

SKOPE

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Making the Most of Teachers' Knowledge and Skills

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Summary

It is widely recognised that teachers have a major influence on the quality of students' learning and achievement. To perform this role effectively, however, teachers need access to appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) as well as the time, resources and support to allow them to work with colleagues. This Issues Paper summarises findings from a recent research project exploring the experiences of teachers of hairdressing in the UK (England and Wales), Norway and France. It examines how far teachers are able to develop and apply their knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning.

Introduction

An international comparative research project was undertaken during 2009 and 2010, aimed at exploring the experience of teachers working in initial vocational education and training (VET) in public schools and colleges. The focus was on teachers of hairdressing. In England and Wales, the teachers work in further education (FE) colleges, which operate as independent institutions, competing for students and funding in quasi-markets. A range of courses are provided for hairdressing students, in particular competence-based National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). In Norway, teachers of hairdressing are located in upper secondary schools (*videregående skole*), which are administered and funded by the local county authorities. The main vocational programmes are apprenticeships, involving two years school-based instruction (with around one third of the time spent on general subjects), followed by two years of work-based training. In France, teachers

are civil servants employed by the Ministry of Education, and work in vocational colleges (*lycée professionnel*). Students mainly follow two or three year courses in order to obtain vocational diplomas, spending half their time studying general subjects.

Research was conducted in four FE colleges in England and Wales, three Norwegian upper secondary schools and three vocational colleges in France. Interviews were held with senior management, heads of department and hairdressing teachers at each site. Interviews were also undertaken with relevant sectoral and policy bodies in the respective countries.

This Issues Paper examines the way in which teachers are able to influence the curriculum and pedagogy, the impact of the growth in bureaucracy and the extent to which their skills are maintained through CPD. These three aspects are considered in relation to their potential impact on teaching and learning.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

England and Wales

The majority of FE hairdressing courses in England and Wales are competence-based NVQs. The curricula, as set by awarding bodies, run to over 100 pages and prescribe in considerable detail the specific 'competences' that students are expected to acquire. As such, there is little scope for teachers to exercise discretion over 'what' they teach to students. The NVQ system also imposes a heavy burden of assessment on teachers who are required to constantly assess and



track students' work, adding to their workload and leaving them with little time to teach elements which lie outside of the formal curriculum.

Teachers felt that they retained more autonomy in relation to their choice of teaching methods. However, the close monitoring of teachers' work, through student feedback forms, observation by other teachers, heads of department and external inspections of awarding bodies and national inspectorates remains an established feature of teachers' experience.

Norway

In Norway, new curricula, introduced as part of the Knowledge Promotion reform, are far less prescriptive than in England and Wales, focusing on broad learning outcomes that are summarised in just a couple of pages. Assessment demands are also lower, with teachers typically undertaking just two assessments per term and exams being set within the school. In terms of pedagogy, Norwegian teachers are expected to provide 'adapted teaching' which involves agreeing with individual students the teaching methods that work best for them. In practice, however, many feel it is necessary to give direction to students' learning and retain autonomy over how they teach. Norwegian teachers also experience lower levels of monitoring and control in relation to their teaching. Although teachers are evaluated by students, there are no external inspections. Teachers generally felt that they were largely 'trusted' to 'get on with the job'.

France

In France, hairdressing qualifications are national diplomas whose content is guided by a 60 page reference manual. This manual contains details as to exactly what must be taught within the diploma. Some teachers indicated that the order could be varied but not the content, while others stressed that there was a 'margin of manoeuvre' where they could add material. Formative evaluations take place throughout the year and are designed and managed by each teacher.

There is little if any monitoring of teachers by the head of the college, and the department is run by a coordinator with no responsibilities for managing staff. Teacher performance is evaluated primarily through the national inspectorate. Teachers are inspected every three to six years and these can be positive experiences, leading to more rapid moves up the pay scale. In one college, teachers called in their local inspector because their head of college was not releasing them for training. In France, there are no evaluations of teachers by students and courses/departments are not graded.

In terms of pedagogy, there is more freedom in terms of how to teach, although as the system is highly centralised new methods can be inserted with little

discussion. Concerns were raised over the lack of influence teachers have over decisions, for example in relation to the content of the diplomas and new pedagogic requirements.

Audit, Bureaucracy and Paperwork

England and Wales

FE colleges in England and Wales have since the early 1990s been subject to a particular model of New Public Management (NPM) that combines elements of both 'marketisation' and 'performativity' and which is based around top-down funding, targets and inspections. College funding is linked to student recruitment, retention and certification, with colleges graded accordingly by external inspectors. Failure to perform against these criteria can result in the closure of particular courses/departments and, in some cases, the removal of the entire senior management team.

For the majority of teachers, the pressure to provide senior management with the data needed to satisfy audit and inspection requirements has resulted in increased bureaucracy and paperwork. Many teachers see these demands as 'getting in the way' of the 'really important' job of teaching.

Norway

Administered by the local county authorities, funding is allocated to schools according to the number of classes at the start of each year. However, the research found evidence of the use of funding approaches that have some parallels with certain practices in England and Wales. One county had recently introduced a system whereby funding to individual schools was reduced according to the number of students 'dropping out'. The county also set targets to reduce 'drop outs', although failure to reach these targets carried no penalties for managers or their schools.

There is evidence that Norwegian teachers have experienced increased demands in terms of paperwork. Teachers spoke of how they were required to monitor student attendance, document individual meetings with students and parents, and agree relevant action plans. While some teachers were critical of the volume of paperwork required, the majority did not regard this as particularly excessive or burdensome. Most felt that they were generally able to complete their work within their allotted hours, something which was not found to be the case in England, Wales and France.

France

In France, recruitment of students is undertaken at regional level and numbers are related to the needs of the economy. Budgets are set according to criteria relating to course needs and numbers of students. Colleges can bid for additional money for specific

projects but their outcomes are not evaluated. There are no targets in relation to success rates, although there are objectives set by the region in terms of the numbers required to retake a year and absenteeism. However, failure to meet objectives does not lead to specific consequences.

The teachers are not required to undertake the same kinds of monitoring tasks required in England and Wales but there were concerns raised about increased levels of paperwork and administrative duties. These changes appeared to be gradual and linked to a host of issues, for example, consent forms and procedures around purchasing orders. Teachers appear to have a heavier workload than in Norway with larger classes and more intense evaluation and marking throughout the year, alongside the demands associated with managing the students during their work placements.

Continuing Professional Development

England and Wales

In England, a policy concern to 'professionalise' the FE teaching workforce led to the introduction in 2007 of a requirement for teachers to be registered with a professional body, the Institute for Learning, and to undertake 30 hours of CPD annually. When it came to updating their craft knowledge, hairdressing teachers in the English and Welsh colleges were found to have relatively good opportunities to access relevant CPD. Many continued to work as hairdressers outside their job, and all permanent teachers had access to technical and product-based training, often run by suppliers of hair products. However, accessing such courses was found to be more problematic for those working part-time or on casual contracts.

In terms of CPD related to pedagogy, provision was far patchier. Colleges tend to adopt 'all college' events at minimal financial cost, covering issues such as 'sharing good practice in teaching and learning' and 'equality and diversity'. The response among teachers to such events was mixed; some were relevant, others were not. Outside of these formal days, there were few instances of teachers attending specific pedagogic courses. It is also questionable how far the introduction of a compulsory minimum tariff of CPD has improved access in England. The general view among teachers was that 'nothing much has changed'. For many, the new requirements were seen as another layer of bureaucracy and form-filling, and there was considerable ambivalence about the potential benefits.

Norway

In Norway the opportunities for hairdressing teachers to keep up to date with their craft appears more limited. While a few teachers continued to work in salons, a number had not practiced their trade professionally for

many years; one had not cut hair in a salon for 30 years! Although some courses were provided by the teachers' hairdressing association and by suppliers of hair products, many managers and teachers voiced concerns about their 'lack of contact with their craft.'

Compared to England and Wales, Norwegian teachers appeared to have access to a greater variety and levels of formal courses in pedagogy. At one school, 60 staff across the school had spent several days in Denmark attending a course on the new 'pedagogic platform', or philosophy, that was being introduced. In addition, two out of the four hairdressing teachers interviewed were undertaking a Masters' level course at the local university on vocational pedagogy for which they obtained teaching remission. Such courses are free for teachers in Norway. At the other two Norwegian schools there was concern about lack of resources and requirements to undertake courses in their own time.

France

In France, there is no obligation to undertake CPD, although there is a right to five days training per year. The hairdressing teachers considered CPD related to their craft to be extremely important, with most spending between two and five days per year undertaking this type of training. They believed it was essential in order to maintain their credibility in front of the students and to keep the courses relevant and stimulating. Suppliers of products provide most of the training but access to these courses is highly dependent on the particular college and their links with the companies. A few teachers worked in salons occasionally but others, as in Norway, had not done so for many years.

Teachers on average spent two to three days a year on pedagogic training. Training is developed by the Ministry of Education in relation to national priorities and involves discussion with the local inspectors. Training is offered, some general and other subject specific, and teachers can ask to attend. Whether they are accepted depends on the availability of places and the agreement of the head of college to release them. Training provided in this way is free and normally during working time. Much of the training relates to changes in the diplomas and rather less on areas like behaviour management. Staff were broadly satisfied with the content of training but would have liked more.

Outcomes for Practice

In England and Wales, the pressures of audit and assessment mean that teachers often have relatively little time to meet and discuss new approaches to teaching. In only one of the colleges visited were teachers generally positive about such opportunities. The other three colleges presented a rather bleaker picture. As the head of department at one college noted,

'What everybody lacks is the time. You sit down and talk to some of them [teachers] for a little while and you get these amazing ideas coming out and that's what they need is the time together to be able to thrash ideas out, inspire each other.' Lack of time and space tended to encourage a more ad-hoc and individualised approach, with teachers sharing ideas with each other as and when the opportunity arose.

Similarly in French colleges, discussion and exchanges with colleagues in relation to ideas and practices are quite low. There are no dedicated times provided for this activity, and what does take place is done informally among small groups of two to four individuals. There are team meetings but these are primarily about coordination, the organisation of work and projects but not about teaching practice. There is the suggestion that some teachers are quite protective of their classroom and the way in which they teach. Rarely do teachers observe each other's classroom activities, also partly due to lack of time and organisation. There is no requirement for teachers to be in the college when they are not taking classes, and contact between teachers may, therefore, be more limited.

In Norway, all of the schools made time available each week for staff to meet and discuss pedagogic issues. In one school, the hairdressing department held weekly meetings lasting a couple of hours where the teachers set their own agenda. Sharing ideas and learning from one another was considered to be the norm. However, at another school, these meetings were seen as poorly structured and planned, with much of the time taken up with dealing with the problems presented by students with behavioural issues. Dealing with these challenges on a daily basis left teachers with little time or energy to discuss approaches to teaching and learning.

With a more flexible curriculum, lower demands in terms of bureaucracy and paperwork and less working outside of contracted hours, teachers in Norway, at least potentially, have more time and space available to share ideas aimed at improving teaching and learning. Such opportunities also depend, however, upon school-level factors, including the support of senior management, the level of resources available, and the nature of the school intake.

Conclusions

Compared to their equivalents in England, Wales and France, Norwegian teachers have a more flexible curriculum, experience fewer demands in terms of assessments and bureaucracy, are more likely to be able to complete their work within their contracted hours, and are largely trusted to 'get on with the job' of teaching without extensive managerial monitoring. In France, while teachers are relatively autonomous within the classroom and have little in the way of management, they feel they have no input into the

pedagogic change and curriculum revisions that emanate from the centralised education system. The implementation of NPM in English and Welsh FE, based on 'marketisation' and 'performativity', and a system of qualifications developed to meet employer needs leaves teachers with little autonomy or discretion in the classroom and minimal space to exchange and develop ideas with colleagues. The existence of tripartite social partnership in Norway has helped to slow the use of NPM approaches, and encouraged a more trust-based system. Decentralisation and active teachers unions in the policy making process, and in work organisation and training issues within the college, help shape a teaching process that allows more engagement and initiative from teachers in the classroom.

The availability of pedagogic linked CPD is far more widespread in France and Norway, and is generally free to the participant (and the college). In England and Wales, CPD related to teaching and learning tends to be very general. It is better in relation to developing their own craft, although it is highly dependent on industry suppliers and teachers working as hairdressers in their own time. While CPD is important in providing ideas and mechanisms to support teaching development, without space for implementation, teachers may not follow through on new approaches. Alternatively they may work excessive hours which can lead to physical and mental exhaustion.

Further Information

This research was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council.

A SKOPE Research Paper comparing Norway and the UK is available to download from the SKOPE website: Lloyd, C. and Payne, J. (2010) 'We have got the freedom' A study of autonomy and discretion among vocational teachers in Norway and the UK', No 95.

Further details on the research project and publications can be obtained from Caroline Lloyd & Jonathan Payne, Email: lloydc4@cardiff.ac.uk; paynej3@cardiff.ac.uk

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