

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i Addysg a Dysgu Proffesiynol Athrawon | Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education

TT 07

Ymateb gan : Undeb Cenedlaethol yr Athrawon, Cymru

Response from : National Union of Teachers (NUT Cymru)

NUT Cymru represents primary and secondary school teachers and school leaders and is the largest teaching union in Wales. We welcome the opportunity to contribute evidence to the Children and Young People's Committee Inquiry into Teachers' Professional Learning and Education.

Arrangements for continuing professional development for the current workforce

It has been widely recognised that the access and quality of continued professional development (CPD) for the teaching workforce is an area that has been neglected for too long by the Welsh Government. In his first keynote speech as Education Minister, Huw Lewis, stated:

“if we want to instil more respect in the profession, then we must take the issue of teacher training – and continual professional development – more seriously than we have to date.”

This was an open recognition that CPD had been the forgotten component of education reform in Wales.

It is important at the outset to be clear about the difference between training and professional development. Training implies being instructed how to comply or deliver a specific initiative or skill, whereas professional development is much broader than this and implies an active role for the teacher. It is developmental and allows the individual to have ownership of their development, whereas training often tends to be perceived as being done to an individual, and is based on a deficit model very often.

The term 'professional development' refers to a full range of learning activities aimed at personal development and career advancement. It usually includes a mix of training and development and a blend of formal and informal learning activities.

Both have their place, but the model we seek is one in which an individual's desire for development is encouraged and supported as a shared responsibility and entitlement for the benefit of themselves and the schools in which they teach. It is in this model of professional learning that true motivation to develop lies.

The appetite for professional development is very evident. Training put on by the NUT as part of its Welsh Union learning Fund (WULF) project has seen over 300 individuals undertake professional development in subjects such as digital competency, mindfulness and behaviour management and Welsh speaking courses. These statistics only cover the period since April of last year with more courses scheduled for the forthcoming months, many of which already have waiting lists. This is the second round of WULF funding as the union supported hundreds of teachers through past CPD events.

At present we have a number of pressures at school level resulting from insufficient funding for CPD, an over-focus on a deficit model to drive through National Training programmes (Literacy /Numeracy /Digital comp Frameworks) rather than investment in broader CPD entitlement/offer. During a period of significant reform in an era of financial austerity, this has perhaps been understandable. However, the method of delivery for CPD has also been changed and a huge amount of responsibility for this has been invested in the Regional Consortia with a stated intention of moving to a school to school development model. We need to be reassured that this is an effective and appropriate model that is equitable for all. Opportunities for professional development and learning must be available regardless of where in Wales a teacher practises, and must be of a guaranteed minimum standard of quality.

It is also worth noting that schools are having additional expectations placed upon them to share good practice and develop other schools. the hub school model is a new development that whilst being positive in terms of recognising the expertise within the profession for developing others, the expectation to work beyond a single school does place new pressures and vulnerabilities on the schools themselves in terms of maintaining and enhancing their own standards whilst key staff members are out of their own classrooms working to develop their colleagues in other settings.

Teachers are desperate for ongoing professional development but for a variety of reasons they have not been able to undertake it with any regularity or with confidence in the quality of training they would receive. In some instances it is a case that there are not enough high quality providers servicing specific areas in Wales, or at least in the topics that individual teachers and/or schools believe they need training in. In some rural areas there is no provision for supply at all which restricts head teachers and clusters from working together and stops them discussing coordinated training approaches.

It is also a case that the fact school funding is being stretched to breaking point has restricted access to CPD. Schools are either unable to afford to buy in training packages, do not believe that they offer value for money or cannot afford to spare the finance required to hire a supply teacher in order to release existing staff for training purposes. This issue was exacerbated when the previous Education Minister, Leighton Andrews, reduced the number of in-service training days available to schools that otherwise would have allowed them to plan training events without requiring supply cover.

Another concern is the restrictions placed on schools by the Welsh Government and regional consortia in relation to the focus of the training. At one point a Welsh Government directive announced that all training should be focused on literacy and numeracy. While undoubtedly those areas are important and schools would welcome training on them, it did mean that there was no room for training on other crucial subject areas or on areas of classroom management and pupil support that would have been extremely beneficial. This was a greater concern for schools that had good literacy and numeracy provisions and therefore were unable to add to existing skill sets.

What has also been evident over the past few years is that the reform agenda has introduced numerous new policies, projects and initiatives into the classroom. There simply has not been the quality or consistency of training to match this and so teachers have not been afforded the ongoing professional development required to ensure that, what have often been well meaning and aspirational policies, are implemented properly. The literacy and numeracy framework was a notable example of this failure, and the Welsh Government needs to be very mindful that those mistakes are not repeated with both the newly introduced Digital Competency Framework and the forthcoming changes to the national curriculum.

It is important to also recognise the specific issues with professional development for those working through the supply sector. Those individuals receive no paid professional development and often cannot even take up voluntary offers of training due to the fact they are essentially on zero hour contracts waiting for notice of employment through a supply agency. This is an issue the CYPC have previously acknowledged and hopefully will find some resolution through the recommendations of the supply taskforce which was established as a result of the CYPC supply inquiry at the end of the last Assembly term.

The noted acknowledgment from Huw Lewis that CPD had not been sufficiently supported was welcomed, as was the commitment to a New Deal for teachers.

We are led to believe the New Deal is no longer in effect having been replaced with the 'Professional Learning Offer.' It appears the only tangible outcome of the New Deal was the PLP which highlights the disappointing lack of impact of this initiative.

There have been some positive changes, such as the introduction of the learning passport through the EWC which has thus far been well promoted and appears to present an opportunity for reflective practice for teachers based on improving capacity within the system rather than simply used as an assessment or performance management tool. However, we do remain in a position whereby the warm words around CPD are not being met with concrete action, and certainly remain detached from any additional funding.

Finally it is worth reflecting on the potential pressures caused by the ambitious requirements of the new ALN Bill as outlined in the current consultation, as well as the ambition for Wales to have a million Welsh speakers by 2050. Both will need significant and ongoing investment in CPD programmes in order to realise these ambitions

The role of initial teacher education

Quite clearly, as outlined in the Furlong Report, initial teacher training needs to develop a new style of teacher to adapt to the challenges that will be presented by establishing a new, innovative and less prescriptive curriculum. The Donaldson Review into the curriculum will radically change what, why and how we teach Welsh students, and with that comes the responsibility to ensure we have a workforce able to design and plan a curriculum rather than simply deliver or implement it

We need a workforce that is inquisitive about why they are teaching something rather than simply doing so because it is a requirement of a prescribed curriculum designed elsewhere. This is the key issue for the NUT in ensuring the successful implementation of a new curriculum, and we believe that skilling the profession in curriculum design has been a glaring omission in terms of a national training opportunity to prepare current members of the profession for the demands of the Curriculum for Life.

ITET should be the first step along a continuum of career-long professional learning that should provide the skills to undertake their teaching roles effectively and enthusiastically whilst motivating teachers to engage in meaningful professional learning throughout their careers. The NUT was very supportive of the Welsh Government's plans to make teaching a Masters level profession.

Unfortunately the planning and delivery of that policy has relegated the ambition to a token aspiration. Worse than this, it seems that the cohorts of new teachers that undertook the MEP have had their aspirations raised without any consideration of what opportunities should follow to build on the research expertise and critical thinking levels they have attained. This is a missed opportunity for system improvement in Wales. OECD refers to research engaged reflective practitioners being key to successful education reform, so this group of early careers teachers should not be forgotten. We

believe it will be worth the Welsh Government revisiting the thinking around this, reconfiguring ITET so that it is possible to attain the Masters qualification during an extended period of initial period of teacher training.

We need initial teacher training to have an increased emphasis on the pedagogy of social and emotional development and well-being of children and education research as a way of curriculum building if both Furlong and Donaldson's recommendations are to be acted upon. If we are to build a profession of research engaged teachers who can design action research and interrogate new initiatives for their effectiveness before employing them without consideration, it will be necessary to enhance the links between Higher Education Institutions and schools, and to ensure teachers have access to the best of education research and to networks of peer assessors to enable them to be research active. We would need to ensure that any opportunities for collaboration are of high quality, and we remain hopeful that with the reform of programs for ITET that require HEIs to form strong relationships with effective schools, that both schools and the institutions will develop their understanding of effective learning and development. Current opportunities are limited as the view is that HEI provision is inconsistent in terms of quality and willingness to engage with the schools sector.

A further concern is the amount of work that a one year course is expecting student teachers to overcome.

The sufficiency of the future workforce

Recent figures show that the number of individuals entering the profession in Wales is in decline. EWC figures last year showed there were 35,516 registered teachers in Wales. This figure was as high as 38,500 just a few years back. Evidence shows that the targets for attracting students to undertake initial teacher training in the secondary sector have not been met in any of the past 5 years, with a third of places not being filled for the last academic year.

These figures suggest there has been a bottoming out of recruitment into the profession, and that we need to ensure teaching is seen as a supported and attractive career for graduates.

Clear professional development pathways are key to this, and access to relevant CPD at key stages in a teacher's career would also ensure that retention rates stay high and that teachers are keen to progress through to positions of senior management, headship, system leadership and beyond. This would guarantee sufficiency at all levels.

We would also highlight the dangers of not investing sufficiently in appropriate and effective CPD and of an unsupported profession being charged with significant reform – high attrition rates and damage to the status of the profession are guaranteed in this instance. The challenges presented by embedding a new curriculum, the digital framework, reaching the targets of Welsh speakers and the ambitions of the ALN Bill are just a few of the numerous areas that teachers will need support through professional development in coming years.