



National College Survey on Teaching Schools
Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers
25 February 2011

ATL, the education union, is an independent, registered trade union and professional association, representing approximately 160,000 teachers, head teachers, lecturers and support staff in maintained and independent nurseries, schools, sixth form, tertiary and further education colleges in the United Kingdom. AMiE is the trade union and professional association for leaders and managers in colleges and schools, and is a distinct section of ATL. We recognise the link between education policy and members' conditions of service.

ATL exists to help members, as their careers develop, through first rate research, advice, information and legal advice. Our evidence-based policy making enables us to campaign and negotiate 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). ATL is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.

ATL policy

ATL believes that teachers as professionals must be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in increasing social justice. Within light national parameters, development of the education system should take place at a local level, within local authority structures: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders; assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools are increasingly encouraged to work collaboratively to offer excellent teaching and learning, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. Accountability mechanisms should be developed so that there is a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, which supports collaboration rather than competition.

Executive Summary

ATL shares the belief that high-quality initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD) is vital to the profession. However, our members are concerned with the policy direction of the government's proposals and that these survey questions are built on the assumption that teaching schools are the way forward for ITT (to use the acronym used by the consultation partners). We believe debate about the role of teaching schools and the implications for teacher professionalism should take place first.

In summary, ATL members are concerned that teaching schools will:

- ◆ de-professionalise teachers, with an over-heavy emphasis on on-the-job craft-like training.

- ♦ weaken the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in initial teacher education (ITE), in terms of research-based practice and stifle reflection and innovation in the profession.
- ♦ face huge staff and financial resource challenges in times of vast local authority cuts, which include restrictions on school funding
- ♦ dilute their core purpose of educating children and young people, with the plethora of purposes levied on teaching schools outlined in the White Paper.
- ♦ further weaken the place of special educational needs (SEN) in initial teacher education and professional development.
- ♦ reduce students' teaching opportunities in other UK countries and further afield.

There is a worrying lack of detail around these proposals. We are concerned that piecemeal surveys and consultations on aspects of the teaching schools' proposals and their implementation will undercut any real attempt to engage with the initial education and continuing professional development needs of teachers. If the government is truly concerned with maintaining and developing the high quality of teachers, then it needs to undertake a proper review and consultation with the profession.

Professionalism

ATL believes that teachers need access to initial and continuing professional education that combines theory and practice, so that they have the deep knowledge and understanding on which to base their professional practice. Teachers use a complex range of skills and knowledge every day in their work with students. Teaching is an intellectual profession, rooted in an in-depth knowledge of learning. This knowledge includes how pupils learn, the potential obstacles to learning and how learning develops. It also includes curriculum content: knowledge of subjects and the relationships between them; understanding wider content such as the development of thinking skills, problem solving, questioning and group working; and knowledge of how pupils' understanding of particular content grows and develops. (New Professionalism, ATL, 2005)

This expertise in both general and subject pedagogy is underpinned by teachers' deep knowledge of their subjects. Teachers also have a responsibility to their pupils' learning, leading to the need for knowledge and understanding of particular pupils as individuals, their interests, needs and potential obstacles to learning. This knowledge is developed through assessment and forming relationships with pupils, families, communities and other professionals. The teaching profession needs knowledge about the complex and compelling forces that influence daily living in a changing world. This includes understanding the political, economic, technological, social and environmental factors that shape society, to ensure that teachers know what pupils need to learn – both in the present and for the future.

Teachers have the ability to adapt their teaching practices and methods to particular pupils. They can draw on their theoretical understanding of learning, their knowledge of curriculum content and what pupils need. This professional knowledge and understanding is not static: it changes and develops over time. Some of these changes take place externally to the profession. They might include knowledge of how the brain works or developments in subject knowledge, changes in political, social and cultural attitudes that affect the way subjects are taught or how children are perceived.

Professionalism therefore implies a responsibility to the continual development of practical knowledge through reflection and interaction. It means reviewing the nature and effectiveness of practice, and continuing to increase understanding of the purposes and content of education, individually and collectively. It is this understanding of the teacher's role that we believe teacher education should support, both in ITE and CPD. It will be achieved in different ways for different teachers, in different settings and at different stages of their careers. It can't be a simple case of one size fits all. A model of initial teacher education that is based on education as 'training' and which concentrates heavily on classroom-based experience risks creating teachers who are not flexible across contexts and with pupils who do not fit within their initial and early experiences.

What is clear is that teachers need access to a framework that combines both theory and practice, so that they have a deep understanding of child development, learning, pedagogy and assessment on which to base their professional choices and practices.

The role of HEIs

The White Paper proposals around teaching schools require significantly more detail about the envisaged role of HEIs in supporting and informing initial teacher training in these institutions. Respondents need to know where the emphasis in ITE will lie within these schools and their networks; what the balance between practice-based 'training' and evidence and theory-based education will be. Our members are aware that there are weaknesses in the current system with tensions between theory and practice. These tensions are exacerbated by the inconsistent quality of HEI-schools links, and with the shorter intensive programmes, an emphasis on speed that can be counter-productive to deep learning and adequate support to students undergoing placements.

We know that many teachers find that the current ITE programmes are often lacking in terms of coverage of child development, behaviour management and SEN. However, HEIs do offer a vital grounding in theoretical understanding around education and pedagogy and continue to provide research evidence to inform practice, for teachers in all stages of their careers. HEI involvement in initial and ongoing professional education provides teacher with crucial professional knowledge, promotes deep understanding of related theory, and promotes reflective practice and innovation. We do not believe that the teaching schools model will address the current weaknesses within the current ITE system and in some aspects, we believe that they will aggravate the problem.

Resource demands

ATL has long supported the role of school partnerships in providing opportunities for schools to share resources and professional expertise. Up to now, partnerships have been supported through their local authorities (LAs). The current devastation of LA resources, the diversifying of school provision and the severe weakening of the LAs' role in relation to schools will result in a significant loss of support for across-school networks.

We do not believe that direct-school funding, including the government's incentive 'pot' for successful teaching school candidates, will provide the required funding panacea, as the weakening of partnerships and the LAs will lead to a massive increase on the demands on school funding. Also, there has been little recognition in the government's proposals of the time and staff resource demands that co-ordinating partnerships and professional collaboration requires.

The responsibilities of teaching schools will lead to a big addition to workload within the schools involved, particularly the teaching schools themselves.

Student teachers will need high levels of support from colleagues and we have little detail about timetable reduction for those staff who will be expected to take on formal roles relating to student training, or responsibilities related to the additional activities. This comes at a time when we know from members across the country that jobs are being cut in many schools.

The role of mentor will require significant development and support. We know that mentoring expertise and support can be inconsistent across schools and a significant number of our NQTs express concerns with the insufficient time and support given by their mentors during their 'training' experiences. We are glad that this consultation recognises the importance of the role of the mentor in looking at appropriate criteria for teaching schools. However, it must be recognised that developing mentors is a resource issue as is ensuring that they have reduced timetables in order that they can support students appropriately. Mentors must have the initial skills and understanding needed to take on the role and the opportunity and expectation to undertake further professional development in order that their professional knowledge and understanding is up-to-date, and evidence-based.

Pupil education: schools' core purpose

Under the White Paper proposals, teaching schools will be combining roles of teacher trainer, CPD provider/procurer, local school improvement partner, service sourcing and procuring, career adviser and leadership development adviser. And they still have to educate their pupils to a high academic standard to keep them worthy of Ofsted's "outstanding" rating. Yet staff will have disrupted timetables, classes will need to be about the training of students in addition to the education of children and in the current context, staff workload will be very high.

Under these types of pressure, the education of pupils at the school is certain to be squeezed and likely to suffer. We believe that the huge pressure these schools will face to keep pupil grades high, while school resources and staff creak under the overwhelming workload demands on them, will lead to vigorous 'teaching to the test'.

We know that high stakes accountability can and has led to schools taking a risk-averse approach to the education of their pupils, concentrating on subjects being examined and further focusing on those elements within subjects most likely to be tested. We are concerned that this will encourage teaching compliant to ideological, government edict in teaching schools. This will lead to an impoverished teaching profession unable to adapt to demand or to innovate to engage pupils, particularly those most disaffected and vulnerable. Pupils' education over time will suffer.

SEN

A good knowledge of child development is crucial so that teachers understand more about how children learn, their behaviours and rates of progress. A number of recent significant reviews (Bercow, Lamb, Ofsted and Salt) show that coverage of SEN is often lacking in current ITE, due to the brevity of training routes and the loss of theory and experience for student teachers.

This leads to an inconsistent level of expertise in SEN across the teaching profession, with resulting problems of identification of special educational need in schools. Under- and over-identification of SEN negatively impacts on pupil engagement, pupil behaviour in schools, on pupils' opportunity to progress and the availability of resources to schools. Salt reported that SEN is an increasingly complex area and recommended that teachers should be given the opportunity

to learn about the range of SEN and of the medical understanding which is growing in relation to some of the conditions which they may meet through their pupils.

An imbalance in ITE provision towards classroom-based training will further undermine any efforts to expand professional learning on child development and SEN which involves deeper-level theoretical understanding. Classroom-based training will be limited to direct experience thus limiting students' range of learning, understanding and experience.

The place of student teachers within the teaching school workforce

We currently have little detail about the status that student teachers will have within teaching schools and how they will work there. We believe this detail must include reduction in timetable commitments, their responsibilities and their remuneration arrangements. Students must be allowed to learn through their teaching; their learning and the learning of their pupils must not be undermined through an approach that assumes a level of practice for which they are neither 'trained' nor ready. Anything else is damaging to them, to their pupils and to the standing of the profession as a whole.

Recruitment

Currently the TDA run high-level recruitment campaigns to encourage entry into the teaching profession. With many of TDA's functions being subsumed into the Department for Education, and the Teaching Schools' emphasis on local models, it is unclear what model of recruitment is envisaged by the government; to what extent the administration of the process will be devolved to teaching school level; how recruitment of under-represented groups will continue and whether this will be subject to review; or what the changes to teacher training will mean for disabled entrants to the profession. We are concerned that the Equalities Impact Audit on the Bill covers neither entry to the profession nor workforce composition.

Student mobility

The kind of training that the teaching schools model espouses could undermine the status of this type of teacher qualification in other UK countries and beyond. For example, the Welsh government has expressed its concerns about this model and intend to monitor it carefully, particularly around the implications for quality control and variability. This could lead to a situation where job options for students who have taken this route are closed off.

Conclusion

In this response, we have gone beyond the limited remit of the National College survey with its focus on the necessary qualities and attributes of successful candidate schools. We believe that far more fundamental questions need to be asked about the teaching schools' model and its implications for professionalism, staff workload, pupil learning and school capacity. Whilst we welcome the emphasis on professional collaboration and strong mentor-student relationships, we are concerned that the structure to support these has been omitted from the model.

We believe that the teaching schools model is flawed:

- ◆ Its ideological foundations, that perceive teaching as a craft only rather than as a profession, will undermine the framework of knowledge and understanding which all teachers need.

- ♦ It poses a threat to current sources of professional knowledge and understanding as embodied in HEIs.
- ♦ It relies on local networks within a context of a weakening of current local structures and a growing diversity of providers.

Whether these flaws are fatal is yet to be seen. We call for more detailed information including

- ♦ how the schools will work;
- ♦ how student teachers will be supported and mentored, including their contractual entitlements;
- ♦ the balance of theory and practice and the role of HEIs;
- ♦ the expectations placed on current staff and the support and recognition they will receive to carry out new roles and responsibilities;
- ♦ how entry to the profession will be managed and monitored, particularly for under-represented groups; and
- ♦ how the impact on pupils will be monitored.

Reference:

[New professionalism](#), ATL 2005