

## The Donaldson / Furlong route map.



This year's EWC event, **Professionally Speaking**, was, speaking professionally, stimulating, insightful and frustrating. Professors Donaldson and Furlong gave good accounts of their reports on the curriculum and ITET respectively and there was clear optimism from both of them about the way things are going in Wales. Their talks, and their reports, have been welcomed by the profession and for once there seems to be consensus that radical change is needed if we are to build an education system fit for the next generations of learners.

In the questions that followed, John Furlong commented that the coming together of the two reports and the two lead authors was coincidental and there had been no 'Master Plan'. Phew! A stroke of luck here then – two eminent professors with views that are closely aligned giving a coherent message for the future. In many ways it was not coincidental because both have good track records of reviewing education systems elsewhere and their fundamental principles meant that they were not really high risk. Of the two, the Donaldson Report provides the greater challenge because of the sheer number of recommendations which the previous Minister decided to accept in total (this is either a huge vote of confidence in the ability of the teaching profession to deliver these or a little bit of political expediency from an outgoing Minister to avoid engaging in deeper scrutiny of the practical implications of some of the recommendations).

So why was it frustrating? Partly because many of the points made (such as the need for consistent, coherent and sustained professional learning and development (PLD) have been made before with no follow-through occurring. There are three policy influences on teachers:

1. A *professional imperative* (this is what you **should** do). Both Furlong and Donaldson took the line that change was necessary in the interests of the pupils and their reasons were justifiable from a broader educational perspective. So teachers **should** reach Master's level on qualifying; radical change **is** necessary for the greater good; and the values of **learning** are greater than those that can be easily measured.
2. A *political imperative* (this is what you **must** do). Look back at the language of Leighton Andrews' 20 points when he set out to give 'a wake-up call to a complacent system' (Google it and read it again. It's sobering to see these points five years later). There was very little flowery professional language in that message. The tone of Estyn is similar: business-like with no room for softies. After all, aren't the education doves the people who have been holding us back all these years?
3. The third influence is the most challenging and the least transparent. It is the *pragmatic alternative* (this is what we are **going** to do) which headteachers and others often adopt when faced with external forces for change. We'll stay as we are thanks. We know what's in the best interests of our teachers, pupils and parents. This is too much too quickly – and anyway, we haven't caught up with the last initiative yet!

It's the pragmatic alternative that causes such variation between schools and between classes in schools. Change occurs at different rates and when the first school in the Mexican wave of change has started, the others at the end are still sitting down. A really important point made by Graham Donaldson was that **realisation** not **implementation** is the way forward. Unfortunately, this is easy to say but difficult to achieve with any level of consistency across the whole system. The colour coding classification should provide incentives for all schools to improve but if it worked there would never be any red schools.

I could buy into the optimism of both professors at the end of the evening and it's good to have agendas to follow in the reorganisation of ITET and the school curriculum. But what else might be needed to ensure **realisation** in more than a small majority of schools in Wales? Here are a few suggestions to be going on with:

- Integration and continued updating of supply teachers (I prefer to use the term 'substitute teachers' as they do in many other countries) and the urgent implementation of the recommendations of the Assembly's Inquiry into Supply Teaching published in December 2015 (<http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10483/cr-ld10483-e.pdf>).
- Invest in teacher leadership. This may mean changing the culture of the school so that leadership does not only come from paid post-holders. For example, NQTs may bring refreshing new perspectives on teaching and often need encouragement to share these with others.
- Build on what the MEP has started – school-based mentors working with colleagues engaging in teacher inquiry to look critically at practice.
- Create time for networking within and across schools (and sectors). The professional benefits accruing from observing other classrooms, teachers and school leaders are greater than we can quantify, and they often pay dividends in the medium rather than the short-term. This is harder than it sounds because it is costly and potentially takes the best teachers away from their classes. This is where an effective substitute teacher system could be so valuable – coming off the bench in the second half to seamlessly take over the class.
- Use the right models of professional learning and development. It's not sufficient to say that we need more professional development. Why wasn't a report commissioned on PLD as well as the curriculum and ITET? There are many models of PLD and not all of them are suitable for the realisation of all initiatives so we need to use different models for different purposes. Currently, the Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) model from Scotland is flavour of the month, but this has come about following many years of discussion on the shape of the teaching profession with all parties, including universities and the Scottish GTC, playing an active part.
- Ensure that changes are sustainable. We've had too many one-off initiatives which fade when funding is switched to the next new idea. It was reassuring to hear from both Donaldson and Furlong that they had not been consigned to the cupboard of history following the change in Minister (well not yet, anyway!)

Strangely, PISA, the elephant in the room, wasn't a major talking point at **Professionally Speaking**. But the PISA results for Wales are imminent and are unlikely to see us overtaking the rest of the field in the home straight. We know what will happen next – the media frenzy which is known as 'the PISA shock phenomenon' will be upon us. The last occasion saw full page headlines on the front of the Western Mail highlighting the failure of Welsh teaching and teachers. Will we all be like rabbits in the headlines? Before and after the EWC presentation the new Minister mingled with the participants and made a good impression on those she spoke with. In the questions that followed she was repeatedly advised to 'hold her nerve'. The teaching profession needs to do the same and, if we strongly believe that what Donaldson and Furlong have proposed is the way forward, we must be consistent in our support and adoption of the recommendations over the next few years as well as the next few months.

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