



EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE  
**Inquiry into Initial Teacher  
Training and Continuing  
Professional Development  
for Teachers**  
ATL'S RESPONSE

JANUARY 2009

## *Executive Summary*

ATL believes that a richer view of teacher professionalism must be recognized and that teachers' Professional Standards are undermined by a system of excessive accountability. This centre-driven accountability is particularly damaging to the local professional collaboration so valuable to teachers' and schools' CPD.

ATL defines key elements of high-quality teacher professionalism which should be the drivers for effective CPD:

- ◆ As an intellectual profession, informed by knowledge of how pupils learn, of curriculum content and of teaching practices and methods;
- ◆ With a basis in care and responsibility for pupils' learning, including an understanding of equalities issues and how they impact on teaching and learning;
- ◆ Requiring knowledge of broader environment (global to local) and of the impact of politics, economics, social, environmental and technological factors;
- ◆ Informed by continuing professional development of that professional knowledge and understanding;
- ◆ Needing to balance professional values against school and organisational responsibilities.

This richer version of what makes for excellent teaching makes measurement of teacher quality a greater challenge under a system which uses narrow target-based measures. ATL outlines a vision where quality is judged through professional, collaborative dialogue and focused self-evaluation through moderated and high-expectation networks, both in and across schools.

ATL believes that the Professional Standards for teachers at different key stages provide us with sufficient detail to judge future entrants to the profession.

Key concerns for ATL members on ITT are lack of consistency in quality at the placement stage, due to insufficient resourcing at school level, in terms of time, training and funding. However, it is the workload that students face while on placement that raises the most concern, many citing the high levels of paperwork required by headteachers struggling with an excessive accountability regime. Members also feel that students and NQTs are insufficiently prepared in the areas of behaviour management and SEN.

ATL's own 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.

ATL's recommendations for action are for the government to:

- ◆ Review its understanding of teacher professionalism, starting with an acknowledgement of the reflective and creative nature of the profession;
- ◆ Urgently review the current accountability system which is already narrowing the curriculum, continuing to cause unnecessary bureaucracy and related high workload, and providing little opportunity for innovation and collaboration;
- ◆ Develop an accountability system which reflects professional dialogue at school and local network levels.

### **ATL – leading education union**

1. 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**

2. 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 facilitating social justice. Within light national parameters, development of the education system should take place at a local level: 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, parents and the local community, which supports collaboration rather than competition.

### **Understanding and measuring teaching quality**

3. On the one hand, it would seem that there is a strong shared evidence-based sense of what makes for good quality teaching and that this is embodied within the Professional Standards for teachers at different career-stages. The Standards, agreed through Social Partnership, outline the attributes, knowledge and understanding, and skills required to meet the Standards. However, the measurement of pupil achievement and of the quality of teaching through narrow pupil achievement targets undermines many of those standards and the development of appropriate teacher professionalism. As the education union, ATL has articulated an understanding of teacher professionalism and what constitutes high-quality teaching which is the basis for our concerns regarding the current state of affairs in ITT and CPD for teachers. The next five paragraphs outline this understanding.
4. ATL believes that 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.The teaching profession is also practical, and has a wide range of practices and methods.
5. Teaching has a basis in care and responsibility for pupils' learning, leading 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.
6. 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 need to learn both in the present and for the future.
7. Finally, teachers have the ability to adapt teaching practices and methods to particular pupils, drawing on their theoretical 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.

8. Like all professional employees, teachers must balance professional values against their responsibilities to the institutions in which they work. Like all public servants, teachers must balance their autonomy against the powers of government. In a context of increasing involvement of parents and the wider community, the profession has a responsibility to demystify professional work and to develop relationships of trust with all concerned. Building on teachers' knowledge and skills, the profession has a responsibility to further debate about policy and practice, to speak with authority on issues of the role of education, including its role and purpose in tackling discrimination and disadvantage in all their manifestations and in promoting social justice. This does not take place in isolation, but needs the support of both employers and professional communities at school level and at wider local and national levels.
9. The measurement of teaching quality is a continuing challenge. The insistence on inspection against narrow achievement targets and performance against particular government initiatives leads to an emphasis on delivery rather than creativity, on adherence to strict guidelines rather than innovation, on tickboxes rather than deep learner engagement and compliance rather than autonomy and professional responsibility.
10. ATL's joint literature review with the GTCE confirmed that collaborative CPD is among the most effective type of CPD and there may be room for some measuring of quality through professional conversations between the partnerships and networks which schools develop to provide opportunities for this kind of collaboration to take place. 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.

### ***Entry to the profession and initial teacher training***

11. It is difficult to comment on the characteristics of those most likely to be good teachers as at the moment, there is some conflict over what it is that teachers and schools should do and be responsible for, and the areas for which they should not be held responsible. The professional standards, agreed in partnership with different stakeholders, including ATL, provide us with the attributes, knowledge and understanding and skills which teachers should have and it is on the basis of these documents that entry into the teaching profession should be decided.
12. Our members do not report widespread concerns regarding the range of routes into teaching. However, there is a growing concern regarding the QTS routes available to those in current SENCO roles who do not have QTS. There is a significant need for appropriate routes to the gaining of QTS that are supportive of the individuals and schools concerned and furthermore, that the current qualifications of people in these roles are properly accounted for and where relating directly to education and/or their roles as SENCOs, can be used to count significantly as credits towards the achievement of QTS.
13. ATL is very concerned about the aspects of the current ITT system which lead to many trainees either not completing their ITT or become NQTs feeling ill-prepared for their new roles. We have frequent complaints of placements in schools that are unsuitable and with

mentors that are not as supportive (many due to their own time pressures) as they need to be. Members have also expressed the need for sufficient funding to be provided to placement schools to ensure sufficient training for staff to mentor student teachers; the incentive package given to schools to provide placements is felt to be inadequate and disproportionate to the amount of time given by school staff to supporting the student teachers. This problem is exacerbated by a lack of sufficient monitoring and supporting by HEIs of students while on their teaching placements.

14. Workload continues to be a serious issue for those concerned with ITT and its impact. Members reported that an overemphasis on detailed lesson plans and the growing amount of paperwork required by student teachers and NQTs (and indeed, experienced teachers) was leading to excessive workload, early burnout and a negative impact on classroom teaching due to exhaustion and a loss in motivation. Any addressing of this issue will involve looking at the impact of Ofsted in schools and of their inspection-foci and the pressure that many Heads feel to provide vast amounts of 'evidence', leading to a culture which emphasises bureaucratic and excessive accountability over a more balanced emphasis on classroom practice and room to innovate and develop.
15. Our members report that existing ITT provision does not adequately prepare or support trainees in the areas of equality and diversity, behaviour-management and SEN; that there is little direct or in-depth coverage of these subject areas. This is unacceptable both for the trainees and for the schools in which they have placements, and those in which they start teaching as NQTs. There needs to be more emphasis on these themes within the HEI programme, as taught areas and also as topics of particular focus and support on placements.
16. Our members, particularly those who are newly qualified, are concerned over the logistical difficulties that many students face on their student placements, with a high number having to travel considerable distances to their schools. When this is added to the significant amount of paperwork and planning expected from these students (which PPA time, whilst helpful, cannot cover), it is hardly surprising that many do not continue to finish their training. Long travel distances for student teachers also compromise the Government's sustainability agenda for schools.
17. The capacity of the current ITT system (and HEIs within that) to encourage innovation and diversity in ITT is limited by the length of training period, extent of school placement and the effect in schools of the accountability agenda in terms of encouraging risk-averse behaviour and compliance with Department-imposed strategies and initiatives. There needs to be a greater symbiosis between research as practised/encouraged in HEIs and the kind of professional conversation which can underpin effective development and innovation at school-level. The current nature of partnership working is not as effective as it needs to be nor is it sustainable with a need for greater funding/support at both levels. Both suffer from an over-emphasis on narrow targets limiting the provision they offer and the extent to which they can encourage creativity and innovation.

### ***Continuing Professional Development***

18. The DCSF has defined CPD as 'any activity that increases teachers' knowledge or understanding and their effectiveness in schools and can help raise children's standards and improve teachers' job satisfaction' ([www.teachernet.gov.uk](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk)). However, ATL, like researchers such as Day (1997), interpret the nature and purpose of CPD much more widely, stressing the crucial role of teachers in the transmission of values and the evaluation and development of education policy for which they need the knowledge and skills to stimulate, sustain and develop professional thinking.<sup>1</sup> However, many teachers still hold a traditional view of CPD as consisting of courses, conferences and INSET days.
19. We know, from research evidence, that the receptiveness of teachers to and their enthusiasm for professional development is affected by their own personal professional needs and yet ATL research shows that much of the CPD over the last five years has been driven by school development needs determined by national priorities and initiatives linked to the government standards agenda. There has been no shortage of training but its impact may not always be

commensurate with the level of funding/time it takes, as it's left many teachers 'training fatigued' and resentful of 'being jumped through the hoops' with material having been 'drawn up by people who don't seem to be teachers'.<sup>2</sup>

20. We recognise that the Strategies and the training it has driven have resulted in greater consistency of practice in literacy and numeracy, challenging teachers' beliefs and stimulating professional learning. However, researchers have found that this heavy-handed approach to change has led to a change in practice not necessarily built on an understanding of its underpinning rationale or principles, stunting the capacity for its sustainment and development. It also risks the over-dependence on teachers on external authority, thus losing the capacity or desire to make professional judgements and become more reflective, the latter being key, we know, to effective continuing professional development with significant and positive impact on classroom practice.<sup>3</sup>
21. Many teachers see CPD as going on courses and while this is a narrow understanding, for many it is their main exposure to CPD opportunities. The courses which members found to be worthwhile CPD were those that were well-structured, focused, presented by professionals with recent knowledge, encouraged active learning and were relevant and applicable to school and classroom settings. Those that were not considered helpful were those that were 'one size fits all' and which were not adapted to participants' needs. The key constraints on access to courses were lack of time, heavy workload, financial cost and distance. However, there is a growing emphasis, which we welcome, on schools as learning communities within broader learning networks although the government must recognise the anomaly of this reflective professionalism with an agenda which has such an over-emphasis on external testing, heavy accountability and from-the-centre directives.

### Conclusion

22. The Committee will need to consider, from the beginning of this review, what teacher professionalism means, particularly if we wish for the pupils of today and tomorrow to become active citizens, equipped with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to participate positively in society, in work, in their communities and families. These young people will need to be lifelong learners, and flexible to the needs of an employment market which, due to technological advances and changing financial circumstances, requires that ability to learn, adapt and often to innovate. From that definition, we must develop a system of ITT and teacher CPD and a school/accountability culture which allows the growth of that professionalism within a supportive and critical framework.

### Submission References

1. Webb, R and Vulliamy, G (2006) *Coming full circle: The impact of New Labour's education policies on primary school teachers' work*, Association of Teachers and Lecturers
2. Ibid
3. Ibid

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