A (micro)pilot at UoW

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Purpose

Teaching has one of the highest turnover rates among PG professional programmes and much research has been conducted on why novice teachers leave teaching. While initially statistics on the high dropout rate of new teachers made teacher attrition a more dominant topic with research focusing on reasons and causes for high rates of teacher attrition, over recent years, there has been a shift in focus from the reasons and causes for teacher attrition towards reasons and causes for retention. Therefore, a more in-depth understanding of factors and strategies contributing to teacher retention can help refine strategies for retaining new teachers. That said, any research focused on improving teacher retention may begin with exploring challenges faced by new teachers. The use of a diagnostic tool reported here looked to address this issue and would potentially yield data that would help to provide resources into those areas that would support student teachers embarking a career into the teaching profession.

Description

To decide and plan the diagnostic tool, a number of primary questions needed to be addressed, as follows:

- What types of questions should be included to improve responses to both academic and professional challenges student teachers face?
- How can the diagnostic tool for PG professional programmes be made distinct from other types of tools suitable for UG and academic programmes?
- How can the outcomes of students' engagement with the diagnostic tool be evaluated as indicated by students' academic and professional progress while completing their pre-service year?
- How can the tensions between a prescribed diagnostic tool and the flexibility required for amendment of the tool depending on students' learning needs be resolved?

The tool was delivered online in the first term in 2021-22, using a question set created by the author. The students were asked to complete the tool by the module leader and received individual feedback on their results upon completing the questions. Thirty-four students completed the questions and engaged with the online materials including self-reflection quizzes, information about skills and strategies, tips, videos, scenarios and finally creating their personal plans in order to further develop their knowledge, skills and experiences related to the areas highlighted in the diagnostic tool. A programme report was compiled by the module leader which summarised the responses and highlighted strengths and areas for improvement for the student cohort.

Reflections on the activity

- All students commented that professional challenges had the greatest impact on their pre-service year.
- Feedback from students indicated that the diagnostic tool was more successful in supporting students with academic aspects of their work. In future, a more tailored diagnostic tool is required for students' learning needs guided by their feedback.

- Questions about mental health and well-being were included in the tool, however, fewer students engaged with these resources despite the need for more appropriate levels of support that can be offered to students in this area based on their responses. The lack of engagement with this aspect could be related to the lack of perceived importance of this aspect of the diagnostic tool by students on professional programmes.

Impact on Students

While all 34 students engaging with the diagnostic tool completed their pre-service programme (the retention rate for the cohort was 87%), further evidence is required to explicate the impact of the diagnostic on student teachers' retention in longer term. More focus on the professional aspects of this programme within the diagnostic could tell what setting and school culture is having the greatest effect on professional outcome of the students.

Institutional Impact

Institutional impact is currently low as the diagnostic tool was mainly designed and delivered for students completing PG Teacher Education Programmes. However, this pilot and involvement in the PARC cluster has demonstrated that the approach is deliverable and has kept the discussion around the use of diagnostic testing for other professional programmes at UoW.

Next Steps

The institution is about to develop the delivery of the tool for a larger student cohort. This will be rolled out in 2022-23 with a focus on gathering feedback from both staff and students to effectively include professional aspects and to gauge the impact beyond the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provider.