

ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS AND LECTURERS

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DCSF Consultation on Amendments to the Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003
Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, September 2009

ATL, as a leading education union, recognises 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 and support staff – are empowered to get active locally and nationally. We are affiliated to the TUC, and work with government and employers by lobbying and through social partnership.

ATL Policy

ATL's education policy is underpinned by the professionalism of teachers. Teachers should be recognised for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in promoting social justice. Development of the education system should take place at a local level: the curriculum should be developed in partnership with local stakeholders and assessment should be carried out through local professional networks. Schools should work collaboratively to provide excellent teaching and learning with a broad and balanced curriculum, and to support pupils' well-being, across a local area. This means that mechanisms must be developed that ensure a proper balance of accountability to national government and the local community, and which support collaboration rather than competition.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We note that it contains a number of disparate elements ranging from a tightening up of regulations to far more fundamental issues of teacher training. While we welcome the opportunity to respond in detail to the TDA regarding requirements for an assessment-only route to QTS, we question a timeline that involves a consultation regarding the principle/advisability of an assessment-only access to QTS running alongside a consultation on the detail of such a route which presupposes a positive response to the former. Our members have expressed a number of concerns, based on their commitment to teacher professionalism and to pupils.

Consultation questions

The registration of Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs) in Scotland or Northern Ireland

We have consulted with our members and colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland, who welcome the clarification and closing of a current legislative loophole that this suggested amendment provides.

We agree with the requirement that OTTs need to have undertaken a period of practical teaching experience at an educational institution in either Scotland or Northern Ireland and are satisfied with the suggested minimum period of 60 days. We welcome the link that this makes with the requirement of minimum 60 days teaching experience which is needed for new teachers in Scotland to gain full registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). As always when teaching experience becomes a requirement to registration, there is a concern that there are sufficient professional opportunities and of the correct type to ensure that OTTs will be able to fulfil this requirement within a reasonable amount of time and that there are appropriate levels of monitoring and support.

Change of arrangements in Northern Ireland regarding award of QTS

ATL's members in Northern Ireland, including those on the GTC welcome the amendments which will recognise the arrangement from 2008 which has meant that the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) has awarded QTS instead of the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), while retaining the reference to DENI to cover people previously qualified.

Assessment-only access to QTS

We will be responding on the detail of this proposal more closely in the current TDA consultation. However, the principle of the idea is also open to challenge and our members have expressed a number of concerns even at this embryonic stage. We already have employment-based routes to teaching. However, we recognise that teachers are a diverse workforce with a wide range of experience and skills and training needs and that some will strongly welcome further flexibility in routes to gaining QTS. While we welcome a move to award professional recognition to experienced teachers, there are important points to consider in terms of their training/professional development.

Trained and qualified teachers will have had, for example, opportunities to learn about child psychology and development, pedagogical theories, research on assessment and curriculum. It is this kind of learning that equips people to develop, change, to be flexible in their practice and to constantly strive to learn and where it can positively impact on learning and behaviour, to innovate. An assessment-only route to QTS, while recognising the invaluable professional experience that many of our current unqualified teachers have, does not seem to recognise the value of education/pedagogic theory, research and professional challenge which good quality teacher training provides. While we don't want to pre-empt the detail within the TDA consultation, we also have strong concerns about the moderation of the process and extent of support for the teacher and for the school which will be required.

Training in British Schools abroad

We welcome the pragmatic flexibility in this proposal to allow trainee teachers working in British service schools abroad (administered by Service Children's Education (SCE), to be awarded QTS with greater recognition of their teaching experience in those schools overseas. However, our members, including those who currently teach in SCE schools have a number of concerns. While we agree with the proposal that trainees in these schools do not need to have had placement wholly or mainly in England, we do believe that part of their training does need to be in England.

Our members believe it vital that trainees get as great a breadth of experience while training as possible. Whilst in many respects, SCE are like schools in England in terms of curriculum and resources, they are also very different. In SCE schools, each family will have at least one parent in employment, children living on the base in many cases, away from extended family with high mobility and turnover of school population. While we agree that a training placement in an SCE school would

be a valuable experience, we are concerned that teaching experience gained solely in SCE schools would be too restricted and limited in scope and variety.

At the moment, this proposal is limited to a widening of category in the relevant legislation. We urge that any detail on the kind of support offered to this kind of placement, including funding, be open to stakeholders for comment at the appropriate stage.

Regulations relating to Guernsey: Change of title and removal of age-limit

Our Guernsey members welcome the updating of title in the regulations, from States of Guernsey Education Council to State of Guernsey Education Department, to reflect current titles in existence. We welcome the regulations' compliance with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, through removing the age limit of 24.

Conclusion

Much of this consultation concentrates on necessary changes in requirements and nomenclature to reflect current working realities and we welcome those amendments. However, there are two proposals which will have an impact on the teaching qualification and we have some concerns about these.

The assessment-only route to QTS will provide a route for currently unqualified but experienced teachers to gaining qualified status and we welcome the commitment to professionalism and the QTS qualification that is presumably the driver for this amendment. However, we urge that this commitment to professionalism also recognises that teaching is an intellectual profession, informed by high-quality learning and research about child development, how we learn, of teaching methods and of curriculum content, promoting creativity and innovation in our schools. This assessment-only route, if it is not going to undermine the profession, will need to recognise this intellectual aspect of teaching and do so within strong structures of moderation and support. Variety in experience is also key to the professional learning of teachers and the inclusion of SCE schools must be something which can add to, not limit, this variety and richness of experience.