

The College of Teaching – update

As you might be aware, the Department for Education (DfE) has confirmed that it intends to provide public funding to support the establishment of a College of Teaching. It has further confirmed its preference for the proposals published by the Claim Your College Coalition. These proposals can be viewed here: www.nasuw.org.uk/CollegeOfTeaching.

The NASUWT has never objected in principle to the creation of a College of Teaching. The Union has sought to engage with the national debate around a College. However, the only model being considered is the one which underpins that published by the Claim Your College Coalition and there are legitimate grounds for concern in relation to these proposals. Ten key concerns are set out below.

Ten reasons to be concerned about current proposals for a College of Teaching

1) Lack of clarity about its role

There is no clear consensus among supporters of the College about the roles and functions it should fulfil. Many of the different potential aims of the College proposed by its advocates are contradictory. In such circumstances, it is highly unlikely that the College could be established on a coherent basis. A body created on this basis would serve to diminish rather than enhance the public status of teaching.

2) Flawed comparisons with the medical colleges

Supporters of the Claim Your College model point to the medical colleges, such as the Royal College of Surgeons, as a basis for a College of Teaching. They claim that the existence of the medical colleges is related to the high professional status of medicine and that the creation of a College of Teaching would have a similar impact on the teaching profession. However, doctors are also required to be registered with the General Medical Council, the statutory regulatory body for clinicians. Following the last Government's deregulation of teaching and the removal of the requirement for teachers to hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), it is highly unlikely that the establishment of a College of Teaching would, of itself, compensate for the attacks on teacher professionalism that have resulted from Government policy.

3) Criteria for membership of the College

The NASUWT believes that there should be a clear standard of entry to the College and proposes it should be QTS. The Claim Your College model does not even require those who want to join to be teachers. All anyone will need to be a member of the College is to have an interest in education.

4) Governance

Serving teachers will not be in the majority on the proposed governing body of the College. Of 14 director posts, only five will definitely be allocated to classroom teachers.

5) Relationships with employers

The Claim Your College Coalition maintains that membership of the College should be voluntary. However, given the size of membership that would be required for the College to operate on a viable financial basis, there is a risk that it would seek to increase its membership by establishing arrangements with employers that would make membership of the College a condition of employment. The involvement of employers and other employer-centred organisations in the Claim Your College Coalition lends weight to this concern.

6) Access to professional development and training

In the absence of a statutory entitlement to continuing professional development (CPD), it is difficult to sustain the claims made by supporters of the Claim Your College Coalition that it would secure improved access to professional development and training for teachers. The medical colleges are only

able to play an important role in the provision of CPD for doctors as a result of their members' contractual entitlement to development and training. The NASUWT continues to argue that teachers need such a contractual entitlement.

7) The cost of membership

Financial modelling undertaken on behalf of the Prince's Teaching Institute (PTI) indicated that annual membership fees for the Claim Your College model would fall within the range of £70 to £130, far in excess of those for the former General Teaching Council for England (GTCE). However, unlike the GTCE, there are no proposals for teachers' salaries to be supplemented by Government to meet College fees.

8) Political partiality

The Claim Your College Coalition has insisted that it can only operate on the basis that it is entirely independent of political interference. However, the provision of direct funding for the College by the DfE risks leaving the College open to undue control and influence by Ministers.

9) Independence from commercial influence

The need for the College to secure significant start-up funding may also leave it open to inappropriate influence by commercial organisations prepared to provide this funding. The interests of these organisations may conflict with those of College members. The DfE has raised the prospect of transferring key workforce-related functions undertaken currently by the Secretary of State, the DfE and the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) to the College of Teaching. In circumstances where a College may be funded directly by commercial organisations, such a transfer of responsibilities could lead to an unacceptable degree of private sector influence over these core functions of the state.

10) Potential undermining of teacher trade unionism

In a speech given in April 2013, Michael Gove gave his endorsement to the current model being proposed by Claim Your College and set out his aspiration that the College would represent a more positive form of representative organisation for teachers than trade unions. This statement has never been repudiated by his successor as Secretary of State for Education.

Little support across the teaching profession

Independent research commissioned by the NASUWT from ComRes on teachers' current key issues, published at the start of the 2015/16 academic year, found that only 9% of respondents rated the establishment of a College of Teaching as a top three priority for the profession. Other concerns, including ensuring that all teachers are qualified (55% of respondents), fostering public support rather than denigration by politicians (51%) and increasing pay (44%), were identified more frequently by teachers as top three priorities and thus as more important factors in raising the standing of the profession.

The survey found that only one in ten (10%) of teachers agreed that the College would improve the status of teaching. Other key results from the ComRes research included:

- 79% of teachers confirming that they know nothing about the proposal to establish a College of Teaching;
- 62% reporting that they are either indifferent or unfavourable towards the proposal to establish a College;
- 66% stating that paying for membership of a College of Teaching would be a low priority in their monthly household budget;
- 89% reporting that it is important to them that a College of Teaching be independent of Government.

Despite claims to the contrary made by the Claim Your College Coalition, independent evidence confirms that there is no groundswell of support across the teaching profession for the creation of the College on the basis proposed by the Claim Your College Coalition.

Without this support, it is not possible to establish a credible, teacher-led institution. The NASUWT is continuing to raise all of these concerns with the Claim Your College Coalition.

The NASUWT has set out clearly the key principles on which it believes a College of Teaching should be based. These can be accessed at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/CollegeOfTeaching.