

DRIVING FORWARD PROFESSIONAL  
STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS



## Models of Support in the Teacher Induction Scheme

Phase 2 report

January 2010



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# 1 Introduction

In 2006 GTC Scotland produced two quantitative and two qualitative reports on questionnaires reflecting on Head Teachers' and Supporters' experiences of the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS). As a result of issues identified in these reports, Ron Clarke, then Professional Officer (Probation and CPD) and I conducted a series of focus groups in the Spring of 2008 to explore further these themes.

We selected the seven local authorities in which to conduct the focus groups to ensure a balance in several senses:

- metropolitan, urban, island and rural;
- large and small; and
- geographical.

In each case, the local authority probation manager assisted in constructing the groups. Though we intended that in each case there would be one focus group of Head Teachers and one of Supporters, some Head Teachers delegated attendance to Depute Head Teachers on the grounds that they had a better operational knowledge of the issues. In total, nineteen primary school Head Teachers, one primary school Depute Head Teacher, eight secondary school Head Teachers and nine secondary school Depute Head Teachers attended the Head Teacher groups<sup>1</sup>. Twenty one primary school and nineteen secondary school Supporters attended their groups.

Almost all of the focus groups<sup>2</sup> were audio recorded and transcribed, though as facilitators we also kept our own notes. The transcripts were passed to Dr. Moira Hulme at the University of Glasgow, who kindly used Nvivo software to provide a preliminary analysis of the transcripts. This analysis has been used as a main source for a substantial part of the following discussion.

## 2 Structure of the focus groups

Focus groups for both audiences were very similar, though in the first section there was, inevitably, a slightly different angle for Supporters from that pursued with Head Teachers. The themes for discussion were:

### A Supporter / Head Teacher preparation

- 1 Recruitment of Supporters  
*Head Teachers*  
What selection process did you use?  
What criteria did you use?  
*Supporters*  
What selection process was used in your school?  
Were you aware of the selection criteria that were used?
- 2 Training  
*Head Teachers*  
Did you receive any training before managing the Teacher Induction Scheme in your school?  
If so, what was the extent of the training, who provided it and what was the quality of the training?  
*Supporters*  
Did you receive any training before taking on the role of a Supporter?  
If so, what was the extent of the training, who provided it and what was the quality of the training?

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<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, all those who participated in the Head Teacher focus groups will be referred to as Head Teachers, as it is not possible to distinguish which speakers were actually Deputes.

<sup>2</sup> In one local authority it was not possible to record the discussions, therefore we had to rely on the facilitator's notes for these discussions.

- 3 Continuing support  
How much continuing support did you receive?  
What were the sources of such support/ (eg local authority, school management, peer, other)  
How far was the support planned in advance to meet your likely needs? How far was it reactive as situations arose?

## **B The Supporter role**

- 1 Time allocation  
How consistently was the 0.1 FTE allocation available to the Supporter(s) in your school?  
How adequate is that time allocation to fulfil the role?  
In practice, how much time does it take to fulfil the role?
- 2 What are the benefits and issues involved in supporting more than one probationer?
- 3 What is the impact in both directions of a Supporter having additional responsibilities?
- 4 How important is it for a probationer to have a Supporter who is a stage or subject specialist?

## **C Organisational structures and their impact**

- 1 How is support organised within the local authority?  
What is the mechanism for communicating between Probation Managers and their teams at local authority level and schools?  
Is support organised centrally or at school level?  
What are the benefits and issues of a model where there is a central Supporter for teachers in different schools?
- 2 How is support organised in a secondary school?  
Is there a Supporter for each probationer (or group of probationers) or is there a regent in addition?  
What are the benefits and issues of a regent model?

## **D Meeting individual needs**

- 1 How effective is the CPD link between Initial Teacher Education and the Teacher Induction Scheme?  
What partnerships exist between the ITE provider and the local authority offering the Induction placement?  
To what extent does the career entry profile inform the planning of a probationer's CPD?
- 2 To what extent are CPD programmes for probationers personalised?
- 3 What measures are taken to support struggling probationers?  
How effective are these measures?  
How well are Supporters prepared to deal with this issue?

# **3 Summary of conclusions**

## **3.1 Recruitment policy and criteria for selection of Supporters**

While Head Teachers clearly have particular qualities in mind when selecting Supporters, mostly relating to their classroom skills and experience, their communication skills and their personalities, they often find these in colleagues who already have convenient roles, commonly those of Depute Head Teacher in a primary school and, in a secondary school, Principal Teacher of the relevant

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subject. Especially in the primary school situation, this may have the additional benefit that there is less demand for class cover to enable the Supporter to operate.

While not unknown, it is rare for teachers to volunteer to become a Supporter, most simply being instructed to take on the role as an addition to their existing remit. This is not to suggest that they resent being Supporters. In general they demonstrated considerable commitment to the school and to the probationers, but most believed that they had been chosen for pragmatic reasons rather than because they had displayed the kinds of quality referred to by Head Teachers.

### **3.2 Training for Head Teachers and Supporters**

Supporters are more likely than Head Teachers to have received formal training for their role, with effective and helpful training being provided by the local authority managers. This training has improved in quality since that offered in the early days of the TIS.

Both Supporters and Head Teachers receive excellent support from local authority probation managers, from the production of comprehensive guidance manuals, which are proactive, anticipatory and revised annually, to practical support in resolving issues, especially where they are trying to cope with a probationer who is having difficulty in achieving the SFR.

### **3.3 The Supporter role**

Although Head Teachers tended to be more positive than were Supporters about the adequacy of the 0.1 FTE allocation, both were clear that good Supporters often go far beyond that time in offering support to probationers. Indeed, there was considerable evidence that, especially among promoted staff in primary schools with other major areas of responsibility, the only way of fulfilling their own sense of obligation to the probationer is to meet outside the normal school day. Head Teachers acknowledged that they depend on the goodwill of their colleagues to deliver the levels of support that are needed, as it is often difficult to guarantee a timetabled slot for this purpose.

Equally, there was consensus that the role of being a Supporter adds to the teacher's workload. This was not necessarily seen as a major issue, but did lead to a need for flexibility on the part of the Supporter and often of other colleagues and for the Head Teacher to be aware of the position and to ensure that support mechanisms were in place where necessary.

On balance, participants believed that the benefits of supporting more than one probationer outweighed the disadvantages, except in cases where there was a personality clash or clear differences in ability between the probationers.

### **3.4 Organisational structures and their impact**

All of the local authorities used the regent model in secondary schools, where it was felt to be successful in several ways: in helping to ensure consistency of practice across the school; in providing an authoritative overview of whole school issues; in coordinating cross-curricular opportunities; and in conducting additional observations where this would be helpful.

There were mixed responses to the concept of the central Supporter, with Head Teachers and Supporters in one local authority being less positive than those in the other. There were concerns over information flow within the school and about a sense of remoteness, though in other ways it removed some pressure from teachers in the school. On the other hand, there was a sense of consistency of practice across the authority.

### **3.5 Meeting individual needs**

All of the participants had serious reservations about the value of the career entry profile as a tool for informing CPD for probationers. They regarded it as vague and often inaccurate. To an extent this may reflect the change of context from student to teacher, with a different level of responsibility and a different level of autonomy. However, there were many instances in which the profile appeared to ignore negative issues and even to be misleading on the overall quality of the individual.

The groups also expressed concerns that assessment of student teachers by universities was insufficiently rigorous in some cases, with students being judged to meet the Standard for Initial Teacher Education despite persistent negative feedback from schools.

Probationers have access to excellent opportunities for CPD, with local authority provision being much better planned than in the early years of the TIS, giving rise to fewer concerns about duplication with school-based CPD. At school level, Head Teachers and Supporters make strenuous efforts to broaden CPD activities beyond simply undertaking courses of study. Some of these, like peer observation or membership of working groups, occur within the school, while external opportunities include visits to other schools or to partner organisations.

The biggest challenge facing a school is that of supporting the struggling probationer. Although all participants agreed that they obtain strong support from local authority probation managers, the impact of a struggling probationer can extend across the whole school and create considerable stress for those in key roles. They have to make every effort to support the probationer while at the same time taking steps to minimise the potential damage to pupils, whose needs were stressed as pre-eminent.

### **3.6 The contribution of newly qualified teachers to schools**

Despite reservations about the performance and potential impact of a small minority of struggling probationers, the contribution of most NQTs is very positive and is appreciated by Head Teachers and other members of staff.

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## 4 Recruitment policy and criteria for selection of Supporters

Three key factors influenced the decision as to who would be an appropriate Supporter: personal and professional qualities; the existing role of the potential Supporter in the school; and the influence of pragmatic issues such as timetabling. There were differing views between Head Teachers and Supporters on the relative importance of these criteria.

### 4.1 Personal and professional qualities

In selecting people to act as Supporters, Head Teachers commonly suggested the following criteria as important qualities they were looking for:

- 'Good practitioner'/ 'effective teacher' (n=4)
- Experienced (n=4)
- 'Professional, positive'
- 'Someone who's setting a good example'
- Strong organisational skills
- Approachability
- Command of 'social skills'
- 'Someone who can be non-threatening'
- 'good communicator, good motivator'
- Someone probationers 'can talk to' and 'seek advice from'
- Someone who can be 'diplomatically honest in a gentle way'

The three most important criteria, based on the frequency of responses from Head Teachers and Supporters, are demonstrable effectiveness in their own classroom practice, an appropriate level of experience (over four years) and strong personal communication skills to support a mentoring role. These were important in establishing the credibility of the Supporter with the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) or probationer.

*We went to the staff ... but generally speaking we opened it up and a number of folk came forward. We were provided with finance from the Authority and provided some training for these mentors. When we were selecting them we were obviously looking for a good practitioner, for credibility within the school in both professional and personal terms.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

*It doesn't have to be a teacher of a long number of years' experience but it should be a teacher who is well aware of good practice and has good practice themselves.*

(Head Teacher LA6)

Across the various focus groups nine Head Teachers referred to looking for volunteers, not always successfully, or actually using volunteers. One, from a secondary school, (LA3) indicated that the school had used eleven out of seventeen volunteers, with selection based on advice by Principal Teachers (PTs).

Some Head Teachers expressed an awareness of the dangers of appointing teachers who might seek to impose their personal teaching style on beginning teachers. There was an acknowledgement among four Head Teachers in two authorities that mentoring was not exclusively modelling or mirroring practice but was more akin to a 'coaching' role.

*I think someone who's also able to recognise that it's not about telling them, you know, accepting their practice as long as the outcome is a positive one. There's a risk of a Supporter finding it hard not to tell them to do this, so you have to be careful in terms of the selection.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*You're not having people attempting to impose their own style.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

Two Head Teachers in one authority (LA7) explicitly spoke of the need to share opportunities and build capacity in mentoring by periodically rotating the Supporter role. Three Head Teachers reported that the annual Performance Review and Development (PRD) process was used to identify teachers who might be 'looking for further challenges' (LA4) and who also possessed the necessary expertise and personal qualities. Three others stated that they would approach individuals in the school who appeared to them to have the necessary qualities and characteristics.

*I was previously Head Teacher of a small school and there I identified the person I wanted to be the Supporter. I was looking there at the interpersonal skills as well as the teacher's current practice and that works tremendously well. Since taking up my post as Head Teacher at [name of primary school], the system that's in place is that it is the Depute's role to support all probationers and students. But that's not the way that it's going to continue working, because I think it's important to get the person best suited for different aspects and to share that expertise and to give other people a chance to see other people in action and learn from that as well as to support them.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

*We're very much looking at it as a standard development exercise to benefit not only the probationer but the person who is undertaking the role.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

Such aspirations for capacity building and personal professional development were, however, absent from the accounts given in the focus groups with Supporters. Equally, there was much less emphasis on the voluntary aspect, with most stating that their selection had been for reasons connected with the other two factors: their position in the school or practical reasons.

*As a PT subject, it came with the job.*

(Supporter LA3)

Six participants from four local authorities did indicate that they had volunteered to take up the Supporter role, with two reporting that expressions of interest were elicited through an open invitation to staff. One of these (LA2) originally took up the role as a non-promoted teacher.

Even when prompted by facilitators, it was rare for Supporters to identify criteria for selection other than practical factors. Where, under prompting, they did identify criteria of the 'ideal' Supporter they, like Head Teachers, referred to experience, approachability and good practice. Only one teacher (LA3) believed that a specific criterion had applied in her own appointment: she was seen as "patient and tolerant of the new person", having helped other new staff in the past.

## **4.2 Existing role**

Although they had referred to personal and professional qualities, most of the Head Teachers acknowledged that the role of Supporter was commonly allocated to senior colleagues as part of their existing remits. They identified Deputes (non-class committed) and Principal Teachers as naturally associated with the Supporter role.

As one Head Teacher commented, *'The use of the DHTs was valuable in using the 0.1 FTE for someone who did not have a class commitment'* (LA3). In secondary schools, the appointment of the Principal Teacher (PT) as Supporter was usually taken to be the 'standard position' (Head Teacher LA 4) or 'the default' position (Head Teacher LA2). The following extract is typical of practices reported across the Head Teacher groups.

*Though we give them some element of choice, by and large it's the Principal Teacher who does the support for the role, but there are occasions when*

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*we've got another member of staff who's volunteered to deal with the role as part of their own professional development.*

(Head Teacher LA 4)

One Head Teacher noted that the requirement to assess probationer performance required the involvement of an experienced senior member of staff.

*I do believe the Principal Teacher has to be the Supporter at the end of the day, because somebody has to pass or fail them and I think it has to be somebody that has that level of management expertise.*

(Head Teacher LA 4)

In only one focus group did a Head Teacher identify a Chartered Teacher with the mentoring role.

*In a secondary school it would be the Principal Teacher who would be the most normal person who would be the Supporter for a probationer in their subject. However, we also have a bit of flexibility there. For example, this year we will have two NQTs in the English department. The other member of the English department is a Chartered Teacher whose specialism is in mentoring. And so we felt that that was a really appropriate person to use in that context.*

(Head Teacher LA 2)

A distinction was made in some groups between the Regent (coordination) and (day to day) Supporter role. In the focus group discussions it appeared that some schools were deploying former senior teachers as Supporters as a legacy of job re-sizing.

*I do have a teacher who was formerly a senior teacher, who has always expressed the wish to continue with the role that he had, so he does the more generic support for the whole group of probationers.*

(Head Teacher LA 4)

Whilst the exercise of some flexibility might refresh the role, delegation of Supporter responsibilities could also entail risk. It was noted by one Head Teacher that experienced Principal Teachers would remain the fall back position, even where an attempt had been made to obtain a volunteer.

*A volunteer was identified through a PRD [Professional Review and Development] meeting but the Principal Teacher has taken over due to difficulties.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA3)

This identification of the role of Supporter with an existing post in the school was by far the most common theme in the Supporter focus groups. The element of choice was, for most of them, not applicable, especially for subject Principal Teachers in secondary schools, where it is commonly seen as part of the remit that goes with the post.

*There was no consultation at all.*

(Supporter LA1)

*You're not in a position to choose.*

(Supporter LA6)

*It was just assumed that I would do it. I was the Principal Teacher of Home Economics and it happened to be a Home Economics NQT, so it was my job,*

(Supporter LA1)

*It's just a case of, "your department is getting a probationer, you're the PT, on you go."*

(Supporter LA3)

One secondary Principal Teacher even used the word 'coercion' to describe the process. A primary Supporter in the same local authority was approached and was willing to undertake the role, but was told

*However, if I didn't want to do it, it would be up to me to go in and cover the class teacher who was going to be doing it.*

(Supporter LA3)

To a considerable extent, gathering the role into such existing remits may be a natural expectation, but it is interesting that many of the Head Teachers chose to emphasise other factors in their selection when it appeared to the Supporters that their existing role was the key consideration.

Sometimes, although the Depute Head Teacher or Principal Teacher or, in a small primary school, even the Head Teacher was the main Supporter, they were able to involve other teachers as well.

*It's a small school that I'm in, so I was the teaching head, and then the NQT was taking over my class, so ... I was her mentor. But as well as myself there was the point three teacher who was a NQT the previous year, so she was able to support the NQT as well.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA2)

In one secondary school (LA4) there was actually a Principal Teacher of teacher support whose job it was to work with all of the probationers, who "provides the listening ear outwith the department, as well as a departmental Supporter, sometimes the PT but sometimes not". Other Head Teachers gave examples of such practices in secondary schools.

*Nominally the Principal Teacher is the Supporter, but sometimes there is a more experienced member of the same subject department who does some day to day support. That's identified through the PRD process.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*In one of our larger departments we had two members of staff who were trained to support students ... So from that, they wanted to get involved in helping the Principal Teacher to support the probationers, which seems to work quite well.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

### **4.3 Pragmatism**

Although there was only one reference by a Head Teacher to pragmatism being a consideration in selection of Supporters, seven Supporters suggested that their selection was largely based on pragmatic grounds such as availability through non-class contact roles (Primary Deputes) or the subject/stage identification of the NQT.

*I was appointed with a remit for the early years and the probationer was going into the primary two class, so I think that was part of the selection really.*

(Supporter LA2)

*Being in management, I tended to have ... more flexible time there that if I needed to cover classes, and likewise as a Supporter, if I was out on Supporters' days as well, I was easier to cover.*

(Supporter LA7)

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One Supporter even suggested that her Head Teacher deliberately chose someone who could help them to utilise staff time most efficiently.

*I will also say, and this is an important factor, and it comes down to the teaching commitment, and the school actually benefits if they use a promoted member of staff who has no class commitment or who has less class commitment than others ... They benefit from that as the 0.1 [FTE allocation] can be used elsewhere in the structure ... It means that we don't need to cover; they don't need cover for me for the 0.1 mentoring*

(Supporter LA3)

#### **4.4 Importance of the subject or stage specialism of the Supporter**

Most of the participants in both Head Teacher and Supporter focus groups offered strong support for the view that Supporters should have familiarity with the subject or stage of the probationer. They regarded contemporary knowledge of curriculum, assessment, resources and pedagogies as significant and felt that subject and stage knowledge are important in judging the appropriate level of pitch, challenge and pace of learning in observed lessons.

Different issues applied in some groups between primary and secondary schools. One primary Head Teacher (LA4) commented that lack of detailed knowledge of the same stage would be a "major disadvantage" to both Supporter and probationer. Another Head Teacher (LA2) observed that, whilst non-specialists might be able to coach probationers, NQTs themselves would prefer to work with Supporters who have the credibility of recent stage/subject experience and expertise, especially in the early stages of the induction year.

*Stage partners can be valuable in supporting someone else at that stage, regardless of whether you are a probationer teacher. I think those of us who have been in that position know how good it is to be able to be involved in joint planning or collaborative work and really have the support of someone else who is working at the same or similar level.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

In smaller schools where a stage partner is not available, an emphasis was placed on collective professional responsibility to support recently qualified teachers and to arrange opportunities to gain experience by visiting other schools.

*We would want everyone to engage in professional dialogue and support each other on a pastoral level. To that extent, we are lucky in a smaller school. It is unfortunate that they don't have a stage experience but we do orchestrate the opportunity for our probationers to go elsewhere. They go to other schools.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

Another primary Head Teacher acknowledged that experienced generalist teachers, who could command a range of skills and abilities for flexible deployment, invariably staffed small rural primary schools.

*A good primary practitioner will have experience of a wide range of stages. We are used to having a big range of levels, particularly with a smaller rural school. You're more used to spinning the plates and juggling the balls that way.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

A Supporter in the same local authority agreed that it was not essential even to have taught at that stage, it being more important to have a number of years' teaching experience and to be up to date with current thinking. A similar point was made by a Supporter in LA5, who also emphasised the importance of teaching experience, though she thought it would be helpful to have taught at the

same stage “at some point”. One Supporter went further, thinking it inadvisable for the Supporter to be the stage partner of the probationer.

*I think that would be just too much ... You'd be thrown together constantly and if there were problems that, you know ... I have a primary seven but we've placed the probationer roughly three or four, and they also glean with the help of their stage partner, so they're actually gaining things from two people.*

(Supporter LA3)

One way of ensuring input from a stage partner was to use part of the probationer's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) time to observe or team teach with a colleague a class at the same stage.

While in the primary sector there was a range of views on the necessity of a Supporter being a stage specialist, in secondary there was more emphasis on the importance of subject specialism. A secondary Head Teacher (LA4) stressed that subject familiarity would be essential in supporting probationers' work with certificate classes and in maintaining compliance with health and safety requirements in subjects such as science, technology or Physical Education.

In secondary schools working with probationers in curriculum areas or Faculties that encompass a range of subjects such as science, social studies or expressive arts, it was common practice to have a curriculum area Supporter, supported by an additional subject mentor. It was suggested that the subject teacher is better placed to identify gaps in curricular knowledge that might occur, for instance, if a probationer teacher with a degree in media studies were teaching English classes. While some did agree that it was possible for a non-specialist to help with generic areas such as class management, lesson structure and communication, they would have less confidence in gauging the appropriateness of the selection of content or the pace of the lesson. In particular, for certificate classes it was important to know that the probationer's marking of pupil work was at the appropriate standard.

*I do think that they get a lot more out of it by having the Principal Teacher there looking at how they're teaching the actual subject. Someone outside the department could give an overview on the general learning and teaching about whether outcomes were shared, about what was going on all over the classroom, were you asking questions, was everybody contributing. Yeah, we're all able to do that, but where I would find it difficult was if I looked at a English lesson and I thought, now have they covered enough in that fifty minutes? I probably wouldn't know that, but an English teacher looking at it would say, no, that was more than enough, or it was far too much.*

(Supporter LA2)

Ensuring an adequate level of curriculum area/stage expertise was not unproblematic, especially in smaller schools. One Head Teacher (LA1) noted, “There's a big issue about how you deliver this in the most efficient way with all the constraints of the timetable”.

*We have a faculty in Social Subjects and the principal teacher is a History specialist, but has Modern Studies. Any time we have placements for geography, it's someone within the old Geography department who takes responsibility for them and works jointly with the Principal Teacher.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

There was a particular concern regarding subject areas in smaller secondary schools where it may not be unusual for a single teacher to provide all of the teaching in that area e.g. Music.

*When the probationer becomes a sole teacher and there is nobody else with the subject I really do worry about that. They have to teach the whole*

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*curriculum from S1 to S6, or depending on which school, then it could be P1 to S6. There are real issues surrounding that for their training.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

One Supporter noted that the use of non-specialists might go some way to avoid the imposition of the mentor's style on the new teacher.

*There is a danger of Supporters going in and saying, 'This is how to do it. I've done it for the last twenty years and I'm not doing it any other way and that's it pal'. That's not a good learning environment for a probationer. You're more open when it's not your subject specialism.*

(Supporter LA7)

In summary, although high levels of support were expressed for the involvement of subject/stage specialists, especially in secondary schools, practicalities of timetabling, school size and available staffing influenced opportunities available for probationers. It was stressed that the professional community within the whole school has a collective responsibility to the novice teacher and that a range of mentors could offer valuable generic support.

*I generally think in secondary a subject specialism has so much that's specific but the probationer's only experience should not be within a department ... Their experience should be broader than within the department.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*I think there are two sides to this. One of the biggest concerns of all the NQTs is assessment within the subject. From that point of view, they absolutely do need to have a subject specialist. However, there is also learning and teaching in general across the curriculum where Supporters in any subject have a role to play. You can go into a subject that you know very little about and immediately focus on how this lesson is structured, how this lesson is being delivered, what are the good learning and teaching points here - rather than getting caught up in the nitty gritty of the piece of writing of the poem or whatever. I think you need both.*

(Supporter LA1)

## **4.5 Conclusions**

While Head Teachers clearly have particular qualities in mind when selecting Supporters, mostly relating to their classroom skills and experience, their communication skills and their personalities, they often find these in colleagues who already have convenient roles, commonly those of Depute Head Teacher in a primary school and, in a secondary school, Principal Teacher of the relevant subject. Especially in the primary school situation, this may have the additional benefit that there is less demand for class cover to enable the Supporter to operate.

While not unknown, it is rare for teachers to volunteer to become a Supporter, most simply being instructed to take on the role as an addition to their existing remit. This is not to suggest that they resent being Supporters. In general they demonstrated considerable commitment to the school and to the probationers, but most believed that they had been chosen for pragmatic reasons rather than because they had displayed the kinds of quality referred to by Head Teachers.

## **5 Training for Head Teachers and Supporters**

### **5.1 Training for Head Teachers**

Very few Head Teachers had received any formal training prior to managing the Induction Scheme, but few saw this as an issue. In LA2 one person had been on coaching and mentoring training, while others reported that the issue had been discussed at a Head Teachers' meeting; in LA3 they

had been provided with a full manual; in LA4 there had been a half day meeting to give Head Teachers an overview; and in LA7 one person reported receiving help and advice from the authority probation manager.

## 5.2 Training for Supporters

In terms of initial training, experience varied between local authorities. Most provided an initial meeting in June or September, or in one case during the summer holiday period, but there was no set pattern to these. Some Supporters had received no training when taking on the role, though in some cases this was because they had taken it up part of the way through a session.

In the first years of the TIS the training might be very limited.

*I was in this right at the very start and I think the training at that time was very limited. And you were basically handed the Standard for Full Registration [SFR] and expected to read it in your own time ... but the training has certainly got better.*

(Supporter LA3)

This improvement was confirmed by another teacher from the same local authority who had also had no training on first becoming a Supporter, but who continued,

*This year there was training available and I signed up for it and I found the first session, which [the local authority probation managers] did, I found that really valuable. I thought that was excellent. It was to the point and it was just what you needed to know.*

(Supporter LA3)

Others agreed that local authority managers offered excellent training, especially by offering practical guidance on the routines and requirements of the TIS such as recording progress in the probationers' profiles. In addition to face-to-face training, most local authority probation managers had produced comprehensive manuals that the Supporters found extremely helpful.

Three local authorities had, at various times, employed external consultants to offer training in areas such as coaching and mentoring, classroom observation and collaborative working. While some Supporters found these useful, others felt them to be less relevant, too theoretical and, in one case, patronising.

When discussing continued training while in the role, few Supporters could offer clear accounts of further training opportunities, beyond observation of mentoring provided by a line manager in their school. Initial meetings were regarded as helpful in providing information relating to the month-by-month schedule of activities across the session and sample profiles that gave an indication of expectations.

## 5.3 Continuing support

### 5.3.1 Developmental support

In two local authorities there could be the opportunity for new Supporters to participate in a buddy system with people already experienced in the role. Supporters in one local authority (LA4) also appreciated the availability of a forum for mentors, but in the same authority one Supporter felt there were inadequate opportunities to meet to discuss problems or progress. This was reflected in comments elsewhere:

*I don't know of any meetings that are overly connected to Supporters. Maybe I've missed them, but I don't remember going to a lot of meetings. Sometimes you get a bit confused... There was one at the very beginning of the session.*

(Supporter LA2)

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*I'm not totally convinced I've got a picture in my mind of the structure of meetings that I can attend.*

(Supporter LA2)

In LA5 there were also four networking meetings per annum to share good practice. However, Supporters generally would welcome further opportunities to meet together and engage in professional dialogue to support their role. Authority meetings focused on the mechanics of programme delivery (the provision of timetables and 'checklists') rather than addressing the broader development needs of Supporters.

*I think there should be something else planned for mentors, to help us get together with other mentors; to see how they're all getting on with all the guidance issues and the form-filling. You're weighed down by the responsibility of making sure these forms are filled in properly.*

(Supporter LA4)

In addition to authority support, Supporters were equally likely to mention colleagues in school as an important source of on-going support.

*If you have any questions, there's support within the school from fellow teachers.*

(Supporter LA1)

*I have a management team that I can go to and I know that they would support both the NQT and me.*

(Supporter LA1)

*Mentors get training from the authority but there's someone in school that they can go to, particularly for advice on things like the interim reports; there's someone else there they can run that past.*

(Supporter LA4)

### **5.3.2 Practical support in issue resolution**

When practical issues arose, all focus groups expressed a very high level of appreciation for the support provided by local authorities' probationer managers. Authority provision was regarded as accessible, supportive and prompt through a combination of telephone and email contact and requested face-to-face meetings.

Head Teachers commented that the involvement of an assessor from outside the school was often very helpful for both Supporter and probationer. There was an awareness of regular updates from the authority detailing the schools' role in the induction programme. Head Teachers appreciated the early involvement of the authority in circumstances where probationers were experiencing serious difficulty.

*She's always on the end of the phone.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*In one case, the support of an officer at Council level was really invaluable in terms of helping us out, coming in and offering advice to us, observing the probationer. That was really useful.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

Both Head Teachers and Supporters referred to be benefits of external support in cases where a probationer was struggling. In one authority (LA7) the probation manager had arranged for

observations in a secondary school by subject specialists from other schools. This kind of approach helped to remove personality from the assessment of progress. In another authority (LA4) there had been a programme of moderation visits to observe probationers who were doing well as a benchmarking exercise to ensure consistency. This gave a sense that the authority was supporting Head Teachers.

Other sources of support were mentioned, if infrequently, including: using cluster meetings to discuss broad issues that could apply across schools; in one authority with a central Supporter system for primary schools, visits from the central Supporter to the school mentor; advice from officials of GTC Scotland; and peer support from within the school.

*You also get support from colleagues who have done it before, or you'll find somebody who has an NQT this year who didn't have one last year will go looking for somebody just to bounce ideas.*

(Supporter LA1)

## **5.4 Conclusions**

Supporters are more likely than Head Teachers to have received formal training for their role, with effective and helpful training being provided by the local authority managers. This training has improved in quality since that offered in the early days of the TIS.

Both Supporters and Head Teachers receive excellent support from local authority probation managers, from the production of comprehensive guidance manuals, which are proactive, anticipatory and revised annually, to practical support in resolving issues, especially where they are trying to cope with a probationer who is having difficulty in achieving the SFR.

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## 6 The Supporter role

### 6.1 Time allocation

In considering whether the 0.1 FTE time allocation was sufficient to support the task of mentoring NQTs, opinion amongst Head Teachers was divided. It was felt that the adequacy of the 0.1 FTE depended on the time of year, the particular support needs of each NQT and the disposition of the Supporter.

*It will have an impact depending on the dedication of the Supporter, how much they want to give. For some 0.1 is not enough and for others they will probably say, 'Well, I've got 0.1 and that's all you're getting'. I think there is a wee bit of personality coming into that as well.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

Other factors influencing opinion on time allocations were current staffing levels in schools (especially departments at secondary level); capacity to maintain remission of class contact time (RCCT); and the efficient operation of departments in secondary schools. Head Teachers reported that they made flexible use of timetabling and routinely relied on the goodwill of volunteer Supporters to maintain adequate levels of support for NQTs.

*If you are the class teacher and you're given enough staffing then it fits in well. Sometimes you are juggling your RCCT.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*When the department is functioning effectively, the time allocated goes well. It's dedicated time. It gives them space.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*There is still a problem in finding the 0.1 FTE allocation. The newly qualified teacher may offer the full time needed to fill the vacancy in the department but other departments may be on full timetables and this makes it difficult to free the Supporter.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*It depends on flexibility. We often use the time between the class day and the 35 hour week. We work on goodwill when a Supporter finds it hard to be flexible.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*It depends on which department the probationer is in. Each mentor has one period as do PTs, but the reality is that 0.1 is not enough. Institutions are putting far more time into it than they are staffed for. The goodwill of the institution is vital, not just that of individual staff.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

Supporters were much more likely to report that the 0.1 FTE allocation was not sufficient to support the role. It was emphasised that support meetings are only one aspect of the role, which also includes preparation, recording, observation and elements of research to support probationer development. One primary school Supporter (LA4) noted that the school used the 0.1 FTE time in a variety of ways, including allowing teachers with a variety of remits "to take time out with the probationers".

A minority of Supporters (LA1, LA4) reported that either they themselves or colleagues at regional support meetings were not aware of their entitlement to 0.1 FTE non-class contact time and reported

that remission was only available to support observed sessions. More commonly, Supporters noted that attempts were made in school to ‘ring fence’ time for a one hour meeting each week, though at times this was difficult (especially in the context of small schools). It was expected that further involvement with the NQT would be accommodated within the Supporters’ overall non-class contact time.

*The point one, I took that to be the hour that I’m in class with the NQT and we work together. We team-teach. I assumed that’s what that was talking about.*

(Supporter LA1)

Supporters in the same authority reported how they felt a personal, as well as professional obligation, to invest as much time as necessary to ensure that ‘their’ probationer met the required standards.

*I was told that that time had to come out of my own free periods.*

(Supporter LA4)

*Because it kind of reflects on you if your probationer’s not doing well, you want to do your best.*

(Supporter LA4)

*Because you want them to be successful, you want to put in as much input as you can.*

(Supporter LA4)

## **6.2 Balancing the Supporter role with other responsibilities**

### **6.2.1 Head Teachers’ perspectives**

In distinguishing between the Supporter role and a management role, Head Teachers were attentive to issues of availability and approachability and, allied with this, the need for a (separate) management figure with the authority to make summative judgments of competence. The Supporter was involved in streaming formative feedback to the probationer and providing support on a day-to-day basis. It was suggested that probationers may be “more comfortable” and therefore more able to talk to members of staff that are not “right at the top of the school” (Head Teacher LA2); and that probationers in primary schools were more likely to accept advice from a stage partner. One Head Teacher, however, stressed the importance of continuing observation by the Head Teacher as lead professional in school: “I want to see myself what’s happening in class” (Head Teacher LA7).

*It’s not as easy to be available. Class teachers can put that into their timetable and nothing really very much will get in the way of it, which is not the case with the SMT.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*Being on the shop floor was slightly better. They find senior management going in for observations a wee bit daunting.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*Someone has to make difficult judgements about the person’s [competence] and challenge them. To my mind that is a slightly different role to that of the Supporter, at least there’s a conflict there in how you would deal with that. If you’re the same person that is doing that, you lose that sense of supporting.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

Head Teachers acknowledged that providing high levels of support to NQTs could detract from other responsibilities held by Supporters. Head Teachers in one authority discussed their sense of juggling

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commitments to ensure a defensible balance between the competing demands on their time. They sought to address the needs of the probationer, their classes, administrative responsibilities and the broader requirements of service to the school. Excessive demands in one area detracted from other areas of performance and could lead to individuals withdrawing from the (additional) demands of the Supporter role.

*In a small team, we are working to promote collegiality. With additional responsibility, when there was a difficult probationer it was hard and the Supporter withdrew. Much depends on the level of support that is required.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

*The DHT spent more time supporting the probationer and her class, the emphasis being on the impact on the children. Therefore, the DHT was taken away from other children.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

*Although the PT identifies benefits in being a Supporter, it does affect other work at the start of the year and the PT has less chance to lead curricular projects.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

*If the Supporter is doing this, (s)he is not doing something else. There is not a limitless resource of motivated, committed members of staff. If there is a problem, it can distort the use of a key individual's time.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

Head Teachers acknowledged that taking on the Supporter role did increase teachers' workload. Supporters are required to complete the formal recording of support offered, targets set and progress towards targets, as well as continuing to manage department responsibilities, teach certificate classes and provide cover for absent colleagues.

*No one who has taken on the role has left any part of the job to the side to be able to do the probationary part. It definitely has been in addition. If it goes beyond the point one support time, it does not mean that anything else is left. It is just an additional workload you have taken on.*  
(Head Teacher LA4)

*They are sometimes under extreme pressure, but they still cover their SQA forms and do all the departmental management aspects that they have to cover as well. The job is done, but people are working longer hours to be able to do it.*  
(Head Teacher LA4)

Aware of role conflict and competing demands on Supporters time, one Head Teacher emphasised the responsibility of the Head Teacher in ensuring that support mechanisms continued to operate in school, and the consequences of failing to address support needs for the probationer, Supporter and wider professional community. Other Head Teachers commented on the need to maintain pupil attainment and drew attention to NQTs' "nervousness about pupil testing" (LA 3). In some schools, this has encouraged team teaching with attendant implications for additional resourcing.

*If you have one of these people in your school, you cannot just leave them to flounder. That does have an impact on staff. It's then down to me or another teacher to release whomever and outsource support. Professionally and morally, I do not think you can just leave these people to get on with it; they do still need the same support.*  
(Head Teacher LA7)

## 6.2.2 Supporters' perspectives

Head Teachers' concerns regarding overloading Supporters resonated with accounts offered by Supporters in the focus groups. Supporters routinely described role conflict in performing the Supporter role to their expected standard and maintaining high levels of performance across a range of other responsibilities in school. Supporters were involved in providing replacement teaching and other duties that on occasion might take precedence over scheduled support meetings.

*Being the DHT this year, it's actually quite difficult being a Supporter as well. I've got a very good probationer, which makes it very easy, but if we've got a child protection issue or something like, I have to go to that.*

(Supporter LA1)

*It was difficult to manage the NQT and do the [project] job because I sometimes felt that I wasn't there enough for the probationer. On the other hand, I was getting some quite good ideas from being a [project] support teacher - on formative assessment and that kind of thing - that I could pass on to the NQT. So, it had an advantage and a disadvantage, but it was quite hard going.*

(Supporter LA1)

Supporters stressed that their mentoring responsibilities often extended to existing members of staff, as well as students and NQTs. The capacity to meet needs across these groups was often influenced by their assessment of the quality of the NQT. Beginning teachers, who needed an intensive level of on-going support, could pose problems. At pressure points in the school year, some Supporters admitted to making difficult decisions as to where to commit their time and emphasised the need to involve colleagues in maintaining satisfactory levels of support to beginning teachers,

*If you are a Depute, the probationers quite frequently come and seek advice and you are not always there for them because you have so many other people to see to as well. You just cannot quite give them the quality of time that you would want.*

(Supporter LA2)

*I have the remit of the class teacher and many of the things I have to do in my new job are after school. The first two terms with a probationer, they need more support. I found it quite difficult running from one thing to the other. I don't want to make my probationer feel that I don't have the time to discuss things, so I put things that I should be doing for my job to the side so that I can go to my probationer more. I have to rely a lot more on my colleagues.*

(Supporter LA4)

Supporters commonly reported that mentor meetings, and associated preparation and administration, were completed before the start of the school day, at breaks and lunch times, at the end of the school day and also at weekends (examples included LA2 and LA4). It was acknowledged that mentoring as an *activity* could not be allocated to a discrete time period but was conducted informally throughout the week.

Difficulties in making time to support probationers could be exacerbated by delays in receiving notification of allocations. A Supporter in one authority described how planning support for probationers was difficult if the school did not know the stage/subject identification of the NQT or whether they would be accommodating an NQT that session.

*I try and do my best for my other Supporters in the team to protect them for a period but it's difficult because we're creating the timetable sometimes before we know when the NQT is arriving.*

### 6.3 Supporting more than one probationer

Despite the frequent expression of reservations regarding workload, both Head Teachers and Supporters were generally positive about supporting two probationers. Both Head Teachers and Supporters felt that there could be significant benefits in that the probationers could provide support for each other and that joint meetings could result in more open discussion.

*It's almost like a triangulation thing ... it gives you the opportunity for more opinions to be expressed and so on, and better discussion I think.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

*It makes your Supporter meeting better, because if you've got somebody that's maybe not very forthcoming you can end up doing all the talking. You've got more people to contribute.*

(Supporter LA3)

They identified a number of advantages to this practice and some caveats. One primary school supporter (LA2) observed that it was helpful in that there could be one longer meeting with two probationers, enabling them to test ideas on each other. A secondary Head Teacher (LA4) took the theme a little further by noting that it could help to prevent a probationer from becoming isolated in a department.

Especially at the beginning of the session, there could be economies of scale in meeting with two, or even with several, probationers to take them through school procedures or to address whole school issues together. Both Head Teachers and Supporters cited the social dimensions of professional learning in a school setting and the significance of peer support. This could be most effective where, in a larger primary school, probationers were teaching classes at the same stage.

The strongest reservations were expressed in relation to circumstances where one probationer among a group may be struggling and therefore require a more intensive level of support or where there are significant differences in personality between the probationers. Difficulties were also mentioned in relation to capacity within smaller schools (ten class primary schools).

### 6.4 Conclusions

Although Head Teachers tended to be more positive than were Supporters about the adequacy of the 0.1 FTE allocation, both were clear that good Supporters often go far beyond that time in offering support to probationers. Indeed, there was considerable evidence that, especially among promoted staff in primary schools with other major areas of responsibility, the only way of fulfilling their own sense of obligation to the probationer is to meet outside the normal school day. Head Teachers acknowledged that they depend on the goodwill of their colleagues to deliver the levels of support that are needed, as it is often difficult to guarantee a timetabled slot for this purpose.

Equally, there was consensus that the role of being a Supporter adds to the teacher's workload. This was not necessarily seen as a major issue, but did lead to a need for flexibility on the part of the Supporter and often of other colleagues and for the Head Teacher to be aware of the position and to ensure that support mechanisms were in place where necessary.

On balance, participants believed that the benefits of supporting more than one probationer outweighed the disadvantages, except in cases where there was a personality clash or clear differences in ability between the probationers.

## 7 Organisational structures and their impact

### 7.1 The Regent model

Especially in secondary schools, it is common for a senior member of staff (usually a DHT but occasionally the Head Teacher) to act as Regent, with overall responsibility for all of the probationers in the school, and often for student teachers on placement as well. Typically, the Regent meets probationers to deal with whole school issues, while the subject based Supporter attends to issues such as classroom management, subject knowledge and learning and teaching strategies. Supporters in two local authorities were very supportive of this model, seeing the Regent as providing support for Supporters as well as for pre-service teachers and NQTs. The Regent was seen to offer a different perspective in observations, helping to validate supporters' judgments and providing linkage between supporters and other students and NQTs. The Regent also played a pivotal role in liaising with the SMT and local authority, as well as setting up opportunities within the school to shadow and meet with experienced colleagues in specialist areas such as Learning Support and guidance. Head Teachers in LA5 felt that the regent model offers consistency and that probationers valued the overview the Regent can provide on whole school issues.

The Regent role was cited as particularly important where schools were accommodating a large number of probationers (LA4).

*The benefit from my point of view is that the Regent organises the cross-curricular type meetings. She also has the benefit of meeting with all the NQTs across the different subjects... It's somebody else to speak to... If there were any issues, she would be there to back me up or to offer alternative ways of doing anything, for a second opinion or whatever. She does one of the observations.*

(Supporter LA1)

Some Head Teachers also described the Regent model as offering enhanced validation. In these cases, the Regent was positioned as a significant actor within a network of support ensuring rigour and fairness. The involvement of a Regent, Head Teacher, subject Supporter (PT subject) or informal mentor (subject/stage partner) in conducting observations was felt to increase the volume and quality of feedback available to the probationer teacher.

*I have meetings with the NQTs on a weekly basis to deal with generic issues and I meet with them as a group. When it comes to observations, their Supporter who is the Principal Teacher in most cases sees them regularly. They are seen by a member of the Senior Management Team, who is the faculty link with that Department and therefore has an ongoing curricular link, and they are also seen by me as a kind of arbiter, someone totally outwith the Department, other than those departments where I am the faculty link in which case it is another member of the Senior Management team who does the refereeing.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

*It is quite good because you have about four or five perspectives. By the time you get to the interim profile, you've actually got quite a good strand of action points and it's obvious the one or two key issues that will come out from the interim profile that you take forward into the final one.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

This process was also seen to reduce the likelihood of a probationer teacher claiming that negative feedback could be attributed to a clash of personalities with the Supporter.

## **7.2 The central Supporter**

In two of the local authorities, Supporters for probationers in primary schools were seconded to work centrally. In these cases recruitment was by application. One person (LA2) stated that, before the interview, a representative of the education authority came to the school and conducted a classroom observation of her working with the children. A similar type of selection process also applied in LA5.

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In LA2, Head Teachers and Supporters expressed more reservations than statements of support. Secondary Head Teachers indicated that a subject mentor would need to be in place to provide specific curriculum expertise in a secondary setting. A primary Head Teacher also reported that the flow of feedback to the school was impaired when an external mentor replaced the internal supporter system. At this school, the Head Teacher felt that additional strong support from a Principal Teacher among the school staff was necessary to support NQTs who were struggling. The advantage of having an external mentor to provide weekly observations and to meet with the NQT in their non-contact time relieved pressure on school staff, but also increased a sense of remoteness between the NQT and the permanent school staff, especially those school staff involved in monitoring and report writing.

*I wasn't sure how that would work in secondary, to see someone coming in and talking to the two English, the two Geographers, or whatever, and thought we would still have to have an internal supporter.*

(Secondary Head Teacher LA2)

*It was just left to the school that we would have the central mentor. She would be coming in. She would be seeing the NQT. There weren't so many opportunities for feedback to us, so it tended to be, you know, we would say to the NQT, 'has your mentor been in today? How did you get on?' And they would complete the feedback sheet and give it to us. The one that's getting on quite well, that's been fine. We've now had to put a Supporter in school with the one that's having difficulties, as well as having the external one.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA2)

Primary Head Teachers also felt that knowledge of the local school setting was important in providing advice to NQTs and that strong communication between school staff was highly desirable in ensuring consistency of advice. Head Teachers reported that it was sometimes difficult to identify time for joint meetings immediately following observations and time for discussion to support report writing.

*She doesn't know how things are done in the school, and there are times she's giving advice to the NQT and not coming through us at all. There have been difficulties.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA2)

*It's finding liaison time. I passed [name] on the steps just now and it's, 'I have to come and see you. I did an observation this morning and I really need to come and speak to you about it.' It's finding time for herself and for someone in the school to meet.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA2)

*I had to write the report and I didn't have all the information. It made it very, very difficult for me. It really made me feel that we didn't know enough about the NQT. I didn't have the information I needed.*

(Primary Head Teacher LA2)

In the other local authority support for the external Supporter system was stronger, perhaps as it had been operating for longer in the primary schools. Head teachers noted that the local support team conducted a good deal of liaison work and informed themselves quickly of the context in each school. They saw the support team as providing consistency of approach and clarity of timelines. The Supporters, including some seconded staff, felt that the system was working well, that the existence of the central team encouraged standardisation, that it gave an effective overview of how well the Induction Scheme was working in the authority and that it facilitated cross-observations.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

All of the local authorities used the regent model in secondary schools, where it was felt to be successful in several ways: in helping to ensure consistency of practice across the school; in providing an authoritative overview of whole school issues; in coordinating cross-curricular opportunities; and in conducting additional observations where this would be helpful.

There were mixed responses to the concept of the central Supporter, with Head Teachers and Supporters in one local authority being less positive than those in the other. There were concerns over information flow within the school and about a sense of remoteness, though in other ways it removed some pressure from teachers in the school. On the other hand, there was a sense of consistency of practice across the authority.

## 8 Meeting individual needs

### 8.1 The Continuing Professional Development link between Initial Teacher Education and the Teacher Induction Scheme

Most discussion in the focus groups centred on the career entry profile brought by probationers to schools from university. Supporters and Head Teachers were virtually unanimous that the profile was not valuable as a planning tool. The principal concern was the level of detail provided in the profile to support development planning. Both groups suggested that the profiles were “bland”, “vague”, “not useful”, “not as specific as they might be”, “not going to tell you a lot”. One Supporter (LA5) went further, describing it as a “*whitewash of the real abilities of the probationer. The comments don’t match the person there*”. There were even a few references to some of them appearing to be cut and pasted or otherwise appearing to be generic.

*The first year that they both actually turned up with it at the initial meeting ... These are two very different characters I’ve got and both of them, shall we say, have much different developmental issues, but they could be the same girls ... Very similar profiles. And from two different colleges as well. I mean they weren’t even on the same course. It wasn’t the same person who wrote them.*

(Supporter LA7)

*I think they are all pretty general. My probationer this year was the best I’ve had, yet her university report was no different from the rest.*

(Supporter LA4)

As a result of these concerns Supporters and Head Teachers relied on direct observation to assess the probationer’s development needs.

Three Head Teachers in different authorities reported concerns about the accuracy of the profiles. In these accounts, Head Teachers felt that the profiles did not provide an adequate account of the development needs of the NQT, which it subsequently became apparent required intervention and extensive support from the school.

*This girl had her difficulties, and they weren’t they weren’t clear on her profile.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

*The girl whom we had most problems with I did get to read her interim [sic] teaching profile and it was glowing and that really worried me.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*The probationer teacher I have this year, her ITE profile really did not prepare me for her standard of teaching and her abilities. It just didn’t match up. I know that teachers go out on placement if they’re doing a four year BEd, which this girl had done, but she is so, so terrible, you know. She really has a lot of issues in teaching, but yet this was not mentioned or even hinted at, or given*

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*me a clue, something that I could read between the lines to let me know that this particular person had lots of issues.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*In the two unsatisfactory probationers that I've experienced, there was no indication whatsoever in their ITE profile that they had those difficulties.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

One Supporter noted that the usefulness of the profile depended on how honest, realistic and specific the NQT had been about her/his needs.

*If they just say, "I need to improve my teaching", that's kind of a bit of a problem. Whereas if they say, you know, "I specifically would like to learn how to use the interactive whiteboard", fine ... Somebody who is coming along with an ITE profile that's clear, and it's obvious where they are trying to go, you realize you've got somebody here who is organized, well prepared, thinking about what they want and hopefully ... will manage the Standard without too many difficulties. If you've got somebody who is coming in very vague, that to me sets up an alarm bell. You would really need to make sure in the early stages that we've got this person on the straight and narrow.*

(Supporter LA1)

Accounts from Head Teachers raised questions about the usefulness of the profile as an effective planning tool in the induction year. In some cases, probationers did not share their profiles with relevant school staff. In others, school staff were sceptical about the continuing relevance of targets set in another context. Some Head Teachers were not aware of the existence of the profile or its transfer with the probationer into the new school setting.

I wouldn't say it informs CPD. It is *referred* to very briefly in the initial meeting with the Supporter and then in continuing discussions between them there will be aspects of their CPD that will be identified and then as a school we would try to give them opportunities to extend their skills. However, my main answer to that would probably be "no". It is not something that is seen as a particularly useful document.

(Head Teacher LA3)

*I only saw it when I specifically asked, because I was thinking of rejecting her and so I'd asked to see it. I didn't know about it actually, it was [the local authority probation manager] that told me about it and then I asked to see it.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

*If you were a weak student, would you be showing it to anyone?*

(Head Teacher LA 7)

More commonly, Supporters also felt that the early stages of the induction year presented different challenges from those encountered on teaching placements from university. Through immersion in the school setting, new targets might be negotiated that were more relevant to the experience of full time teaching.

*I think in the first six months you can forget about anything that's on that [laughter]. By the time they've coped with their own class, set up their own class and found out what happens in the school, their heads are just spinning.*

(Supporter LA2)

*This will be the first time ever they've been into a classroom and had to establish it themselves, so you don't know what their needs are going to be in that respect because they've never been faced with that situation before.*

(Supporter LA2)

*I don't think some of them have made the transition between being a student and being somebody employed.*

(Supporter LA3)

In five local authorities, participants extended this last theme by raising questions about the assessment of competence by universities of teachers who were successfully completing initial teacher education. In a minority of cases, Head Teachers and Supporters had difficulty in determining how a candidate had achieved the Standard for Initial Teacher Education. This was case for probationers who had completed B.Ed. as well as shorter PGDE programmes. As a Supporter in LA6 argued, *"If there's a problem then [during the induction year], there has to have been a major problem during their university time"*.

*I think there is a serious issue of people who should not be on induction but who have successfully come through their year as a student.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*We need to bite the bullet and actually start to question the people who are getting through a BEd4 and coming out not able to do the job they're there to do. Somewhere along the line, someone is not putting their head above the parapet and saying, 'this isn't for you and you really need to think seriously about it'.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

Some felt that universities were unwilling to fail students on the basis of feedback from schools, preferring to offer them another placement. Some Supporters also acknowledged that students on placement in secondary schools were more likely to be given 'good' classes, but those on the Induction Scheme, with full responsibility for the class, might not.

*Well, it's only a year. I'm not going to be giving them the top sections when I don't know what they're like, so the chances are they are going to be in the middle of the road dash bottom sections and they cannot cope because they have never seen it. They don't know what the reality of it all is.*

(Supporter LA3)

## **8.2 CPD programmes for probationers**

### **8.2.1 Local authority provision**

Primary and secondary Head Teachers in two authorities were particularly appreciative of the programmes of CPD provided by their authorities for probationer teachers. However, Head Teachers and Supporters recognised that centrally provided generic CPD could not be specifically tailored to the particular needs of individual and schools.

*They organise a varied programme. In many respects that's not personalised, whereas the school will tend to make it more personalised*

(Supporter LA1)

*Within [the local authority] the support is provided centrally. They have a very extensive CPD programme starting off even before the schools open. The NQTs are brought in two days early and are paid for it. Then there is an ongoing programme throughout the year.*

(Secondary Head Teacher LA3)

Head Teachers in one authority acknowledged that whilst the programme of training sessions available to probationer teachers was carefully planned and published in advance of the academic

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session, authority CPD providers were nevertheless attentive and reasonably responsive to their needs.

*The Authority are constantly looking at what needs are out there and how to meet them.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*We get a programme right at the start of the year, which outlines every single training course and sometimes there is a change, but generally it's fairly fixed.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

A Head Teacher and a Supporter in two different authorities expressed some concern about duplication in provision. However, Head Teachers in a third authority (LA4) described authority and school provision on the same topic as 'complementary' rather than necessarily the same. School-led CPD was able to offer input that was specific to a particular practice setting, rather than at a generic level. One Head Teacher suggested that authority training was more important for NQTs who had followed the shorter PDGE route into the profession.

*We have had complications with our NQTs. What's happened is when we have in-service days, we've covered things that the NQT has already covered as part of that core, and the poor soul has to sit through it yet again.*

(Supporter LA1)

*I had an NQT who was a postgrad, and then I've had an NQT currently who is a B.Ed. For the postgrad, the training that the Authority did was very appropriate for her, but the B.Ed. seems to have covered a lot and it seems to be repetition.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

One Head Teacher commented that rather than a lack of formal and informal opportunities for CPD, the range of choices available to probationers sometimes occasioned a need to counsel against 'over committing' to additional training at this early and demanding stage in a teacher's career. A supporter in another authority (LA6) commented, "It's only after Christmas that my probationer even starts thinking about the extra things".

*I think possibly the one difficulty with it is because there is such a comprehensive range of courses, in some ways with the very keen probationer you're actually just pulling back a little bit from over-committing.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

### **8.2.2 School based provision**

By contrast to the CPD offered by local authorities, covering broad issues, school-based CPD tends to relate closely to the needs of the school and of the probationer.

*They're getting an overview from the local authority of a subject matter, whereas you're doing training in school. It's very much specific to what's happening in your establishment.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

Head Teachers in three authorities stressed that probationer teachers were actively encouraged to participate in school-led CPD and to become active members of school-wide working parties. Examples of probationer participation in working parties included Eco schools groups, subject focused, cross-curricular and cross-school (transition) initiatives. In one school, probationer teachers were set an explicit challenge to participate in an initiative that would have an impact at whole school level. These Head Teachers regarded participation in working parties as enhancing the status of

probationers among their peers and felt it helped to foster a sense of their participation as full members of the school community, despite their possible temporary status.

*Some of our probationers have all joined the same working party. They are working in a cross-curricular way to do things and that has just been great.*  
(Head Teacher LA1)

*We have set them a whole school challenge: to do something on a whole school basis and to liaise with people in other departments. One of them is doing an environmental project that he's organising and bringing different departments into discussions on critical skills. The other is working with pupils from our ASG<sup>3</sup> primaries who are very able and working with everybody coming into the school. It's working very well. They are two very good probationers and we had the confidence to give them that sort of responsibility.*  
(Head Teacher LA2)

*Every probationer for the last four years has been a member of a working party. Normally they are keen to get involved. Everyone has been involved in a curricular working group and they have been able to deliver back to the staff at in-services or meetings. This helped them to feel part of the school and to feel respected by their peers.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

Peer observation was used in two schools as an effective form of local CPD. Probationers were encouraged to observe each other, as well as experienced teachers from other departments/another stage. In one case, probationer teachers were encouraged to visit a school with different a socio-economic mix. A secondary Head Teacher (LA3) reported how probationers are encouraged to engage with other professionals in school such as social work links, the school nurses, and the campus police officer.

*We have paired the probationers up and they go in and watch them once just for general teaching style and then secondly to go over particular issues. I was in Art today and the Maths teacher was in observing. There was a good rapport going on. I think they all find it very useful because actually they don't see how their immediate NQTs are doing, so it is quite good to go in and see someone else as a basis for comparison.*  
(Head Teacher LA3)

Supporters described how professional conversations in support meetings gave rise to CPD opportunities for probationer teachers. These included the opportunity to visit associated schools, visits to other areas of provision in the school - other departments and support services, as well as extra-curricular provision or curriculum enhancement. From time to time this might be to address a specific issue arising from the regular Supporter meetings.

*One of mine ... had concerns about her behavioural issues and she had a class that were little monkeys, put it that way, but they were nothing compared to some of the other schools, so I arranged for her to have a day in another school where the behaviour issues were far greater, and when she came back it made her slightly calmer about how she was progressing, because she realised that ... things weren't as bad as she thought they were.*  
(Supporter LA7)

A Head Teacher (LA6) reported a similar strategy to support a probationer who was struggling with learning and teaching strategies. In this case the probationer visited several other classes to

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<sup>3</sup> Associated School Group

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observe teachers using different strategies and was then asked to write feedback identifying areas of his own work in which he could apply these strategies. The Head Teacher of a small primary school (LA3) regarded working with a teacher in a larger school nearby or visiting the nursery as a normal part of the probation experience in that authority.

Supporters also directed probationers to external programmes of support, as well as creating opportunities at school level to address particular needs.

*We have personalised our weekly meeting and used that as a CPD as well. We've had markers' meetings, we've developed resources, we've looked at where interests lie and how we can develop that.*

(Supporter LA1)

### 8.3 Supporting the struggling probationer

A recurrent theme across the transcripts was the impact of supporting probationer teachers who experienced difficulties meeting the SFR in the induction year. Fifteen references were made to the negative impact on colleagues and the wider school community of supporting a struggling probationer in school. In the following three extracts, Head Teachers describe the potential impact on the school community. Powerful language was used in the focus group discussions to describe the consequences of working with 'failing' probationers. This experience was variously described as 'horrific', 'horrendous', 'devastating', 'nothing prepares you for it until it happens' (LA4).

*I can think of a scenario where a Principal Teacher was the supporter with a probationer who was failing significantly. This had an enormous impact, not just upon that teacher but also upon the department and on the Supporter and across the school in some ways, but particularly in the department. It was very, very damaging.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

*For a time I was very concerned last year because my Supporters could not have worked any harder to support my probationers and they then needed support. No matter how hard they were working, the probationers were not engaging with the support that they were trying to put in place. They became demoralised; which meant an additional workload for me because I was not only supporting probationers, but I was supporting my Supporters, who were feeling incredibly de-skilled and just couldn't understand why they couldn't get these girls to pick up, to take commitment, to do what they needed to do. So it is an incredibly complex and difficult thing to have to handle and to manage.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*It was incredibly stressful and it wasn't just the Supporters it hit. It just permeated the whole of the department. It was really, really, difficult to do and at the same time, they were still trying to meet the learning needs of the children.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

Head Teachers reported significant resourcing implications in providing support for struggling probationers. It was suggested that this additional support was drawn from other areas of the school and that consequently other needs might go unmet.

*She got a really disproportionate amount of the Supporter's time - way beyond what she should have got and I only had that luxury because my Depute was non-teaching. That was to the sacrifice of other children who would have got support elsewhere in the department. That was the crisis point and that was what had to be done.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

One Head Teacher expressed frustration at what he or she perceived to be limited scope for damage limitation when serious competence issues arose during the induction year (LA3). Another described how timetabling was used to reduce the impact on pupils of less experienced teachers (LA4). One Head Teacher gave an account of the longer-term implications for pupils and staff who were left to pick up the pieces and re-build parental confidence.

*If it was a permanent member of staff, I could do some damage limitation. I could reduce the impact they would have on that particular class or year group. I cannot do that, even though some days I feel like saying “get your coat, get out of the school”. But my hands are tied, and the authority’s hands are really tied in that respect as well.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*I try and timetable equally so the same class isn’t being hit all the time, but it’s a hard job to take on, to try to keep the school floating anyway.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

*We had parental complaints and parental meetings. There was not a week that I didn’t have a parental meeting with regard to the situation in classes. We still have to try to repair the damage this year, the work we’ve had to do with that group of children. The class teachers have had to pull out all the stops again, additional workload for them, trying to close the gaps that were created.... That girl was damaging my children every time she walked through that door and that’s why after five weeks she was never alone with the class. It was nothing short of horrendous and professionally it devastated me.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

There was consensus across the focus groups on the need to maintain accurate record keeping and follow agreed protocols carefully, especially when working with struggling probationers whom they may have to recommend for cancellation of registration. It was also personally stressful to be faced with such a decision.

*It’s not a particularly comfortable procedure to go through ... you are on the line ... And I think that’s somebody’s career that you’re either saving or, or saving them from a career that they shouldn’t go into.*

(Supporter LA7)

In such circumstances, Supporters were attentive to the need to document processes of support and negotiated targets carefully throughout the year. Head Teachers and Supporters expressed sensitivity to formal requirements for accountability.

*We’re always aware of the legal approach.*

(Supporter LA4)

*The probationer I’ve got who’s struggling, I’ve got a lot of documented evidence and the probationer’s signed it so if it does come to the case where she’s not recommended, I’ve got a lot of evidence to back it up.*

(Supporter LA2)

*You have to provide support continually and if you don’t, then you’re on the carpet. That’s a concern. That might worry Principal Teachers who have been given that responsibility; next minute you’re in the Headquarters explaining yourself.*

(Supporter LA4)

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As one Head Teacher (LA2) observed, the first issue is to get the person to accept that they have a problem to enable the school to help them to overcome it. Supporters in one local authority (LA7) felt that more mature probationers were less open to accepting ideas and suggestions than were younger probationers. They could be forthright in responding to observations that they perceived as critical of them.

Some Head Teachers commented on the need to assume collective responsibility and to draw on the full range of resources available to support struggling probationers. In these cases, care was taken to emphasise that Supporters were not solely responsible for probationer performance, but that school and authority level support was also available.

*I would not want a Supporter to hang on to that problem. I would want them, and I emphasise that at the beginning, to come to see me because it is bigger than just two people. It may take the whole school, indeed the whole authority, to do anything meaningful.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*If you are involved in meetings when you are saying to someone they are not really doing very well, you have a witness. This is important because things will be distorted if you don't. I have someone taking minutes that are agreed on and action points that are agreed on and it becomes perhaps a little more formal. I found I had to go down that route because otherwise it is "oh, that's not my record of the meeting" so you must keep it crystal clear.*

(Head Teacher LA3)

*The support from [the local authority] has been good. You know, they've been on the phone, we have regular visits, again just to cross reference what we're saying and they agreed everything that we said and that, again, as a manager is important, because ... you know you're not imagining it, but you just want someone to say, look, can you just double check this.*

(Head Teacher LA4)

In the last instance the local authority contact came to the school to conduct additional observations. Similarly, a Head Teacher (LA7) reported that the local authority probation manager brought in a highly regarded subject specialist from another school to carry out observations to confirm the school's opinions. One probation manager became more deeply involved in raising the probationer's awareness of the position.

*[The probation manager] came in just a couple of weeks ago to speak to a fresh probationer we've got just now, and it was a pastoral sort of meeting with her. But it was really someone else laying it on the line, you know, this is what could happen ... What will happen if, you know, if there are no changes.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

Two Supporters on one authority suggested that novice Supporters would benefit from training to help them establish a professional relationship from the outset with NQTs in their school. It was noted that as assessors as well as Supporters, experienced teachers performing Supporter roles needed to establish clear parameters and expectations. Two Head Teachers from the same local authority emphasised the need to establish the right atmosphere early in the process, through open discussion.

*It depends on the quality of the relationship between these two people ... but I think equally [important] is the line of communication then back from the Supporter to the Head Teacher ... It's making sure that there is a very honest and open dialogue, so that there's nothing happening secretly, that the probationer is well aware that there are concerns about something, but that this is what we need to do to address it.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

*That's where the training is lacking for the supporter right at the beginning, because the supporter's got to get away from the "I'm just trying to create a relationship with you just now, so I'm going to say everything's okay". We need to be honest right from the beginning.*

(Head Teacher LA7)

## 8.4 Conclusions

All of the participants had serious reservations about the value of the career entry profile as a tool for informing CPD for probationers. They regarded it as vague and often inaccurate. To an extent this may reflect the change of context from student to teacher, with a different level of responsibility and a different level of autonomy. However, there were many instances in which the profile appeared to ignore negative issues and even to be misleading on the overall quality of the individual.

The groups also expressed concerns that assessment of student teachers by universities was insufficiently rigorous in some cases, with students being judged to meet the Standard for Initial Teacher Education despite persistent negative feedback from schools.

Probationers have access to excellent opportunities for CPD, with local authority provision being much better planned than in the early years of the TIS, giving rise to fewer concerns about duplication with school-based CPD. At school level, Head Teachers and Supporters make strenuous efforts to broaden CPD activities beyond simply undertaking courses of study. Some of these, like peer observation or membership of working groups, occur within the school, while external opportunities include visits to other schools or to partner organisations.

The biggest challenge facing a school is that of supporting the struggling probationer. Although all participants agreed that they obtain strong support from local authority probation managers, the impact of a struggling probationer can extend across the whole school and create considerable stress for those in key roles. They have to make every effort to support the probationer while at the same time taking steps to minimise the potential damage to pupils, whose needs were stressed as pre-eminent.

## 9 The contribution of newly qualified teachers to schools

### 9.1 Testimony of Head Teachers and Supporters

Although the focus groups were not asked specifically about the contribution of early career teachers on the schools, in some focus groups Head Teachers and Supporters were keen to comment positively on this. Their comments aligned closely with the findings of the research study on teacher professionalism (GTCS, University of Glasgow, 2008)<sup>4</sup>. They said that probationer teachers are refreshing and energising departments, especially in the context of ageing staff profiles. Participants used words like "zest" and "dynamic" to describe the approach of many probationers, appreciating their command of formative assessment and new learning technologies.

*One particular department was struggling for staff over a couple of years. That had a very bad effect on morale and the performance of their pupils. They were able to get two NQTs and it just so happened that the two NQTs were outstanding. That had a very positive effect. They have become very responsible, competent. They don't need a lot of shepherding and that's had an impact across the department.*

(Head Teacher LA1)

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<sup>4</sup> Hulme, M., Elliot, D., McPhee, A. & Patrick, F. (2008) Professional culture among new entrants to the teaching profession. Edinburgh: GTCS.

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In addition to this new energy, there was evidence that NQTs make a valuable contribution to learning and teaching and to the corporate life of the school.

*I really enjoy working with them. We've had a number of projects that we've done to ... develop things within the department. They have a real incentive to develop and produce materials because obviously they are trying to impress. They're looking for a job so, you know, you tend to get a lot of extremely good work out of them.*

(Supporter LA1)

*Every year you learn so much from probationers because they're fresh out of university, they have got all the latest things.*

(Supporter LA6)

*Some of our lot have all joined the same working party and they are working in a cross-curricular way to do things and that's just been great.*

(Supporter LA1)

*The one we have just now ... she's thrown herself into absolutely everything that's going on at the school - working groups, industrial Wednesday, volunteering for every after school session that there is, and peer support, peer observation - enthusiasm beyond belief.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

*We've averaged about five, six for the last year. We've been very fortunate that they've been, a few have been real characters. They have not just done their subject; they've got into the whole life of the school, and therefore the reputation of NQTs is actually an extremely positive one.*

(Head Teacher LA2)

## **9.2 Conclusion**

Despite reservations about the performance and potential impact of a small minority of struggling probationers, the contribution of most NQTs is very positive and is appreciated by Head Teachers and other members of staff.

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