

Teacher Standards Review

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) consists of 15,000 members of the leadership teams of maintained and independent schools, academies and colleges throughout the UK. This places the association in a unique position to see this consultation from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and colleges. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the draft standards for teachers.

In general, we are supportive of the greater emphasis on teaching in the draft standards and the aspiration, as set out in the remit, that they should be unequivocal, clear and easy to understand and provide a tool to assess teachers' performance and steer professional development.

We do, however, have a number of concerns about what has been produced so far and elaborate on these below.

Code of conduct

We appreciate that the Review Group had to adopt such an approach because of its remit, but believe that it is a mistake to fuse the code of conduct with the standards and feel that a continued separation of the code of conduct, professional standards and professional duties, which is the norm in most countries, would not blur distinctions and enable head teachers to make judgments against the different strands more easily.

The sections relating to conduct do not do full justice to the current GTCE's Code of Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers. The substance of what is contained in the preamble and most of the ethics and behaviour standard should be incorporated into a revised code.

'Maintaining the highest standards of attendance and punctuality' should be part of that code.

We are in favour of the broad thrust of standard 9, but are uneasy about the inclusion of specific ways in which teachers are required to uphold public trust in the profession and maintain the highest standards of ethics and behaviour. Such specificity implies that all other aspects of behaviour are acceptable, even when they might contravene the standard. We would prefer to reflect these important considerations in broader terms (on the lines of some of the bullet points already in the text) in a revised code, which would still achieve the desired effect, for example:

- demonstrate respect for diversity and promote equality;
- demonstrate honesty and integrity and uphold public trust and confidence in the teaching profession;
- have tolerance and respect for the rights of others;
- treat all pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, at all times observing professional boundaries;
- have regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being ('in accordance with statutory provisions' should apply to all aspects of teachers' behaviour, not just this single dimension, and should be included in an overarching preamble).

Teachers will either behave in the appropriate way or they will not (in which case they should be subject to disciplinary procedures) and only 'yes' or 'no' judgments are required, whereas any assessment of performance demands a more qualitative approach.

Purpose

ASCL fully endorses the principle that teachers should be judged against their professional standards and that the standards should not merely serve as a 'backdrop' to any assessment of performance.

We also understand the aspiration that all teachers should be good teachers and that there may be negative connotations attaching to 'satisfactory' or 'sound'. However, we would be concerned if a significant number of teachers, who were fully effective in post, but not yet 'good' owing to lack of experience, would be regarded as failures – and needed to be subject to capability procedures. This may just be a question of semantics, but we think that it should be made much clearer whether the standards are 'neutral' statements of what is required of teachers with heads and others being expected to make judgements of performance against them on a rating scale (which we would prefer) or whether all the standards need to be met absolutely. Or are they intended as a minimum?

Progression

The standards as presented do not have scope for progression; this will cause significant difficulties. Currently there is progression between the QTS standards and the core standards, even though the wording on many of the standards is not significantly different. If the same standards are to be used for assessments of performance for QTS, induction and 'good' teachers, then different expectations must be applied at the different stages (tantamount to having different standards). In our experience, even the very best new teachers are only fully effective in post (and meet the standards in their entirety) after some two years.

It would have been helpful to be able to see the whole continuum of progression at the same time, rather than have to consider one set of standards in isolation from the rest.

Omissions

The revised standards do not include communication with parents or carers (only 'give pupils regular feedback') and parents and carers also seem to have been left out of the reporting loop.

Standard 10 does not cover a range of important collaborative dimensions: for example, communication within a team, co-operation with colleagues and active contribution to effective team working.

Above all, the standards should include reference to rapport, interpersonal skills, relationships and engagement with pupils, which are essential to the successful delivery of lessons.

Conflation

Whilst we are supportive of attempts to reduce bureaucracy, it appears that the overall number of standards has been reduced by conflating two or more separate entities. For example:

- 'You must take responsibility for improving your teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues.'

- ‘You plan lessons and organise content to generate interest, foster understanding, and promote concentration through effective use of lesson time.’
- ‘You consistently plan lessons and sequences of lessons that engage pupils and promote educational attainment.’
- You make effective use of support staff; you make appropriate use of a range of applied technology to support your teaching.

Thus in bullet point 1, it is possible for teachers to take responsibility for improving their teaching without necessarily responding to advice and feedback from colleagues.

This makes judgements against the whole standard difficult, as a teacher could meet one aspect, but not another.

Personalisation

We do not believe that the increased personalisation (the new proposals focus on ‘you must’ rather than ‘teachers should’) is helpful.

Professional standards, which we have looked at from NSW, Queensland and New York, instead merely emphasise teachers doing or knowing or understanding ‘x’, without any obligatory imperative, for example:

- demonstrate the capacity to apply effective strategies for teaching;
- provide advice and support to colleagues;
- teachers collect required data and perform non-instructional duties;
- know and understand the pervasive nature of language, literacy and numeracy and their role in learning and everyday situations.

We would prefer such an approach in that it is relatively easy to make assessments of performance on a rating scale, but if ‘should’ or ‘must’ have to be used then ‘teachers should’ (as per the current standards) would seem to be a form of wording more suited to professional standards and appear less targeted at individuals.

The STPCD 2010, incidentally, states that ‘teachers may be required to ...’ (this is not very helpful and is inconsistent with the use of ‘must’ in the case of DHs, AHs, ASTs and ETs).

Alignment with teachers’ duties in the STPCD

It is vital to ensure that the full set of standards is closely aligned with the duties set out in the STPCD. There is inevitably more than a degree of overlap between the standards and teachers’ duties, though there are different emphases, but there is, for example, nothing in the standards about the management of staff and resources, communication with parents and carers or appraisal, and no reference in the duties to homework and the planning of other out-of-school activities or contribution to the wider life of the school.

This should be an opportunity to look at the duties in the STPCD again. In comparison with the STPCD 2009, the duties have been slimmed down in the STPCD 2010 and too much has been left to a general application of paragraph 62.4: *‘A teacher employed full-time must be available to perform such duties at such times and such places as may be specified by the head teacher (or, where the teacher is not assigned to any one school, by the employer or the head teacher of any school in which the teacher may for the time being be required to work as such) for 1265 hours in any school year, those hours to be allocated reasonably throughout those days in the school year on which the teacher is required to be available for work.’*

Specifics

Just as the inclusion of National Strategies and personalised learning (at the behest of the Department) in the current standards reflected the nostrums of the times, so do the references to 'if you are teaching reading to primary-age pupils, you demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics' and 'if you are teaching mathematics to primary-age pupils, you demonstrate a clear understanding of strategies for teaching early mathematics.' Such specificity should have no place in a general set of professional standards (though someone teaching in the primary sector should be assessed appropriately in terms of subject knowledge and how pupils learn).

Prescription

There is too much emphasis on how things should be done and over-prescription. For example:

- 'You use high-quality questions to elicit answers which recapitulate, consolidate and confirm understanding.'
- 'You make accurate use of formative and summative assessment.'
- 'You use relevant data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan subsequent.....'

By way of illustration, it should be sufficient to say that teachers should assess pupils appropriately and effectively – not accurately. Effective assessment is much broader than taking an inherently quantitative view. Whilst accuracy against qualitative criteria will result from correctly pitched judgements, there is much within effective assessment which is only accurate in the sense that it clarifies the next steps in the pupil's learning.

Alignment with Ofsted criteria

The draft standards seem to be reasonably well aligned with the evaluation schedule in the school inspection framework, but this alignment needs to be completely explicit, including the grading, so that the standards can provide an effective basis upon which the quality of teaching should be judged. In the past, school leaders have often been challenged when judging the quality of lessons/teaching on the grounds that Ofsted does not require such grading (when it is patently expected in practice).

Headings

There are 36 new standards, arranged into 2 main categories and 10 sub-headings.

By way of comparison, the NSW standards are clustered into 3 domains (professional knowledge, professional practice and professional commitment) and 7 elements:

- teachers know their subject/content and how to teach that content to their students;
- teachers know their students and how students learn;
- teachers plan, assess and report for effective learning;
- teachers communicate effectively with their students;
- teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments through the use of classroom management skills;
- teachers continually improve their professional knowledge and practice;
- teachers are actively engaged members of their profession and the wider community.

We think that such an arrangement is worthy of serious consideration as an alternative – as is the inclusion of performance indicators, as in the New York standards.

Deletions and amendments

In standard 3, the wording 'you demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and correct use of standard English' is not as much in tune with the broad composition of school-age pupils as the wording of the existing standard (C17), 'Know how to use skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their teaching...').

ASCL feels strongly that bullet point 4 in standard 6 should be omitted; there is no reason for high-ability pupils to be singled out for special treatment, when there is a clear expectation that teachers should be aware of and be able to minister to the needs of all pupils. And the essential point of this standard is covered adequately elsewhere.

Other Comments

We welcome the inclusion of 'You must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which you teach' (standard 9), but feel that it would be more appropriately placed in standard 10 and that it could be strengthened by the addition of 'and actively support'.

We are not sure that bullet points 2 and 3 of standard 1 actually relate to the heading.

A clearer definition of what constitutes pupil progress within the standards, when outcomes are of vital importance, would be appreciated.

We would question whether it is appropriate to include 'are accountable' in the preamble; teachers are wholly accountable for the effective discharge of their responsibilities, but accountability has no place in this context, as it is patently not a standard.

ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.