



Department of

Education

www.education-ni.gov.uk

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

alan.boyd@education-ni.gov.uk

11 January 2023

**GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (GTCNI) – WIDER
ENGAGEMENT WITH THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

Dear HELG Members

As you are already aware, following a highly critical independent review of the effectiveness of the Council/Board of GTCNI, the Minister announced in December 2021 that DE would bring forward legislation to dissolve and replace the organisation, that in the interim GTCNI's Council/Board would be immediately stood down until the underpinning legislation could be changed, and that the organisation and its employees would continue to operate under direct DE oversight, ensuring its statutory functions would continue to be delivered as fully as possible.

The Minister also confirmed at that time that DE would bring forward a public consultation on the functions delivered by GTCNI to determine which were regarded as essential or helpful in supporting the teaching profession and to consider how these could be protected and most effectively delivered in future. This consultation took place between 13 June and 30 September 2022. Many of the Department's delivery partners provided responses to the consultation and the Department is grateful for the insight and careful thought these responses contained. Nonetheless, the overall level of responses was disappointing with only very limited input being received from the teaching profession itself.

This may, at least in part, be reflective of the perceived failure of GTCNI to add any value to the working lives of teachers 'at the chalk-face', however, as all of the options for replacing GTCNI will impact directly on the circa 27,000 teachers registered to work in our schools, and those who will be joining the profession in NI over the next few years, we consider that starting to draft legislation without some greater insight into the views of our current and future workforce is likely to prove counter-productive. Prior to standing down on 28 October 2022, Minister McIlveen agreed with this assessment and asked us to explore alternative mechanisms to engage with teachers, enabling us to make more informed decisions on an optimal replacement for GTCNI.

There are naturally significant difficulties in engaging with the profession during a time of ongoing industrial action and we are sensitive to the fact that many current teachers will understandably wish to follow their Union's guidance during this period of 'Action

Short of Strike' (ASoS), however, we firmly believe it is in best interests of the profession that we continue to pursue progress in this matter rather than maintaining the current interim position for what might be a protracted period.

We are therefore intending to undertake a further targeted survey of those teachers currently working as Associates (*such as ETI Associate Inspectors*), as secondees within our key delivery partners or those serving on existing advisory or policy development working groups and fora (*such as the EA's Principals' Forum*). These individuals are experienced teachers, well aware of the challenges of working in the modern classroom but also possessing, by virtue of their additional service or secondment, a broader understanding of the needs of the wider education system.

Additionally, we feel that a helpful and different perspective might be found by surveying final year student teachers (BEd Year 4 or PGCE) whose views are perhaps less influenced by the historical failures of GTCNI but are informed by the professional mindset inculcated through their studies and their own (albeit more limited) practical teaching experience. In seeking to build a solution fit for the future, their aspirations for their chosen profession will undoubtedly be important considerations. Arguably, as those whose entire careers could sit under the auspices of whatever replacement for GTCNI is put in place, today's students have an even stronger interest in making sure the solution chosen is the right one.

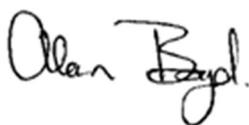
We would hope to engage with these students via a short, targeted online survey taking no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. Participation for students, as indeed for all participants, would be entirely voluntary, however, we would hope that many of those approached would see value in sharing their views and helping to shape the future of the teaching profession in NI as we look to develop a GTCNI Bill.

Timing wise, we hope to issue the targeted survey towards the end of January 2023. At present all I would ask is that you consider the proposed approach and confirm if you would be willing/able to facilitate the distribution of a short explanatory email with a link to the aforementioned survey to your students. It would also be helpful if you could identify a designated contact within each of your organisations with whom we could liaise as our plans are refined and finalised.

Should you feel unable to facilitate this process, we would greatly value any alternative suggestions you might have for engaging with your students on this issue in the immediate to short term.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could respond via email to the GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team (GTCNIInterimSponsorshipTeam@education-ni.gov.uk) by COP on Friday 20 January 2023.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Boyd". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

ALAN BOYD
GTCNI Interim Sponsorship Team