FORUM

The 2007 Revised Standards for Qualified Teacher Status: doubts, challenges and opportunities

PHIL JACKSON & JEFF SERF

ABSTRACT September 2007 saw the introduction of the new 'Q' standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status. Drawing on a meeting of 140 primary and secondary school ITT tutors, this article sets out to record and discuss the teachers' initial reactions to these new standards a few weeks before their introduction. The article shows classroom teachers have significant concerns about a significant minority of the standards and this indicates that HEIs and other ITT providers now have a challenging management of change agenda.

Introduction

For the last 20 years individual publicly-funded educational institutions have been asked to exist in a competitive environment, inspired by the ideology of the 1979 Conservative government. At the same time, the state system has been subjected, in some respects, to increasing central government control, including a regime of accountability administered via inspection and public scrutiny of data that measures aspects of performance. Where the training of teachers is concerned, since 1993, standardisation and regulation, based upon measurable outcomes, has been facilitated by the use of mandatory 'Standards' that define the exit competences that all student teachers (or trainees) must achieve in order to be recommended for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Teacher training institutions and schools are now being required to work with a fourth version of the Standards which set out the current centralised view of what teachers are, what they do and, to a degree, how they think. Following a consultation period the Training and Development Agency (TDA) announced, in June 2007, that the revised 'Framework of Professional Standards for Teachers (2007)' would replace those introduced under Circular 02/02 from September 2007 as part of a suite of Standards that show clearly what is expected of teachers at each career stage, that is the:

Q Standards – applicable to qualified teacher status;
C (core) Standards for mainscale teachers who have successfully completed their induction;
P Standards for post-threshold teachers on the upper pay scale;
E Standards for excellent teachers;
A Standards –for advanced skills teachers (ASTs).

The suite has been designed so that each set of Standards builds on the previous set, so that a teacher being considered for the threshold would need to satisfy the threshold Standards **(P)** and meet the core Standards **(C)**; a teacher aspiring to become an excellent teacher would need to satisfy the Standards that are specific to that status **(E)** and meet the preceding Standards **(C and P)**; and a teacher aspiring to become an AST would need to satisfy the Standards that are specific to that status **(A)** as well as meeting the preceding Standards **(C, P and E)**.
http://www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/professionalStandards/Standards.aspx (accessed 15 July 2007)

It is intended that this suite of Standards will help teachers to review their professional practice, inform their career decisions and identify their professional development needs. Thus, when teachers wish to progress to the next career stage, the next level of the framework will provide reference points for future development and should be used as a backdrop to performance management discussions about identified areas of strength and areas for further professional development.

It would be wrong to assume that this kind of Standards-based approach has universal support. Such a framework may be viewed as a symptom of 'uniformity, conformity and compliance' (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004, p. 126, but see also Apple, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2001; Griffiths, 2000; and Hartley, 2000). Moreover, there have been a few exceptions to this approach to teacher education that have tried to provide a critical perspective for trainee teachers (Bankov, 2007; Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Beyer, 2001; Harber & Meighan, 1986).

It remains to be seen how far the Q Standards will satisfy the demands for procedures and processes that enable teacher education to fulfil the crucial role it potentially has in preparing twenty-first century teachers. Niemi (2002), Reid & O'Donoghue (2004), Dooly & Villanueva (2006), Jennings (2006) and Shawcross & Robinson (2007) provide perceptive criticisms as to how, and why, teacher education needs to be reviewed.

However, the purpose of this discussion is more pragmatic and of the moment. The new Standards *will* undoubtedly form the basis of initial teacher training (ITT) and we wish to record and consider the challenges they present to partnerships of schools and Universities, as perceived by the school-based trainers within our partnership

The 2007 (Revised) Standards: dissemination and discussion

The revised Standards are arranged in three inter-related sections:

professional attributes, embodying the attitudes and commitment expected of those qualifying to teach;
professional knowledge and understanding, requiring trainees to be confident and authoritative in what they teach and how pupils learn; and,
professional skills, underpinned by the first two sections and relating to the skills of planning, monitoring and assessing pupils' learning, teaching and class management.

To introduce these new Standards to partner schools and explore common issues, themes and approaches, the University of Wolverhampton hosted a joint conference for both primary and secondary school-based trainers. Eighty secondary and 60 primary school-based trainers attended a day conference that started with a presentation outlining the context for, and the content and structure of, the revised Standards.

This initial introduction was followed by a familiarisation activity that involved the participants identifying specific Q Standards that linked explicitly to three Treasury-funded initiatives that underpin the Standards.

The first of these – *Every Child Matters* - may be described as the 'main driver' of the Standards. ECM is seen as being fundamental to the work of schools and the trainees' necessary understanding of the five outcomes for children's welfare, and their role in providing all learners with the support necessary to achieve them, is writ-large through the Standards. The second initiative is the promotion of the principle is of personalised learning, which NQTs need to appreciate and demonstrate that they can implement. Here, the focus is on the learner and his or her individual progress rather than the curriculum, and on supporting and challenging every learner. This requires the trainee to pay close attention to what individuals know, understand and can do and to differentiate their tasks, materials and 'instructional scaffolding' accordingly.

The notion of 'new professionalism' is the third principle. The Q Standards have been designed as the gateway to the profession and so highlight the early professional's responsibility to engage in continuing professional development, by analysing personal competence and identifying personal targets for development as a means of maintaining and improving professional practice.

Doubts and Challenges

For most of the school-based trainers, the day provided a first sight of the revised Q Standards and so it was necessary to provide them with the opportunity to discuss and explore their initial reactions to them. It is

participants' responses to the task 'Identify four or five major differences between the 02/02 Standards and the Q Standards … and what challenges might these present to you as school-based trainers?' that form the basis of the discussion that follows.

It is interesting to note that eight Standards generated significantly more discussion and comment than any of the remaining 25 Q Standards [1] and that overall these eight received equal attention from both primary and secondary representatives. The participants' comments relating to each of these eight Standards are now considered in turn and provide insight into their overriding concerns.[2]

Q8 – *Have a creative and constructively critical approach towards innovation, being prepared to adapt their practice where benefits and improvements are identified.*
This Standard generated more comments than any other. Participants questioned the degree to which individuals could be 'trained' to be creative and the extent to which trainees would be allowed, in the limited time available, the 'freedom' and 'space' within which to 'think outside the box' and 'take risks'. There was recognition that creativity and innovation may be either supported or hindered by the 'culture of the school' and the 'approach' of the teachers with whom the trainees are working. Participants showed awareness of the unwillingness of some teachers to allow trainees to deviate from 'existing schemes of work', their fear of '…experimentation on your class when you are responsible for results' and, in some cases, teachers' reluctance to 'let go' of their control of classroom activity. Several commentators pointed out the potential conflict between ensuring that trainees do not 'just take the school's planning and run with it', and the situation 'where everything is online … and many trainees currently download and deliver without much thought about whether what they deliver matches the needs of the pupils'. Another frequent comment about Q8 was also made in the context of all other Standards considered here; namely: 'How will we assess this?', In this context the question was asked: 'Do trainees fail if their lessons are not creative and innovative?' and the uncertainty of school-based trainers was demonstrated by the stated fear of not 'being up to date with innovation yourself'.

Q10 – *Have a knowledge and understanding of a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies and know how to use and adapt them, including how to personalise learning and provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.*
Responses indicated that trainers will undoubtedly welcome any guidance provided by, say, the TDA about this Standard, especially as to the meaning of 'personalised learning.' It was clear from the comments that this sample of practising teachers were unsure as to what 'personalisation' entails and several commented on what can be summarised as the 'skills' gap' with experienced mentors feeling they are unable to achieve a sureness of touch with trainees: 'Most people have heard of it, but don't know how to achieve it'.

Commentators pointed clearly to actions that university-based trainers should undertake to prepare trainees to engage in personalised learning; for example, ensuring that trainees are 'not taking on too much planning and getting bogged down by it'. Again commentators took up the theme of a lack of adequate time: 'Short period of time (for trainees), getting established with pupils – difficult to know how to personalise learning'.

Q13 – *Know how to use local and national statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching, to monitor the progress of those they teach and to raise levels of attainment.*
Trainees' use of statistical information was seen as a challenge for similar reasons. For example, again, a skills gap was perceived ('Very often only the post-holders are involved in data manipulation and analysis' and it is 'Time consuming for the mentor who may have difficulty/little experience of this depending on position in school') as well as the relatively short period of time that trainees could devote to such activities ('Length of time to evaluate progress' and 'In 10/12 weeks!')
Participants also identified challenges relating to making appropriate data and statistics accessible to trainees and in linking and sequencing of university- and school-based training.

Q19 – *Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.*
Comments relating to personalised learning featured also in participants' responses to Q19 and echoed those discussed noted above (Q13) – that there is a 'Need to know pupils well' and 'This is fairly new to schools as well, so expertise not abundant' – but additional challenges perceived here included catering for trainees in schools where it would be 'difficult if no (EAL) pupils in school'. However, there was an acknowledgement that training for responding to pupils with EAL had featured in the 02/02 Standards so there was established expertise.
An added theme in commenting on this Standard revolved around the word 'promote', which participants described as a more challenging and possibly 'loaded' term.

Q25a – *Teach lessons and sequences of lessons across the age and ability range for which they are trained in which they use a range of teaching strategies and resources, including e-learning, taking practical account of diversity and promoting equality and diversity.*
This Standard generated almost as many comments and as much discussion as Q8 and participants' responses to e-learning corresponded to some extent to those noted for Q13 and Q19. Once again, the readiness of schools and staff was questioned; the Standard was seen as a 'Challenge to current staff in that they may not be familiar with virtual learning environment – ours will not be

ready for 12 months', 'Training for teachers' (is needed), 'the VLE is in its infancy in schools' and the problem of 'Access to ICT due to other option blocks using them'. Other participants saw a link between this Standard and Q8, stating that, for example, 'Trainees need to be able to adapt and understand the need for flexible teaching styles to suit the needs of the learner'.

Q25a was seen as making specific demands on trainees in that they should have a 'Wider notion than using ICT' and 'Experience/training of using IWB, Digiblue, etc'.

Q25c – *Teach lessons and sequences of lessons across the age and ability range for which they are trained in which they adapt their language to suit the learners they teach, including news ideas and concepts clearly, and using explanations, questions, discussions and plenaries effectively.*

The requirement that trainees should be able to adapt their language to suit their pupils brought forward some interesting comments about how far this 'skill' could be taught. For example, one participant commented that it is a 'Difficult skill to teach', whilst another noted 'Some trainees do this naturally'. It would appear that all participants welcomed the explicitness of ensuring the suitability of language for the learner and the implications that trainees must 'know how to 'pitch' particular ideas to different pupils' and that they 'must be prepared to look at their own subject knowledge'. One suggestion was that trainees would require training 'on the linguistic understanding of each year group.'

Q28 – *Support and guide learners to reflect on their learning, identify the progress they have made and identify their emerging learning needs.*

Participants recognised the extent to which Assessment for Learning (AfL) is integral to this Standard and how AfL is underpinned by a secure knowledge of a wide range of assessment and feedback strategies; for example, 'Trainees need to have a clear understanding of AfL so they can incorporate it into planning e.g. success criteria, peer- and self-assessment, partners' responsibilities', as well as having a 'familiarity with 'levelness''.

For one participant, the Standard marked a significant change – 'not just to 'teach', but to facilitate the learning and independence of pupils' – whilst several returned to previous themes – 'What do they need to achieve this Standard?' (evidence), 'Maybe everyone else has this fully implemented, but we are still 'working towards'' (skills gap/school readiness) and '… need time to interact with individuals – not easy to manage on a practical level' (the length of time required to get to know pupils).

Q30 – *Establish a purposeful and safe learning environment conducive to learning and identify opportunities for learners to learn in out of school contexts.*

Participants identified Q30 as linking closely to ECM and its implications for '… training specific to (the) wider framework than the trainee's teaching specialism'. The legal (and moral) responsibilities of teachers taking pupils off-

site were reflected clearly in participants' comments, with frequent references such as 'Re-affirming safe practice particularly in practical activities' and 'Red Tape!' Other comments raised issues about the trainees' responsibilities off-site'; for example, 'What is the role of the trainee when taking out-of-school activities/learning?' and '… what are realistic expectations?'

The discussion, so far, has focused on those Standards that generated almost equal discussion and debate amongst both primary and secondary school-based trainers. However, now it will turn to the one Standard that elicited no comments whatsoever from primary colleagues, but a significant response from secondary colleagues.

Q32 *– Work as a team member and identify opportunities for working with colleagues, sharing the development of effective practice with them.*
How far the differentiated response from primary and secondary school-based trainers reflects fundamental differences in how their respective schools function: the 'departmental' structure, the size of their schools or the 'tradition' of additional adults in primary classrooms is interesting. However, here the purpose is merely to reflect on the discussion of the day.

It is fair to state that comments suggest that secondary colleagues may find difficulty in providing trainees with practical experiences to support their progress towards this Standard. For example, 'Time to work together – staff are often too busy', 'Cannot force members of the department to collaborate with trainees – lack of time/willingness' and 'Lack of opportunity to share. Colleagues spread across the school. How do you enforce need to collaborate?'

One participant drew on past experiences with an individual trainee and commented '….reluctance of trainee to share', whilst another saw some resistance from teachers within one school, '… challenge for trainers to accept new ideas'. However, suggestions as to how school-based trainers could provide suitable opportunities for trainees were also offered. For example, one strategy involved identifying a 'subject-specific task or project group' or '… making sure trainees work with a teaching assistant in at least one class'.

Conclusions

It must be recognised that this paper, purposely, has focused on the challenges an initial reading of the 2007 revised Standards for QTS provided for school-based trainers. In general, the overwhelming response to the Standards from the participants was favourable and that discussions and debate took place in an atmosphere of positive enthusiasm and engagement. As a body, the conference saw the revised Standards as providing the basis for reviewing what is already strong ITT provision, as well as the foundation of training that will result in high quality NQTs.

It is possible to identify four challenges or themes in the participants' responses to the task 'Identify four or five major differences between the 02/02

Standards and the Q Standards … and what challenges might these present to you as school-based trainers?'

Firstly, school-based trainers were very concerned about what they perceived as restrictions on the trainees and, therefore, on schools' opportunities to provide suitable training experiences. Such restrictions include what has become very much 'paperwork dominated training' e.g. lesson planning, record keeping, evidence collation and logging. ITT providers will need to examine what they ask trainees to do and why, with regard to such activities. Other restrictions noted were the reluctance of teachers to allow trainees to experiment (and fail?), and the straightjacket of the curriculum that pupils have to learn. Here, perhaps, the revision of GCSE specifications, the Key Stage 3 review and the rehabilitation of thematic planning, teaching and learning in the primary school may all allow teachers and trainees more freedom to respond to learning needs in an individualised way.

It is perhaps no surprise that mentors frequently pointed to a shortage of time and all parties involved will need a firm idea of what can be achieved in 24 or 18 school weeks – with not all of it spent in the classroom and with widely differing trainees. In working in a time-efficient manner, trainers and trainees will need to plan carefully the process in order to utilise specific lessons or series of lessons to provide evidence for specific Standards

Secondly, there was a distinct feeling amongst participants that the Q Standards may well be ahead of what is reality in some schools. This points, perhaps, to a deliberate policy of using ITT as a driver of change within schools. Currently access to facilities and staff expertise in the areas of e-learning and personalised learning is variable. However, schools will realise that the latter incorporates a range of skills, for example, data analysis, e-learning and differentiation. Those who have been involved in ITT for some time may see similarities here with the situation that existed when the first wave of ICT hit schools. One strategy may be to use what could well be a trainee with greater expertise than the teacher(s) to lead small, focused developments in, say, the use of pod casting.

Schools, thankfully, are unique and vary in what they offer their pupils and their trainees. Again, ITT may wish to revisit some of the strategies they have employed so successfully, to date, in ensuring that, as far as possible, no trainee is disadvantaged because of the 'nature of the attachment'. Therefore, schools with specific strengths in, for example, the use of statistical information, personalised learning, e-learning or working with pupils with EAL may well be able to provide valuable experiences for more than the one or two trainees 'doing their attachment there'.

Thirdly, a challenge facing all trainers is to ensure that the trainees experience what they are expected to provide for their pupils. Providers must continue to address trainees' individual needs (possibly through e-learning) and provide appropriate models of assessment and feedback, etc, as well as being creative and innovative.

Finally, the specific challenge for secondary trainers would appear to be how best they can provide trainees with meaningful and effective experiences develop their ability to work as a team member.

To some extent we all value familiarity and are generally comfortable with what we know. Continued evidence suggests that 'the quality of teacher training, and the quality of new teachers, (is) the best ever' (Holley, Chief Executive of the TDA, 2007).

The task facing ITT providers is to exploit whatever opportunities the Q Standards provide to ensure that future generations of teacher can respond to the very real challenges that they will face. This will have to be achieved within rigorous time-constraints and a firm grasp of the capabilities and needs of individual trainee teachers.

Notes

[1] Circular 02/02 contained 42 Standards whereas, as some are quick to point out, there are 33 revised Q Standards. However, 5 of the 33 have sub-divisions and so one could argue that there are, in fact, 40 Q Standards.

[2] It should be noted that each Standard has the prefix 'Those recommended for the award of QTS should:' and that, for the sake of brevity, this has been omitted from the Q Standards listed on pages 130-133.

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PHIL JACKSON graduated in economics from Leicester University in 1971 and entered the secondary school teaching profession, with a PGCE, in 1973. After 15 years service in secondary education in the West Midlands he was contracted to undertake inservice training of teachers in business and IT as part of the TVEI. He was based at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, and became involved with initial teacher education. He has managed PGCE subject programmes (in ICT and in business education) and managed the GT programme. He is currently Secondary Programmes Director at the University of Wolverhampton. *Correspondence:* Phil Jackson, School of Education, University of Wolverhampton, Gorway Road, Walsall, West Midlands WS1 3BD (p.e.jackson@wlv.ac.uk).

JEFF SERF graduated in geography and economics before training as a geography teacher. He taught in a number of comprehensive schools in the West Midlands and studied for a Masters degree in Political Education before joining the University of Wolverhampton. He is now Primary Programmes Director and his research interests include development education, education for democratic citizenship and human rights education. *Correspondence:* Jeff Serf, School of Education, University of Wolverhampton, Gorway Road, Walsall, West Midlands WS1 3BD (j.m.serf@wlv.ac.uk).