

## Supporting Newly Qualified Teachers in Post-Primary Schools

### Key Points

- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) was considered to prepare student teachers well for teaching and the vast majority taught in schools which had a teacher tutor with specific responsibility for induction. The Head of Department (HoD) was identified as the best source of support during the first year of teaching.
- Improvements to support suggested by newly qualified teachers (NQTs) included more monitoring and regular feedback in school, and earlier and more relevant courses from the Education and Library Boards (ELBs), including subject-specific advice.
- The kind of support provided by teacher tutors was described as largely pastoral, whilst HoDs contributed all the support which arose from the NQT's work within the department. Both groups complained of a lack of time to carry out these responsibilities. Support from ELBs was predominantly short in-service courses, and a need was identified to negotiate and provide a standardised programme of support across all ELBs.
- The ELB induction officers identified best practice in school-based support for NQTs as a well thought out induction policy, regular meetings between the NQT and senior staff, target setting and action planning, and the opportunity for self-reflection; worst practice was exemplified by teacher tutors who did not have enough time for NQTs or who failed to recognise the requirements of the role, not all NQTs in school being permitted to attend in-service courses, and NQTs having too heavy a workload.
- There was a high level of consensus amongst HoDs and teacher tutors as to what constituted the principal needs of NQTs, for example, classroom and behaviour management, familiarisation with the school's ethos, pastoral system and whole school policies, teaching examination classes and communicating with parents.
- Most HoDs surveyed were not familiar with the competence framework for teacher education, although most teacher tutors were.
- The majority of HoDs and teacher tutors surveyed disagreed with the abolition of the probationary year; they believed NQTs should be assessed within their schools at the end of induction. There was a strong preference for HoDs to carry out such assessment with teacher tutors contributing a more independent perspective. The NQTs themselves wanted more observation of their teaching and better feedback on progress.
- About two-fifths of NQTs surveyed did not make their Career Entry Profile (CEP) available to anyone in school; those who did were most likely to show it to the teacher tutor. Most teacher tutors and HoDs had not seen a completed CEP and admitted to having little knowledge of its use and application.
- Most teacher tutors had not received training for their role with NQTs, with half expressing a wish for training compared to almost all HoDs.
- Most teacher tutors were in favour of accreditation for their work with NQTs, whereas most HoDs were not.

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Focus of Study

This Research Briefing summarises the findings of research commissioned by the Department of Education into existing support provided for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. Information was collected by questionnaire surveys and interviews, focusing on newly qualified teachers, Heads of Department, teacher tutors and induction officers from the five Education and Library Boards.

## **1.2 The context**

The reform of teacher education in Northern Ireland which began in 1990 resulted in a competence model designed to accommodate initial training, induction and early professional development. The new competence model includes the issuing of a Career Entry Profile (CEP) to all student teachers at the end of their initial teacher education.

The dominant theme at all three stages became 'partnership', whereby a 'lead partner' would take the greatest responsibility at each phase: the Higher Education Institutions at the initial phase, the ELBs during induction and, during Early Professional Development, the schools.

If newly qualified teachers are to develop both professionally and personally, then an effective induction programme must be provided by the ELBs and by the schools themselves.

## **1.3 Induction of newly qualified teachers**

Following Initial Teacher Education, induction is a crucial, formative phase in teacher development during which practices and attitudes are formed and consolidated. Cole et al. (1995) suggested that support for NQTs within schools is likely to come from 'a variety of people, for a variety of needs' and asked, 'Can any one teacher be all things to another teacher?'. In addition, therefore, to the important part played by the Head of Department in guiding NQTs on all subject-specific matters, the teacher tutor, who is a designated member of staff, has a special responsibility for NQTs. They, along with members of senior management, teacher colleagues and ELB induction officers, must collaboratively support the NQTs 'in gaining a better understanding of their own role and skills' (Moyles et al., 1998).

## **2 Main Findings**

### **2.1 The views of newly qualified teachers**

Most NQTs felt well prepared by their ITE programme, enjoyed seeing pupils learn but were concerned about discipline and the lack of time. They took problems to the HoD, but also tried to use their own independent strategies to resolve these. Most NQTs' teaching was observed during induction by the HoD and, to a lesser extent, by ELB subject advisers or the teacher tutor. Monitoring and assessment were thought generally satisfactory, although a few considered feedback to be inadequate, and most preferred a written, not just a verbal, report.

Internal support was thought 'very good' with external support more likely to be 'good' or 'adequate'. Most NQTs thought the schools should give greater support, monitoring and feedback as well as a reduced time-table, and ELB subject advisers should arrange earlier and more relevant in-service days.

The best source of support, overall, during induction was the HoD whose 'pivotal' role embraced both academic and pastoral matters. Most NQTs received support from ELB induction and subject advisers in school or at in-services courses, said to centre largely on resource provision. Courses could, however, be insufficiently subject-specific.

Well over half of those holding a Career Entry Profile made it available to senior staff (usually the teacher tutor) but discussion of it was said to be superficial. It was rare for ELB staff to request the CEP. The very small number of NQTs who discussed their CEP with internal or external staff for target setting and action planning had no difficulty interpreting areas of strength or those for development, but time to do so was a major constraint.

### **2.2 The views of Heads of Department and teacher tutors**

Most HoDs and teacher tutors surveyed thought NQTs were well prepared by their ITE programme, particularly in their specialist subject. Although most teacher tutors were familiar with ITE programmes, most HoDs were not.

When supporting NQTs, neither HoDs nor teacher tutors interviewed used the 'B' competences which were described as 'wordy' and 'clinical'.

Most HoDs and teacher tutors surveyed devoted half an hour per week to NQTs, although there was frustration that this was insufficient. Interview data showed that specific time was not allocated by senior management, but HoDs tried to see NQTs 'as the need arose'.

Most HoDs and teacher tutors thought that assessment of NQTs should include classroom observation, feedback discussion and a written report on strengths and areas for development.

Teacher tutors (together with NQTs and ELB officers) said that future induction should include high quality internal and external support, and more non-contact time for NQTs.

### **2.3 The views of ELB induction officers**

ELB induction officers highlighted the need to adopt a standardised approach to target setting across all three phases of teacher education.

Relationships between Higher Education Institutions and ELBs were not considered to be particularly strong, although ELB induction officers believed that they had good relationships with schools and this belief was mutual.

ELB induction officers envisaged their contribution to ITE programmes as including the provision of feedback on student teachers' needs during induction, and having input into courses, admissions criteria and assessment of student teachers.

Future contribution by ELBs to INSET (In Service Training) for newly qualified teachers would include better identification of the NQTs' needs, more individual support at school-based level and greater follow-up after in-service courses.

## **3 Recommendations**

Detailed recommendations were made in the report for schools (including Principals, teacher tutors, Heads of Department and NQTs), for ELB induction officers, for Higher Education Institutions and for DENI including the Northern Ireland Teacher Education Committee (NITEC), with four underlying key principles:

- (i) becoming a teacher is a process of lifelong learning and teacher education should reflect this;
- (ii) responsibility for teacher education should be shared;
- (iii) supporting newly qualified teachers provides an opportunity to effect substantial change in the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school; and
- (iv) professional development planning for beginning teachers should be an integral part of a school's staff development and school improvement policies.

## **4 Methodology**

The project started in June 1997 and data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study began with an analysis of a questionnaire sent to NQTs awarded qualified teacher status in 1996, the last to experience the probationary year, and a sample was interviewed. A second questionnaire was sent to NQTs qualifying in 1997 and follow-up interviews were carried out with a small sample.

Questionnaires were also sent to Heads of Department and teacher tutors, and interviews were carried out with a sample of each group.

Lastly, detailed interviews were carried out with the induction officers from the five Education and Library Boards.

## **5 The Project**

The contract for the 15-month project, which began in June 1997, was awarded by DENI to the School of Education, University of Ulster at Jordanstown. The grant holders were Dr John Dallat, Senior Lecturer, Dr Anne Moran, Senior Lecturer, and Mrs Lesley Abbott, Research Officer for the project. The cost of the project was £20,000.

## **6 Full Report**

The full report entitled "Supporting Newly Qualified Teachers in Post-primary Schools in Northern Ireland", DENI Research Report Series No. 14, by Anne Moran, John Dallat and Lesley Abbott, is available from DENI, price £5.

***This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views it contains are not necessarily those of DENI.***

## **References**

Cole, A.L., Squires, F.A. & Cathers, E. (1995), Supporting Beginning Teachers, Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).

Moyles, J. Suschitzky, W. & Chapman, L. (1998), Teaching Fledglings to Fly ... ?, Report commissioned by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), School of Education, Leicester University.

## **Previous Research Briefings**

DENI funded research 1993/94 RB1/1993

DENI funded research 1994/95 RB1/1995

Persistent school absenteeism in Northern Ireland in 1992 RB2/1995

Approaches to differentiation in primary schools RB1/1996

Education and economic development in Northern Ireland:

empirical evidence and regional perspectives RB3/1996

DENI funded research 1996/97 RB1/1997

A follow-up survey of teachers who qualified in 1991 and 1992 RB2/1997

Diversification of the first foreign language - a review of the

literature RB3/1997

An initial analysis of the impact of formula funding and local  
management of schools RB4/1997

A review of research evidence on the apparent underachievement of boys RB5/1997

Staying on in full-time education in Northern Ireland:  
an economic analysis RB6/1997

An investigation into non-completion of NVQ and GNVQ courses in  
Further Education colleges RB1/1998

Science at Key Stage 4 RB2/1998

DENI funded research 1997/98 RB3/1998

The success of young people in further education and vocational training:  
an economic analysis RB4/1998

Practice in mainstream schools for children with special educational needs RB5/1998

An evaluation of the Craigavon two-tier system RB6/1998

Northern Ireland suspension and expulsion study(1996/97) RB1/1999

### **Purpose of DENI Research Briefings**

DENI places a high value on the wide circulation of research results to ensure that research has the maximum impact on policy and practice in education. DENI Research Briefings are designed to provide attractive, interesting and easy access to research findings for policy makers, researchers, teachers, lecturers, employers and the public to facilitate informed discussion of education issues. Research cannot make decisions for policy makers and others concerned with improving the quality of education. Nor can it by itself bring about change. But it can create a better basis for decisions, by providing information and explanation about educational practice and by clarifying and challenging ideas and assumptions.

**The full range of DENI Research Briefings can be accessed at the DENI Internet site - [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)**

**DENI Research Briefings may be photocopied for use within your own institution.**

A limited number of additional copies may be obtained from:

Statistics and Research Branch  
Department of Education Northern Ireland  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
BANGOR  
Co Down  
BT19 7PR

(Telephone 01247 279679/Fax 01247 279100/e-mail:stats.mail@deni.gov.uk)

***Edited and produced by Statistics and Research Branch, Department of Education  
Northern Ireland***



**A Government Statistical Publication**