

Editorial: Initial Teacher Education and Wales's National Mission for Education

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Whilst educational research has helped us to understand that background, home environment, peer and community influences are all important determinants of the success of learners within education systems and indeed of those systems *per se*, it also establishes that teachers have a significant part to play. When Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed deduced from their observations of successful education systems around the world that ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’ (Barber and Mourshed, 2007:19), in effect they echoed what had been claimed over 2000 years before that ‘a nation will prosper to the degree that it honours its teachers’ (Plato, 380 BC).

It is perhaps surprising, therefore, as we show in our own contribution to this special number of the *Wales Journal of Education* (WJE), that it was only a little over a century ago that professional training was first introduced for intending teachers. By comparison, legal training stretched back to Roman times, the right to practice medicine had been regulated from the early 15th century and both nurses and engineers received professional training earlier in the nineteenth century than did teachers. Until the 1970s it was not necessary to undertake teacher training in order to teach in secondary schools as graduation carried with it qualified teacher status. No wonder that one of the most eminent historians of education in the United Kingdom and himself a former teacher and later teacher-trainer could reflect that ‘teacher training has never had a good press; while university education departments, with some exceptions, have seldom been highly regarded’ (Simon, 1998). A three-volume history of the

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University of Wales barely mentions its role in either the education of teachers or indeed of the work of its education departments (Williams, 1993 and 1997; Morgan, 1997).

In Wales, at least, since the dawn of devolution the status of teacher education has begun to change. At the outset of a devolved education system in a previous volume of the *WJE*, the head of the education branch of the civil service in Wales noted both the growing importance of initial teacher training and the need for teaching to become an evidence-based profession (Davies, 1999). The welcome new attention that was being placed on the importance of the sector also, however, led to a spotlight being placed on its logistics. A growing awareness that the number of teacher training places for primary teaching had been allowed to grow exponentially to a point where the labour market (inside and outside of Wales) could not provide sufficient opportunities for career progression, led the Welsh Assembly Government to commission a review of the sector in 2005. The resultant report led to a rationalisation of numbers and provision, with three regional centres being created that, in each case, straddled two university departments (Furlong *et al.*, 2006).

This increased focus on teacher training did not disappear after these changes in its configuration. From 2010 onwards a significant ratcheting-up took place in relation to accountability pressures within the Welsh education system. This was the result of changing political priorities whereby the Welsh Government became much more sympathetic to the neo-liberal 'performance' paradigms that were prevalent in other education systems and which up to this point it had eschewed (Egan, 2017). The consequences of this are described as follows by one Welsh teacher:

The machine drives teaching to the test, extra revision, sessions after school, in the holidays, on INSET days, on weekends and even on exam day. It forces good teachers out of the profession. It damages the reputation and status of schools and teachers' (Williams, 2018:33).

Teacher education was not able to escape this new environment. When inspected by Estyn it was generally found to be wanting and when as a result a further review commissioned by Welsh Government, its author found the state of the sector to be 'adequate and no better' (Tabberer, 2013:14). One of the recommendations of the review was that the Welsh Government should appoint an independent adviser for initial teacher education. This was accepted and in due course, having validated these findings, he recommended that a process of reform and re-accreditation be undertaken in initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales (Furlong, 2015).

This is the background to this special number of the *WJE* which is published in the academic year when the first of the newly accredited courses will have commenced. Working with John Furlong as a guest editor and drawing on his extensive experience, we have assembled contributions from each of the newly accredited providers, views from other parts of the United Kingdom and an international perspective. Contributions from the editors on the historical and intellectual background to the reforms are joined by some vignettes from school leaders in Wales.

The contributions from universities in Wales make clear their commitment to the two central tenets of the reform and re-accreditation process: close partnership working between the universities and lead school providers and courses underpinned by research-informed clinical practice. Each of the variants of this model, however, has a distinctive element: the utilisation of university-based subject expertise (Harris *et al.*); a focus on the development of professional identity (Daly *et al.*); cross primary/secondary career progression (Thomas *et al.*); a key role for teachers in developing the research focus at school level (Beauchamp *et al.*); the centrality of Welsh language and culture (Griffiths *et al.*) and the integration of research skills into course modules (Waters and Sharpling). This special number of the *WJE* has, therefore, succeeded in bringing together, in a way that has never happened before, an ecology of ITE provision in Wales. Hopefully as a coda to what has inevitably been experienced by the ITE partnerships as a competitive process, this will support future shared learning and the development of a community of practice.

The contributions from 'outside' of Wales were intended to provide both a wider context and a commentary on these developments. The importance of ITE being an element of career-long learning (Dickson) is a useful corrective to what at times may seem an over-concentration on its starting point. One of the longest established university partnerships in England provides an interesting vantage point from which to view the reform process in Wales (Mutton and Burn). Finally, in a thoughtful contribution from outside of the UK, the importance of ITE contributing to the fundamental issue of pupil equity within the Welsh education system and the need for a completely fresh approach to system accountability are highlighted (Cochran-Smith).

So, as ITE begins an exciting new period in its evolution in Wales, we believe that the corpus of knowledge and insights we have brought together in this special number, should provide a useful primer and guide for the journey that lies ahead. If, however, ITE is to sustain its current prominent

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place in the Welsh education reform process, it is likely that it will need to respond in an agile way to other policy developments. Of itself, re-accreditation cannot guarantee quality: the proof of the pudding will inevitably be in the eating and the internal quality assurance of the new partnerships is probably the biggest challenge that will now face the ITE providers.

Neither can the establishment of a reformed and re-invigorated ITE sector hope to overcome the longstanding challenges in secondary ITE recruitment and the downturn in applications to primary ITE programmes. As three research studies commissioned by the Welsh Government through the Education Workforce Council have shown, the reasons for this situation and the related difficulties being faced in retaining graduates in the profession, are far more complex and profound (Egan *et al.*, 2019; Harris *et al.*, 2019). Wales invests far less time than most OECD countries in the initial and early career development of its teachers (Allen and Sims, 2018). Finding solutions may, therefore, require reaching out beyond ITE to early career development and involving university/school partnerships in this continuum (Welsh Government, 2018 and Dickson below).

It is also noticeable that in the wide range of contributions to this number that there is a silence about the role of leadership within ITE. As in all other sectors of education in Wales, this is likely to be a significant factor in determining the quality of provision in the new ITE courses, distributed as this will be across universities and lead partnerships schools. Surely there must be a role here for the new *National Academy for Educational Leadership in Wales* to develop leadership provision for various roles within ITE partnerships?

This leadership should be exercised within a quality assurance environment that gives animation to the democratic accountability that Marilyn Cochran-Smith calls for in her contribution. Given that ITE in Wales must currently be responsive to the objectives of Welsh Government, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Education Workforce Council and Estyn, there must be a case to be made for it being the most regulated sector within the Welsh education system. It will be difficult for creativity and innovation to thrive in such an environment. Some urgent thinking is, therefore, required about how the concept of democratic accountability could be used to fashion a more slimline, cost-effective and purposeful system of quality assurance based on self-evaluation.

Finally, there will be the critical role that ITE has to play in supporting the new school curriculum in Wales. This will require teachers who are

much more confident about their pedagogy and who instinctively employ the enquiry approaches to close-to-practice research that so many of the contributors to this number are seeking. In this context, it may be timely to consider why every other profession initially prepares graduates to work across its terrain, whilst teachers are prepared at first (and nearly always forever) to work within a specific sector of their profession. The pioneers who have been leading the development of the new curriculum in Wales and the professional learning that will be needed to support it, often reflect that it will require a new 'type' of teacher and a paradigm shift in mind-sets, if the underlying philosophy of the curriculum is to be fully realized.

So, there is much to ponder going forward and exciting opportunities to grasp. If ITE is to continue to be regarded as an important part of the education system in Wales, it is right that this should be so and those who resist this risk moving it back to the margins from which it has escaped.

We will watch these and other possible developments with interest as they unfold, but not as the editors of the *WJE*. This editorial is our valedictory and we will now pass over editorial direction to a new team to lead the journal forward as it becomes available freely online to all in Wales and around the world. With the support of our Editorial Board, the University of Wales Press and most of all our contributors, over the last four years we believe we have taken the *WJE* forward from what was at the start an uncertain future to one where it can now look forward with confidence to what lies ahead. We would not deny that it has at times been a difficult journey but is has certainly been enjoyable and rewarding. More than ever Wales now needs a forum for scholarly education research and robust professional enquiry enjoying equal esteem and value.

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