

A Critical Review of Headteacher Professional Development in England & Wales

by

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The impetus for this paper comes from the introduction, under the direction of a central government agency, of national standards for the teaching profession in England & Wales. The standards are to be based on the professional knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities at all levels of the profession and replace the *ad hoc* structures for continuing professional development that have existed until now. Two of the standards relate to the role of headteacher and have been designed to present a formal, accredited route to the key leadership position in compulsory education.

A profession without a professional council

Unlike other professions, teachers in England & Wales have no self-elected council to oversee the certification and standard of their work. Partly this is because of history and partly because there have been so many schisms between various teacher associations. The bedrock of the education system in England and Wales, despite a raft of legislation during the last 17 years, remains the 1944 Education Act which not only established a tri-partite education system, but also placed the responsibility for the provision of school places with local government. Relationships between central government, local government and teacher associations during the next thirty years were

characterised by a period of 'cosy consensus' with teachers being largely responsible for the content of curriculum. In addition individual teachers were seen as responsible for standards of teaching and could rely on a self-autonomous professional existence. Even Secretaries of State for education appeared to settle for this level of control, so much so that one 1960's Minister, David Eccles, referred to the 'secret garden' of the curriculum.

In this situation the teacher associations remained dominant as long as they stayed united, but, disastrously, they became subject to conflict, most notably between the largest two of the six. Central government strode purposively into this power vacuum in the mid-1970s in the shape of Prime Minister James Callaghan who, in his now famous 1976 Ruskin College speech, seized the initiative and moved the educational debate to one of accountability. In the aftermath subsequent governments instituted legislation and statutory instruments that systematically reduced the power of teachers to manage the curriculum and their own standards of performance. By 1992 the content of the curriculum had been established by statute, standardised national tests were to be administered to children aged 7, 11 & 14, schools were subject to external inspection and teachers conditions of service and pay were managed by central government.

In 1994 the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) was established by central government and charged with the responsibility of improving the quality of the nation's teaching force. Since its inception the TTA has busied itself with a

series of actions which, they claim, will significantly improve the quality of the teaching force in England and Wales. The early manifestations of these intentions have been a radical review of initial teacher education, a re-assessment of the formal system of teacher appraisal, a comprehensive review of the funding mechanisms for the continuing professional development of teachers and the introduction of national standards of performance. The TTA, by dint of its position, is now a quasi-professional council and is establishing the criteria by which teachers are to be judged and developed. Policy and direction for the TTA flows from its own non-elected board which, quite unlike any other professional council, is thus a decision making body imbued with politics. It is in this context that I will examine the new standards and certification processes proposed for the school leaders of tomorrow.

Towards national standards and certification

The national standards are intended to operate at all levels of the profession, from newly qualified teacher (NQT) through to the experienced headteacher. There are to be six categories: NQT, Expert Teacher, Subject Leader, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), a professional qualification for Headship and the Expert School Leader. Each of the standards are to be based on the notion of readiness for role for which the TTA will provide certification. Standards already exist for NQTs who now graduate with a Profile of Competence and career entry profiles and we are now in the trial period for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). At the time of writing the TTA is consulting on both the middle management qualification labelled National Professional Qualification for Subject Leaders and on the

requirements for the Expert School Leader. Work on the remaining two qualifications will commence later in the year.

Slightly ahead of the announcement regarding NPQH was the introduction of the Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme (Headlamp), also a TTA initiative, but not one of the national standards. Headlamp is for those entering their first headship and provides funds to assist their continuing professional development within the context of their school. NPQH, on the other hand, will be the minimum entry qualification for Headship in the future. The Secretary of State for Education anticipates that the introduction of national standards for Headteachers will lead to a significant improvement in the management and leadership of schools which, in turn, will result in higher levels of academic achievement from the nation's school population. Certainly there is now a clear set of expectations in terms of tasks, knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities which apply to all three phases of headship with the result that those teachers preparing for, being inducted into or maintaining that key management role know what is formally expected for the first time in history.

The standards for headteachers

The first public notice of the intention to move toward a formal qualification for aspiring headteachers was made through a press release by Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education, in September 1995. This was swiftly followed by the publication of draft standards for the new qualification which

was to be awarded by the TTA, who would administer the assessment process and the officially sanctioned training & development programmes through regional centres and distance learning packages. The scheme has now established 10 regional centres in England and one centre in Wales, each with both an Assessment Centre and a Training & Development Centre. In addition a contract has been issued to a distance learning provider.

The route to NPQH is that those who are aspiring to become Headteachers will present themselves to a regional Assessment Centre who will determine how much of the formal training programme they have to complete through a regional Training & Development Centre before undertaking a summative assessment that will lead to the granting of the qualification. The qualification is designed to demonstrate that successful candidates should be competent in the headteacher role so is an assessment of potential rather than of competence. NPQH will thus provide a guarantee to school governing bodies that headteacher candidates have undergone a thorough preparation programme for the role. The expectation amongst the teaching profession is that within five years every aspiring headteacher will need this qualification.

The development of NPQH, Headlamp and the proposed Expert School Leader qualifications has resulted in the determination of key principles and standards which outline the core purpose of Headship, key areas for development and assessment, skills and abilities, knowledge and understanding required for the award of the qualifications (see Appendix One). Twenty-three tasks for the

successful management and leadership of schools have been developed which are grouped into five categories:

1. Strategic direction and development of the school.
2. Learning and teaching in the school.
3. People and relationships.
4. Developing and deploying staff and other resources..
5. Accountability for the efficiency and effectiveness of the school.

Successful completion of the programmes of development will also require participants to be able to demonstrate mastery of fourteen skills and an appropriate level of professional knowledge and understanding before proceeding to either award. There is no formal requirement for Headlamp which has been designed to allow newly appointed headteachers to continue their professional development in the context of their new school.

Discussion

Prior to the introduction of NPQH and Expert School Leader central government initiatives to improve the quality of headteachers in England and Wales consisted of disjointed and insubstantial attempts to provide management development programmes for headteachers. The first attempt at formal training for headship came with Department of Education and Science (DES) Circular 3/83 which introduced one term training opportunities (known as OTTO courses), complemented by 20 day basic training packages. Despite what seemed a good level of interest, only 11% of the potential client group had been through these development routes by 1988 (Creissen and Ellison, 1996). One consequence of this alarming statistic was that central government established a School Management Task Force (SMTF) in 1989 working under

the direction of the DES (which became the Department for Education shortly after and is now the Department for Education and Employment - DfEE). A national audit of school leaders was undertaken, a number of key research projects were commissioned and a valuable and informative report was published by SMTF which identified a range of key principles for management development, many of which can now be seen in the new standards. Following this a brief (one year) effort was made to assist newly appointed headteachers into role in 1992 through the introduction of a Headteacher Mentoring Scheme, again under the direction of the SMTF.

Nevertheless, until the introduction of the new standards, it was a fact that there was no common qualification for headship. Role definition remained the province of the hiring body which, since 1988, has been the governing body in all maintained schools. Running concurrently with this lack of systematic preparation there had been a growing understanding in the education community that leadership is the most significant quality in the management of successful schools (e.g. DES, 1977, Weindling, 1989; Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995). The various attempts to improve the quality of school management have failed both to define the role and to reach a high enough proportion of school leaders to make a difference. In the main it has been individuals seeking headships who have organised and, in many cases, paid for their own development. Usually this has been a postgraduate qualification in educational management although some prospective candidates have availed

themselves of qualifications in business management, generally with a focus on public service or personnel management.

The introduction of formal standards for headship is a welcome step forward, therefore, in a country that has systematically failed to address seriously the professional development of school leaders. However, rapid introduction has resulted in real and potential flaws. There are a number of concerns and possible weaknesses inherent in the plans which will be addressed under the following categories:

- the introduction of professional qualifications in a political context
- the inadequacy of the evidential basis for assessing experiential learning
- the quantity and quality of accredited training programmes

The introduction of professional standards in a political context

It is a matter of concern that the move toward national standards and professional qualifications for the teaching profession is being driven by an agency of central government, particularly as the non-elected management board of the TTA continue to introduce a political dimension to the process. This politicisation has manifested itself in a number of ways. For example the model of management contained in the draft documentation is mainly operational and largely androcentric in nature. It is a model designed for direction and control rather than for facilitation and empowerment and is one that is often presented as a typical 'male' model. From the literature on school improvement (Duke, 1987; Hopkins & Ainscow, 1992; Per Dalin, 1994; Reynolds, 1996) we know that it is aspects of the latter model of facilitation and

empowerment that needs to be exhibited by successful school leaders, who expect the learning needs of their students to be met in association *with* others rather than directly *through* them. Thus as they stand the standards represent a modernist model of management in what is now a post-modernist era.

Similarly, and as appears to be the case here, it is difficult to imagine a properly representative professional body failing to recognise the developments in knowledge and understanding resulting from the huge amount of research into management and leadership over recent years. Although the new standards claim to be focused on school improvement, the strict criteria and compartmentalisation evident in the new qualifications would seem to militate against continuous improvement in favour of accountability and efficiency. This determination to apply centrally determined criteria is also evident with the development of compulsory training packages that are so tightly constrained that they include compulsory activities. And this despite the evidence from a wealth of literature on adult learning (Brookfield, 1986; Honey and Mumford, 1982; Kolb, 1984; Thorpe, Edwards and Hanson, 1993) that identifies a need for the trainer to choose from a range of teaching strategies that match the preferred learning styles of the participants as well as taking account of their previous learning. As it stands the training package more closely resembles that commonly found in industries where the elimination of mistakes is more important than the individuality of the trainee. A more appropriate strategy for a teaching profession would have been to determine the learning outcomes required from the formal programme of training and allow the contracted

providers to use their professional expertise to devise activities that would lead to that learning.

In the run up to the general election later this year, all the main political parties seem to accept the need for a General Teaching Council. Indeed, key members of the TTA are now publicly voicing their intention to act in this role and there has been a welcome series of statements from them which indicate they wish the new standards to be established by the teaching profession through their processes of national consultation. Professional teacher associations should breathe a collective sigh of relief as these developments have happened despite them and not because of them. Their failure to distinguish between their job as professional associations and their job as unions has resulted in the re-professionalisation of the teaching force being led by a government appointed agency, rather than by their members. Hopefully recognition of professional standards and certification will be in the hands of teachers before the end of the next government term. The temptation to follow populist and political imperatives might then take second order over the desire to improve learning.

The inadequacy of the evidential basis for assessing experiential learning

Criticism also needs to be levelled against the proposals in that there has been little debate about the need for rigorous methods of recording and authenticating the learning experiences of candidates that happen either as a part of the planned programme of preparation, or incidentally with school based activity. Candidates submitting themselves for initial needs assessment in

NPQH, for example, are asked to submit the name of a referee who can authenticate their claims for experiential learning. Little information is supplied in the way of guidance or criteria to assist the referee, a situation that can only lead to inconsistency in assessment. Such an approach contrasts sharply with the system of certificated assessors and verifiers that are a feature of other vocational qualifications. This is a serious weakness in a scheme that is touted as one having national status and comparability of successful candidates.

One solution in this context would be to commence work on a Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) that prospective and actual candidates would be encouraged to maintain. Clearly candidates need systematically and accurately to record their learning. Candidates for the headteacher awards could use their PDP to verify their learning for a variety of audiences such as universities and NVQ providers, as well as for the TTA qualifications. Further thought needs to be given by the TTA, as the certifying agency, to establishing models for the verification of incidental and school-based learning against national standards if the new awards are to have continued credibility.

The quantity and quality of accredited training programmes

The TTA believes concerns regarding the rigour and validity of the final qualification have been addressed by requiring the regional centres to provide quality assurance systems that stands up to scrutiny by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). Yet serious reservations remain about the achievement of these aspirations, given that the work on the philosophy and content of the programme of preparation for NPQH was still incomplete at the commencement

of the trials period in February, 1997. Certainly the management group for the Training & Development Centre of which the author is a member foresees problems with ensuring sufficient and suitable facilitators will be available to lead the programme of preparation of candidates. This concern exists both on the level of quantity and quality.

In terms of quantity the TTA has instructed successful contractors to be prepared for between 500 and 1000 fully funded candidates per region for NPQH from September, 1997. Running a cohort programme for potential candidates means finding enough facilitators to service something between 35 and 70 groups, each of which could be actively engaged in all modules. Even in the event of many of the early candidates seeking exemption from parts of the new award as a result of prior experience the situation does not ease greatly, but passes to the Assessment Centre. Certainly a large number of claims for exemption is anticipated by the TTA who expect some of the first tranche of candidates to be qualified within a year on what has been designed as a three year programme. Getting assessors and/or trainers in sufficient quantity to meet this volume will not be easy given the lack of guidelines still evident at this stage.

In terms of quality similar concerns exist within the contractors in that inadequate attention seems to have been paid to providing school-based support mechanisms for candidates. Literature on staff development and training (e.g. Joyce & Showers, 1988) show that most transfer of new concepts

takes place when there is feedback on performance, especially when there is coaching on the job, with consequent higher levels of skills and ability evident when those processes have been employed. The current model of training provided by the TTA focuses more on content than process and on instruction rather than on-site, on the job coaching. In addition, a 'cascade' model is advocated whereby 'experts' will lead instructional sessions for two representatives from each region which are meant, in turn, to be transmitted to those who will lead the preparation programmes for NPQH candidates. This seems a weak model for the development of the next generation of school leaders!

Concluding comments

The introduction of these new qualifications are being conducted at breakneck speed and apparently with little opportunity to reflect on theory and experience from either the world of research or from the educational world in general. Consequently there are many areas of concern that have not been adequately addressed and there are many issues that still remain unresolved. It is to be hoped that the opportunities to absorb knowledge and understanding from other systems and to fully explore the unresolved issues will remain a feature of the evolving culture that accompanies the new qualifications. This is by no means guaranteed in a country where the professional associations remain divided and factional at a time when the incorporation of a General Teaching Council would probably be the most efficacious mechanism by which to respond to the concerns and issues which have been outlined above and to others that will undoubtedly emerge in the future. While the certification of the

nation's teaching force remains in the hands of a central government agency it continues to be vulnerable to political rather than professional pressure to improve learning outcomes.

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