

Parliamentary Briefing



Children, Schools and Families Bill: Licence to Practise

Introduction

Clauses 23 to 25 of the Children, Schools and Families Bill would introduce a Licence to Practise for teachers teaching in maintained schools, non-maintained special schools, Academies, CTCs and CCTAs. It is intended that the Licence to Practise would be accompanied by the entitlement to continuing professional development (CPD), announced in the 21st Century Schools White Paper. If the Bill receives Royal Assent, the GTCE will be involved because one of its duties is to maintain the Register of qualified teachers. The Bill will require the Council to issue the Licence to Practise and to consider any appeals arising from it.

The GTCE believes that the first and most important test of the proposals is whether they would bring real and tangible benefits for teaching and learning, and therefore to children and young people. There are more than half a million registered teachers in England and it will be a challenge to develop a system which has sufficient rigor to make a positive impact on standards of practice, whilst remaining proportionate and not unduly burdensome for teachers, school leaders and schools.

The GTCE is working closely with DCSF officials to advise on the development of a system which is manageable and confers real benefit. The GTCE has long advocated better access to high quality professional development for teachers as research evidence shows that this is key to improving standards of teaching. It strongly supports the planned introduction of an entitlement to continuing professional development, allied to the teacher's own personal professional responsibility to reflect on and develop their own practice.

GTCE research confirms that supply teachers continue to have difficulty in accessing professional development opportunities and work outside the performance management structures that support the majority of teachers. In developing the model for a Licence to Practise, priority should therefore be given to supporting such as supply teachers and those returning to teaching to demonstrate that they meet the required professional standards.

Improved supply of high quality professional development opportunities, a robust moderation and quality assurance system and a fair appeals mechanism are all essential components of a model which must give all teachers an equal and equitable chance of renewing their licence. The Licence to Practise should build on existing systems such as performance management and the professional standards framework. These underpinning structures will need to be substantially improved, and consistently applied.

Initial feedback from a GTC teacher reference panel reveals concerns about the Licence to Practise which derive from teachers' very differing experience of the

Parliamentary Briefing



Children, Schools and Families Bill: Licence to Practise

application of performance management and the use of the professional standards framework. Whilst some see the introduction of a licensing system as a welcome parallel with other professions, many are sceptical about the practical benefits that can be secured and interpret the initiative as another burden for them and their schools.

If a Licence to Practise is to strengthen professional accountability it must convey to the profession a message of trust and permission to innovate. This may be difficult to achieve if it is simply layered onto the many existing accountability mechanisms to which teachers are already subject. There urgently needs to be a better balance between enabling teachers to use their expertise to enhance teaching and learning and the legitimate act of holding professionals to account for their practice.

Parliament needs to signal belief and trust to those on the frontline. Only then, can we move closer to the GTCE's vision for teaching in the future:

“Teaching in 2012 will thrive in an environment that enables teachers to exercise informed professional judgement and allows good leadership to flourish. The challenges faced by teachers in their day to day practice will be recognised and the practice of teaching celebrated as a complex and creative activity. The experience and expertise of the profession will influence national and local policies for teaching and learning in the interests of all children and young people.”

Continuing professional development (CPD)

The GTC is a committed advocate of an entitlement to continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers because there is a proven link between teaching quality and learning outcomes. Effective professional learning is known to be the surest determinant of high quality teaching.

The Government has rightly recognised that the introduction of a Licence to Practise makes an entitlement to CPD essential. In fairness, teachers can only be expected to maintain and enhance their practice if they have the opportunity to do so. The availability of CPD for teachers depends on opportunities and resources of funding and, especially, of time.

The quality as well as the quantity of CPD needs to be addressed, along with equity of access. It is also important to avoid specifying the entitlement in ways that suggest undertaking CPD is an end in itself. In order to realise the benefits of CPD the entitlement needs to emphasise opportunity to put learning into practice and reflect on, share and evaluate the impact of that learning on practice.

Parliamentary Briefing



Children, Schools and Families Bill: Licence to Practise

The GTC has been particularly concerned to explore the professional opportunities for supply teachers and those returning to teaching after a break. We have focused specifically on such teachers because GTC survey work and other research have highlighted shortcomings in their access to CPD. The GTCE Survey of Teachers also shows that part-time teachers have a disproportionately low level of access to and participation in CPD. We are, however, mindful when considering the proposed Licence to Practise to emphasise the importance of new arrangements benefiting all teachers, and thereby, all learners.

Performance management

Performance management is a significant element in the operation and success of these proposals. Yet while it should be a robust system that addresses both poor teaching and improves practice, currently there is considerable variability in its quality and consistency in schools. Moreover, insufficient knowledge about its quality results in inadequate attention to address any weaknesses. The GTC believes that better evidence is needed on its effectiveness; improved teacher support; and more attention to the role of the head teacher in assuring quality and consistency.