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RESEARCH NEWS

Cambridge Assessment Parliamentary Research Seminar Series – *Better training: Better teachers?*

Sylvia Green Research Division

This seminar series is organised by Cambridge Assessment and hosted by Barry Sheerman MP, Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee and held in the House of Commons. The aim of the series is to bring together members of the research, academic and education communities as well as policy makers and influencers. This provides the opportunity for those working in educational research to present new ideas and evidence to key decision influencers as well as providing a forum for discussion on important topical issues in the field of education. Previous seminars have covered topics such as, *Aspects of Literacy*, *New Approaches to National Assessment* and *What makes a good teacher?*

The latest seminar took place in February and focused on the issue of effective teacher training. Over 140 teaching professionals attended, including researchers, practitioners and those involved in the delivery of teacher training in both Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) contexts. The seminar was entitled, *Better Training: Better Teachers?* This was a topical area since the select committee is undertaking an inquiry into ITT and CPD for teachers and teacher education is a key policy area. There were two guest speakers. The first to present was Professor John Furlong, Director of the Oxford University Department of Education. The second speaker was Dr David Pedder, Lecturer in Educational Leadership and School Improvement at the University of Cambridge.

PROFESSOR JOHN FURLONG

Professor Furlong addressed a series of questions and began by asking, *What is the role of initial teacher education in improving the quality of teaching and learning in our schools?* and *Is the Teacher Supply Model fit for purpose today?* The difficulties he outlined were: the impact of the economic downturn on supply; hidden and suppressed shortages; implications of the changing gender and age structure of the profession;

the flight from private schools; local pressures on school funding; impact of the collapse of the housing market on job mobility.

He also questioned whether we have the right routes into teaching and whether they really bring in different populations. He asked what the right balance of different populations entering the profession should be, whether the quality was the same for each of the routes and why those routes have to be so separate. The data he presented on the quality of the intake into the profession indicated that 58% of those in primary and 54% in secondary had 'good' degrees. Interestingly, the data also showed that in 2007 the average UCAS tariff for undergraduate teacher training was 198 (equivalent of C, D, D), while for Mathematics it was 395 and for European Languages 434. He asked if it was time to abandon the BEd or dramatically increase its intake quality.

The question of quality of provision was discussed and the issue of Teach First was raised. The question was whether there was any evidence to say that Teach First was an effective strategy in raising the quality of entrants to the profession. Another area of the 'quality' discussion related to whether the current approach to quality control is fit for purpose. A great deal of teaching is described as satisfactory and we need to have control approaches (standards, regulatory and inspection frameworks, self assessment documents) that will enhance quality beyond 'satisfactory'. Data were presented on the link between teacher education quality and educational research and the trend was for institutions scoring highly for research to be more highly rated for the quality of their teacher training provision. This led to a discussion about who our teacher educators are and how we recruit and develop them. A survey conducted by Dr Viv Ellis from the University of Oxford, asking *Who are our HEI Teacher Educators?* found that in three months last year a survey of advertised jobs showed that there were 65 posts advertised of which 50% were permanent and 25% were hourly paid temporary workers with pro-rata salaries of £28,000–£35,000.

In answer to the question, *What do we know about what makes effective initial teacher education?* Professor Furlong pointed to the international consensus as the importance of authentic in situ professional learning, quoting Hogan and Gopinathan (2008):

If student teachers are going to learn how to become effective teachers, let alone expert teachers, they need to learn from expert teachers in authentic teaching contexts, on the one hand, through close observation and a gradually expanding supporting role in the classroom, and, on the other hand, being coached and mentored, and their learning being appropriately scaffolded by expert teachers/mentors.

He proposed the weakness of ITT is the weakness of the knowledge base of the teaching profession itself. He highlighted the need for 'a suite of "signature pedagogies" that teach people to think like, act like and be like an educator' (Shulman, 2005). Such pedagogies, he suggested, would promote deep understanding in different subjects and that we should, 'build programs of teacher education around these kinds of signature pedagogies' (Shulman, 2005).

DR DAVID PEDDER

In his presentation, Dr David Pedder focused on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and reported on his research project, *Schools and CPD, State of the Nation*. He presented a brief overview of the design of the study but concentrated mainly on the findings and implications for policy in relation to three broad themes:

- The benefits, status and effectiveness of CPD
- The planning and organisation of CPD
- Access to CPD

The research design incorporated:

- A literature review based on 28 reports and 33 articles/conference papers.
- Surveys returned by over 1000 teachers at 151 schools with a 39% response rate overall.
- Qualitative 'snapshots' in 9 primary and 3 secondary schools.

The findings from the survey under the theme of 'Benefits, status and effectiveness of CPD' indicated the following:

- There is a lack of effective CPD in terms of levels of classroom contextualised practice, collaboration with colleagues, and research informed professional learning;
- There is a lack of effective CPD practice in terms of both the form and duration of CPD activities.
- There is little indication that current CPD is seen as having an impact on raising standards or narrowing the achievement gap. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of teachers thought that CPD would have a positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement.
- Teachers identify a wide range of benefits of CPD – however, these benefits vary significantly by school and teacher characteristics.

- School leaders report that school-based and classroom-based CPD with a clear focus on learning processes and improving pedagogy provide more value for money than CPD that takes place outside schools.

Issues raised around the second theme, 'Planning and Organisation of CPD', were:

- Relating to school contexts – strategic planning for CPD frequently does not provide for the wide range of professional development needs that exist in schools. Planning and organisation of CPD in schools tends not to be strategic and struggles to meet the competing development of individual teachers and whole-school improvement plans.
- Relating to schools as organisations – organisational choices made in schools about roles and responsibilities do not always support or help to develop CPD planning and provision.
- Relating to culture change and aspects of New Professionalism – some changes to teachers' perceptions and actions in relation to their roles and responsibilities are evident, in tune with the New Professionalism agenda. Wholesale change has not occurred.
- Relating to evaluation of CPD and follow-up – evaluation systems of CPD used in schools are insufficiently tied to considering planned outcomes, identifying specific criteria and considering value for money.

On 'Access to CPD' the survey indicated that:

- Teachers are offered a narrow range of CPD opportunities which vary significantly by experience, career stage and leadership responsibility.
- Both school-level conditions and teacher perceptions serve as barriers to CPD participation.

The findings from this research suggest that a great deal needs to be done to target CPD and to enable teachers to make the most of the opportunities on offer.

The presentations provoked lively discussion around some fundamental questions about teacher education and they will undoubtedly lead to further debate during the planned inquiry into this educational area.

For further details on the presentations see the Cambridge Assessment website: http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/ca/Events/Event_Detail?id=126302

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