



# **Review of Teacher Education in Scotland**

**ATL Scotland's response to  
the call for evidence**

**25 June 2010**

## **ATL – the education union**

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), as a leading education union, recognise the link between education policy and our members' conditions of employment. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate from a position of strength. We champion good practice and achieve better working lives for our members. We help our members, as their careers develop, through first-rate research, advice, information and legal support. Our 160,000 members – teachers, lecturers, headteachers, support staff and students – are empowered to get active locally and nationally.

ATL is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). The union is a member of the Social Partnership – working with the UK Government, employers and other unions on education issues. ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

## **Introduction**

ATL Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment upon the Review of Teacher Education. We believe that a topic of such importance should have had a longer public consultation than two months; however we recognise the tight timescales afforded to the review team by the Scottish Government. We are therefore grateful for the opportunity to make a late submission in respect of our written evidence.

## Section A – Teacher Education Today

**A1) What do you believe are the MAIN overall strengths and areas for improvement within teacher education as a whole in Scotland today and why?**

**Overall strengths:**

We believe that the increased collegiality within schools, the Teacher Induction Scheme and the increase in professional reflection and dialogue to be the main strengths within teacher education as a whole in Scotland. Whilst the Teachers' Agreement is at the heart of much of these improvements they have only been achieved through the professionalism and dedication of Scotland's teachers. At a time when it is fashionable to attack the public sector such commitment to improvement should be recognised and celebrated; particularly so during a period of massive change to the structure of Scottish Education with the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence.

**Overall areas for improvement:**

We believe that further improvement remains to ensure that collegiality occurs comprehensively across all of Scotland's schools. The same can be said of teachers' experiences of the Professional Review and Development system.<sup>1</sup> We would also like to see increased linkage between the various standards so that they are clearly articulated and understood as a continuum.

**A2) When thinking specifically about initial teacher education in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?**

**Strengths:**

The promotion of a reflective practitioner is one of the strengths of initial teacher education. Anecdotal evidence from student members is that they feel well prepared for the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence. This perhaps chimes with the 2008 report commissioned by the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) and published by the University of Glasgow<sup>2</sup> where 'probationer teachers entering schools...were "revitalising the profession"; exerting a "re-invigorating" influence on school culture'.

**Areas for improvement:**

The increasing pressures on placements: demands placed on schools; reduction in number of placement visits and the issue of responsibility for assessment clearly need to be addressed in respect of future improvements. With the reduction in student teacher numbers for 2010/11 it remains to be seen as whether or not there is capacity of staff from the teacher education institutions (TEIs) to increase their engagement with students' placements.

---

<sup>1</sup> Learning Together: Improving teaching, improving learning. HMIe 2009

<sup>2</sup> Professional culture among new entrants to the teaching profession. GTC Scotland 2008

**A3) When thinking specifically about probation/induction in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?**

**Strengths:**

The probation/induction scheme in Scotland has been described as being world class by external observers. We can be proud of the induction experience for new teachers. It is a vast improvement of the experience of teachers graduating a decade ago and something that students elsewhere in the UK covet.

**Areas for improvement:**

Not all probationers' experiences are 'world class', far from it. We have been told numerous tales of probationers' poor relationships with their supporter, inadequate support from the school and sadly even cases of bullying. With thirty-two local authorities across Scotland hosting 3,478 probationers in the 2009-10 academic year, it stands to reason that the 'human factor' will come in to play. None the less we would like to see a strengthening of the guidance and support offered to supporters, who overwhelmingly play a fantastic role in assisting the development of the next generation of teachers; as well as increased support for probationers when things aren't proceeding as well as they could be during their probation year.

We would strongly resist probationers being viewed as cheap labour by local authorities at a time of difficult financial settlements. We have anecdotal evidence from members that probationers are being used to fill appointments at the expense of experienced teachers. Each school must have a good balance of experience within their teaching staff to allow for the appropriate learning and teaching of pupils and opportunities for staff development and whole school improvement.

**A4) When thinking specifically about continuing professional development in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?**

**Strengths:**

It is clear that one of the main strengths of CPD in Scotland today is the National CPD Team. Through the CPD Network and project-teams, professionals engaged in CPD from across the country are able to engage with one another, participate in discussions and begin to evaluate their practices. ATL strongly supports the work of the CPD Team and hopes that in this time of financial constraints the Scottish Government will continue to fund the work of the CPD Team.

**Areas for improvements:**

It is clear that access to CPD provision, and not just courses, is patchy across the country. There are examples of good practice, however it is also clear that 9 years after the Teachers Agreement it is inconceivable that not all teachers have the same opportunities, not withstanding geographical challenges. We have already raised our concerns regarding the PRD process. The use of *GLOW meets*/online meetings are a partial answer to this, but are no replacement for face to face discussions.

One challenge to the sustainable improvement of CPD is that of the isolation experienced by teachers. A variety of literature has found and confirmed by members at a focus group that teachers often have little opportunity for meaningful dialogue about their practice on a day-to-day basis. Collaborative CPD is one antidote to the effect of isolation. A joint literature review conducted by ATL and the GTC England found that collaborative CPD is among the most effective types of CPD. There may be room for qualitative feedback through cross-partnership/network professional conversations which schools develop, providing opportunities for this kind of collaboration. These professional discussions will explore the concept of what is good teaching in a dynamic and meaningful way that is context-based but contains principles which can operate across a range of contexts. This would be far healthier and reflective of teacher professionalism than a definition which is static, something which is always exacerbated by an emphasis on narrow forms of measurement. This dialogue and self-evaluation would be empowering and challenging, allowing teachers' autonomy to innovate and build vital learning relationships with their pupils, providing both a responsibility and a support for a continually reflective and developing professionalism. Perhaps these are best reflected in current practice by *Learning Rounds*?

**A5) How do teachers' learning needs change as they progress through their career and how well does the current Scottish system cater for these changes?**

Good teachers, those that meet professional standards, have the ability to adapt their teaching practices and methods to particular pupils, drawing on their theoretical understanding of learning, their knowledge of curriculum content, their knowledge of what pupils need and their knowledge of the global/local/technological etc. society in which their pupils live. Teachers need access to CPD which combines reflection with new demands; new information and skills building on their experience and knowledge. These new challenges and opportunities may spring from developments in curricular knowledge, child development and community needs or, as is often the case, new external policy challenges.

Teachers need access to collaborative CPD through networks regularly, where they can constantly share information with other professionals, reflecting on their own and others' practice and learning of new developments within the area of education. They also need the opportunity to put what they learn into practice so that they constantly develop their teaching, encouraged and supported by an environment which allows innovation and creativity in the classroom. Hopefully the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence will afford such opportunities.

An additional aspect of teachers' learning is the relationship with HEIs and the development, articulation and debate of professional research and knowledge. Teacher's learning is not solely concerned with collaborative CPD but about being challenged by new research, particularly teacher research.

More specifically the introduction of curriculum for Excellence poses specific challenges which this review is not necessarily in a position to influence. Feedback from members suggests there has been a lack of preparation and the recently announced additional CPD doesn't seem to be enough. As content changes in some subjects there has to be provision for this and currently the provision is haphazard.

**A6) How can the impact of teacher education (specifically continuing professional development) on improving young people's progress and achievements be evaluated?**

ATL believes the National CPD Team should be commended for the work it has done in this area. Knowing the impact of CPD is an important element of teacher education and the National CPD Team has, through its CPD Network, carried out work on the topic and will continue this in the next academic year.

**A7) What do you see as the MAIN characteristics of teacher professionalism and how can these be supported by teacher education?**

Teaching is an intellectual profession, based on a high degree of general and systematised knowledge. This includes an in-depth knowledge of:

- Learning: how pupils learn, potential obstacles to learning, pre-conditions and dispositions to learning; how learning develops; and
- Curriculum content: knowledge of subjects and the relationships between them, understanding of wider content such as the development of thinking skills, problem solving, questioning and group working, and a knowledge of how pupils' understanding of particular content grows and develops.

Teaching has a basis in care and responsibility for pupil's learning, learning to the need for knowledge and understanding of particular pupils as individuals, their interests, needs and potential obstacles to learning, knowledge developed through assessment and through relationships with pupils, families, communities and other professionals. They also need to have an understanding of equalities issues and how they can impact on teaching and learning.

The teaching profession needs knowledge about the complex and compelling forces that influence daily living in a changing world, including the political, economic, technological, social and environmental, in order to know what pupils to learn both in the present and for the future.

Finally, teachers have the ability to adapt teaching practices and methods to particular pupils, drawing on their understanding of learning, their knowledge of curriculum content and their knowledge of what pupils need. This professional knowledge and understanding is not static: it changes and develops over time. Some of the change happens externally to the profession: knowledge of how the brain works or developments in subject knowledge; changes in political, social and cultural attitudes affect the way that subjects are taught, or ways that children are perceived. Professionalism therefore implies a responsibility to the continued development of practical knowledge through reflection and interaction, to review the nature and effectiveness of practice, and to continue to increase understanding of the purposes and content of education, individually and collectively.

ATL's definition of teacher professionalism requires a revised and enriched interpretation of CPD, one which acknowledges the complexity of a teacher's role. We believe that current CPD provision is disproportionately driven by national priorities and initiatives and unable to respond to or meet the needs of individual teachers. On an individual level, this leaves teachers de-motivated and can result in a shallow compliance with external top-down edicts without a deeper understanding of the principles, making any practice change to be less sustainable.

## Section B – Future Challenges

**B1) Thinking about these challenges, what qualifications/skills/attributes and qualities should we be looking for when selecting people for initial teacher education in the future?**

Upon commenting on the media debate prior to the general election surrounding alleged comments made by the now Minister of State within the Department of Education Nick Gibb MP that he would “rather have a physics graduate from Oxbridge without a PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) teaching in a school than a physics graduate from one of the rubbish universities with a PGCE.” ATL’s General Secretary Mary Bousted responded by saying “No one would dispute the desire to attract students with top grades into teaching and for teachers to be highly qualified. But politicians would be foolish to ignore the other qualities which are vital to make a good teacher – the ability to communicate, to inspire and enthuse young people, a good imagination, empathy and patience. Academic geniuses without these qualities are highly unlikely to make excellent teachers.”

We have heard articulated a strand of thought that in order to meet the recent supply and demand for increased student teachers at ITEs in Scotland significant numbers of students who would otherwise not have been accepted onto the course found themselves as student teachers. It is inconceivable that students who would otherwise not have been accepted found themselves recipients of large sums of public money via their teacher education and the probation year. This does not appear to be reflected in the GTCS report which stated that ‘probationer teachers entering schools are generally well prepared for the roles and responsibilities of class teachers’.

**B2) What transferrable skills/attributes/qualities will teachers in all or specific sectors need to successfully meet future challenges?**

*Skills:* Flexibility, ability to adapt and to reflect. Creativity in the face of change and future challenge, highly ITC literate.

*Attributes:* A multi-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning; the rapid accumulation of new material and to engender trust.

*Qualities:* Commitment to meeting the educational needs of all children and young people.

**B3) In what ways does teacher education as a whole need to adapt to ensure that all teachers are able to meet future challenges?**

There will need to be a focus on how children and young people develop, on the needs of an increasingly technological world, on the demands of a global society which has concerns about the impacts of climate change.

**This submission was prepared on behalf of  
ATL Scotland, CBC House, 24 Canning Street, Edinburgh, EH3 8EG**