



**REPORT ON THE 2011 AUTUMN RESIDENTIAL
FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH, GEOGRAPHY AND
HISTORY**

19TH - 21ST NOVEMBER 2011

HELD AT BARCELÓ MAJESTIC HOTEL, HARROGATE

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PRESENTATIONS BY SUBJECT LEADERS

MONDAY 21ST NOVEMBER

Brief presentations were made, on the last day of the Residential, by Teacher Leaders in English, History and Geography, summarising the outcomes of the teacher group discussions. The main points were:

The distinctive value of the Residential

- reawakening enthusiasm and passion for one's subject
- updating subject knowledge
- being introduced to new ideas and uses of technology
- opportunities for exchanging ideas and good practice with other like-minded professionals
- engagement with leading academics in discussing the teaching of particular topics in schools.

Issues for the future

English

Curriculum

- the lack of coherence across the Key Stages
- the marginalisation of English Literature (there is too little of it at KS3, it is devalued at KS4 in comparison with English Language and inhibited by modularisation at KS5).

Exams

- they are too narrow in focus; there is little opportunity for candidates to display depth and breadth of knowledge.

Teaching

- Teachers would like to be freed from the institutional processes which diminish their aspirations to
 - continue to raise their own levels of knowledge through subject-specific CPD
 - be able to pursue a curriculum which is rich in literary content, ensures progression and encourages scholarship.

History

Curriculum

- The National Curriculum Review should include consultation with History teachers to ensure challenging and rigorous subject-based teaching at the heart of the curriculum.
- The acknowledgement of the importance of History in the creation of the English Baccalaureate has implications for time allocation: 250 teaching hours are needed in KS3 and the move to a two-year KS3 should be resisted.
- The KS3 curriculum should not shy away from difficult topics such as the Holocaust and Middle Eastern politics.

Assessment

- Examining needs to be able to give credit to answers that go beyond narrow specifications, where, for instance, the candidate refers to recent research that has not yet got into the exam textbooks.

CPD

- Initial Teacher Training and CPD need to focus more on subject-centred knowledge

Geography

Curriculum

- There are concerns about an over-prescriptive approach to its acquisition. Whilst a base of core knowledge is important, understanding the concepts is essential, and there should be flexibility to allow teachers to determine what content learning is most appropriate for their pupils.

Fieldwork

- This is an essential component of Geography and all schools and pupils should have access to it.

CPD and Assessment

- Geography is a constantly changing subject. Teachers must be given every opportunity to stay up to date; and the examining must be able to accommodate and reward candidates for knowledge of new subject content.

PLENARY PANEL DISCUSSION IN RESPONSE TO SUBJECT PRESENTATIONS

MONDAY 21ST NOVEMBER

Bernice McCabe (BMC)
Stephen Hillier (SH)
Jean Humphrys (JH)
Jon Coles (JC)

Chair, Co-Director, The Prince's Teaching Institute
Chief Executive, Training and Development Agency
Interim Director of Education and Care, OFSTED
Director General for Education Standards, DoE

Summary of the main points raised in discussion of issues outlined in presentations:

The proceedings opened with presentations by Teacher Leaders in English, History and Geography, summarising from the group discussions what had been of particular value in the course and what the current issues were in the three subjects.

This was followed by a plenary discussion with a panel made up of Bernice McCabe, Stephen Hillier, Jean Humphrys and Jon Coles together with Teacher Leaders in the three subjects: Tammy Nicholls (English), Helen Brittain (History) and Paul Cornish (Geography).

There were four main areas of discussion:

- A. Teacher Training
- B. Inspection
- C. Examination and Assessment
- D. Curriculum

Summary of the discussion

A. Teacher Training

The PTI and its delegates welcome the emphasis on subject knowledge, inspiration and scholarship in the new Teaching Standards. Given the current restrictions on funding, what do you think the schools can best do to embed this principle in their culture?

- Delegates felt that the change of emphasis in the Teaching Standards is striking and exciting, as reflected in the PTI presentations. They thought that politicians are mainly interested in the outcomes that parents want and felt that inspirational teaching is a key contributor to success. More emphasis might be given to this by centring Initial Teacher Training in schools with inspirational teaching. Further momentum is provided by initiatives like Schools Direct, even if things can't be changed overnight and inspirational new teachers cannot be produced by schools on an industrial scale.
- It was identified that, as in other professions, schools like to have moral ownership of training up the next generation of practitioners. No-one can inspire children like a teacher who is passionate about his or her subject. It was agreed that outstanding schools have like-minded teachers who share their enthusiasms and if they establish links with similar schools, you then

have a basis for providing good training for teachers both at the initial stage and thereafter.

- It was felt that school departments should be able to determine the level and nature of the subject-based CPD which they engage in; but school leadership has first got to be convinced about the value that it adds.
- Although some may feel that good potential teachers may be lost by setting the entry qualification for training too high, it is reasonable that the funding should favour those who are best qualified. As for recruitment by Free Schools, e.g. from the Military, it was agreed that Heads will only appoint those they think will serve them well, whatever their formal qualifications.
- Delegates felt that, for long-serving subject teachers who do not aspire to senior leadership posts, there should be a purely academic route towards top salary levels (as in Singapore, perhaps with internal professorships). This would provide them with an incentive to keep improving their subject knowledge and pedagogy through CPD.
- It was pointed out that Teach First has done a very successful job in bringing more top graduates into teaching and helping schools in particularly challenging environments; and that is why it is receiving further government endorsement. Of course if a Teach First teacher drops out mid-year, that causes a problem – as it does with any teacher doing the same; but even then the Teach First teacher will take a first-hand experience of education into whatever path of life he or she then chooses to follow.

B. Inspection

Statutory compliance still seems to loom large in Inspection. Yet it is widely acknowledged that the quality of a school is determined by the quality of its teaching. How can this be better reflected in the scheme of Inspection?

- JH outlined that there are different modes of inspection for different kinds of school; but there is a new scheme coming in which will give greater emphasis to Teaching and Learning and their impact. Inspectors will not require detailed lesson plans or a particular shape to the lesson, but they will expect the lesson to be effective. As to statutory requirements, most schools meet 90% of them anyway and this will enable Inspectors to give less attention to compliance and more to the quality of education and its provision and to the leadership and management of the school.
- Ofsted expects Heads to be lead teaching professionals and to know what CPD is necessary to maintain subject knowledge in their teachers. Ofsted also has subject experts who determine the relevant parameters of inspection, and the Inspectors themselves receive plenty of subject-based training. Delegates said that further evidence of the quality of subject provision in schools could be found in, for instance, the richness and consistency of related extra-curricular activities and from talking to pupils and looking at their work.

C. Examination and Assessment

There is a strong feeling among delegates of all subjects here that their students are examined more on their knowledge of particular textbooks than on their knowledge of the subject as a whole. Would you like to comment?

- Delegates identified a tension between the need for pupils to know what they are going to be examined on and the opportunity for them to show deep knowledge. There is also a problem if specifications are not kept up to date and, as in Geography for instance, pupils have access to new data and new interpretations which run contrary to the orthodox views expected by the examiner. Delegates thought that, realistically, there has to be a trade-off between the reliability and consistency of the examining scheme and its validity in evaluating scholarship. But the new revised curriculum should make it easier for richness of knowledge to be rewarded.
- Delegates said that there were notable problems this year, particularly with one Board, over the quality and consistency of marking in some subjects, and this affected not just morale in schools but also the realities of University choices and decisions about levels of staffing. SH mentioned that Ofqual is set up to investigate just this sort of thing and has the power to enforce change. Work is in progress.
- The apparent gap philosophically between what examining boards expect and what teachers and Universities want can in part be explained by the much wider range of purposes that A level now serves in comparison with when it was first introduced. It was pointed out that the present Government wishes to place more emphasis on its function in preparing for Higher Education and therefore academics are being given a greater role in determining subject content. But changes cannot happen overnight.
- Delegates found it worrying that Exam Boards are also acting as publishers, sponsoring textbooks which limit the scope of enquiry and intellectual aspiration. Ofqual is investigating this, but its powers to intervene may be limited by law.
- Mention was made of the better type of textbook, which does not offer single answers but points to where the relevant information and possible interpretations of it can be found. This then helps the teacher as well as the pupil.

D. Curriculum

The delegates welcome the prospect of a revised National Curriculum with a smaller core and more opportunities for teachers to pursue interesting and challenging topics. What additionally needs to be done to ensure continuity and coherence between the Key Stages and between School and University?

- Delegates expressed concern that there is a risk that a narrower curriculum may be made an excuse in some schools for narrower teaching when the intention is that the extra space around the core should be used to introduce richer teaching. This is a very important message to get across to schools. It is also important that Universities should make clear what they expect at A

level (while maintaining a dialogue with schools) and see that it is incorporated into the Sixth Form curriculum.

- Delegates felt that subjects like Geography suffer from the current restrictions on providing cover for teachers absent on fieldwork. They stressed that it is in the nature of the subject that geographers need to go out and collect data for themselves in order to test hypotheses. The Rarely Cover agreement which inhibits this is an example of the danger of unforeseen consequences when a purely regulatory approach is taken to a problem. Some of the difficulties can be mitigated by advance planning, but in truth it was felt that there is a strong case for changing the regulations.
- Delegates raised the issue that funding cuts have fallen heavily on post-16 education, to the detriment of pupils in Sixth Form Colleges and the education they receive. Although they felt that the DofE has fared better than most Government Departments, they did feel that the worst cases need to be brought to the Government's attention.

PUPIL PANEL DISCUSSION

SATURDAY 19TH NOVEMBER

A discussion was held involving pupils from three different non-selective schools. Two of the pupils were in Year 11 and three in Year 13.

Summary of main points:

What do you particularly enjoy and find valuable in the study of your subject?

History

- the communication and exchange of complex ideas in which there is no definitive right or wrong answer
- the encouragement of personal study and independent learning
- awareness of the effect of different perspectives on historiography

English

- opportunities for creativity and the exercise of imagination
- the skills required in analysing the use of language to express ideas
- learning to use language correctly and give structure to extended writing
- encouragement to read books

Geography

- learning how the world works and how we affect it
- developing the skills of research and information gathering
- becoming better informed about world issues.

What is the best sort of teaching?

- Teaching that combines knowledge and experience, so that the teacher is willing and able to answer questions and engage in complex discussion
- Knowing how pupils' minds work so that there is good interaction and feedback
- "the quality of how you deliver what you know is more important than how much you know"
- "the most inspiring teachers encourage pupils to become teachers themselves".

What activities or techniques have helped you to learn difficult aspects of your subject?

- interactive questioning rather than simple tests
- structured debates in which opposing points of view are supported
- the use of appropriate technology, e.g. smartboards and the sharing of online links.

Do you think the acquisition of knowledge or of skills is more important?

- They are interdependent, but knowledge has primacy; concentration on skills can inhibit the range of knowledge, whereas knowledge kindles interest in the subject.

What message about education would you like to convey to the Government?

- There is too much emphasis on exams; they cause unnecessary stress and kill the passion for subjects. More enjoyment needs to be put back into education.
- More credibility should be given to vocational aspects of education. At the moment too much importance is attached to getting the grades to win places at University. The academic and the vocational routes should have parity of esteem.

SELECTION OF QUOTES FROM DELEGATE EVALUATIONS

“It has been a privilege to re-engage with my subject and experience not just the teaching of academics of the highest calibre, but also have the opportunity to connect with other outstanding professionals - my peers from such a wide variety of schools. I cannot wait to return to my department and my students to inspire and enthuse.”

“I found all [the lectures] enjoyable and stimulating. Definitely food for the brain. Reminds me why I became a teacher!”

“The Residential has fulfilled the objectives. It brings the importance of teaching History to the forefront. It has been a joy to celebrate teaching such a wonderful subject.”

“I have been completely inspired by the lectures and seminars and have appreciated the chance to hear some fabulous practice from other teachers which I will take back into my department.”

“The whole weekend was focussed on the importance of Geography and the lectures provided ample material that can be used to tackle challenging topics.”

“It has certainly reinvigorated my passion for the subject and has reminded me of the vital role of English, particularly English literature which is so vital.”

“The residential has such a clear and vital vision. Pupils cannot but be enriched by all that the residential strives to do.”

“The pupil panel was an excellent way to start the course putting the students at the forefront of why we were on the course. The honesty and mature approach was inspiring.”

“The lectures were excellent - I will be changing my KS3 syllabus to incorporate Northern Ireland.”