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Teachers' standards are far too low, says next Politeia Study. Subject knowledge must be first priority and failed training system should go.

High standards at school depend, above all, on teachers who are intellectually able and academically qualified in their subjects. Yet in this country the standards of teachers in the subjects they will teach, are pitched pitifully low especially at primary level, and far lower than in other similar countries. Politeia's next study, *Comparing Standards: Training the Teachers**, reveals that whereas the highest academic standards are demanded of potential teachers elsewhere, the story here is very different. In particular:

Standards of subject knowledge are too low:

For Primary teachers on education degree (BEd) courses, standards of subject knowledge in the subjects of the primary curriculum are too low both at entry and on the courses, while the confused criteria and box-ticking mania of education bureaucrats undermines the qualification.

For Secondary teachers, though some teachers have good subject degrees, others may teach subjects not studied to degree level. The PGCE, the teaching qualification after the degree, is unreliable and the victim of bureaucratic box ticking criteria.

The system also fails on a number of counts. In particular: it is over centralised with a myriad of often irrelevant targets; the competency based assessment model is damaging; the inspection process is part of the problem; it fails to attract or retain the most able teachers.

What can be done? The pamphlet proposes a series of radical steps to improve teachers' standards:

Standards at entry must be raised. *Primary teachers* must have A levels in the subjects they will teach at school and be brought to A level standard in maths and English. *Secondary teachers* should have a degree in (or close to) the subject they will teach.

Standards of subject knowledge for teachers should be raised. *Primary teachers* should be taught the subjects of the primary curriculum with emphasis on subject teaching. There should be three main routes to primary teaching, two through the subject departments of universities, where teachers can prepare to teach the younger or older age, and for mature entrants with proper qualifications, a separate route.

The concurrent route should be replaced by a consecutive route. Teachers should qualify first in their subjects. Professional training should come second.

Professional Training should take place either on the job in school or in a new University Practice School system. Candidates should have a choice of on the job training in school, or through a partnership model of university practice schools working with the education departments. Marenbon, Woodhead and Smithers want entirely school based training with no role for the education departments. Burghes proposes a university practice schools model where practice schools would work in partnership with the universities, a model which heads and graduates wary of a clean break, might prefer.

Teachers should qualify through knowing their subjects and the academic institution should judge - not the officials or quangos - who is qualified to teach. Qualifications should be awarded by the universities as the custodians of excellence, and not determined by the central quangos or criteria.

No further funds for training should go to the government agencies, OFSTED, the Teacher Training Agency, QCA or DfES in respect of initial teacher training. All funding should be paid to the training institutions, either entirely to the schools for school based training, or in the university school partnerships, pro-rata, to the school and education departments.

Comparing Standards: Teaching the Teachers, The Report of the Politeia Education Commission* will be published by Politeia on Monday 25th October, and is available from Politeia, 22 Charing Cross Road, WC2H OQP at £10.00. **The text will be available by e mail in advance to journalists on application by response to this message

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