

Briefing for Parliamentarians: Qualified Teacher Status and the Schools White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*

This briefing explains:

- how Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is achieved;
- why QTS is important;
- changes to QTS since May 2010; and
- the implications of proposed reforms to QTS set out in the Schools White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*.

What is QTS?

The possession of QTS confirms that an individual has successfully completed an accredited programme of initial teacher training (ITT) designed to allow them to provide high-quality learning in specific subjects or age phases.

All applicants for QTS must hold a first degree in a subject relevant to the area or phase in which they intend to teach.

The principal routes to QTS are:

- University-based undergraduate training**, in which QTS is gained through a three-year first degree programme.
- University-based postgraduate training**, in which QTS is secured through successful completion of a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). PGCE courses are typically one year in duration.
- School-based ITT**, in which training is undertaken in a school environment. Some school-based routes allow trainees to gain PGCEs, although this is not mandatory. While centred in schools rather than universities, all school-based routes are offered in collaboration with higher education institutions. Current school-based routes include the Teach First and School Direct programmes.
- Assessment-based routes**, aimed mostly at individuals without QTS but with significant prior teaching experience.

The National College for Teaching and Leadership's requirements for ITT and the relevant Ofsted inspection framework are that programmes of ITT, whether school or university-centred, include extended periods of practical experience in schools.

Since September 2013, candidates for QTS have been required to pass skills tests in literacy and numeracy before embarking on a programme of ITT.

Why QTS is important

In a public education system, all children and young people should be entitled to be taught by qualified teachers. Teachers must have a secure grounding in the subjects and curriculum areas they teach.

It is for this reason that teaching remains a degree-level entry profession. However, possession of subject knowledge is, of itself, insufficient to ensure that teaching will secure the highest possible levels of pupil attainment and progress.

Teaching is a complex, professional activity. Therefore, programmes of ITT establish a robust, theoretical underpinning to the work that teachers undertake.

Successful completion of a programme of training leading to QTS:

- provides teachers with the means by which they use their specialist subject or curricular knowledge to devise relevant and engaging learning experiences for pupils;
- allows teachers to develop critical professional skills and knowledge in areas including child development, learning theory, behaviour management and educational psychology;
- develops teachers' ability to act as reflective professionals through the use of evidence and research; and
- ensures that teachers recognise the broader social, cultural, legal and economic context within which the education system operates.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has confirmed that the professional skills, knowledge and understanding required for effective teaching cannot be secured exclusively through possession of subject knowledge and practical experience gained in schools, important though these dimensions of training are. The OECD is clear that effective education systems adopt approaches to ITT that include both practical and theoretical dimensions.¹

However, since May 2010, Government policy has been based on an understanding of 'teaching [as] a craft' that is best learned by teachers watching and learning from other teachers.²

Conceptualising teaching in this way ignores the professional nature of teaching. Teaching is not only a craft, but is also an art and a science. The art of teaching is about being responsive and creative, and about developing intuitive capacities. The science of teaching is about using research and other evidence to inform decisions about how to teach. The craft of teaching is about mastering the full range of skills and practices needed to work with children and young people effectively. This broader vision of teaching is critical to the status of teaching as a profession.³

It is for this reason that higher education institutions have a critical role to play in the provision of high-quality ITT. Universities and other comparable bodies ensure that teachers in training can develop the full range of skills, knowledge and understandings required to teach effectively. In this context, it is important to note that many of the education systems cited frequently by the Government as high performing or fast improving place significant emphasis on the importance of higher education in programmes of early teacher education.

QTS, in which the importance of both practical and theoretical development is emphasised, is therefore essential for ensuring that teachers develop the full range of skills needed to teach.

QTS and Government policy since May 2010

Prior to May 2010, the Education (Specified Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2003 (the 'Specified Work Regulations') placed clear restrictions on the employment of unqualified staff in teaching roles in maintained schools. These restrictions made clear that, apart from certain limited categories of teachers in training or teachers with qualifications gained from overseas, an unqualified teacher could only be employed in circumstances where no qualified teacher was available. While employing such staff, schools were obliged to continue their efforts to secure a qualified teacher.

Although the 2003 Regulations did not apply to academies, all academy funding agreements included terms that replicated the requirements made of maintained schools on the employment of unqualified staff in teaching roles.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2011) *Building a High-Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from around the World*. Paris; OECD.

² Department for Education (2010). 'Gove to the National College: "We have to make opportunity more equal"' (first published 17 June 2010). Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100624130438/http://www.education.gov.uk/news/news/nationalcollege>, accessed on 07.06.16.

³ Pollard, A. (2010). *Professionalism and pedagogy: a contemporary opportunity*. Available at: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/11320/8/TLRPGTCEProf%26Pedagogy_2Redacted.pdf, accessed on 07.06.16.

The former Coalition Government made two important changes to these arrangements:

- i. for academies and free schools, funding agreements no longer stipulated that qualified teachers should be employed in teaching roles. Academies with funding agreements that had included QTS stipulations were invited to apply to have these provisions removed; and
- ii. for maintained schools, the Specified Work Regulations were amended to remove the requirement that unqualified teachers could only be employed in teaching roles when a qualified teacher was not available.⁴ While the Regulations continue to specify that instructors should only be appointed where special qualifications and/or experience are required, this decision now rests entirely with schools.

Therefore, there are now no effective restrictions on schools employing unqualified staff in any teaching role as they deem fit.

These policies have resulted in a significant increase in the deployment of unqualified staff in state-funded schools in England. In 2014/15, there were 20,320 unqualified staff in service, an increase of 22% on the previous year.

This scale of increase places the ability of the education system to continue to increase standards at significant risk. Survey work undertaken by the NASUWT in 2015 confirms the validity of this concern. Teachers and headteachers reported that the vast majority of unqualified staff in their schools were not on training routes leading to QTS and that, in many cases, no meaningful attempts were being made to find qualified teachers for vacant posts.

Almost two thirds of respondents reported the use of unqualified staff instead of teachers to undertake a variety of roles including:

- covering for long-term sickness;
- developing the curriculum;
- preparing pupils for public examinations; and
- reporting on learning and progress.⁵

Government plans to abolish QTS

Educational Excellence Everywhere sets out proposals to take these reforms further by abolishing QTS entirely.

In its place, the Government intends to introduce a system of school-led accreditation in which decisions about trainees' suitability to teach will rest entirely with schools.

Full accreditation will only be achieved after teachers have demonstrated their proficiency over a sustained period in the classroom once they have completed a course of ITT.

The White Paper suggests that this period may last for several years. Individual headteachers would decide when a teacher has achieved the requirements of accreditation and make a recommendation to this effect.

The White Paper states that the recommendation will be ratified by a high-performing school.

However, far from supporting the Department for Education's claimed ambition '*to raise further the quality and status of this country's teaching profession*', implementation of these proposals would have precisely the opposite effect.

⁴ Education (Specified Work) (England) Regulations 2012.

⁵ NASUWT (2015). 'Use of unqualified teachers in schools rises'. Available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/Whatsnew/NASUWTNews/PressReleases/NASUWT_013936, accessed on 09.06.16.

The NASUWT's key concerns include:

De-professionalisation: The proposals would further entrench the notion in existing Government policy that key teaching skills, knowledge and understanding are developed most effectively through practical experience alone. This would serve to distance teaching from other professions, such as medicine and law, in which practical experience is complemented by theoretical and research-centred learning facilitated by higher-education institutions.

Variations in training quality: Giving discretion to individual headteachers to accredit teachers could lead to excessive and unjustifiable variation within and between schools in the ways in which these functions are discharged. In particular, the length of the pre-accreditation period and the criteria used to assess the suitability of teachers would likely differ significantly between schools. As a result, pupils and parents would have no guarantee that teachers would have been subject to common, national accreditation criteria, unlike comparable accreditation processes for doctors and legal professionals.

Recognition of accreditation: Given that individual schools would have responsibility for their own accreditation standards and procedures, implementation of these proposals would mean that there could be no obligation on schools to recognise accreditation gained by teachers elsewhere. This would create serious barriers to teachers moving between schools. It would also undermine the attractiveness of teaching, as those who might otherwise be attracted to the profession could have no expectation, as currently, that their accreditation as qualified teachers would enable them to work anywhere across the system.

No such restrictions on professional mobility exist in other comparable professions. For example, doctors upon completion of their training are able to secure employment in any appropriate setting and have full geographical mobility in respect of their deployment across the health service. They are not restricted to working only for those employers willing to accept accreditation from the institution in which they undertook their training.

Implications for recruitment into teaching: The proposals in the White Paper raise the prospect that teachers would need to wait substantially longer than at present to gain full accreditation. In light of the increased pay flexibilities available to schools, there would be a genuine risk that schools would seek to depress access to pay ranges for qualified teachers until accreditation has been secured. This approach to the pay of new entrants to teaching would compound seriously the existing crisis in teacher recruitment and create additional barriers to securing adequate levels of teacher supply. The further diminution in the role of higher education institutions in the provision of ITT envisaged in the White Paper is also likely to deter many graduates from contemplating teaching as a career due to the perceived decline in status that would result.

Capacity to deliver a school-led accreditation system: As acknowledged in *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, current arrangements for securing high-quality continuing professional development for teachers and headteachers across the education system are not effective. In such circumstances, transferring principal responsibility for the accreditation of teachers to schools raises legitimate concerns about how well placed these schools would be to undertake these responsibilities.

At a Conference for primary teachers and headteachers organised by the NASUWT in March 2016, the overwhelming majority of participants (81%) reported that they were not confident that their schools had the necessary skills, time and capacity to take on this role effectively.

An even greater proportion of teachers and headteachers working in Teaching Schools (93%), identified by the Government as central to the White Paper proposals, expressed similar concerns.

The NASUWT believes that the Government's proposals are fundamentally flawed and urges MPs to press for the retention of a national accreditation system and criteria.

If you would like further information or to discuss any aspect of this briefing, please email the NASUWT Parliamentary Liaison Officer chris.weavers@mail.nasuwt.org.uk.