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Primary school teachers have been overwhelmed with a plethora of initiatives in recent times, from national assessment targets and curriculum reform to workforce remodelling. Although there has been some evaluation of the impact of individual initiatives, there is little in the way of research into the cumulative effect of changes on primary teachers' work. ATL was delighted to commission Rosemary Webb and Graham Vulliamy to revisit 50 schools which they had originally studied as part of an ATL project in the early '90s. Doing so has enabled them to give us an overview of the effects New Labour reform has had on teachers' roles, attitudes and professionalism over the intervening decade.

For many teachers, the overwhelming feeling in the early part of this new century is that education policy has "come full circle": that the most recent reforms are putting back into teaching what had been taken away by the imposition of narrow and prescriptive literacy and numeracy strategies. But teachers also recognise that there were benefits from the strategies; coming full circle does not mean a wholesale return to how things used to be. There is an emerging belief that the primary national strategy promises a middle path between freedom and prescription, and the possibility of developing a new kind of teacher professionalism which balances flexibility with accountability. However, while we retain the narrow end of key stage assessment with results used for a variety of conflicting purposes, the resulting pressure is likely to continue to have adverse effects on children's learning and teachers' well-being. We are working hard to bring change to the system to make a new teacher professionalism a real possibility.

Teacher professionalism has also been influenced by workforce remodelling and, in particular, the greater role of support staff in the classroom. For some teachers, the increased responsibilities taken on by teaching assistants has felt like a threat; for many others there is excitement about how this increased support has enhanced teachers' professionalism. ATL, in partnership with government and other teaching and support staff unions, is committed to supporting enhanced professionalism, for both teachers and support staff.

Each chapter in this report can be read on its own to provide an insight into particular changes to policy and practice. Taken together, the full report tells a fascinating and very readable story about the changes for teachers at Key Stage 2. ATL is pleased to find signs that teachers feel they are beginning to reclaim their professionalism.

***Dr Mary Bousted***

*ATL General Secretary*

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This report is the result of an ongoing research project (2003-06), commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), into the impact of the New Labour government's educational policies on primary school teachers' work. These policies have resulted in profound changes at a variety of levels, from curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to performance management and workforce remodelling. In combination, they embody Prime Minister, Tony Blair's, vision to "restore teaching to its rightful place as one of Britain's foremost professions ... recognising the need for a step change in the reputation, rewards and image of teaching, raising it to the status of other professions such as medicine and law" (Blair, 1999). The mechanism for doing this was laid out in the policy document *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change* (DfEE, 1998b), with its aim to "modernise" the profession and embrace a "new professionalism".

While policy-makers and educationalists have contributed extensively to debates concerning this new professionalism (eg Hargreaves, 2000; Sachs, 2001), there has been little research into the impact such changes have had on teachers' own perceptions of their work, to update the extensive pre-New Labour research on this theme conducted for the Primary Assessment, Curriculum and Experience (PACE) project (Osborn *et al.*, 2000).

Our research incorporates a longitudinal dimension as it replicates a previous ATL-funded research project carried out between 1992 and 1994 in 50 primary schools in England and Wales (Webb, 1993; Webb, 1994; Webb and Vulliamy, 1996). The 1992-94 ATL study produced two research reports, the first of which (Webb, 1993) looked at the impact of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the introduction of the national curriculum on classroom practice; the second of which (Webb, 1994) looked at their impact on whole-school issues and the management of change. The first of two planned reports from the 2003-06 project, this publication specifically addresses the impact of the New Labour government's reforms on primary teachers' classroom practice and on their perceptions of teacher professionalism.

### Research context

In England and Wales the reforms of the '80s and '90s increased direct government control of teaching and exerted pressure for the remodelling, reskilling and change in culture of teaching. A rich collection of research texts document in detail the impact of the pressures created by curriculum and assessment reform on primary schools (eg Campbell and Neill, 1994; Galton *et al.*, 1999; Woods *et al.*, 1997; Osborn *et al.*, 2000). Our 1992-94 ATL research portrayed the experiences and practices of teachers in the post-1988 Education Reform Act context of multiple innovations. It documented their responses to escalating workloads and the new demands of their expanding roles, such as subject development and monitoring (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996). While addressing whole-school issues, its focus in relation to classroom practice was predominantly at Key Stage 2 (KS2), in order to monitor the impact of the national curriculum's introduction on the teaching of junior children. This also

acknowledged the fact that the views of KS2 teachers are less frequently represented by professional groups than their colleagues in the early years.

At that stage we found teachers' values, beliefs and prior experiences were powerful mediators influencing the range of responses to the changes. Increasingly, as shown in our comparative research study of curriculum change in England and Finland in the mid-90s, government prescription of curriculum content, the associated intensification of teachers' work and the increased managerialism harnessed to external agendas were de-motivating and disenfranchising teachers leading to "change without commitment" (Webb and Vulliamy, 1999b). In this context, external agendas were met out of fear, resignation or perceived necessity for self-preservation and the image of the school.

Osborn *et al.* (2000), in their data for the PACE project collected between 1989 and 1997, demonstrate how the shift from professional autonomy to contractual responsibility as the basis for accountability was associated for many teachers with increased stress, value conflict and reduced job satisfaction. Such undermining of teacher morale is reflected in the chronic under-retention of newly trained teachers and the resignation of experienced staff, leading to teacher shortages and unfilled teaching posts (Smithers and Robinson, 2001). However, from the inception of the reforms, research has also revealed teachers are creatively interpreting the requirements according to their own professional values and the perceived needs of their pupils and, through so doing, are developing new knowledge and skills (Webb and Vulliamy, 1996; Woods, 1995; Vulliamy *et al.*, 1997).

The first major changes for primary schools introduced by New Labour were the national literacy strategy (NLS) in September 1998 and the national numeracy strategy (NNS) in September 1999. These required teachers to make considerable changes not only in the content of their teaching but also to pedagogy. Shifting government discourses on the theme of pedagogy provide a striking insight into the changing nature of policy-makers' definitions of "teacher professionalism". Prior to the Education Reform Act 1988, schools and teachers were not subject to any prescription concerning curricula or pedagogy and teaching methods, in particular, were viewed as the product of professional judgement (McCulloch *et al.*, 2000). While the Education Reform Act introduced, for the first time in English schools, government prescription over curriculum content, it was made explicit that:

*The Education Reform Act does not prescribe how pupils should be taught. It is the birthright of the teaching profession, and must always remain so, to decide on the best and most appropriate means of imparting education to pupils. (NCC, 1990, p.7)*

The strategies, however, introduced daily literacy and numeracy hours into primary schools and, crucially, specified class organisation and teaching methods. The justification for this was that "the time has long gone when isolated unaccountable professionals made curriculum and pedagogical decisions alone without reference to the outside world" (DfEE, 1998b, p.14).

At the outset of our research, government intervention in the primary curriculum continued with the publication of a new primary strategy (DfES, 2003a). This was intended to blend a more creative and flexible curriculum with the standards agenda already established by the NLS and NNS and the accompanying performance tables of SATs results in English and maths. It was therefore timely to explore the impact of the strategies on teachers' classroom practice, values and perspectives on professionalism, and to establish the continuities or discontinuities in their responses with those generated by curriculum and assessment reform in the '90s.

New Labour's strong promotion of the use of ICT in schools also had potential implications for changes in primary classroom practice. For example, in 1998 the government launched the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), which provided a network of information, learning materials and funding for schools through the Standards Fund and its associated Virtual Teacher Centre (DfEE, 1998a). Since then the government has committed resources both for the training of teachers in ICT and for the purchase of hardware, such as interactive whiteboards, in primary schools.

It was also timely to revisit the analyses of primary teachers' work over the last decade because, in acknowledgement of the changing demands being made of teachers and the subsequent need for opportunities in professional growth and development, the government was implementing the raft of measures set out in the Green Paper *Teachers: meeting the challenge of change* (DfEE, 1998b). Together with the national agreement *Raising standards and tackling workload* — an agreement signed by most education unions, employers and the government in 2003 — such measures initiated a fundamental reorganisation of the management of schools and the remuneration of teachers in England. This included proposals for a major expansion in the use of support assistants, the allocation of 10% of teachers' time for preparation, planning and assessment (PPA), redesigned patterns of progression through the career structure — coupled with a new performance management system — and the introduction of a fast-track to allow speedy progress through the restructured levels of the teaching force (Menter *et al.*, 2004).

Given the general research aims and context discussed above, the study addresses the more specific research questions as follows.

- 1** What effects are the New Labour government's educational policies having on primary teachers' attitudes, values and experiences?
- 2** What are primary school teachers' perceptions of the changes in their roles and responsibilities over the last decade?
- 3** How do primary teachers respond to these changes and how do they impact on teacher self identity, notions of teacher professionalism, job satisfaction and school cultures?
- 4** What formal and informal strategies are adopted by teachers, especially headteachers, individually and collaboratively to cope with, manage, harness and/or challenge the demands made of them?

The focus of this first report is specifically on classroom practice and, as such, concentrates particularly on the first two of these research questions.

### Research strategy

The same condensed fieldwork qualitative research strategy has been used for this report as in the 1992-94 research. This involved classroom observation, teacher interviews and the collection of relevant documentation from day-long visits to a sample of 50 schools in 16 local education authorities (LEAs) throughout England. (Note that the term “LEA” is used throughout this report, as opposed to the term “local authorities or LAs” which is now in use, since this was the term used at the time the research was conducted.) Given the centrality to the research of teachers’ perspectives on their work, interviews formed the predominant method of data collection. The semi-structured nature of the interviews and the open-ended questions enabled teachers to convey their “work stories” (Kainan, 1992) in their own terms, metaphors and conceptual frameworks. The methodological rationale for such an approach is discussed more fully in Webb and Vulliamy (1996, pp.3-7).

The aim was, on the one hand, to capitalise on the potential advantages of qualitative research methods in providing in-depth insight and analysis that is faithful to the complexity of context. This overcomes the common drawback of national questionnaire surveys where the language used is often either ambiguous or used in totally different ways in different schools. On the other hand, we were conscious of the criticisms made of much qualitative research by some policy-makers and academics for the often very small, and unrepresentative samples used in such studies (see Gorard, 2001). Our research strategy was therefore guided by a combination of the use of qualitative research techniques — mainly tape-recorded interviews — with a sample of schools large enough to be likely to reflect the range of teachers’ responses to change.

### The sample schools

The potential to draw general conclusions from the findings requires consideration of the criteria for the selection of the original 50 schools in the 1992-94 study, and of the manner in which these schools changed over the subsequent decade. Thirteen LEAs, of which 12 were in England and one in Wales, agreed to participate in the original project and were chosen to reflect variety in terms of their size and inner city/urban/rural nature. Schools were selected on the following basis:

- personal contacts (10)
- from information given in the *Primary education directory* and other published sources (12)
- following participation in an earlier research project (Webb, 1993) on the implementation of the national curriculum (11)
- from LEAs’ suggestions of schools which they felt were either closely following LEA guidelines or were organising the curriculum in ways strongly approved by the LEA (17).

Our aim in the LEA-nominated sub-sample was to ensure that we had examples that were perceived to be good practice. We wrote to and/or phoned headteachers requesting permission to include their schools in the project. This was granted in all but six cases, where headteachers stated that they and/or their teachers were under too much stress to participate in the research. A consequence of this may be that the original 1992-94 project research sample did not represent those schools throughout England and Wales who recognised that, at that time, they were really struggling with the implementation of the national curriculum.

The aim of the follow-up 2003-06 research was to re-visit each of the original 50 schools, if possible, in order to provide a longitudinal account of changing school and teacher fortunes over the intervening decade. We decided, however, not to include the one Welsh school in the original sample since English and Welsh educational policies have diverged over the intervening decade and a single school could clearly not be seen as representative of the Welsh experience. Instead, we substituted a school of similar size, the participation of which in two previous research projects (the York-Finnish project [Webb and Vulliamy, 1999a,b] and the York-Jyväskylä teacher professionalism project [Webb *et al.*, 2004]) meant that we had teacher interview data and classroom observation data going back to 1994.

When we found that a small school in the original sample had closed in the first year of the project (2003), we made one other substitution of a small school that had also been part of the earlier projects referred to above. Following local government reorganisations, the 2003-06 sample of 50 schools came from 16 LEAs rather than the 13 in the original 1992-94 research. Using the DfES's classification of LEAs by region, 7 were from Yorkshire and the Humber, 4 from the North East (all these four were in the same single authority in the 1992-94 study), 2 from the North West, 1 from East of England, 1 from East Midlands and 1 from the South West.

Fieldwork for the first phase of the research took place over a three-year period (2003-05) and, as with the 1992-94 project, further fieldwork is planned in about a quarter of the original sample of 50 schools in 2006. While most schools, when contacted, readily granted us research access, there were some schools that preferred to delay because of ongoing staff morale and leadership problems (eg having just been placed in special measures) or because the timing was felt to be inappropriate (eg a forthcoming Ofsted inspection). In such cases we waited for a year or so before trying again. Despite some schools in our sample having been through extremely difficult circumstances, access was finally granted to each of the 48 schools from the original sample (giving, as in 1992-94, a total sample of 50 research schools).

Table 1a provides a comparison of the 1992 and 2003 research samples by type of school. This indicates that both the "first" schools in the original sample had been subsequently reorganised into primary schools. Two middle schools and four junior schools had also turned into primary schools.

**Table 1a** Research sample by type of school in 1992 and 2003

Date	Primary	Junior	Middle	First	Total
1992	35	8	5	2	50
2003	43	4	3	0	50

Table 1b shows that whilst 12 schools from the original sample had remained about the same size as before (with a less than 10% increase or decrease in pupil numbers), 26 schools had increased their pupil numbers by more than 10% and 12 schools had pupil numbers that had fallen more than 10%.

**Table 1b** Distribution of changes in numbers of pupils in sample schools 1992-2003

Changes in pupil numbers	Down 50-74%	Down 26-49%	Down 10-25%	Down 9%-Up 9%	Up 10-25%	Up 26-49%	Up 50-74%	Up 75-100%	Total
No. of schools	2	2	8	12	12	8	3	3	50

As a consequence there had been a relative move towards larger schools in the 2003 sample compared with the 1992 one (see Table 1c).

**Table 1c** Research sample by size of school in 1992 and 2003 [%s]

	Small schools 0-100 pupils	Medium schools 101-300 pupils	Large schools 301+ pupils
1992 research sample	18%	54%	28%
2003 research sample	14%	48%	38%

Table 1d gives the 1992 and 2003 figures for school size for primary schools in England by way of comparison with our sample. The original 1992 sample had a higher proportion of large schools than in England generally. This arose from a deliberate decision to include a higher proportion of larger schools, following the government's pronouncements that they wished to encourage the wider spread of organisational strategies, such as specialist subject teaching and setting by ability, which were thought to be more commonly associated with large schools (assumptions which our original research subsequently showed to be incorrect — see Vulliamy and Webb, 1995). A comparison of the 2003 sample by size of school with English primary schools in general indicates that the relative reduction in the number of small schools mirrors almost exactly the national picture, but that the shift from medium-sized schools to large schools is slightly bigger in our sample than in the national average.

**Table 1d** Size of English primary schools in 1992 and 2003 [%s]

	Small schools 0-100 pupils	Medium schools 101-300 pupils	Large schools 301+ pupils
English primary schools in 1992	18%	65%	16%
English primary schools in 2003	15%	61%	24%

Note: row and column totals in tables may not equal 100% due to rounding.  
Sources: DES, 1992, p.125 and DfES, 2003c, p.45.

Our primary concern in selecting the original 1992 sample of 50 schools had been to ensure that it reflected the full diversity of KS2 provision in terms of size and type of school and that other aspects of the diversity of primary schooling were reflected. For example, it was important to get a mix of inner-city, suburban and rural schools, a multicultural mix (from all-white schools through to one school with 98% ethnic minority pupils) and a mix of religious denominations (including Church of England, Roman Catholic and Methodist). While the individual schools researched may not have been representative of others with similar characteristics, we believed that a sample of schools chosen in this manner should have ensured that the main issues and approaches to the implementation of the national curriculum at KS2 were identified.

The introduction of national standard assessment tasks (SATs) testing in the '90s provides us with additional data by which we can assess the extent to which the 2003 research sample may or may not be representative of English primary schools more generally. Table 1e indicates the distribution of the sample schools' average point scores in KS2 SATs in the first year of the project.

**Table 1e** Distribution of sample schools' average point scores in 2003 KS2 SATs

Average point score	21.0-21.9	22.0-22.9	23.0-23.9	24.0-24.9	25.0-25.9	26.0-26.9	27.0-27.9	28.0-28.9	29.0-29.9	30.0-30.9	31.0-31.9	No figures	Total
No. of schools	1	0	1	2	3	9	4	12	7	4	1	6	50

Note: the average score for schools in England was 27.4

Source: Primary School League Tables for England 2003, *Education Guardian*, 4 December 2003

The average point score for a combination of English, maths and science results is compiled according to the following points tariff: 15 points level 2 or below; 21 points level 3; 27 points level 4; and 33 points level 5. An advantage of the average point score figure is that many pupils achieved level 5, which is more than the expected standard, and the average point score reflects this. Our research sample contains schools at the extremes of low and high achieving. The lowest performing school in our sample was in the bottom 20 for all English primary schools in 2003 (around 13,000 KS2 schools in total), whilst the top performing one was in the top 100. However, there were 28 schools in our sample above the English average figure of 27.4 and only 16 below this average (6 schools were too small to have their results recorded in the performance tables). Thus, whilst our sample covers the full spectrum of national SATs results, it is somewhat biased towards better achieving schools than the national average. This is probably a consequence of the likely exclusion of a representative number of poorer performing schools in the original 1992 sample (discussed above).

### Data collection and analysis techniques

Data from each of the 50 schools were collected during a day visit. The most common pattern for such visits involved:

- completing a school data sheet (see Appendix A)
- tape-recorded semi-structured interviews with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and between one and three further teachers, depending on the

size of the school (see Appendix B for examples of interview guides); where possible, we re-interviewed any teachers who had been interviewed in the 1992-94 research. Most of the interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes

- observation of a KS2 class for a lesson (focusing particularly on classroom organisation, teaching methods and the use of resources, especially teaching assistants), followed by a tape-recorded interview with the teacher who taught it
- informal conversations with teachers at breaks and lunchtime and observation, where possible, of other school activities such as assemblies
- collection of the school's prospectus and any other relevant documentation (eg lesson plans for the lesson observed).

The fieldwork was carried out by Rosemary Webb (18 schools), Graham Vulliamy (19 schools), Jo Armitage (7 schools), Verna Campbell (4 schools) and Hilary Blundell (2 schools).

188 teacher interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in full. As can be seen from Appendix B, the interview guides contained some common questions for all interviewees but had different emphases for headteachers, deputy headteachers, coordinators and class teachers. However, the exact questions asked often varied. This was firstly because fieldwork was conducted over a three-year period with new government initiatives coming on stream. Secondly, the aim was to pursue themes in some depth rather than to obtain more superficial responses to every single potential question, given the limited interview time available. Overall, we aimed to ensure that, within the total sample of 188, we had large enough sub-samples to permit generalisations as to interviewees' attitudes to key government reforms. For example, of the 188 interviewees, there were 124 giving evaluative comments on the literacy strategy and 119 on the numeracy strategy.

The analysis of the 188 interview transcripts followed the process of category generation and saturation, based upon the "constant comparison" method originally advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967), used in our earlier research. However, unlike the 1992-94 study, the depth and rigour of the analysis of our teacher interviews were aided by the use of MAXqda software for qualitative data analysis. The method combines an inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. As each new segment of an interview transcript is selected for analysis, it is compared with all previous units of meaning and subsequently grouped or categorised with those that are similar. If no similar unit of meaning exists, a new category is formed and consequently the emerging category system is constantly modified and refined. Given the unusually large sample size for a qualitative interview study, we have also been able to supplement the qualitative analysis with, where appropriate, quantitative comparisons using relevant variables, such as whether teachers began their teaching before or after the implementation of the Education Reform Act 1988 (see below).

An assessment of the potential to draw general conclusions from our findings also requires consideration of the composition of the teacher interview sample. Table 1f indicates the nature of the sample by role and gender. Whilst 27% of the total sample was male, the proportion of heads who were male was 44% and of deputies 33%, reflecting the tendency towards higher proportions of males at more senior levels in primary schools than has been found in other research (eg Wallace and Huckman, 1999; Southworth, 2004). Since 28 of the deputy headteachers in our sample were also class teachers (together with 4 headteachers from very small schools), 70% of the sample were class teachers and 30% of the sample members of senior management without a specific class (though, especially in the case of deputies, often doing a variety of teaching to different classes and groups throughout the school). The fact that 27% of our interview sample was male, compared with a national average in primary schools in 2003 of 16% male (DfES, 2003c, p.50), reflects our deliberate intention to ensure that senior management perspectives were obtained from each of our 50 schools.

**Table 1f Composition of teacher interview sample by role and gender**

Heads	Deputies	Other teachers	Total
50 (28 F; 22 M)	39 (26F; 13M)	99 (84F; 15M)	188 (138F; 50M)

Note: In one school the acting headteacher could not be interviewed due to sickness whilst in another school there was both an acting headteacher and an associate headteacher

Research in England has found that there are differences in teachers' responses to the '90s reforms between those who had entered teaching before and after the implementation of the Education Reform Act 1988 (eg Day, 2002; Osborn *et al.*, 2000). Such differences have also been found in the perspectives of teachers in other countries that have experienced similar reforms (eg Locke's 2001 discussion of teacher professionalism in New Zealand). As seen in Table 1g, 68% of our teacher interview sample started their first job prior to 1990 and were therefore trained prior to the implementation of the reforms in the Education Reform Act, whilst 32% of the sample started their first job in 1990 or afterwards (including 8 teachers who started their first job in 2000 or later).

**Table 1g Composition of teacher interview sample by date of first job**

1st job pre-1990	1st job post-1990	Total
127	61	188

A final point to be taken account of in terms of the composition of the teacher sample in this research is the manner in which the teachers were chosen for interviews. In our prior telephone discussions with headteachers about our intentions, we asked to be able to interview the headteacher, deputy headteacher and anyone who had been interviewed in the previous 1992-94 study. In addition headteachers were asked to select one or two further members of staff for interview, one of whom should be the teacher of a KS2 lesson that had been observed. Such a sample is likely to be biased towards the more confident teachers. It should also be noted that, despite 4 of the

schools in the sample having a more than 95% Asian pupil intake, there was only one Asian teacher in the sample. The rest were white (including two from European countries other than the UK). The school sample was such that no school had a high proportion of Afro-Caribbean pupils.

With the above in mind, we would suggest that the main limitations on drawing general conclusions from our interview findings are, firstly, that the sample is likely to under-represent both less experienced teachers and those who are experiencing difficulties in their teaching. Secondly, the views of teachers from an ethnic minority background are not represented.

As in the 1992-94 study, the analyses of data from the classroom observations were both less reliable and less valid. This is because they were based on open-ended observations and observation of just one lesson may well have been unrepresentative of the totality of that teacher's lessons. Moreover, since headteachers chose which class would be observed, this is likely overall to be a sample of lessons taught by the most confident and better teachers in the schools. The original intention for such classroom observation was simply to provide a context for the class teacher interviews and also to use such observations to provoke questions concerning the relationships between whole-school planning and classroom practice.

Nevertheless, such caveats notwithstanding, we did use analysis of classroom observations (51 in total) first to look at relationships between curriculum organisation, classroom organisation and teaching styles. Secondly, by comparison with the similar analysis of the 54 lessons in the 1992-94 study, we used them to identify major changes (such as a very large increase in whole-class teaching and the total demise in our sample of some previous approaches, such as the use of carousel and menu systems for pupil activities). Thirdly, they were useful in exploring topical classroom issues, such as the greatly increased use of both ICT and teaching assistants, which reflected major changes in classroom practice since our earlier study.

Throughout this report we have generally included the numbers of pupils in a school when presenting quotations from interview data, so that readers can differentiate between small and large schools. In a few cases such numbers have been omitted because we have wished to preserve school and teacher anonymity fully (for the same reason any names within interview quotations are pseudonyms). Dates of interview quotations are also stated because some government innovations came into force at different stages of our fieldwork period between 2003 and 2005.