



***Attracting, training and retaining the best
teachers: ATL's Submission to the Commons
Select Committee***

October 2011

1. ATL – leading education union

ATL represents teachers, support staff, lecturers and leaders. We believe 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. Schools should be supported 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.

2. 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 supports collaboration rather than competition.

3. **Identifying the sorts of applicants who become the best teachers and strategies known to be effective in attracting these applicants**

Research and school-based evidence does not provide a simple blueprint of an applicant type; instead it shows us that it is intrinsic motivation and training and support at initial and continuing stages which is key to teachers feeling and being effective in their professional roles. Entrants into teaching who go on to feel passionate about and committed to education, and confident in their practice, are those who are motivated by aspects of the job itself;

"To work with children, the chance to be creative in my work daily, to make learning fun and interesting, to help children feel cared for and supported at school." (ATL member survey, November 2010)

ATL believes the government to be misguided in its emphasis on degree classification in applicants as it undermines other, vital, measures in trainee teacher selection.

4. GTCE research in 2009 reported that the two motives cited as 'strongly' attracting the largest percentage of their survey respondents to undertake ITT were the prospect of 'helping young people to learn' (78%) and of 'working with children or young people' (59%). However, extrinsic factors, while often not specific motivators, play a key role in individuals' decisions to join and to stay in the profession. ATL members often report this complex interplay of factors:

"Because I love children and am passionate about my subjects areas plus it afforded me holidays to be with my children and an excellent pension and benefits scheme - I would continue but these are the primary reasons." (ATL member survey, November 2010).

5. Strategies to recruit individuals who will become the most effective and committed teachers need to recognise the motivation that these individuals portray and the economic realities which they inhabit. Studying is becoming increasingly expensive and with a growing number of applicants coming through postgraduate routes, bursaries will prove a strong incentive to help people make the decision or enable them to afford to make this investment in their future career. Pay, benefits and pensions arrangements need to be sufficient to make that investment worthwhile and affordable throughout their careers.

6. Equality is important within professions as is recognition of expertise and useful experience. Therefore, it is vital that recruitment strategies are sensitive to the morale of those already within the profession. We need joined-up policy thinking with strategies on recruitment and retention that complement rather than damage each other. The General Teaching Council has reported on the number of complaints made by early-career teachers around recruitment packages that have

- been introduced a year too late for them to benefit; “the experience of being less well rewarded than more inexperienced colleagues doing the same job has been demoralising, and may have an impact on retention”.¹
7. Motivation and recruitment strategies are only part of the story of our best teachers; the quality of training and professional education they receive at initial and later stages of their careers is vital to their effectiveness and to their ongoing commitment to education.
 8. **Particular routes into teacher attracting high-quality trainees and Government’s proposed changes to initial teacher training (ITT)**

One size doesn’t fit all in initial teacher education routes, both in terms of attracting students and in terms of meeting their training needs. We know from research that students pick training routes for a variety of reasons which include the following factors; the balance of school-based and theoretical elements within the course, financial considerations, geographical availability, course duration and a complex interplay of those factors with other personal considerations. GTCE has published a number of reports on initial teacher education which we recommend the Committee access as they capture the complexity of the issue; [GTCE ITE Research Package Link](#).
 9. The government proposed-bursaries will provide incentives but ATL is very concerned about the huge variability in bursaries available, which not only favour particular shortage subject areas but also secondary strongly over primary. This is an unfortunate step at a time when early intervention and strong early education is identified as such a vital factor in dealing with a range of learning, behaviour and SEN challenges. 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.
 10. The proposed change to the status of Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) trainees from supernumerary status is also alarming, and fails to reflect the negative impact of excessive workload on the initial and early experiences of student teachers. It will also affect the workload

¹ GTCE, ‘Recruiting and retaining the best teachers. Initial advice from the General Teaching Council’, June 2001, p.5

of their teacher colleagues, thus limiting the amount of time and support that they will be able to give to trainees.

11. ATL members, particularly those in independent schools, would welcome a look into assessment-only routes to QTS; recognising the experience and expertise they gain throughout their careers in the independent sector. Up to now, the University of Gloucestershire has been the sole provider for this with limited places, thus severely restricting the availability of this option. We hope that this government will continue the work of the previous administration in reviewing this route with the view to expanding it, to other providers and increasing the number of places available for experienced but hitherto non-QTS teachers working in the independent sector.
12. **Evidence on the type of training which produces the most effective teachers and whether the Government's proposed changes to initial teacher training, particularly the focus on more school-led training, will help to increase the number of good teachers in our schools.**

Research evidence and what we know from members is that, with so many variables and the range of individuals with different needs within the teacher population, there is no one type of training that can be identified to produce the most effective teachers. School-led training has identified strengths of staff who are experienced in mentoring resulting in high levels of support for trainees. However, increasing the numbers of schools involved in school-led training will require a significant investment in professional development of staff mentors and in making workload adjustments to ensure that school staff have the time and opportunity to enhance their own professional development in order to better support the learning and experience of trainees.
13. ATL's members are also concerned by the government's significant investment in the expansion of Teach First, which while successful against some measures of achievement, is costly, resource-intensive and has low retention rates. What Teach First does show us is that extensive investment, with an intensive package of HEI support within schools from initial training into early professional development (EPD) and the opportunities for trainees/NQs to network and support each other are factors that increase chances of success.
14. HEI expertise is vital in ITT, whether as leader or partner within the training routes; Ofsted and HMCI have confirmed that HEI-linked programmes are generally of higher-quality. We know from member feedback and from the experience of members in schools that routes should provide strong grounding not only in subject pedagogy and child development, but also in understanding pupil behaviour and building strong and supportive relationships with pupils, SEN, earlier

- stage approaches (early years and primary, for example), assessment for learning etc. Schools cannot alone provide this range of knowledge, understanding nor access to extensive research.
15. The government's recent initial teacher training proposals² state 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.
 16. Finally, research shows that initial teacher education routes that include an emphasis on interpersonal skills, development of understanding of pupil behaviour, organising workload, preparation for reflective practice, backed by strong partnerships between HEIs and schools and training for school mentors within ITE routes are key to producing effective teachers. While we welcome the lack of central prescription to high-quality providers on how to deliver better quality initial training on behaviour, we are concerned that, with the comparisons within their recent proposals to synthetic phonics, 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 throughout government's proposals on initial training, CPD and standards, as part of the focus on behaviour. Furthermore, we are concerned that government's focus on 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.
 17. SEN has long been acknowledged as a weakness in initial training and continuing professional development and the SEN Green Paper made a commitment to address this weakness. This is not reflected within the recent government ITT 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.

² DfE, 'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers', 2011

18. **Assessing and rewarding good teachers and the use of Government's draft revised standards for teachers**

This inquiry asks about the use of the government's draft revised standards to which ATL responded on behalf of members; [DfE Review of Teacher Standards: ATL Response](#). ATL is concerned that government proposals around ITT/CPD, teacher standards and the curriculum amongst others betray a vision of successful teaching as about no more than a set of techniques rather than use of professional judgement. Therefore, we believe that these standards are overly-prescriptive and detailed and will drive conformity and compliance with the ticking of those 'technique boxes', undermining the professionalism of teachers and their ability and confidence to innovate in order to meet the needs of pupils.

19. Teachers' work needs to be recognised within proper structures of professional recognition with appropriate remuneration. They also need to be rewarded with proper professional autonomy; this links strongly with retention as research from the University of North London found that the most common reasons for leaving teaching are to seek more professional autonomy, and more opportunities for creativity.³ The GTC also found that teachers have questioned "the balance between their significant professional responsibilities, and their opportunities to make decisions about how best to fulfil them", with teaching perceived as offering "fewer opportunities for the exercise of expert judgement than other professions". Teacher morale and retention will be supported through enabling teachers to apply what they know from their professional training and experience, to decisions about curriculum and pedagogy within a framework that ensures an entitlement for all pupils.⁴

20. **The contribution of professional development to the retention of good teachers**

Professional autonomy which relates strongly to the retention of good teachers relies on teachers having the opportunities for professional reflection and development. Access to continuing professional development (CPD) is a vital part of professional retention as is recognition and career development. Teachers building their own knowledge, reflecting and growing in confidence in their practice is key to their enjoyment and levels of effectiveness. Research and member evidence shows that CPD which is "personalised, relevant, sustained and supported" is most likely to be effective, "critical to improving teaching quality and learning experiences and outcomes" for pupils.⁵ For CPD to be most effective, it must be CPD that builds on the personal needs and wishes of teachers, rather than merely following policy diktat. Supportive school leadership is also vital to ensure that

³ GTC, Recruiting and retaining the best teachers, 2001

⁴ OECD Project: Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers: country questionnaire

⁵ GTCE Evidence to the Select Committee, 2009

teachers have both access to CPD and the opportunity to sustain the learning through their practice, reflection and work with colleagues.

21. **Retention of teachers across even the most challenging schools**
Job satisfaction for teachers is related to factors such as professional autonomy, role confidence, workload and work-life balance, access to high-quality CPD, career development and adequate remuneration. It also involves teachers feeling that they are realising the objectives which encouraged them to enter the profession in the first place; making a difference to the lives of children and young people, growing in their love and interest in their subjects, enjoyment of working with children and young people, job variety and challenge.
22. Issues of retention therefore not only need to address teachers' initial training and CPD, but also issues of professional autonomy and responsibility, particularly relating to curriculum and assessment and appropriate levels of accountability. The current excessive levels of accountability are a negative factor in teachers' motivation and retention levels.
23. Retention relates to teachers' professional confidence, not only in their subjects but also in building positive relationships with pupils, dealing with ranges of behaviour and of SEN. CPD can support the latter, but can only do so effectively within whole-school strategies of support and with access to external services and sources of expertise. Unfortunately the availability of these is being drastically cut.
24. In order for future school and profession needs to be met, it's vital that trends within the profession of retention are monitored, to ensure that personal and state investment in teacher training are well made. As diverse profiles of entrants emerge, it is important that the differing levels of retention are noted; for example, different levels of volatility amongst different groups has been noted, such as career changers, who are more likely to leave teaching than those who didn't change career to enter teaching. Research needs to be done to understand how the initial motivation that brought these individuals into teaching can be kept alive.
25. The Select Committee has specifically asked about retention in challenging schools. For teachers to avoid frustration and the damage it causes to morale, it is vital that challenging schools have the support they need to meet the often challenging needs of the children and young people with whom they work; the suitable professional training across the whole school workforce, the necessary in-house resources, access to relevant external services such as health and social care, and sufficient staffing numbers to avoid work overload and burnout.

26. The diversification of the school system, the emphasis on competition, the cuts to local authority funding and responsibilities, and the decline of support staff's training/CPD opportunities along with the decline in their numbers, will make the work of challenging schools more difficult as it is likely to result in an over-concentration of 'challenging' pupils in these schools, less access to local support services, the undermining of school partnerships and the loss of in-school staff resources and expertise. Retention needs far more than quick-fix strategies; it involves a holistic approach to education and to the role of teachers and other education staff.

27. **Conclusion**

ATL welcomes this inquiry into attracting, training and retaining the best teachers. We know, backed by member and research evidence, that this cannot be about finding the quick fix or easy answer; it isn't about identifying the 'right' sort of person, the 'right' sort of training route. Rather, it is about particular principles and features of professionalism and support across a diverse set of routes, across a diverse group of people, whose motivations relate to intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards in terms of salary, pensions and holidays, while not key motivators, are vital in ensuring retention in the profession, reflecting the challenging work, the economic needs of teachers and their families and the professional responsibility they bear. Teachers value their professionalism; a professionalism that is based on proper autonomy and on the opportunity to continually learn and improve through reflection, innovation and creativity.
