

DRIVING FORWARD PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS



Reflecting on Experiences of the Flexible (Alternative) Route to Full Registration

Research Report

October 2009

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APPENDIX – Confidential Questionnaire

1 Background to the Research

This research took place with a view to gaining insight into the experiences of teachers who followed the Flexible Route¹ to full registration between 2002 and 2008. The purpose of the research was to evaluate the levels of support received by teachers on the Flexible Route, in order to inform developments in policy and in practice to enhance that experience.

Teachers may enter the Flexible Route for a variety of reasons. In some cases they are teachers who are eligible for the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) but who find themselves unable to accept a placement on that scheme or who choose to follow the Flexible Route for personal reasons. Most other participants are teachers who are not eligible for the TIS as they trained outside Scotland.

2 Methodology

The research was conducted through a survey of all teachers who had gained full registration by this Route between its establishment in 2002 and the end of March 2008. Professional Services provided a list of 4006 names of teachers for this purpose, though it may be that some of these ought not to have been included as they included applicants for Exceptional Admission who had been granted provisional registration pending receipt of some relevant documentation. Although technically on the Flexible Route, they were not genuine participants, and this was reflected in a small number of responses from teachers querying why they had been sent questionnaires.

The list was divided into those for whom GTCS held email addresses (2428) and those for whom GTCS had only home addresses (1578). We sent questionnaires to each teacher by one route only, to avoid the risk of duplication, and received a total of 350 responses. Those who were invited to respond electronically did so by accessing an online survey through the software "Survey Monkey" and to aid processing of data we entered the paper responses into the same online survey.

In designing the questionnaire, Ron Clark and I sought to test the extent to which the Flexible Route experience replicates that of the TIS. We divide the questionnaire into the following sections:

- ❖ Details about the participating teacher - sector, age range, type of initial teaching qualification, university of initial teaching qualification, nature of teaching service during each year of the probationary period, sector in which currently teaching, nature of current teaching post, current employer;
- ❖ Questions relating to the provision of supporter meetings - frequency, focus, value in development, agreed actions, nature of meetings;
- ❖ Questions relating to the provision of observed teaching sessions - frequency, focus, nature of feedback, value in development;
- ❖ Questions relating to the provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) experiences - local authority provision, school provision, use of initial teacher education profile to plan CPD, match of activities with Standard for Full Registration (SFR);
- ❖ Questions relating to the GTC Scotland probation website - value in providing support and guidance, value of specific sections;
- ❖ Questions relating to the probation process - encouragement of reflection, enhancement of classroom skills, provision of suitably varied timetable; and
- ❖ Questions relating to the overall experience - overall quality, quality of support provided by local authority, by school and by GTCS, development targets linked to SFR, preparation for full registration; extent to which CPD has addressed development targets.

We constructed most questions as statements with which respondents were invited to "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree" or "strongly disagree". There was no neutral option. At the end of each section there was an opportunity for those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to discuss their reasons in a free text response.

¹ Although, when the research was conducted, the title was the Alternative Route, the report will use the new terminology of the Flexible Route throughout. The original title was used in the questionnaire so has been retained there.

3 Quantitative Results

Table 1: Demography of respondents

a Sector

Sector	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
Primary	147	42.0
Secondary	201	57.4
No response	2	0.6

b Age group

Age group	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
21 - 30	141	40.3
31 - 40	99	28.3
41 - 50	66	18.6
51 - 60	40	11.4
No response	4	1.1

c Initial Teacher Education qualification achieved

Qualification	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
B Ed Primary	44	12.6
PGDE (Primary)	28	8.0
PGDE (Secondary)	79	22.6
Other	190	54.3
No response	9	2.6

Table 2: Nature of teaching service as a probationer

a Numbers of responding teachers by employer in each survey year

Local authority	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Aberdeen	1	2	7	13	10	6
Aberdeenshire	3	6	8	9	9	8
Angus						
Argyll & Bute			2		1	1
Clackmannanshire					2	3
Dumfries & Galloway	4	3	3	10	10	3
Dundee			3	3		3
East Ayrshire	1	1	2	3	1	
East Dunbartonshire		1	1	1	1	2
East Lothian	1	2	1			3
East Renfrewshire		1	4	5	1	1
Edinburgh	6	8	11	14	15	11
Falkirk	1	3	5	4	4	4
Fife	3	3	7	7	9	8
Glasgow	6	11	14	18	17	14
Highland		5	10	13	11	7
Inverclyde		1		1		1
Midlothian	1	3	1	4	7	3
Moray	1	3	2	1	2	2
North Ayrshire	1	2	2	4	2	3
North Lanarkshire	1	4	5	4	7	5
Orkney					1	1
Perth & Kinross	1		2	5	3	2
Renfrewshire	1	2	3	3	2	3
Scottish Borders	4	1	1	3	2	1
Shetland	1	1	2	1		
South Ayrshire						
South Lanarkshire			2	5	2	1
Stirling			1	1	1	3
West Dunbartonshire	1	2	1	3	5	2
West Lothian	1	7	8	10	7	5
Western Isles	1					
Unspecified local authority			3	5	6	5
Total number of teachers working for Scottish local authorities	37	63	103	140	128	103
Scottish independent schools	12	24	19	25	22	19
Scottish colleges	6	4	3	1	1	2
Teaching in England	27	17	18	15	12	10
Supply agency	1	4	3	2	1	0
Private sector training provider	2	2	2	1	1	2
Teaching overseas	20	13	11	9	10	10
Other	1	3	1	0	5	1

Totals will be less than the sum of individual authorities as some teachers taught in more than one authority in a single year. In 2006-07 and 2007-08 one teacher responded "Scotland wide". In some cases, teachers also taught in local authority and independent schools in the same year or in both a Scottish and an English local authority. In 2003-04 and 2004-05 one teacher working in a local authority in England also worked for a supply agency.

b Number of establishments (schools, colleges or other places of work) worked in

Number of establishments	Number of teachers					
	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
1	81	85	104	132	121	94
2	5	15	19	20	19	16
3	5	2	9	8	4	7
4	1	3	6	5	7	4
5	4	1	8	5	5	2
6		1	1	2		1
7		1			1	
8	1	1	1		1	
9					1	
10	2	1		1	2	
11				1		
12		1			2	
14				1		
15		1		1	1	
30			1			
40				1		
50					1	
61						1
Unspecified ("several", "various", supply", "too many to count")	5	3	3	4	6	5
Total number of respondents	104	115	152	181	171	130

c Average length of teaching post

Length of post	Number of teachers					
	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8
Up to one week	3	3	0	1	0	1
Less than one month	1	1	2	4	3	3
One to three months	4	6	10	7	14	5
Four to six months	10	10	19	22	18	18
Seven months to one year	41	54	61	86	82	54
More than one year	29	21	29	39	36	28
Unspecified (supply)	5	3	6	2	4	3
Unspecified or varied widely	1	8	14	11	5	4
Total number of respondents	94	106	141	172	162	116

These tables show that, although a minority of respondents had short-term or supply contracts that involved working in many schools, it was much more common for teachers to serve in one, or at most two schools, in a particular academic year, with between 60 and 70% having average lengths of post of at least seven months (two school terms), though there was a slight tendency for contract lengths to fall after 2004.

Table 3: Nature of current teaching service

a Sector in which teaching currently

Sector	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
Nursery	6	1.7
Primary	129	36.9
Secondary	184	52.6
Special Educational Needs	28	8.0
Other	25	7.1
No response	0	0

Note: totals come to more than 350 as some teachers responded in two categories (eg primary and Special Educational Needs).

b Nature of current teaching post

Nature of post	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
Full-time permanent	193	55.1
Part-time permanent	38	10.9
Full-time temporary	44	12.6
Part-time temporary	19	5.4
Supply	51	14.6
Other	17	4.9
No response	2	0.6

Note: totals come to more than 350 as some teachers responded in more than one category (eg part-time permanent and part-time temporary or either of these with supply).

It is encouraging that almost two thirds of those achieving full registration by this route are now in permanent posts.

Evaluating the experience

The following tables summarise the responses to questions about various aspects of the probation experience, each table being followed by some commentary on key issues arising from the statistics or from open ended responses. Though these were invited where probationers disagreed or strongly disagreed with statements, some who gave more positive responses also chose to amplify their thoughts in this way.

It should perhaps be noted that in almost all cases only about 260 probationers provided responses to each individual statement, with a smaller number responding to those about the usefulness of the GTCS probation web site.

Table 4: Responses relating to Supporter meetings

a Pattern of supporter meetings

Supporter meetings occurred	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
Weekly	61	17.4
Fortnightly	39	11.1
Monthly	46	13.1
Other	121	34.6
No response	89	25.4

b Evaluation of supporter meetings

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
The frequency of supporter meetings was appropriate	68	25.8	96	36.4	50	18.9	50	18.9	264
The focus of each supporter meeting was pre-defined	55	21.0	106	40.5	53	20.2	48	18.3	262
Discussions at supporter meetings were helpful in my development as a teacher	85	32.4	110	42.0	26	9.9	41	15.6	262
Clear actions were defined at the end of each meeting	71	27.1	111	42.4	35	13.4	45	17.2	262
Supporter meetings were well structured and collegiate	69	26.3	104	39.7	43	16.4	46	17.6	262

Note: Percentages given for all statements in this and following tables are of total responses to each individual statement.

Key issues

Twenty three respondents indicated that they either had no mentor or supporter at all or that, where they worked in several schools, such support was provided only in some schools. On a series of short term contracts or on supply they were not in schools for long enough to develop a mentoring relationship. Some respondents went further, saying that they were classed as non-induction or regarded as “just supply” therefore told that they were not entitled to formal support. In a few cases, schools appeared to be unaware of the requirements of the Flexible Route.

Although over 60% of those responding felt that the frequency of supporter meetings was appropriate, only just over a quarter met fortnightly or more frequently, which implies that many respondents did not perceive a need to meet as regularly as this. However, some teachers reported that even where they had a mentor or supporter, they had no, or very few, supporter meetings. Often, teachers noted that as they were teaching full timetables, or as their supporters or line managers were under pressure themselves, any meetings were held at lunchtimes, after school or “squeezed into times when the mentor and I were free”. One respondent even alleged that the school “made them up for the final profile”.

Where mentoring support was provided, respondents’ experiences varied widely. From the table, almost 75% of respondents found supporter meetings valuable in their professional development, with two-thirds of them agreeing that the meetings were well structured and collegiate and 70% that they defined clear actions. There could be debate as to whether this is a source of satisfaction or of concern, as between a quarter and a third of probationers disagreed with these statements, suggesting that practice is far from consistent and that some schools do not provide Flexible Route probationers with the support they need. A few respondents noted that, all though they had access to mentors, the mentors were not sure of their role and appeared to have had little or no training.

Among those who provided open responses, some found the support provided to be weak and haphazard, feeling that they were burdens on the school, while others described the support from Head Teachers, other members of Senior Management Teams or Principal Teachers to as excellent. Even where formal support was limited or absent, twenty two respondents said they received valuable informal support and advice from Head Teachers, Principal Teachers or other colleagues.

Table 5: Responses relating to observed sessions

a Pattern of observed sessions

Observed sessions occurred	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Survey Population
Monthly	97	27.7
Other	168	48.0
No response	85	24.3

b Evaluation of observed sessions

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
The frequency of observed sessions was appropriate	76	28.6	122	45.9	42	15.8	26	9.8	266
The focus of each observation was pre-planned	73	27.3	115	43.1	52	19.5	27	10.1	267
Clear, specific feedback (oral and/or written) was provided after the session	103	38.6	119	44.6	25	9.4	20	7.5	267
Observed sessions were helpful in my development as a teacher	101	37.8	121	45.3	22	8.2	23	8.6	267

Key issues

As with supporter meetings, three quarters of respondents felt that they had an appropriate number of observed sessions from which they received clear, specific feedback, though slightly fewer agreed that the focus of each observation was pre-planned. Over 80% found the experience helpful in developing their teaching abilities.

Again, this leaves a significant minority who did not receive this type of support. Such respondents often reported that they were not seen as a priority for the school as they were not “real” probationers or that it was difficult to fit in observations during short stays in a school. Typically, they said that they only had observed sessions either as part of general school observations or to assist with completion of the final probation report. A small number expressed their frustration that observations had been organised and subsequently cancelled or that the observer had simply failed to turn up.

Table 6: Responses relating to CPD experiences

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Local authority (or other) CPD programmes provided a worthwhile, balanced range of CPD opportunities	55	20.7	144	54.1	39	14.7	28	10.5	266
School CPD programmes provided a worthwhile, balanced range of CPD opportunities	56	21.1	147	55.5	44	16.6	18	6.8	265
Local authority (or other) and school CPD opportunities complemented each other to provide a balanced range of CPD activity without duplication	41	15.5	146	55.1	57	21.5	21	7.9	265
The targets set out in my university career entry / ITE profile were used to plan my CPD activities	29	11.2	96	37.2	85	32.9	48	18.6	258
CPD activities undertaken were clearly matched with specific areas of the SFR	56	21.2	128	48.5	51	19.3	29	11.0	264

Key issues

Again, about three quarters of respondents agreed that programmes provided by local authorities and schools met their CPD needs in a balanced way, with slightly fewer agreeing that their activities matched specific areas of the SFR. However, a significantly lower proportion, just under half, agreed that the targets in their career entry profiles were used in planning CPD activities. Some probationers graduated before such profiles existed or came from overseas, but ten respondents stated that no-one looked at their career entry profile, while a few stated that they did not contain relevant targets anyway.

The open responses reveal that the greatest frustration shared by many respondents was that, because they were not on the Teacher Induction Scheme, they were not permitted to attend probationer CPD events arranged by their local authority, except in a few cases where these were twilight sessions. Though in some cases this was because they were on full timetables and schools were unable or unwilling to release them (especially when on supply), others felt that it was another example of their being treated less favourably than those on the TIS – one commented “Felt ostracised from other probationers”.

Table 7: Responses relating to the GTC Scotland probation website

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
The probation website was useful and relevant and provided support and guidance throughout my Flexible Route experience	20	8.5	121	51.5	64	27.2	30	12.8	235
The “hints and tips” section and “your experiences” sections were helpful and provided advice I could use in the classroom.	19	8.2	119	51.1	62	26.6	33	14.2	233

Key issues

Many respondents undertook their probationary service before the GTCS probation website went active in January 2007. This may explain the large number of teachers who were unaware of its existence or who stated that they did not use it, two of whom stated that they were not allowed access to the site while others commented that they did not have time or were “too busy teaching”.

Few respondents chose to comment on the content of the site by open responses, and of those who did their views varied from “probably the only positive thing throughout the whole experience” to criticism of the “hints and tips” section as unrealistic and over-optimistic, making out that problems can always be solved easily.

Table 8: Responses relating to the probation process

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
The probation process encouraged, and provided opportunities for, reflection on practice	54	20.5	137	51.9	41	15.5	32	12.1	264
The probation process encouraged, and provided opportunities to enhance, my classroom management skills	67	25.4	133	50.4	32	12.1	32	12.1	264
The probation process provided opportunities for me to teach a suitably varied timetable	79	29.9	116	43.9	39	14.8	30	11.4	264

Key issues

As with previous sections, roughly three quarters of responses were positive, suggesting that for the majority of probationers the process enabled them to reflect on their practice, enhance their classroom skills and teach a varied timetable. The minority who did not find the process assisted them to achieve this progress is, however, significant.

Both of these types of experience are reflected in the open responses. Some clearly found it a very valuable process, commenting that exposure to a range of classes equipped the probationer with confidence and skills or that teaching in a variety of schools offered a depth of experience and the opportunity to see a range of good practice. One even remarked that it is a more realistic process than the Teacher Induction Scheme, as it reflects more closely the reality of teaching as a fully registered teacher.

More common, though, as might be expected in an open response section inviting additional comment by those who disagreed with the statements, were negative reactions. There were frequent references to being “thrown in at the deep end” and to being treated as an ordinary member of staff, not as a probationer. One commented that “schools cannot be bothered with Flexible Route probationers, especially short-term contracts”, a theme that recurred in responses elsewhere in the survey, particularly among those whose experience had been largely of supply work.

Table 9: Responses to the overall experience

Statement	Excellent		Good		Average		Poor		Very Poor		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Rate the quality of your overall experiences of the Flexible Route	62	23.2	86	32.2	47	17.6	38	14.2	34	12.7	267
Rate the quality of support generally provided by your Local Authority (or other)	48	18.1	72	27.2	54	20.4	46	17.4	45	17.0	265
Rate the quality of support generally provided in your school	101	38.0	72	27.1	46	17.3	23	8.6	24	9.0	266
Rate the quality of support generally provided when contacting GTC Scotland	56	21.1	100	37.6	57	21.4	34	21.4	19	7.1	266
Rate the quality of support provided on the probation website	20	8.9	78	34.7	83	36.9	16	7.1	28	12.4	225

Key issues

Of those who responded, just over half rated their experience overall as excellent or good, but still one in four rated it as poor or very poor. Support from schools and from GTCS were regarded much more highly than support from local authorities, which received positive ratings from less than half of the probationers and negative ratings by one in three.

Again, the open responses provided a wide range of views. As in other sections, some probationers on the Flexible Route felt that schools and local authorities regarded them primarily as cheap supply cover or as “ordinary” teachers rather than as probationer teachers who needed support. There were further comments about lack of awareness of the Flexible Route, one alleging that a local authority officer said the probationer was “entitled to nothing as a supply teacher first and a probationer second”, while another was of the opinion that the Flexible Route is seen by schools as a second class route, schools being unwilling to take responsibility for supply teachers who may have only brief periods of service. There were also examples of probationers who had served in more than one school and found they received very different levels of support in different schools.

It is sometimes possible to identify specific groups of probationers. Two who identified themselves as being from overseas were particularly negative. The first stated that it was the worst professional experience of her/his career, with the local authority “horrible” and school managers taking advantage of probationer status by “blackmailing” the teacher into accepting extra work. The second felt discriminated against as an overseas probationer. Three probationers who worked at independent schools were highly critical of their experiences and felt that someone should be monitoring the treatment of probationers in these schools, though a fourth praised the “open dialogue and constant improvement” offered at a different independent school.

By contrast, some enjoyed the experience immensely, reporting gratitude at the levels of support offered at school level (though positive comments about local authority support were rare). It is clear that some supporters, senior managers and often other colleagues made significant efforts to support probationers. One mentor even continued to offer support when the probationer moved to another school.

The relatively small number of people who commented additionally on support from GTCS tended to be critical, though sometimes it was clear that they did not understand the functions of the Council or had unreasonable expectations (mostly who were unhappy with the recognition offered to their qualifications or experience from outside Scotland including the person who commented on the Council’s “ludicrous ignorance” in refusing to recognise History of Art as a History degree). Both here and elsewhere in the responses some teachers appear to think that it is GTCS that owns the Flexible Route and sets the requirements. The most common complaints about service were of lack of consistency in advice being offered on contacting Council officers or about slow replies to requests for information.

Table 10: Responses relating to teacher development

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total Responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Development targets linked to specific attributes of the SFR were defined at the end of probationary service	46	18.0	141	55.3	42	16.5	26	10.2	255
The Flexible Route has prepared me well for my initial experiences as a fully registered teacher	89	34.4	113	43.6	28	10.8	29	11.2	259
I have been able to undertake CPD experiences which have enabled me to address the development targets set out at the completion of my probationary service	60	23.4	128	50.0	42	16.4	26	10.2	256

Key issues

These figures reinforce the messages elsewhere in this report that the majority of Flexible Route probationers believe that their experiences prepare them well for future teaching employment, but that a significant minority of about one quarter do not agree with this.

4 Key issues from open responses to the opportunity to make other comments at the end of the survey

One hundred and nineteen respondents took the opportunity to make additional comments in the open response section. Of these, only a very few made positive comments about the Flexible Route itself, those who did noting that it gave them experience of “what teaching is really like”, preparing them well for the responsibility of being a full-time teacher, or that it was beneficial to have worked in a range of schools with a variety of teaching colleagues from whom they learned different things. Some others praised the schools in which they worked or their supporter, head teacher or other colleagues for helping them through.

Most of those who responded were much more negative. Their issues fell into a number of categories:

General treatment

Some reported a feeling of isolation and abandonment. One commented, “I was made to feel I was the only person completing the Flexible probation”, while another “was made to feel of little value or worth” by the school head teacher. Others referred to being thrown in at the deep end and left to fend for themselves, to “sink or swim”. Some also asserted that there was little knowledge about the Flexible Route at school, or in a couple of cases even at local authority, level.

Several respondents, including some who reported positive experiences, observed that it was chance whether they landed in a school with supportive staff or not.

Supply teaching

Both in this section and elsewhere in the survey there were numerous references to schools seeing the participants “just” as supply teachers, with their probationer status secondary and even a burden for the school. This was summarised by one respondent who wrote, “Schools calling for an emergency supply teacher do not want to have to mentor and observe her, when she’s probably only there for a day or two. Some schools have turned me down because I was a probationer and they wanted a supply teacher for a couple of weeks and didn’t want to bother with me”. Such a view gained support from a teacher trained in England who said that “some schools view probationers as less than competent or a nuisance, rather than as trained professionals”.

A further issue in relying on supply work to complete probationary service was that the work can be erratic and even when available it does not permit the teacher to establish a relationship with the pupils, nor to experience planning and delivering a coherent series of lessons

Coming from another country

Some of those who identified themselves as coming from, or training in, a country other than Scotland had particular difficulties to overcome. In some cases these related to complaints about the handling of their cases by GTC Scotland, though some of these were based on misunderstandings of the role of the Council or on its powers. For example, complaints that GTC Scotland officers “did not understand” the system in England in some cases seemed to be based on an expectation that transfer of registration should be automatic regardless of the nature of their English status. Others complained that the process was too lengthy and bureaucratic, or that GTC Scotland gave insufficient credit for teaching experience in their countries of origin, leading to very long probationary periods. One summed up the process and “not easy or welcoming” and “felt like I was trying to take a job from someone who was ‘more’ entitled to it as they had trained in Scotland”.

Some made suggestions for improvement of the system. One felt it would have been beneficial for people from outwith Scotland to have a briefing on the McCrone agreement so that they knew the hours they were required to work and on the outlines of the Scottish curriculum, especially the 5-14 guidelines. A similar thought occurred from a teacher who had found difficulties in grasping the Scottish education system because of the nature of supply work. This respondent thought that an induction period for overseas qualified teachers would give more consistency to their development.

GTC Scotland service

Some responses revealed that even probationers who had trained in Scotland lacked an understanding of the role of GTC Scotland in administering probation. One probationer complained that family circumstances prevented the teacher from taking a place on the TIS so (s)he was “forced” to use the Flexible Route. The respondent then observed that “the GTC has to recognise that people’s circumstances can change and incorporate a more flexible attitude towards part-time probationary service”. A teacher with two young children made a similar observation that she could not risk being posted at a distance from home so had to enter the Flexible Route with service in an independent school. This teacher believed that “in an effort to be ‘fair’ to everyone the system may alienate and push away excellent teachers. There *must* be some consideration of personal circumstances in the allocation of probation posts if the scheme is to be a success in the future”. These responses show a clear misunderstanding of what GTC Scotland can and cannot do, as was reflected in similar complaints by other respondents, one of whom maintained that the only TIS place offered would have involved a 250 mile round trip every day, but that “my local authority didn’t know I existed and would have taken me on had the GTC informed them of my situation”, an option not actually open to GTC Scotland. Perhaps there still needs to be more clarity in the information provided to probationers about the allocations to the TIS.

An unfair system

The issue which caused most bitterness among respondents was the comparison many made between their experience and that of participants in the TIS. They felt it to be unfair that they taught full timetables, therefore in their eyes had gained more experience than TIS probationers, had access to much less (and sometimes grudging) support and had fewer CPD opportunities. Yet they were being paid at point 0 on the scale and had to remain on probation for much longer than those on the TIS. In some cases they continued to face disadvantage even after obtaining full registration as some employers placed them at point 1 on the pay scale, putting them a year behind graduates of the TIS who had completed registration in one year. Many felt very strongly about these issues, describing it variously as “degrading”, “frustrating and unfair” and even “discriminatory”.

Some expressed their resentment at the requirement to complete 270 days on probationary service, even when they had worked full-time for a year, actually doing more teaching than those on the TIS, especially as their employers continued to pay them at level 0 for the whole probationary period.

Enhancing the probationary experience

Some respondents provided suggestions for ways of enhancing the probationary experience.

- ❖ As some found a lack of knowledge of the Flexible Route in schools and even at local authority level, it would be helpful to provide to local authorities, schools and probationers simple, clear information about the requirements of the Flexible Route, including timescales for completion of Interim and Final Profiles, and the roles of the probationer, supporter, head teacher and local authority in fulfilling these requirements. This should be featured on the GTCS website²;
- ❖ Given the lack of support at local authority level experienced by many respondents, it would be valuable for each local authority to have a named person responsible for supporting Flexible Route probationers
- ❖ The final report should be from the head teacher of the school in which the probationer served the longest, not from the last school where the service may have been very brief;
- ❖ As noted above, candidates coming from outside Scotland could benefit from an induction into the Scottish educational system and curricular requirements; and
- ❖ It would be valuable for probationers on the Flexible Route to have access to at least some of the CPD opportunities provided by local authorities for those following the TIS.

² It is likely that revisions to the GTCS website since the survey was carried out have already addressed this issue.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Access to support

There can be no doubt that the Flexible Route is a lottery for probationers. There are two elements to this: the number of schools in which the probationer served and the level of support provided by schools and local authorities regardless of the length of service. This support can be seen as “arbitrary and inconsistent depending on the institution where they serve their probationary time”, as one teacher from the USA described it. To an extent, this is unavoidable, as some probationers have long-term posts enabling them to complete their probation in a single school, while others have a mixture of experiences that may include a series of short term contracts or erratic supply work. However, it is surely unsatisfactory that access to support should be so much a matter of chance.

Recommendation 1

GTC Scotland and its partner stakeholders should review and clarify the arrangements and requirements of the Flexible Route, in order to maximise the benefits of the process. This should include consideration of whether it would be appropriate for the final report recommending full registration should come from the head teacher of the school in which the probationer served for longest, rather than just the most recent head teacher.

Nature of support

The inconsistency referred to above is reflected in respondents’ descriptions of attitudes towards them at school or at local authority level. While many recorded their gratitude to colleagues or head teachers for their support, a significant minority reported great difficulties in this area, with forty nine making specific reference to such issues in their open responses. Some of these simply said that the teacher received no support or was treated as an ordinary member of staff or ‘just’ as a supply teacher, not as a probationer. Others went further, recording actual refusals to provide support because, as non-induction or supply teachers they, in the words imputed to one head teacher, “didn’t warrant any support”. It may be worth debating whether probationers on the Flexible Route should have some form of specified entitlement to support, and if so what that might entail.

There are too many such references for this to be dismissed as carping by a few dissatisfied people. Together with references to schools or local authorities (see especially the key issues relating to *Table 9*) being unaware of the fact that the teacher was a probationer or appearing not to have great knowledge of the Flexible Route, there may be a case for GTC Scotland conducting a campaign to raise awareness of the Flexible Route at local authority level to ensure that all probationers are given at least a reasonable level of support. The issue of probationary support for supply teachers is worthy of particular attention.

Where support was offered, probationers in general found that the supporter meetings and observed sessions were of value in developing their skills as classroom teachers, though a few referred to uncertainty on the part of some mentors as to their role. This suggests that in some schools people who have not been supporters in the TIS may be fulfilling this role for Flexible Route probationers, and it may be appropriate to remind local authorities of the need for training before someone takes on this role in either context.

Recommendation 2

GTC Scotland and its partner stakeholders should review the guidance provided to schools and local authorities to seek to provide more consistent levels of support for probationers on short-term or supply contracts. This guidance should clarify the support needs and entitlements of probationers and the responsibilities of schools and local authorities to provide it.

Recommendation 3

GTC Scotland should conduct an awareness raising campaign to raise awareness among schools and local authorities to remind them of these needs and responsibilities.

Recommendation 4

In order to simplify administration and provide more consistency of support, each local authority should be encouraged to have a named person responsible for Flexible Route probationers.

Teachers from outwith Scotland

Given the variety of backgrounds from which such probationers may come, it is important that GTC Scotland continues to review and refine the information available to support them and to ensure that relevant GTC Scotland officers receive any necessary training to ensure consistency in the advice they provide.

The suggestion of an induction into the Scottish educational system for those training elsewhere may be worth investigating. Perhaps rather than induction a briefing publication would be helpful to ensure that probationers are aware of key initiatives such as A Curriculum for Excellence as well as details on the respective roles of national government, local authorities, schools and GTC Scotland.

Recommendation 5

GTC Scotland, perhaps in partnership with the Scottish Government, should prepare a briefing publication outlining the key features of the Scottish education system and major policy initiatives to assist teachers moving to Scotland from other countries.

Status of probationer teachers on the Flexible Route

Although it is not intentional, there does exist a perception among many Flexible Route probationers that the process discriminates against them. The facts that most of them teach full timetables, often have less access to CPD opportunities, formal mentoring support or classroom observations than participants in the TIS, yet are paid at the same rate, produce understandable resentments. These are reinforced by the requirement to teach for more than one full year under these conditions and at the same rate of salary, and that some report they are then placed at lower levels than they feel would be appropriate once fully registered, especially where prior service does not appear to be taken into consideration in post-probationary placements.

Recommendation 6

There should be a review of the conditions applicable to teachers undertaking the Flexible Route in terms of the length of probationary service required of them and the appropriate terms for their remuneration during and after probationary service.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

GTC Scotland and its partner stakeholders should review and clarify the arrangements and requirements of the Flexible Route, in order to maximise the benefits of the process. This should include consideration of whether it would be appropriate for the final report recommending full registration to come from the head teacher of the school in which the probationer served for longest, rather than just the most recent head teacher.

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CONFIDENTIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Reflecting on Experiences of the Alternative Route

Please use black or blue ink to complete this questionnaire.
Please place a cross (x) in the appropriate box where boxed options are presented.

SECTION A – PERSONAL/CAREER DETAILS

- 1 Indicate your sector: Primary Secondary
- 2 Indicate your age group: 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60
- 3 Indicate the Initial Teacher Education qualification you achieved:
BEd (Primary) PGDE (P) PGDE (S)
Other Please specify

4 At which University did you complete your teacher education?

5 What was the nature of your teaching service in each academic year whilst you were a probationer teacher?
N.B. 'or other' allows you to denote varying contexts, e.g. in an independent school.

2002/03

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

2003/04

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

2004/05

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

2005/06

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

2006/07

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

2007/08

Local authority (or other) employed in	
Number of schools worked in	
Average length of teaching post	

6 In which sector are you currently teaching?

Nursery Primary Secondary Special Educational Needs

Other Please specify

7 What is the nature of your current teaching post?

Full-time Permanent Part-time Permanent Full-time Temporary

Part-time Temporary Supply

Other Please specify

8 In which local authority (or other) are you currently employed?

For each of the statements in sections B1 to B4 and C below, please show your degree of agreement on a scale of 1 - 4 by placing a cross in the one box which best reflects your personal opinion.

SECTION B – EXPERIENCES OF THE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

This section consists of a series of questions to elicit views on your experiences of the Alternative Route.

B1 – Supporter Meetings (Meetings between you and an in-school mentor/supporter)

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree
	1		2		3		4
9	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
10	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
11	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
12	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
13	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

- 9 The frequency of supporter meetings was appropriate.
- 10 The focus of each supporter meeting was pre-defined.
- 11 Discussions at supporter meetings were helpful in my development as a teacher.
- 12 Clear actions were defined at the end of each meeting.
- 13 Supporter meetings were well structured and collegiate
- 14 Supporter Meetings occurred:

Weekly Fortnightly Monthly Other

If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the statements presented in questions 9 to 13, use this space to discuss your responses and suggest any improvements that might be made to the Supporter Meeting process:

B2 – Observed Sessions (Observation of your teaching by your mentor and/or others)

	1	2	3	4
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

19 Observed Sessions occurred:

Monthly Other

If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the statements presented in questions 15 to 18, use this space to discuss your responses and suggest any improvements that might be made to the Observed Sessions process:

B3 – Continuing Professional Development Experiences

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	1	2	3	4
20 Local authority (or other) CPD programmes provided a worthwhile, balanced range of CPD opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21 School CPD programmes provided a worthwhile, balanced range of CPD opportunities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22 Local authority (or other) and school CPD programmes complemented each other to provide a balanced range of CPD activity without duplication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23 The targets set out in my university career entry/ITE profile were used to plan my CPD activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24 CPD activities undertaken were clearly matched with specific areas of the Standard for Full Registration (SFR).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the statements presented in questions 20 to 24, use this space to discuss your responses and suggest any improvements that might be made to the CPD Activities process:

B4 – Probation Website

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 25 The probation website was useful and relevant and provided support and guidance throughout my Alternative route experience | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26 The “hints and tips” section and “your experiences” section were helpful and provided advice I could use in the classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 27 Please use this space to discuss your responses and suggest any improvements we could make to the site. | | | | |

B4 – General

- | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 28 The probation process encouraged, and provided opportunities for, reflection on practice. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29 The probation process encouraged, and provided opportunities to enhance, my classroom management skills. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 The probation process provided opportunities for me to teach a suitably varied timetable. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the statements presented in questions 25 to 30, use this space to discuss your responses and suggest any improvements that might be made:

B5 – Overall Rating of Experiences

On the five point scale provided:

	Excellent 1	Good 2	Average 3	Poor 4	Very poor 5
31 Rate the quality of your overall experiences on the Alternative Route.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32 Rate the quality of support generally provided by your Local Authority (or other).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33 Rate the quality of support generally provided in your school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34 Rate the quality of support generally provided when contacting GTC Scotland.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35 Rate the quality of support provided on the probation website.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you provided a poor or very poor rating to any of questions 31 to 35, please use this space to discuss your responses:

SECTION C – ALTERNATIVE ROUTE : FULLY REGISTERED TEACHER LINKS

This section consists of a series of questions to elicit views relating to your initial experiences as a fully registered teacher, i.e. beyond probation.

	Strongly Agree 1	Agree 2	Disagree 3	Strongly Disagree 4
32 Development targets linked to specific attributes of the SFR were defined at the end of probationary service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33 The Alternative route has prepared me well for my initial experiences as a fully registered teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34 I have been able to undertake CPD experiences which have enabled me to address the development targets set out at the completion of my probationary service.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you disagreed or strongly disagreed with any of the statements presented in questions 32 to 34, use this space to discuss your response:

35 In light of your teaching experiences as a fully registered teacher, identify any specific areas of CPD activity that you would particularly welcome:

SECTION D – ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to make any other comments relating to the topics covered in this questionnaire.

If you would be willing to participate in a discussion group to further explore issues arising from responses to this questionnaire please provide your contact details below.

GTC Scotland aims to promote equality and diversity in all its activities

GTC Scotland

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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
Scotland

Direct weblinks

Main site:

www.gtcs.org.uk

Probation department:

www.gtcs.org.uk/probation

Probation site for teachers:

www.probationerteacherscotland.org.uk

Registration department:

www.gtcs.org.uk/registration

Chartered teachers:

www.gtcs.org.uk/charteredteacher

Professional recognition:

www.gtcs.org.uk/professionalrecognition

Professional conduct:

www.gtcs.org.uk/professionalconduct

Research:

www.gtcs.org.uk/research

Code: GTCS.....