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BRIEFING NOTE: THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL

This research note provides a brief introduction to the role of the newly established General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and an overview of the organisation and operation of the equivalent bodies in Scotland, England and Wales. The first elections to the Northern Ireland Council will be held in May 2002.

Library Research Papers are compiled for the benefit of Members of The Assembly and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public.

THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL

1. BACKGROUND

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTC(NI)) will be an independent self-regulatory body comprising 33 elected members, representing the different sectors and partners in the Northern Ireland education system. The role of the Council will be to promote the professional interests of teachers and to enhance their status. It will represent both teachers in grant-aided schools and peripatetic teachers.

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 which came into operation on 1 October 2001 detail the precise combination of the Council. General Teaching Councils have also been established in England, Scotland and Wales. The results of the first election of the GTC(NI) will be announced on 24 May 2002.¹

A GTC(NI) Advisory Group, comprised of representatives of the main educational bodies has collaborated with the Department of Education on the establishment of the Council.

2. THE COMPOSITION OF THE COUNCIL

The Council will contain 14 elected teachers. This group will comprise:

- one teacher (whether or not a principal) in a nursery school
- one teacher (whether or not a principal) in a special school
- five teachers in primary education who are not principals
- five teachers in post-primary education who are not principals
- one principal in primary education
- one principal in post-primary education.

The remaining 19 members will consist of:

- five members appointed by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council
- two members from the Association of Education and Library Boards and two from the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
- one member from each of the following organisations:
 - Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta
 - Governing Bodies Association
 - Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
 - Transferors' Representative Council
 - the Archbishop of Armagh and the Bishops of Clogher, Derry, Down and Connor, Dromore and Kilmore acting jointly (as representatives of the trustees of Catholic maintained schools)
 - Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (Northern Ireland)
- four members appointed by the Department. One of these members will be a representative from the industrial and commercial sector. The remaining three members will represent wider public interests.²

¹ http://www.deni.gov.uk/teachers/d_gtc.htm

² <http://www.northernireland-legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/sr/sr2001/20010288.htm>

The GTC(NI) will employ its own staff, headed by a Registrar.

3. THE ROLE OF THE COUNCIL

According to the Department for Education, the GTC(NI) will be

a key player in helping to shape the education service of the future. It will bring a fresh and authoritative perspective by drawing on the experience and knowledge of teachers. It will give teachers the opportunity to contribute to and shape change, working in partnership with the Government, employing authorities, schools and others.

In addition, the Council will:

- provide a voice for the teaching profession by speaking with authority on education matters reflecting the experience of practising teachers
- work with other bodies on matters affecting the well-being of teachers to improve teachers' working lives.³

The Council will provide advice on issues such as:

- training, career development and performance management of teachers
- standards of teaching
- standards of conduct for teachers.

All teachers employed in grant-aided schools will be required to register with the Council for an annual fee. The Department states that this fee income will maintain the Council's independence, however DE will be providing assistance with start-up costs for the new body.

The Council will develop a Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for registered teachers, and will have powers to remove individual teachers from the register if it finds them guilty of serious professional misconduct.

4. GENERAL TEACHING COUNCILS IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES

SCOTLAND

The General Teaching Council for Scotland was the first professional council for teaching in the UK⁴. It is a statutory body, which was established by the Teaching Council (Scotland) Act 1965.

The Scottish GTC has 50 members: 26 of whom are elected registered teachers and principals; 18 are appointed members, representing interested organisations such as employers, private schools, further and higher education, and the churches; and six are nominated by the Scottish Executive to represent parents, the commercial and industrial sector, those teaching children with special education needs, and public interest.

³ DE (2001) The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland: Your Questions Answered

⁴ www.gtcs.org.uk

The Council is responsible for maintaining and enhancing the quality of teaching in Scotland. Its activities include:

- maintaining a register of qualified teachers
- overseeing standards of entry to the profession
- accrediting and reviewing courses of initial teacher education
- exercising disciplinary powers in relation to registration
- supporting probationer teachers by means of seminars, visits and publications
- advising on the supply of teachers.

The Council's register currently contains around 75,000 names of teachers who are entitled to teach in publicly funded schools in Scotland. Local authorities are obliged to employ only registered teachers. Staff in teacher education institutions who are involved in the professional education of teachers must also be registered. There are three categories of registration: provisional, conditional and full.

The Council is financed entirely by registered teachers through the annual registration fee of £25. The initial admission or re-admission fee is £35. Further details on the organisation and operation of the Council can be found at <http://www.gtcs.org.uk>.

ENGLAND

Following the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act, the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)⁵ was established on 1 September 2000. This Act also introduced the General Teaching Council for Wales (see below). A history of the campaign to establish such a council is available at <http://www.gtce.org.uk/news/featuresDetail.asp?ezineld=40>.

The Act requires the Council to advise the Secretary of State and other bodies on the following issues:

- standards of teaching
- standards of conduct for teachers
- the role of the teaching profession
- the training, career development and performance management of teachers
- recruitment to the teaching profession
- medical fitness to teach
- other matters relating to teaching.

The Council's membership includes elected teachers, teachers appointed by the main teachers' associations and trade unions, and other educational bodies (this category also includes representatives of the Disability Rights Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission as well as the National Children's Bureau).

The Council's register of teachers was launched on 1 June 2001. The registration fee is currently £23. This amount, payable from May 2002, has been covered by the teachers' pay award from April 2002. Further information on the registration process in England is available at <http://www.gtce.org.uk/gtceinfo/redpro.asp>.

⁵ Further information on the Council is available from www.gtce.org.uk

Disciplinary matters are considered by three committees in GTCe. These are as follows:

- an Investigating Committee
- a Professional Conduct Committee
- a Professional Competence Committee.

WALES

The General Teaching Council for Wales has 25 members; 12 of whom are teachers elected by their peers. Nine members are appointed by the National Assembly for Wales following nominations from teacher unions and other educational organisations and four members are appointed directly by the Assembly. Since February 2001, it has been a legal requirement for teachers to be registered with the Council in order to teach in a maintained school in Wales. The Council has 38,000 teachers on its Register, including some qualified teachers working in independent schools, higher education, or further education. The Council's responsibilities include:

- advising the Assembly and others on teaching issues such as continuing professional development and recruitment to the teaching profession
- working to improve morale in the teaching profession and raising the status of teachers amongst the general public
- maintaining and promoting high professional standards through its register, the Professional Code and its professional conduct and competence work.

Further information on the GTCw can be found www.gtcw.org.uk/welcome.html.

5. INTERNET RESOURCES

The Department of Education's web site has a section devoted to the General Teaching Council, which may be accessed at:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/teachers/d_gtc.htm

The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (Constitution) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2001 are available at:

www.northernireland-legislation.hmsi.gov.uk/sr/sr2001/20010288.htm

The web site addresses for the equivalent Councils in Scotland, England and Wales are as follows:

www.gtcs.org.uk

www.gtce.org.uk

www.gtcw.org.uk

The Teaching and Higher Education Act (1998) is available at

<http://www.hmsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980030.htm>.

The report of a review of the operation of the Scottish Council, undertaken in 1998, is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/library2/doc01/rqtc-01.htm.

The views of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers on the GTC are available at

<http://www.askatl.org.uk/issues/GTC/folder.htm>.