

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee Consultation

Teachers' Professional Learning and Education

Respondent: Jamie James, on behalf of the University of South Wales

The University of South Wales (USW) is a forward-thinking, dynamic provider of Higher Education. USW equips people in Wales with essential skills, knowledge and social capital with which to succeed in the world of work. USW's School of Education, Early Years and Social Work, now in new facilities within the University's modern Newport City Campus, brings together expertise in professional and vocational education with access to national and international research in key areas of related professional disciplines, including counselling, therapies, social work and early years, building on our strong tradition of innovative and high quality teacher education.

1. In relation to the arrangements for continuing professional development for the current workforce, there is a perception that changes to examination specifications communicated in advance, support mechanisms, and the processes for their delivery have some way to go in engaging teachers and supporting them for the upcoming alterations. For instance, the WJEC Design and Technology curriculum is changing to enhance and encourage the teaching of systems and control-based activities for learners aged 11-19; while the WJEC is offering insights into the specification changes for all subject streams in Design and Technology, not all teachers tell us that they are likely to attend and they will therefore fail to receive the required help to improve their skills in order to deliver the new curriculum.

2. Similarly, for ICT there will be a stronger, more sophisticated focus on coding and for Science more emphasis on practical work and application. School partners communicate to the University that they do not yet feel prepared to deliver the required content in time. The University is looking to a model whereby it could support with the required professional development provision: schools will need financial support to release teachers to attend such training.

3. Notwithstanding this point, offers of after-school conferences and meetings have been well-received where schools have been able to attend. A recent "Teach-Meet" event held at the University and organised in conjunction with the Education Achievement Service enabled teachers to come together to share good practice and diversify their professional activity. This model, if resourced sufficiently, could provide a suitable medium for enabling larger numbers of teachers to benefit from training and development related to the new curriculum. Resources required would include

- Coverage of the costs of teaching resource exemplars,
- Payment for the time of facilitators where these are sourced externally,

- Time for teachers to assimilate new ideas, prepare for their use, and reflect on their use following development events.

4. One should not underestimate the issue of time, and the effect of its paucity on the ability of the workforce to engage with professional development opportunities designed to prepare teachers for the requirements of the new school curriculum. Teachers' workload, and an emphasis on quantitative performance measures in evaluating their performance, both impact negatively on their ability to make effective use of the training available. In particular, since trialling new techniques requires reflection and revision of practice, teachers need more time to think about not only what the new curriculum will require of them, but how they are going to deliver it, so that learners' progress is not hampered by either a lack of confidence on the part of teachers, or by the inevitable "trial and error" that comes with implementing new practices.

5. We feel that the ability to provide development opportunities to the workforce, and in particular the ability of Higher Education Institutions to do so, would benefit from greater information for the Higher Education sector at large as to progress with particular elements of the new curriculum, and the potential content that it may contain. As a current provider of Initial Teacher Education, we are in constant contact with school partners. At the time of writing this response, the experience of both schools and the University is that there is a general hunger for greater detail as to the progress being made in designing the curriculum, and that this applies equally to Pioneer Schools taking part in the design process, and to other institutions. Higher Education Institutions have not been able to take part fully in the design process, and are not in receipt of sufficient detail on its progress, with the consequent challenge in gauging both the specific needs of the workforce and the steps that we can take to support with the needs of the workforce.

6. We are highly appreciative of Regional Education Consortia for their engagement with us, and their support in working with what information does exist as to the new curriculum. This engagement has developed organically out of the relationships that already exist between universities and the Regional Consortia, and must be further strengthened, and formalised, in order to stabilise lines of communication between government, schools, and universities. More forward planning must take place, and structured engagement opportunities designed with Higher Education Institutions in mind, in order that this can happen, and in order that the sector can have confidence in the quality of the policy implementation that is taking place. Currently, we feel that there is some way to go before universities are fully in that communication loop.

7. In relation to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the University welcomes the reforms recommended by Professor John Furlong, and the Welsh Government's response to these recommendations. If high quality leadership

can direct and coordinate national efforts to reform, there is a great potential to transform the quality of experiences that student teachers receive, the access of professionals to contemporary knowledge and the outcomes for pupils in schools in Wales.

8. In particular, the University sees great potential for the collaborative partnerships with schools that will be a requirement of new accreditation criteria, to improve not only the ability of new teachers to deliver the new curriculum, but also to engage in-service teachers in new practices through research and reflection, and to give all teachers a revitalised sense of their professional identity.

9. The new approaches to ITE and the new school curriculum have in common their call for all professionals to develop their decision-making skills and ability to form their own theories of action, based on engagement with evidence and reflection. This is extremely positive, and lies in stark contrast to the largely reductive models of teacher professionalism that have predominated in recent years and that are defined by slavish adherence to lists of behaviours expected of teachers and rigid specifications and assessment schedules. These latter elements squeeze out the opportunity for teachers to think for themselves and to exercise professional judgement as to what is best for the learners in their care. This similarity between reform of ITE and the school curriculum is positive because it demonstrates a unity of ethos and philosophy in terms of what is asked of teachers in their day-to-day work; teaching will become about ways of thinking, not just ways of demonstrating compliance.

10. Whilst the new ITE accreditation criteria promise much, however, there is an issue of resource that must be rectified if new approaches are to be effective. Not only must universities be fully supported to develop their own staff for the paradigm shift that the new criteria require in their way of approaching their knowledge, skills and understanding, schools must also be supported to engage with the higher expectation of their investment of time and resources (both financial and human) that will come with their involvement in co-delivering new programmes of ITE. There is an unfortunate belief circulating that universities and schools can deliver excellence whilst relying entirely on the current fee regime to fund both university and school activity. This is erroneous and demonstrates the need for a more nuanced understanding of the way programmes of Higher Education are financed. Longer chains of institutions involved in ITE delivery will require larger numbers of individuals to deliver programmes, which in turn will place a heavy resource burden on schools and universities. If ITE is not resourced in order to be successful, and if the communication issues raised in paragraph 5 above are not addressed, the great potential for ITE to add capacity to schools' and teachers' ability to deliver the new curriculum will be severely affected.

11. Notwithstanding this point, the University remains very positive about the potential for new approaches in ITE to encourage teacher educators to re-engage with contemporary classroom practice and research, and to spread good practice in relation to the delivery of the curriculum through the partnerships of schools involved in ITE delivery. Schools will have opportunities to lead the delivery of elements of ITE and will be better placed than ever before to share the best elements of their delivery of the new curriculum with other professionals. This potential ought to be extended further to enable other professions that engage with learners to understand what the new curriculum will mean for the way we expect young people to develop and the skills we are seeking to propagate in our learners. If social workers, counsellors, educational psychologists and other professionals who impact on the lives of children and young people fail to understand what the curriculum changes mean for children, they will be less well-placed to cater fully for the needs of children and young people in a holistic way. In deliberately structuring its own provision and organisation to encourage these connections between professionals, USW is directly addressing this need.

12. The University is currently reorganising its ITE provision to encompass the new curriculum. The diversity of practice in relation to the new curriculum which will come with a staggered implementation of the new provisions makes it very challenging to ensure that student teachers are ready to face the multiplicity of situations that they will face when they enter the classroom. We are working to ensure that the current curriculum can still be delivered, whilst also preparing students for new curriculum provisions. This places challenges of time on students and teacher educators and risks inhibiting the quality of provision of the new curriculum by Newly Qualified Teachers in particular. A continued commitment to improving the lines of communication between the partners - Welsh Government, universities and schools - is vital. This must focus on more open access to the discussions being undertaken with schools and a clearer picture as to which schools will be delivering the new provisions and when.

13. A key part of USW's ITE provision is that of the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). Revised regulations for the delivery of employment-based programmes have not yet been published and the confirmation as to what will happen with this stream of ITE is essential if GTP students are to be well-equipped to deliver the new curriculum. Uncertainty as the specific changes that will take place will mean that universities are unable to design programme modifications on time.

14. As to the sufficiency of the workforce, we note first of all the lack of teachers in most STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects. Recruitment in these areas is extremely challenging. Whilst the cross-curricular, skills-based focus that is characteristic of the new curriculum will enable schools to implement more flexible staffing solutions in shortage areas, this should not become an "antidote" to shortages in key areas of

children's and young people's learning. The lack of STEM teachers in particular will hamper the ability of teachers and schools to instil the broad skills aimed for in the new curriculum, as key skills prevalent in STEM subjects will be missing from teachers' capacity to deliver.

15. There is also a shortage of teachers in key parts of the curriculum delivered by Welsh-medium and bilingual schools; again, STEM subjects suffer particularly here, but there is a shortage of Welsh-speaking teachers in general, and a shortage of applicants to programmes of ITE through the medium of Welsh. As a University with substantial Welsh language provision through the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, we continue to make significant efforts to increase our intake of Welsh-speaking students, and we see an increase in applications from Welsh-speaking applicants as a result. Students tell us that they view North and West Wales as the heartland of such provision despite the increase in the number of Welsh-medium schools locally, but we continue to build a culture on campus and in our relationships, whereby South East Wales can be seen as a natural choice for the provision of ITE through the medium of Welsh.

16. Two key areas that affect the supply of high quality teachers to the profession are the unattractiveness of the profession in terms of work-life balance, and, linked to this, mental health and wellbeing problems that lead to attrition. The University has previously been surveyed on its insight as to incentives to join the profession. Our response to that survey is just as valid here; financial incentives are, in our experience, of limited value. Until the teaching profession can be seen as an accessible and sustainable career choice that allows space and time for reflection, personal development and a work-life balance, and until solutions to the rising tide of mental health problems in the profession are sourced, there is continued risk to a sufficient supply of teachers to engage with the new curriculum.

Jamie James

Head of the School of Education, Early Years and Social Work

Faculty of Life Sciences and Education

University of South Wales