

Introduction

Bore da, pawb. Diolch yn fawr am y gwahoddiad i siarad yma heddiw.

Good morning everyone, and thank you for the invitation to address you here today.

Looking at yesterday's agenda, I can see there will have been some lively conversations, and I'm sure that will feed into your questions at the end of this speech!

I arrived home last night after spending two very interesting days in Scotland, alongside Elaine Edwards, attending the International Summit on the Teaching Profession.

The main theme of the event was “Empowering and Enabling Teachers to Deliver Equity and Improved Outcomes for All” – not the snappiest of titles, but I have to say, the sessions held throughout the conference were fascinating.

It’s funny, but you would think that ‘Improved Outcomes for All’ is a value shared by everyone. But, worryingly, these are different times.

Perhaps we’ve taken for granted that common, progressive values were fundamental to our sense of selves – to our sense of being a nation and society.

These are now being challenged on a daily basis.

We shouldn’t be afraid of challenge. But we must guard against those who seek division, who foster prejudice, who sell a narrow nostalgic vision of a fake past that can somehow also deliver a brighter future.

I worry that much of our contemporary debates – not just in Education - are based on myth and misinformation.

Whether it's blaming bilingualism for any education shortcomings;

Or focusing on feminism as weakening the economy;

Or even decrying devolution as the enemy of progress;

We face old prejudices in a new context.

But I'm an optimist. I guess as a Liberal Democrat I have to be!

And as teachers I know that you too are optimistic and positive about the difference you can make every day.

Bill Clinton once said that access to education is access to the future.

And it is equitable and excellent education which will deliver a prosperous and progressive future for our children and for our country.

Principles

Just yesterday at the Edinburgh summit I met the English Minister for Schools.

Those of you of my vintage will remember the show 'Not the Nine O'clock News'. They had a famous sketch called 'Nice Video, Shame About the Song'. Well, the same could be said for the Minister. "Nice Man, Shame About the Policies".

Anyone who thinks that selection and segregation in the school system is the answer is, I'm afraid, trapped in that narrow nostalgic vision I just mentioned.

I want to make it absolutely clear that under no circumstances will we see selection in Wales' education system like we are seeing in England.

Grammar schools are a policy always based on myth, never on evidence. Fewer than 3% of grammar school pupils are on free school meals, compared to 20% across England. This is not a policy that will 'improve outcomes for all'.

In Wales, I'm proud to say that we will combine equity with excellence. No child's ability to succeed should be defined by their economic or social circumstances.

And I'm just as proud to say that we've seen the attainment gap between our poorest pupils and their peers continue to close.

Teachers across the nation tell me that the PDG – now named the Pupil Development Grant – is giving them the tools to make that difference.

And that's one of the reasons I've decided on the name change – swapping deprivation for development.

I believe it better reflects the existing excellent practice, and that this more positive name will better emphasise learner progression alongside reducing the attainment gap.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS / ITET

A key focus of the conference in Scotland was looking at how government **and** unions could help put in place appropriate structures for teachers professional learning.

And I think we can say that we're moving in the right direction on that here in Wales.

It is for that reason that I've been, if I am honest, disappointed in UCAC referring both this month and last month to our education profession being "in crisis".

I simply don't accept that. Don't get me wrong, I know that together we have to look at accountability, workload and professional learning opportunities. And we're doing just that.

It's not for nothing that the OECD has recognised our approach to co-construction and that "commitment to improving the teaching and learning in Wales's schools is visible at all levels of the education system."

And we have to move forward at pace – every day I'm focused on our reforms to raise standards and ensure we reward and recognise excellent teaching.

I know that teaching is one of the most difficult and testing professions. I understand that. But it's also one of the most

rewarding. As Education Secretary I am determined that this Government will support the profession to be the best that it can be. Because, frankly, nothing is as important as getting our education system right so that we raise standards for all our children and reduce that attainment gap between our poorest pupils and their peers.

In my agreement with the First Minister that brought me into Government, we committed to 'incentivising, recognising and promoting teaching excellence'.

And I will continue to honour that commitment.

I've said many times before that an education system can only be as good as the people who are in front of our children in the classroom, so of course providing good quality training for our teachers must be a priority.

Government must provide the opportunities and structure, but I think we will all agree that it is the most forward thinking practitioners who step up and truly embrace the chances in front of them.

They understand that it's not *just* about moving with the times, it's about playing a crucial part in developing our shared vision of a world class education system in Wales.

I don't believe anybody can ever say that they are the finished product. Anyone who claims that there is nothing more they could possibly learn is either somewhat delusional... or it's the latest tweet from Donald Trump.

There is always more to learn. In fact, I believe that the teacher should be the biggest learner in the classroom.

On my recent study visit to Finland, I found that teachers are better qualified and publically they are held in the highest

regard. That's how it should be in Wales, ensuring that teaching is the go-to profession for our best and brightest graduates.

I want our teaching profession to have the same respect it used to have. I've spoken to teachers who feel undervalued in today's society, and that is unacceptable.

I'm sure it won't have escaped your attention, but there are quite a number of reforms underway. I want teachers to take control of their professional learning, whilst actually having the time to teach, and have confidence in what they're teaching.

That's why, for instance, we're pursuing a targeted approach to reducing class sizes and introducing new professional standards for teaching and leadership in schools.

I will support you to be the best you can be, raising the standing of the profession as a whole.

And I will support you through the new Professional Teaching Standards, promoting ambition, aspiration and ownership.

I need to be clear here, as there seems to be some confusion about what I mean by 'Teaching Standards'. I **do not** mean that I think the standard of teaching in Wales is sub-par. I know full well of the excellence already in our education system.

What I want these standards to do, is establish a **high-status** teaching profession by setting the benchmark for entry into the profession, and by providing a framework to support the development of leadership capacity all levels.

You can access the consultation on the standards on the Welsh Government webpage – and I would encourage you to do so.

It should go without saying that we must also give school leaders, our head teachers, the skills *they* need to lead. And

that's why we're pushing ahead with the establishment of our National Academy of Educational Leadership.

Now, more than ever, Wales needs strong leaders that are up for the challenge.

And make no mistake, what lies ahead of us over the next few years **will** be a challenge – but one I am certain we can meet.

PAY / CONDITIONS... AND SUPPLY TEACHING

I know there are lots of questions surrounding teachers pay and conditions, especially as it will now be our responsibility here in Wales.

Understandably, the English Department for Education has made substantial changes to the pay system in recent years, which reflect changes to the education system in England.

We will now have the responsibility, and opportunity, to deliver a system which is more relevant to our national ambitions.

I spoke earlier of the need for progressives to continue to keep making the argument, to not rest on our laurels.

I would like to thank you for leading the way on the issue of devolution of teachers' pay and conditions.

Quite simply, you were able to recognise that it wasn't some sort of UK-wide national system. It was an English system that happened to operate here in Wales. A complete anomaly as our education systems diverged.

Can I ask that you keep making the argument? While we will be receiving these powers, we still need to convince people about the course we're following. I ask that you continue to show the courage to lead on this matter.

We've got the chance here to shape the teachers' pay and conditions system in Wales, to underpin our aspirations for the education system, raise standards and support and develop the profession.

WELSH MEDIUM (ONE MILLION SPEAKERS)

We are already well underway in developing our rich and unique Welsh way forward, and let's not forget that the new Curriculum for Wales will have a key role to play in achieving the goal of one million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The target is an ambitious one, and schools will be making a massive contribution in achieving this goal. I know this from my own experience of bringing up bilingual daughters.

I pledge to continue to work with you to help make this target a reality. Whether it is cultural, personal, or professional, the

benefits of bilingualism, and indeed speaking more languages, are far-reaching.

But, again, both inside and outside the Assembly, we are seeing these views under attack. You have a champion in me, and I ask that you continue to keep delivering the best education possible.

In addition to this, Local Authority Welsh in Education Strategic Plans will have a significant role to play.

As my colleague Alun Davies, the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Welsh Language, said a couple of weeks ago, some local authorities have been proactive in increasing Welsh medium opportunities.

However, other authorities need to up their game. Therefore Alun announced the appointment of Aled Roberts to conduct a rapid review on the WESPs.

Of course, I know Aled well. He has the experience and the background to make progress on this issue and we as a government look forward to receiving his recommendations.

Since taking on the role of Cabinet Secretary, equity in the education system has remained a priority for me.

Therefore, I have been concerned to often be told of the lack of availability of Welsh textbooks. I do not expect children who do their exams through the medium of Welsh to be disadvantaged in any way.

My officials have worked with WJEC to look at the best solution in addressing the issue in the short term.

There are now new working practices which have helped to reduce the difference in timescales between the availability of textbooks in English and Welsh.

Positive, creative steps have been taken to improve the situation, such as making draft versions of the textbooks available on the WJEC's secure website before free copies of printed versions are distributed to schools.

This ensures that the content is available at a much earlier date for teachers and learners. New digital resources are also being developed, and current resources are being revised to fill any gaps and are available on WJEC's website.

However, I am clear that this is merely a temporary solution for the current reform of qualifications. As I have previously stated I am dissatisfied with the current situation and I do not expect Welsh-medium learners to be disadvantaged in any way.

We need to find a long term solution for this issue. We also need to plan for the future requirements of the new curriculum - in both Welsh and English.

I will be hosting a summit on the 26th of April to look at ways in which we can address this issue. I can guarantee that UCAC will be involved in this summit.

CONCLUSION

I'll conclude my remarks by reflecting on the recent OECD report on our education reform journey.

It gave us a clear message that we are making progress and we have a long term vision in place to keep improving.

We are already taking action on many of their recommendations and I've highlighted those today.

From creating a new national academy for leadership, transforming initial teacher education, launching new

professional standards, and introducing a national approach to professional learning.

The report also said that that we need to celebrate our successes more. I agree.

The profession has been ready to embark on this reform journey for a long time, and now that we're actually on it, I'm proud of the tremendous commitment and energy that's accompanied every step.

Our national mission means we must have an education system that enables our citizens to compete with the best in the world.

It's a big responsibility, but one that we're all signed up to. And I have absolute faith in your commitment to delivering the best results for our young people.

Rydych chi fel undeb yn arwain y ffordd. Dw i'n croesawu eich cyfranniad bositif, ond hefyd eich sialens a craffu. Ac byddaf i hefyd yn eich holi chi a chynnig sialens.

Gyda'n gilydd gallwn gwneud y gwahaniaeth. Dyma'r amser i symud ymlaen gyda'n gilydd, yn adeiladu ar y sylfaen cadarn sydd yna yn barod.

(English translation of the above)

(You as a union are also leading the way in a number of areas. I welcome that positive contribution, but also the challenge and scrutiny you bring. And I will continue to ask questions of you.

Together we can make a difference. I hope we can continue forward in this way, and build on the strong foundations already laid.)

Diolch yn fawr.