

MINISTER'S SPEECH FOR TEACHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE 21 NOVEMBER

- Thank you very much, Will.
- Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen, and thank you for inviting me to help you get this very important Conference under way.
- It's great to be back in this historic old city – I've actually been several times before, with various Ministerial hats on – and I've walked the Walls! – though this is my first time as Education and Employment & Learning Minister.
- I know, as Will has said, that this is your third Conference on the Teacher Education Review but also hadn't met together for over 30 years come to a view of where you are, what the strengths and weaknesses of the current system are, and where we need to be going with teacher education.
- The intervening work that has gone on with the various studies has been enormously important for this, of course; and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the authors

– David Taylor and Rod Usher, CCEA, the General Teaching Council, the Education and Training Inspectorate and indeed Douglas Osler – for the excellent and thoughtful contributions they have made to the teacher education debate.

- But most important of all, I think, will be the work that you do here, today and tomorrow, on how teacher education should move forward.
- As Will said.
- Among your papers for this Conference you will have a set of “underpinning principles”, which my Departments are proposing should guide your discussions, and should be the foundation for the concrete proposals that my Departments will prepare/based on what emerges from this Conference.
- I’d like to focus on these, but I’d like to start by adding one of my own.
- Teachers have one of the most important jobs in our society. You’ll have heard before people saying that they are the custodians of the future, and

that's right, but they're more than that, they are the shapers of the future.

- What is happening in education today is pivotal to Northern Ireland becoming more economically independent and competitive.
- We need to improve the skills levels of our workforce, current and future, to ensure that Northern Ireland plc can compete in the global economy.
- Schools need to ensure that young people leave not only with adequate qualifications, but sufficiently confident and social skills that they will need throughout life. Jobs – life skills.
- So it is important that the teachers themselves are sufficiently in touch with the needs of the society - that means having a sense of the world of work and the role of education in preparing young people for that.
- I would like you keep this point in mind during your deliberations today and tomorrow, and I'd appreciate some thought to what we could do to broaden the opportunities for young teachers to

get more experience of the world of work beyond the education sector.

- But the most important thing, of course, is that our teachers should be as highly skilled as teachers as possible.
- I know that in Northern Ireland we are very fortunate in the calibre and qualifications of young people who want to go into teaching.
- And that of course is a real plus for the system in Northern Ireland.
- But high-quality beginning teachers must stay high quality, and that means high-quality training and support throughout their careers.
- Getting your qualification to teach is only the beginning of learning to be a teacher: ongoing professional development is essential.
- I think that it is important that this should take place within the context of a properly implemented Performance Review and Staff Development Scheme.

- I know this is just your first year of the PRSD scheme, and I understand there have been some teething problems, but this is only to be expected but proper performance management is an essential part of good practice, and driving up standards, for all professionals, and teaching must not be seen as any less professional than any other career.
- In terms of this Review, let me make it quite clear where I am coming from.
- Teacher education in Northern Ireland is not broken and does need to be fixed. I am content that the teacher education system here is basically sound, evidence shows that.
- But the title of your conferences emphasises the climate of change.
- There has never been a time in Northern Ireland's history where so much of the education system has been changing at the same time:
 - The curriculum is changing, from 4 to 16 and beyond.

- The grammar/secondary post-primary split is changing.
- The whole administrative structure of education is changing with the Review of Public Administration.
- The way teachers plan and deliver their lessons is changing, with the new technologies.
- And we are learning much more about the way children learn.
- And, of course, perhaps the biggest single driver of change, and it is one that is outside all of our control, is demographics.
- The primary school pupil population in Northern Ireland has fallen by over 18,000 over the last decade, and that trend is set to continue – the forecast is for the school population to have gone down by another 30,000 by 2015.
- That is something we cannot ignore when we are planning for the future of teacher education. It is

not an option for us to continue as if nothing is happening.

- So this series of Conferences, and your commitment to embrace and plan for this huge tide of change, could not be more welcome nor more timely.
- What we need to keep at the forefront of everything we plan and do, is a single person, and that person is? that person is the pupil. A child.
- Everything we do must be geared towards making every child's educational experience a better one, fitting the child better to be an adult, in everything that word means, in a society that is developing technologically and socially so fast that we cannot even imagine what it will be like when our four-year-olds turn forty, in 2041.
- So one of the most important things our schools should be doing is equipping our young people to be adaptable, to acquire transferable skills, to be enterprising in their approach, and to cope successfully with change.

- And that means our teachers themselves have to be adept, not just at coping with change, but at influencing and managing change.
- I want to say something about ‘underpinning principles’ for how teachers themselves should be developed.
- I think they are an excellent set of principles, and I am going to take a moment to focus on each one.

The ‘Underpinning Principles’

- *What is best for individual teachers, to help them achieve their full potential should underpin and motivate all our considerations of policy, procedure and practice – that I believe in this I think goes without saying;*
- *Initial, induction, early professional development and continuing professional development of teachers need to be brought more closely together – the concept of partnership working among the HEIs, CASS and schools through the early years of teacher education is sound in theory, but if it does*

not work well in practice, we need to see what we need to do to make it work better;

- *In particular, the induction year needs to have more consistent rigour, meaning and benefit for the new teacher* – the Induction year is particularly important for teachers, and I will be interested in your views on how it can best be built on;
- *The revised teaching competences, once developed fully, should provide an excellent basis for bringing continuity to teachers' career-long professional development;* particularly exciting proposal, which I think could be of great benefit to teachers in planning their professional development through PRSD.
- *We should aim for consistency in provision of all facets of teacher education, throughout a teacher's career* – again, I would support this unreservedly: it makes best sense for the teacher, and it makes the best use of professional support.

Now this next one is exploiting to the full the potential of ICT to:

- exploiting to the full the potential of ICT to improve the quality of support available to every teacher throughout their career is key. I mentioned the pivotal role of education in raising the skills levels of the workforce and improving the economy.
- The way people – not just teachers – are professionally developed now is changing: most professionals will want to get, and already do get, a significant proportion of their on-the-job training on-line, and in many jobs they get most of their training on-line.
- How can we expect teachers to teach young people, many of whom have very advanced ICT skills, unless they have the same or better skills?
- And the best way teachers can develop the skills they need to teach young people is by developing those skills themselves in the same situation.
- I believe that it is fundamentally important that, with young people learning on-line, teachers themselves should have the experience of being learners on-line.

- This has major implications for how we plan the continuing professional development of our teachers and how we educate new teachers.
- And I know John Anderson is going to talk more about all this tomorrow morning.
- Next ‘underpinning principle’, which builds on this concept of the learning community:
- *We should also recognise that teachers themselves are not the only learners – and that everyone involved in teacher education, at all stages, should have the chance to experience all of its facets, so that they can get a better understanding of how it is experienced by the teacher.*
- In particular it is vital that all teacher educators should have recent and relevant experience of teaching in the classroom, so that they are best placed to support beginning teachers by knowing of what they will actually face.
- And finally, there is a rider to these underpinning principles, which is the glue that binds them all

together and makes them work and that's the role of the GTC:

- *The General Teaching Council should monitor teachers' professional development and maintain records for all teachers. This will place the GTC in a position to provide a strategic oversight in respect of teacher education – this is a new and very appropriate role for the GTC, and it has the potential to be a very powerful tool, not only for improving the coherence of each teacher's professional development, but also for raising standards of teacher education overall.*
- Put together, I believe these 'underpinning principles' provide an excellent basis for moving forward in teacher education, and I commend them to you in your deliberations today and tomorrow.

Review of Public Administration

- Review of Public Administration.
- As you may know, the Secretary of State will be making an announcement on his decisions

tomorrow, and I will also be making a more detailed statement on the implications for the education sector.

- While I would not want to pre-empt either of these, there are one or two important points I would want to make now.
- First, can I turn to the initial training of teachers, particularly costs and structures. This has been reviewed in the Taylor Report and also considered by Osler, and I am content that no compelling evidence has been presented for the current number of institutions which provide initial teacher education to be reduced.
- My proposals, therefore, about the quality, consistency and coherence of teacher training, from student to retiring teacher, will be based on an assumption that there will be greater coherence in the model of delivery, not necessarily in the number of institutions that deliver initial teacher education at this point.
- That does not, of course, preclude closer formal or structural relationships between the Higher

Education Institutions if they choose to develop them.

- But I will not be seeking to reduce the number of bodies offering initial teacher education as a result of this Review.
- But we should explore carefully every opportunity for Institutions to work more closely together, in the spirit of “A Shared Future”, which the Secretary of State has said will be at the heart of Government policy and spending priorities.
- So I will be expecting clear indications of areas in which the institutions – can collaborate more effectively and economically as an important outcome of your Conference.
- But your qualification to teach is only the beginning of learning to be a teacher – to be a good teacher, you need to be a good learner throughout your career.
- But in particular, the first three years of teaching – Induction and early professional development – are

vitaly important stages in developing teaching competence and need to be supported.

- I have already touched on these, and I am looking forward to hearing your views on how these early stages of professional development can be made more coherent.
- But I am equally concerned about how teachers' professional development is managed throughout their careers, and PRSD is a valuable tool for ensuring that this is done effectively and I am very supportive of the proposed role for GTC in monitoring teachers' continuing professional development.
- The Curriculum Advisory and Support Services were created under the 1989 Education Reform Order to fill a real gap in inservice training, and this was particularly important at that time, when a new, statutory curriculum was being introduced into schools for the first time ever.

- But I think the intervening years have demonstrated how the role of CASS, as a service, has developed in the interim.
- The need for inservice training has not diminished; but since the late 1990s schools' needs have changed, and the focus of CASS as a responsive service has changed with them.
- The need for there to be a source of support to help schools with the range of their inservice training needs has been demonstrated without question.
- The issue for us now, is how that support should be organised, managed and delivered across the range of support services that are provided.
- The first point is that there should be a single service, for all of Northern Ireland, delivering the same high-quality provision, no matter where a school is located or what the teachers' needs are.

- The second point is that that service needs to have a local focus – it needs to respond to identified local needs, and to be delivered locally.
- My aim, therefore, is that there should be a single professional support service, capable of meeting all of teachers' professional needs, throughout Northern Ireland, regionally planned, and locally delivered, and this is what I hope the new structures which I am announcing tomorrow will deliver.
- Given that details are being announced tomorrow, I have asked Gerry McGinn to speak briefly on this issue to you then.
- In conclusion, I would just like to encourage you to engage very fully with all the issues and keep at the forefront of your minds the professional development needs of future generations of teachers – and of course the best interests of the pupils.
- Thank you.