recommendations that might offer a positive impact at a local and national level. For clarity, where the views of students or alumni are drawn upon, these are from secondary subjects.



## 2.1 Barriers to Recruitment

- **Recruitment into ITE**

Nationally and locally, recruitment into Primary ITE programmes is healthier than into Secondary pathways. Recruitment to some of our Secondary subjects (such as English) is above target year on year, although nationally the number of English students entering ITE is only 25% of the national target ([SRRP, 2025](#)). Even though typically above national recruitment numbers, our recruitment into subjects such as MFL, Welsh, Chemistry, Physics, Design and Technology and ICT remains under target year on year, (SRRP, 2025). The Covid secondary recruitment bump seen in 2020 in SUSP has since not been replicated across subjects other than English. This pattern aligns with national findings that there is a substantial under-recruitment to secondary Initial Teacher Education programmes with only 424 of 1109 places filled in 2023–24 ([ESTYN, 2025](#); SRRRP, 2025). The impact of shortage subject incentives is unclear - numbers in those subjects remain low but could be even lower should the incentive be removed. The worry about an increased debt burden is mentioned by some students who are considering applying for ITE. Secondary school colleagues report that take-up for many shortage subjects is low at A level, therefore reducing the pool of potential future applicants to those subjects.

### Recommendations

- The fee and incentive system should be reviewed and options for incentivising entry to the profession considered. This might include, for example, a waiver of PGCE fees upon completion of the second year of teaching. From our local data, entry into the profession for those subjects upon completion is generally strong year on year, although how long alumni remain in the profession is unclear and could be the subject of national review.
- There should be some focused work undertaken to strengthen and support take up of shortage subjects at GCSE and A Level. Without this, there are no pathways into degree level study and, from that, ITE.

#### 2.1.1 Marketing

Whilst there is national marketing activity to encourage applicants into teaching, students on Secondary shortage subject pathways reported that this had minor



impact on their decision to apply to ITE. Many report that they were unaware of recruitment campaigns and had based their decision on other factors, such as a desire to continue with their subject or to follow a fulfilling career path. This points to a need to review what range of marketing vehicles can best reach this group. Welsh Government already use various vehicles to market and recruit in a range of ways. They have led campaigns and focus groups that aim to address specific concerns or misconceptions, such as one recently around teaching salaries. Nonetheless, there does seem to be a need to explore this further.

In line with the findings in the reports cited, our secondary students and alumni, and Partnership colleagues suggest that, in Wales, teacher pay does not generally seem to factor as a key barrier into the profession, although there remain some misconceptions about teacher salary scales. More frequent comments were made by secondary alumni about a need for more time to focus on planning, preparation, and professional development. For some subjects, however, there remains a strong perception that there are other more financially rewarding career pathways available that are less demanding (and for some, higher status) than teaching. Instead, some students cited negative perceptions as more influential. This included concerns about workload and behaviour. These findings align with the 2019 Welsh Government [report](#) into teacher recruitment.

### Recommendations

- Current marketing and recruitment approaches should be further evaluated in a systematic way and that a renewed campaign is needed (in a variety of forms, at a local and national level) that presents teaching as a rewarding career to counter negative public and media presentation of teaching is necessary. Locally, we have had some success with, for example, close collaboration in recruitment with schools and drawing upon alumni to share their professional experiences.
- Our Secondary PGCE students regularly cite the sense of being part of rewarding career 'something bigger than just yourself,' engagement with their disciplines and job opportunities as key reasons they apply for ITE programmes. These factors could be the emphasis of targeted national campaigning.
- Of those who were considering entering the profession, there does seem to be some concern about what the Curriculum in Wales means for them (in line with the findings of SSSRP 2025). There are, for example, some misconceptions around the role of subject and AoLEs within the

curriculum and the portability of an award from a Welsh provider. These concerns could be given some attention in a 'myth-busting' type of campaign aimed at addressing misconceptions.

### **2.1.2 Perceptions**

As noted above, the reputation of the intensive nature of ITE programmes, and of the profession, is seen as a possible inhibitor by some students. Alumni report that the negative preconceptions they had about the profession were largely around behaviour, workload, and stress levels. Many students felt that the worries about challenges they had been aware of prior to starting ITE had been allayed by well-planned support and programme design, coupled with close and transparent Partnership working. Whilst they report feeling well-prepared for the profession, some alumni feel that they might benefit from more time to focus well on fewer things.

### **Recommendations**

- Consider how to best counter negative perceptions of the profession. This might include evaluating current workload arrangements in schools, particularly in the light of increasing demands on teacher time. In SUSP, we have made well-being a core element of our provision. This includes supporting student teachers to manage workload and to prioritise tasks within a positive and supportive environment with clear communication channels.
- The view held by some that ITE feels a little 'overcrowded' by external requirements might also be explored perhaps with a view to looking closely at how ITE requirements fit into Induction. We have worked with partners on this and would welcome the opportunity to explore this further.

### **2.1.3 Systems for recruitment**

The system for ITE recruitment is routinely cited by staff as unsuitable. Allocation numbers, particularly for smaller programmes, mean that longer term strategic planning is difficult. This is particularly concerning given the financial uncertainties in the sector. The current long lead times set by UCAS from offer to acceptance also emerges as a factor that impacts negatively in planning and recruitment activity. Programmes are unable to have a clear idea of how many of their offers



have been accepted until late in the cycle. This has an impact not only on their financial planning but also their recruitment activity planning.

### Recommendations

- ITE student allocations should be reviewed with quality of provision as a key principle. The time between an offer being made and acceptance should be shortened to allow providers to have a clearer idea of student numbers. It would also allow a more complete national picture of ITE student numbers to be gathered which could inform national and local marketing activities.

#### 2.1.4 Narrow pathways to Qualified Teacher Status in Wales.

Some school partners and students report that a one-year fulltime pathway to QTS is not suitable or even possible for many. One head teacher commented 'it is just not feasible for everyone. We are losing out by not having more flexible ways into teaching.' The pathway limitations identified centre on two key issues -entry requirements and types of programmes available.

Amongst our partners and alumni, there is a clear consensus that entry to the profession and to ITE programmes should remain focused on quality and that it is right to have high expectations of entrants to the profession. It is, however felt that new pathways to those qualifications that fulfil entry requirements to ITE could be explored to afford greater opportunity to those who might otherwise be precluded from applying to ITE programmes.

In addition to pathways currently offered by the Open University, the need for a wider range of routes into QTS is also seen as invaluable recruitment mechanism by some school colleagues. Some school colleagues, alumni and current students, felt that there are extremely limited pathways to QTS in Wales for those who could bring with them considerable experience in school/teaching. School leaders report frustration at the lack of available fast-track or flexible pathways for staff currently working as cover supervisors, laboratory technicians or teaching assistants, with degree level qualifications, in schools. Some have started to explore alternative paths to QTS for these staff members that are available elsewhere, such as assessment-only routes led by universities in England. Colleagues in the local system also reported a gap for those who have a PGCert (or similar) post-16 qualification to gain QTS by way of a flexible route through a

university accredited programme. A route of this kind could also attract those who have a teaching qualification from outside the UK.

### Recommendations

- Some form of subject knowledge enhancement provision is cited by several school colleagues and leaders as a valuable way of providing pathways into Secondary school shortage subjects for those who might, for example, have extensive professional experience but a degree that does not fit current requirements. Subject enhancement provision could be developed, accredited and endorsed through existing ITE Partnerships where there is existing subject/disciplinary expertise and experience. This could also be used to provide purposeful professional learning for the growing number of teachers teaching out of subject in secondary schools.
- Colleagues strongly suggest that national, funded Welsh Language Enhancement provision (designed specifically for the language demands of the profession) would similarly provide recruitment and retention pathways for Welsh-medium teaching. Dysgu Cymraeg currently offer a 6-week virtual Welsh language level differentiated and incentivised programme for those entering ITE. The impact of this should be evaluated. There is also considerable change ahead once the Welsh and Education Bill is passed this summer with the National Centre for Learning Welsh changing into 'Athrofa/Institute'. This will impact on Welsh-language teaching across all education sectors, including schools and their teachers. The plan for how change this will impact ITE is yet to be seen but will need to be considered in the light of recruitment and retention issues on the sector.
- The need for more flexible, financially sustainable routes (such as part time study over two years, 'top up' routes into QTS and Secondary undergraduate QTS programmes with subject specialism built in) should be explored with HEIs so as to provide opportunities to those unable to commit to a full time one year (unpaid for many) programme. There might, for example, be scope for providers to engage with their academic departments to work towards incorporating more teaching placement modules into UG degrees if appropriate. This should also include work between HEIs and the EWC to review what these more flexible and varied



accredited pathways to QTS might look like and how they would be quality assured.

### **2.1.5 Recruitment into employment.**

Due to recruitment difficulties in some subjects, several secondary school colleagues report that teachers routinely teach out of subject. Some alumni report feeling that they would welcome the opportunity to widen their experience but wanted this to be better supported during their NQT year. Some regional and school colleagues point to specific difficulties in recruitment in more rural areas. A perceived lack of flexibility in teaching compared to other professions emerged as a concern of some of those entering or considering entering the profession. Post-Covid work patterns are perceived to have changed in other professions in a way that they have not in teaching. Some secondary school colleagues report that school budgets and competing demands have hindered recruitment activity, with posts sometimes advertised late, with a declining pool of potential applicants. Secondary colleagues also report that posts are not always filled due to budgetary constraints, with existing staff taking on increased roles. Difficulties in recruitment to, for example, Mathematics, Physics and Welsh roles are reported by some, with some reporting extremely shallow pools of applicants from which to draw. Again, some school leaders report their involvement in ITE as having a positive impact on recruitment of high quality staff.

### **Recommendations**

- Some schools have explored ways in which a degree of flexibility can be put into their working practices, such as working from home PPA. This has generally been difficult to manage in an efficient and equitable way, but where it has worked has been seen as valuable.
- Several schools comment that they see their participation in ITE as a key factor in their successful recruitment to posts. This might be the subject of some evaluation.
- Some specific activity aimed at recruitment in more rural areas is needed.

### **2.2 Factors affecting retention.**

School colleagues report that retention seemed to be stable for most of them in many secondary subjects. Colleagues in Welsh medium settings reported more



difficulty in recruiting but also in retention in some subjects as there were greater opportunities available for those with strong Welsh language skills. There was some comment around experienced staff not being replaced and the loss of experience in the system. It was reported that in general, however, people who left the profession generally seemed to do so in the first few years of their career. Alumni offered several reasons for this:

1. The degree of support that is in place during their ITE programme is radically reduced during their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year, which some found hard to adjust to. Some reported feeling that there was inconsistent mentoring of NQTs and in expectations. Some secondary alumni reported that timetables for NQTs can be a problem, with a perception that NQTs are often given classes that are difficult to manage or have complex needs.

2. Available career pathways and the opportunities for meaningful professional development were identified by some alumni as factors that might impact retention, although there is no clear information as to whether these factors had influenced those who had left the profession. The value in a distinct career pathway that recognises excellence in classroom practice is seen in comments from ECTs and more experienced school colleagues. Some alumni report feeling that career development typically means leaving the classroom and moving into managerial roles. A pathway that is focused on pedagogy or advanced skills as a teacher might be of interest to some. Some schools have introduced leads in research and enquiry or in teaching and learning that are closely connected to enabling the wider system to benefit from pedagogical expertise. These roles were seen as valuable possible vehicles for retention.

In line with the EWC [report](#) (2021) excessive administrative burdens are cited by some secondary school colleagues as impacting negatively on how they view their roles. This administrative demand is seen as rapidly increased in response to recent reform agendas. Recent changes to assessment, including some ambiguity around how to record pupil progress in a holistic way, and GCSE reform (including more teacher-assessed NEAs) are seen by some as likely to add to this burden. Again, in line with EWC findings amongst others, teachers report feeling pressed to add to their routine workload with no additional resource being afforded to accommodate this.

## **Recommendations**



- A review of new processes for Induction might be considered that centres on how well they build confidence and resilience as well as competence and that extends its reach in a more explicit way into year two of teaching. It might point to the need for a piece of scoping activity to gauge the experiences of Early Career Teachers (ECTs), including where possible those who choose to leave the profession.
- It might also point to the need for a revised national approach to coaching and mentoring that supports teachers through their NQT year and into Early Career.
- A career pathway that is focused on pedagogy or advanced skills as a teacher might be of interest to some. A review of any increases in administrative and other demands in teacher time should be undertaken. This is especially so in the light of reform and new qualifications.

### **2.3 School Leaders**

Due to the nature of our work, we have less information relating to this point. Nonetheless, the recruitment and retention of school leaders is seen as a concern by some of our school colleagues. Some point to excessive accountability in the system, financial constraints and increased responsibility making the role unappealing. Some feel that 'reform fatigue' has left many feeling overwhelmed and under supported and that leadership pay-scales also need to be reviewed. Middle leaders report a lack of interest in pursuing senior leadership roles, citing quality of life, lack of reward and pressure. This aligns broadly with the findings in the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR, 2024) [report](#) into the leadership crisis in Welsh education. There is general agreement that without secure leadership at school level educational reform is unlikely to be successful and presents a system-wide risk. Recent changes to regional and local support have resulted in some uncertainty about roles, responsibilities, and accountability.

### **Recommendations**

- Further clarity is needed around the middle tier, including local and regional responsibilities.



- Better financial and administrative support for schools that would reduce the administrative burden of school leadership and allow space for strategic work as opposed to 'spreadsheets and firefighting.'
- Promoting flexible career pathways and improving the public perception of school leadership could also help attract more candidates to the role. These findings are in line with those of [Scott et al](#) (2021) who found that financial burdens, lack of local/regional support and increased demands contributed to a reluctance to pursue leadership roles in schools on Wales.

#### **2.4 Diversity of the workforce.**

Despite a national incentive programme and targeted recruitment activity undertaken locally, as well as by Educators Wales and the Welsh Government, the entrants to the profession still do not reflect the diversity in the population of Wales. This can be seen quite clearly in the [School Census](#) workforce findings. Locally, we organise targeted recruitment events in partnership with organisations such as Ethnic Youth Support Team and will continue to review this element of our work. The impact of this work has, so far, been minimal. We have also reviewed curriculum, ensuring that we foster an inclusive educational environment that reflects Wales's diverse society.

#### **Recommendations**

- Some students report that the perception of the profession is a mixed one and that this might need to be the focus of attention at a national level.
- Others suggest the need for more visible role models from a wider range of demographics so that students from diverse backgrounds can see themselves in the profession. This might be linked to a mentoring programme that supports potential applicants into the profession from diverse backgrounds.
- Nationally, a scoping exercise is needed to gather information around attitudes and barriers to teaching. This might identify the need for routes into teaching that are varied and flexible and meet the needs of a wider demographic. Achieving a more diverse teaching workforce in Wales is a



multifaceted endeavour requiring sustained commitment and collaboration across educational institutions, government bodies, and communities.

## 2.5 Impact on learners

Poor teacher recruitment and retention in Wales have significant adverse effects on pupils, impacting educational quality, equity, and long-term outcomes. As noted in Estyn's Annual [Report](#) (2024), schools facing teacher shortages often rely on non-specialist or temporary staff, particularly in key subject areas like mathematics, science, and Welsh. This compromises the consistency and quality of instruction, leading to gaps in pupils' learning (Estyn, 2024) Staffing shortages have forced some schools in Wales to narrow their curriculum, with reductions in subjects like modern foreign languages and science. This in turn diminishes pupils' academic and career opportunities, particularly in more rural or deprived areas, where the impact of teacher recruitment and retention difficulties are more keenly felt, as noted by the NFER [Report](#) in 2020. Our data corroborates these findings, with school colleagues expressing concern over the impact a lack of specialist staff, an increase in supply and cover staff in response to increasing staff sickness and an over-stretched workforce will have on pupil outcomes. Increases in class sizes are also raised as a concern by some: 'I feel rushed, and I can't give them what they need. Everything takes longer.'

## Recommendations

- A workforce review should be undertaken that gathers comprehensive data around staffing patterns and impact on subject availability and specialist staff.
- This should also include a specific focus on schools serving rural areas and areas of deprivation.

## 2.6 Impact on delivering educational reforms.

Educational reform in Wales is at scale in breadth and depth. It demands that teachers and schools not only do different things but that they are different. The reform agenda requires teachers to be responsive decision makers. It asks them to be evidence-informed, enquiry-engaged curriculum creators. We have planned our provision to develop these attributes in our student teachers as noted in our ESTYN report.



Curriculum reform requires high-quality teachers who have space for meaningful professional development and the time to implement it. Some school colleagues report that this is challenging with current staffing levels and uncertainties. Churn in the workforce destabilises schools and makes reform agendas difficult to sustain as attention turns to coverage rather than reflection. Estyn (2024) reports that many schools struggle to align curriculum development with effective teaching and assessment strategies, partly due to staffing issues. School colleagues also report that reforms such as the ALN bill, the Welsh Language Bill and a renewed focus on skills demand more specialist support and training, which is hard to provide amid shortages. Some school colleagues feel that the ambitious reform agenda is not deliverable unless recruitment, retention and workforce management are addressed. This includes building in more time for professional development that will make reform achievable.

The Welsh Language targets for teaching are particularly under threat as fewer and fewer students apply to Welsh medium pathways, despite incentives as well as marketing and recruitment activities undertaken locally, by Educators Wales and the Welsh Government. For some school colleagues, the reform agenda in Wales feels out of step with the realities of the classroom: 'I am dealing with poor behaviour, more and more well-being concerns, and more reliance on supply teachers. My time is spent on the day to day.'

## **Recommendations**

- Consider how to fund appropriate support for school to fully participate in reform activity.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of teacher workload.
- Provide time and funding for appropriate high quality professional learning.

## **2.7 Impact on teachers and the wider workforce**

Many of the impacts are noted above.

## **2.8 Addressing recruitment and retention.**

In summary, SUSP acknowledges that there is a recruitment and retention crisis in Wales that needs urgent attention. Actions are needed in the short and



long term at a local and national level. These should be in the form of a financially sustainable strategic workforce plan that is constructed in collaboration with key stakeholders. Many of these are outlined above, but our key suggestions are summarised below:

- Accreditation criteria for alternative routes into teaching should be explored in collaboration with ITE providers with proven track records in high quality provision. This plan should be funded and provide a range of viable and sustainable pathways into teaching. These pathways must not reduce quality or be seen as a lesser route into the profession. This should also include subject and Welsh language enhancement to allow potential applicants to develop entry level requirements.
- Whilst there is a varied marketing approach in place, there seems to be a need for refreshed national and local marketing campaign that aims to address negative perceptions of the profession and raise the profile of teaching. Consider, too, how to encourage more pupils to study shortage subjects at GCSE and A Level.
- Address those factors identified as informing negative perceptions of the profession such as behaviour and consider how staff wellbeing and work-life balance can be managed. This might include exploring how some flexibility might be introduced to the system.
- The funding mechanisms of ITE programmes should be revised to allow for security in the system. This would allow space and time for the development of high-quality alternative pathways. Allocations should also be rationalised to allow for the growth of successful provision.
- The support for and expectations of NQTs and ECTs should be reviewed in a systematic way.
- Explore ways in which workload concerns can be addressed and that adequate time can be given for impactful professional learning. This should include looking at how to streamline or better support managerial and administrative pressures that have increased due to reforms across the system.
- Review career development opportunities and how these might be best supported. This should include a review of support for middle leaders to encourage them into senior leadership.