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## **Advanced Skills Teachers and Excellent Teachers: A critique of current policy from a national and a global perspective**

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### **Background**

In recognition of the need for schools to attract and retain excellent classroom teachers as well as raise student attainment by broadening the skills and knowledge base of schools, the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) role was introduced in 1998; the term derives originally from Australia. Established now for just over 10 years in England, the current estimate is that there are around 4,500 serving ASTs. An OfSTED survey of the initial development of the role in 2001, a follow up study in 2003 and a more thorough review undertaken by CfBT in 2004 were all largely positive about the value of the role. However, they also expressed some uncertainty over its long term value and at that time there were no plans for the Excellent Teacher [ET] role, introduced in 2006. This role, the ET, has had almost no impact so far with only 67 teachers recruited in 2009. A number of other countries are experimenting with comparable roles, for example the AST designation is still in use in Australia, the Highly Accomplished teacher in the USA and The Chartered Teacher in Scotland and now Wales. How does the AST role compare with other models and can it be said that there is a policy for the development of expert teachers in England?

### **Research Questions**

This paper will present the main findings from a study that focuses on the experiences of the current AST workforce and their views of that role and of the Excellent Teacher initiative. Key questions to be considered relate to the experience of being an AST; the assessment process; AST management and deployment as well as professional development within the role. The research will also report on the views of LA AST co-ordinators who have developed strong local policies [Goodwyn and Fidler, 2003] that might inform a more national policy. ASTs themselves are asked to put their development [or lack of it] into a perspective, do they consider themselves part of a key policy development? Their views and experiences will be compared to those of the Chartered Teacher and the Highly Accomplished teacher.

### **Methods**

The research methods for this study are a large scale, on-line survey of all ASTs in each of the 150 LAs in England, as well as interviews with a sub-sample of these. Interviews with LA-coordinators and head teachers are also included in the research design. We use a national ASTs and LA co-ordinators database as our sampling frame and aim to achieve a response rate of 50%. All data collection is scheduled to be completed by June 2010.

A pilot of the on-line survey was completed in November 2009 and the results of this were used to inform the main survey. Data collected via the main survey investigates current ASTs attitudes and experiences of their AST role and their view of the introduction of the Excellent Teacher. In addition, motivations to become an AST, the process of assessment as well as on-going support and development are also considered. Data from the on-line survey will be analysed using SPSS, allowing us to explore for differences, for example, across LAs, subject specialism and length of time as an AST. All interviews will be carried out via telephone and, once transcribed, will be analysed using a content analysis to permit an exploration of patterns and themes within the data.

### **Frame**

This study is framed using a grounded theoretical approach where, through the process of analytic induction, the key concepts and ideas that help improve our understanding of the experiences of ASTs will emerge from our data and inform the discussion of our findings. A more deductive approach, linking concepts presented with theoretical ideas will also be utilised to add greater depth. In this study, notions of expertise in teaching, for example, will be helpful in exploring motivations for becoming an AST (Goodwyn, forthcoming 2010). The key findings will be compared to recent significant reports on the US 'Highly Accomplished' model and the Chartered Teacher in Scotland.

### **Research findings**

The McKinsey Report (2007) identified the teacher as the key variable in high performing systems and this report has had significant influence in England, for example informing the move to introduce a Masters level qualification for all teachers [The MTL]. Research about the role of ASTs is therefore significant as it allows us to improve our understanding of teaching more broadly and consequently construct better teacher preparation courses and staff development programs. Comparing the development of the AST with similar programmes in other developed systems [USA, Australia, Scotland] allows for a deeper understanding of the benefits of such programmes to education systems.

It is anticipated that the findings from this research, the first of its kind on this scale, will offer policy makers concerned with professional development opportunities for expert teachers, an opportunity to review how well existing policies develop or hinder current ASTs and ETs, in terms of their deployment, support and professional development. This research will therefore have national and international relevance, in terms of potential to impact on policy and practice as well as addressing a significant gap in the research and literature in this area.