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**Association for Professional Development in Early Years**

**Draft response to the questions posed in the government consultation on strengthening Qualified TEACHER STATUS AND IMPROVING CAREER PROGRESSION FOR TEACHERS**

This response to the consultation on strengthening Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), has been complied by Viki Veale, senior lecturer in early years and primary education at St Mary’s University London, on behalf of TACTYC. It focuses on the implications and impact the proposals will have on teachers working in Nursery and Reception classes in Primary school settings.

A brief summary of the key proposals is provided followed by a response to the questions posed by the Department for Education, (DfE) using the headings under which they are presented.

**Summary of key proposals**

The lead proposal in this consultation paper is that the current induction period for newly qualified teachers be extended from one year to two. This entails the development of a structured programme of support including robust mentoring which promotes progression within this timeframe.

The rationale for this proposal is that a strengthened induction programme will support retention by providing opportunities to strengthen professional practice and gain additional qualifications creating ‘a more fulfilled workforce, where people feel valued and supported to develop’ (DfE, December 2017: 9).

It is recognised that we already have strong ITT provision in the UK. The proposed changes, we are assured, will build upon, without impacting this provision. There is also an assurance that a prolonged induction period will not affect post ITT salaries, (page 13). However, it should be noted that comparable ‘high status professions’, (page 14) have higher starting pay in many cases and this pay increases at a significantly faster rate than that in teaching. Consideration of this factor is crucial if commitment to improving recruitment and retention within the education sector is sincere.

It is proposed that the DfE works with teachers and sector experts to develop a framework for the extended induction period based on a set of core knowledge and skills which might potentially include:

* subject and curriculum knowledge;
* evidence based pedagogy, including subject specific pedagogy;
* use of and engagement with evidence;

supporting pupil well-being including the need for promotion of mental health and the development of learning environments which make behaviour issues lees likely;

* uses and understanding of assessment;
* supporting vulnerable pupils, e.g. the disadvantaged and marginalised and those with SEND;
* personal development;
* resilience;
* mindfulness;
* sufficient financing to develop support networks.

Two models are proposed for how the programme of post ITT support (‘the early career content framework’ page 16) might be developed:

1. The commissioning of a small number of CPD providers to develop the content of this framework.
2. Existing providers apply to become approved providers and develop content.

The consultation paper recognises that effective support for teachers and teaching is essential if curriculum and assessment reform are to be successful. It states that it is the wish of the government that the proposed changes be led and ‘owned’ by the profession rather than imposed upon us, (DfE, December 2017: 9).

No distinction is made within the document between the Early Years, Primary and Secondary sectors of education. While it is positive that each sector is being given equal consideration, it is imperative that there is a recognition of the very different pedagogic approaches and pastoral proficiencies required at each stage of learning and development.

**PART 1: STRENGTHENING QTS: PROPOSALS FOR POST ITT TEACHERS**

**Responses to questions posed: Continuing Professional Development**

The proposal that a robust framework of mentoring and CPD be developed and that the induction period for newly qualified teachers be extended to two years has clear benefits to those who have followed a high intensity post graduate route into teaching. For undergraduate students who have already benefited from a more gradual route this proposal also has clear benefits ensuring that there is a structured programme in place to support them in the early stages of their professional development.

The development of a framework for the induction period is a positive step to ensuring that all teachers feel supported in all schools. However, the proposed areas do not adequately reflect the different levels of contact with parents and outside agencies that early years and primary teachers have in comparison to our secondary colleagues. Nor does it reflect that while secondary colleagues generally focus on one or two subject areas in depth, teachers in early years, key stage one and two generally focus on a broader range of subject areas and areas of learning and development.

One suggestion, which would better reflect the distinct nature of teaching in each stage of education, is to align the areas within the framework more closely to the teaching standards. This would support continuity of expectation and development from ITT into QTS.

The terminology suggested within the proposal, ‘QTS provisional’, implies an extended ‘test’ period. The key issue is not that people leave teaching because they didn’t have long enough to get used to it, the leave because they are overburdened and undervalued. Consideration should be given to the public perception of these proposals and to the terminology in particular. On completion of ITT, the existing term ‘NQT’ could be used for those following traditional post graduate or undergraduate route with full QTS being awarded at the end of the induction period.

While there is no perceptible negative outcome to prolonging the period of induction for those who have followed work based routes into teaching and are now transitioning into their new roles, many of these new teachers already have a great deal more than two years’ experience of working within schools and their commitment to teaching has already been established. The decision to withhold awarding QTS until the end of the induction period should be reviewed for these teachers in particular.

**Responses to questions posed: Mentoring**

The consultation paper highlights that ‘mentoring is an intrinsic part of most high status professions’ which can have a positive impact on morale, motivation and career development, (page 18). However, it acknowledges that mentoring provision within schools is highly variable. It is proposed that a mentor role is developed as part of the statutory induction guidance in addition to the induction tutor. This proposal is intelligent as separating these roles provides new teachers with a professional friend who is distinct form the person coordinating their assessment. It should be recognised that the development of new roles involves the accommodation of new responsibilities for teachers who are already often overburdened. As such it is imperative that financial incentives are put in place to attract teachers into this role.

It is asked who should be responsible for developing and assessing the quality of mentor provision within schools. ITT providers already have robust, Ofsted monitored mentoring systems in place to support students throughout their training. This involves ensuring that all schools receive a degree of mentor training. Compulsory mentor training and a structured mentoring programme quality assured by universities would maintain this level and quality of provision while providing continuity and clear progression paths into achieving masters’ level qualifications in line with the Early Years’ Workforce Strategy (DfE, March 2017).

Quality could be further assured by the introduction of university based mentors but this would involve funds being devolved to universities in order to accommodate this additional workload. This would however be particularly beneficial to early years’ teachers in small primary schools where there may not be early years’ practitioners within the senior leadership team. An understanding of the unique nature of early years and a valuing of the play based pedagogical approach is imperative if induction and mentoring of early years teachers is to be effective.

**Responses to questions posed: Development Time**

Funding is a significant limitation in ensuring that all teachers receive and have time to access high quality professional development as schools need to cover not just the cost of the training but of releasing staff to attend.

The recommended 10% non-contact time is currently used almost universally for planning preparation and assessment (PPA) with staff development occurring outside this time. One potential model which bears consideration may be to increase the percentage of time that new teachers are released from class to 20% in their first year. This would allow them to attend a full days training which could include university based masters level modules (in line with the aims of the Early Years workforce Strategy, (DfE, March 2017). This would encourage reflection on and synthesis of the theory and knowledge taught during ITT with their day to day practice (page 16).

**Responses to questions posed: Assessment and accreditation**

It is suggested that head teachers continue to be responsible for the assessment of their NQT’s but that quality assurance mechanisms are put in place. The introduction of a quality assurance mechanism which may include an accreditation process that demonstrates an understanding of the requirements is a sensible suggestion, particularly for early years’ teachers working in primary school settings where head teachers may lack experience and expertise in this unique phase.

Utilising the existing infrastructure and expertise of ITT providers in terms of assessment, training and accreditation is a logical cost saving and quality assurance measure. This further supports the aims of the early years workforce strategy, (DfE, March 2017), to encourage more early years practitioners to engage in masters level research. However, if universities are to be able to provide quality assurance and potentially external mentoring, costs will still be incurred and these must be covered by the DfE not by individual universities.

**Responses to questions posed: Additional considerations**

It is suggested that restrictions are maintained on the limitation on how long a teacher can teach on a supply basis. This restriction is important as it ensures that all teachers have reached the required standard not just those in full time contractual employment.

It is important to acknowledge that many schools can be toxic working environments and staff should not be tied to one particular setting in order to achieve QTS. The proposal to extend induction could lead to new teachers staying in schools where they are not happy and actually have a detrimental effect on retention. Also, while teaching continues to be in crisis, new teachers may not have the luxury of staying in one year group or even key stage in the second year of their induction and this too could place additional strain on them.

It should also be recognised that, while greater structured support is necessary for many teachers in terms of securing improvement in their professional practice, for those who finish on good or outstanding, withholding QTS may have a negative impact on morale as it represents a sustained ‘test period’. This is particularly inappropriate for those who have followed work based routes and have more experience than other teachers they may be working alongside.

Care must be taken, if extending the induction period, to link this with the opportunity to gain masters level credits or specialisms which further support the goal of raising the status of the profession. This demonstrates a sincere commitment to raising the status of teachers and brings us in line with countries such as Poland and Finland where all teachers are required to study to masters’ level and where teachers genuinely feel valued and supported.

In line with the value and status of teaching as a profession in other countries, review of maternity, paternity rights and encouraging a culture in which job sharing to achieve greater work life balanced is appreciated and welcomed is also necessary when considering how to support recruitment and retention and has obvious implications if the induction period is to be extended.

Introducing a measure to ‘strengthen QTS’ implies that the standard of teachers receiving this award is weak. Caution should be taken not to further alienate the education sector workforce or to further diminish the public perception of teaching. There must be a recognition that the retention crisis in education has not arisen because the quality of teachers or teaching in this country is inadequate, rather that the rewards of teaching simply do not match the responsibilities and that the current curriculum and assessment systems place teachers in a pedagogic position misaligned with their principles around the value and purpose of education.

It must also be recognised that this policy does not exist in isolation. It is heartening to see a statement to this effect on page 8, (DfE, December 2017). Teachers join the profession because they want to teach a broad and balanced curriculum but our test based system means that many teachers become disillusioned after a few years when they realise that they are ‘teaching to the test’ rather than promoting a love of learning. The focus on a test based curriculum has led to rising levels of anxiety amongst teachers and pupils. Plans to reintroduce a fundamentally flawed baseline assessment for Reception pupils will further add to this and impact both recruitment and retention amongst some of the most ethical potential teachers who are attracted to the profession because the genuinely want to support the holistic development of young children. If the commitment to value and support teachers is sincere, then the views of teachers must be included not just in this consultation but in the development of and consultation on all policies.

We may live on an island but we are part of a dynamic and fluid international community and our government would do well to look to the example of countries where early years and primary provision is exemplary and child centred if they sincerely wish to recruit and retain teachers in order to improve standards of education in Great Britain.

**PART 2: POST QTS TEACHER QUALIFICATION PROGRESSION AND LEADERSHIP**

**Responses to questions posed: Professional Qualifications**

The vast majority of teachers join the profession because they want to teach. For too long the only way to progress beyond a certain point has been to move away from teaching and into management. The proposal to introduce a full suite of NPQ’s is a welcome one. Suggestions for inclusion in this suite include NPQCL- curriculum leadership, (subject specialisms). It is important to recognise that not all teachers want to pursue accreditation but linking NPQ’s to masters’ level credits and pay increases would provide a meaningful incentive to do so and reflect practice in other ‘high status professions’.

It is asked which specialisms should be prioritised. Within early years and across the primary sector all areas of learning and development and all subjects should be considered equally important within a broad and balanced curriculum. It is likely that if some subjects were to be prioritised, these would be maths and English with the possible inclusion of science, which is taught with increasing infrequency due to the emphasis on SATs despite its continuing to be a core subject. If core subjects were prioritised people may pursue them for the wrong reasons. It is also worth noting that the opportunities for teachers to pursue NPQCL would be limited dramatically by doing this as, particularly within small primary schools, they would have to wait for someone to leave before they could step into a new role.

Other potential areas which might be included in a suite of professional qualifications aimed at early years and primary teachers offered by the writer of this response include: NPQPL- phase leadership, NPQI- inclusion, NPQPPB- promoting positive behaviour, NPQM- mentoring.

It is asked how teachers in more challenging schools can be encouraged to undertake further professional qualifications. The barriers to doing so are the same as for teachers everywhere but, due to the additional pressure teachers in these settings are under are perhaps appreciably higher: time, financial incentive, opportunity and range of options to meet their strengths and interests.

**Responses to questions posed: Badging of CPD**

It is proposed that an independent external body is commissioned to ‘badge’ (quality assure) continued professional development, (CPD). Quality assurance is key to consistency in CPD. It would seem prudent once again to look to universities/ ITT providers to achieve this rather than establishing new bodies. However, again, this cost needs to be covered at government level rather than consumed within the already tight budgetary constraints of many institutions.

**Responses to questions posed: Further CPD**

It is asked how teachers can be encouraged to undertake further professional development beyond the extended induction period. The answer to this question is similar to that given elsewhere within this response: financial incentive, opportunity and range of options to meet their strengths and interests, time.

**Responses to questions posed: Mentoring**

It is asked how a genuine culture of mentoring can be encouraged. It is not surprising that experienced teachers struggle to mentor new teachers into a profession in which they have lost faith. Again, I refer to the statement on page 8 of the consultation document which acknowledges that investments in assessment and curriculum are unlikely to be successful unless support is put in place for teachers and teaching and emphasise that this policy cannot be viewed in isolation.

For early years’ teachers in particular, there need to be closer links made to the Early Years Workforce Strategy, (DfE, March 2017), and closer attention needs to be paid to the voice of experienced early years teachers in the consultation process on baseline assessment. Improving conditions within schools by reviewing assessment and curriculum must happen before over stretched teachers are asked to take on new roles and responsibilities or head teachers are asked to introduce additional workload will further impact retention. This would demonstrate that the government is sincere in the claim that it values teachers and sees teaching as a ‘high status profession’ as professed in this document.

Once this has happened, the introduction of a university level quality assured NPQM with masers accreditation would encourage mentoring to be seen as a valued role within schools. It is essential though that these qualifications are also linked to additional pay to provide a tangible incentive to invest time and energy into achieving them and assimilation of the additional workload that these roles entail. At this time, with proposed changes to the ITT criteria, there is no means of predicting what this workload might be.

**Responses to questions posed: Sabbaticals**

Early years is a research informed sector, our statutory framework and assessment practices are all supported by a vast body of theory and a constantly expanding body of research into how children learn and develop. Measures to support action research are to be welcomed. The development of a fund to cover the salaries of teachers taking sabbaticals is positive however and may offer new opportunities which support retention.

**Summary**

As explained in the summary of this consultation paper, the proposals outlined are wide ranging and part of the larger context of the school environment and the education system as a whole. In a recent letter from Rt Hon Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, dated 29th January 2018, ITT providers were asked to remove from their recruitment requirements the condition that candidates to ITT courses must have completed a set period of time in school. An understanding of the profession is essential if candidates are to be able to make informed choices about their future careers. This attempt to boost recruitment is extraordinarily misguided and will not only have a negative impact on attrition rates in ITT but ultimately, on the number of new teachers entering the profession.

For those that remain, the Secretary of State’s ambition to improve retention and social mobility through encouraging accreditation is admirable, but additional accreditation should be through recognised postgraduate pathways such as Masters Degrees in line with the recommendations made in the Early Years Workforce Strategy, (DfE, March 2017).

If teaching is to become a ‘high status profession’ the views of the sector about how best to strengthen our profession must not just be elicited but taken into account. The sector has long called for reform in curriculum and assessment. Reform in these areas will go a long way to reduce the workload of teachers and ensure that our day to day practices are more closely aligned with our pedagogic principles. This would undoubtedly have a positive impact not only on recruitment but retention of teachers, particularly in the most challenging areas.