

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19
ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

COV 37

Ymateb gan: Cyngor y Gweithlu Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education
Committee

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak
on children and young people in Wales

COV 37

Response from: Education Workforce Council

Thank you for your email of 28 April 2020 seeking views on the impact of COVID-19.

The Education Workforce Council (EWC) is the professional regulatory body for the education workforce in Wales, covering teachers and learning support staff in school and further education (FE) settings, youth / youth support workers and work-based learning professionals.

Under the Education (Wales) Act 2014, the principal aims and functions of the Council are to:

- Contribute to improving the standards of teaching and the quality of learning in Wales
- Maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers and others who support teaching and learning in Wales
- Safeguard the interests of learners, parents and the public and maintain public trust and confidence in the education workforce

The EWC has, in the main been able to continue to deliver both its core work as set out in legislation (funded by registration fees) and the activities it carries out on behalf of the Welsh Government (under terms and conditions of grant). We have always had in place well-tested business continuity processes and robust IT systems, therefore when lockdown commenced, our staff transferred to home working on 23 March 2020 fairly seamlessly.

On behalf of the EWC, I would like to highlight the following points to the Committee:

1. As a “workforce council”, it would be amiss of us not to mention the efforts, adaptability and responsiveness of the seven groups that we register in schools, further education, work-based learning and youth work. These staff (our registrants) have established new ways of working, from hub working to home working via digital platforms in order to support learners in a whole variety of ways. Parents and

carers have developed a new understanding and appreciation of the work of education practitioners, and this has had a positive impact on the status of the professions overall. We would encourage the Welsh Parliament and stakeholders to celebrate this contribution.

2. A key aspect of the Council's work is to investigate and hear allegations of unacceptable professional conduct, serious professional incompetence and / or relevant criminal offences that might call into question a registered person's fitness to practise. We undertake this work to safeguard learners, parents, carers and the public.

In the interests of natural justice, the Council took a decision in late March to postpone public fitness to practice hearings until the summer break (hearings are not generally held in the summer holidays). This mirrored the approach taken by other regulators. The Council has been commended by a number of stakeholders, including trade unions for its swift and decisive action in this regard.

We are aiming to recommence hearings in September, subject to government COVID-19 restrictions.

3. All EWC registrants must comply with the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice. Any breach of the Code can be investigated by the Council and call one's registration into question. Since educational settings have closed and online learning has increased, we have been asked for advice and guidance from a number of registrants, employers and others about appropriate practice online. Our guide to "social media use" for our registrants (available on our website) has been particularly relevant in this regard.
4. The Council collects its annual registration fees between February and April. A small number of supply workers have informed us that they are without work since COVID-19 took effect and might have difficulty in paying the annual fee. We have worked with these staff and their employers to ensure they are not disadvantaged at this time, while balancing the need to safeguard learners, parents, carers and the public.
5. The EWC has a statutory responsibility to accredit Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Wales and monitor their compliance once accredited. The Council has worked with the Welsh Government and ITE providers to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in light of COVID-19, despite programmes having needed to vary from those which we accredited. We will also be able to issue Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) certificates to trainees who

complete their programmes on 1st August as usual, once providers have confirmed results.

6. The EWC has a central national role in providing administrative, funding and recording services for new teachers undertaking statutory induction in Wales. We have worked with the Welsh Government, regional consortia and local authorities to ensure that those undertaking Induction are not disadvantaged this year. We will be able to issue certificates to new teachers who complete Induction from late August as usual, once results have been confirmed by local authorities.
7. Since lockdown, we have seen an increase in the number of our registrants accessing the professional services we offer. March and April saw the highest number of new users of the Professional Learning Passport (e-portfolio) since its development in 2017, while other services such as our good practice guides, EBSCO (the world's largest full-text research database for educational professionals) and our blogs have seen increased usage.
8. Finally, we are aware that in addition to Brexit, COVID-19 has necessarily reduced the potential for the Senedd to process legislation. However, there are some matters that the Minister and officials have reassured the EWC remain a priority for legislative change despite COVID-19, namely:
 - Registration of staff in independent schools
 - Interim suspension orders
 - Recognition of overseas qualified teachers in Wales

We would not want to see any delay in rectifying the risks to safeguarding and equality that currently exist in respect of these matters.