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Teaching Council for Wales leader, Angela Jardine, says it is vital to maintain the attractiveness of teaching to talented graduates

Cuts 'must not harm the quality of teaching'

GRAHAM HENRY
graham.henry@walesonline.co.uk

CHAIR OF TEACHING COUNCIL FOR WALES SPEAKS OUT

A TEACHING leader in Wales has warned that education budget squeezes should not affect teaching quality.

Chair of the General Teaching Council for Wales, Angela Jardine, warned that maintaining teaching as an "attractive profession" was "essential for the health and success of Wales".

Ms Jardine – a practising teacher – said that funding reductions should not be allowed to "jeopardise" the quality of teaching which, she said, "is at the very heart of the system".

She was adding her voice to the debate that emerged after a statement from the European Network of Education Councils (EUNEC) that warned EU governments about the negative impact on national economies of failing to invest in the future of education.

The statement, which was formulated by teaching and education councils from 31 EU member states, pinpointed the protection of investment in teachers' skills as crucial to the long-term well-being of Europe.

It said: "Shrinking budgets should not become an obstacle to the implementation of educational reforms. If there have to be cuts in budgets they should not be aimed at development expenditure."

In this regard, EUNEC is most concerned about the negative impact on the teaching profession. The attractiveness of the teaching profession should be one of the cornerstones of budget policies."

Ms Jardine, who represents the GTCW at EUNEC, said: "The brightest and best people must see teaching as a career in which they can achieve their full potential and in which their skills will be developed fully and fully."

"Naturally we recognise the need for budget restraint at this time, but it is a question of priorities and maintaining and increasing the attractiveness of teaching to the most talented graduates must be one of the highest priorities."

"That is what really affects the quality of what the system delivers to our children."

She also gave backing to the Assembly Government's Foundation Phase, which she said had the potential to "build bright futures for children in Wales".

"Let us not allow the promise inherent in flagship policies like this to be diminished by lack of investment."

An Estyn report this week praised the Assembly Government's learning through play Foundation Phase for the youngest learners, one of the few bright spots in a damning report into the state of Welsh schools.

The EUNEC statement is the result of extensive discussion and consultation during 2010 among education and teaching councils across Europe, all of whose countries are facing cuts in educational expenditure due to economic upheaval and national budget deficits.

They warned that failure to invest in the future of education would be "disastrous" for social cohesion and would cause most damage to those with greatest needs, including "minority groups, lower-skilled people and those with special needs".

The EUNEC statement concluded by calling on all European governments and policy makers to treat education as an investment that brings proven returns to the economy, rather than an overhead or a burden on the exchequer.

Ms Jardine's warning follows the Estyn report on the state of Welsh schooling, which identified shortcomings throughout the system.

The chief inspector of schools Ann Keane said that the pace of improvement of Welsh schools was too slow and meant that schools were falling behind counterparts across Europe.

Ms Keane said systems to track learners' progress throughout their education are "not good enough" and that it was inconsistent and "not robust enough", making it difficult to identify gaps in basic skills and to plan support in a consistent way.

Ms Keane said: "Yes, we have made some improvements, but we haven't progressed enough and our own report shows that."

An Assembly Government spokesman said that it welcomed that the report showed it was making progress, but added: "We acknowledge there's still work to do to raise standards and will now consider the report in detail before preparing our response."