

## **Opening Statement by Dr Seán Rowland, President, Hibernia College**

Chairman and members of the Education Committee, I welcome this opportunity to address you on the issue of teacher supply in Ireland. Let me very briefly give some background to Hibernia College.

I returned to Ireland from Boston in 2000 having been in Boston College and Harvard University. I came back with a plan to transform teacher training here using technology that I had witnessed at MIT. I founded Hibernia College as Ireland's first private teacher training college. Initially, we were treated with outright hostility and claims that online learning had 'no place in Ireland and especially not in teacher education'.

Nearly 20 years later, I believe that Hibernia College has proven the success of our model as we now have 10,000 graduates and online learning is being embraced by all colleges and universities.

Turning to the subject of teacher supply, Hibernia College has already played a major part in dealing with the shortage of primary teachers. We can also help greatly with the post primary problem at present. Ironically, one of the objections to our arrival here was a claim that we would 'flood the market' with teachers. I sometimes wonder how much worse the teacher supply problem would have been had Hibernia College not been established.

I wish to emphasise to the committee that Hibernia College has not received any state funding and our 10,000+ graduates have funded themselves completely.

Turning to the issue of teacher supply, the following are some steps I would recommend to help alleviate the teacher supply problem at post primary level.

### **1. Incentivise Teaching Careers**

- I. Improve the attractiveness of teaching careers by provision of more permanent positions – the **Striking the Balance report** indicates only 42% post primary teachers are in permanent positions.
- II. Restoration of qualifications allowance to encourage more teachers to pursue higher qualifications.
- III. Increase budget allocation for CPD with a greater emphasis on accredited awards.

### **2. Be more flexible and mobile**

- IV. DES to fund programmes designated as 'subject knowledge enhancement' to provide already qualified/registered teachers with additional subjects for which there is an identified skills gap.
- V. Establish 'cluster panels' of supply teachers in local areas so that there is greater sharing and flexibility between schools. Teachers on cluster panels should be offered guaranteed permanent employment.
- VI. Provide opportunities for unqualified teachers working abroad to pursue initial teacher education programmes leading to registration with the Teaching Council on their return to Ireland.

### **3. Make more use of technology assisted solutions**

- VII. Use Online Auxiliary Teaching technology to assist schools by remote provision of teachers in subject areas for which there is a teacher shortage,
- VIII. Auxiliary Teaching also allow schools to offer more subjects through Hibernia College creating virtual classrooms.
- IX. Auxiliary Teaching can also address issues of home schooling in the case of disciplinary or health related forced absences.
- X. Provide a bank/database of pre-recorded lessons covering the entire curriculum which can be downloaded to support 'out of field' teaching or teacher absences.

In addition to the above there are some obvious steps that can be taken such as high profile media campaigns celebrating teaching as a career and maintaining more accurate databases on qualified teachers and their availability to teach.

We need more teachers in Ireland and all colleges will need more placements in schools for their student teachers. While some schools actively participate with colleges to take student teachers, others do not. There are many reasons for this situation. This would be a good time for the Department of Education and Skills to help encourage schools and particularly new schools to take advantage of student teacher placements over the coming years.

My final comment. One obvious constraint to the employment of substitute teachers in the geographic location in which they are based. This limits the choice for school principals when it comes to finding substitute teachers. At Hibernia College we are currently piloting a project that allows suitably qualified teachers to work from home or abroad to deliver classes using our VLE platform that has proven so successful with student teachers to teach post primary subjects. I'd love to return to you at another time to tell you how this pilot has worked.