



DfE Review of Higher Level Teachers' Standards
Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers
9 September 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 should be 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.

ATL's Response to Consultation Questions

ATL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current review of teachers' standards through answers to questions raised at this stage of the review on higher level teaching standards. We regret that we do not have the opportunity yet to comment on a draft version of these standards. As stated in our response to the new teaching standards consultation before their publication in July, we regret that the opportunity has been lost for relevant stakeholders to comment on all new standards under review in one package, in order to address issues of complementarity.

Consultation Questions

Q1 Is there a need to develop additional standards for teachers beyond those published by the DfE on 14 July (replacing Core and QTS)?

ATL believes that there is a need to develop additional standards for teachers beyond those published by the DfE on 14 July, which will replace the current Core and QTS standards. Teaching is a reflective and expert profession where professionals develop their skills, knowledge and expertise throughout their careers, both in the classroom and in the school environment. This experienced expertise should be rewarded appropriately in order to avoid discouraging teachers from leaving the classroom in order to receive appropriate recognition and recompense. It is essential that schools have a clear set of standards against which to assess applicants for progression to the upper pay scale and to advanced skills teachers and excellent teacher posts. National standards will ensure consistency across the country and allow mobility for such teachers.

Q2 What characteristics over and above the standards published on 14 July should the best classroom teachers have?

The higher level teacher standards should relate to the role that these teachers could fulfil. We believe that the demands and opportunities facing them are strongest in the areas of coaching and mentoring, provision of professional advice and feedback to colleagues and to work in those areas within and beyond their own school. Therefore, additional higher professional standards should take account of the following characteristics:

- ◆ Extensive knowledge and understanding of how to use and adapt a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies most effectively, including how to personalise learning to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.
- ◆ Extensive knowledge and well-informed understanding of assessment requirements within their curriculum areas and know how to improve the effectiveness of assessment practice within the workplace.
- ◆ Demonstrate excellent and innovative pedagogical practice.
- ◆ Contribute to the professional development of colleagues through coaching and mentoring, demonstrating effective practice and providing advice and feedback.
- ◆ Possess the organisational and interpersonal skills necessary to work effectively with staff and leadership teams beyond their own school.

The latter two characteristics are perhaps the most vital as the demands being made on schools in terms of ITE and CPD mean an increasing demand for high-quality mentoring and coaching within schools, something which, at the moment, suffers from national inconsistency.

We do not believe that post-threshold, advanced skills teachers or excellent teachers should have standards which demand a level of school leadership. These posts are essential in raising standards at schools and help to keep excellent classroom practitioners in the classroom without having to seek a career path through the management route.

Q3 Are standards the best way to identify higher level characteristics in teachers?

Within a national structure, standards are vital in ensuring that higher level characteristics are recognised. Standards should be clear without being too prescriptive – describing a quality of knowledge, skills and behaviour rather than a list of duties which would better belong within a job description.

ATL also recognises that standards cannot fully capture what it is to be an expert teacher - but if overly prescriptive, standards can impede the development and practice of expert teachers. Expertise is not just about carrying out different tasks or even those tasks to a

higher level; it is about the development of an instinctive knowledge and understanding related to teaching and pupils. Research shows that expert teachers not only act differently from novices but also think in fundamentally different ways: “These advanced modes of professional thinking are also tacit and less readily codified and generalised...so experts need to be freed from rules and prescriptions and given the liberty to operate autonomously, creatively and instinctively.”¹ The need for standards to be measurable, which we recognise, must not result in an emphasis on ticking boxes of ‘best practice’, which limit creativity and undermine autonomy, but should focus instead on levels of skill, knowledge and behaviour in excellent teachers.

Q4 What are the areas of professional practice that contribute most to developing good teaching?

Time and space for teachers to reflect on their own practice constructively within a supportive and knowledgeable environment, informed by evidence and experience, is invaluable for the development of excellent pedagogical understanding translated into high-quality teaching practice. It is also important that teachers are given time, through regular CPD, not only to share ideas with colleagues within their own school but also to have the opportunity to do so with colleagues from other schools, across subject/year boundaries to ensure that the learning is broad and different perspectives gained.

Teachers need to be given encouragement, by school leadership and with support from colleagues, to innovate and to concentrate on classroom learning rather than on incessant targets.

Teachers also need to have access to research, having a “knowledge and understanding of the evidential basis of effective teaching” so that, as they develop their expertise, they can “replace compliance with others’ definitions of ‘best practice’, the test of this being that a teacher, like a doctor, should be able to cite the evidence and other justifications for his or her professional decisions”.²

Access to external expertise, ie from areas outside of education but relevant to the development of children and young people and to the communities around them, to increase professional learning is very important. We have seen this in areas such as special educational needs, child protection and mental health for example. Under the impact of current cuts, in services and with local authority structures of expertise and support, we are very concerned that this area of development and support for teachers will become increasingly limited.

Q5 If there are areas of practice that are not already covered in the new Teachers’ Standards, should these be identified through additional standards?

Higher levels standards cannot be about just squeezing in what was omitted from the new Teachers’ Standards. They should describe a higher level of expertise suitable for fulfilling an expert classroom teacher or extended professional role. Therefore, the expertise in pedagogy and classroom management, skills in building strong collaborative relationships with peers, within and outside of the school, and with relevant external services, skills in building constructive pupil and learning-focused relationships with parents, pupils and the broader community, excellent curriculum knowledge and an understanding of child development and a range of learning needs are all needed for those who wish to take on a strong mentoring role both within and outside of their own workplace. However, areas of practice related to strategic and school policy-related leadership should not be put in these

¹ Children, their World, their Education: Final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review, ed Robin Alexander, p.505

² [Review of Teachers’ Standards: Notes from Prof. Robin Alexander, Univ of Cambridge](#), p.2

standards as these would better found in leadership standards; these standards should be about the retention, further development of, and sharing of classroom expertise.

Additional comment:

ATL has already expressed concern that the teacher standards, as published in July 2011, lack an emphasis on valuing diversity and promoting inclusion and equality, elements that were very much part of the current QTS and Core standards. These elements should be in all professional teacher and educational leadership standards as they are core to the role of school staff today.

ATL has proposed that higher level standards should have a strong emphasis on leading and supporting CPD in schools, with a strong emphasis on teaching and classroom practice. However, as we stated in our earlier response, it is concerning that there is little emphasis on professional development in the July teacher standards and innovation is absent. This change in emphasis from the previous Core and QTS standards fits with the worrying de-professionalisation of teachers manifest in those revised standards. Against this background, we are concerned that the revised higher level standards will be similarly impoverished.

We must also reiterate our view, expressed in our response to the revised teacher standards, that standards must not be subject to “political prejudice”³, agreeing with Prof Robin Alexander’s statement that “the standards must highlight the true fundamentals of teaching, and this means that they should be grounded in research rather than the policy of the moment”.⁴

ATL believes that the role of teachers as active agents and professionals in their professional development and an emphasis on creativity and innovation should be reflected within all the professional standards. These higher level standards, relating to expertise and experience in classroom teaching, are key to this, and we hope to have the opportunity to respond to the standards in draft, for further comment.

³ [DfE Review of Teachers' Standards, ATL Response, 10 June 2011](#), p.3

⁴ [Review of Teachers' Standards: Note from Prof Robin Alexander, Univ of Cambridge](#), p.2