

**Department of Employment and Learning
Study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern
Ireland
18 December 2013**

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit views to the study of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union representing teachers and school leaders in Northern Ireland.

COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT believes that any decisions about the structure of teacher education must be informed by evidence about education quality. The OECD suggests that there are at least four areas that policy makers must address in order to build a teaching profession that is able to meet the challenges of the 21st century and maintain world class education systems.¹ These are:
 1. *'making teaching and attractive profession...not just through pay, but by raising the status of teaching, offering real career prospects, and giving teachers responsibility as professionals and leaders of reform. This requires teacher education that helps teachers to become innovators and researchers in education, not just deliverers of the curriculum...'*;
 2. taking steps to ensure that all teachers have an entitlement and access to *'effective development...through longer programs that*

¹ Cited in NASUWT (2013) *Maintaining World Class Schools*, NASUWT, Rednal.

upgrade...qualifications or that involve collaborative research into improving teaching effectiveness...’;

3. ensuring that ‘*appraisal and feedback is supportive in a way that is welcomed by teachers...lead[ing] to self-improvement and involve[ing] teachers in improving schools’ with systems of teacher compensation that are ‘fair, based on multiple measures, and transparently applied in ways that involve the teaching profession...’;*
4. engaging ‘*teachers in the planning and implementation of reform...moving beyond consultation to involvement [and] transforming schools into learning organisations, with teaching professionals in the lead*’.²

4. This highlights the importance of recognising and developing teachers as professionals, ensuring that there is a national framework of professional standards and conditions of service for teachers, and of teachers playing an active role in decisions about education and the teaching profession. It also highlights the need for initial teacher training to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to meet the challenging, complex and sophisticated demands of teaching in the 21st century. Similarly, initial teacher training (ITT) must recognise and help to develop the different dimensions of teaching: the ability to be creative and intuitive (art), the importance of using research and evidence to inform practice (science), and mastering pedagogic techniques (craft).³ The NASUWT believes that the review of the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland should draw on this evidence and ensure that ITT in Northern Ireland is consistent with these policies and practice.

5. Building on this evidence, the NASUWT believes that ITT policy in Northern Ireland must recognise teaching as a high status profession and promote the professional status of teachers. Respect for the professionalism of teachers is a hallmark of an education system that is

² Ibid.

³ Pollard, A (2010), *Professionalism and Pedagogy: a contemporary opportunity*, GTCE, TLRP and ESRC.

genuinely committed to raising standards and extending the educational opportunities for all pupils.⁴

6. ITT should support trainee teachers to develop the skills and attributes associated with professional practice, including using their professional judgement to identify and apply approaches to teaching and learning that best meet the needs of learners. This includes providing opportunities for trainee teachers to work in a range of contexts and with a diverse range of pupils, including working alongside established teachers to observe applied approaches to teaching and learning.
7. Evidence indicates that the most effective school systems are those where there is a culture of collaboration between teachers and principals in managing a school and where teachers contribute to the management of a school.⁵
8. ITT must encourage and support trainee teachers to work collaboratively with colleagues within schools and across the teaching profession. There must also be structures in place to enable experienced teachers to collaborate both within and beyond their school. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an important vehicle for enabling collaboration. Further, trade unions play a central role in enabling teachers to collaborate and engage in discussions about education policy and practice at national, local and school level.
9. The infrastructure for teacher education in Northern Ireland must recognise the significant contribution that unions make to teacher training and education and ensure that frameworks are in place to engage with unions in decisions about education policy and practice. The infrastructure

⁴ International Labour Organisation (ILO)/United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) (1966). *The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers*, UNESCO, Paris.

⁵ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD (2013), *PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices, Volume IV*. Paris, OECD.

also needs to promote the important role of teaching unions to trainee teachers.

10. Evidence from high performing education systems indicates that they adopt approaches to initial teacher education that balance and integrate practice and theory rather than emphasising one or other aspect to a disproportionate extent.⁶ Therefore, the teacher education infrastructure in Northern Ireland must ensure that all trainee teachers have opportunities to develop and extend their theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding of teaching as having opportunities to develop and extend their practical skills.
11. The relationship between theory and practice is extremely important and teachers, as professionals, have a vital contribution to make to educational research, including developing thinking and understanding about education, teaching and learning. It is vital that the study of the education infrastructure supports teachers to develop the skills and expertise to operate as reflective, enquiring and transformative practitioners.⁷
12. Equally, it is essential that the teacher education infrastructure actively encourages teachers to contribute to educational research by ensuring that there are strong links between schools and higher education and a framework in place that enables teachers to share practice across Northern Ireland.
13. Studies show that trainee teachers would like more support with identifying and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and challenging discrimination and injustice through teaching and teaching practice. For example, they would like more help with teaching pupils with special

⁶ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2011) *Building a High Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from Around the World*. Paris, OECD.

⁷ Menter, Ian; Hulme, Moira; Elliot, Dely, and Lewin, Jon (2010) *Literature Review on Teacher Education in the 21st Century*. Scottish Government Social Research, Edinburgh.

educational needs (SEN) and teaching pupils from 'diverse backgrounds')⁸ Also, international evidence shows that high performing education systems have greater levels of equity than other systems.⁹ It is vital that the teacher education infrastructure supports trainee teachers, beginning teachers and experienced teachers to develop, maintain and extend their awareness and understanding of matters related to equality and diversity.

14. Closely linked to this last point, teachers need to understand the broader social, cultural, legal, economic and political context within which the education system operates. This is important because teachers may need to draw on the expertise of other professionals and services in order for a pupil's needs to be met. Also, schools must be aware of and respond to issues affecting local communities. This includes engaging members of communities in the life of the school and picking up issues that may have an adverse impact on pupil's learning. The infrastructure for teacher education needs to recognise the relationship between education and broader society and ensure that both trainee and trained teachers understand this relationship and identify relevant sources of support and expertise.

15. While these points highlight areas that should be addressed within the infrastructure for teacher education, there is also a need to examine the nature of that infrastructure and key issues arising from the existing structure.

16. The NASUWT agrees that there should be a strategic approach to teacher education. OECD evidence supports this view and many high performing systems in PISA place great emphasis on high-quality teacher training and professional development.¹⁰ Further, the issues highlighted

⁸ For example, Owen, K.; Broadhurst, K. and Keats, G. (2009) *Sink or Swim? Learning Lessons from Newly Qualified and Recently Qualified Teachers*. NASUWT; Birmingham.

⁹ OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD, Paris.

¹⁰ OECD (2011), op. cit.

above may not be addressed unless the approach to training and education is strategic.

17. The NASUWT recognises that there are significant problems with the teacher demand model that operates in Northern Ireland and notes that there is a problem of oversupply. It is vital that the review recognises the impact of oversupply on individuals.
18. The Union considers it completely unacceptable to argue that teacher training is a good grounding for careers outside of teaching. People who undertake teacher training do so because they want to teach. Public money is invested in training them to teach and trainees should be supported to achieve their aspirations.
19. The NASUWT has substantial feedback from teacher members in Northern Ireland which highlights the difficulties they are experiencing in securing employment and the significant stress that arises from them being unable to get a job. It is critical that the review of teacher education infrastructure leads to action that results in a better match between the number of teaching posts available and trainee numbers.
20. The NASUWT believes that all trainee teachers gaining qualified teacher status (QTS) should be guaranteed a teaching post to enable them to complete their induction. This policy operates successfully in Scotland. It means that beginning teachers receive further training to develop their knowledge and skills and are better placed to compete with experienced teachers for posts.
21. The NASUWT recognises that there are sensitivities around decisions to potentially cut, close or merge small colleges. It is essential that the implications of potential decisions to cut, close or merge institutions are considered carefully. However, the primary focus must remain on building a system that will be best equipped to provide high-quality teacher training that meets the needs of trainee teachers and secures high quality learning

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outcomes. High-quality learning outcomes should be interpreted broadly to include learning that promotes equity, community cohesion and social justice.

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