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Parallel working group sessions: Case-studies

A – Ethical behaviour of all actors in education

Case study by Tom Hamilton, General Teaching Council for Scotland, United Kingdom

A national case study of how ethical behaviour has been approached in professional codes and standards for Scottish schoolteachers.

Overview

The workshop began with an introduction to the areas that were to be covered during the presentation. A brief explanation of the role and remit of GTC Scotland was to be given. Following this the current Teacher Education Standards in Scotland would be introduced and explored, particularly in terms of the statement on Professional Values and Personal Commitment which they all contain. Next the Code of Professionalism and Conduct (COPAC) would be introduced and its approach explored. Links between the Standards and COPAC were to be highlighted and then details of a planned review of COPAC would be given.

Role and Remit

A brief introduction of the history of GTC Scotland was given.

Initially formed in 1965 as a Non-Departmental Public Body the status of GTC Scotland was changed in 2012 to that of an independent Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) which reports on an annual basis to the Scottish Parliament.

GTC Scotland has various legal duties laid out in its legislation.

First and foremost it has to keep a register of teachers and registration is a legal requirement for any teacher to teach in the state school sector in Scotland. While not legally required about 90% of teachers in the independent school sector in Scotland are also registered, with schools seeing registration as a kite mark of quality. (It should be noted that a Bill currently before the Scottish Parliament will shortly also make registration in the independent school sector mandatory.)

GTC Scotland also has the legal power to establish and review the standards of education and training appropriate to school teachers. It therefore determines teaching qualifications and sets the requirements for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes for school teachers. In most countries it is the Government which makes such determinations but in Scotland this role is given, through legislation, to GTC Scotland, a PSRB.

Another element of GTC Scotland's remit is to establish and review the standards of conduct and professional competence expected of a registered teacher. For conduct, GTC Scotland does this through its work on professional values and its model of professionalism. The values are central to what it means to be a teacher in Scotland and GTC Scotland extensively publicises and encourages debate on what teacher professionalism is and should be. For competence, GTC Scotland publishes a Framework on Teacher Competence which is endorsed by the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), a tripartite organisation comprising of the Scottish Government, the Scottish Local Authorities (which employ teachers) and the education unions. With the endorsement of the SNCT, the Framework is then used by all Local Authorities as the basis of steps to be taken to measure and support the competence of any teacher in Scotland whose proficiency is questioned.

Another important element of the remit of GTC Scotland is to investigate the fitness to teach of individuals who are, or are seeking to be, registered. This gives GTC Scotland legal powers to refuse applications for registration from people deemed not to be fit to teach and to cancel the existing registration of any individual whose conduct is judged to fall significantly short of the standards expected of a registered teacher. (GTC Scotland also has a range of other disposals such as reprimands.)

A final element of the role and remit of GTC Scotland is that it is required by the legislation to set up and maintain a system of 're-registration' for all teachers. This five yearly sign-off against the Standards, GTC Scotland has chosen to entitle Professional Update.

Teacher Education Standards in Scotland

GTC Scotland has a suite of Standards which cover all the stages of teaching from being a student to being a Head Teacher. They are:

- The Standards for Registration (Provisional, Full)
- The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning
- The Standards for Leadership and Management (Middle Leadership, Headship)

The Standards for Registration are in two parts, Provisional and Full, and are mandatory requirements to become a teacher in Scotland. The Standards for Provisional Registration lays out what a student in a Scottish university completing an ITE programme must meet on graduation while the Standard for Full Registration specifies what must be attained at the end of a probationary period in order to achieve Full Registration. (The Standard for Full Registration thereafter is the baseline Standard for competence for all teachers in Scotland.)

The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning is not mandatory but instead is something which experienced teachers may choose to use to reflect their development as accomplished teachers. It is designed to be aspirational and to encourage ongoing professional learning throughout their careers as teachers.

The Standards for Leadership and Management are in two parts, Middle Leadership and Headship. These two parts address the career progression of teachers who chose to go down a promoted post pathway in leadership and management. From 2018/19 it will become mandatory for all Head Teachers on appointment to hold the Standard for Headship.

Elements of the Standards

The following diagram appears in all of the Scottish Teacher Education Standards.



It lays out the three elements which GTC Scotland has deemed to be necessary to fulfil to be a teacher in Scotland. Teaching in Scotland is viewed as a complex task which needs each of these elements before it can be successfully completed.

At the heart of being a teacher in Scotland are Professional Values and Personal Commitment but teachers must also have Professional Knowledge and Understanding and Professional Skills and Abilities. All three of these elements must be successfully attained (and then maintained) to teach.

Professional Values and Personal Commitment

Scotland is happy to emphasise the place it puts on values for teachers and that statement of values has been a longstanding practice within its Teacher Education Standards.

When the previous Standards were being reviewed and the current suite of Standards being developed there was debate around the values which should be included. These were not just tablets of stone developed by the GTCS and handed down from on high - there were specific questions asked and comment sought from all parties involved in education over what should be included and ultimately the following areas identified:

- Social Justice
- Integrity
- Trust and Respect
- Commitment

As all the Standards were being reviewed at the same time the opportunity was also taken to include exactly the same statements on values in all of the Standards, emphasising that such values are of continuing relevance at all career stages and levels. Whether you are a student teacher or a Head Teacher the same values should be at the heart of what you do.

Social Justice

The section on Social Justice spells out that teachers should embrace locally and globally the educational and social values of sustainability, equality and justice and recognising the rights and responsibilities of future as well as current generations. It goes on to state that teachers should commit to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in relation to age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and belief, and sexual orientation. Teachers are further required to value as well as respect social, cultural and ecological diversity and promote the principles and practices of local and global citizenship for all learners. They are also expected to demonstrate a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning a way to a better future. Finally, they are enjoined to respect the rights of all learners as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and their entitlement to be included in decisions regarding their learning experiences and have all aspects of their well-being developed and supported.

Integrity

The section on Integrity requires teachers to demonstrate openness, honesty, courage and wisdom. They are expected to critically examine their personal and professional attitudes and beliefs and to challenge assumptions and professional practice. Critical examination is also required of the connections between personal and professional attitudes and beliefs, values and practices so as to effect improvement and, when appropriate, bring about transformative change in practice.

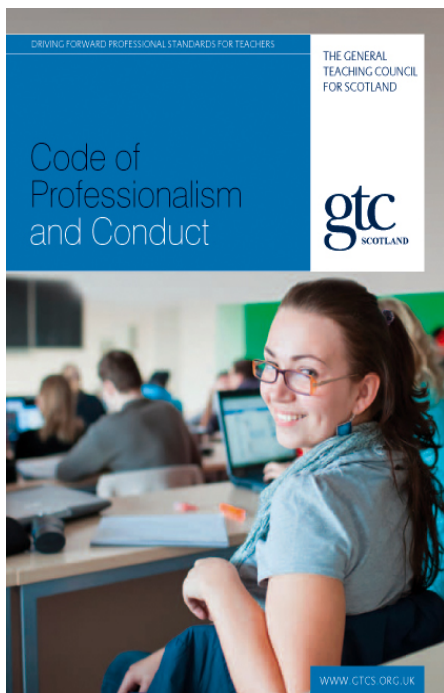
Trust and Respect

The section on Trust and Respect states that teachers must act and behave in ways that develop a culture of trust and respect through, for example, being trusting and respectful of others within the school, and with all those involved in influencing the lives of learners in and beyond the learning community. They must also provide and ensure a safe and secure environment for all learners within a caring and compassionate ethos and with an understanding of wellbeing. There is also an expectation that they will demonstrate a commitment to motivating and inspiring learners, acknowledging their social and economic context, individuality and specific learning needs and taking into consideration barriers to learning.

Professional Commitment

The final section on Professional Commitment enjoins teachers to engage with all aspects of professional practice and to work collegiately with all members of their educational communities with enthusiasm, adaptability and constructive criticality. They are expected to commit to lifelong enquiry, learning, professional development and leadership as core aspects of professionalism and collaborative practice.

Code of Professionalism and Conduct



The original version of COPAC was introduced in May 2008 and, to reflect legislative changes and the change in the status of GTC Scotland, a revised version came into force on 2 April 2012, the date that GTC Scotland became an independent body.

Based on GTC Scotland values, COPAC provides guidance on the conduct expected of registered teachers in five sections:

- Professionalism and maintaining trust in the Profession
- Professional responsibilities towards pupils
- Professional competence
- Professionalism towards colleagues, parents and carers
- Equality and Diversity

COPAC has various uses but importantly it clearly states the standard of conduct and competence expected of registered teachers. Although the behaviours described in the Code are unthinkable to the vast majority of registered teachers and members of the public, GTC Scotland has a duty to identify them so that the boundaries of professional behaviour and conduct are clear and public trust in teachers is maintained.

That said, the tone of COPAC is worthy of comment as it does not simply preach at teachers but rather sets them various ethical dilemmas, suggesting to them that they need to give particular thought to getting themselves into certain situations and then how to behave.

Planned Review of COPAC

A review of COPAC is planned for the near future. The purpose of the review will be to update COPAC, ensuring that it is in line with current expectations and that it matches in with the Teacher Education Standards, including their values. The plan is that the process of review will follow the same kind of broad model as used for other recent reviews such as that of the Standards. Consultation and consensus building will be central to that process.

The review will be conducted under the auspices of the GTCS Council and it will also eventually sign-off the final document. Various GTCS Committees will be directly involved in the process. These will include the Professional Regulatory Assurance Committee and the Education Committee, both of which will have a locus in the review. A Steering Group with representation from a wide range of actors is likely to be set up and a Writing Group will take forward the preparation of the actual text.

The Steering Group will be expected to do exactly that, steer, and hence will benefit from having a wide range of voices on it including employers, the teacher unions and, to represent the public interest, parents.

Public Consultation will certainly feature in the process and it is likely to take the form of regional public meetings, focus groups and online opportunities to comment. Publicity will be sought through material on the GTCS Website, press releases and extensive use of social media such as Twitter.

Conclusion and some discussion questions

What has been outlined above is from within the specific context of Scotland and it is important to bear in mind that other countries have different systems and contexts meaning that while lessons may be learned from other systems it is unlikely that one country's solutions will exactly fit another country's needs. The suggestion is that countries may adapt from international comparators but they would be unwise simply to try to adopt.

That said, the following questions may be worthy of consideration.

Within the work of GTC Scotland how does it ensure that there is linkage between the Standards and COPAC?

Vey importantly, how does it ensure that the values identified are actually enacted by teachers?
And how will it know?

Finally, are the values identified above of significance and use beyond Scotland?

Web Links

Standards: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/standards.aspx>

COPAC: <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/fitness-to-teach/fitness-to-teach.aspx>