

National Assembly for Wales Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education



Submission of written evidence on behalf of *Cardiff University*:

Cardiff University has been the lead institution for the Masters in Educational Practice (MEP), a collaboration with Bangor University, Aberystwyth University and the Institute of Education, University College London. The MEP was established in 2012 by the Welsh Government to improve newly qualified teachers' classroom practice and develop their leadership in schools. Over 750 teachers will have graduated from the MEP from 2012-7. Cardiff University is also the lead HEI for the Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD). WISERD has had a significant role in recent years to support and attempting to build education research capacity in all universities across Wales. The School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University (and formerly the School of Education) has been delivering education-related undergraduate and postgraduate courses for almost 40 years. Alongside the MEP it currently offers various undergraduate degrees in education (single and joint degrees; though none are teacher qualifying degrees), two taught postgraduate courses in education and childhood, is the only university in Wales that provides ESRC postgraduate research degrees in education, has one of the longest established professional doctorate courses in education in the UK, and delivers full-time and part-time PGCE Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) programmes.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Since the Welsh Government opted nearly a decade ago to develop a national School Effectiveness Framework¹ (SEF) and implement it by creating national networks of professional learning communities (PLCs), there has been the challenge of creating an effective balance between 'top down' mandated change and supporting 'bottom up' improvement efforts. The current challenges the Welsh Government faces in implementing the new curriculum via the use of Pioneer Schools has several parallels with this earlier phase of school improvement. In the interim period the educational landscape of Wales has changed considerably, particularly through the establishment of regional consortia and the adoption of a national model for regional working², which has had a substantial impact upon professional learning and leadership development.
- 1.2. A shared strategic aim of the regional consortia is the development of a 'self-improving'³ or school-led system. An approach to improvement based upon schools supporting each other by engaging in a range of collaborative partnerships and networks, from informal network to 'hard' federations. For a system to become self-improving means investing less in traditional CPD courses, and external providers and experts, and investing more in developing the capacity of schools to meet the professional learning needs of the local system, the aim being to develop school-to-school support based on practitioners inquiring together and jointly developing new practices.
- 1.3. The idea of a self-improving⁴, or school-led, system, is premised on the belief that 'traditional' CPD courses are relatively ineffective in bringing about changes in classrooms and professional learning is most effective when it is 'site-based, fits with a school's culture and ethos, addresses particular needs of teachers, is peer-led, collaborative and sustained.'⁵ A self-improving system would be underpinned by a professional learning offer based on sustained school-to-school learning led by practitioners.
- 1.4. The recent round of Estyn inspections of consortia highlighted major differences in consortia approaches to supporting collaborative working and the nature of their professional development offer. Some still operate with a relatively traditional CPD programme, primarily based on short-term courses in core subject areas run by an advisors and external experts. Even when the responsibility for the CPD offer is given over to schools, as was the case in the development of Hub schools in the Central South Consortium, care was needed to ensure that the leaders of the Hubs did not simply replicate at a smaller scale a very traditional CPD offer. Estyn did highlight some examples of good practice, for example the Central South Challenge four different strands of collaborative working.
- 1.5. A recent survey by the Central South Consortium⁶ of over 800 teachers, middle and senior leaders in primary and secondary schools asked a series of questions in relation to the

¹ Welsh Assembly Government (2006) *School Effectiveness Framework*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly.

² Welsh Assembly Government (2105) *National model for regional working: Guidance* Cardiff: Welsh Assembly.

³ Hargreaves, D.H. (2012). *A self-improving system in international context*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

⁴ Hargreaves, D.H. (2012) *A self-improving system in international context*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

⁵ Menter, I, Hulme, M., and Elliott, D. (2010) *Literature Review on Teacher Education in the 21st Century* Edinburgh: Scottish Government

⁶ Central South Consortia (2017) *CSC Staff survey 2016*. Ty Dysgu: CSC

leadership of learning in schools, the learning environment and the extent to which teachers were engaged in inquiry and joint practice development. The survey generated the following key findings:

- When asked how effective senior leadership were in ensuring there are opportunities for professional learning in school, 71% of primary and 59% of secondary teachers rated them as good or outstanding
- 80% of primary and 50% of secondary teachers agreed/strongly agreed that their school has a collaborative school culture characterized by mutual support
- When asked how often they worked with other teachers to improve teaching and learning across classes, 46% of teachers replied that they do so at least monthly but one in ten said they never work in this way
- When asked how often they carry out collaborative research into topics of professional interest to them, 70% answered that they did so either 'never' or 'once a year or less'.
- When asked how effective senior leadership were in giving teachers opportunities to engage in collaborative working with colleagues from other schools, a quarter of secondary teachers rated their senior leadership as poor and nearly a third of all teachers rated their SL as only satisfactory in this regard
- Nearly 90% of primary teachers agreed/strongly agreed that their school has a culture which is open to working with other schools to share ideas and practice; in contrast only 60% of secondary teachers agreed/strongly agreed
- 70% of primary teachers agreed/strongly agreed that their school actively encourages staff to work with colleagues in other schools, in comparison with only 46% of secondary teachers.
- When asked how effective senior leadership were in giving teachers opportunities to engage in collaborative working with colleagues from other schools, a quarter of secondary teachers rated their SL as poor and nearly a third of all teachers rated their SL as only satisfactory in this regard.

1.6. Furthermore, the OECD report 'Improving schools in Wales' highlighted the lack of knowledge in the system about the strengths and weaknesses of school leadership. The lack of recent and robust research evidence into school leaders' experience of working collaboratively and the overall quality of the leadership of professional learning in schools makes it difficult to estimate the scale of the leadership development challenge.

1.7. International research on the most improved educational systems argues for the importance of adopting approaches to professional learning and improvement that are responsive to both a system's current performance and its capacity to improve. The strategies adopted need to develop with the system through each phase of improvement. Once key foundations are in place, such as a clear learning model and robust ITE system, there needs to be a move away from providing guidance and prescription and concentrate on giving greater autonomy to schools leaders and practitioners. The role of central government increasingly becomes one of facilitating school-based learning, increasing collaboration between schools, sponsoring innovations in schools and helping share these across the system.

2. Arrangements for continuing professional development for the current workforce

- 2.1. Evidence can be found from the Wales MEP programme – this WG funded initiative has now been discontinued with the last cohort currently undertaking their final year of studies. The MEP programme was designed to provide a very rich, practice-focused learning experience for professional teachers at the early stages of their careers.
- 2.2. The programme has enabled significant learning about accreditation processes for professional programmes at Masters Level and a model for teacher professional inquiry. The MEP signalled a very important strategic development away from one off courses and was designed and built around principles of sustained engagement and learning over time and through inquiry. It has a strong emphasis on context specific developments and was crucially based on research informed evidence. There is a significant body of evidence in the final year inquiry projects which are currently held on the EWC website (<http://www.ewc.wales/mep/index.php/en/>).
- 2.3. The MEP has produced a significant number of graduates with a Masters in Educational Practice. This programme has been a Wales wide, high quality, high stakes experiment in teacher continuing professional development and it has also understood and realised the importance of capacity building. This has been achieved through supporting the students with professional mentors who themselves have been through extensive training, professional development and quality assurance processes and whose roles have underpinned the success of the programme.
- 2.4. Going forward, the specifics of the ‘new deal’ are yet to be fully understood and implemented within the profession. What is known is that the focus on professional development has shifted from the centre and the new direction of travel appears to be one where there is greater focus on local provision through subsidiarity via pioneer schools. This is an interesting departure - giving responsibility to schools in supporting teachers’ development and in delivering the new curriculum. This is an exceedingly challenging task and one which requires clarity around the framework, parameters and support structures in order to ensure equity, robust quality assurance and national consistency. There will need to be proportionate assurance on whether there is capacity within the system to provide a school-based model which isn’t too dependent on individuals and won’t dilute the main role of schools in educating the next generation. The role of universities in supporting this development may need to be better understood and implemented on national scale.
- 2.5. The current model has the potential to further fragment the sector and may result in polarisation and division of schools and practices. Whilst there may be local excellent practice this will not necessarily be coherent and joined up, which may result in a lack of a clear coherent structure in the sector. This may hinder the rapid progress that is hoped for.
- 2.6. Further clarity would be helpful around expectations for engaging in professional learning and CPD – without a clear steer in relation to its value and status the practice of engaging in teacher inquiry and undertaking research informed professional development will not become promoted, embedded and valued in the sector.

3. The role of initial teacher education

- 3.1. The Furlong (2015)⁷ report makes clear recommendations on the need for sustained teacher learning which is research informed and promotes the idea of a two-year structure. There needs to be a strong and coherent interface developed between ITT and teachers' continuing professional development. The role of universities needs to be better defined, and in ways that assist in underpinning the importance of inquiry and teacher research.
- 3.2. However, university-based initial teacher education in Wales is hampered by the low levels of education research capacity in provider departments. Of all the universities in Wales only Cardiff University submitted staff to the Education sub-panel in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). This was recognised in the Furlong (2015) report, which recommends to extend the role of WISERD in supporting teacher education providers.
- 3.3. The relationship between research and teacher education is an important one. For example, the Foundation Phase constitutes a radical new departure from traditional methods of teaching and learning amongst young children. It is based on a number of relatively new theories of learning and requires very different approaches to teaching and learning. As the recent evaluation of the Foundation Phase demonstrated, these reforms have been very challenging to practitioners. But it is not clear to what extent primary teacher education providers have altered their provision accordingly. Furthermore, the evaluation gave a number of insights into the delivery of the Foundation Phase. Again, a teacher education workforce that is not, minimally, research literate is unlikely to be able to utilise such findings and insights in order to improve the content of their provision.
- 3.4. In England, the response to poor quality initial teacher education and the limited research capacity of many university providers has been to encourage alternative forms of teacher education, typically through schools (e.g. Teach First and School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT)). However, it is not clear how these new models of teacher education address the shortcomings of more traditional approaches. Whilst these alternative forms of teacher education may have important advantages they are not designed to ensure they benefit from the latest education research on pedagogy, classroom management, teacher education, additional learning needs, leadership, the use of ICT in learning, and so forth.

4. The sufficiency of the future workforce

- 4.1. There needs to be improved mapping and succession planning for the sector – a complete and coherent workforce planning model. This model needs to account for the skills development required to realise the ambitions of Successful Futures and the current bilingual vision, as well as realise research informed practice teacher inquiry for all teachers.

⁷ Furlong, J. (2015) *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers: options for the future of initial teacher education in Wales*, Oxford: University of Oxford.