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Blog post

Addressing teacher education recruitment in Wales: Two new paths to teaching

Alison Glover, Research Associate at The Open University in Wales · Sarah Stewart, Director of PGCE at The Open University in Wales · 15 Apr 2024

With UK nations failing to hit teacher recruitment targets, and more teachers leaving the profession, education leaders are calling out the risks this poses, such as an overworked profession struggling to deliver for all learners. Individuals report why they wish to teach; to make a difference, to work with young people, or love of their subject (Perryman and Calvert, 2020). So, why aren't these enough to attract new teachers? This blog post focuses on the benefits of two new routes into teacher education introduced in Wales.

Policy initiatives, such as the early career framework and the ITT market review, are suggested to negatively [contribute to teacher shortages](#) (Innes et al., 2023). People's decisions to teach can be influenced by their [view of the profession](#) (Lowe-Belk, 2023), while a lack of flexibility in teachers' roles is also a career-turn off in a post-pandemic workforce which offers agile working. But perhaps the main reason is the cost-of-living crisis which means aspiring teachers cannot afford to train. Keen for a solution, the Welsh government introduced two flexible routes into teaching in 2020. These routes are part-time or employment-based, and provide options for individuals otherwise unable to achieve their ambition to teach, as they continue with work or caring commitments and/or receive an income while studying.

Even though it is proposed that Welsh education reforms offer ‘a newfound sense of optimism’, particularly as there is an increase in teachers’ autonomy in their role as curriculum designers, recruitment and retention challenges prevail (Evans, 2022, p. 389). Reform is targeted at shortage subjects, (such as Maths), and at rural schools and those in areas of high disadvantage which face recruitment difficulties, and also at addressing the lack of teachers of colour (Davis et al., 2023).

What do the new routes do differently? First, distance learning means students study when and where they want. Second, opening the course to those with a local school in which to learn, means students can participate despite being hours from a university campus. Similarly, the employment-based route allows student teachers to stay connected to their communities, and for schools to invest in staff.

Research with participants found that the two new routes are supporting diversification of the workforce (Glover & Stewart, 2023). For example, double the number of 25–39-year-olds participate in the new routes compared to those training via a one-year PGCE. Consequently, these more mature students bring transferable skills from prior work and life experiences into teaching.

‘I wanted to experience other things before becoming a teacher. I believe these experiences now enrich what I can bring to the students in terms of my experiences and skills.’
(Employment-based student teacher)

Many of these student teachers have children. They frequently raise the benefits of studying part-time and being able to fit studying

around their children. Some report that they need paid employment, as a teaching assistant, or in another job. The proportion of students reporting they had not applied to a one-year PGCE because they need to earn an income increases each year.

‘I simply could not have balanced family life alongside that level of commitment. Plus, I could not have afforded to change career and take time out to study.’ (Part-time student teacher)

‘The flexible routes are positively contributing to addressing the problems with recruitment into teacher education in Wales.’

Working with schools has wider effects on the system – as schools adapt working practices for student teachers working flexibly so too do opportunities open for school staff. The flexible routes are positively contributing to addressing the problems with recruitment into teacher education in Wales. Since 2020, more than 200 teachers have graduated to the teacher workforce in Wales via these new routes.

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