

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Response of the General Teaching Council for Wales on the National Assembly for Wales Policy Review on the 'School of the Future'

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for Wales is the statutory, self-regulating professional body for teachers in Wales. It seeks to raise the status of teaching by maintaining and promoting the highest standards of professional practice and conduct in the interests of teachers, pupils and the general public.

The Council aims to provide an independent, representative and authoritative voice for the teaching profession in Wales and seeks to provide robust advice to the Welsh Assembly Government and other organisations on teaching issues.

2. The Council welcomes the opportunity of contributing to the Policy review by the Welsh Assembly Government on the 'School of the Future', and will limit its remarks to issues that fall within its remit.

Preliminary Issues

3. The Council would wish to make the following points which we believe are very relevant to the context in which the review is being carried out and the nature of this response:
 - The school is a building but also a learning community. Much of what follows in this submission relates to the practice of learning in the school of the future.
 - Schools are, nevertheless, located in buildings and the Council notes the need to ensure that all schools of the future are located in buildings that are conducive to learning of the future. The current standard of some school buildings is a cause for serious concern and is a factor acting against efforts to improve standards. We cannot expect 21st century education systems to function in 19th century school buildings. The Assembly will need to invest significantly in school buildings, if the vision of future learning in the school of the future is to come to fruition.

It is, therefore, important to be clear about the meaning of the term 'school' when engaging in this debate.

4. The Council strongly questions the omission of the future role of teachers from the remit of the 'School of the Future' policy review. The success of any school is dependent on the quality of the teachers it employs. Teaching and supporting learning is a complex process and the expertise of trained professionals is of paramount importance in this.
5. We would suggest that any review of the role of schools is incomplete without this consideration. Given that the Committee is encouraging 'blue skies'

thinking in the policy review, the Council will direct some of its comments to the question of the future of the teaching profession within the school of the future. The Council is also considering developing a parallel discussion document on the 'Future of the Teaching Profession' and would be prepared to submit a more detailed report on this to the Committee, if considered helpful.

Teachers within the school of the future

6. In the school of the future we would see greater trust on the part of government and society in the professional judgement of teachers. We envisage an education system in Wales in which accountability is based on teachers' professionalism rather than the current over-emphasis on external accountability as perhaps demonstrated through the current inspection arrangements and target setting. The Council, which is a self-regulatory professional body, is already playing a role in demonstrating how the teaching profession has itself become professionally accountable through the development of a Professional Code for Teachers and through the investigation and hearing of cases involving teachers' professional misconduct and incompetence.

The Council also sees teaching in the school of the future as working in a rather different way to that which has traditionally been the practice, in particular in the following ways:

Teachers as managers of other adults

7. We see teachers in the school of the future as no longer working as individuals in classrooms but as managers of teams of support staff. Teachers would retain their responsibility for directing learning of pupils but will have the support of suitably qualified staff such as teaching assistants, administration staff, technicians and pastoral support workers. We see school managers concluding that employing teachers to undertake administrative and certain pastoral activities is not an effective deployment of a highly trained resource. As a result, teachers would be able to concentrate on their core work of teaching but they would have teaching assistants to work with small groups and individuals pupils within the classroom, and administrators to assist in, for example, the preparation of resources, the collection of statistics and other information.
8. The Assembly will need to ensure there is sufficient funding available to employ support staff but the increased investment will be rewarded by an improvement in standards as teachers are able to spend more time on their core activity of teaching.
9. With the change in the role of the teacher there will also need to be a change in the initial and ongoing development and training of teachers to ensure they have the necessary management skills to work with other adults in the wider team and to maximise the impact of the support staff.

Teachers as managers of resources

10. Teachers should have a far greater range of resources at their disposal and this would enable them to provide a variety of opportunities for pupils which

will stimulate learning. Much of this will be ICT related (see paras 27-30 below).

Teachers as learners

11. The School of the Future may have a greater recognition as a 'learning organisation' with teachers playing a full part as learners as well as educators. All teachers should have the opportunity to participate in regular CPD activities resulting from professional dialogue within schools. Schools themselves need to be 'learning communities' for teaching staff. Additionally, teachers need to be given the opportunity to further develop by undertaking research, visiting other schools and by being given time to undertake development projects. The Council's advice document "*Continuing Professional Development – An Entitlement for All*" outlines our views on a professional development system for the future.
12. The remainder of this response follows the order of issues set out in the Committee's consultation invitation document of August 2002.

The school as a community resource

13. All schools should aim to be more firmly embedded in their surrounding communities, reflecting the needs of those communities and thereby enhancing the diverse range of experiences available in the community they serve. Schools should aim to develop a partnership between home and school in support of pupils. This could involve providing support for parents to ensure that they are able to provide the necessary conditions for their children to function in school. Schools need to interact with their communities through members serving on governing bodies, links with local industry and other organisations and through developing relationships with organisations such as other education providers. The school of the future could foster these links in order to provide an enhanced range of opportunities for its pupils.
14. Consideration needs to be given to developing ICT links between the home and school which could improve the role of the home in pupils' learning.
15. In addition to benefiting from inputs from the community, the school of the future may better be able to contribute as a provider of learning for the local community. The school of the future will possess a wide range of resources (e.g. art areas, workshops, theatre & music facilities) which can be utilised outside school hours. Many schools currently open their premises to adult education courses in the evenings and, therefore, contribute to the wider learning of the community. By making the school available as a wider learning resource for the community, schools and local authorities can spread the cost of new resources and provide enhanced opportunities for all their learners.
16. In many rural areas, schools can often serve as focal points for the community, providing places where adults can learn, relax and engage in social activities outside school hours. Where school premises can be developed with tailor made areas and annexes, schools can provide focal points for wider activities, including leisure, during school hours.

17. The Council considers that limiting the use of school buildings to 195 days a year is not an effective use of resources and suggests the Assembly, LEAs and schools investigate how this significant resource can be better utilised. However, the increased utilisation of school buildings should not lead to an increase in the workload of school managers. Resources need to be provided to support this work, with possibly a role for LEAs in co-ordinating this activity.

Use of, and developments in, information technology

18. The school of the future will make extensive use of the latest Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Through the use of ICT, schools will be able to enhance the opportunities available to pupils and make use of the wide range of resources that will be available from sources such as the World Wide Web and educational CD ROMs and their technological successors.
19. The use of ICT can also enhance the teachers work while preparing lessons. We would see the National Grid for Learning well established in schools and a natural focus for teachers' planning and sharing of lessons. The Assembly needs to ensure that the necessary support exists to enable schools to maximise the benefit from this relationship.
20. Teachers will need to have access to high quality training to ensure that they are fully able to maximise the opportunities provided by new technologies. To date, despite efforts by government through NOF funded training, many teachers do not have a level of ICT understanding which allows them to embed technologies into their teaching or into the management of their work in schools. This will require the Assembly Government, providers of Initial Education and Training and providers of ongoing professional development to develop to a much larger degree the level and quality of the ICT training funded and delivered.
21. Schools will have an important role in ensuring that pupils are prepared for the world of work by having the necessary ICT skills. This will include developing keyboard skills or the use of voice-activated software that may take the place of the keyboard in the future. The school curriculum will also need to be sufficiently flexible to prepare pupils to react to rapid change in the available technologies.
22. The administration of schools will be greatly improved by significant investment in ICT. All schools should have electronic registration processes to improve the monitoring of pupil attendance. ICT will also be used to record information from assessment which is helpful to inform teachers' day to day decisions about pupils' progress and to assist in report writing. It would be important that increased efficiency in school administration is used to reduce the bureaucratic administrative burdens on teachers through the employment of administrative, secretarial and ICT support staff. This will greatly reduce the currently excessive workload of teachers and enable teachers to get on with their core function of teaching and supporting the learning and development of pupils.
23. The impact of developments in ICT is largely dependent on schools having the available resources. Controllers of school budgets, be they at Assembly, LEA or school level will need to make hard decisions regarding the technology that will be purchased. While not all schools will be able to continually update their resources and have the latest ICT equipment, the

Assembly needs to ensure a sufficient investment of funding to ensure that all schools are properly resourced and are able to regularly update their hardware to take advantage of ICT developments. As a minimum all schools should be networked, all teachers and learners should have their own e-mail addresses and all should have ready access to PCs or laptop computers within the classroom.

24. Regarding software, the commissioning of CD ROMs and programmes which can be put on the NGfL Cymru, will increasingly not only target an all-Wales perspective (which is the focus of current commissioning of bi-lingual resources) but also reflect the needs of localities and areas of Wales in order to encourage greater relevance to learners. In addition, there is a need to utilise technological developments to provide a greater range of resources in Welsh and also to support developments that are unique to Wales such as the Curriculum Cymreig.

Teaching Methods

25. Teaching is a complex and skilled art which requires adapting a range of teaching styles and approaches to different situations and pupils. We do not see this core challenge of the adaptation and appropriateness of teaching as changing significantly in the school of the future.
26. However, in the school of the future, teachers may be able to give greater consideration to the preferred learning styles of their pupils and adopt a range of teaching styles for different situations. There will always be a continuing need to ensure that methods of teaching are appropriate for each Key Stage. We also see greater consideration being given to planning for continuity in schools of the future.
27. The development of technology referred to above may help teachers to adapt their teaching to the needs of individual pupils. ICT will better enable pupils to learn at their own pace and to their own abilities although for early years and infants the role of the teacher will always be more significant than for older pupils. There will be opportunities for an element of on-line assessment of pupils' work to assist in developing and consolidating learning. School managers will need to give consideration to the needs of pupils in providing teaching support with younger pupils needing more support from teachers than older pupils.
28. We see the challenge for teachers of the future in developing aspects of their role, particularly as facilitators of learning and mentors of individual pupils, in addition to their roles teachers of whole classes and groups.
29. It has been stated that a significant proportion of what pupils will need to use in their future lives has not yet been invented. This illustrates that inculcating a love of learning and a facility of 'learning how to learn' will be a much more central theme behind future curriculum design and pedagogy.
30. During recent years there has been constant change in the field of education, often without a proper period to pilot, evaluate and introduce new initiatives. Changes in the future will have a better chance of success if they are based on valid research, are developed through a wide and extensive consultation which fully involves the teaching profession and are piloted fully over an extended period before they are introduced.

Curriculum

31. Although Council does not have a direct remit for advising on the curriculum, it believes that curriculum and associated assessment design is central to one of the Council's aims as set out in the Teaching and Higher Education Act , namely, "to contribute to the improving of the standards of teaching and the quality of learning". It therefore offers the following as a stimulus to the thinking encouraged by the policy review.
32. The RSA Report on Redefining the Curriculum (1999) says that no-one in their consultation thought that education would look the same in twenty years as it does now. While there was no consensus on a strategy to transform education, there was widespread agreement on the need for a new strategy capable of transforming what young people learn and how they learn; a strategy that would be more appropriate to equip young people to face an increasingly complex world where many old certainties have disappeared. The teaching of skills such as global citizenship to better prepare pupils for the challenges ahead of them will be significant in this regard.
33. According to the RSA, reforming the curriculum so that it is competence-led, instead of information-led, would be the most effective strategy for doing this. The broad requirements of current legislation would remain, but within this the curriculum would aim to develop in each individual the range of competences they will need to manage their lives and their work. This desire, of course, needs to be balanced against the development of a core knowledge base for pupils, alongside understanding and skills as defined in the revised National Curriculum.
34. There would be far-reaching implications to such a change but this could be the driver for change in both the training of teachers and the structure of schools. There could possibly be less socialisation of teachers into subject groups, flatter systems of management, and a more integrated experience for pupils.
35. A reform of the curriculum on these lines would fit in with focusing education in the future on learning, rather than teaching. Taking what is best for learners as a starting point overturns many of the conditions of education that are currently taken for granted. There have been great advances in knowledge of individual learning styles in recent years that are only gradually having impact on teaching with some children still not be being taught in a manner suited to their learning style preference. Understanding individual processes of thinking and individual learning preferences are metacognitive abilities that have been recognised as being essential for dealing with the complexities of a professional role such as teaching, and children can be taught to understand these aspects of themselves. They are invaluable requisites for the complexity of 21st century life.
36. The Council is aware of proposals to introduce a Foundation Stage for ages 3 to 7. While the Council will take the opportunity to comment on the proposals when they are published for consultation, we consider it essential that care is taken in planning this activity. This stage will only provide a sound foundation

for the learning of all pupils if it is introduced following thorough planning and lengthy piloting.

37. There can be no consideration of curriculum without associated assessment. In the school of the future, we see assessment for the purpose of assisting teachers to better identify the next learning steps for pupils as being paramount, with summative assessment emerging from teachers' on-going professional judgements, rather than the current emphasis on separate 'assessment occasions' for summative purposes (e.g. end of key stage tests).

Funding

38. The success of the school of the future is dependent on the provision of sufficient resources to enable investment in ICT equipment, support staff, professional development opportunities and also a sufficient number of teachers. The Council will not comment on methods of allocating funding but there is a need to ensure that the school of the future is funded as a community that provides a range of opportunities for its pupils.

Adding value to the education and school experience.

39. In addition to providing formal education, schools also provide a range of other opportunities for pupils e.g. enhanced opportunities for pupils in leisure and creative areas as well as in academic subjects. The school of the future may work within a framework of accreditation which might include devolved powers to accredit some of these activities.

Changing school patterns

40. The Council is aware of the current debate on the structure of the school year but does not consider it within its remit. We suggest that the Assembly ensures that any changes are based on empirical evidence that is able to prove benefits for both pupils, parents, teachers and society at large.

Conclusion

41. The Council values the opportunity to comment on the 'School of the Future' and considers that this exercise can be used as a means of developing a long-term strategy for the development of schools. However, the Council reiterates the central importance of teachers in the school of the future and encourages the Assembly to ensure that all teachers are fully prepared to maximise the opportunities which will emanate from the Committee's policy review .