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England's Teachers at Bottom of the League. Lowest entry standards for primary, highest wastage and most over-management: urgent change needed, warns Politeia study.

The teaching profession in England is in crisis, far more so than its counterparts in other Western countries compared in Politeia's new study, *Teachers Matter*. 30-50 per cent of new teachers leave the profession in England within five years of starting and overall 12 per cent leave each year or retire - far higher proportions than in other European countries. Moreover, teachers in England are the least well-educated. Official standards for entry are pitched far lower than elsewhere with only two GCSEs in English and Maths being required to enter training. These are amongst the findings of Politeia's new study, *Teachers Matter*. The comparison with other similar Western countries shows that this country has a crisis in its teaching profession.

Teachers Matter begins with Professor John Howson's *Report*, analysing the evidence on recruitment and employment across a number of Western countries. Politeia's Education Commissioners,* Professor David Burghes, Dr John Marenbon, and Chris Woodhead highlight the problems and show what needs to be done. In particular this country has:

- Lower standards of entry for would-be-teachers especially at primary level. England sets entry to primary training at just two GCSEs in maths and English, and candidates then take an education, not a subject, degree course. Other countries demand the full range of subjects to A level standard and follow it with intensive subject study to degree level for three or four years.
- A higher proportion of teachers leaving at the start of the career (30-50 per cent) and throughout their career (12 per cent a year).
- The most controlled and centrally managed profession. In no other country is a teacher's day to day work circumscribed by government or bureaucrats.
- Low final salaries and pay models which do not generally reward outstanding teaching or non-management responsibilities.

The Commissioners conclude that the entry and training model has failed. Too many of the wrong candidates being are being admitted and processed through a system unable to equip them to teach. Entry standards are too low. Meanwhile pay and conditions are amongst the worst in the European countries, with the lowest final salaries and the highest levels of control, and consequently attrition rates. With half the profession nearing or over 50, says John O'Leary, vigorous steps are needed to tackle pay and conditions, especially for mid-career teachers.

***Teachers Matter* concludes with a robust set of recommendations for the next government. The aim must be to attract into teaching the most academically and professionally able from each generation. In particular:**

1. Entry standards must be raised. Primary teachers should have A levels in subjects of the primary curriculum, including maths and English, or be obliged to take them during training.
2. The BEd should be abolished and all primary teachers for the 8-11 age range should be expected to take a joint subject degree at university. Primary teachers so equipped could be generalists, teaching a range of subjects, or specialists, concentrating on for example maths or languages.
3. Secondary teachers should be expected to have taken to degree level the subjects they will teach at secondary school.
4. Professional training – and the budget for it – should go to the school to buy in the best training and new forms of training and providers.
5. Conditions of work need urgent reform:
 - (i) The next government should pledge to abolish political and bureaucratic control of the classroom. A short summary of the obligations on schools under law should be published and no further directives issued. It would be for schools to obey the law and publish all additional policies.
 - (ii) Intensive targets and assessment policies should be abolished with one test in English and maths set for the penultimate year of primary school. Weaker pupils should be brought up to standard by the final year of primary school.
6. Teachers' pay should be reformed. Higher salaries for able entrants can be found in recession by freezing all central and government education (non-teaching) posts. Meanwhile administrative and management staff in central and local government can be redeployed in schools to help heads with the non-educational tasks (planning, site management, returns, grant applications).

****Teachers Matter: Recruitment, Employment and Retention at Home and Abroad* by David Burghes, John Howson, John Marenbon, John O'Leary and Chris Woodhead, edited by Sheila Lawlor, is published by Politeia.**

**Teachers Matter* includes: *The Report* (Part I) by John Howson; *Commissioners' Response* (Part II), by David Burghes, John Marenbon, John O'Leary and Chris Woodhead; *Conclusions and Recommendations* (Part III) by Sheila Lawlor

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John O'Leary is Editor of the Times Good University Guide and was Editor of *The Times Higher Education Supplement* between 2002 and 2007.

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