

Review of Teacher Education in Scotland

The Scottish Government has asked Graham Donaldson, former HM Senior Chief Inspector of Education, to undertake a wide-ranging review of teacher education in Scotland.

The Review began on 8 February 2010 and will report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning by the end of the year. Below is the response submitted by Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS).

Section A – Teacher Education Today

Before Scotland can move forward in the development of teacher education it is important to look at the current system and identify both those areas that are already perceived as strong and those that are currently perceived as areas for improvement. This process will help us to develop a more effective framework to move forward, so that we are prepared to meet future challenges.

A1) What do you believe are the MAIN overall strengths and areas for improvement within teacher education as a whole in Scotland today and why?

Overall strengths:

General Comment: Often the practice does not match up to the principles or the reality to the theory.

Strengths (theory):

An all graduate teaching profession.

Having a shared understanding of the standard to be reached in the Standard for Full Registration (SFR)

Placing the Teacher Education Institutions within higher education and developing a strong partnership between the universities, schools and the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS).

The introduction of the teacher induction scheme offering a guaranteed year for all probationers with a reduced timetable to allow time for self-evaluation and professional support.

Seeing the probationary year as the start of a career in teaching, with recognisable targets and motivation for those who wish to stay in the classroom and those who wish to become part of management and aspire to leadership and Headship.

Working in a joined-up way with GTCS, HMIE, LTS and others with a wide range of opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD).

Increasing opportunities creativity and innovation through teachers sharing good practice and developing new ideas through websites and IT systems.

Overall areas for improvement:

General Comment: Referring to the above, where reality does not meet expectations.

Although Scotland has an all graduate teaching profession, teachers do not seem to be regarded as professionals in the same way as other professionals. Is this because our 'clients' are children and young people? Professionals are generally regarded as experts in their field, with specialised knowledge, fully qualified, skilled and trained, all of which should earn the teaching profession the highest esteem. Why is this not more apparent? The low status of the teaching profession may mean that we are losing well qualified entrants who would make excellent teachers.

We often entrust our youngest pre-school children to young classroom assistants, who may not be graduates and whose pay will usually be well below that of the classroom teacher.

Development in pre-school years is crucial –do we have the right systems in place?

The partnerships seem to work well in some areas and less well in others -inconsistency is a common complaint. Communications between the universities and schools can leave much to be desired.

Better use could be made of the Standard for Full Registration (SFR) throughout a teacher's career, especially in the first five or so years. Professional values and personal commitment, professional skills and abilities, professional knowledge and understanding are and remain at the heart of good teaching and should be at the core of all joined-up thinking. A belief in and wish continuously to improve on the illustrations of good practice in the SFR would hold teachers in good stead.

The lack of employment opportunities for probationers in Scotland is tragic. At the same time there is a shortage of teachers in certain subjects. How can this not be foreseen?

The stepping stones in a teacher's career development need to be more explicit and opportunities for development encouraged, especially if there is a shortage of skilled and committed applicants for Headship in Scotland. The quality of Chartered Teacher courses was described as variable and the absence of liaison with Headteachers in choosing to do the course unrealistic.

A2) When thinking specifically about initial teacher education in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?

Strengths

General Comment: It is time to review the four year B.Ed and the one year PGDE, neither of which is ideal. The standard of delivery, as well as the length and content of the courses, needs to be reviewed, as does the standard required of applicants.

The encouragement to teachers to be reflective professionals, with greater autonomy, is welcomed and sits comfortably with the principles of Curriculum for Excellence.

The teacher induction scheme should in theory allow those not suited to teaching to be screened and identified.

Self evaluation by students and completion of their ITE profile were welcomed.

The mix of pedagogy and practice is essential and should be continually monitored and evaluated. Contrasting school placements with opportunities for observation and cross-curricular experiences are welcome.

More varied and flexible routes on offer by the universities in Scotland leading to a teaching qualification are welcome.

Areas for improvement

General Comment: The quality of the education system can only be as good as the quality of its teachers.

In some but not all cases, there is a lack of confidence in the B.Ed with regard to subject knowledge and content and a lack of confidence in the PGDE in relation to practical classroom skills. Students were described as 'wonderful' but lacking basic training in certain areas. Some felt that the PGDE lacked both pedagogy input and practical training sessions.

The main issue for probationers before starting their probation year is classroom/behaviour management, which was barely covered in some ITE courses.

A main concern is the lack of consistency in the arrangements for school placements, with regard to the tutors' input, communications with the school and the mentors' input, all of which tend to be variable.

Experienced teachers and mentors are not happy about the theory covered in the courses, not only in content but also in the timing – the study of sociology, philosophy, psychology in relation to teaching only falls into place once the student has a deeper understanding of children and young people's behaviour in the classroom. Should the PGDE be awarded after the induction year and be seen as a two year course? Lectures in the first year of some B.Ed course were described as meaningless, more focus being needed on the theory of learning and reflective practice. Are 3 years needed for the B.Ed?

Lecturers and tutors were described as being out of date, far removed from the 21st century, and out of touch with the current generation of pupils and how they learn. Lecturers should be able to demonstrate and use examples of different teaching strategies and provide case studies on classroom management. They should be able to use a judicious balance of teaching approaches, as is required of the registered teacher. A tick box mentality must be avoided in evaluating students and in students evaluating themselves.

Would experienced practising teachers on secondment not make good lecturer/tutor appointments?

Improved dialogue between the universities and schools could help, with greater clarity in defining the expectations of the school placements. Time should be allowed for more peer coaching, mentoring and exercises in modelling teaching

There is general concern about the criteria for selection for the courses. Examples were given of students with first class honours degrees but who were not able to perform in the classroom; students exhibiting a poor grasp of English (literacy), bad spelling and poor numeracy skills. Ideally should Higher level English and Mathematics be part of the entry requirements? Evidence of critical thinking, problem solving skills, cross-curricular understanding was seen as crucial, as well as academic achievement and subject knowledge.

Knowledge, skills and values are essential, and so is the right personality for teaching. Teachers want to make a difference and need the capacity to do so - a love of and commitment to children and young people, the ability to engage with them, to motivate and inspire. The SFR refers to certain characteristics required of a teacher but states: "These holistic quality indicators are not a formal part of the SFR". Perhaps they should be as not all teachers are born naturals and need support in these areas.

A3) When thinking specifically about probation/induction in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?

Strengths

General Comment: The probationary year is universally praised.

The year's induction scheme is seen as a high quality, rigorous system , allowing time for observation undertaken by different staff, good progression during the year with the opportunity to identify key strengths and areas for improvement. Most probationers emerge highly motivated, enthusiastic, professional, with a commitment to their subject area and a sound knowledge of the theory.

The probationers have a positive effect on the rest of the staff and raise morale with their enthusiasm and commitment. They are also a means of bringing up-to-date knowledge and training to schools and a refreshing stimulus for others. They are up-to-date with the SFR and can match their progress against the standards. This practice can be spread and shared with other staff.

The reduced timetable is crucial for the induction year but probationers need support to make the transition to a full-time timetable.

Areas for improvement

The lack of employment opportunities is totally de-motivating.

Why should the induction period for modern languages teachers be longer than a year?

A minority of probationers struggle and it is doubtful whether they will be able to be successful teachers, even with support and encouragement. Both universities and schools are reluctant to 'fail' a probationer, yet the GTCS appeal system demonstrates that some should not have been passed at the outset. Could there be a category between pass and fail?

It is important to ascertain whether a struggling probationer reflects badly on the quality of the ITE course or whether the difficulties lie within the probationer.

Schools are unhappy about using time to top-up a probationer's basic skills that should have been covered in the initial teacher training programme (see above).

Schools like to be able to help the probationer to develop and to have the freedom to give the probationer a wide ranging experience of all aspects of school life, including extra-curricular activities. Peer support is important.

A4) When thinking specifically about continuing professional development in Scotland today what do you believe are the MAIN strengths and areas for improvement and why?

Strengths

General Comment: CPD is accepted an integral part of teaching practice, the key being to find CPD that is high quality, relevant, topical and up-to-date.

CPD should be part of the culture in all schools, not a tick box exercise in order to meet the required 35 hours.

The best CPD is seen as that given by teachers to teachers (peer coaching) in their own school or between schools, sharing good practice and exchanging ideas. Buying in training providers for the whole staff on in-service days is an effective way of sharing CPD but is costly.

Teachers in the independent sector, from probationers to Heads, have open access to the SCIS CPD programme (as do teachers in local authority schools). To be fully effective, attendance at courses should be voluntary and the choice of the individual teacher, evidencing a commitment to the course, a wish to reflect on current practice and to share the learning experience with colleagues.

Teachers need to record the time spent on CPD, to reflect and to monitor the impact it has on their teaching practice. CPD should be used as part of a continuing professional dialogue, linked to their own professional review and development plan and to the improvement plan of their department and whole school. CPD sits comfortably with the ethos of self-evaluation and should be used constructively in that context.

New teachers readily take on responsibility for their CPD, which they see as presenting opportunities to develop, improve and challenge their practice. For longer serving teachers an imaginative CPD programme is needed to encourage them to keep up-to-date and to refresh their practice. Mentoring a probationer is seen as excellent CPD as is involvement in curriculum development. GTCS professional recognition is welcomed as a CPD opportunity.

The SCIS CPD programme is popular and well established, for staff to attend out of school courses of varying length at different times of the day, week and year. Meeting colleagues from other schools ensures that teachers do not become isolated or unaware of different styles of teaching and work based activities. Teachers can share subject knowledge and developments and engage in cross curricular activities. CPD needs to be exciting, stimulating and enhancing.

CPD opportunities online are infinite and exciting.

Areas for improvement

Quality assuring the vast array of providers offering CPD to teachers is a concern. Learning by experience when the experience is negative is a waste of time, resources and money. Even courses run by professional institutions can be disappointing, depending on the skills and ability of the trainer.

Access to online materials and to teaching communities will increase and is a positive development for learners and teachers. Monitoring is needed when accessing courses or providers online.

A5) How do teachers' learning needs change as they progress through their career and how well does the current Scottish system cater for these changes?

Monitoring needs should be the responsibility of every individual teacher, supported by a tutor or mentor in school. Some of a teacher's learning needs will be predictable as they move up the scale, others will be less predictable depending on circumstances.

Teachers' learning needs relate to their ongoing professional development and to their career aspirations and may need to be considered separately but in parallel. Having limited promotion opportunities increases the onus on teachers and on school leaders to identify and meet learning needs, to avoid stultification and frustration.

At a national level CPD for career development needs to be carefully considered. Leadership training should be offered from an early stage in a teacher's career and developed in parallel with the different and increasing responsibilities assumed by teachers as they move up the career scale. Schools feel that more training is needed for aspiring and existing Heads of Department and for transitions, for example, from probation to the early years of teaching, from the more experienced classroom teacher to Head of Department, from Head of Department/Faculty Head to Deputy Head and from Deputy Head to Head. There is unease and differing views on the role that a Chartered Teacher should be expected to assume, thereby creating inconsistencies and uncertainty. The quality of national leadership training is variable and Scotland would benefit from a robust but flexible national CPD leadership programme.

The SCIS leadership courses use a mix of high quality outside trainers and existing Heads and Deputies. SCIS also provides Heads, senior managers and others with generic training on whole school responsibilities such as employment law, disability discrimination and child protection.

More accredited courses leading to a Masters qualification was not seen as a good way of promoting a culture of CPD in the profession. Teachers wishing to undertake research projects which could have an impact on learning and teaching should be encouraged.

A6) How can the impact of teacher education (specifically continuing professional development) on improving young people's progress and achievements be evaluated?

This is an important but difficult challenge that all CPD providers will recognise. There is therefore scope for a national forum to meet to create a system that individual teachers and schools can use.

Experience of tried and tested techniques, such as Assessment is for Learning, active learning and IT in the classroom, have been shown to have a positive impact on young people's learning, but it takes time for such practices to become embedded in the learning programme and even longer for the impact to be assessed. It would be costly and impractical to establish a national CPD monitoring programme but perhaps it could be done for specific initiatives, in relation for example to Curriculum for Excellence.

Individual teachers are best to evaluate the impact that CPD has on their performance as teachers and on the performance of their learners, but when would this be done?

Immediately after the course and again six months or a year later? Teachers are busy, with little or no spare time, and evaluation of the impact of CPD would need to become part of a routine built into their professional review and development plan in order to be effective.

Recognised quality indicators to carry out this assessment would be helpful with national guidance on defining the key characteristics of effective CPD, on how best to monitor the extent to which the knowledge gained is impacting on classroom practice and the impact on pupil achievement and attainment.

This could also be suitable for longitudinal research studies.

A7) What do you see as the MAIN characteristics of teacher professionalism and how can these be supported by teacher education?

The standards set out in the Standard for Initial Teacher Training and in the standard for Full Registration continue to hold good, particularly in the context of the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.

It is difficult to select the 'main' characteristics as one of the key aspects of a teacher is the all-round nature of the job, the need to be all things to all children, to be flexible, able to react to crises as well as to deal reflectively with complex situations.

The 3 standards of the SFR should be constantly reinforced throughout a teacher's career:

- professional knowledge and understanding:
a teacher should be regarded as a provider of learning, as a learned individual, as a scholar who imparts knowledge to children and young people from age 3 to 18, as well as a carer of children.

- professional skills and abilities:

a teacher needs to be well organised, able to plan ahead and to be flexible, to have vision and to be aspirational for every pupil; a teacher needs to be committed and dedicated, not to clock watch yet able to set boundaries for the pupils; teachers should be trusted by pupils, parents, colleagues and society at large; teachers need to be excellent communicators at all levels, orally, electronically and on paper.

- professional values and personal commitment:

a positive caring ethos imparted by a school and its teachers can have a deep effect on the pupils, creating a sense of belonging, of commitment to family, to the local community, to society; values of honesty, truth and justice; of friendship and support

- personality : this is a fourth characteristic that should be taken into account for teachers –their personal profile. As there is no one size fits all for pupils, the same applies to teachers; matching a teacher’s profile to the style and character of the school and its pupils, whilst some characteristics are common to all –patience, tact, understanding, consistency and a sense of humour; the wish to make a difference and help young people develop; a readiness to work in teams, to be accountable and to learn from others.

Section B – Future Challenges

Developments at a social, political and economic level across the globe are changing the ways in which we learn, live and work. The pace of change, combined with the impact of new technology, means that the general population needs to continually adapt and develop new knowledge and skills to be successful. Scotland’s education system must prepare young people to thrive in this environment. We need to support teachers to allow them to engage with confidence in this emerging agenda, and with an as yet unknowable future agenda. Teachers need to maximise outcomes for young people and ensure the highest quality of relevant learning.

B1) Thinking about these challenges, what qualifications/ skills/ attributes and qualities should we be looking for when selecting people for initial teacher education in the future?

See above and below.

Picking up some of the themes mentioned above, there is a wider challenge to improve and widen access to initial teacher education and to improve the status of teachers in society, than the selection of people for initial teacher education. Even in Scotland where education is highly regarded, why is the teaching profession not more attractive? Does it put off students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those from ethnic minorities? Why is it not attractive to more men as a career? Are we doing enough to promote teaching as a career, using our own inspirational teachers as role models?

Initial teacher education panels do and should have regard to the points made in A7 and elsewhere, using recently qualified teachers as well as experienced teachers and university staff to make the selection. The selection process should be rigorous and challenging but wide ranging in looking for the right qualities in applicants. It should not be a paper exercise.

If universities feel that they are not receiving candidates with the right academic qualifications or the right skills or values, they should discuss the position with schools to try to identify the problems. Are the schools not producing the right calibre of candidates and if not why not? Working in partnership to prepare pupils for a career in teaching might help to strengthen the recruitment process. (If the responsibility for setting entry requirements moves to the GTCS, it will be even more crucial to engage partners in the process and to ensure that the process is robust and open to scrutiny).

B2) What transferable skills/ attributes/ qualities will teachers in all or specific sectors need to successfully meet future challenges?

A dearth of employment prospects and career opportunities is a serious blow to the profession, making the message about transferrable skills even more important. Once qualified as a teacher, opportunities may come later and CPD can be used to refresh skills, provided that the commitment to teaching remains intact.

Does the question imply that transferrable skills will be needed within schools or the place of teaching or across different sectors? Is this because of the job shortage or Curriculum for Excellence?

The transferable skills are mentioned above in several parts of the response. The skills and values and personal profile of a teacher are transferable in most contexts of working with children and young people but specific skills are needed for specific situations, such as additional support needs, emotional and behavioural difficulties, specialist education for those with disabilities. Knowledge and pedagogy need to be adapted to specific areas of a child/young person's development and subject expertise remains vital. The aim should be to support the least able, to develop the most able and to inspire all pupils to reach their full potential.

B3) In what ways does teacher education as a whole need to adapt to ensure that all teachers are able to meet future challenges?

Over the centuries much has changed yet much is still familiar in how pupils are educated at school level. Teacher education needs to be strong, reliable, robust yet adaptable to change. The success of schools that are over 300 years old and still flourishing is a good example of how new challenges have been met without prejudicing the system or the successful education provided.

More emphasis is likely to be placed on pre-school education as psychologists and others emphasise the importance of the first three years in life. This would suggest more training on the pre-school years and more working across sectors, especially at the transition stage.

Managing transitions at other stages is also likely to need more emphasis particularly from primary to secondary, as the age of adolescence and puberty moves ever younger. Even in all-through schools in the independent sector, the transition needs careful thought –perhaps the divide could be less sharp if there were less of a divide between the training of primary teachers and that of secondary teachers? Perhaps teacher training for all teachers should focus more on the transition periods in tune with the 3-18 range of Curriculum for Excellence?

Teachers are expected to fulfil many roles –that of educator, carer, social worker, parent, psychologist, safeguarder – working more closely with other agencies and other professionals is likely to gain more importance in order to try to prevent serious tragedies. Similarly working more closely with parents/carers and the home will gain more importance as schools become more integrated into their local communities.

This all requires time and flexibility, which are not easily found in the present school day or in the way school education is presently structured.

Even with the changes that more sophisticated and accessible IT will bring, a teacher role will remain essential. The skills will need to be adapted but a knowledge and expertise in learning and teaching will remain at the heart of education.

Section C – Further Comment

General Comment: This section is being used to make some points that are particularly, but not solely, applicable to the independent sector.

The sector's response to the opportunity to contribute to the teacher education review at short notice at a very busy time of year illustrated a very substantial commitment to the education system in Scotland. There was an enthusiasm to participate, discuss, share ideas and consider what might be best for pupils in all sectors.

The independent schools have made a very significant contribution to teacher education in Scotland which they feel may be under-estimated. Many schools enthusiastically accept students for teacher placements where they are given a high quality experience of classroom teaching and of participating in whole school activities. Schools often accept students at short notice and work flexibly with the teacher education institutions. Students report very positively on their experience.

Similarly a number of independent schools participate in the teacher induction scheme which they see as a very positive development for the probationer, for the mentor, for other teachers in the school and for the school as a whole. Although independent schools do not receive funding under the Teacher Induction Scheme, the teachers follow the same process as those in the scheme and fulfil the SFR requirements in the same period of time. This is often misunderstood and needs to be made more explicit by the universities and the GTCS. There is still evidence of prejudice against recommending an independent school to teachers for their induction year, although they report very positively on the experience. Not being part of the Teacher Induction Scheme means that an independent school can only take a probationer if there is a staff vacancy but they have the freedom to select candidates and to offer them a full-time post at the end of the probationary year, if they complete their SFR successfully. This is a major attraction.

Perhaps spending the induction year, part thereof, in a boarding school or in an independent special school would enhance the types of opportunities available to probationers.

The independent schools receive applications from a minority of teachers who have been refused registration by the GTCS. These teachers may be registered in England (with whom there is no reciprocity as there is for teachers in the European Union) or may have trained through Teach First or the Graduate Teacher Programme in England, or may be mature entrants to the teaching profession. As they cannot be considered for a post in a local authority, many turn to the independent sector. Some have turned out to be inspirational teachers, highly qualified, often in shortage subjects, but cannot obtain GTCS registration without returning to full time study. This is seen as losing opportunities for Scotland and short-sighted as there should be more flexible routes, through the GTCS, to enable such teachers to be welcomed and registered in Scotland.

Submitted by Scottish Council Independent Schools (SCIS)

21 Melville Street

Edinburgh EH3 7PE

www.scis.org.uk

lizb@scis.org.uk

June 2010