Consultation response

A world-class teaching profession

February 2015

National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)

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About NFER

NFER is one of the UK's leading independent providers of research, assessment and information services for education, training and children's services. We make a difference to learners of all ages, especially to the lives of children and young people, by ensuring our work improves the practice and understanding of those who work with and for learners. NFER's purpose is to provide independent evidence which improves education and training. As a charity we are always thinking about ways in which we can achieve this purpose. In particular, we are focusing attention on the use of evidence for improvement, taking a proactive approach to setting the research agenda for education and children's services in order make a real impact on policy and practice.

About this document

Between 9 December 2014 and 2 February 2015 the Government conducted a consultation into its vision for a world-class teaching profession and the establishment of a College of Teaching:

The Government is committed to improving teacher quality as a key part of our plan for education. The teaching profession is fortunate to include many thousands of dedicated, hard-working individuals transforming the lives of children and young people while working to improve their own professional practice. We want to help teachers to go even further in raising the standards of their profession, and so we are seeking views on:

- *Improving the quality of professional development and learning undertaken by all teachers; and*

- *Facilitating the establishment of a new independent professional body for teaching (a "College of Teaching").*

This document details NFER's response to this consultation. Our response should be read in the context of our support for the *Claim Your College Campaign* to which we are one of a number of signatories.

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About the College of Teaching and Claim Your College campaign

The Claim Your College coalition has been initiated by the existing College of Teachers, the Prince's Teaching Institute, the Teacher Development Trust and the SSAT in collaboration with practising teachers and school leaders.

Its proposal is backed by a 100-strong coalition as of 1 February and this number is expected to grow. This includes a wide range of organisations and individuals from across the education sector including unions, subject associations, schools, practising teachers, school improvement and leadership organisations and third sector organisations. The full list of supporters is available on the Claim Your College website.

The proposed College of Teaching aims to give teachers equality of status with other professions by advancing high standards, recognising excellence and promoting evidence-based practice and policy. Claim Your College's campaign stresses that a College of Teaching should not have a regulatory role, should be independent of government, and should be entirely voluntary in membership. The guiding principle of a member-led organisation means that ultimately it will be for the membership to decide what the College of Teaching will do for them but potential benefits include greater professional recognition, support from College mentors and access to up-to-date pedagogical evidence and knowledge.

Why NFER supports the College of Teaching proposal

In recent NFER reports we have argued that a professional representation body such as the proposed College of Teaching could play a key role in supporting the demand and conditions for evidence-informed practices among the teaching profession (Durbin and Nelson, 2014; Nelson and O'Beirne, 2014). We know that teachers are most likely to listen to, and trust, the views of other teachers when developing their practice (Judkins et al., 2014). There is also an argument that better use of evidence in practice can be a boost for teachers' professional autonomy (Nelson, 2014).

A professional representation body for teachers could support the profession to engage effectively with the evidence around effective CPD and teaching practice in general, in order to raise teaching standards and pupil outcomes. Evidence suggests that schools which understand academic/professional research and apply the learning in support of change often have the best outcomes (Schleicher, 2011). Schools that adopt a culture of enquiry, underpinned by an understanding of professional research, are also most likely to improve teaching and learning and improve outcomes for young people (CUREE, 2011).

We agree with the principle of a new professional body for teachers, independent of government and with the credibility to challenge the status quo. We agree that such a College should have responsibility for professional standards and professional

development; and that it should have a key role in supporting the profession to become more evidence informed.

More broadly, the CoT needs to be regarded as a respected body (across policy, practice and public life), a trusted voice, which can lobby and call for change with the capacity and credibility to support the profession to overcome obstacles. Strong lines of communication between the CoT and Ofsted will be very important. Potentially, a new relationship could be built between schools and Ofsted, via the CoT, a two-way relationship that identifies gaps in provision and supports the identification of quality indicators and measurement/inspection criteria.

NFER's response to the government's consultation questions

1. What are the greatest impediments teachers and schools face in regularly undertaking high-quality professional development?

Schools face a variety of challenges in regularly undertaking high quality continuing professional development (CPD). In order to properly understand these, it is important to be clear about the variability in potential target groups, purposes and timeframes of CPD:

- **Target groups**: There is a wide range of target groups for professional learning (teachers, support staff, specialists (e.g. SENCOs), middle leaders and senior leaders, for example).

- **Purposes**: The purpose of CPD varies according to its target group (it may exist to support whole-school improvement, subject or topic-specific knowledge, enhancing pupil outcomes, responding to a particular policy or initiative, or supporting individual career progression, for example). The variety of target groups and purposes of CPD influences the challenges and enablers in ensuring good access to high-quality CPD.

- **Start points**: There is a need to clarify a desirable start point and trajectory for professional learning across the teaching profession. For example, should a teacher's first year post qualification and the mentorship received be considered professional learning, as is the case for nursing, midwifery and allied health professionals (DH, 2010).

At a general level, there are a number of current deficiencies: there are limitations in the supply of high-quality CPD; there are issues about the processes by which schools embed professional learning in their day-to-day practices; and there are limited resources available to schools to enable them to do so.

1.1   Limited resources:

Time and money are key constraints for many schools; therefore schools need to be convinced of the benefits of engaging in high quality CPD, and engaging with

evidence more generally. A clear 'business case' needs to be presented to schools, demonstrating the proven benefits of particular approaches or CPD interventions (taking into account key target groups and purposes) in order to maximise the likelihood of schools investing in these activities. Recent NFER research conducted with United Learning illustrates that there are some ways in which schools can be supported to engage with research evidence and invest in CPD (Judkins *et al*., 2014). One headteacher in this study claimed that engaging in research evidence, in fact, saved time in his school. These include:

- Allowing teachers the time, space and freedom to implement new ideas (sometimes through internal innovation funding).

- Offering training on research engagement to ensure teachers are aware of the timescales and timeframes involved in evidence-based professional learning.

- Creating a school culture where evidence-based approaches are valued, and used to inform classroom practice.

1.2   Variability in the quality of provision

The CPD marketplace is competitive, and there is wide variation in the quality of provision. A degree of competition can be healthy. It can support innovation and creativity across schools with different teachers, pupil cohorts and contexts. However, an effective market for CPD requires schools to make good 'buying decisions', based on evidence of the value as well as the cost of provision. At present it is difficult for schools to differentiate at any level between strong and weak provision.

We believe that some degree of quality assurance (QA) or identification of good practice would be helpful for schools and teachers, enabling them to make better decisions based on more information. It is possible to envisage a College of Teaching (CoT) playing a useful role in this process.

- **Quality assurance of CPD provision** - Work that we have been involved in with Nesta and the Social Business Trust suggests that there are a number of useful ways to provide QA without moving to a 'list of approved suppliers'-type model. For example it is possible to build a 'star rating' or 'sliding scale' approach to identifying quality (including peer-rating elements, as well as some external quality judgements on the robustness of the intervention/training approach). Ideally, this would be considerably more nuanced than a 'strong/weak' rating.

- **Identification of key CPD principles –** In addition to providing evidence about effective CPD providers or programmes, schools and teachers often find it helpful to access the evidence about essential ingredients for good CPD gathered from a variety of different studies. We already have some good indications about what effective CPD looks like at a general level (see section 1.3 below), although there is scope for a great deal more investigation on the efficacy of specific CPD programmes. Development and widespread sharing of this knowledge could be a role for a CoT.

- **Supporting the identification of need** – CPD needs to be sufficiently flexible to address teacher- and school-defined needs for knowledge and development. A CoT could be a helpful vehicle to identify needs and advise on appropriate models of CPD that are fit for purpose, whether that be in terms of CPD supporting career progression; CPD supporting specialist, or subject-specific practice; CPD supporting continuous quality improvement; or CPD supporting policy translation and school-level action, for example.

1.3   Variability in school approaches to supporting, embedding and sustaining good CPD

We know that there is insufficient assessment of the quality of the vast array of CPD programmes that are currently available. But we also know that not all schools view CPD as part of an ongoing cycle of professional learning. Although the evidence shows that one-off training days are among the least effective strategies for embedding sustained professional learning (CUREE, 2011), many schools still adopt this approach. Research conducted by NFER found, rather, that the following factors are among the most effective ingredients of CPD (Lord et al., 2008 and 2009; Springate et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2011):

- enquiry-based problem-solving that involves reflection and evaluation

- collaborative approaches, involving peer learning, coaching and mentoring

- modeling of effective teaching and learning strategies

- observation

- opportunities for networking and discussion, 'learning walks'

- approaches that are applicable to school and classroom settings

- approaches that are personalised, taking account of prior knowledge and experience

- approaches that are linked to the performance-management cycle.

Bearing this knowledge in mind, a useful function for a CoT could be to work with schools to create the **climates** and **cultures** that enable an environment for 'meaningful learning' to take place. The focus would need to be on helping schools to develop their systems, structures and processes and to make decisions about leadership, resources, staffing, school-improvement planning and so on (see also our response to Question 6 below).

2. To what extent, and how, do teachers currently evaluate their professional development? What would support more rigorous evaluation?

As an independent research organisation committed to supporting schools to use the best available evidence to support their practice, NFER believes that there should be more effective evaluation of CPD. There are a number of potential tiers to this:

- **Holistic research** that enables further identification of the key features of effective practice (see 1.3 above) – this is likely to be conducted by professional researchers, or as a collaboration between researchers and teachers.

- **Robust impact evaluations of specific CPD products and/or approaches** – this is likely to be conducted by professional researchers/statisticians, or as a collaboration between researchers/statisticians and teachers. There is a dearth of this kind of evidence at the moment. Over time, it could help schools to make informed procurement decisions when deciding on an external supplier, and form the basis for the kind of sliding-scale rating of quality/impact referred to above.

- **Local-level evaluations of school-generated CPD**, or of the implementation of an evidence-based CPD approach within a school. Schools and individual teachers will need support and skill development to evaluate their own professional development.

An evaluation of the National Science Learning Centre, undertaken by NFER for Myscience, found that most schools had not adopted a systematic approach to evaluating the impact of CPD. Staff who had evaluated CPD had typically focused on outcomes for teachers, rather than pupils. At least one member of staff in each school reported being unsure about how to evaluate the impact of CPD on teaching and learning (Everett *et al.*, 2013).

This suggests that there is a need to develop teachers' skills, if they are to effectively evaluate their professional development. Evaluation is complex, especially if there is a desire to investigate the impact of an approach. Therefore, a model in which professional researchers and teachers work closely together to evaluate the effectiveness of different models of CPD could be a good way forward. We suggest that as the CoT develops and begins to focus on sharing and embedding good CPD practice in schools, that there is a commitment to a programme of evaluation – both external and internal.

2.1 External/professional evaluations:

NFER is well placed to offer support with external evaluation. Our expertise incorporates the full range of quantitative and qualitative research and assessment methodologies and we have a strong knowledge base in teacher professional development and evidence-informed practice. Last year our research team worked on around 100 research projects for a wide range of clients and grant-awarding bodies dedicated to education policy and/or practice issues.

2.2 Internal/teacher-led evaluations

NFER will be launching a free online self-review tool this Spring, which will help schools to assess their existing levels of research engagement and capacity to support enquiry-based professional learning. It helps schools to think about how professional enquiry can support school improvement; where the school currently is on that journey; how to develop; and how to find more help, support and resources. We also offer our Enquiring Schools service. This is a **fresh approach to teacher**

development and school improvement built around enquiry-based projects carried out by teachers, with support from NFER.

We are happy to share our knowledge and expertise about supporting enquiry-based learning and local evaluation with you as the work on embedding high quality CPD in schools develops. The self-review tool could be a useful resource to help schools monitor and evaluate both their readiness for high quality, whole-school CPD, and the effectiveness of different approaches.

3. Where should the balance of responsibility lie between teachers, schools and Government for ensuring that appropriate professional development is undertaken? How, in the longer term, might responsibility sit with a new independent professional body?

We believe that it is very important for the teaching profession to take ownership of its own professional development. We know that schools learn well from each other. Headteachers and teachers make key decisions about how to deploy their resources to best effect, and it is they who need to be convinced of the value of CPD; understand how best to engage with it; and how to embed the learning.

Government can play a role in helping the system to transition to one where high quality CPD is a core feature of teachers' careers – reinforcing the importance of good quality evaluation, setting out the standards that CPD should adhere to, and providing funding for the rigorous evaluation of specific approaches.

Eventually, this could lead to an environment in which school leaders demand evidence from CPD suppliers of the impact of their programmes and then commit to embedding high quality professional learning across their schools. All of these stages could be ably supported by a CoT.

4. Despite the growing reach of the Teaching Schools network, are there areas where coverage of schools would remain a concern? How could any gaps be addressed?

Evidence on the impact and benefits of school partnerships is mixed. NAO (2009) research shows that there is little hard evidence of peer-to-peer and school-to-school support having an impact on students' educational outcomes. NFER's submission to the Education Select Committee inquiry into School Partnerships and Collaboration similarly highlighted the fact that: 'there is as yet no rigorous empirical longitudinal evidence that partnering has a positive impact on educational outcomes' (GB. Parliament. HoC. Education Committee, 2013, Ev 74).However, the NAO report does cite qualitative evidence that partnering can have benefits, including: sharing resources; energising teachers to review their practice; and helping schools to identify and tackle their most pressing problems.

We know that the evidence base on the impact of partnership working is inconclusive. However, we also know that there is an enormous amount of peer-to-peer learning underway via a variety of formal and informal school partnerships and

collaborations, and therefore that there are a number of potentially useful mechanisms for sharing and embedding good practice that can be built on. Teaching School Alliances are just one of these structures.

If the 'new high-profile fund to drive the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based professional development' is to be filtered through Teaching Schools, then there are some important questions to be asked:

- How effectively do all Teaching Schools engage with schools in their networks? What strategies can be put in place to ensure that there is sharing and embedding of high-quality learning in all alliance schools? This needs to extend beyond a dissemination-based approach to something much deeper. Evidence shows that socially-interactive approaches are much more effective than dissemination-based approaches in mobilising knowledge effectively (Nelson and O'Beirne, 2014).

- What checks and balances will there be to ensure that this happens in a fair and consistent manner?

- How can Teaching Schools be supported and encouraged to share learning beyond their alliances into non-alliance schools? It will be crucial to ensure that no schools are left behind. There are a number of other formal and informal school partnerships that could be brought into the funding model to ensure wide, and fair, coverage. These range from national- and local-level school networks and membership bodies, through academy chains and Local Authorities, to locally-based school consortia and informal networks such as TeachMeets.

- What practical steps can be taken to ensure there is an equitable dispersion of funds for the development of outstanding practice, the sharing of key lessons, and support for embedding practice across all schools including Teaching Schools, alliance schools and non-alliance schools?

It will be important to evaluate the proposed model for developing and sharing effective CPD practice from the outset. We know that evidence on the impact of school partnerships is mixed and therefore we should not assume that the proposed funding model will definitely 'work'. It will be important to monitor and evaluate the model as it develops, in order to ascertain key elements that lead to success and can be replicated. It will also be important to identify challenges and areas for development to take into account as support for good quality CPD across the school sector develops.

6. Will teachers benefit from an online platform that collates and presents evidence-based best practice?

In addition to the suggestion in the consultation document that an online platform be developed, we note that Sir Andrew Carter's (2015) recent review of initial teacher training also calls for the development of a central portal of summaries of the research evidence on effective teaching. The Carter review suggests that a CoT may be a natural home for this.

As the consultation document notes, there are already a number of useful models for distilling and sharing the evidence on effective teaching and learning upon which to build (the Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit and the Institute for Effective Education's Evidence4Impact website are mentioned). There are also a number of other resources including NFER's On the Web; Education Futures' MESH Guides; the Evidence-based teachers' toolkit and the Evidence-based teachers' network. Additionally, there is an array of online networks supporting teachers to collaborate, share practice and develop communities of research engagement and collaborative enquiry.

NFER believes that, before a new platform is developed, it would be wise to explore all existing resources and infrastructures, looking for opportunities to augment existing approaches, or build on existing networks. We know that developing a really good resource or tool is only part of the equation. For the evidence to be widely accessed and used in schools, a great deal of thought needs to go into the issue of effective implementation. It is also important to understand why schools do not universally use existing resources at present.

With this in mind, over time, key roles for a CoT could be to:

- **Champion the case** for the importance of evidence-based approaches – stimulating a debate across the profession.

- **Act as a conduit** between the teaching profession and research commissioners in order to identify the needs, interests and challenges of the profession and ensure that the most relevant research is conducted and collated.

- **Identify and promote the evidence** of 'what works' in relation to CPD – this could include pointing teachers towards existing evidence platforms and helping to support their use.

- **Assist in translating the evidence** for classroom practice – helping to make it relevant and ready for schools, and acting as a broker bridging the gap between research and practice.

- **Help support a school culture/climate of readiness** to receive and act on the evidence (including promoting a professional debate about the required leadership, resources, climate, staffing, partnership working and so on that will be required for effective implementation of evidence-based CPD). As mentioned in Section 2.2 above, NFER's forthcoming free online self-review tool for schools could provide a useful starting point in helping to assess schools' current levels of readiness and engagement.

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