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One size fits all: The increasing standardisation of English teachers' work in England

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ABSTRACT: English teachers in England have experienced a lengthy period of external constraint, increasingly controlling their practice. This constraint was originated in the 1989 National curriculum. Although in its first version it was in harmony with practice, its numerous revisions have moved it a long way from teachers' own values and beliefs. This move is illustrated through research into the teaching of literature, which is seen by English teachers as often arid and driven by examinations alone. This period has been increasingly dominated by high-stakes testing, school league tables and frequent school inspections. Another powerful element has been the introduction of Standards for teachers at every career level from student teachers to the Advanced Skills Teachers. Research demonstrates that this introduction of Standards has had some beneficial effects. However, research also shows that the government decision to replace all these, hierarchically structured standards, with a single standard is seen by many teachers as a retrograde step. Evidence from Advanced Skills Teachers of English shows that the government's additional proposal to bring in a Master Teacher standard is equally problematic. The decline of the National Association for the Teaching of English, the key subject association for English teachers, is discussed in relation to this increasingly negative and constraining environment, concluding that many English teachers are choosing a form of local resistance which, while understandable, weakens the credibility of the profession and erodes the influence of its key voice, NATE.

KEYWORDS: English teaching, standards, testing, literature teaching, subject associations.

INTRODUCTION

English teachers in England should all, by now, be the same shape and size, as they have been experiencing a standardising pressure for 24 years, a pressure on curriculum, student outcomes and a pressure on teacher performativity. This entire period, 1989-2012, has also been marked by constant revisions to the instruments of standardisation; that includes the National Curriculum, which sets out content and defines expected student outcomes, and the descriptors of teacher performance through teacher standards. The other relentless factor is the increasing force of high-stakes testing regimes for students (Marshall, 2000). This article approaches "Teacher Standards" as a complex and interrelated mesh affecting all teachers' work. It distinguishes, where possible, between the positive elements of professional standards, which can enable teachers to demonstrate their capabilities and their values, and the negative elements, which focus on performativity and surveillance. It considers, as equally important in this professional "mesh", the way (in England) curriculum, methods of assessment and imposed models of pedagogy constitute a prescriptive standardising frame within which teachers have to labour. It is important,

then, to review the standards for all teachers in England and then the content-specific parts of the English teacher's subject environment. The key perspective for this article is to see Standards in England as a phenomenon of neo-liberal models of teacher and curriculum control, so it matters less what they actually say; far more important is what they "do" to teachers.

At the time of writing, this is the final year of one regime of generic (not subject-specific) standards (see below) and the introduction of one single standard for all teachers and the strong likelihood of one additional Master Teacher Standard. Recent research strongly indicates the further demotivating effect of these "reforms" on one group of experienced and effective English teachers (Fuller, Goodywn & Francis-Brophy, in press). As standards are always ideologically imbued, there will a brief analysis of how the new standard differs in emphasis from the previous ones and how they are likely to be antipathetical to English teachers in general.

The challenge when writing about English teachers' work in such conformist times is the danger of going into great detail just to describe the situation and its endless macro and micro changes. This article will therefore focus on the most recent (and continuing) change to standards describing teacher performance and its implications for English teachers.

The concept of standards has become increasingly confused. As most professions seek to describe their professional purposes and behaviours, this drive can be seen as of potentially great value to the teaching profession. For example, it will be argued that the Advanced Skills Teacher role in England, established in 1997, provides a case where specified standards have been relatively successful and credible and have been valued by teachers themselves. The article will also review the last 10 years in relation to the English curriculum, drawing on several research studies, and focus closely on literature teaching as a prime example of the issues and teachers' feelings about English teaching.

It will begin with a review of a further element of the professional environment, the subject knowledge association for English teachers in the UK, reviewing the relative decline of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), interpreting this as a prime indicator of the emerging professional environment where beginning teachers in particular seem disinterested in advocacy for their subject. It will then review the new standards, report some research about the introduction of the proposed Master teacher Standard, and consider the curriculum and the specific place of literature and its teaching as a case study. Finally, in terms of introduction, it must be stressed that, in relation to teacher performance, the emphasis in England throughout this period has been on generic standards for teachers with no attention, for better or worse, to the nature of subject-specific teacher knowledge; this contrasts, for example, with Australia and the USA. It is worth noting that Ingvarson has pointed out how teacher standards and a national curriculum can work positively together (Ingvarson, 2009a, 2009b). Overall, the article seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of English teachers' work as defined by the current standards-driven and professionally compliant environment in England.

THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF ENGLISH TEACHERS AND THE ROLE OF NATE

In 2013 NATE will be 50 years old, a real cause for celebration. It was preceded by LATE, The London Association for The Teaching of English, formed in 1947. The emergence of LATE remains globally significant to English teachers, as seminal figures such as James Britton, Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen, John Dixon and others were all closely involved in its founding (see Gibbons for several accounts, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). It can be argued that this was a hugely significant moment and defined English in ways that remain deeply embedded in current practice around the world if not in official curricular descriptions. The emphasis in this article is principally on the significance of NATE as an organisation. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, it represented the cutting edge of thinking and of research. For example, its members were invited to sit on the Committee of Enquiry into the Teaching of Reading, the outcome of which became known as The Bullock Report Department for Education and Science (DES, 1975). By the time there was another significant enquiry into the teaching of English (The Kingman Report, DES, 1988), there was no NATE representative. The committee formed to generate the National Curriculum in 1988 was chaired by Brian Cox, a Professor of English Literature. It included, bizarrely, Roald Dahl and again, no one from NATE. In retrospect this can be seen as the beginning of the decline in its status in relation to the political sphere, even though its membership was still very strong and its local branches extremely active.

Over the 20 year subsequent period, membership has been slowly ebbing; over the last 5 years in particular, it has declined by about 40%, national conference sizes have decreased from an average of 750 to 250, and local activity is now much more "patchy". However, as someone active in the organisation over that whole period, and for 12 years before that, I can attest that it has remained active at many levels, running conferences nationally and locally, workshops across the country, and producing excellent publications, from research journals to the most practical material. Whenever invited, it has been active in consultations, working with government agencies; it has been represented by invitation on many committees, although not the most important ones. Although much reduced in number, it still has an active membership across the whole UK (not just England).

However, I have to attest to a real decline in influence at all levels political and professional. (It should be acknowledged that this is also happening to all other subject associations, not just NATE.) Its decline may be attributed to several factors. In political terms there has been a deliberate marginalisation by governments and an attempt to characterise NATE as a left-wing, subversive agent. An example would be influential blogger John Bald, writing about Michael Gove's comments about NATE, commenting on the teaching of Standard English, simply stating with no evidence: "NATE with classic Leftist elitism...is blind to the fact that its policies have the effect of denying access to this key skill...so perpetuating inequality" (Bald, 2012). Secondly, as teachers have become more and more technically "savvy" and the internet has become dominant, teachers have become expectant of its instantaneous affordances of resources, ideas and so on. In England this has been visible in the rise of "Teach It"[1], an organisation that has been supremely successful in working with

[1] Teach It is a subscription service but can be viewed at www.teachit.co.uk

English teachers and providing them with resources. It has a membership structure that has been very attractive to English teachers (including student teachers) and continues to thrive. It has also been an excellent partner to and supporter of NATE. However, there can be no doubt that it has occupied some space that NATE might have occupied. Thirdly, some of this decline must be considered ideological. In such standardising times, it might have been that NATE stood out as the bastion for English teachers, a rallying point against stultifying conformity; NATE has indeed operated in this way. However, it appears that many English teachers are sufficiently conditioned by the demands of standards to prefer to stay within the confines of those expectations. NATE has every intention of maintaining its special role for English teachers and its 50-year anniversary is a strong sign of its robustness; however its status remains problematic.

A recent example highlights how it has been positioned in the political sphere and relates to the specific consultation mentioned above about the proposed revision to the National Curriculum. NATE was, of course, "consulted" on the new curriculum and responded in a properly professional way, expressing, amongst other things, its disquiet at a reductive emphasis on teaching grammar and spelling, arguing that a requirement for all 11-year-olds to take a grammar test before leaving primary school was likely to narrow the curriculum even further. This led to the current Chair of NATE being publically vilified by the Minister for Education, Michael Gove, who referred to "the man in charge of NATE...who believes that it is oppressive to teach children grammar" (Rayner, 2012). This kind of attack is familiar to readers from many countries, where professional English associations are regularly attacked for their supposed left-wing stance and for championing diversity and minority cultures.

Unhappily, although NATE can continue to claim that it represents the voice of well-informed English teachers, it can no longer say it represents anything like the majority. Whilst membership is partly made up of school departments where there might be as many as 20 teachers as well as individuals, that school membership is also steadily declining; as mentioned above, this decline is evident across a number of associations but is not, in my view, because entrants to the profession are not passionate about English teaching. It seems more likely to be a result of a conviction that anything they can do is only at the school and classroom level. What is the point of being "national", when no consultation, no survey, no inquiry appears to take any notice of what teachers feel and think? It is a "keep your head down" mentality, a survivalist mode in a time of prescription and national conformity. It is seeing standards, whether about teacher or student performance, as a national imposition, so that quiet, unobtrusive local action is all that is meaningful, making membership of a national body an irrelevance.

TEACHER STANDARDS IN ENGLAND

The last 15 years have been marked by a profound emphasis on creating a standards framework to encompass all teachers from student teachers to the Advanced Skills Teacher, a term borrowed from Australia in 1997. In England, this has been an entirely generic process with subject knowledge always simplistically described as something all teachers should have as relevant to their teaching domain. The process began in 1997, first with standards for student teachers (33 standards), then for Newly

Qualified Teachers who had completed their Induction ("Core" 41). By 2007, additional standards were in place for all teachers, including "Post-threshold" (10) for the majority of experienced teachers but with additional Standards for Advanced Skills Teachers (3) and then in 2010, The Excellent Teachers (15), making 102 in all. Therefore, by 2007, the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF, 2007) had clearly marked out a hierarchy of standards mapped onto teacher career progression. There were also separate standards for aspiring and serving Head Teachers/principals, leading to The National Professional Qualification for Head Teachers.[2] Many of these standards are often elaborations of the same standard several times with each new version having a slight linguistic difference. Here is an example from the set of standards that have been abandoned in favour of the single standard. They are both about professional values. The first one is for student teachers:

> ***Demonstrate*** *the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from children and young people*

The second one is for very experienced teachers:

> ***Hold*** *positive values and attitudes and adopt high standards of behaviour in their professional role* (my use of bold)

Overall, therefore, the repetition can be rather confusing, with the difference between "demonstrate" and "hold" seeming to be trivial.

This article will not debate in any depth what value standards may have in developing good and outstanding teachers. The comprehensive report by Ingvarson and Kleinhens in 2006 provided an excellent overview of developments in Australia but with an extremely well informed international set of reference points[3]. This report points out the very real advantages of standards when they are properly formulated by the teaching profession; it notes how such standards can authentically describe accomplished practice, thus leading to genuine teacher professional learning and enhanced practice.

> Responsibility for the development and application of professional standards enables the profession to exercise more control over its professional learning. Our review of national and international literature indicates teachers have had limited say in systems for their own professional learning, compared with universities (especially in the USA) and government (as in England). The capacity to develop standards gives the profession the ability to play a stronger role in defining the long-term goals of their own professional learning. Professional standards place individuals in a more active role with respect to their professional learning. Valid standards clarify what teachers should get better at over the long term if they are to play a significant part in improving their schools and the "quality" of learning. (p. 4)

[2] Tracking the constant changes to teacher Standards is highly problematic for researchers, as they often only exist in web or PDF form and once revised or scrapped disappear rapidly from public access. Such material is not being archived or stored except by individuals.

[3] Ingvarson has developed this thinking further. (See Ingvarson & Hattie, 2008; Ingvarson & Kleinhenz, 2006).

The report discusses the value of English/literacy specific standards, reviewing both STELLA, Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia (AATE) and the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards in the USA and supporting the value of such teacher-led and credible initiatives.

Apart from one small-scale project[4] (Goodwyn, 1997) there has been no English specific Standards development in England. Two subject associations in England, one for Geography and one for Science, have produced descriptors for Chartered teachers. However, both appear to have had little take up.

As for the advantages of the model developed in England between 1998-2011 of essentially a hierarchy of standards, it suffices to say they have been helpful in focusing on ensuring all teachers are properly trained initially by defining pre-service teacher education programme requirements. They have been useful in-service for assessing teacher development and professional learning needs. They can, as with Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) standards, describe outstanding performance, providing an aspirational level for all teachers. Research in to the latter area (Fuller, Goodwyn & Francis-Brophy, 2012) demonstrates which teachers (including English teachers) were highly motivated and effective. The obvious weakness of such Standards, however, is that they reify performance and can be a blunt instrument with which to beat teachers at every stage of their careers. The fundamental weakness in England of these standards, and of the new single standard, is that they have no research-based credibility; nor have teachers been sufficiently involved in their development and refinement.

It might therefore be a welcome relief to English teachers to anticipate the scrapping of the current descriptors and the introduction of a single standard? Here is an example of several Standards from the former list of 102[5], this one focusing on teacher knowledge (DCSF, 2007, p. 17):

> C 15 Have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy including: the contribution that their subjects/curriculum areas can make to cross-curricular learning; and recent relevant developments.
>
> C 16 Know and understand the relevant statutory and non-statutory curricula and frameworks, including those provided through the National Strategies, for their subjects/curriculum areas and other relevant initiatives across the age and ability range they teach.
>
> C 17 Know how to use skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT to support their teaching and wider professional activities.

The language of such standards may be characterised as striving to sound like factual descriptors with the chief emphasis on a competency model of teaching.

[4] The Advanced Certificate in English teaching (ACE) was a research project conducted at the University of Reading in the early 1990s. A group of local teachers were funded to meet and design a set of descriptors to capture the highly accomplished teaching of English. Lack of further funding meant the project did not become fully established.

[5] As mentioned in a previous footnote, the full list no longer exists at the time of writing. Some of the sections are visible on the Department for Education web site, for example, for ASTs but some have been removed as they have been formally replaced by the single standard.

Here is a section from the new single Standard (Department for Education [DfE], 2012), which covers similar areas s to those above:

> **3 Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge**
> - have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings
> - demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship
> - demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject
> - if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics
> - if teaching early mathematics, demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate teaching strategies. (DfE, 2012, p. 6)

It must first be noted that this is not a "single standard", although the overall number of words is less between the two sets of standards. It is clear that this is still a list of fragmented standards, grouped under headings, exactly as before. The attempt to make one descriptor for all teachers at all stages of their careers leads to the need to add "rider standards", for example, the last two above referring to early reading and early mathematics. The research discussed below shows that experienced teachers are especially critical of this attempt at simplification in a "one size fits all" model.

These standards may be characterised as still essentially a competence model with slightly more emphasis on performativity. For example, the term *demonstrate* is used 9 times; in the previous standards it was only used twice in the Core standards, with an additional 3 uses for the Excellent Teacher. Much more striking, in my personal view, is the subtle shift in language and implied values. Firstly, I find the phrase "promote the value of scholarship" has a nineteenth-century and rather gentlemanly resonance. Secondly, the term "articulacy" suggests to me a very middle-class view of how a teacher should speak; the previous Standards used the more neutral term *communicate*. Thirdly, the phrase, "demonstrate...the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject" is a significant shift, as the previous Standards made no direct mention of Standard English. It may be argued, therefore, that this "Standard" has elements that English teachers will find especially restrictive. English teachers are generally known (Goodwyn, 2010a) for their "liberal" view of language, their concern for the idiolects and rich linguistic diversities of their students and their urge to engage with the actual lives of their students. The term "scholarship", however well intentioned and appropriate at Oxford or Cambridge, has a profound remoteness from the lives of so many young people. This single standard is therefore, in my opinion, not a welcome change in terms of its substance or its provenance.

The other proposed change, with significant implications for English teachers and indeed all teachers, is the creation of a new, single, Master Teacher Standard, replacing the higher-level categories discussed earlier, such as The Advanced Skills Teacher (AST), Excellent Teacher (ET) and Post-threshold Teacher (PT). In the report mentioned above (Ingvarson & Kleinhens, 2006), there is a careful analysis of

the Post-Threshold standards and their advantages and disadvantages (pp. 81-83). The authors signaled clearly that these standards were significant enough to deserve attention. It should be noted that all three of these designations (AST, ET and PT) carry with them substantial salary increases as well as responsibilities. There has been no discussion of teachers' rewards in relation to the proposed Master Teacher Standard. The chair of the review commented as follows about the "nature" of the Master Teacher description:

> We have therefore stepped back from any temptation to draft "more of the same", relying on a stock of comparative adjectives and adverbs to represent progression from the new Teachers' Standards. What we are recommending instead is a narrative statement that characterises in a comprehensive way the range and depth of practice expected consistently of a "Master Teacher". This description – which should more properly be considered as *a standard* than as *standards* – is not designed to provide a prescriptive or exhaustive list to be used for "tick box" assessment, but should be used creatively to help good teachers develop and understand where their practice – already secured on the foundation of the Teachers' Standards – could further be improved, and also shared with colleagues. (Coates, 2011a, p. 4)

Whatever the virtues of the idea of narrative, the result here is a quaint mixture of nostalgia and whimsy, and resonant of the new Standard's ideology. For example, the section on D. Environment and Ethos, states:

> The class is one in which pupils feel welcome and valued. There is a stimulating culture of scholarship alongside a sense of mutual respect and good manners. The Master Teacher has an excellent rapport with classes and with individual pupils.
>
> The classroom environment created to support study and activities is an inspirational example of practice, appropriate to the age range or phase. Resources, including books and IT, are well-chosen and stimulating, contributing significantly to progress in lessons. Resources excite, extend and support different abilities, interests and aptitudes.
>
> In classrooms for younger pupils, visual stimuli arising from children's own work offer powerful models to which other children can aspire. In classrooms for older pupils, scholarship is also evident in the classroom surroundings. Displays often reflect contemporary events and a breadth of subject matter which extend beyond the subject under study. (Coates, 2011b, pp. 10-11)

Again, we have "a stimulating culture of scholarship", "excellent rapport" and "scholarship is also evident in the classroom surroundings", all resonant of a secondary, private-school classroom ethos. Finally, there is "Displays often reflect contemporary events", a comment somehow deeply patronising to all teachers as if they would normally have some tatty old posters of Shakespeare and Dickens hanging off their tired display boards. As this Master Standard has yet to be accepted by the Ministry, it has yet to be tried in practice and possibly may never be approved. A decision was expected in September 2012 but has been delayed. However, the fact that the Teaching Agency has endorsed it (see Hillier, 2012) puts it at the "likely" end of the spectrum.

There is no thorough research evidence about what teachers in general, or English teachers in particular, think about the new Single standard or the proposed Master

Teacher. However, a recent survey in July 2012 of Advanced Skills Teachers (Goodwyn, 2012b) (following on from a previous large scale survey, Goodwyn & Fuller, 2011) asked for their views on this proposed change. Within the sample of 800, there were 234 responses, with specifically 30 from English teachers. The survey was provided online with opportunities for open-ended comments and the English respondents took full advantage, writing at length. All the respondents were extremely angry at the proposed changes and felt their well-established and credible roles were being completely undermined, and that this was a backward step for the whole profession. Echoing Ingvarson's report, they argued that the progressive standards had, at least, demonstrated the professional accomplishments of all teachers.

English ASTs commented about the current value of the AST:

> I feel very strongly that the AST scheme has been a wonderful initiative. Good teachers are able to stay in teaching posts rather than moving into management roles where they no longer teach students. The tough process also means that the role has gravitas when working with other teachers and contributing to leadership decisions. Despite all the threats to the professions I am really enjoying this role and it seems such a shame that after going through such a strict and difficult process where people were promised life long status as AST this has now changed. I do hope sense prevails and that the current ASTs are made Master Teachers. (Teacher with 25 years of experience, AST for 10)

> The crucial thing about ASTs is that excellent teachers are paid leadership scale salaries to keep them in the classroom, rather than the usual SLT route which inevitably means seriously reduced timetables. There must continue to be a way of keeping excellent teachers teaching! (Teacher with 15 years experience, 7 as an AST)

Of course, this sample is made up entirely of ASTs, and therefore they are very likely to hold a very positive view of their current and previous work and to be, at the very least, suspicious of a new standard that may signal the demise of their status and their enhanced salary. However, they are also in a strong position as experienced professionals, externally assessed in order to become an AST, to review the potential of the proposed new standard.[6]

As regards the idea of a new Master Teacher Standard, the following list of comments, each one made by a different teacher, is worth quoting, as collectively it gives a very clear picture of how these English teachers with the AST designation, view it as a diminishment of their role and also a setback for the profession as a whole:

> At this stage there are too many ambiguities about the role of a "Master" teacher and how it would either sit alongside or replace the AST designation. The idea of one set of standards for all stages of career is by definition a deterrent to reflection and progression. Having incremental standards allows teachers to explore how to improve their teaching to reach the next level of standards. In addition, people who have worked for these designations (AST/ET) are now in a position where the validity of their role, and the standards they have worked hard to address, are brought into question. On a separate issue, there have been mentions that no monetary value would

[6] For an analysis of the AST standards and other comparable standards, see Goodwyn, 2010a.

> be affixed to the achievement of "Master" teacher status. For many people, AST/ET is a form of career progression which allows them to make progress in terms of wages, whilst remaining in the classroom. We would all like to believe that teachers would forego any wage increase associated with managerial posts to stay in the classroom, but the reality of the situation is that with the removal of the AST/ET standard the only way to increase your monetary "worth" is by taking a position that takes you out of the classroom.
>
> Confusion about how it differs from AST. At least AST reinforces the "skills" that I have shown to be awarded the status.
>
> Devalues our achievements.
>
> Differentiation is an integral part of all jobs and of all walks of life, why have one tier when what we have works?
>
> I cannot see how this supersedes AST standards. Furthermore, it is very loose.
>
> I think that this is a good title for those who do not want to complete a "masters" degree.
>
> It is not connected to pay in as precise a way as the previous AST standards; there is a sense that it would be, as the documents say, something to which all teachers would aspire – there's no commitment to outreach, and little sense of career progression.
>
> It is unclear how the standard will be assessed. Will it be based on head's judgement? In which case the same problem arises as has arisen with post threshold development – and what benefit it will give to individuals who have it?
>
> It seems sad that all the work that we had to do to pass the AST standard will be lost.
>
> Seems unlikely to happen in the short time decisions have to be made (April 2013). ASTs have credibility at the moment – Master Teachers are unlikely to carry the same weight when ASTs were so easily removed. Its makes the status seem temporary and throw away. The profession will lose those teachers who are excellent practitioners from focusing on teaching and learning and going down the management route instead.

Overall, these English teachers, who, given their externally assessed status as ASTs, can be considered as representing leading practitioners, see the move to single standard plus Master Teacher as hugely retrograde. This is a powerful example of a situation where the credibility given by professional standards (whatever their limitations in other ways), tested over 15 years, has been swept away by government in its attempt to create even greater standardised uniformity.

THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR CURRICULUM

The overarching context for teachers' work in England for almost 25 years has been increasing standardisation of content, pedagogical approaches and teacher performance. It is very well documented that all political parties have been seeking much closer control of curriculum, all teachers and the assessment regime (see Allen, 2002, Beverton, 2003, Goodwyn, 2010a). Equally there have been external pressures

to redefine the subject; see, for example, Green, 2006 and Goodwyn and Fuller, 2011, on English as Literacy, Jones (2006) on neoliberal redefinitions of "creativity" in English, and Jewitt, Bezemer and Kress (2009) on technological policy impact. The "measures" used for student and teacher performance (and surveillance) are now absolutely explicit. All schools are placed in league tables by results; each school is regularly inspected and graded; all teachers are judged through regular performance management tools and set targets each year, usually directly linked to student performance.

The National Curriculum for English has been in place since 1989 (DES, 1989), English was the very first subject to be "defined", a prime example as always of its political and cultural significance. Its history has been well documented (for an overview of such accounts see Goodwyn, 2004a, 2004b). It has been through several revisions (about every four years) and is due, inevitably, for another one, with the likely introduction of the latest version in 2014. Such revisions are always ritually accompanied by "consultation" with teachers and "stakeholders", always a derisory exercise allowing whatever agency conducting the consultation to produce a long list of consultees, but with no obligation to produce any evidence that the contributions have been given any credence. In this recent instance, NATE was consulted and its treatment will be discussed below.

The story of the National Curriculum in England is relatively simple. The very first version found much favour with English teachers (Goodywn, 1992). Every subsequent version (Goodwyn & Findlay, 1999) has been less favoured and the introduction of the additional "Framework for English" in 2000 was a true nadir for teacher engagement (Goodwyn, 2004a). The Framework was a follow-on from The National Literacy Strategy, a hugely prescriptive programme the subject of much debate in itself, especially as it was conceptualised as "informed prescription" (see Stannard & Huxford, 2007).[7] The overall effect on teachers' work is characterised by there being too much content, excessive emphasis on high-stakes testing leading to narrowly focused teaching, and relatively little teacher choice, especially with literature. This will be discussed in more detail below.

English teachers are now very accustomed to having to work with an imposed curriculum and one that is significantly revised every few years. Typically, the current revision is constructed by its producers as simpler and less cumbersome:

> The new National Curriculum will set out only the essential knowledge that all children should acquire, and give schools and teachers more freedom to decide how to teach this most effectively and to design a wider school curriculum that best meets the needs of their pupils. (DES, 2012, p. 1)

To sum up, in England curricula "come and go"; teachers find it hard to get overwrought by yet another change. The particular language or emphasis of a new version, which might have generated much debate in the early 1990s, is generally treated with quiet resignation. Other changes, especially to assessment regimes, such as the introduction of a technical grammar test, still provoke strong reaction (see

[7] Stannard and Huxford (2007) offer a defense of this approach and Goodwyn and Fuller (2011) a rejoinder.

NATE, 2012). Rather than trying to capture debates in relation to the whole curriculum, the focus below is on literature and its teaching.[8]

LITERATURE TEACHING AS AN EXEMPLAR OF STANDARDISING TEACHING

During the period 1997-2012, there has been a particular emphasis on "the imperative to secure progression" (DCSF, 2007, p. 1), encapsulated most powerfully in the National Literacy Strategy for primary schools (1997-2011) and the Framework for English (2000-2011). Even the use of the term Framework speaks of a fixed, rigid and mechanical structure. This emphasis has resulted in particular pressures on literature teaching to teach narrowly to the standard tests at ages 14 and 16 and to approach texts in extract formats so that students can superficially cover content required by a packed and inflexible National Curriculum. In England, the effect of the Framework for English has been to add an additional layer of prescription so as to create a kind of pedagogical template, overlaying the content of the National Curriculum. As already discussed, the content of the NC, combined with the assessment regime, has become increasingly unpopular with English teachers (Goodwyn, 2003, 2010a; Goodwyn & Findlay, 2002, 2003). However, much of the NC is not highly controversial. For example, Shakespeare is the only named author students have to study but very few English teachers object to his having some central importance in the secondary curriculum. However, the Framework is highly controversial, especially in relation to its negative impact on the teaching of literature, something especially important to English teachers as the research reported here demonstrates.

This section summarises the key findings of two inter-related research projects, undertaken over the period 2006-2009. The first was a survey of student teachers of English as they completed their PGCE courses in 2007. The second was a national survey of serving teachers in the period 2006-2007. These studies were undertaken to examine the way current and student teachers of English felt about literature teaching, especially after several years of the highly prescriptive and assessment-driven paradigm (The Framework for English). The studies are, at the time of writing, several years old but, apart from the removal of the Key Stage Three Test for English and the "end" of The Strategies[9], the actual school context is currently the same.[10]

Study 1 focused on student teachers of English in their final weeks of their training year; there were 182 respondents from 10 Universities. Study 2 investigated practising teachers; there were 254 individual respondents from 180 schools. In both cases these numbers are well below the statistical level that would allow for a claim of being truly representative, and this is acknowledged. However, these surveys follow on from many years of work investigating English teachers' views about The Literacy Strategy

[8] This research has also been discussed elsewhere. See Fuller, Goodwyn & Francis-Brophy (in press) and Goodwyn (2010b).

[9] The "Strategies" were a series of initiatives intended to transform pedagogy through what was known as "informed prescription" (see Stannard & Huxford, 2007, Chapter 1 for detail). There were several strategies, the best known and most comprehensive being The National Literacy Strategy. They have all now officially come to an end and in their place has been the revision of teacher standards, proposed new examinations and tests, and the anticipated reform of the National Curriculum.

[10] For more details of the survey questions, please contact the author.

and The Framework for English, and the findings have a clear consistency over time (Goodwyn, 2003, 2004a, 2004b).

In the discussion below, apart from a brief sections on student teachers reasons for becoming English teachers, the two surveys will be combined to maximise the sample and also because a number of questions were the same. The findings here are a selection from the data with the emphasis being on those questions that most directly relate to the impact on literature teaching of the standards agenda.

Focusing first and briefly on the survey of student teachers, they were asked about the reasons given for becoming an English teacher and these were remarkably consistent and can be summarised in order of importance as follows: Love of/enthusiasm for/passion for the subject, working with young people, a love of literature/reading and being good at the subject of English. These motives being in order of importance to the respondents, it is interesting to note that 1 and 3 are very similar but that "love of reading" is given a distinct status. Respondents do not put, for example, "love of language" or "love of writing". This survey, like others (Goodwyn, 1992; Goodwyn & Findlay, 1999) shows that the "next generation" of teachers wanted to become English teachers at least partly because of a love for literature; they share that passion with several previous generations. These three factors were also significant: teaching is creative/full of variety/not an office job, the influence of an inspirational English teacher and a good career/money/holidays. It is evident that the chief motive for joining the profession of English teaching is about a passion for the subject.

Reporting on the combined results of the two surveys, when asked to rate the personal importance of Literature to them then, 75% said "Very", 20% just "Important" and 5% "Fairly", suggesting that, from the teachers' perspective, Literature remains central to their teaching and their personal and professional identity. As regards literature's importance within the current curriculum, the results for importance diminished somewhat. Its current place was rarely seen as "Very Important" (only 20%); the next two categories were "Important" (45%) and "Fairly Important" (30%). These figures are almost repeated for the prediction of the next few years. These figures suggest a solid place for literature, although many comments were pessimistic, especially from experienced teachers who predicted the predominance of "Functional English" and a much more Linguistic than literary orientation within the curriculum.

Estimates of curriculum coverage and numbers of Schemes of Work (SOW) devoted to Literature again support there being a great deal of curriculum time devoted to literature. All respondents were positive about having SOWs devoted to literature. About 5% actually stated that *all their SOWs* were such. However, about 20% of teachers stated that three-quarters were literature. The great majority, 60% of English teachers, estimated about half their schemes focused on literature.

It is worth noting here that the respondents who returned the survey may well be those teachers for whom literature IS very important. This may have influenced both their choice of school to work in and how they interpret what a SOW actually is. It seems likely that for many such teachers, wherever possible, they want the English curriculum to have a strong focus on literature. Certainly the findings demonstrate that overall these teachers *perceive* that a great deal of work in English is centred on literature in some way or another. As regards estimates of time, over 75% stated that

they spent at least half their time on explicit literature teaching. One of the ironies of such extensive coverage is that 90% felt there was too much poetry in Key Stage 4 because it all had to be intensively covered for the terminal GCSE English examination.

Respondents were invited to reflect on the impact of the Framework for English on literature teaching. It should be noted that the student teachers were encouraged to draw on their conversations with more experienced teachers as well as their own views. 100% said there had been a strong impact. Of the approximately 50% who chose to respond by adding comments, 90% commented in the negative, all stating, in one way or another, that literature teaching had become much more instrumental, dominated by narrow objectives and focused on textual extracts. Half of these commentators expressed extreme frustration at the lack of opportunity to study a whole text in any detail or depth. Many experienced teachers also commented on literature teaching becoming "scripted", and on the emphasis being constantly on the assessment objectives and "a right answer".

Respondents were also asked to reflect on pupil response to literature as follows:

> When students are being assessed on their response to literature, what kind of response is given most importance (regardless of whether you agree with this emphasis)? Please put these in order, 1 being the most dominant: Analytical ( ), Personal ( ), Formal ( ), and Creative ( ). Please comment on your view of this order.

There were some differences between Key Stages 3 and 4 but, fundamentally and taken together, 80% put the emphasis on "Analytical" and "Formal", with "Personal" and "Creative" as either 3 or 4. Of the half who chose to comment, the great majority expressed this emphasis as the key negative impact of the last few years, stressing that they felt pupils were missing out on the real point of literary study. Equally, they emphasised how disengaging the effect was on all pupils, even the most able, but disastrously so for the less capable.

One of the most striking findings related to their views about how things might be improved in the future. These views were expressed as comments and were analysed for key words and phrases. In Key Stage Three, over 80% wished to see the end of the Framework for English, which was characterised as prescriptive, limiting, not student-centred and assessment obsessed. All these teachers wanted much more autonomy and flexibility. At Key Stage Four, about 70% of teachers also wanted much more flexibility and autonomy. They also wanted much more personal engagement with texts and with students choosing some of their own texts. These surveys demonstrate conclusively how much English teachers deeply resent the prescriptive and controlling nature of the curriculum/high stakes testing nexus.

It is conceivable that the revised version of the National Curriculum (expected September 2013) will offer English teachers much more scope to teach Literature as they see fit. However, the current Secretary of State, Michael Gove, seems to hold very narrow and traditional views about what Literature should be taught. In one much reported speech he stated:

> Classic literature is at risk of dying out in schools...fewer than one in 100 teenagers who sat one exam board's English literature GCSE last year had studied novels published before the 20th century...only 1,236 out of 300,000 students read *Pride and Prejudice*, 285 read *Far from the Madding Crowd* and 187 studied W*uthering Heights* as part of the test. More than 90% of exam papers were based on three books alone – *Of Mice and Men*, *Lord of The Flies*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* – all of which were published after 1930. We're not picking up enough new books, not getting through the classics, not widening our horizons. In short, we're just not reading enough. (Paton, 2011)

It seems likely, therefore, that even with a more "relaxed" National Curriculum, should the review produce such a thing, there will be strong pressure on literature teaching to conform to a Framework-style approach.

CONCLUSION

English teachers in England are very much caught in a mesh of standardising instruments that restrict, distort and yet intensify their work. This article has examined several of these instruments and this list is intended to remind readers of how this mesh operates. The National Curriculum, originally broadly welcomed, is now a strait jacket in terms of prescribed content. The introduction of the new Single Standard for all teachers, and the possible Master Teacher Standard, are very much about controlling how teachers must behave. All schools are placed in a league table by their raw exam results and these tables are published annually. There is a concerted effort to drive teacher training out of Universities, creating Teaching Schools and Schools Direct, a means for schools to have direct allocations of training places. There is a new inspection framework for all schools, as yet further evidence of the close control and surveillance of teachers' daily work. The General Teaching Council, set up only 10 years ago to be the independent regulatory body for teachers, has been abolished with no replacement. The decline in membership and influence of subject associations like NATE adds to the picture of passive conformity across the profession.

In order to recover some genuine autonomy, I would suggest that English teachers need to argue for:

- A genuine not tokenistic revision to the National Curriculum in which teachers are working at the design level;
- A fundamental change to the very narrowly focused assessment regime;
- A new independent body, like the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the US, to design credible and professionally authentic teacher standards;
- NATE's taking a lead role in defining standards or descriptors, of some kind, for the best English teaching.

It would also add weight to such arguments if teachers took a much more active approach to NATE and helped to rebuild its membership and status. England has certainly reached an educational nadir in many ways, but many of these trends are happening in other English-speaking countries, where the teaching of English is also being targeted by neoliberals. Perhaps The International Federation for the Teaching

of English (IFTE) can act as an organization that might help support the fight back for English teachers, too often marooned on their national island? Overall, it is clear that English teachers themselves must reassert their fundamental belief in the value of a subject that is broad, deep and offers every individual student some cultural, personal and emotional space – not something standardised and commodified to suit politically conservative ideologues.

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