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# Research Study on the Attractiveness of Teaching, and Retention of Teachers

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## Summary

### 1. Research aims and methodology

- 1.1 The Welsh Government is pursuing an ambitious programme of reform of the country's education system. In 'Education in Wales: Our National Mission' the Welsh Government has set out the vision for a teaching profession that is attractive, with high morale and professional satisfaction.
- 1.2 Data from the Welsh Government shows an increase in teachers leaving the profession since 2012, although the figures for 2016 show an overall fall in numbers leaving since 2007. The Education Workforce Council's analysis of data in 2017 found that, 'despite there not being a recruitment and retention crisis in Wales, there are concerns in four areas: new teachers, headteachers, Welsh-medium teachers, and teachers of STEM subjects'.
- 1.3 The Welsh Government is addressing the need to reform the structure of both initial and on-going teacher education. It is implementing the recommendations from Professor John Furlong's report Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers (Welsh Government, 2015).
- 1.4 To help realise the Welsh Government's vision, it will be important that high-quality entrants are attracted to the teaching profession, that they remain in teaching, and develop as leaders within the system. It is crucial that Wales retains its teachers and encourages those who have the potential to make a difference to pupils to choose a career in teaching.
- 1.5 There is currently limited primary qualitative research available in Wales on what currently motivates people to want to teach, what keeps them teaching and what might cause them to consider leaving.

- 1.6 The overall aims of the research were to explore the following: what factors encourage individuals to pursue a teaching career in Wales; what factors discourage individuals from considering pursuing a teaching career in Wales; what factors contribute to teachers in Wales remaining in the profession; and what factors contribute to teachers in Wales leaving the profession.
- 1.7 The main approach used for the research was qualitative. It provided an effective means of exploring the objectives in more detail across a broad range of participants and topics than would be possible via other means. Qualitative investigation is not designed to be statistically representative; it is intended to provide the in-depth understanding which was required for exploring the factors that influence engagement with teaching. The research also included a review of existing literature and a quantitative online survey among teachers.
- 1.8 A range of participants were engaged in the research and the total qualitative sample was 199 individuals. The research consisted of:
- Visits to 16 schools – including focus groups with teachers across eight primary and eight secondary, the latter including a focus group with ‘A’ Level pupils; six of the schools were Welsh medium (three primary and three secondary);
  - Visits to three ITE Centres - one focus group with staff and one with ITE students at each;
  - Three focus groups with undergraduates (not studying to be teachers);
  - 20 in-depth phone interviews with teachers who had left or were seriously considering leaving the profession;
  - 24 stakeholders via in-depth phone interviews, focus groups and a face-to-face interview.
- 1.9 The online survey was designed to help identify leavers. It also provided high level quantitative data on the main aims of the research. The survey received 1,945 responses from qualified teachers.
- 1.10 The different stages of fieldwork took place from March to July 2018 with a delayed individual interview taking place in August 2018.

## **2. Key findings**

*Summary of the key issues about teacher recruitment and retention from the existing data and literature reviews*

- 2.1 The issue of 'attrition' within the teaching profession is experienced across the countries examined in the literature. Studies from England, Australia, The Netherlands and the United States suggest that up to half of all entrants to teaching choose to leave in the first five years.
- 2.2 The published research refers to the influence of staff turnover on the continuity of learners' experiences, and on the consistency of teachers' expectations of learners.
- 2.3 The studies examined emphasise that practitioners' reasons for leaving vary and their decisions are influenced by factors such as their initial motivations for becoming a teacher, the quality of initial preparation for the profession, school governance and leadership and the level of professional support enjoyed by practitioners.

### **The attractiveness of teaching as a career**

#### *Factors that attract individuals to want to teach*

- 2.4 In keeping with the literature review, two common motivating themes across the sample were teaching as a **vocation**, sometimes from an early age; and the opportunity to **make a positive difference** to pupils.
- 2.5 A number of further factors also emerged. They included: the impact of having worked with young people and children prior to wanting to become a teacher; switching to a more worthwhile and fulfilling career; continuing and sharing a passion for their subject; a love of the Welsh language; and the influence of an inspirational teacher.
- 2.6 Some participants had been uncertain what career to pursue and teaching had been a fall-back option. Life-stage or a change in circumstances had the potential to attract individuals to want to teach as well.
- 2.7 Job security and conditions were contributing factors on occasion: teachers would always be needed and longer holidays fitted around childcare.
- 2.8 Any financial incentives to train received among ITE student participants were not systematically recorded. However, some were teaching and studying subjects that would attract more significant incentives. Financial incentives were occasionally raised as a contributing motivation to teach.
- 2.9 The evidence reviewed on the impact of incentives on teacher retention is not sufficient to provide a reliable indicator of what strategies work in different contexts.

*Perceptions of teaching as a career among 'A' Level pupils and undergraduates*

- 2.10 Young people described how they wanted a career that offered job satisfaction, an adequate salary and good work-life balance. Views on teaching as a career were mixed. The main positive association was job satisfaction through having a positive impact on pupils. A second positive association was longer holidays. Some thought there would always be a need for teachers as well.
- 2.11 Some 'A' Level pupils in Welsh-medium schools were attracted to the prospect of training to be teachers through the medium of Welsh. They often felt more comfortable communicating in Welsh, especially if it was their first language or if they felt they knew more subject-specific terminology in Welsh.
- 2.12 Some of the non-fluent Welsh speaking young people tended to be open to the concept of having to use some basic Welsh in the classroom and were not discouraged on the whole.
- 2.13 In the cases where participants had already explored the options of where to teach and financial incentives to train, England was thought to offer more attractive incentives than Wales. Opinions were mixed on whether or not it would attract them to teach in England.
- 2.14 Positive associations with primary school teaching included: nurturing and influencing lives at an early point; having enjoyed primary school more than secondary school; and pupils who would be easier to manage than secondary school pupils. Positive associations with secondary school included: following a passion for their subject; a more intellectually stimulating environment; and being equipped with transferable skills beyond teaching.
- 2.15 The most prevalent negative aspects young people associated with teaching were a heavy workload and that the job could be quite stressful. Work-life balance might therefore be affected. Also, some felt that teaching was not a particularly respected or appreciated profession. In addition, some doubted teachers' pay reflected the amount of work they did. Other sectors generally were sometimes considered to be more attractive financially.
- 2.16 On occasion, some Welsh-medium pupils doubted their own Welsh language skills and were concerned they would pass on incorrect Welsh to pupils. For those with limited Welsh language skills it might also mean Welsh was one more thing to have to learn.
- 2.17 Reservations associated specifically with primary school teaching included: having to be more involved with health and safety and childcare tasks; not being able to follow a passion for a subject; and the challenge of trying to keep young children interested in learning. For secondary school teaching, concerns included having to manage teenagers.

### *Awareness and understanding of routes into teaching and expectations of training*

- 2.18 Unless participants were already interested in a career in teaching, they were uncertain about routes and guessed what entry requirements might be. Opinions varied on these requirements when prompted, mostly around GCSE attainment.
- 2.19 Those young people who knew of others with experience of teacher training tended to expect the workload when training to be challenging. Concerns associated with teaching generally were also raised for training, such as managing children's behaviour.

### *Young people's sources of information on teaching as a career*

- 2.20 Some young people recalled seeing TV ads to do with becoming a teacher although recollections of their content tended to be vague. They were aware that an incentive was offered. It was not clear to all that the campaign applied to England rather than Wales. The internet was deemed to be a likely starting point to search for information about becoming a teacher. Family and friends, teachers and careers advisers were further sources.

### *How teaching is viewed as a profession generally*

- 2.21 Across participant groups, the teaching profession was not thought to be **as well respected or valued as it could be**. There were also sometimes thought to be less positive perceptions among the general public regarding the work involved for teachers, including workload pressures, stress and funding cuts.
- 2.22 Sources for these perceptions covered the media / social media (which could involve media stories in England leaking into Wales), family and friends, teachers and the Welsh Government (e.g. its perceived regular criticism of teachers).

### *ITE Centres and attracting students*

- 2.23 ITE Centre staff referred to: activities based at the Centres (e.g. open days, one-to-one discussions, targeting undergraduates at the university); partnership working (e.g. developing strong links with schools, other university Schools); and digital efforts (e.g. using social media).
- 2.24 Themes emphasised by ITE staff to attract potential applicants included making a positive difference, how rewarding teaching is and the goal of becoming an inspiring teacher. The support available with the Welsh language when training was also stressed, for those who

might lack confidence. Some staff reported looking for evidence of a resilient quality in applicants.

### *Challenges faced with attraction and recruitment*

- 2.25 Challenges highlighted by ITE staff included: public perceptions of teaching; the draw of other sectors; the increasing need for Welsh language speakers in other sector roles; Welsh speakers lacking confidence in their own Welsh; and GCSE entry requirements. ITE staff were uncertain what impact financial incentives to train might be having.
- 2.26 Some ITE staff reported how it could still be difficult to identify the best students until they had taken on their first placement. This stage was noted as a time when students could leave the course because they could not handle the teaching itself.
- 2.27 Teachers and stakeholders also referred to issues filling STEM subject and Welsh language posts.

### *Suggestions among participants for improving the attractiveness of teaching*

- 2.28 Suggested improvements tended to focus on **improving the general perception and status of teaching** and addressing **workload** issues. A further improvement was to better understand how to reach potential applicants – and the need to be more targeted with these efforts.
- 2.29 Finance related suggestions emerged as well (e.g. exploring the effectiveness of the financial incentives available in Wales). Strengthening partnership working across schools, ITE Centres and universities was also highlighted by some as an important improvement needed.

## **Teacher retention and what can cause teachers to leave the profession**

### *Factors that supported a commitment to teach*

- 2.30 A key theme that continued to motivate individuals to want to teach was **making a positive difference** and **seeing pupils develop** their learning.
- 2.31 A second prevalent theme concerned **professional support**. It included supportive **mentors** for ITE students and those on NQT induction. It also incorporated less formal support (e.g. from other staff and peers). The need for school leaders and other colleagues

to take a close interest in nurturing those in the early years of their careers was highlighted in the literature review.

- 2.32 Feeling part of a team from the outset of qualifying was thought to help to keep teachers motivated, as well as for more experienced teachers.
- 2.33 Feeling valued and recognised, along with good leadership were further factors that helped maintain a commitment to teach. The literature suggests that nurturing a sense of professional autonomy through meaningful involvement in decision making is also key. Furthermore, it highlights how the importance of access to ongoing professional development opportunities was evident where schools were effective in reducing attrition.
- 2.34 The variety of the role and holiday allowance also contributed towards maintaining motivation to teach. In addition, enthusiasm for a subject and job security featured as motivating factors in the online survey.

*Factors that can cause doubt about continuing to teach*

- 2.35 **Workload** was the main theme identified across different types of participant. Stress was also a prominent theme in the online survey. Both these themes were mentioned among teachers who had left or were leaving the profession. Examples included: during teacher training, the combination of written assignments and placement requirements; and for teachers, data collection and accountability, the extent of which left some feeling that they were not trusted to do their jobs. ITE students and those on NQT induction could also be concerned on seeing the stress more experienced teachers were under.
- 2.36 The main disadvantage raised among Welsh-medium teachers that related to the Welsh language was a lack of Welsh language resources versus English language resources. However, Welsh language related issues had not contributed to any participant's decision to leave or consider leaving the profession.
- 2.37 Inconsistent levels of **support** in school for ITE students and those at NQT induction also emerged as a theme, with an emphasis on experiences with mentors. A lack of support from senior leaders arose among participants who had left or were seriously considering leaving teaching, for example not recognising an individual's stress. As a result, some felt unable to ask for help and did not want to admit they were struggling to cope. A combination of a number of different factors could contribute to a teacher deciding to leave the profession.

- 2.38 In addition, issues with mental health and wellbeing and not feeling very supported generally emerged among some of those who had left or were seriously considering leaving the profession.
- 2.39 There tended not to be a clear pattern among participants who had left or were considering leaving teaching regarding which sources of support to approach when they needed help.

#### *Suggestions among participants for improving teacher retention*

- 2.40 Two common suggestions for improving teacher retention were to reduce **workload** and, particularly for ITE students and those on NQT induction, improve the consistency of **professional support**. Linking with workload issues, there were specific suggestions for exploring how **more time can be freed up for teachers** to manage their work more effectively and to ensure that they can focus on pedagogy.
- 2.41 Less prevalent suggestions included: reducing the amount of change and allowing reforms to bed in; improving the status of teaching generally; encouraging more collaboration between schools, and finance linked suggestions (e.g. 'golden handcuffs' and improved teachers' pay).

### **3. Conclusions**

#### **Factors that encourage individuals to pursue a teaching career in Wales and encourage them to remain in the profession**

##### *Overarching messages*

- 3.1 It is clear from the research that individuals are motivated to become and remain teachers primarily due to a sense of teaching as a vocation. This relates to the opportunities it brings to have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people – making a difference. These reasons for entering teaching were identified by serving teachers, young people considering teaching as a career and ITE students including those who had moved from other careers: the job satisfaction associated with teaching versus other roles had been an important draw to the profession as well. Some participants stated that they had been prompted to enter the profession because of the influence of an inspiring teacher.
- 3.2 The research found differences in perceptions among pupils and undergraduates about teaching in primary and secondary schools. Some referred to the nurturing element of the role in primary school, as well as perceptions that behaviour management would probably



be easier. When considering the attractiveness of the secondary sector, factors included passion for a subject and possible further career development.

- 3.3 Effective and consistent professional support during ITE, NQT induction, early career teaching and for more experienced qualified teachers is an essential component for retention.

#### *Opportunities to promote knowledge and skills*

- 3.4 Some saw teaching as an opportunity to fulfil and share a passion for a subject (highlighted mainly by secondary school teachers and those pursuing secondary ITE courses). Teaching also offered Welsh speakers the opportunity to promote the Welsh language as part of their daily work.

#### *Opportunities for creative professionalism*

- 3.5 The expectation of a degree of autonomy over the working day was a theme in the literature review and emerged on occasion as an attractive factor among ITE students and young people with an interest in teaching.

#### *A structured career*

- 3.6 The potential for job security and career progression within teaching, alongside factors such as holiday entitlements, were also contributing to the attractions of teaching and to retention. However, they were much less important than working with learners and enabling them to fulfil their potential, as reflected in the literature review.
- 3.7 While there was a need to promote the attractions of school leadership, it was sometimes recognised that not all teachers want to be Heads or Deputy Heads. The potential for teachers to progress to other forms of school leadership (e.g. leading on a curriculum area, supporting learners with specific needs) was not a key factor that currently contributed to participants' motivation to teach.

## **Factors that discourage individuals from considering a teaching career in Wales and contribute to them leaving the profession**

### *Overarching messages*

- 3.8 Some young people were deterred from the idea of becoming primary teachers by perceptions such as bureaucracy, dealing with parents, the lack of opportunities to engage with a particular subject, the level of intellectual stimulus they would have in secondary rather than primary schools, and the emotional/physical demands of a primary school teacher's role. Factors putting young people off secondary school teaching centred on managing teenagers and perceptions of stress. These examples were in addition to the broader concern with workload.
- 3.9 There were concerns with the image of teaching. Some young people believed that they could access higher salaries with less stress and workload by pursuing other careers.
- 3.10 Negative perceptions of teaching (e.g. with workload) encountered via a range of sources were thought to discourage people from becoming teachers.

### *Tackling workload issues*

- 3.11 Teachers' workload and stress were major factors that were off-putting for potential entrants, early career teachers and prompted some teachers to leave the profession. Participants emphasised the need to reduce the amount of data collection and to ensure such data is used. They also suggested a review of school systems to minimise the number of targets they were required to respond to; and to reduce bureaucracy. Participants stressed the need for more time to reflect on practice and develop the strategies to enable them to balance the demands of the role.

### *The need for more support*

- 3.12 The research identified the importance of supporting teachers and developing a culture in which they feel able to admit to struggling including around mental health and wellbeing, underpinned by visible support channels. Some qualified teachers mentioned a lack of support from school leaders as a reason for leaving teaching.
- 3.13 An individual's reasons for leaving teaching can be complex: the research suggests several factors can combine to lead a teacher to move on.

## **Other key issues highlighted in the research**

### *Remuneration and financial incentives*

- 3.14 Overall, qualified teachers and ITE students did not identify pay as the key motivation to want to teach. Even so, an adequate salary was felt to be important among young people and serving teachers. Furthermore, the level of remuneration and perceived job security for those in stable posts were factors that contributed to remaining in the profession. However, some did not think remuneration reflected the volume of teachers' work.
- 3.15 Financial incentives to enter teaching were a helpful bonus for some, but there is potential for this to be regarded as unfair. For example, incentives that depended on the degree attained by a student were sometimes queried on the grounds that degree attainment was not necessarily a sign of a good teacher.
- 3.16 Incentives in England were perceived as more visible than those in Wales. Also, it was not always clear to participants that the incentives were aimed at attracting applicants to teach in England.
- 3.17 There were cases where young people were attracted to teach in England because of the incentive difference with Wales. This raises the question of how prevalent this intention is and how likely it is that those who move to England intend to do so for a fixed period.

### *Recruiting to ITE*

- 3.18 ITE providers emphasised the positive difference teaching can make and how rewarding it could be. They sought candidates who demonstrated a sense of commitment to teaching as a career, and looked favourably on applicants who had shown a previous commitment (e.g. through relevant work experience).
- 3.19 The research identified the importance of forging and maintaining links with potential teachers and targeting young people earlier in schools. This should include establishing closer links with careers advisers and keeping in touch with people who had expressed an interest in teaching to maintain their interest as they pursued their degree courses.
- 3.20 The research and literature review found that some people may become interested in pursuing a career in teaching at different stages of their lives. This emphasises the need to ensure that opportunities are available and supported for people to enter teaching at these different stages.

- 3.21 The research indicated the practical importance of ensuring that accurate and up-to-date information is made available to potential teachers. This should also be clear about matters such as equivalency tests for GCSE qualifications.

### *Marketing strategies*

- 3.22 The need for more targeted recruitment campaigns was highlighted on occasion among ITE Centres and stakeholders. There are opportunities to develop further understanding of which groups should be targeted and how best to refine the key messages. Targeting those looking for a career change would extend the pool of potential teachers.
- 3.23 Young people were aware of marketing campaigns, including those from ITE providers from England, which emphasised the incentives in England. There was less awareness of recruitment campaigns for Wales. As result, there did not appear to be in Wales a clear, consistent and prominent message on the benefits of choosing to teach.
- 3.24 Some participants referred to the negative role the media can play when reporting on teaching, including how issues that might arise in England could leak into the Wales narrative. The extent to which there is an issue with the image and regard for the profession needs to be assessed.

### *Preparing for ITE*

- 3.25 Prior to training, some current teachers and ITE students sought as much experience as possible. Others had developed an interest in teaching having spent time working with young people, including through youth and community work. This highlighted the value of opportunities for potential teachers to have worked as much as possible with children and young people before making their decision to train as teachers.

### *Early career issues*

- 3.26 The importance of the quality and consistency of mentoring for all practitioners in the early years of their careers as well as at ITE is a key message. In particular:
- The need for mentors to have the required training and to be given time to devote to the role;
  - Mentors needed the personal attributes which meant they were approachable and supportive;

- Ensuring mentors provided high-quality feedback as part of their support.
- 3.27 It was suggested that early career teachers could develop the role of supporting those at NQT induction alongside more experienced colleagues. Such arrangements needed to be in the context of a culture of support for all teachers in a school.
- 3.28 Providing this support was important in order to retain teachers in the early years of their careers.
- 3.29 Some ITE staff felt that a minority of trainee teachers would have benefitted from a longer PGCE.

### **Overarching conclusions**

- 3.30 To conclude, there is a need for a holistic approach to dealing with teacher retention that includes taking steps to support teachers and addressing stress and workload. These issues also affect teacher recruitment. Matters relating to effective careers advice and guidance, improving communication campaigns and highlighting positive messages about the role, were also evident in discussions about the attractiveness of teaching as a career.

## **4. Research implications**

- 4.1 Described below are key policy implications arising from the research. They have been grouped as implications for Welsh Government, ITE providers, Local Authorities / Regional Education Consortia and schools although there is some overlap.

### **Key themes for policy**

- 4.2 Teaching is a recognised, respected profession that is crucial to the future of Wales. This is a key message and should be integral to all strategies and clearly communicated by the Welsh Government and its partners.
- 4.3 Teaching is an exciting opportunity to make a positive difference to the life chances of children and young people. The new curriculum arrangements mean that teachers in Wales have opportunities to be creative and innovative in shaping what is learned and in responding to learners' individual needs. This presents an opportunity to promote teaching as an exciting and fulfilling opportunity in which professionals will enjoy considerable autonomy to fulfil their professional roles.

- 4.4 In relation to data collection, the evidence suggests that there is a need for schools, Regional Consortia, Estyn, and the Welsh Government to be clear about what needs to be collected (with the aim being to minimise data collection and maximise the use of existing data) and to be clear about what data is required for formative and accountability purposes. The findings from this research need to be considered in light of current discussions about future accountability and inspection arrangements.

## **Implications for Welsh Government**

### *Use of incentives*

- 4.5 The implications of incentives in both Wales and England to attract potential entrants, especially where there are shortages of teachers, need to be acknowledged and understood. This needs to be on the basis of quantitative evidence of trends and qualitative evidence about individuals' choices and the impact of financial incentives on their decisions.

### *Routes into teaching*

- 4.6 The research indicated potential benefits in creating flexible routes into teaching to enable people to train to enter teaching at different points. Further work is required to maximise the role of those support staff (including TAs, LSAs and cover supervisors) who have the potential to become teachers. This could be in the form of:
- a) a marketing campaign targeted at support staff with the potential to be great teachers to encourage them to consider undertaking ITE to develop their careers;
  - b) the creation of bespoke routes into ITE for those with over four years' experience of working as teaching support staff who meet set standards for entry.
- 4.7 Those contemplating teaching benefit from having gained experience as support staff prior to starting a course leading to QTS. It would be undesirable (and indeed counterproductive) to make previous experience as support staff a requirement for entry onto a course leading to QTS. However, there is a need to consider how to strengthen the opportunities for those considering ITE to gain potentially valuable classroom experience as support staff.

### *Recruitment strategies*

- 4.8 The research suggests the need for a strategic approach to recruiting teachers, where responsibility for promoting teaching as a career, and using an evidence-based approach to ITE recruitment targets, is led by one organisation in partnership with other key

stakeholders (such as ITE providers). It would be beneficial for the lead organisation to promote awareness of teaching as a profession through targeted marketing and high-quality and timely careers advice and guidance, by working closely with CEAG providers, ITE providers, schools, HEIs and other partners.

- 4.9 The evidence on the impact and effectiveness of current recruitment strategies, in particular the current Discover Teaching campaign, is not robust at present. This suggests a need to consider establishing a clear audit of existing practice and the impact of current recruitment strategies.

### **Implications for ITE providers**

- 4.10 ITE providers should ensure that accurate and up-to-date information is provided to potential applicants on entry requirements and equivalency tests.
- 4.11 In light of evidence from outside Wales about the length of induction periods, there may be a need to evaluate the effectiveness of the arrangements for formal induction of NQTs. The support needs of schools where NQTs are employed and the level of input that should be expected from ITE providers should also be considered as part of the work of embedding reforms to ITE provision in Wales.
- 4.12 ITE providers and Estyn will continue to monitor the quality of mentoring of ITE students. The Welsh Government should consider using this evidence to determine whether further development work is required and to identify good practice to support the sector.

### **Implications for Local Authorities / Regional Education Consortia**

#### *Support for teachers*

- 4.13 Existing support channels for teachers may need to be promoted more effectively. Local Authorities should ensure that the available support is accessible and that practitioners are aware of the help they could access and that they are encouraged to seek help when necessary. This should be as part of a culture which emphasises that it is acceptable to ask for support.

## Implications for schools

### *Workload issues*

- 4.14 There is concern about the workload of senior and middle leaders as an issue affecting retention and recruitment to those roles. This implies a need to make it easier for individuals to contribute as school leaders, possibly through more flexible working arrangements (such as part-time working).

#### Report Authors

The logo for Beaufort Research, consisting of the word "beaufortresearch" in white lowercase letters on a dark purple rectangular background.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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