



Prifysgol Cymru  
Y Drindod Dewi Sant  
University of Wales  
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa  
Institute of Education  
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

# Wales Education Commission

Meeting Four: Monday 5th November 2018  
Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea, SA1 1RR

[www.athrofa.cymru](http://www.athrofa.cymru)

# Wales Education Commission

Present: Professor Dylan Jones, Dean, Yr Athrofa, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Professor David Woods, Warwick and London universities; Professor Mick Waters, Wolverhampton University; Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Director Violence and Society Research Group, Cardiff University; Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales; Professor Peter Rabbett, Yr Athrofa, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Gareth Evans, Yr Athrofa, University of Wales Trinity Saint David; Tegwen Ellis, Headteacher, Ysgol Cynwyd Sant, Bridgend; Russell Dwyer, Headteacher, St Thomas Community Primary School, Swansea; Michele Thomas, Headteacher, Pembroke Dock Community School, Pembrokeshire.

The fourth meeting of the Wales Education Commission reconvened an international panel of distinguished educationalists to share their expertise in support of the Welsh Government's work to improve education. The Commission has signed up to be an independent voice, critical friend and source of advice to the education community. A core element of Yr Athrofa, the Institute of Education, the Commission ensures that we are outward-facing, learning from the best practice and most effective research on teaching and learning, leadership and the development of a self-improving system.

This meeting of the Wales Education Commission signalled a slightly different approach, in that leading practitioners working in Welsh schools were for the first time invited to join in the discussions, as guests of Yr Athrofa. These new, visiting members of the Commission, are all respected headteachers who have a reputation for providing high-quality teaching and learning, and a keen interest in educational developments outside of their own jurisdiction.

The meeting came at an interesting time for education in Wales and coincided with the launch of a new National Approach to Professional Learning for the teaching profession in Wales. Matters relating to professional learning therefore formed the basis for the meeting, which was split into two distinct parts. The first invited four Commission members to present their views on the challenges of educational leadership and their implications for Wales.

These included:

- Teaching: A Valued Profession – Findings from the independent review of school teachers' pay and conditions (Professor Mick Waters)
- The Nine Pillars of Great Schools – School improvement and the implications for teachers (Professor David Woods)
- The Chartered College of Teaching – Key developments and lessons for Wales (Professor Jonathan Shepherd)
- Qualifications, reform and the implications for professional learning (Philip Blaker)

The meeting's second part focussed on the developing National Approach to Professional Learning, and sought reflections on the Welsh Government's vision for professional learning in Wales. Members were shown an early iteration of the new National Approach and invited to comment on the constituent elements of the model as it appeared in draft form. The meeting concluded with a contribution from Education Minister Kirsty Williams and her team, who presented written questions to the Commission for deliberation. Previous reports emanating from the Commission have been welcomed by Ms Williams and thus the Cabinet Secretary was again invited to ask members for their views on a series of issues. Her questions were taken in turn and fuelled healthy debate among members.

# Teaching: A Valued Profession

The Commission began by taking evidence from Professor Mick Waters, lead author of *Teaching: A Valued Profession* – the independent review of school teachers’ pay and conditions in Wales. Professor Waters’ report put forward a number of recommendations through which a ‘Career, Conditions and Pay Framework for School Teachers in Wales’ can be achieved. The report was published in September 2018 and the Welsh Government has yet to formally respond to its findings. Professor Waters was invited to present key findings from the report and an open discussion of the points raised followed, during which the following observations were made:

- The Commission considered it appropriate to ‘re-think’ compulsory schooling and suggested that nothing should be ‘off the table’ and dismissed out of hand as Wales continues on its ambitious journey of educational reform. This was considered particularly applicable to the formation of the school week and potential changes to timetabling. Having more flexibility in this regard was seen as welcome.
- Members said a ‘national conversation’ to consider matters relating to school structures, teachers’ working conditions and professional development opportunities would provide more space in which to debate perennial issues effectively. It was suggested that changes to existing practices would be better done ‘bottom-up’ than by policymakers from on high.
- The value of INSET (In-Service Educational Training) days was called into question, and members doubted whether increasing statutory INSET days from five to seven would in fact support effective professional development. There was a general feeling that if the existing five days were ineffective, then increasing those days to seven would result in yet more ineffective learning opportunities. It was suggested that the quality of INSET days was more important than quantity.
- The Commission welcomed the possibility of developing ‘system leaders’ in the truest sense; e.g. headteachers that are employed nationally to support schools across the country on a needs basis. These ‘leaders for Wales’ would be parachuted into schools in most need, rather than stay in charge of their current school only. It was recognised, however, that lines of accountability and headteacher salaries would need to be worked through.
- Members suggested that teachers had to be more proactive in terms of their own professional development, and take control of their own learning journeys. It was noted that a number of experienced teachers in Wales (and further afield) choose to stay in their established positions for the duration of their careers and, in some cases, ‘stifle opportunities’ that may be available to others who are more ambitious.
- The possibility of partner universities being used to support INSET days was discussed, and members noted a positive impact resulting from the instances in which higher education colleagues had been invited into school to support staff development.

# The Nine Pillars of Great Schools

The Commission heard from Professor David Woods, Chairman of the London Leadership Strategy (LLS). The LLS is a not-for-profit organisation that is run and led by serving headteachers. It is born out of the ‘London Challenge’ programme and works to keep its spirit and mission alive. The LLS lays claim to an extensive network of National Leaders of Education and a network of outstanding schools leading learning across England. Professor Woods presented on school improvement in London and the implications for teachers. An open discussion of the points raised followed and the following observations were made:

- Members noted the importance of schools being ‘outward-facing’ when embarking on a process of systematic improvement. It was suggested that schools could undertake a process of ‘show and tell’ with colleagues in other schools in a bid to share practice and learn from the experience of others. This could include both positive and negative experiences. Case studies were also seen as beneficial in this context.
- The role of ‘moral capital’ in underpinning the London Challenge was discussed. Members noted that one of the fundamental features that made the London model successful was recognition that there was no real additional funding available – and that the motivation for getting the better performing schools to share their learning was to embed a sense of moral capital, that motivated teachers to think about their role of improving the outcomes for all London’s children.
- The Commission worried about teachers’ understanding and use of data, and the use of data for accountability purposes. It was suggested that more extensive conversations around data for learner development and school improvement purposes was required. Members called for the development of a ‘common language’ with regards to data and what it means for teachers in the classroom.
- Members questioned whether “Wales knows what Wales knows” and championed a more strategic sharing of good practice. They called on the system at large to be better adept at celebrating Wales’ best schools and teachers – and not to shy away from the variation that exists between providers.
- Members bemoaned a lack of confidence in identifying and designating the best schools and leaders to lead school improvement – and championed a process akin to “the best helping the rest”. They called on educators across the system to celebrate better the excellent or ‘world class’ educational practice in Wales.

# The Chartered College of Teaching

The Commission invited Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Director of the Violence and Society Research Group, Cardiff University, to present on the Chartered College of Teaching. Professor Shepherd is a founding fellow and trustee of the Chartered College, which exists to improve the quality of education for children and young people by supporting teachers, championing great teaching and raising the status of the profession. The organisation operates predominantly in England, but is in the process of developing more of a presence in Wales. An open discussion of the points raised followed and the following observations were made:

- It was suggested that Wales should consider the ‘anatomy of teaching’, and what key elements make the profession tick. The education inspectorate, trade unions and universities (which help facilitate a research base) were considered significant.
- A strong case was made for the introduction of a professional body that is ‘bottom-up’ and driven by teachers themselves. This body would offer members an ‘independent national voice’ that the Commission determined would help ‘raise the status’ of the profession and bring confidence to the education workforce in Wales.

- Members noted that a professional body would allow teachers a platform to engage, on a national basis, with latest research and evidence related to teaching and learning, and make collective decisions based on these findings. The fact that such a professional body would not carry a regulatory duty was considered an important distinction.
- The potential for introducing an awards scheme into the body was noted, with incentives to excel deemed important in helping to raise the status and performance of the teaching profession more generally. Awards would celebrate success and reward those teachers considered to be experts in their field.
- Members noted that seed funding may be required to establish such an organisation, and that the Welsh Government might be minded to support a professional body financially. It was suggested that teachers themselves need to have a say on what a professional body like the Chartered College of Teaching might look like in Wales.

# Qualifications, reform and the implications for professional learning

Philip Blaker, Chief Executive of Qualifications Wales, was invited to present to members on the future of post-16 qualifications in Wales. Policymakers have acknowledged that qualifications will need to align to the developing national curriculum and that this may have implications for GCSEs and A-levels. Both GCSEs and A-levels have undergone significant changes in recent years and the qualifications system in Wales has diverged considerably from that currently operating in England. Mr Blaker provided a brief overview of these changes and posed a number of questions regarding the future of qualifications in Wales, after which the following observations were made:

- Members noted that qualifications must change in order to bring about a change in the practice of and content provided by secondary schools, in particular. The focus on the C-D boundary at GCSE level was considered hugely significant. Members said the case for change was made stronger by the fact that all facets of Wales’ education system was undergoing a process of change.
- The Commission acknowledged the public confidence in the GCSE brand, which was something policymakers would need to consider carefully if planning significant changes to qualifications at age 16. That universities were placing more emphasis on GCSE performance made this all the more pertinent, said members.
- The new structure supporting Wales’ national curriculum does pose a number of challenges, most notably what qualifications arise from Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). Members noted the difficulty of integrating, e.g. humanities, and questioned which of the more ‘traditional’ subjects would be retained in the new qualifications system.
- How external assessment fits within Wales’ accountability system was the cause for considerable debate, and members resolved that the latter must change in order for Wales’ ambitious reform agenda to fit into place. Indeed, it was suggested that teacher-led assessment and high-stakes accountability ‘are not good bedfellows’.
- Despite the large amount of subsidiarity afforded by Wales’ new national curriculum, it was stressed that specifications are still required to ensure that qualifications are taught consistently and fairly across schools.

- Conversely, it was suggested that steps should be taken to ensure teachers do not resort to ‘teaching to the test’ and Wales should make every effort to prevent a reductionist model from evolving. Members noted that, traditionally, ‘what gets measured gets done’ and that perverse incentives should be properly considered.
- The need to ensure pupils, parents and teachers have confidence in qualifications was considered paramount. The probably professional learning implications for teachers as a result of the qualifications overhaul was also noted.
- Members warned of the potential for high achieving schools to administer the new curriculum and associated qualifications better than those schools that are deemed to be struggling. It was suggested that schools that had less confidence in their ability to interpret the new system may revert back to a more reductionist model.
- The Commission considered whether a more project-based approach to assessment would fit better within the new national curriculum. A shift from a predominantly exam-based system to one that is more coursework-led was discussed. Adaptive, digitally-delivered assessment was also referenced.
- The apparent disparity between vocational and academic qualifications was discussed. Members noted that vocational qualifications do not currently have a strong, universal badge and that this was problematic.
- The Commission welcomed the fact that there was a fairly long lead-in to the introduction of the new curriculum, and that there would be a phased roll-out on a year-by-year basis. This, members said, would allow a more considered response to the development of qualifications and give Wales the best chance of developing a system that was fit for purpose.

# National Approach to Professional Learning

The meeting's second part focussed on the developing National Approach to Professional Learning, and sought reflections on the Welsh Government's vision for professional learning in Wales. The National Approach to Professional Learning seeks to address shortcomings relating to existing provision by giving the education system in Wales a model of eight interconnected elements that: Describe the Welsh Government's expectations of the system's behaviour, and so make policy and resourcing decisions transparent to the middle tier and schools; express design criteria for professional learning activities, resources and processes, and so guide providers across the system on how provision and experiences should be designed; and set out the entitlement of all participants in the system, so that leaders and practitioners across all schools and settings know what to expect from the middle tier in terms of provision and support. Members were shown an early iteration of the new National Approach and invited to comment on the constituent elements of the model as it appeared in draft form. The following observations were made:

- Members expressed some concern that another 'model' was being added to an already-crowded system. They suggested that with new Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership, and the Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model, there was a risk of over-burdening schools yet further. It was suggested that adding additional structures could confuse the system, rather than make life easier for practitioners.
- The Commission noted that, while useful in principle, the document supporting the National Approach to Professional Learning had been written by government officials and not the profession itself. It was stressed that the National Approach was for school leaders and their staff to adopt and build upon – and should, ultimately, be owned by teachers. Rather than reinventing the wheel, members suggested it would be more appropriate to build on what we have already got and fill the gaps in provision from there.

- Members called for schools to be allowed a certain amount of subsidiarity in how they take forward the National Approach to Professional Learning in their own contexts. It was suggested that it was the responsibility of schools themselves to 'make sense' of the expectations included in the document, and that no strict demands of schools should be made. This relates to previous points that teachers need to take ownership of their own learning journeys. A 'dependent model' of professional learning is not what is required, said members.
- The Commission recommended that schools undertake an 'audit' of their own professional learning provision/needs, and seek out support from middle tier organisations and colleagues in other schools to fill identified holes. Members said it was up to schools to determine where they are on their own professional learning journeys. This, they said, could develop into a portfolio of expertise that could be shared more widely among clusters of schools.
- Members warned against telling schools who to work with and when. They suggested this must be an organic process that is led by schools and not directed to schools by ruling administrations. Schools must be empowered to make their own decisions, they said.

# Questions from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

The Commission was asked to consider, drawing on their experience, the following questions from Cabinet Secretary Kirsty Williams and her team:

## 1. With regards to the recruitment and retention of teachers, is it better to accept it should not be a career-long profession for everybody and facilitate many more entry and exit point for professionals to diversify the workforce? If so, how would this change the professional learning demands?

- Members suggested that it was incumbent on schools to recognise and make best use of the expertise that exists within their own classrooms. It was also suggested that teaching staff should be encouraged to undertake additional qualifications as this would benefit the whole school, not just the individual in question.
- Teacher confidence was considered a big issue, and the Commission again suggested that raising the status of the profession and giving teachers greater control over their development was crucial to improving rates of recruitment and retention. Members also questioned the availability of professional learning opportunities and suggested that some practitioners may not be able to access the professional development they desire.
- The Schools as Learning Organisations (SLO) model was considered beneficial, but members doubted that schools were fully aware of it and what it entails. It was suggested that only schools that had been piloting the SLO model were au fait with its principles, and broader communication was required to bring more schools onboard.
- Members discussed the possibility of introducing 'pedagogical leaders' into school staffing structures to better support teachers, teaching and professional development. These leaders would be specialists in pedagogy and be employed, at least in part, to support colleagues to develop. They would also help co-ordinate professional learning opportunities and help broker professional support as appropriate.
- Members considered the benefits of introducing an 'asymmetric week', with one member in particular hugely energised by the positive impact it has had on their own school. Releasing half a day a week for professional learning activities has come at no cost to the school and doubled the professional development time available to teachers, they said. Parents were also said to be in favour of the move.

• The Commission suggested that an evaluation of all policy and process at every level of the system was required to determine what was working and what was not. Only then, it was argued, would policymakers be able to take an informed view as to what was required moving forward.

• Members stressed that recruitment and retention would be better if people know that teaching is a career-long and well-established profession. It therefore follows that professional learning should be available to all, whenever they choose to access it.

## 2. What is the right balance between national system-level professional learning provision and locally-organised and planned offer (especially when in the middle of complete system reform)?

- The Commission warned that there was currently no equity in the system, with different regional education consortia doing markedly different things. Members suggested each consortium brought with it a different diet of support and challenge, and there was also variance within the consortia themselves. It was recommended that provision be tailored to need and more concerted attempts to support 'hard to reach areas and schools' should be made.
- As a rule, members said that professional learning provision needed to be framed in terms of what is considered to be good practice, and be underpinned by a good explanation of the rationale for introducing such activity. It was suggested that policymakers exercise trust and enhance teacher agency.
- It was suggested that schools set up as if in a market place, setting out their stall in terms of what they can offer other schools – and, indeed, what it is they are looking to develop themselves. This, it was noted, could provide a vehicle through which schools could learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- The Commission believed that all teachers should be responsible for leading professional development activities at some point in their careers, and school INSET days could be used to give different practitioners of varying experience the opportunity to present to colleagues. This could be done in a teacher's own school, or a host school incorporating teachers from a number of schools.

- Members again warned against forcing schools to collaborate and work with certain schools within a set cluster. It was re-enforced that collaboration works better when it happens naturally, without direction from ruling administrations. Similarly, the importance of teachers leading their own professional development was made clear.

**3. Consider the emphasis on professional learning as a collective learning process, as opposed to a more personalised learning offer. What are the good examples of this?**

- Members began by referencing the public confidence required to better promote teaching as a profession, and indeed the education system more generally. In turn, there must be a confidence in the school community to lead the system in the best interests of learners, they said.
- The development of a national college, such as the Chartered College of Teaching referenced earlier, was considered one such way of driving professional learning collaboratively. As well as supporting teachers, championing great teaching and raising the status of the profession, such organisations could facilitate professional learning opportunities and networking among professionals.
- The Commission welcomed the Welsh Government's ongoing process of co-construction and recommended that this should be continued into the professional learning agenda. Making better use of the 'Professional Learning Pioneers' was also suggested.
- Ensuring a more consistent approach to professional learning across the regional education consortia was proposed as an important action. Members referenced the fact that regions were employing different approaches to professional learning and provision varied significantly depending on where you are located in Wales.

- The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework, also known as EntreComp, was cited as worthy of closer consideration. EntreComp offers a tool to improve the entrepreneurial capacity of European citizens and organisations. The framework aims to build consensus around a common understanding of entrepreneurship competence, learning outcomes and proficiency levels.

- The Commission reiterated the need to engage higher education institutions more in the professional development of the wider education workforce, and recommended more structured opportunities for knowledge exchange between university and school-based staff.

- More generally, members said that 'the pyramid needs to be turned a bit' and that the education system at large was, to some extent, still low on confidence. Members said that too often in Wales, practitioners talk about the problems rather than looking more optimistically to future opportunities. This, they said, needed to change to help drive forward the educational reform agenda.

- Similarly, members said that messaging around professional learning and the wider reform agenda needed to be carefully planned, and that the terminology commonly used across the education system could be primed for an overhaul. For example, members suggested that 'senior management team' (SMT) was not a useful phrase given that school leaders lead, and not manage. This was, they said, indicative of a wider issue around the language of teaching, and that it would be useful to start a debate on what common terminology should be used moving forward.



Prifysgol Cymru  
Y Drindod Dewi Sant  
University of Wales  
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa  
Institute of Education  
Addysg i Gymru Education for Wales

[www.athrofa.cymru](http://www.athrofa.cymru)