

Review of teacher standards

Initial evidence of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents 15,000 members of the leadership teams of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. This places the association in a unique position to consider this from the viewpoint of the leaders of both secondary schools and colleges.
- 2 ASCL welcomes the intention of simplifying the standards and making them clearer and more rigorous.
- 3 In the short time available for this initial response, and before the review group have commenced their work, it would not be possible or appropriate to set out an alternative set of standards. Instead, we make some general points to indicate the direction that we hope the review will take and the principles that it will follow, and trust that ASCL and its members will be fully consulted at every subsequent stage of drafting and agreeing a new set of standards.
- 4 The current standards are far too extensive; ASCL would welcome a concentration upon the key behaviours needed for effective teaching and support of learning. There is far too much in the standards which whilst positive in its own right is not directly related to the core business of effective teaching. An example is C9, 'be open to coaching and mentoring'.
- 5 Too many standards are process driven and do not relate to outcomes or effectiveness. For example, P9 'promote collaboration and work effectively as a team member' reflects a general sense of worthiness, but does not define collaboration with whom, or to what end.
- 6 Some of the standards are too low-level to add anything to an understating of what an effective teacher should do, for example C17.
- 7 Some of the standards are too closely aligned to government policies and strategies current at the time of their writing to have any genuine or lasting value. There are too many references to the previous government's attempts to manage from the centre; for example, three part lessons and the mechanical setting of objectives. These reflect a particular approach, and are not essential to the business of teaching. No doubt these references will now be removed, but it is important not to repeat the mistake with respect to projects now under way.
- 8 ASCL agrees that the present standards are too broad and 'woolly'. The descriptors are often vague and open to subjective interpretation. Terms such as 'appropriate' are likely to mean different things to different people, effectively handing back the key question of what is effective teaching to the users of the document. Terms such as 'sufficient' should not be used unless it is clear for what outcome the knowledge, skill or behaviour is or is not sufficient.

- 9 School leaders use these standards with underperforming teachers, and in that context the great majority of the standards are of no value. That would suggest that they have little value for effective teachers either. The only standards that members have found of use in this context are C28, C29, C30 and C38. The others are rarely referred to because of the faults mentioned above.
- 10 It is important that the standards allow for progression. There are minimum standards that should apply to even the newest teacher, but it is not reasonable to expect NQTs to display all the qualities of their more experienced colleagues. Similarly, teachers who have passed the 'threshold', and who are drawing the higher salaries of the upper pay spine, should be expected to reach a higher set of standards than those who have not.
- 11 However, some of the standards do not show progression; compare Q16/17 and C17 for example.
- 12 And the post threshold standards are far too weak. If the threshold is to remain in the national teachers' pay framework, there should be a much closer connection between the standards and the criteria for 'crossing the threshold'.
- 13 There is a more general need for these standards to be set in the context of other initiatives. There is a need for much greater coherence, with for example: the national curriculum, teacher training (including in the context of 'teaching schools'), inspection, performance tables, floor standards, and other accountability measures that apply to schools and their staff. It is important for the review of the national teachers' standards to take account of this and not work in isolation from other developments.
- 14 The standards cover teachers in a wide range of circumstances, and teaching a wide range of students of different ages and abilities. If they are adaptable enough for this they should be easy to extend to cover teachers in colleges, and ASCL would recommend this, especially as there is now to be some convergence between the teaching forces in schools and colleges as QTS and QTLS are aligned.
- 15 There is no very strong need for separate ET and AST standards. These grades are relatively rarely used. Both grades, or the ET grade, might be abolished altogether, and if ASTs are retained there is a need to rethink their role completely. Again, coherence is needed between the STPCD and the standards.
- 16 Ideally, a new set of standards will have enough objective markers in them to remove the problems of subjective interpretation. For example, subject knowledge needs to be strong enough to teach to the highest level required by the particular post in the particular school. Behaviour management needs to be strong enough to ensure that learning is not disrupted and all students can maximise their progress. Outcomes need to meet targets sensibly derived from national norms, taking account of local circumstances.
- 17 The standards need to keep to the essentials: teaching, achievement, safeguarding, behaviour and wider contribution/leadership. They need to be kept relatively few in number so as not to lose the essentials in a mass of statements.
- 18 The above refers to the existing teacher standards and the way that ASCL would like to see them amended and replaced. However, the remit also refers to the GTCE code of conduct. This raises some quite different concerns. It would be dangerous to try to roll these two documents together; one is a statutory document relating directly to employment, the other is an attempt of the profession itself to set out minimum expectations of professional ethical behaviour. Both potentially have a value, but they

are not of the same kind, and the latter set is not suitable for regulatory or political definition.

- 19 If standards were to be adopted and enforced as part of the statutory framework that impinged upon the private morality of teachers (beyond a generally agreed minimum) it is likely that they would fall foul of human rights legislation.
- 20 ASCL would therefore urge the review to stick to the present teacher standards and set aside the GTCE code of conduct, or at the very most append it (or rather a briefer version of it) in the way that the Nolan principles of public life are often appended to other documents.
- 21 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is very willing to be further consulted and to help in any way that it can. If there is a need for focus groups or to call school and college leaders to give oral evidence ASCL will be able to assist.

Martin Ward
Deputy General Secretary
Association of School and College Leaders
4 April 2011