

So who is educating our learners?

We know a lot about school teachers in Wales. This is because the Education Workforce Council (EWC) and its predecessor the General Teaching Council for Wales has maintained a Register since 2001 and provides unique data for government and others to use in shaping educational policy. The requirement for the EWC to have a Register forms part of its statutory responsibilities under Welsh Government legislation and every year we publish an Annual Statistics Digest summarising key data from the Register.

The data from this year's Digest shows that there is a lot to be positive about. For instance, we have a highly experienced workforce and yet the age profile of the profession is such that everybody is not about to retire! There continues to be a healthy supply of newly qualified teachers wanting to teach in Wales each year, and we enjoy retention rates that are the envy of our neighbours across the border. Over a third of registered school teachers can speak Welsh, a figure that is noticeably higher than that recorded in the latest census.

The data does, however, indicate some challenges for the Welsh education system. For example, under 3% of registered school teachers are from minority ethnic groups. Less than 25% of those in the profession are male (with the figure decreasing annually) and the numbers trained to teach key subjects such as Maths, English and Modern Foreign Languages always make interesting reading.

The statistics also provoke discussion about our senior leaders in schools. There are over 200 fewer headteachers in Wales compared to four years ago, as schools amalgamate or heads are asked to cover more than one school. The age profile of our leaders is encouraging, with the percentage of heads aged 50 and over at its lowest level since 2003. Each year we see the gender balance improve as more women complete the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and take up posts as headteachers. On the flipside, there are some issues to consider as school governing bodies testify that applications for some headteacher vacancies are low and on occasions posts have to be re-advertised.

While school teachers have needed to register since 2001 in order to practise their profession in Wales, recent Welsh Government reforms have seen teachers in the 15 Further Education colleges in Wales joining the Register from 1st April 2015. There are currently over 5,600 full-time and part-time FE teachers registered in Wales, although this number is likely to fall in future years as funding cuts take effect.

Now the Register includes teachers in FE, we can make some interesting comparisons between them and their colleagues in schools. For example, there is a higher proportion of men working as FE teachers (41% in FE compared to 25% in schools). The average age of FE teachers (47) is higher than the average for school teachers (42). Over time, as FE teachers fully populate their registration records, new data about qualifications, subjects being taught, Welsh language ability and ethnicity will also become available for the first time in Wales.

On 1st April 2016, school and FE learning support staff will also join the Register. Estimates currently put the number of new registrants at around 25,000 and the EWC is working with local authorities, schools, colleges, supply agencies and trade unions to raise awareness about the new requirements and ensure all those already in employment are registered ready for next April. Once support staff are on board, the EWC will turn its attention to Youth workers and staff within the Work Based Learning sector in Wales, who must register from April 2017.

Over time, as each new group of education practitioners joins the Register, our knowledge of the workforce will improve. This has the potential to significantly enhance workforce planning and policy development in Wales, and indeed, there are very few countries in the world that will know as much about their education workforce. As they say, "knowledge is power"!

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