

GTCW POSITION PAPER

INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ITET) – THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR WALES (OCTOBER 2008)

1. In accordance with the General Teaching Council for Wales' mission to contribute to improving standards of teaching and the quality of learning and to maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers, the Council believes that as the autonomous professional body or teachers, it is the most appropriate body to own professional standards and to accredit programmes of initial teacher education in Wales. The Council believes that undertaking such a role would bring about a more coherent and rational system.

Ownership of standards and accreditation of Initial Education Programmes by professional bodies

2. An analysis of current approaches by a significant sample of professional and/or regulatory bodies is provided at Annex B. It is apparent from this comparison exercise that all bodies surveyed own the professional standards for initial qualification and undertake the role of assuring the appropriateness of initial education delivered on their behalf by the HE sector. The detail of the assurance process varies between the bodies and can be generally classified in two ways:
 - those who directly oversee the design and delivery of programmes of study that lead to their profession's required outcomes (this would include those within the medical professions that have well established legal powers to oversee the delivery of programmes by universities that date back to the mid 19th century);
 - those who offer the opportunity to HEIs to accredit their programmes to deliver 'dual currency' in terms of both the HEIs academic outcome and exemption from elements of the professional bodies various stages.
3. The process of accreditation of initial professional education is a logical extension of the ownership of the professional standards by the professional body.
4. Professional and/regulatory bodies appear to take quite different approaches to the mechanics of accreditation or approval, examples vary from 'light-touch' assessment of professional competence at the end of the programme through to visits to assess quality of teaching and resources available to learners. Some bodies will provide a model syllabus whilst others are more specific in what is to be covered within a programme.
5. By way of background information, there has been in recent times increasing pressure from HEIs and the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) to minimise the regulatory burden upon institutions and to this end the Higher Education Regulatory Reform Group (HERRG) has been seeking a reduction in the duplication of quality assurance processes and any unnecessary 'interference' in the work of

HEIs. Currently over 100 professional bodies either directly regulate HE provision or accredit provision. Members will need to be mindful of such 'light-touch' aspiration by UK government in shaping any potential role for GTCW in ITET accreditation.

UK & Ireland: comparisons of ITET course accreditation and ownership of professional standards

Scotland

6. In Scotland the General Teaching Council for Scotland undertakes a central role in the accreditation of ITET courses and this reflects its long established presence within the Scottish educational system and its ownership of the professional standards. Recent proposals in Scotland, will see GTCS take on a direct approval role for ITET programmes rather than using the previous mechanism of making recommendations for approval to the respective Minister.

Northern Ireland

7. In Northern Ireland the GTCNI has recently acquired powers of accreditation of ITET courses alongside the Inspectorate on behalf of the Department for Education, but ownership of the professional standards remains with the Department and not GTCNI.

Republic Of Ireland

8. The Teaching Council in the Republic of Ireland will have the power to accredit ITET. There are no national professional standards for 'QTS' in the way that there are in four countries of the UK.

England

9. The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) undertakes a similar role in England to that of the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCW) in Wales in terms of the accreditation of ITET programmes and it employs the services of OFSTED to undertake the inspectorial role undertaken by Estyn. It is worth noting that such inspection based approaches are very unusual within quality assurance of HE provision. The GTCE has no direct role in the accreditation of ITET programmes (and does not have ownership of the associated professional standards of QTS) but does engage with the TDA in ensuring the appropriateness of initial education and the professional standards. Obviously the TDA has a very much more teacher and school workforce focussed core mission and associated expertise base and infrastructure when compared with a funding body such as HEFCW. HEFCW has no role in England in the accreditation of ITET courses.

Wales

10. As noted in the previous paragraph, HEFCW has an overarching responsibility for accrediting ITET courses in Wales, with Estyn undertaking inspections of the courses on HEFCW's behalf. The key difference between the accreditation bodies for ITET in Wales and England (i.e. HEFCW and the TDA) is the TDA's core teacher education and recruitment mission, and associated expertise base and infrastructure. HEFCW does not have these skills and it is questionable what added value it brings to the accreditation of ITET courses.

The role of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

11. The mission of the QAA is to safeguard the public interest through sound standards of higher education qualifications and to inform and encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. They do this by working with higher education institutions to define academic standards and quality, and carry out and publish reviews against these standards.
12. The QAA was established in 1997 and is an independent body funded by subscriptions from UK universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main UK higher education funding bodies.
13. The QAA also lists professional, statutory, regulatory and other bodies that are recognised for the purpose of presenting information to QAA and asking it to investigate a possible cause for concern about an institution offering higher education programmes or awards. Whilst the GTCW does not have accreditation powers for ITET it is formally recognised as a body by QAA that can express cause for concerns in relation to HEI programmes in Wales. It does appear ironic that whilst the Council does not have positive powers to accredit ITET courses it does have the authority to request investigation of a programme giving cause for concern.

The argument for change

14. The Council believes that a system whereby the professional body for teachers accredits initial teacher education and training would be more logical, rational and consistent not only with the roles of other professional bodies across the professions but also bring the GTCW more in line with most of the teaching councils in the UK, with exception of GTCE.
15. Accreditation of ITET should rest with a body that has the capability and knowledge to understand the current and future professional issues facing teachers.
16. Initial education programmes leading to professional status must clearly integrate with professional development frameworks for the profession and as such ITET has to be seen as the first stage in a coherent and progressive framework of on-going professional learning. The Council already acts as an accepted, respected and autonomous voice for teachers and teaching. The Council believes that it is its role to continue and extend this role in order to safeguard professional standards for teachers from their entry to the profession through to Chartered Teacher and headship.
17. Any process of accreditation must be proportionate and strive to maintain a 'light- touch' approach whilst ensuring high professional standards are maintained and that newly qualified teachers are appropriately prepared for the classroom.
18. A framework for accreditation will need to ensure that programmes of ITET are 'fit for purpose' in terms of being quality assured to meet the requirements of:
 - prospective teachers
 - the profession

- employers – schools and LEAs
- the Welsh Assembly Government
- the public

19. The Welsh Assembly Government needs to take cognisance of the disparity of approach to the accreditation of initial teacher education and training when compared with almost all other significant professional and/or regulatory bodies.
20. Whilst the approach to ITET accreditation adopted in Wales broadly mirrors the structure of accreditation in England, it is peculiar in that it utilises a HE funding body to undertake the equivalent role of the TDA. Questions could be asked about the appropriateness of HEFCW's role in accreditation on behalf of a profession it does not represent. This along with issues around the lack of role segregation in an apparently unique combination of funding and programme accreditation roles. **Logic would normally dictate that funding bodies focus on funding and professional bodies upon the professional relevance of provision.**
21. The current accreditation approach in Wales (and its associated inspection and compliance structure) has the potential weakness of not being enhancement driven to meet the needs of a rapidly changing profession.
22. Under the present system, the inevitable focus is upon existing standards and historical issues and these weaknesses are compounded by the related long legislative lead times required to bring about change. These systemic flaws result in a system that has the potential to produce approaches to programme accreditation that are based around the historical needs of the profession and compliance checking, rather than a more dynamic and pro-active approach to prepare aspiring teachers for current and emerging professional challenges.
23. As the autonomous professional body for teachers in Wales charged with upholding and maintaining standards in teaching, and, as an organisation committed to the professional development of teachers throughout their professional lives, the GTCW feels that it would be well placed to assure both the profession and the public that courses of initial teacher education are fit for purpose.
24. The GTCW already has strong working relationships with schools of education in Wales. The GTCW has a remit to advise the Welsh Assembly Government and other designated bodies on the training, career development and performance management of teachers. We are the only strategic, independent body which represents the profession of teaching and its associated professional issues. It is the Council's opinion that its role should include accreditation of initial teacher education courses, courses which are the foundation stone of a teacher's career, and which mark the start of a teacher's professional journey.