



QTLS Impact Study

Research into the current offer of Professional Formation leading to Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status

Executive Summary: June 2015

1. Aim, objectives and key questions for the research

The aim of the study was to further the Foundation's understanding of the strengths of professional formation and to identify ways in which it could be developed in the future to meet the needs of a broader audience, whilst maintaining its current integrity.

The objectives were to:

- determine applicants' motivation for undertaking professional formation in the current climate
- outline the strengths of the process of professional formation and ways in which this could be improved to maximise impact
- identify the impact of the process of professional formation on teaching and learning, both in terms of teaching and learning practice and learner outcomes
- suggest ways in which professional formation could be developed in order to achieve greater consistency between QTLS and QTS.

The key questions for the research study were:

1. What is the motivation for undertaking professional formation in the current climate?
2. What are the strengths of the process and how could it be improved in order to respond to potential changes in demand from the sector and in order to be more consistent with QTS?
3. What is the impact of the process of professional formation on teaching and learning?

2. Methodology

The methods used to collect the impact data were an online survey with members who had recently achieved QTLS, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and former IfL staff and a focus group with a small group of SET reviewers and moderators.

Data collection was carried out between February and April 2015.

In total, over 175 responses were received through the online survey, interviews and focus group. The online survey achieved 146 responses: 68 responses from those who achieved QTLS status in December 2013 and 78 responses from those who achieved QTLS status in December 2014. Nineteen interviews were conducted and ten people attended a focus group. Non-completers from December 2013 were invited to take part in the research; however, it proved hard to secure their participation.

3. Summary of findings

a) Type and distribution of the respondents

The majority of the respondents who completed the online survey described themselves as either teachers, lecturers and tutors. A small number were senior managers (5%). The largest number of respondents were working in secondary schools (at just under 32%), followed by further education colleges (19%).

With respect to the completion of their initial teacher education (ITE) qualification, the data suggests that in 2014, more people who completed QTLS were newly qualified, suggesting that an increasing number of teachers are taking QTLS following achievement of their ITE qualification.

b) Motivation

Respondents talked about their motivation for undertaking QTLS in the current climate, referring to 'the changing landscape' of further education and the greater overlap between FE and 14-19 provision. They referred to an increase in the demand for a flexible workforce that is able to respond to needs of learners regardless of the 'institutional sector' in which they were learning.

When asked what their motivation was for undertaking QTLS, the highest response amongst survey participants was 'To increase my professional status' (79.5%). This was followed by 'As a practitioner working in the further education sector, I wanted to have the flexibility to be able to work in schools' (66.5%).

Stakeholders interviewed also believe that the motivation for undertaking professional formation is for the professional status and with this the reassurance and the recognition of currency that holding QTLS brings.

All respondents considered that QTLS had an important benefit for the individuals' own personal recognition as well as from their managers, and as providing status across all areas of the education sector.

The survey did not specifically ask people if they paid the QTLS fee themselves or if their employer paid. The small number of respondents who indicated that they had received financial support would indicate that the majority of people are self-funding their QTLS status.

c) Support

The responses from survey respondents in relation to support demonstrated that there was an even split between respondents who considered that they had enough support from their institution to undertake the process and those who did not. The support that was valued from their institution included observations and feedback, talking to their manager and reflecting on the process and financial support.

The survey results show that more respondents rated the support they received prior to enrolment higher than that received post enrolment. This could suggest that there is a need to improve post enrolment support.

The survey results show a significant number needing 'technical help when completing my workbook' (58%). They also show that there was a significant split between those who found the REfLECT+ tool easy to use (50%) and those who did not (30%). 20% found the tool neither difficult nor easy to use. The results suggest that there is a need to examine the reasons why over half of the respondents needed technical help to complete the workbook.

d) Strengths of QTLS

There was a general consensus from all respondents that QTLS is a good CPD opportunity and that it is needed. From the survey respondents, the key strengths of QTLS were that it enabled practitioners to reflect on their practice and that the process was cathartic, confidence building and enabled candidates to recognise their skills and experience. Respondents referred to 'consolidation' of professional practice, knowledge and their learning.

Professional status and recognition were seen as key strengths of QTLS from the interviews held with stakeholder organisations. An important element of this included professional recognition and status for those qualified through a post-compulsory route and now teaching in the school system having legality parity with teachers' QTS.

There was an acknowledgment that the parity of QTLS with QTS was a strength that 'can be used across the sectors' and with this, there was a sharing of practice and of learning across school and FE provision and the opportunity to widen the breadth of experience, their knowledge and their skills and expertise.

e) Areas for improvement

The research has provided some clear indications of areas for improvement and suggestions that the Foundation may want to consider:

- Increase employers' understanding by providing clearer guidance about the parity of QTLS and QTS (with respect to the legislation) and the benefits of the process in enhancing practitioners' status
- Provide greater clarity about what evidence is required in applications, how much or how little narrative/evidence is needed, and consider providing an exemplar submission
- Provide opportunities for more contact with other applicants (trainers or fellow students) to be able to network with others who are going through the process and provide or encourage a system of mentor/peer support either through buddying up with applicants or through peer support provided by employers
- Integrate QTLS as an element of the Level 5 Initial Teacher Education qualification
- Allow applicants to apply for QTLS at any time or increase the number of application windows
- Increase people's awareness and the importance of QTLS when they are undertaking initial teacher training
- Provide more guidance beforehand for potential applicants, for example through interactive online workshops or face-to-face events to talk through the professional formation process
- Provide clearer guidance on the website and include an explicit requirement for evidence of formal observation of teaching and learning throughout the professional formation process
- Provide more feedback during the process
- Increase opportunities to demonstrate evidence in support of the 2014 professional standards
- Develop progression routes from QTLS
- Address the currency issues in relation to Level 2 English and maths qualifications (i.e. these should have been achieved in the last five years)

There was a clear steer that the REFLECT+ online tool needs to be examined in terms of the support needed to use it and to respond to the large number of negative comments about the ease of use. This could be partially addressed through peer support/online forums and workshops, as well as the development of an online interactive introductory course.

f) Impact

The research has identified that for the vast majority who have completed the process it has had an impact on their practice. 80% of the respondents who achieved QTLS in October 2013 considered that professional formation had improved their teaching practice and 84% of all respondents felt that the process had increased their confidence in their teaching practice. Interestingly, 28% of the 2013 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement 'undertaking professional formation has meant that I have raised my learners' achievement'.

When asked about the next steps after QTLS, over half (52%) of the 2013 applicants and 42% of the 2014 applicants said that they would ensure that they continued to receive on-going support for their professional development.

g) Further support the Foundation can offer

With respect to further support that the Foundation can offer, the interviewees from the stakeholder organisations

offered a number of suggestions. Some of these could be implemented in a short time, whilst others will need more careful consideration. For example, in relation to parity between QTLS and QTS, a number of stakeholders questioned how this could be fully achieved in a deregulated context.

One stakeholder offered the view that the Foundation needs the support of the stakeholders as 'it helps to sit round a table' and this was reinforced with the message that teachers needed to be engaged in decisions.

Finally, in considering ways in which QTLS could be developed in the future to meet the needs of a broader audience whilst maintaining its current integrity, the research suggests that the Foundation will need to acknowledge the complexity of the further education workforce and the different routes and pathways that people take to bring their skills and knowledge to the sector.

4) Recommendations

The evidence suggests that QTLS status has an important place within the education and training sector, providing practitioners with a structure for recognition and status and with parity and esteem with their counterparts in the school system. For many who voluntarily elect to undertake QTLS, it is an investment in and recognition of their ongoing professional development.

The process of reflection is held in high regard and there is a strong foundation to build on.

Specific recommendations include:

- 1 Develop and implement practical ways to promote QTLS and to engage with employers as well as potential candidates.
- 2 Develop a marketing strategy that includes the production of video case studies and that demonstrate that QTLS is relevant across the whole of the FE and skills sector.
- 3 Consider running QTLS roadshow workshops to broaden the reach and increase the number of applicants, a strategy employed previously by IfL.
- 4 Improve the quality of information about QTLS on the website, ensuring that there is clearer, more succinct information about the process and benefits.
- 5 Review whether the application process of QTLS could be strengthened with a closer alignment to the FE Advice service.
- 6 Carry out a review of the REFLECT+ on-line tool and establish whether there is an alternative/easier online portfolio system, since evidence from the research showed that a significant number needed technical help when completing their online workbook (58%).
- 7 If the Foundation consider that QTLS is truly to have parity with QTS, then further work is needed to examine developing a comparable system where QTLS could be integrated into the Level 5 initial teacher education.
- 8 In order for QTLS to have further parity with QTS in relation to the need to evidence Level 2 maths and English skills, the Foundation could consider introducing a requirement that these Level 2 awards must have been gained in the last five years. However, in order for this not to be a barrier to recruitment, the Foundation needs to first consider how to work with providers in the sector to make it easier for applicants to take a Level 2 online test to demonstrate these skills, without the need to enrol on a course. The Level 2 and 3 English and maths online tools that have been commissioned by the Foundation will be of significant benefit to applicants needing to develop their personal maths and English skills.

- 9 Introduce opportunities for peer support and mentoring, either through local networks or through increased mentoring from their supporter within their institution, particularly for those who have just completed their initial teacher education programme. Feedback from candidates and stakeholders highlighted that they did not like having little contact with others (trainers or fellow students) and not being able to network with others who were going through the process. The Foundation might like to consider offering an online CPD programme for supporters wishing to develop their mentoring skills.
- 10 Strengthen the QTLS process in relation to the 2014 Professional Standards and in particular in relation to being able to evaluate professional practice with others and assessing impact of professional practice on learning. Make explicit references to the professional standards in sections of the online workbook.
- 11 Review the QTLS process to determine if the process can be strengthened by introducing collaborative activity to provide the opportunity for candidates to talk about their teaching and professional development.
- 12 Explore further whether there needs to be different routes for vocational teachers – previously ATLS was developed.
- 13 As the conferrer of the QTLS status, consider running celebratory events. Whilst there would be a cost for the Foundation, these events would provide an opportunity to recognise achievement and promote the ongoing opportunities post-QTLS.
- 14 Consider increasing the amount of support offered by the Foundation during the application process, i.e. when members are completing their online workbooks. The research suggests that applicants valued the prior enrolment support considerably higher than that received during the application process. The development of a short online course introducing applicants to the REFLECT+ tool and demonstrating key functions, might be helpful for those applicants who may be less confident with the technological aspects of this software.
- 15 Revisit the requirement that those members who gain QTLS must remain members to retain their QTLS status and instead look at how to develop an incentive for people to remain members, for example by providing progression routes to Fellowship.
- 16 Convene a stakeholder/practitioner group to help develop ways forward.