



# **Department for Education: Government consultation Strengthening Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and Improving Career Progression for Teachers**

**Submission of evidence by the National Foundation for Educational  
Research**

**9 March 2018**

## **Introduction**

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Department for Education's consultation on the strengthening of qualified teacher status and improving career progression for teachers. In doing this, we are pleased to contribute to thinking in this priority policy area. In addressing five of the questions listed in the Call for Evidence, this submission draws on a range of evidence including key publications from NFER's Research Programme and portfolio of projects on the school workforce and recruitment and retention of teachers.

## **Question 3: What core competencies, knowledge areas or particular skills do you think should be developed in a structured way during the induction period?**

NFER agrees that the induction phase for early career teachers should include the structured development of core competencies, knowledge and skills about assessment (assessment literacy) and for engaging with and using evidence.

### **Assessment literacy**

A focus on the development of assessment literacy during early career induction would allow teachers to build on knowledge about assessment gained during their initial teacher training. The Carter review of initial teacher training recommended that 'assessment, including the theories of assessment and technical aspects of assessment, be part of a framework for ITT content' (Carter, 2015). A structured approach to further learning would allow teachers to explore with expert guidance, the application of assessment theory in teaching and its role in improving children's outcomes. This approach should help teachers develop more in-depth understanding and skill in applying assessment techniques.

Additionally, a structured approach could facilitate a shared understanding of, and active participation in, school assessment. NFER (SSAT, ASCL and NFER, 2017) believe that the most effective school assessment systems are those designed by local practitioners to suit their particular context. Our May 2017 Teacher Omnibus survey (a nationally representative sample of at least 1000 teachers in England) found that 52 per cent of respondents would appreciate training / guidance in how to develop their own assessment tasks and questions; 43 per cent said that they would benefit from further guidance / training in effective formative assessment practice; and 73 per cent of respondents were keen to receive training in assessing writing (NFER, 2017). School-wide training that explains and trains early career, and more established teachers, on assessment techniques helps ensure that all colleagues have a shared understanding of what good assessment practice looks like.

### **Engaging with and using evidence**

NFER has argued for some time (Durbin and Nelson, 2014) that for teaching to become an evidence-informed profession, able to identify and apply the most effective approaches to teaching and learning, teachers need the knowledge, skills and confidence to seek out and appraise evidence, and to interpret it for use in practice (Nelson and O’Beirne, 2014). We therefore recommend that the ability to engage with and use evidence is developed as a core competence through structured development from the start of a teacher’s career. Including development of the core competencies to engage with and use evidence in an early career induction framework would complement and build on their inclusion in the Teachers’ Standards and in ITT, and emphasise the value of evidence to teaching as a profession.

Our recommendation is in line with that of the Carter (2015) review of initial teacher training. It noted that high-performing international education systems induct their teachers in the use, assessment and application of research findings, and that trainee teachers need to “understand how to interpret educational theory and research in a critical way, so they are able to deal with contested issues.” The review recommended that “evidence-based teaching should be part of a framework for ITT content” and highlighted the value of teachers developing the core skills to access, interpret and use research to inform classroom practice. The Carter review concluded that it is critical that ITT – and the Teachers’ Standards - should highlight to trainees and early career teachers why engaging with research is important and build an expectation and enthusiasm for teaching as an evidence-based profession.

A structured approach to early career development that builds understanding about the role and function of research, alongside opportunities to engage with and use evidence would also help challenge perceptions that research and evidence are an ‘add-on’ rather than as central to raising standards. NFER looked at the role of research and development (R&D) in Teaching Schools and found that understanding of research in a majority of teaching schools is still at a developmental stage. Although R&D is a key area of responsibility, we found it to be considered less important than other priorities, and regraded as an add-on by many Teaching School Alliances (Walker, 2017). This finding reflects that of Nelson and O’Beirne (2014) who found that teachers regard research and enquiry as most valuable when its purpose is clearly defined and when they can see that it offers a means to an end. A structured induction programme could provide opportunities to show teachers how

evidence can identify required improvements and inform solutions, as well as give them the skills and confidence to use evidence in practice.

### **Question 6: Which of these proposals do you think would help improve the quality and quantity of mentoring for all new teachers?**

We welcome the focus on mentoring as an important contributor to the support offered to early career teachers. Our evaluation of 'Starting Out', a two-year pilot mentoring programme for science and mathematics teacher trainees and early career teachers found that mentoring support made a difference to mentees' personal, professional and career development, better equipping them for a career in teaching (Macleod et al., 2011). Mentees at all stages of their early career valued the opportunity to receive support from an experienced teacher who could offer additional and subject-specific advice, be a sounding board for ideas, and provide a practical, 'real-world' perspective on issues and concerns they raised. Mentors were particularly valued when they were not the mentee's line manager but offered an alternative source of support with whom mentees could raise queries or issues which they may be less able, or inclined, to discuss with their line manager (or other colleagues in school). This mentoring support – by email or face-to-face – typically took place between once a month and once a fortnight (depending on mentees' needs). Mentees were unanimous in their view that there was considerable future need for this form of mentoring.

Mentoring is a common feature of most induction programmes for beginning teachers in Europe. [Eurydice at NFER](#) research into teaching careers in Europe (European Commission, 2018) identified that mentoring is mandatory in 29 European education systems, and recommended in another five. It is, however, rarely regulated beyond early career teaching. In the European schemes, mentoring for induction programmes usually encompasses personal, social and professional support for beginning teachers. The European Commission handbook for policy-makers on induction into the teaching profession states that a mentor is an experienced teacher appointed to take responsibility for new colleagues or prospective teachers, introducing them to the school community and professional life, supporting them and providing coaching and advice when necessary.

An evaluation of the Starting Out programme (Mcleod et al., 2011) highlighted that the development of effective mentoring support required initial training for mentors, supported by a mentoring specialist, and bespoke mentoring training materials specifically tailored to the programme.

Other key messages from the research included:

- Mentors need to be assigned in a timely way - once into the academic year, some potential mentees who had not been assigned a mentor earlier had learned to cope without additional support, or were too busy to participate.
- Mentees may be reluctant to highlight their need to join a mentoring programme for fear of admitting weaknesses and inability to cope.
- Some schools were concerned that mentees' participation in the scheme might take up too much time.

- Mentees on the Starting Out programme valued access to support via peer-to-peer networks in addition to that provided by their mentor.

Mentoring is important throughout a school career, not just for those at NQT level. NFER's recent research into headteacher retention (Lynch and Worth, 2017) found that headteachers who were happy in their role, as well as those who were considering leaving or had left headship, felt that there should be more support and induction for new headteachers, including opportunities for peer support such as mentoring, coaching and shadowing.

**Question 13: Considering all of the above, what impact would this model of a strengthened QTS have on post-ITT teachers in terms of teaching practice, retention, and morale?**

There is little robust evidence available from the UK about the impact of approaches to induction and early career support on teacher quality, retention or morale that from which to derive insight into the possible impact of a new model for a strengthened QTS.

One possibility is to consider instead, the impact of CPD on those outcomes. However, there is also little robust recent research on continuous professional development (CPD) for early career teachers in England that could provide insight into possible relationships between a strengthened QTS, practice, retention or morale.

Recent research by NFER on the influence of CPD on teacher retention in general, however, found that whether or not a teacher felt their school provided appropriately for their professional development was found to be 'not significantly associated with a greater desire to leave or stay' amongst teachers (Lynch et al., 2016). Instead, the research found that teacher engagement underpins retention, and that protective factors associated with better retention include:

- job satisfaction
- having adequate resources
- reward and recognition
- being well supported by management

It is possible that the teachers in our sample considered CPD when reporting their job satisfaction, or that overall, most teachers are content with their CPD, though it could also mean that teachers do not want more CPD because they are dissatisfied with the quality of what is on offer (Weston, 2016).

Before any conclusions can be drawn about the implication of our findings for the new QTS model, we would recommend initial research to find out whether early career teachers perceive the proposed new model for a strengthened QTS to be CPD or to be part of support received from management.

**Question 17: What specialisms should be prioritised?**

NFER welcomes the consideration of alternative career pathways in teaching. Our analysis of teachers joining and leaving the profession suggested that pathways for progression that are not management/leadership might influence good teachers to remain in teaching, and

increase the hours available from high quality teachers for direct teaching (Lynch et al., 2016; Worth et al., 2015). These pathways would need to be reflected through pay scales and professional development opportunities.

### **Question 23: Do you think that a fund to pilot sabbaticals would be a positive step for the profession?**

There is limited evidence on the impact of sabbaticals on professional development. However, NFER research into headteacher retention (Lynch and Worth, 2017) suggests that career strategies / pathways which enable headteachers to move into different roles which are beneficial to the sector - including school inspection, advisory roles, and opportunities to train future leaders, before returning to headship - could be important in preventing heads from considering leaving the profession for good.

They might also offer heads the opportunity to develop the skills they may need to move into system leadership roles (Lynch and Worth, 2017).

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