



**DfE 'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers – An improvement strategy for discussion'**

***Response from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers***

***29 July 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 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 Department for Education's belief that high-quality initial teacher education (ITE) is vital to the profession. However, our members continue to be concerned that the policy direction of the government's proposals will, in fact, undermine the professionalism of teachers, portraying, as it does, teaching as merely a set of techniques rather than the reflective, expert and continually developing profession that it must be.

In summary, ATL members are concerned that this 'improvement strategy':

- ◆ Undermines measures other than degree achievement in trainee teacher selection
- ◆ Involves significant investment in a route which, to date, has a low retention rate
- ◆ Undermines particular sectors and routes into teaching

- ◆ Places very high workload demands on the existing workforce, particularly in schools with GTP programmes and teaching schools.
- ◆ Needs to have more rigorous requirements on all schools involved in ITT to have strong partnerships with high-quality HEIs
- ◆ Further weakens the place of special educational needs (SEN) in initial teacher education and professional development.

### **Raising entry levels to initial training**

ATL welcomes the DfE's statement that academic attainment is not the only important factor in being an effective teacher. However it is concerning that alongside this document's assertion that "good subject knowledge of teachers is an important factor in the success of pupils", there is no recognition of the importance of pedagogical skills, either subject-specific or generic. This is compounded by the linking of government funding to the achievement by trainees of a second class degree or higher. The single measure of degree success is put solidly in the ascendancy over other measures or judgments, crucially undermining them.

As stated in ATL policy, valuing degree classification above all else in terms of selection for teacher training ignores the fact that academic success does not mean a person will be any good at teaching children. It takes many other qualities – the ability to communicate, to inspire and enthuse young people, a good imagination, empathy and patience. ATL members are concerned whether an interpersonal skills test will be able to capture these qualities, particularly as it will be trumped by a funding focus on degree achievement. Furthermore, it would be useful to know the weight that the interpersonal test results will be given within the application process. ATL is also concerned that such tests should be done properly but we are uncertain whether the resources and commitment needed to make the process worthwhile will be available; the Teach First selection process is in-depth and rigorous but there is no doubt that it is time and resource-intensive.

Our members' concerns are that the proposed changes to funding and skills tests arrangements will undercut the flexibility of training providers to recognise the exceptional candidate who does not have the traditional qualifications and it is the pupils and the profession who will be the poorer for that.

### **Expansion of Teach First**

ATL recognises that Teach First embodies some core principles with which we agree, particularly their focus on tackling disadvantage and their emphasis on strong training partnerships between participant schools and the supporting universities. There is no doubt that this is a successful programme for its participants, who achieve QTS and a PGCE after a year in school and receive leadership development and organisational theory training in their second year. However, the Government's drive to expand the Teach First programme must be treated with caution as this is a highly selective resource-rich programme on a small scale, characteristics which are difficult to replicate on a much larger scale, particularly within this economic climate.

Indeed, in these financially straitened times, the government-sponsored expansion of Teach First which has proved so far to have a relatively low level of retention beyond its compulsory initial two-years, seems to an expensive short-term investment; only about 50% of Teach First trainees remain in school much beyond the compulsory two years. As the Teach First mission is about tackling inequality through developing highly-skilled people not only into inspirational teachers but also into "leaders in all fields"<sup>1</sup>, the rate of retention in schools is perhaps not so

---

<sup>1</sup> [History & Mission statement, Teach First website](#)

surprising. However, it does raise some crucial questions as to its suitability as a mainstream teacher training route.

Expanding Teach First into the primary sector and asking them to develop a similar scheme to attract career-changers into the profession may well provide a carrot to high-achieving graduates into those areas, but with an attack on teacher pensions, cuts in salaries coupled with an already low retention rate for the programme, it is yet to be proved to be the panacea that the Government hopes for.

### **Fees and bursaries**

This paper states that “the principle that those who benefit from higher education should contribute more to the cost should apply to teacher training just as it applies to other university courses.” However, there is a strong risk with high fees that fewer young people will decide to go to university, either to do the first degrees which precede a postgraduate route of teacher training or to apply for postgraduate education courses. This will, in turn, impact on the range of courses available and the extent of support which will be offered to students, and indeed to schools. Furthermore, there will be an incentive on those who do study to take subjects that lead to well-paid jobs, and it will be difficult for teachers’ salaries to bear the burden of paying off loans, buying a house and paying into a pension fund. In this context, the bursaries offered look insufficient to meet the need to make teaching a widely-attractive profession.

The prioritisation of shortage subjects through bursaries is a continuation of trend and not one which has proved to be particularly successful. Also there is a risk that the prioritisation within the bursary system will have a negative impact on those given less priority like the primary sector. The government wishes to strengthen the teaching of maths in primary and the confidence of primary teachers in this area. However, the top bursary of £20K is only available to those who will do Maths in secondary with a huge drop for the top primary bursary of £9k, even for those with the top degrees. This is a perverse incentive and does little to attract those from maths and science backgrounds into primary.

The omission of undergraduate initial teacher training courses from the bursary system is questionable; it undermines the value of education as a discipline and indeed fits with the idea that teaching needs minimal pedagogical learning and that the emphasis should only be on subject knowledge and expertise. It will also have a disproportionate effect on the primary sector as the majority of undergraduate initial teacher training courses are in the primary and early years sectors. Degrees in areas such as Early Childhood Studies have also been omitted from the bursary list, which could have a negative impact on the Early Years sector.

We recommend that the government build in a regular review of bursaries particularly as the financial situation, university fees and the current bursary system could lead to shortages in areas currently sufficiently filled, particularly in the humanities. This bursary system is focused on attracting people to specific roles rather than to the profession in general and it is vital that this policy is regularly reviewed as it risks creating a divided system and new shortages. It is also vital that regional variations are accounted for, which the system of bursaries, as outlined in the strategy document, does not seem to do.

We recognise that the teaching schools model is still in development but we would welcome early information on how they are to fit within the fees/bursaries model. If student fees are to apply to the teaching schools route of teacher training, then we would like clarification on how the fee amount is to be decided, and by whom.

The role of the Teaching Agency will be key in providing funding to courses where the cost of provision cannot be met with tuition charge income. However, we would like to know more about the criteria to be applied to the “public interest” justification in order that courses in need receive this additional funding in order to understand how this fits within the overall strategy.

### **ITT places and routes through teacher training**

We welcome the intent, within this document, for further careful consideration of the impact of higher education funding on ITT place allocation. We look forward to seeing new proposals in light of the risks and opportunities within the conjunction of this training strategy and the wider HE funding context.

ATL is very concerned with the proposed changes to the funding of the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). The government states its intention to improve teacher training and to support changes in order to do that yet this proposal to remove the requirement for GTP trainees to supernumerary will mean that it will be schools and teachers who will bear the financial and workload cost, not the government. Trainee teachers not only require a theoretical understanding on which to base their practice but they also require time to reflect upon their and colleagues’ practice, with the support of school mentors. This capacity within the school is unlikely to be found if GTP trainees are to be expected to take on increased teaching responsibilities as they are training. We welcome the Government’s intention to consult with schools, trainees and training providers, and we hope, also the professional unions, about the risks / opportunities in expanding the programme as outlined in the discussion document. Parents should also be consulted as it will result in GTP trainees, ie untrained teachers, having greater teaching responsibilities with potentially less collegiate support and this could have a negative impact on their children’s education.

ATL welcomes the proposal to simplify the application process, potentially to make it a universal application process. We also welcome the intent to enhance the TDA’s online portal on GTP providers so that potential applicants can have access to full course information and can apply for the GTP directly.

### **Management of initial teacher training**

The discussion document states the intention that over the next five to ten years schools should take on responsibility for ITT. However, ATL is concerned that the school system, as a whole, does not have the capacity and with increasing education cuts, is unlikely to have the resources to develop that capacity. There is also a concern about the impact that this will have on higher education institutions and on their role in initial training, and in supporting the profession as a whole, through high-quality education research.

ATL believes that teacher professionalism involves continual review of the nature and effectiveness of practice, in light of knowledge gained through experience and research. High-quality HEIs play a crucial role in this, embodying the principles of study, reflection, research and innovation, enabling teachers, individually and collectively, to build their understanding of the purposes and content of education. We recognise that not all HEIs are of equal quality and that work needs to be done to ensure consistent high-quality education and research in HEIs across the country but removing responsibilities and funding from HEIs as a whole is certainly not the way to achieve it.

In this light, we welcome the inclusion of an emphasis on strong relationships between schools and universities, within a framework that ITT provision will be accountable to the strength of such partnerships. However, it is still open to

question whether it is schools rather than universities, who should, in terms of capacity and professional needs, lead those partnerships. There is no recognition within this document of the impact of different routes upon the workload of the profession, on teachers and leaders and yet this strategy is placing hugely increased demands on the staff of schools involved in initial teacher training.

ATL has already raised our members' concerns regarding Teaching Schools in our response to the March 2011 consultation ([NCSL Teaching Schools Consultation: ATL Response](#)). The emphasis in this strategy on relationships with universities is welcome but we believe that that emphasis should be reflected more strongly in requirements for teaching schools and other school-based routes.

We also believe that diversity within school networks for ITT and CPD purposes is crucial to their success. Therefore we are very concerned that the discussion document raises the possibility of large chains of academies comprising networks, diluting that very diversity, with the risk that we end up with teachers trained to a particular teacher model, influenced by the sponsor's vision rather than by the needs of the wider diverse society, comprising the myriad of roles which young people will fulfil throughout their lives, and by developments in areas such as science and education.

This strategy is not particularly detailed on funding, but on current information, we do not believe that direct-school funding, including the government's incentive 'pot' for successful teaching school candidates, will provide the necessary, proper funding, as the weakening of partnerships and the LAs will lead to a massive increase in the demands on school funding. Furthermore, 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.

### **ITT content**

Appropriately, this strategy includes reference to the revised professional standards. ATL has already responded to the standards document ([DfE Review of Teacher Standards: ATL Response](#)) and therefore will only briefly reiterate here the dissonance between the government's handing over of significant responsibility for ITT to schools, while prescribing professional practice, ie systematic synthetic phonics as a single method, to the profession, in standards and in ITT strategy. Having a particular teaching methodology described as a fundamental priority for government is incompatible with the scale of change facing education at the moment and shows a lamentable lack of trust in teacher and teacher educator professionalism. ATL wholly rejects the underlying assumption of government policy, as seen in their reviews/proposals around ITT/CPD, teacher standards, curriculum amongst others, that successful teaching is about no more than a set of techniques.

We welcome the acknowledgement that behaviour is a key issue of concern for teachers, particularly NQTs and trainees. We also welcome the commitment to tackle all forms of bullying, particularly homophobic bullying. We welcome the lack of central prescription to high-quality providers on how to deliver better quality initial training on behaviour although we are concerned, with the comparisons within the document to synthetic phonics, that it is technique that is the focus rather than deeper understanding of pupil behaviour. Indeed, we would welcome an emphasis on child development and SEN within the document, as part of the focus on behaviour. Furthermore, this commitment to tackling behaviour through ITT, particularly in schools, will be undermined by the cessation of local behaviour support partnerships and a massive reduction in the capacity of local authorities and extended services to provide the essential support for schools in tackling the deeper issues behind pupil behaviour. This puts huge pressure on ITT as the way to tackle

behaviour problems in schools, wrongly putting the responsibility on individual teachers rather than behaviour being faced as a broader school-wide, educational and community challenge.

ATL members are extremely concerned that there is no mention of SEN within the improvement strategy document. SEN has long been acknowledged as a weakness in initial training and continuing professional development and the Green Paper made a commitment to address this weakness. This is not reflected within this strategy and ATL hopes that further proposals and information will be forthcoming in relation to SEN and ITT. ATL believes that an imbalance in ITE provision towards classroom-based training will undermine any efforts to expand professional learning on child development and SEN which involves deeper-level theoretical understanding. Classroom-based training, without appropriate HEI input, will be limited to direct experience thus limiting students' range of learning, understanding and experience.

## **Conclusion**

ATL believes that teachers need access to initial professional education that combines theory and practice, so that they have the deep knowledge and understanding on which to base their professional practice. 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).

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 initial education should support. 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.

ATL believes that the fundamental flaws in this strategy lie in the following:

- ◆ That its ideological foundations are based in the perception of teaching as a narrowly-defined craft rather than as a profession, which will undermine the framework of knowledge and understanding which all teachers need.
- ◆ That it poses a threat to current sources of professional knowledge and understanding as embodied in HEIs.
- ◆ That it relies on local networks within a context of a weakening of current local structures and a growing diversity of providers.
- ◆ That it omits consideration of workforce capacity and impact of increased school-based training on the school's workforce and on pupils' education.
- ◆ That it undermines the primary sector through its bursary proposals.

## **References:**

- [New professionalism](#), ATL 2005
- [NCSL Teaching Schools Consultation: ATL Response](#), February 2011
- [DfE Review of Teaching Standards: ATL Response](#), June 2011