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Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar gyfer yr [ymchwiliad i recriwtio a chadw athrawon](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Inquiry into Teacher recruitment and retention](#)

Ymateb gan: Gwasanaeth Addysg yr Eglwys Gatholig  
Response from: Catholic Education Service (CES)

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Dear Sir/Madam,

The Catholic Education Service ('CES') is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Bishops' Conference). The Bishops' Conference is the permanent assembly of all the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales and the CES, as the education agency of the Bishops' Conference, is charged with promoting and securing education on behalf of the Bishops.

In Wales, the CES is represented by the Wales Adviser, Angela Keller, and we also have two Welsh Catholic Dioceses each with a Director of Education. There are 81 Catholic schools in Wales which educate over 28,700 pupils.

This written submission to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into Teacher Recruitment and Retention is being made on behalf of the Catholic Education Service (CES) and representatives of Catholic Dioceses in Wales.

### **Recruitment**

Workload and lack of flexibility have had an impact on recruitment. A negative perception of schools and the profession in the media was believed to have contributed to the current issues. A headteacher in the Archdiocese of Cardiff described the recruitment of staff as the most challenging aspect of the role and is anticipating that some key vacancies will not be filled for September. There are reports of a shrinking pool of applicants at all career stages and for teaching and support staff. Rurality, budget restraints and a competitive jobs market have worsened the situation.

**Diversity:** There is less diversity in the teaching staff in Catholic schools than in the general population as reflected in the last census. The CES census of Catholic schools in Wales (2024) has verified that the teaching workforce is 92.5% white British which is in line with the % of white British teachers in maintained schools as a whole as published in EWC data. Wrexham diocese has the least diverse teaching staff. There is greater diversity amongst support staff who may have been employed to meet the needs of the significant numbers of students with English as an additional language.

**ITE:** The recruitment of Catholic graduates is a significant issue for the sector. One of the key

barriers to recruitment of Catholic graduates is that there is no specific ITE provision for Catholics in Wales. Those wishing to study at a Catholic university must study in England and a significant number are then employed in English schools. By developing an element of ITE training to address the specific needs of the Catholic sector and Catholic graduates, the Welsh system will be addressing the gap in provision that draws Catholic graduates to English universities with the risk of losing them permanently to the wider pool of Catholic schools in England.

It would be beneficial to graduates who are considering pursuing a career within the Catholic sector to begin to develop ITE students' leadership skills and positive attitudes towards leadership and that their ITE experience has sufficient breadth to address this requirement. Would it be possible for an option on programmes for Catholic schools to provide a professional insight into specific aspects of teaching in a diocesan school? We feel that giving an insight into leadership in a Catholic school for those who may wish to pursue a career in the sector would be a positive step to developing leaders for the future. In addition, this would provide a holistic approach and complement changes we have discussed as part of the review of NPQH. In practice this would require opportunities for student teachers to develop some understanding of formal leadership roles such as Head of RE and Head and Deputy Head.

In many respects, Catholic schools are facing similar recruitment issues to Welsh medium schools when it comes to attracting Catholic graduates. The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill proposes that if you are a Welsh speaker that there should be an option to have some if not all practical experience within a Welsh medium school. We suggest that if a Catholic graduate is considering a career in teaching, then there should be the option in their ITE programme to have some if not all of that of their practical experience within a Catholic school. A primary headteacher commented that ITE providers are not matching Catholic students to Catholic schools with two unintended consequences in that they are not gaining the knowledge and experience of teaching RE and that the NQTs are being lost to the system at source. Financial incentives are being offered for other core subjects but there is no understanding that RE is a core subject in Catholic schools. Diocesan authorities also have concerns regarding the new RS specification not as supportive of Catholic school needs and will lead to fewer students going on to study at A level and degree level.

**NQT/ early career teachers:** A Headteacher stated that there are fewer newly qualified teachers coming through ITE every year. Another commented that those who qualified as teachers during the pandemic period had little practical experience and a subject knowledge deficit that is making an impact on schools. There is a general feeling amongst colleagues that newly qualified teachers are less prepared for the rigours of teaching than previous generations. A Headteacher described their experience of trainees recently has led them to believe that teaching is less of a vocation and more of a job. There is a feeling that the brightest talents are looking to other professions rather than education.

**Priority areas:** The recruitment of RE teachers is a particular concern in Catholic primary and secondary schools. Indeed, there was a consensus that secondary level that recruitment in all core subjects is particularly challenging. Subjects identified by Headteachers as causing concern at secondary level where there are very few applicants for posts: RE, Welsh, mathematics, science and MFL. Catholic schools are keen to embrace the Welsh language and expand provision through the medium of Welsh. However, this has proven difficult to implement due to the lack of Welsh-speaking teachers. This is also difficult to implement when a large proportion of learners are

already learning English as an additional language.

**Support staff:** The additional work that is now required to help implement changes and keep up to date with the new processes has proven to be a challenge for ALNCoS that are also class teachers. This is the case in many primary schools as they do not have the funding or budget to employ support staff to support classroom teachers. However, access to funding is not the only barrier to the recruitment of support staff. The challenges presented by increasingly complex needs of learners with ALN coupled with the relatively low salaries for support workers has meant that recruitment to these posts remains difficult.

**Leadership:** There are firm examples in the West of the dioceses where the biggest issue threatening the existence of schools is the inability to recruit Catholic leaders. The numbers in fields for leadership positions is shrinking and some schools have had to readvertise 3 or 4 times. Headteachers agreed that the breadth of responsibility and accountability meant that middle leaders were becoming increasingly reluctant to progress to leadership roles. In addition, it was suggested that there are deputy headteachers who have been deterred from applying for headship posts citing workload, budgetary pressures and some of the additional burden incumbent on Headteachers in church schools such as estates management where the head and governors must raise 15% contribution towards any capital costs for maintenance or building projects. Additional factors affecting the recruitment of leaders are social pressures schools being seen as frontline in dealing with societal problems.

There is significant concern that the new arrangements around NPQH will not allow the Catholic system the time to develop a cohort and prepare them for the aspects of leadership that are peculiar to Catholic schools. Leadership recruitment is often a response to a dynamic situation and the new procedures with NPQH in Wales will exacerbate further the problems associated with succession planning for leadership posts due to the time lag which will be inevitable. Headteachers in Catholic schools across Wales, representing the primary and secondary phases have raised that the current NPQH arrangements are having an impact on the ability to secure leadership appointments.

The pausing of the NPQH and the relaunch with a cap on numbers has had an impact on the pool of candidates for school leadership positions. Catholic schools have leadership positions pending and a small pool of candidates who may be of a suitable calibre to fill these roles, but they are having difficulty accessing NPQH and even those who have applied with the support of the local authority officers have failed to obtain places in the initial cohort.

Delayed access to the NPQH and the length of time taken to complete the process is seen as potentially off putting to those who may consider progressing to leadership roles. A primary headteacher recounted how a member of staff with clear leadership potential had failed to secure a place on the NPQH for a second time due to the cap on numbers. Church schools make up 10% of the schools in Wales yet feedback from Headteachers across Wales suggests that this is not taken into consideration in the allocation of places in each NPQH cohort. If this is the case, there will be a detrimental effect on the ability to recruit leaders within church schools.

## Retention

Some headteachers reported difficulty in retaining staff due to high workloads and lack of funding. A headteacher spoke of successful efforts to develop leadership skills in-house but losing the staff to larger schools who have the financial resources to offer promotion to highly performing staff. Furthermore, the headteacher felt that retention of potential leaders was made more difficult as improvement partners were highlighting promotion opportunities in community schools. Other headteachers agreed that headhunting and financial incentives had an impact on retention of staff and cited Welsh teachers, ALNCOs and leadership candidates being lost to other schools or school improvement services.

A Headteacher spoke about the factors affecting retention of serving headteachers and the constant pressures they face, 'The expectation that a Headteacher is knowledgeable in a range of managerial tasks without any training such as HR, health and safety, risk management and being accountable for these and many other things, which cause constant anxiety. Scrutiny from parents and in some instances personal attacks and smear campaigns. Education reform, particularly ALN reform, accountability changes and curriculum changes. HR issues with staff.'

There is evidence to suggest that Headteachers are retiring earlier or leaving the profession to work in advisory services or alternative career paths.

## Impact

Impact on teachers and wider workforce Headteachers stated that they may be unable to fill all posts for September. This inability to recruit is exacerbated by the half term deadline for resignations and this will lead to an over reliance on supply teachers which will impact on strained school budgets. The demand/availability of supply teachers may lead to compromises on quality, subject relevance and availability.

Headteachers discussed the pressures around implementing new systems effectively, particularly the ALN reforms. A headteacher stated that, ALN reforms and the shrinking of specialist support services has meant that learners with more significant and complex needs are being educated in mainstream provision. It was stated that more TAs have been required quickly to keep learners safe and for them to access the curriculum. This has meant that Catholic schools have not had the opportunity to take the time to recruit Catholic staff.

Heads also spoke of the pressures created by deficit budgets. Some schools cannot afford to recruit or retain TAs for support. TA posts that become vacant are not replaced when schools are in deficit budget. Head teachers are having to make impossible decisions; employ a TA for support or use the money for the 15% contribution to stop the roof leaking.

Previously, many headteachers highlighted they have been reliant on dedicated and resilient ALNCOs to ensure they were progressing well in implementing the new ALN system. However, many, especially those in primary settings said the role of ALNCO had become a full-time job, creating budgetary pressures as there was insufficient funding to allow for additional staff to assist:

'We have worked extremely hard to ensure we have met timelines and implemented all that is needed, but that has come at a huge financial cost and also workload for staff.'

Recent Welsh Government guidance on the proposals for school improvement, describes one of its key policy aims as facilitating active professional learning where leaders and practitioners from other schools, along with the LA, can provide effective and reciprocal support and challenge. The review document goes on to state that, 'The LA should work in partnership with school leaders to build capacity, skills and expertise across schools within a culture where the whole local system has a commitment to the shared goal of raising standards and improving the educational experience of all learners.' For church schools to flourish in the new system there must be equitable access for the sector to Welsh Government funding and resources. Only in this way will we be able to meet the distinct requirements of the workforce and their entitlement to professional development. Also, section 50 inspections are a statutory requirement and CPD is required to support this aspect of professional life in a church school. Diocesan officers have not been contacted by LAs regarding the specific requirements of church schools and there has been no offer of a routeway to enter dialogue with LAs via ADEW / WLGA. However, we feel that, with the large numbers of LAs all with different approaches and priorities, is it possible that the specific needs of church schools will be overlooked. Church schools are a significant, long standing and effective part of the educational landscape in Wales. Church schools have a place to play in the future success of Welsh education but to do this church schools require effective professional learning that meets our specific and unique needs - something Local Authorities and, indeed, any national body are unable to provide.

### Impact on learners

Headteachers and diocesan officers spoke of the impact of lack of resources. One direct impact was a lack of training for behaviour management and pastoral teams, and this has led to the pressure to exclude learners from school.

The recruitment of support staff is not supported by funding so that fewer support staff are available for intervention work and this is contributing to a lack of progress in reducing the impact of poverty.

ALN reforms are presenting a pressure for schools. Examples were given of learners with significant additional learning needs and schools felt unable to meet the needs of some of these learners. This was a source of tension with parents and specialised services are in short supply.

Catholic schools in Wales are more ethnically diverse than the national average. Headteachers have reported significant numbers of pupils arriving from India, Sri Lanka, and Africa who do not have English or Welsh as their first language. Some EAL learners with ALN come from families who are reluctant to have their child referred or have an IDP, so additional engagement and reassurance with parents are required.

One school reported that it is sometimes difficult to identify whether a EAL learner is struggling with language acquisition because English or Welsh is their second language, or whether they are struggling due to an ALN.

ALN reforms hand in hand with shrinking services meant that Headteachers felt they would be more likely to face tribunals as they were unable to meet the needs of learners and the expectations of parents. A headteacher stated, 'Challenges facing us now are a significant lack of funding causing a deficit budget meaning that experiences, resources, specialist provision we have been providing for our pupils will no longer be affordable'

Headteachers are approaching a crisis where they will be unable to provide for all learners and will not be able to access increased funding for workforce and estates. Many schools are in budget deficit and can no longer afford the TAs required to support learners and this has a negative impact on learners and classroom teachers.

### Actions

Some initial thoughts to address issues regarding recruitment and retention are as follows:

- Review the procedures around resignation times to introduce a greater degree of flexibility.
- Develop a joined-up approach using schools as a hub for other services to build capacity and make better use of budgets and relieve pressures on schools.
- Ensure that the new school improvement proposals acknowledge the specific needs of the Church Schools sector. The school improvement agenda may be a missed opportunity if the needs of church schools are not addressed directly.
- Provide funding for the 'Church Schools Professional Learning Proposal' developed by the Church in Wales and Catholic church.
- Facilitate an ITE solution for church schools within the Welsh education system.
- The cost of obtaining a PGCE is a barrier to those who are not eligible for bursaries. Consider paying the fees for all ITE students with the proviso that the costs will be paid back if they do not stay in the profession for an agreed period.
- With the scale backs in provision in Welsh universities, consider funding a wider application of existing schemes so that schools can recruit and train new teachers in partnership with higher education institutions.
- Address concerns regarding the latest NPQH procedures.
- Work with the Catholic and Church in Wales diocesan authorities to provide NPQH modules which meet the needs of those serving in Catholic schools and those who may wish to join the sector.
- Executive Headteachers are being deployed more often to bridge the gaps in leadership recruitment and retention. Catholic Heads have completed the Executive Headteacher programme, a national course run by the Catholic Education Service. However, this has now been discontinued as there is greater focus on the development of Chief Officers for Catholic multi-academy trusts in England. It would be beneficial to offer an Executive Headteacher programme (as part of our learning offer) for Welsh Church school Heads, particularly as new models of Federated schools are developed.
- A consistent pattern to support working with and across the 22 local authorities providing fair access for the sector to Welsh Government funding and resources
- An acknowledgement of the distinct requirements of church schools around leadership, governance, curriculum and collective worship.
- We also strongly advocate that an agreed protocol for LA engagement with Diocesan Education teams is developed. This would focus primarily on school improvement. It would ensure consistency of information sharing, timeliness of meetings, involvement in decisions regarding Church schools and the ability to support pan-Wales collaboration as an integral part of an improvement support package rather than additional to it.

As stated above. The CES represents the education policies of the Bishops of Wales on education to Government and assists the dioceses in supporting our schools. We have welcomed the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and recruitment and retention will become a focus for further discussion with Headteachers and diocesan authorities.