

Newly Qualified Teachers' Experiences of their First Year of Teaching

Findings from Phase III of the Becoming a Teacher Project

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Abbreviations

BA/BSc - Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Science

BaT - Becoming a Teacher

BEd - Bachelor of Education

CEDP - Career Entry and Development Profile

CPD - Continuing Professional Development

DCSF - Department for Children, Schools and Families

DfES - Department for Education and Skills

GTC - General Teaching Council for England

GRTP - Graduate and Registered Teacher Programme

GTP - Graduate Teacher Programme

HEI - Higher Education Institution

ICT - Information Communications Technology

ITT - Initial Teacher Training

LA - Local Authority

LEA - Local Education Authority

MFL - Modern Foreign Languages

NQT - Newly Qualified Teacher

PE - Physical Education

PGCE - Postgraduate Certificate of Education

QTS - Qualified Teacher Status

RTP - Registered Teacher Programme

SCITT - School-centred Initial Teacher Training

SEN - Special Educational Needs

TDA - Training and Development Agency for Schools

Executive Summary

Introduction

The *Becoming a Teacher* (BaT) research project (2003-2009) is exploring beginner teachers' experiences of initial teacher training (ITT), Induction and early professional development in England, in a context in which there is a multiplicity of routes of entry into the teaching profession and a statutory Induction period for all newly qualified teachers (NQTs) on completion of their ITT.¹ During this Induction period (normally lasting one school year for those in full-time teaching posts), NQTs must demonstrate their capability against a set of Standards which were designed to be consistent with and build upon those developed for ITT. One of the key objectives of the BaT research is to examine the extent to which the experiences of people entering the profession via different ITT routes may vary, and the extent to which such experiences may be shaped by other factors, including beginner teachers' prior conceptions and expectations of teaching and teacher training.

This report presents findings relating to teachers' experiences of their first year in post and their experiences of Induction.

Research Design

The findings presented in this report were produced from the analysis of data generated primarily from:

- (i) a telephone survey of 2,446 NQTs;
- (ii) in-depth face-to-face interviews with 73 NQTs;
- (iii) email exchanges ('ejournals') with 46 NQTs; and
- (iv) in-depth face-to-face interviews with 27 NQT Induction tutors.

The survey and interviews were conducted close to the end of the NQTs' first year of teaching (post-ITT), mostly in June-July 2005. The ejournals took place at regular (half-termly) intervals during the 2004-2005 academic year.

The survey, interview and ejournal samples included both primary and secondary phase NQTs (and Induction tutors), and NQTs who had followed a range of ITT routes, namely: the university-administered Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE); the Flexible PGCE; the Bachelor of Education (BEd); the Bachelor of Arts/Science with Qualified Teacher Status (BA/BSc QTS); School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) programmes; and Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP).

¹ We use the term 'newly qualified teacher' (NQT), in this report, to refer to all those who successfully completed their initial teacher training (ITT) in 2004, regardless of whether or not they were actually working as teachers at the time of data generation (in 2005) or whether or not they had been able to undertake/complete a formal programme of Induction. That said, the reader will observe that many of the specific findings presented in the report will be based on the responses of those who had taught at some stage since completing their ITT.

Collectively, the data generation activities outlined above are referred to as 'Wave 3' of the BaT study. NQTs who were surveyed, interviewed and who participated in the ejournals at Wave 3 had also taken part in earlier survey and interview work which focussed on their motivations for undertaking ITT and their expectations and prior conceptions of teaching and ITT (Wave 1), and their experiences of ITT (Wave 2).² (Further information regarding the survey and case study samples, including response rates, is provided in Chapter 2).

Some of the data generated in Wave 3 were analysed in conjunction with data generated in Waves 1 and 2 of the study in order to examine, for example, the extent to which NQTs' experiences were related to their earlier experiences, motivations or prior conceptions.

Key Findings

The highs and lows of the first year of teaching

Whilst 93 per cent of those survey respondents who had worked as teachers since completing their ITT indicated that they enjoyed teaching, case study (interview and e-journal) data suggest that first year teachers typically experience a range of both 'highs' and 'lows' throughout the school year, and sometimes even during the same working day.

The high points experienced by NQTs tended to be associated with (i) positive relationships with pupils and colleagues; (ii) their perceptions of professional autonomy; and/or (iii) their perceptions of achievement and change.

- Many NQTs indicated that they found developing relationships with pupils to be a rewarding and engaging task, and 25 of the 73 case study interviewees referred to 'highs' associated with their perceptions of pupil learning and development, and their role in fostering this.
- Thirty-six interviewees described positive relationships with individual colleagues or groups of colleagues, with 14 speaking positively about feeling part of a team or about having particular colleagues with whom they worked closely, and another 14 describing supportive relationships with teacher colleagues.
- Twenty-five interviewees talked about the 'highs' that resulted from their increased sense of autonomy during their first year of teaching, with some emphasising the importance, in this context, of having their own classroom or 'their own' pupils/students, of establishing their own classroom routines, and/or of being able to be more flexible in their lesson planning and teaching than had been possible during their ITT.
- Many NQTs also talked about the positive feelings they derived from being recognised as teachers (mentioned by 22 interviewees) and from being trusted as teachers, particularly by their colleagues (17 interviewees).

² Findings from these first two phases of the project were presented in earlier reports (Hobson & Malderez (Eds), 2005 and Hobson *et al.*, 2006).

- Some NQTs talked about the ‘high’ associated with the sense of achievement of ‘surviving’ or managing the intensity of a term or a full year as teachers. Such a sense of achievement was encouraged or heightened, for some, through the receipt of encouraging comments on their work from colleagues, pupils/students, their pupils’ parents or carers, and external sources such as Ofsted.

The ‘lows’ experienced by NQTs were often related to (i) the demands of the role or their reported workload; and (ii) challenging relationships with pupils, with pupils’ parents and/or with colleagues in their schools.

- Forty-nine of the 73 interviewees described their workload as extensive, with some NQTs pointing in particular to what they perceived to be an excessive amount of ‘paperwork’ and ‘administration’ associated with being a teacher, in addition to the normal demands of planning, preparation, teaching and assessment. That said:
 - Thirty-four interviewees described their workloads as manageable and 47 discussed how they managed their workload, including the use of ‘smart’ marking strategies, not setting up the expectation of books being returned the next day and not planning the unattainable.
- Forty-one bemoaned poor pupil behaviour, with some describing traumatic individual incidents with pupils or groups of pupils and talking about feelings of powerlessness in this regard.
- For some NQTs (e.g. at least 27 of the 73 case study interviewees), poor relationships with teaching and/or non-teaching colleagues, including their head teachers, Induction tutors and support staff, were said to have contributed to significant ‘lows’ during their first year of teaching. Some NQTs reported an unwelcome reception on their first day or in the early weeks or months of their teaching careers, and others reported a lack of approachability or even hostile or aggressive behaviour on the part of some colleagues.

NQTs’ experiences of finding their first post

The majority of respondents to the Wave 3 survey had managed to obtain permanent (66%) or fixed-term (21%) teaching posts, with a further seven per cent working as supply teachers. Five per cent were no longer looking for a teaching post, and only one per cent were unemployed and looking for a teaching post.

Seventy-seven per cent of those (2,406) teachers who had either held or had looked for teaching posts since the completion of their ITT reported that they had not encountered any particular difficulties when looking for a teaching post. However, primary phase NQTs were more likely than their secondary counterparts to report having encountered difficulties in seeking a teaching post, with almost 32 per cent of the former, compared with 12 per cent of the latter reporting difficulties. In addition:

- NQTs who had graduated from primary BEd (46%), primary BA/BSc QTS (35%) and secondary Flexible PGCE (23%) programmes were more likely than those graduating from other ITT routes to report that they had encountered difficulties in seeking a teaching post.

Just over a third (34%) of those who reported difficulties in seeking a post indicated that one of those difficulties was finding employment in their preferred location.

Almost a third of NQTs (32%) obtained teaching posts in schools in which they had undertaken placements during their ITT.

- Those who had followed the GRTP route were (unsurprisingly) more likely to obtain posts in their ITT placement schools than those who had followed other ITT routes.
- Older NQTs, males, and those who had reported (in the Wave 2 survey) good relationships with mentors and other teachers in their ITT placement schools were also more likely to obtain teaching posts in such schools.

The nature of the teaching work undertaken by NQTs

Whilst 66 per cent of all survey respondents reported holding permanent teaching posts at schools or colleges, the figure for secondary phase NQTs (76%) was significantly higher than that for those teaching in the primary sector (58%).

The vast majority (93%) of survey respondents who were teaching (or had taught) in secondary schools reported that they had taught at least one of their stated specialist subjects, with almost two-thirds (65%) reporting that they had taught *only* those subjects that they had previously indicated (on completion of their ITT) were their subject specialisms. Around a third (35%) of secondary phase NQTs reported that they had been teaching at least one subject that they had not indicated was one of their specialist areas, and six per cent reported that they had *exclusively* taught subjects other than those that they had indicated were their subject specialisms.

NQTs were less likely to report teaching those age groups (Years 6 and 11) associated with public examinations than they were to report teaching other year groups:

- 21 per cent of primary phase NQTs reported teaching Year 6 pupils compared, for example, with 37 per cent who stated that they had taught Year 1; whilst
- 79 per cent of secondary phase NQTs had taught in Year 11, compared to between 89 and 91 per cent who had taught Years 7-10.

Not all NQTs appeared to be receiving all of the statutory entitlements for Induction with, for example, a quarter of those survey respondents who had held full-time teaching posts reporting that they had only had 'two hours or less' non-contact time per week, which is less than the statutory ten per cent entitlement.

NQTs' reported enjoyment of working as teachers and their ratings of their work-based relationships

The vast majority of NQTs surveyed (93%) reported that they enjoyed working as teachers, and the vast majority reported 'good' or 'very good' relationships with teaching colleagues (97%), pupils (97%), non-teaching staff (96%), parents (89%), and head teachers (82%). Just four per cent of survey respondents disagreed with the proposition that they had enjoyed working as teachers, with two per cent 'strongly' disagreeing.

- There was a statistically significant association between reported enjoyment of teaching and reported positive relationships with colleagues. Those NQTs who gave more positive ratings of their *relationships with other teachers* were also likely to give more positive responses regarding their level of enjoyment of teaching.

NQTs' perceptions of their strengths as teachers

When NQTs were asked (without prompting) what they considered to be their strengths as teachers, the most common responses were (i) the '*ability to develop productive relationships with pupils*' (given by 32% of the respondents); (ii) the '*ability to maintain discipline in the classroom*' (26%); and (iii) '*knowledge about my teaching subject(s)*' (21%).

A comparison between the Wave 2 (end of ITT) and Wave 3 (end of first year of teaching) responses of those respondents completing both surveys suggests that there were two notable aspects of teaching in which these beginning teachers felt they had developed since their ITT. These were:

- '*Lesson planning/preparation*', which was given as a perceived strength by six per cent of those surveyed in the Wave 2 survey and 17 per cent in Wave 3; and
- the '*ability to maintain discipline in the classroom*', which was reported as a strength by 18 per cent of respondents in the Wave 2 survey and 26 per cent in Wave 3.

Access to and outcomes of the Induction process

Of all those survey respondents who had worked as teachers since completing their ITT (2,357), 88 per cent indicated that they had access to a formal Induction programme, with 11 per cent indicating that they had not.

The vast majority (84%) of those NQTs who had access to a formal Induction programme and who knew the outcome of their Induction process reported that they had been recommended to pass. Thirteen per cent of respondents stated that they did not yet know (at the time of the survey) whether or not they had been recommended to pass their Induction.

Of the three per cent of respondents (64 out of 2,083) who indicated that they had not been recommended to pass:

- 52 per cent (33 NQTs) stated that they had not been in post for a sufficient length of time;

- 17 per cent (11 NQTs) stated that they had not had sufficient support from their schools.

Factors which helped NQTs in working towards the Induction Standards

When survey respondents were asked who or what, if anything, had helped them in working towards the Induction Standards, the seven most common responses all related to people, including:

- ‘colleagues at school/college’ (44%);
- ‘Induction tutor/mentor’ (41%);
- ‘head of department’ (11%); and
- ‘contact with other NQTs’ (7%).

NQTs’ relations with their mentor or Induction tutor

The vast majority of those survey respondents who had been teaching and who had had a mentor reported ‘*very good*’ (65%) or ‘*good*’ (29%) relationships with those people, with only one per cent rating those relationships as ‘*poor*’.

- NQTs were significantly more likely to rate their relationships with their mentors in positive terms if the mentor worked in the same subject area and less likely to do so if their mentor was also their head teacher.
- Those NQTs who rated their relationships with their Induction tutor/mentor more highly were also more likely to report that they had been recommended to pass their Induction.

The use and perceived value of the career entry and development profile (CEDP)

Whilst over half (55%) of survey respondents indicated that their Induction tutor/mentor was using their CEDP to support their development as teachers, there are some question marks surrounding the value or current use of the CEDP as a tool for supporting an individualised development process and the transition from ‘student teacher’ to fully qualified teacher. For example:

- 29 per cent of respondents disagreed with the proposition that their Induction tutor/mentor was using the CEDP to support their development;
- 34 per cent did not feel that the CEDP provided a useful link between ITT and Induction; and
- 35 per cent disagreed that the CEDP had been used effectively in arranging their Induction.

NQTs' ratings of the assessment of and 'feedback' on their teaching

Over three-quarters (78%) of survey respondents rated the assessment of their teaching as 'good' or 'very good', whilst 80 per cent rated the feedback on their teaching as 'good' or 'very good'.

Six per cent rated the assessment of their teaching as 'poor' or 'very poor'; and seven per cent rated the feedback on their teaching as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

NQTs' ratings of the support and professional development opportunities received

Seventy-seven per cent of survey respondents who had worked as teachers rated the support they had received as 'very good' or 'good', whilst seven per cent rated such support as 'poor' and two per cent as 'very poor'. Forty-one (of the 73) case study interviewees reported that on at least some occasions they felt unsupported by colleagues such as heads of department, mentors and senior managers.

Eighty-eight per cent of survey respondents who had held a teaching post reported having undertaken additional training and development (additional to ITT) during their NQT year.

- Case study data suggest that some of the most valued aspects of these training and development opportunities involved the chance to meet other NQTs, and content relating to 'behaviour management' and the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT).

Where reservations were expressed about the value of training or continuing professional development (CPD) that NQTs undertook, these included perceived repetition of content covered in NQTs' ITT or Induction-specific programmes, perceptions of content being too general or theoretical, and comments on facilitators' lack of ability or effectiveness.

Future training and support needs

In response to an open-ended survey question which asked what additional training or professional development they felt they might need in their second year of teaching, the most frequent responses given were:

- 'knowledge about my teaching subject(s)' (given by 18% of respondents);
- 'knowledge of general subjects/skills' (16%); and
- 'ability to work with pupils with special educational needs (SEN)/inclusion' (13%).

When survey respondents were asked (again without specific prompting) what support, if any, they felt should be provided for them in their second year of teaching, the largest number of responses (21% of respondents) stated that they would like to have (or to continue to have) a mentor.

NQTs' expected employment status for the following school year

The vast majority (95%) of those who, at the time of the Wave 3 telephone survey (June/July 2005), were currently teaching (or who were looking for a teaching post in the 'present' academic year), indicated that they planned to be (or to remain) teaching at the start of the following academic year.

- Eighty per cent of these expected to be employed in a permanent or fixed-term teaching post in the same school or college as that in which they were 'currently' working.

Case study data provide indications as to why the majority of NQTs wished to remain in their current posts, including liking the school, feeling settled and being given opportunities to take on additional responsibilities.

Nine per cent of survey respondents who held permanent or fixed-term positions had already obtained or planned to obtain posts in new schools. The main reasons given by these NQTs for moving or wanting to move schools were:

- their existing contract would be ending (24%);
- they wanted to move elsewhere in the country (21%); and
- they were seeking career development opportunities (17%).

NQTs' medium-term career plans

Regarding NQTs' future plans, 91 per cent of those survey respondents who were currently teaching or planning to be in teaching in the following term reported that they expected to still be teachers in four years' time. Four per cent stated that they *did not* expect to be in teaching in four years' time.

Factors affecting beginner teacher retention

NQTs' perceptions of the *heavy workload* associated with teaching or to what they considered to be an unacceptable *work-life balance* helped to explain why some of those who had successfully completed ITT programmes were not 'currently' teaching, why some of those who were 'currently' teaching were not planning to be in teaching posts in the following term/academic year, and why some of those who were 'currently' teaching did not expect to be doing so in four years' time. For example:

- Almost a third of those survey respondents who stated that they *did not* expect to be in teaching in four years' time indicated that they hoped to find a job with a better work-life balance.

Difficulties relating to *pupil behaviour* also helped to explain why some of those who had successfully completed ITT programmes were not 'currently' teaching and why some of those who were 'currently' teaching were not planning to be in teaching posts in the following academic year.

Induction tutors' perspectives on NQTs and the Induction process

Seventeen of the 27 Induction tutors who were interviewed stated that, in their view, NQTs today were well-prepared and capable of carrying out their teaching roles effectively; whilst 16 interviewees referred to NQTs as 'assets' to their schools:

- fifteen interviewees perceived that NQTs' enthusiasm was one of their biggest assets;
- eight talked in positive terms about the new strategies and up to date information that NQTs brought to their schools; and
- six said that they valued the life experiences that NQTs bring.

The two main development needs of NQTs which Induction tutors identified were: (i) the ability to manage classrooms and pupil behaviour; and (ii) workload management skills.

The majority of Induction tutors interviewed (18 of the 27) identified insufficient time as the biggest constraint on their ability to carry out their role effectively. The things that were identified as being most helpful to Induction tutors' ability to carry out their role were:

- the allocation of designated time to meet with and support the NQT;
- timetable management to ensure that they (Induction tutors) and their NQTs were both 'free' at certain times during the school week.

On the evidence of the Induction tutor interviews, the majority of Induction tutors/mentors enjoy their role and see involvement in the Induction of NQTs as beneficial both to themselves and to their schools.