

Response to the Northern Ireland Assembly General Teaching Council Bill Consultation

Submitted by the Controlled Schools' Support Council

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the consultation on the General Teaching Council Bill.

Background

The Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) is the sectoral support body for controlled schools in Northern Ireland. The controlled sector is the largest education sector in Northern Ireland, representing 49% of all schools. CSSC supports controlled schools which include Nursery Schools, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Grammar Schools, Integrated Schools, Special Schools and Irish-Medium Schools. The sector has a non-denominational Christian ethos and welcomes children of all faiths and none.

CSSC works on behalf of controlled schools and the wider controlled education sector to enhance the quality of education provision. As 38 of Northern Ireland's Special Schools are controlled schools and 33,729 pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are educated within controlled schools, CSSC recognises the importance of high-quality teaching and robust professional standards across the education system.

Previous Engagement

CSSC previously engaged with the Department of Education's 2022 consultation on the future of teacher registration and regulation in Northern Ireland. In that response, CSSC set out its views on the importance of a professional body for teachers, the need for clear governance and accountability, and the significance of establishing a positive professional ethos within any reformed organisation.

Position on the General Teaching Council Bill

CSSC welcomes the progress made in bringing forward legislation to reform the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland. CSSC acknowledges the significant operational improvements reported under interim management arrangements and supports the Department's decision to pursue reform of the existing body.

Given that the General Teaching Council Bill primarily concerns the regulation and professional standards of individual teachers rather than the strategic support and governance of schools, CSSC does not consider it necessary to provide detailed commentary on individual clauses at this time.

However, CSSC would highlight the following high-level observations consistent with its 2022 response:

- **Governance and Accountability:** CSSC supports the establishment of clear governance structures with robust procedures and a strong sense of accountability. It is important that lessons are learned from the conclusions of the Board Effectiveness Review to avoid a repeat of previous difficulties.
- **Professional Ethos:** CSSC places strong emphasis on the importance of ethos as the foundation for organisational success. A positive, forward-thinking professional culture should be established from the outset, with relationships based on mutual respect and a shared commitment to supporting the teaching profession.
- **Teacher Confidence:** Teachers need to see the value of a professional body and understand its role as the guardian of standards and conduct within the profession. Sustained engagement and clear communication will be essential.
- **Independence:** CSSC believes it is important that the reformed body maintains a strong degree of independence, enabling the profession and the wider public to have confidence that the organisation is not being unduly influenced.

Conclusion

CSSC welcomes the General Teaching Council Bill and the opportunity it provides to address historical challenges within GTCNI. CSSC looks forward to continued engagement as the Bill progresses through the Assembly.

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