

Higher level teacher standards

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 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 issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of both secondary schools and colleges.
- 2 ASCL welcomes a move to define and recognise the best practice amongst teachers.
- 3 When the Standards for Teachers were published ASCL was critical of a number of aspects; in particular the absence of sufficiently clear progression, the absence of sufficiently clear objective benchmarking for teacher effectiveness, and aspects of the tone of the document. All three of these criticisms are partly addressed by these draft higher level teacher standards.
- 4 ASCL supports the move to reform the existing professional standards for teachers, which have never been satisfactory, although their introduction at the time was a significant step forward in providing a coherent progressive professional structure for teachers. In particular, there have always been difficulties surrounding the concept of the 'threshold' and how to assess teacher performance objectively against it; progression beyond the threshold has been problematic and contentious; the excellent teacher standard has been little used; the AST standards are thin to say the least, despite ASTs in a number of areas having made an important contribution to school development and improvement in collaborative contexts.
- 5 The draft 'master teacher' standards, when read as a whole, provide an authentic description of the work of a very effective and strong teacher. We particularly welcome the inclusion under section C, outcomes, of objective national benchmarking, which is absent in any robust form from the now finalised teacher standards. This will help school leaders to identify and hold to account teachers who may be judged to fit the requirements for master teacher status.
- 6 However, in other respects there is some concern that the document reads as a general description, and will not lend itself well to use as a basis for performance management, pay progression, or determination of competency. There is use of some vague terms that depend on judgement being exercised in very broad areas. The impression is given that 'professionalism' is a higher-level attribute, when we should and do expect it of all teachers. The term 'outstanding' is relative, and by definition very difficult to achieve consistently.
- 7 Given the lack of precision in the standards it is likely that school leaders' judgements will be widely challenged, and that there will indeed be a lack of consistency. Attention does need to be given to the methods by which teachers are to be assessed against the standards and how this can be made consistent, fair and transparent.
- 8 We are however greatly concerned about a lack of coherence between the teacher standards and the master teacher standards. This relates to our additional concern about the apparent lack of a clear plan for the reform of the teacher standards overall. It would, at a simple level, have been desirable to have the same, or similar, broad category headings for

the teacher standards and the master teacher standards, so that professional progression could have been properly identified and tracked. It would be useful to know if any further stages are to be identified or benchmarked, or are we aiming to move from the current five stage set of standards to a two stage reformed set. It is hard to comment holistically on the reform of the standards without knowledge of the overall direction of the reforms.

- 9 We are concerned that the master teacher standards are being developed and published without a clear overall picture of how the standards are being reformed in total, without any criteria for proportions of teachers expected to be in the master teacher category, and without any understanding of how teachers' pay structures or school funding arrangements will be adapted to fit the new standards. This adds uncertainty and confusion to an already pressurised profession, and makes the job of school leaders in maintaining motivation and morale amongst teachers harder. As noted above, ASCL by no means wholeheartedly supports existing structures, nor does it oppose reform on principle, but we do need to have an understanding of the direction of reform, and it is important that there be consultation on a package of reforms, in order to avoid the impression that we are moving from (albeit imperfect) coherence to fragmentation and confusion. Without an overall plan, good work, such as much of what is encapsulated in the draft master teacher descriptors, risks being neutralised.
- 10 Finally, we would wish to make a point with some force about the proposed nomenclature. Though understanding that it was chosen to try to give appropriate recognition to those at the top of a high status profession, ASCL is deeply uncomfortable with the term 'master', for three reasons.
- The first and most important is to do with the gender specificity of the term. It should be remembered that the majority of the teaching profession is female, as are many of the most expert teachers. A gender-neutral term would be far preferable to describe our most able teachers. The term 'master' is used to designate a male teacher only in some independent schools.
 - The second objection is the association of the term 'master' with craftsmanship; the term AST was unsatisfactory to many, because teaching is not *only* about skills. It is about intellect, understanding and knowledge as well, and not only about the subject being taught, but about pedagogy and the development of young people's minds. We would like a term to be found which reflects that.
 - Thirdly, many teachers already have, or will acquire, masters' degrees, some in education, some before becoming 'master teachers', and some after. The use of the term risks real confusion.
- It would be better to find another word of similar dignity, but lacking the faults of 'master'.
- 11 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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Association of School and College Leaders
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