

Parliamentary Briefing

Opposition Day Debate - 29 January 2014: Teacher qualifications

Deregulation of teaching qualifications

England stands alone in deregulating teacher qualifications. In addition to the abolition of the requirement that teachers should have an academic and professional teaching qualification there has also been unprecedented deregulation of routes into initial teacher training in England.

This has undermined teacher education in universities and risks damaging the school-university partnerships which have been the bedrock of teacher education for many years. These relationships between schools and universities have been used to support school and college improvement and practice-based research into teaching and learning.

Trainee teachers also face career risks arising from the approach that is being taken. The Department for Education (DfE) has promoted and tripled the number of places allocated to School Direct. However, this route can result in trainee teachers only achieving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). It is not always being made clear to applicants that some of the school-led training programmes only lead to QTS and not to academic qualifications that are fully portable.

In contrast, teacher training that leads to university qualifications, such as a B.Ed or a first degree and then PGCE, as well as QTS, results in teachers achieving qualifications that are recognised not only nationally, but also in other parts of the United Kingdom and internationally.

Implications for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The dismantling of the requirement for teachers to have academic and professional teaching qualifications will lead to a loss of capacity for CPD and will reduce opportunities for continuity between initial training and further professional development.

The emphasis by successive governments on reforming initial teacher training has not been matched by the same attention to reforming CPD, despite a pledge by the previous government to professionalise teaching. Yet, as recognised by the Education Select Committee, creating a world class school system cannot be achieved merely by improving the new intake to the system, nor indeed will the current intake continue to perform at the highest levels if they do not have access to appropriate CPD.

Many other countries, including Wales, are actively encouraging or even requiring teachers to work towards advanced qualifications. Yet, in England, on one estimate, central government support for teachers undertaking postgraduate professional development has

fallen from £30m to £3m a year. The Government argues that funding is now in school budgets and implies that CPD is best provided at school level or school federation level. While this may be true of some aspects of CPD, there is a danger of great variability in what is available to different teachers and of a reduction in access to university-accredited professional learning. This is particularly disturbing when teachers may now enter the profession without initial training.

Research-informed practice in teacher education

Evidence from around the world indicates that the most effective teachers are those who are able to combine excellent practical skills with the ability to understand and use research in their development of their teaching. In Finland, for example, new teachers take a programme that combines 'clinical' experience with a strong emphasis on using research to inform their practice.

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) has established an inquiry investigating the role and contribution of research in teacher education and its association with school improvement. An interim report was published on 9 January 2014. It concludes that there is strong evidence that teachers and teacher educators need to:

- engage with research, in the sense of keeping up to date with the latest developments in their academic subject and on effective instructional techniques to inform their pedagogical content knowledge; and
- be equipped to engage in enquiry-oriented practice, which means having the capacity, motivation and opportunity to use research-related skills to investigate what is working well and what isn't fully effective in their own practice.

The interim BERA report also concludes that:

“High-performing education systems demonstrate that this type of enquiry-oriented practice requires clinical preparation, through carefully designed programmes of initial teacher education, which allow trainee teachers to integrate knowledge from academic study and research with practical experience in the school and classroom.”

“The focus on clinical practice then needs to be sustained throughout teachers' professional careers, so that disciplined innovation and collaborative enquiry are embedded within the professional culture and become the established way of teaching and learning in every school.”

Conclusions

- There is no research evidence to suggest that the abolition of the requirement for teachers to be qualified will improve teaching standards or practice.
- In common with those countries which perform well in terms of educational outcomes, teachers in England should be required to achieve both an academic and

professional teaching qualification regardless of the type of school or college in which they are employed.

- The Department for Education should ensure that trainee teachers who are being encouraged to embark on school-based programmes are clearly informed of the benefits of studying for an academic qualification in addition to Qualified Teacher Status. These trainees must also be fully advised of the limitations of a stand-alone QTS qualification in terms of their future careers.
- The removal of the requirement for teachers to attain both academic and professional initial teaching qualifications will undermine the potential to develop a comprehensive professional development career structure for the teaching profession in England.
- A national comprehensive professional development structure for the teaching profession which builds on initial academic and professional teaching qualifications should be developed, agreed and funded.
- Proposals to link this professional development framework with a system of licensing and re-licensing of teachers or the establishment of a Royal College of Teaching require much more consideration and consultation and should not deflect from the need to develop a funded CPD framework.
- The reforms to ITT provision will undermine the capacity of university education departments to contribute and support school and college improvement and the delivery of a comprehensive CPD framework in all regions and localities.

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