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: Eystn
Response from: Estyn

Background information about Estyn

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000[1] and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

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[1] This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

Response

Introduction

In our response to this consultation, we have considered our inspection evidence, our Annual Report[2] and thematic surveys, meetings with school and Initial teacher Education (ITE) leaders, meetings with local authority representatives and data from the Welsh Government, Education Workforce Council (EWC) and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers.

During the pandemic, there was an improvement in recruitment to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. However, although the number of student teachers on primary programmes has remained relatively buoyant in the last four years, recruitment to secondary programmes has decreased overall. Since 2014, recruitment to secondary programmes has decreased by nearly a half. Recruitment of students to teach shortage subjects and through the medium of Welsh is of a particular concern.

Although the data for the retention of teachers in the profession is more positive than that for the teaching workforce in England, over the last five years almost a quarter of teachers have left the profession. Most strikingly in the last three years, the proportion of teachers leaving the profession in the first five years of teaching has more than doubled[3].

The Committee would welcome written evidence on all or as many of the points below from professionals, individuals and organisations.

Consultation Response

Barriers to recruitment: Intake into ITE and factors impacting recruitment into post (including a focus on priority subjects, Welsh medium, secondary schools and the impact of Wales' educational reforms on teacher recruitment).

In Estyn's Annual Report 2024, we noted the following information about the intake of student teachers to ITE:

Recruitment to secondary initial teacher education programmes

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[2] [2] Annual Report - Estyn
[3] Teacher retention: teachers who left the profession by subject and number of years experience

Since 2014, the number of students on secondary programmes has declined by nearly a half. While there was a temporary increase in recruitment during 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, this was mainly due to prospective students seeking relatively more secure professions and applications from those who lost their jobs during the pandemic. Over the last two years, recruitment has declined sharply and there are significant issues in key subject areas, namely maths, science and Welsh. In the most recent year, recruitment is well below pre-pandemic levels. While there has been little research on the reasons for this in Wales, potential reasons for the lack of interest in teaching in secondary schools may include:

• perceived challenges associated with behaviour and the fact that schools are having to pick up many of the duties formerly provided by partner agencies through local authorities, CAMHS etc

• the relative buoyancy in recruitment in other graduate professions

• a perception that the arrangements for the new curriculum may lead to teaching outside one's area of interest/expertise

This decline in recruitment is a significant concern.

Figures across the ITE partnerships in Wales show that recruitment varies considerably from provider to provider. Over the last decade, none of the partnerships has succeeded in recruiting to their overall targets. These figures are particularly stark in the last two years. As a result, there are substantial shortfalls in the number of newly qualified teachers.

The low number of students training to teach through the medium of Welsh across secondary subjects is particularly worrying. Over the last ten years, there has been a notable decline in the number of students training to teach individual subjects through the medium of Welsh in secondary schools. The most recent recruitment figures are exceptionally low. This trend presents a significant challenge for the Welsh Government's ambition to reach a million speakers by 2050 through the expansion of Welsh-medium education and the realisation of the Welsh Language and Education Bill.

Recruitment to primary programmes

Overall, recruitment to primary programmes has remained buoyant over the last four years.

Partnerships have over-recruited primary teaching during this period. Inspection evidence suggests that one reason for this is to off-set the falling numbers of secondary students applying for ITE and to ensure the financial sustainability across the range of ITE programmes. Increasingly, the excess primary students are being recruited by secondary or all age schools. While this practice ensures that pupils have a class teacher, these prospective teachers will not have been prepared specifically to teach in the secondary

sector and will most likely require extra support through induction and professional learning.

The recruitment of students training to teach through the medium of Welsh, although more positive than in secondary provision, is still a concern with only a few students following Welsh-medium pathways.

There are several barriers to recruitment:

Perceived inflexibility: teaching is increasingly competing with a wide range of professions that offer what are perceived to be more favourable conditions. Home working and flexible working hours are not features of the teaching profession and this is seen by some as a disincentive.

Routes into teaching are too narrow: The Open University and other partnerships are offering flexible routes to attract a wider range of applicants, but currently, these do not go far enough. For instance, in Wales we currently have no undergraduate secondary ITE provision to provide a route into teaching for those who wish to teach at secondary, but do not have a degree.

Financial pressures: in the current financial climate, many students, particularly post-graduate students who have already accrued student debts consider spending further to train to become a teacher a particular challenge.

Negative perceptions of teaching: secondary pupils who we have spoken to in school tell us that they would not want to teach because they see many of their teachers working very hard and having to deal with poor behaviour.

Uncertainty and misconceptions about the Curriculum for Wales: when we have spoken to student teachers, they tell us that prior to commencing their training programme, they were unsure about the requirements for teaching in Wales. They were uncertain about the range of subjects taught in primary schools and some secondary student teachers reported that they were unclear about the areas of learning. Those even less familiar with the curriculum in Wales thought that it may be a requirement to speak Welsh to become a teacher in Wales. The views of these students indicate that there are prospective candidates who may not apply to ITE programmes in Wales.

Recruitment challenges for schools

In the Annual Report, we note that:

During our inspections, schools across the whole of Wales reported that there has been a decline in the number of applicants for teaching posts. Secondary schools are finding recruitment especially challenging. The average number of applicants per vacancy has more than halved since 2011, while the situation in primary schools has remained relatively buoyant, see data from the Welsh Government here. This situation is particularly problematic in Welsh second language, science, mathematics, modern foreign languages, English in Welsh-medium schools and music. It is especially acute in more rural areas and

in Welsh-medium and bilingual schools. Often, schools have needed to advertise multiple times to fill teaching positions. Schools and local authorities reported that there may be subtle differences in why they need to re-advertise posts.

Factors affecting retention: (including a focus on priority subjects, Welsh medium, secondary schools and the effectiveness of early career support).

The number of teachers leaving the profession in the first years of teaching has increased over the last five years. In 2023, 119 secondary teachers and 167 primary teachers left the profession. In terms of secondary teachers, worryingly, the highest number of teachers leaving the profession are teachers of English, mathematics, science and Welsh second language[4].

Despite recent increases in the starting salary of new entrants to the profession, there are several underlying issues that hinder effective recruitment. These include the relative inflexibility of teachers' working conditions, a decline in the number of people aged between 20 and 25 and the poor public perception of teaching as a profession.

Speaking to school leaders and teachers in schools, we have found that the most common factors affecting retention are:

Workload and stress

In secondary schools, due to budget pressures and difficulties in recruiting staff, teachers are increasingly teaching more than one subject and working outside their subject expertise. In small schools in particular, teachers are experiencing additional stress, planning and preparing pupils for examinations in unfamiliar subjects.

The EWC statistics show that in some subjects, there is a high proportion of secondary teachers teaching outside the subject in which they were trained. Around half of chemistry and physics teachers and around one fifth of English and mathematics teachers trained in another subject. Amongst teachers of Welsh, the proportion is more than one quarter[5].

Teachers also tell us that planning and preparing for teaching the Curriculum for Wales in primary and secondary schools has increased their workload. Teachers have also told us about the added pressure brought about through the implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) Act.

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[4] [Teacher retention: teachers who left the profession by subject and number of years experience](#)
[5] [Annual Education Workforce Statistics](#)

Another factor contributing to teachers' workload pressures has arisen following the pandemic. There has been an increased demand for well-being and mental health support across educational settings, and the attendance of pupils has yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels. Teachers report that they are spending a higher proportion of their time supporting pupils' well-being. Furthermore, pupils' sporadic attendance puts pressure on teachers' planning and assessment practice.

Weak leadership can also add to teacher stress. In schools where there are unhelpful whole-school policies pertaining, for example, to teaching skills or assessment practice, this may increase teacher workload with limited positive impact on pupils' outcomes.

Working conditions

In many schools, leaders placed a high priority on retaining skilled and dedicated staff. A few schools were very successful in doing so. In these cases, leaders planned carefully to create a stable and positive work environment. They fostered a positive and inclusive school culture where teachers felt valued and respected. They ensured that teachers are involved in decision-making processes, which promoted a sense of trust, ownership and engagement. In these schools, leaders ensured that there are effective behaviour strategies, they planned carefully so that teachers have manageable class sizes, they eliminated unnecessary administrative tasks and ensured that staff have sufficient planning and collaboration time. Increasingly, school leaders have been trying to be creative to give staff greater flexibility and a better work life balance. In a few secondary schools, headteachers have been creative with PPA time to enable staff to have one afternoon a fortnight where they can work from home or come in to school slightly later in the morning. However, approaches like these are becoming more difficult with recent budgetary challenges.

The increase in workload has meant that some teachers feel that they no longer have a positive work-life balance. Overall, the number of teachers working part-time has increased over the last 10 years[6], aligning with broader employment trends towards flexibility. Part-time teachers add much to the profession and support the widening of the workforce. However, this brings challenges to schools, for example, in managing continuity for pupils' learning and in developing a whole-school culture of professional learning.

Long school holidays are considered by many to be a positive aspect of the job, however, with costs increasing, the relatively high price of travel and accommodation in the school holidays this has become another negative factor in teacher retention.

Support for life-long professional learning

A structured and purposeful plan for teachers' professional learning is essential to attract prospective candidates to the profession and to ensure retention. The most effective

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[6] Latest statistics on the education workforce in Wales published

schools have a strong culture of professional learning that provides for teachers' needs at all career stages and creates pathways for progression. At present, we do not have a robust enough programme for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) nationally. In Wales, all secondary student teachers and the majority of primary student teachers are trained through the PGCE route. It is clear that 36 weeks is a minimum length of training, and that, for PGCE trainees in particular, a great deal of learning about teaching comes in induction and beyond. A lack of preparation for teaching is an important factor in retaining teachers. Another component in recruitment and retention for many teachers is the prospect of progression. At present, we have no national approaches to identify future leaders and provide pathways to leadership for those early in their career.

School Leaders: specific factors affecting recruitment and retention of school leaders.

Appointing to leadership positions has also become more difficult over the last few years. Recent challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and significant system wide changes such as curriculum reform and ALN reform have added to the workload pressure of headteachers and other leaders. Many headteachers felt that these issues created extra pressures over and above what they already felt was a challenging occupation. This has contributed to a few leaders expressing low morale in the role and occasionally prevented teachers seeking leadership roles.

When facing recruitment difficulties to leadership roles, and in particular to headship roles, local authorities and schools often considered potential alternatives. These were often temporary solutions until a permanent headteacher is appointed, such as another senior leader or teacher within the school taking up the headteacher role or a headteacher or leader from another nearby school acting as an executive headteacher. When the temporary solution has been exhausted, an increasing number of schools and local authorities looked to develop more long-term solutions. These include, for example, creating a federation of schools where one headteacher has responsibility for more than one school. There is a lack of research on the benefits of this practice and its impact on pupils. While this practice notionally solves a problem, often executive headteachers found that the demands of the role are overwhelming.

Diversity of the workforce: whether the current and future workforce reflects the diversity of the Welsh population including gender, race and ethnicity and disability.

Overall, the workforce does not reflect the diversity of the Welsh population. For many years, the gender split in the teaching workforce has been around 25% / 75% in favour of female teachers. The proportion of female headteachers has increased over time,

although more male teachers than female progress to headship in relation to the relative proportions of practitioners (38.5% opposed to 61.5%).

In terms of ethnicity, the proportion of teachers from non-white backgrounds although increasing slightly over the last five years, remains very low. In 2024, 2.1% of teachers identified as non-white, as opposed to 4% of the whole population. Less than 1% of headteachers in Wales come from a non-white ethnic background.

There has been a steady increase in the proportion of teachers who declare a disability, from 0.6% in 2020 to 1.2% in 2024[7].

Impact on learners: of the current position on and the delivery of education and on wider support for learners.

Good teaching is essential for effective learning. Recruitment to secondary ITE programmes is an increasing concern. ITE providers tell us that the relatively positive recruitment to primary programmes is, in part, to ensure financial stability for the ITE partnership. Recruitment issues in ITE in secondary subjects often result in weaker candidates training to be teachers as the ITE partnership struggle to fill places. This situation together with more teachers leaving the profession is very likely to have a negative impact on pupils' learning and progression.

Headteachers in secondary schools reported during inspection and in additional meetings, that in recent times, the quality of candidates is too often not up to the required standard. As a result, there are situations where schools have managed to fill positions but often needed to put additional support in place to secure an acceptable standard of teaching. In an increasing number of cases, failure to recruit teachers means that schools have to deploy staff to teach outside of their area of expertise. In the best examples, these teachers have been offered extensive professional learning, subject mentors and opportunities to observe experienced practitioners teach. Departmental leaders offer these staff high levels of support, monitor their work closely and involve them in discussions around how best to teach different aspects of the subject. In many cases, this support means that pupils receive at least suitable provision. In a minority of cases, however, the support offered by leaders was not comprehensive enough and pupils received poorly delivered, uninspiring lessons as a result.

Impact on delivering educational reforms: including the Curriculum for Wales. Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill.

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[7] Annual Education Workforce Statistics

The issues in recruitment will certainly hinder the progress of national reforms. The most significant shortage in ITE is in students training to be teachers of Welsh language, where the number recruited across all ITE provision has been below 25 students in each of the last four years, which is less than a third of the target figures. In schools, over a quarter of all teachers who teach Welsh language have not been trained to teach the language[8].

The low number of students training to teach through the medium of Welsh across secondary subjects is particularly concerning. Over the last ten years, there has been a notable decline in the number of students training to teach individual subjects through the medium of Welsh in secondary schools. The most recent recruitment figures from the ITE partnerships are exceptionally low. This trend presents a significant challenge for the Welsh Government's ambition to reach a million speakers by 2050 through the expansion of Welsh-medium education and the realisation of the Welsh Language and Education Bill.

In addition, although all the ITE partnerships support students to develop their Welsh language skills, they do not emphasise well enough how teachers might support pupils' Welsh language development. Furthermore, there is little continuity for students to develop their Welsh skills between ITE and NQT programmes. There is considerable variance in the professional learning offer across Wales to support education practitioners to make progress in their linguistic skills and to teach through the medium of Welsh[9].

The majority of schools have made suitable progress in implementing the curriculum for Wales successfully. While progress varies across different settings, with secondary and all-age schools generally at an earlier stage of implementation than primary schools, most schools have collaborated with their staff and local communities to shape a curriculum vision aligned with the purposes and aims of the Curriculum for Wales. However, in Successful Futures, Professor Donaldson is clear that effective pedagogy is crucial for the success of the Curriculum for Wales[10]. Estyn's Annual Report[11] notes that a minority of schools in Wales have yet to establish clear and consistent expectations for the quality of teaching across the school. As a result, these schools often receive recommendations to improve the quality of teaching as they frequently lack sufficiently high expectations or a shared understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. In the majority of secondary schools, "shortcomings in teaching were seen frequently".

Impact on teachers and wider workforce: including impact on use of teaching assistants and support staff, effect on use of supply teachers.

We have noted, during our inspections that there have also been challenges in recruiting and retaining support staff. Increasingly, support assistants with older children are no

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[8] Annual Education Workforce Statistics
[9] Support for Welsh in Initial Teacher Education
[10] Successful futures: review of curriculum and assessment arrangements | GOV.WALES
[11] Annual Report - Estyn

longer attracted by the benefits of school holidays and have applied for other posts that offer more flexibility or hybrid working improved career pathways and better pay. This has put increased pressure on teachers, having a negative impact on recruitment and retention. Teacher shortages and increase absence rates have mean that schools are relying increasingly on supply teachers. Where schools are relying heavily on the use of supply teachers, we have seen that this can impede pupils' progress and cause an increase in poor behaviour. In the worse cases, this causes increasing challenges in recruitment and retention.

Addressing recruitment and retention: What actions should be taken, and by whom, to ensure the sustainability of the education workforce and how such actions should be prioritised.

Over time, approaches to improving recruitment have been too narrow and mainly focused on finding more recruits, rather than a more comprehensive evaluation of the system as a whole. Potential solutions should consider more varied routes into teaching as well as aspects of retention to ensure that we have enough high-quality teachers across Wales to meet the needs of our schools and their pupils. Options, such as planned career breaks after a specific time in the profession, sabbaticals and opportunities to pursue other routes in education, for example, subject support or educational psychology could be offered as flexible career pathways.

Possible approaches include:
• Ensuring that recruitment and retention strategies are considered holistically and system wide, so that programmes attract the brightest and best candidates and support them to stay in the profession.

• Changes to the design of ITE programmes to make sure that not only do they support the development of students in the best way, but also provide enriching and exciting opportunities, such as working in a range of contexts and international placements.

• Increasing the range of routes into teaching. These need to be more flexible and varied to attract a wider range of applicants. The low recruitment to secondary subjects, especially to shortage subjects and those in the medium of Welsh, is a concern. The Open University programmes are designed to widen participation, and, although helpful, this does not go far enough to help the recruitment to shortage secondary subject areas. Alternative routes into teaching could be considered in Wales, such as degree apprenticeships (where students earn while they work towards a degree with QTS), undergraduate secondary provision and assessment-only routes.

• Create more attractive incentives, particularly for Welsh-medium applicants. Bursaries and incentives have improved recruitment, but not extensively, and the number of students recruited do not always translate into new teachers entering the professional in Wales. There may be imaginative solutions to reimbursing degree fees for those who enter

the teaching profession, or completely abolishing student fees for initial teacher education programmes. However, these have significant financial implications.

• Conditions for teachers new to the profession, especially in secondary schools, need to be more attractive. There needs to be creative solutions to ensure working in a school is seen as attractive proposition. These may include such initiatives as:

(i) 'Retention payments', which have been implemented successfully in England
(ii) Data collected and shared centrally on reasons for teachers leaving the profession in order to inform retention strategies
(iii) 'Lead schools' with a track record of securing exemplary behaviour to collaborate with 'partner schools' to help them diagnose issues and develop new strategies.
iv) professional learning opportunities and flexibility in the first few years of teaching beyond the current additional planning and preparation time.

• This combined with a rich and differentiated programme of professional learning and mentoring for teachers in their first three years of teaching is essential to retention.

• Higher Education Institutions and School should work together more closely to develop effective practice in planning for the Curriculum for Wales