

NQT Quality improvement study

4.3 Quality of NQTs

NQT quality in broad terms was picked up in the environment map, and therefore not covered in the surveys reported here.

4.3.1 Personal Factors

When schools were asked to list NQTs' qualities and strengths, SLT members highlighted NQTs' personal characteristics in relation to their ability to manage the workload and display commitment and enthusiasm. Well over half of SLT and Mentor interviews referred to these characteristics.

Hard working

Of the 22 secondary schools that provided interview data three specifically mentioned that willingness to work hard was a characteristic of their NQTs and of those they would wish to employ. The SLT from one such school reported that the school looks for staff that are *"properly qualified, committed, enthusiastic, competent, not afraid of hard work, resilient and who will 'buy into' the ethos of the school"* (Assistant Headteacher, secondary). However, two SLT members noted that NQTs can have problems managing the workload expected of them. One school that recruited mainly from the PGCE route noted that NQTs *"would be better prepared if they had a fuller timetable and workload in marking and management toward end of their final placements, so as NQTs they had a realistic approach rather than trying to operate at the level they did for their planning etc on ITT course"* (Assistant Head and NQT mentor, secondary).

Commitment

NQTs' commitment to the profession was strongly evidenced by four of the 21 secondary schools, two primary (from 20) and one (of four) special school SLT members. One SLT member noted that the school had employed *"about 15 NQTs in the last 5 years and found them all to be very talented and committed to teaching"* (Deputy Head, secondary faith school). One primary interviewee noted that *"they [NQTs] are full of new ideas about teaching and are well versed in new initiatives such as the PNS"* (NQT mentor, primary faith school). For one special school interviewee, some strengths of NQTs in the school included open-mindedness, keenness and willingness to learn (senior staff member, special school).

Enthusiasm

Seven of the 21 secondary interviews noted the importance of their NQTs' enthusiasm, a term associated with: freshness and openness to new ideas (three schools mentioned this); energy or stamina (two schools); motivation; vibrancy; dedication and a passion for learning. Such NQTs can display ambition, a thirst for knowledge and an absence of cynicism (all cited by one school each). Among primary SLT members, NQTs' enthusiasm was manifested by: willingness to learn and try new things (two schools); building a good rapport with staff and pupils; and excitement (one each). One special school found that strengths of

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their recent NQTs have included enthusiasm, their desire/thirst for knowledge and the fact that they have brought new and innovative ideas into the school. Among the NQTs interviewed, six noted that they were enthusiastic and committed while two others (both in secondary schools) lacked confidence (though of course it would be difficult to isolate the effect of their ITT on these characteristics).

4.3.2 Professional factors

Professional factors highlighted by SLT members included: subject knowledge; assessment; classroom management skills; ability to work with pupils at different ability levels; and dealing with parents, though it unclear from our interview data whether these are issues for the schools mentioned because of a lack of them in the NQTs.

Subject knowledge

Four of the 21 secondary school SLT members reported NQTs' subject knowledge as a strength; two of these schools recruited mainly from the PGCE route. The importance of subject knowledge for SLT members encompassed: NQTs' broader understanding of educational issues (a mainly PGCE school); teaching practice; ability to use ICT in the classroom (two noted this). Use of ICT was also highlighted by all five primary school SLT members who also reported good subject knowledge as a strength of their NQTs (three primary NQTs interviewed also cited their ICT skills as a strength). One school noted that in applicants they are looking for an 'extra dimension'; *"not just someone who can deliver their subject, but people who have other useful experiences, for example people who have done unpaid voluntary work with youngsters, people who have completed the Duke of Edinburgh award, etc"* (NQT mentor and Assistant Headteacher, secondary).

However, three secondary and three primary schools cited subject knowledge as a weakness of their NQTs. One secondary school that recruited mainly from the PGCE route believed that ITT courses could/should do more to fill in gaps in subject knowledge and knowledge of how to teach the subject (e.g. a chemist arriving in school will be expected to teach 'Science' and they need to be prepared for this). The school's NQT mentor noted that *"this might be a big ask for a one year course, but they have to be ready"* (Assistant Head, secondary school coming out of Special Measures). Another PGCE-recruiting school with above average GCSE 5 A-Cs cited sciences and modern foreign languages (MFL) as subjects where NQTs were not confident enough to teach at appropriate levels in a secondary environment (Deputy Head, secondary). Among primary SLT members the teaching of reading was identified as a weakness among NQTs for three interviewees. Among NQTs only three of 38 interviewees (two secondary and one primary) felt their PGCE programmes did not adequately prepare them with subject knowledge.



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Assessment

Surprisingly little was said about NQTs' preparedness for assessment of pupils by SLT members and mentors in either primary or secondary schools (though it is a concern of NQTs, see below). SLTs require *"an understanding that there is more to the job than academic achievement, but with a good understanding of assessment and high aspirations for the children"* from their NQTs and in this respect *"the quality of NQTs in recent years has improved"* (Headteacher, primary). Among secondary school SLT members there were three positive and no negative comments in relation to assessment. A significant minority of NQTs themselves however feel themselves unprepared by their ITT experience; four of the 19 in secondary schools (all from the PGCE route) and seven of 19 primary NQTs (mostly PGCE-recruiting) felt that their ITT did not prepare them or assessment.

Classroom management

Classroom and behaviour management is an identified weakness in almost half of secondary school interviewee comments; six interviewees specifically mentioned NQTs lack of experience in this area though there was some understanding that this has always been a problem, though one that recruits mainly from the PGCE route noted that the general awareness of classroom management issues that the NQTs have are at a lower level than they used to be (induction co-ordinator, suburban school with above average GCSE 5 A-Cs). One interviewee stressed that this is an area where, understandably, NQTs need effective support (Deputy Headteacher, secondary). Specifically, the ability to deal with SEN pupils and inclusion issues generally was highlighted by one interviewee, who believed that a one-off session at university was not enough to prepare them adequately for the pastoral side of the job (Deputy Headteacher, secondary).

One NQT mentor believed that all ITT routes could do more on behaviour management, and that *"the emphasis ITT places on Teaching and Learning leads to an assumption that if you design the lesson well everything will go well, but there is also a need to develop the necessary skills to manage the class"* (NQT mentor, school with High Performing Status). Among primary school interviewees there was a more positive assessment of the classroom management skills of NQTs; one interviewee (school in deprived area) believed behaviour management skills had improved in recent years (Deputy Headteacher and NQT mentor, secondary) while another, from a school that preferred the EBRs believed that NQTs strengths *"have something to do with their experience in managing classes they have acquired both from university placement and from their previous experience prior to commencing their ITT"* (Headteacher, secondary).

Four primary interviewees (recruiting from all routes) saw classroom behaviour management as a weakness of ITT, one of whom thought that NQTs often arrive preoccupied with concerns about behaviour management; *"they may lack the confidence to walk straight into a class and 'deliver' straight away and that this can be remedied by in-school training"* (Headteacher, faith primary).



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Among interviewed NQTs there was also a clear difference between primary and secondary schools: a third of those based in secondary schools noted that they felt unprepared by their ITT in relation to behaviour management (almost all from PGCE route); but a similar proportion of primary NQTs noted this as a strength of their ITT (equally split between PGCE and Undergraduate routes).

Differentiation

Closely related to classroom management is the issue NQTs' ability to understand and deal with differentiation in the classroom (pupils working at different ability levels). Two secondary and three primary interviewees highlighted this as an area of weakness. For one interviewee from a secondary school that mainly recruits from the PGCE route, the context was the differentiated curriculum (having to meet the needs of gifted and talented cohorts and new vocational subject areas); *there was a need for ITT to focus less on subject content and more on new approaches to teaching* (Headteacher, secondary). Amongst primary interviewees, one school inclusion leader specifically mentioned the GTP route as better preparation because such NQTs would have already benefitted from staff development in this area. In addition, planning problems were highlighted by three other primary interviewees. Among NQTs interviewed, those in secondary schools were more likely to struggle with differentiation.

Planning is important in the context of working with pupils at different levels of ability. One interviewee noted that as the school works on the cross-curricular 'theme of enquiry' system, some NQTs have initially struggled to adapt to this having been trained to plan lessons around Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) units (Headteacher, 'outstanding' large primary). Other interviewees noted that planning is one of the difficulties faced by some NQTs, depending on the individual, while another interviewee believed this was *"part of trend caused by increased expectations and demands made of NQTs over the last five years"* (Acting Assistant Headteacher, secondary). NQTs themselves believed that lesson planning was a strength of their ITT, and this was especially so for primary interviewees (one third expressed this view) and those from the PGCE route.

Dealing with parents

Dealing with parents is an issue only of note to those in primary schools. One primary interviewee thought NQTs were often unprepared by their ITT for dealing with parents of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (school inclusion leader, primary); another in relation to the changing expectations of parents (Headteacher, primary). Interviewed NQTs were not unduly concerned about this aspect; only two of 19 secondary and two of 19 primary NQTs found that they were unprepared for dealing with parents by their ITT.

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4.3.3 Quality of NQTs

Across secondary and primary phases the majority of interviewees who responded to this question believed that the quality of NQTs had improved over the last 5 years. Of a total of 25 interviewees (none of which were from special schools) 17 believed that there had been an improvement; seven thought the quality was the same and only one believed that the quality of NQTs had worsened. Of 13 secondary school interviewees, nine believed that there had been an improvement, two thought the quality was the same and one believed that the quality of NQTs had declined (Deputy Headteacher, small secondary in deprived urban area, 40% Asian intake); among the nine primary interviewees six thought that quality had improved and the other three that quality had stayed the same. Two of the three independent school interviewees believed that quality had improved and the other that it had stayed the same (see Table 20 below).

Table 20 Has NQT quality improved over time, by school type

School type	Better	Same	Worse	Total n
Secondary	9	3	1	13
Primary	6	3	0	9
Independent	2	1	0	3
Total	17	7	1	25

When we look in more detail at the personal and professional characteristics that constitute variations in perceived quality among NQTs the overall picture is generally positive, with most of the concerns identified relating to the difficulty of adequately preparing NQTs within the one-year PGCE framework compared with ITT routes that offer more classroom experience.

Among personal factors, interviewees were positive about NQTs' commitment, enthusiasm and ability to handle the workload, although workload management was more of an issue for those from the PGCE route. On subject knowledge there was a balance among between those that believed NQTs were adequately prepared and those that thought that there was too much to be learned in one (PGCE) year. SLT and mentor interviewees were broadly satisfied with NQTs preparedness for assessment; however NQTs themselves were more concerned about this aspect of their ITT. NQTs in secondary schools and some SLT/mentors also thought classroom management and behaviour management were areas of concern. Differentiation was another area that was of more concern among in relation to secondary NQTs than primary, but that was highlighted by few interviewees. Most interviewees were also broadly satisfied with NQTs' ability to plan lessons and also to plan in the longer term, and with NQTs' ability to deal with parents, with the exception of some NQTs in primary schools when dealing with parents of children with special educational needs.



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4.3.4 Summary

- Across secondary and primary schools the majority of SLT members who responded believed that the quality of NQTs had improved over the last 5 years. Of a total of 25 SLT members (none of whom were from special schools) 17 believed that there had been an improvement; seven thought the quality was the same and only one believed that the quality of NQTs had worsened.
- The personal and professional characteristics that constitute variations in perceived quality among NQTs the overall picture is generally positive, with most of the concerns identified relating to the difficulty of adequately preparing NQTs within the one-year PGCE framework compared with ITT routes that offer more classroom experience.
- SLT members were positive about NQTs' commitment, enthusiasm and ability to handle the workload, although workload management was more of a concern for those from the PGCE route. On subject knowledge there was a balance among those that believed NQTs were adequately prepared and those that thought that there was too much to be learned in one year.
- SLT and mentor interviewees were broadly satisfied with NQTs preparedness for assessment; however NQTs themselves were more concerned about this aspect of their ITT. NQTs in secondary schools and some SLT/mentors also thought classroom management and behaviour management were areas of concern.
- Differentiation was another area that was of more concern among in relation to secondary NQTs than primary, but that was highlighted by few interviewees. Most interviewees were also broadly satisfied with NQTs' ability to plan lessons and also to plan in the longer term, and with NQTs' ability to deal with parents, with the exception of some NQTs in primary schools when dealing with parents of children with special educational needs.