

Valuing Beginning Teachers

A paper to the PPTA Annual Conference from the Young and New Teachers' Network

1. Introduction

Successful teacher induction is a vital investment in the future of our profession and the education sector. It plays a critical part in building on initial teacher education, establishing the foundations of teaching and in the retention of teachers.

The Provisionally Registered Teacher (PRT) experience has changed markedly in the past two decades. Until the advent of Tomorrow's Schools and the demise of the inspectorate, new teachers were observed and advised both by their HoDs/senior management and by external agents of the Department of Education. Post-Tomorrow's Schools, support, supervision and assessment of PRTs fell solely to the school. For several years in the 1990s, teacher registration wasn't even required. In those days, it was possible to disappear into the classroom and emerge two years later to get registration signed off by the principal. Those days are long gone.

With the reintroduction of compulsory registration in 1996, requirements for support and supervision and assessment were re-established. Over time, those requirements have become more stringent. PRTs are now responsible for gathering evidence of planning, reflective practice, lesson observations and ongoing professional development over a two-year period, in order to demonstrate that they have met the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions and are able to become fully-registered teachers.¹

Over that same time span, secondary teaching has become increasingly complex, demanding and pressured, and continues to be so. It is clear that not all PRTs are receiving the appropriate induction and support to survive, let alone thrive, in the secondary schools of today. Recent research,² and the anecdotes gathered from the PPTA YANTs (Young and New Teachers) network while investigating this issue, indicate a vast diversity in conditions, workload and support for PRTs. Addressing these concerns is not easy in a system where each school is individually responsible for induction, but teachers who are inadequately supported may leave teaching, change schools or stay but with diminished commitment,³ so it is imperative that ways are found of providing better induction experiences.

¹ The Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions are viewable at <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/registration/renew/dimensions.stm>

² Cameron, Dingle & Brooking (2007) Learning to Teach: A Survey of Provisionally Registered Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, Wellington: New Zealand Teachers Council

³ Cameron, Baker & Lovett (2006) Teachers of Promise: Getting started in teaching, Wellington: NZCER ongoing

2. Induction

Induction is a process that includes both formal and informal programmes and systems of sustained support and professional development to assist new recruits to make the transition into competent and professional teachers who are eligible to become fully registered.⁴

In New Zealand, the Teachers Council charges schools with responsibility for providing advice and guidance to PRTs during the process of attaining full registration, and PRTs with responsibility for gathering an appropriate body of evidence for full registration. The council has prepared thorough guiding documents to assist with the process of working towards full registration.⁵ PPTA has also provided guidelines to assist, and the Secondary Teachers' Collective Agreement (STCA) guarantees additional non-contact time to provide support and induction for first- and second-year teachers and to teachers new to New Zealand. Extra time is also provided to heads of departments (HoDs) through the STCA so they can support any PRTs in their departments.

Despite this level of support, and increased guidance for schools from the Teachers Council about what the induction process should look like and what is required for registration, PRTs still feel that induction is too often like the 'Wild West' for them. This paper seeks to explain why there is such a mismatch between the national provision of support and the individual experience of it.

3. Research

Other groups are also concerned about the risk to the secondary teaching service if young teachers aren't retained in teaching and assisted to reach their potential. The induction of new teachers has been the focus of a great deal of research and policy development by various organisations over the last few years, including the NZCER 'Teachers of Promise' study,⁶ a wide-ranging longitudinal Teaching & Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) Project⁷ and an ERO review of Year 2 beginning teachers in 2004. The Teachers Council also conducted a three-stage research project, between 2006 and 2008, which is being used to inform their development of the new Registered Teacher Criteria and the refinement of the induction and registration process.

As the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Council consider how the induction process could be improved, it is timely that we ask our members about the problems they have experienced with induction and what they consider a sound orientation process would look like.

⁴ Achinstein, B., Athenases, S.Z. (ed), (2006). *Mentors in the Making: Developing New Leaders for New Teachers*. Columbia: Columbia University, p 5

⁵ NZ Teachers Council/Ministry of Education (2006) Towards Full Registration: A Support Kit. Available online at <http://www.teacherscouncil.govt.nz/communication/publications/resources0001.stm>

⁶ Cameron, Baker & Lovett (2006) op cit

⁷ See for example Anthony, Haigh, Bell & Kane (2007) Induction into the profession: Findings from New Zealand Beginning Teachers. Paper presented at the World of Educational Quality, AERA Annual Meeting, 9-13 April, 2007, Chicago, Illinois.

4. The reality of the PRT experience

Cameron, Dingle and Brooking say:⁸

the system underestimated the complexity of the induction process, mentoring, etc, and it was not done well.

This research also uncovered views that bode badly for the retention of new teachers:

- 14.6 per cent of secondary teachers said teaching did not meet their original expectations
- 21 per cent were not as happy about teaching as they thought they would be
- 12.7 per cent said their school was not a great place to work
- 15.9 per cent did not expect to be teaching in five years time.

So, what contributes to these levels of disaffection with their experience?

4.1 Conditions

PRTs are in a vulnerable situation in schools and, whether by design or accident, often end up with working conditions that are unfair or even illegal. For example, around 40 per cent are not employed in a permanent position.⁹ ERO was sufficiently concerned by this to recommend:

that the practice of some schools of employing beginning teachers in temporary positions 'as de facto probationers' should be investigated.¹⁰

As well as missing out on job security, many PRTs don't even get their correct salary from the time they start work. Many start on the wrong pay due to the time it takes to establish the correct salary step and for any adjustments to be processed. It is often a complicated, messy, slow and stressful process – especially as many of these members have just finished studying and have debts and the added financial pressure of entering the professional workforce for the first time.

PRTs have also talked about having been given no information about other financial issues, such as accessing moving expenses or how to claim back expenses incurred through travel or professional development. PRTs who don't have these problems seem to be in schools where they receive diligent support from their coordinators, the PPTA branch and an effective orientation programme.

Many of our PRTs report not receiving their STCA entitlements, including the minimum non-contact provisions:

⁸ Cameron, M. ,Dingle, R. , and Brooking, K. (2007) op cit p 75

⁹ Ministry of Education

¹⁰ ERO review of Year 2 beginning teachers (2004)

- 53.5 per cent of first-year secondary teachers were teaching more hours than permitted by the STCA
- 69.4 per cent of first-year secondary teachers, and 67.5 per cent of second-year secondary teachers, were not receiving their full entitlement of advice and guidance time
- 26.1 per cent of full-time first-year secondary teachers, and 25.5 per cent of full-time second-year secondary teachers, were not receiving five hours of non-contact time.¹¹

These statistics are disgraceful. Again, effective orientation and support is needed to help to ensure that employers do not abuse vulnerable new teachers.

4.2 *The work*

Ideally, PRTs should get the minimum requirements of the STCA and also enjoy a 'kind' timetable that minimises the number of rooms that they teach in and balances the difficulty and size of classes. A good timetable can help to create the space needed for PRTs to better reach their potential and to become effective teachers who enjoy their work. Unfortunately, this is not always the experience that our new teachers have.

Another common surprise is their timetable: 24.2 per cent of PRTs are teaching to some extent outside their subject area (outside the area for which they are qualified).¹² This wouldn't be such an issue if PRTs were supported with adequate resources (schemes, literacy resources etc) and professional development, or were not working in a subject in isolation.

Even the best-designed teacher training course cannot cover all the situations that PRTs may encounter in their first two years of teaching. In fact, PRTs feel that their expectations (based on what they learn in training) are very different from reality. The example that is often given is that they are told in their training that it is highly unlikely that they will be expected to take a form class in their first two years. In fact, they may be expected to after their first two days!

4.3 *Professional learning and support*

Time and again, members describe situations where the appropriate professional development, resources and schemes weren't available, and practical support from their colleagues didn't exist. They describe having to find their own contacts and organise their own professional development. This 'sink or swim' approach makes our PRTs feel undervalued and as if their colleagues don't have any respect for them. This is the beginning of the slippery slope that leads to PRTs leaving the profession.

It is understandable, especially in hard-to-staff subjects or in small or rural schools, that many PRTs will end up with responsibilities sooner than may be ideal. It is not unusual for a PRT to be a sole teacher in a subject area, or responsible for budgets, scheme development or assessment

¹¹ Cameron, Dingle & Brooking (2007) op cit p 37

¹² Ibid p 38

management, at the same time that they are meant to be concentrating on developing their expertise in the classroom. The question is how the system can appropriately support those who are thrown unceremoniously into this professional deep end.

4.4 Orientation

Induction should start with an appropriate and effective orientation to a new workplace, but 11.5 per cent of beginning secondary teachers were given no formal orientation to their school.¹³ PRTs talked about turning up at their school and finding that nothing was organised for them – no keys, alarm codes, computer login, photocopying code or email. Some didn't even have access to their classroom before their first day:

it was like they were surprised I was there...

PRTs believe that orientation should start *before* day one, and include:

- time with someone who can provide them with course outlines, schemes etc
- introductions to key people, such as senior management, their HoD, departmental colleagues, other YANTs, PPTA representatives, and key support staff – including those in the canteen! (PRTs talked about how important it was to meet these people before they might actually need their help)
- an overview of basic systems such as the photocopier, alarms, discipline systems/pastoral care, SMS (student management systems), applying for leave/professional development, and how duty works (PRTs felt that it would be beneficial to know who is in charge of what and who they should seek out to discuss a particular issue)
- information about and access to resources such as keys, classrooms, workspaces, computers, IT, photocopying and laminating.

Once 'Day One' is over, a whole new set of information needs to be accessed by PRTs. 'Orientation' should certainly last more than a day – *timely* introductions to SMS, report writing, parent interviews, pastoral care, assessment and moderation are also needed.

4.5 Induction and registration

PRTs have two main objectives in their first couple of years: meeting the requirements for registration and developing their expertise as teachers. Bizarrely, many PRTs feel that these are not always the same: that the requirements for providing evidence for registration have little to do with their development as a teacher. Twenty per cent of respondents saw the Teachers Council processes for full registration as just a bureaucratic requirement, and that the way forward should certainly not include asking beginning teachers to collect even more 'evidence' for registration purposes:

¹³ Ibid p 39

it was like the programme was ‘tick the box’ based...

...set up for ERO, not me...

...boring, irrelevant, a waste of time..

The philosophy of recording the process of development and having to meet strict professional criteria in order to become registered is not under challenge by PRTs – ‘reflective practice’ sits at the heart of current teacher training.

The problem seems to lie in what evidence schools require PRTs to collect. YANTs don’t like the lack of clarity provided by their schools (around a third didn’t know what criteria were used to assess them¹⁴) and believe that, if they knew more about what the requirements were before they even started the registration process, they would be better able to manage the process for themselves and ensure that the documentary evidence collected was related to everyday practice.

Being expected to do two periods of observation a week is a bit much.

I resented having to provide a written lesson plan for each lesson.

We need tighter specs of what schools must provide in their PRT programme; a basic framework.

...writing reflections on teaching – I found talking to other staff much more valuable and time worthy.

Those who have been provided with advice and guidance programmes based on the Teachers Council’s advice seem to feel that the process is much more useful than those who haven’t. However, the Teachers Council says that the responsibility for gathering the evidence required for registration ultimately sits with the PRT. This seems an unreasonable position, given that PRTs have very little control over the provision of their advice and guidance programmes or their working conditions. They are, of course, responsible for meeting the standards required for registration, and do not desire to avoid a rigorous process or providing the evidence to show that they are meeting these standards. What they do resent is that, if they have been employed in a school that has not met its obligations with regard to providing adequate support to them, and as a result they fail to get registered, it is they who are penalised and who suffer the disadvantage of not being registered, not the school.

4.6 *Mentoring*

It is a given, both in the research and the guidance provided by the Teachers Council, that any effective induction programme must involve a mentor. In most New Zealand secondary schools, PRTs participate in advice and guidance programmes that are organised by a ‘PRT coordinator’ (often a member of senior management) and receive more personal support from one or more HoDs. In reality, despite having a specific time allocation tagged to HoDs for advising PRTs, and

¹⁴ Ibid p 107

the Teachers Council recommending that mentors be allocated to PRTs, 12.1 per cent of secondary teachers had no assigned mentor/tutor teacher/supervisor, only 30.6 per cent of first-year secondary teachers were receiving their full five hours of advice and guidance, and only 32.5 per cent of second years were receiving their full 2.5 hours of advice and guidance.¹⁵

5. Induction in a perfect world

5.1 More mentoring

YANTs have discussed what the ideal system would look like, with a particular focus on the possibilities of a formal mentoring scheme. They were in complete agreement that mentors should be trained and have time to spend with them. They had many wonderful things to say about the mentoring, both formal and informal, provided by senior teachers around the country. They described these people as being both willing and able to provide practical advice, as well as a 'sounding board' when things got tough. Effective mentors were described as caring, available, and knowledgeable in the areas where PRTs needed specific guidance (mainly subject knowledge and classroom management). Ideally, they were also proactive, inspiring and trained. YANTs believe that many well-intentioned mentors have been set up for failure by not being given the time or training to provide any real assistance.

PRTs also valued the informal mentoring provided by the wider school community. This seemed to happen most often in schools where school-wide professional learning communities were well resourced. They also often referred to a 'buddy', often not in their department, who provided them with support other than curriculum advice. This was someone that the PRT trusted (often because they were not involved in registration) and could relate to, someone who helped them adjust to the complexities of working in a school environment.

They believe that the ideal situation would be where the value of this support was better recognised and enabled, by giving the 'buddy' allocated time (perhaps an hour a week) to meet with their PRT. This buddy would ideally be selected in consultation with the PRT, with consideration given to the individual professional and emotional support needed. This would be in addition to the time allocated to HoDs.

There is a huge variety in the structure of mentoring systems across jurisdictions. Some have a mentor, usually a senior teacher, allocated from within the school; others have mentors provided from outside the school (as often happens in the early childhood sector in New Zealand). Those that seemed to be viewed by participants as most useful had mentors who were well trained and resourced.

Successful induction programmes include personalised plans of professional development, support and networks. A mentor who is well trained and given the time to support their PRT can come from within or outside a school.

¹⁵ Ibid pp 37, 46

The Teachers Council, in recognising the importance of trained mentors, is considering whether to make it a requirement for induction that every mentor needs to be trained.¹⁶ This idea is supported by the Ministry of Education,¹⁷ but PPTA has expressed reservations about whether the government would be genuinely willing to adequately resource this for secondary schools, where any teacher, because of their particular subject specialties, might at some time need to be called upon to act as a mentor for a beginning teacher

A mentoring system based within the school could look something like a version of the very successful SCT (Specialist Classroom Teacher) model. These people have been given time and some professional development to become experts who provide effective support to their colleagues. While training may make the mentoring process a much more valuable one, a key flaw is that it may also cause undue complications and stress in schools where there is no formally trained mentor on the staff, or where there are a large number of PRTs. The model is limited in its ability to be flexible enough to meet the potential requirement of every PRT having access to a trained mentor in order to complete their induction.

An external mentoring system could provide the flexibility required to enable every PRT to have access to a trained and resourced mentor. Another advantage of an external mentor is the ability for them to be advocates and agents for change in schools with dysfunctional induction systems. This could also help to improve consistency between schools. They would have the time and training to build knowledge specifically useful in supporting PRTs. They would be able to help establish contacts and networks for PRTs as they progress particular areas of focus (whether it be an area of strength or interest, or one that needs development). This would be especially useful in small or isolated schools.

Our YANTs are particularly attracted to the idea of an external mentoring system, and would like to see such a system piloted in 2009 as part of the Teachers Council's programme of induction and mentoring pilots. One system that looks particularly interesting is run by the New Teacher Centre in Santa Cruz. There, external mentors are seconded from the classroom for a maximum of three years. They have training as mentors, work as a team, and have a caseload of only 15 teachers each!

It is pleasing to see that all the recent New Zealand research has recommended that the mentoring role be strengthened, and that appropriate professional development and networking opportunities for PRTs be improved. The Teachers Council is in the process of trying to improve its policy around gaining and maintaining registration, and it plans to pilot new processes in 2009. It would be useful for the PPTA to further explore mentoring and induction systems being used effectively in other jurisdictions, watch the ideas being proposed and trialled in New Zealand, and develop policy about an ideal induction system for New Zealand secondary teachers (see recommendation 2).

¹⁶ New Zealand Teachers Council Draft Policy Document for Gaining and Maintaining Registration as a Teacher in Aotearoa New Zealand (March 2008)

¹⁷ Ministry of Education. (September 2007), *Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century: A review of Initial Teacher Education Policy*

In order to provide some accountability, schools should be audited and held accountable for providing a personalised programme of orientation, advice and guidance during the registration process that is consistent, rigorous and effective, as required by the Teachers Council. This may also help to solve the problem of inconsistency (both within and between schools) and the uncertainty in the induction process that PRTs are unhappy with (see recommendation 3).

5.2 More information

PRTs also believe that they need to be provided with more information about the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions and the evidence needed to attain full registration. They would appreciate the Teachers Council requirements having a higher profile in secondary teacher education courses and the Teachers Council providing more advice directly to PRTs on provisional registration so that they can have greater control over their registration process (see recommendation 4).

There are very useful publications available on the PPTA website which explain the rights of PRTs. One of the most frequently accessed is the *YANTS Guidebook: A Guide for Young and New Secondary Teachers*.¹⁸ This resource could be further developed to provide guidance for branches about how to better support PRTs. It could cover common PRT issues such as letters of appointment, salary credits, timetable provisions and registration, as well as how the branch can get involved in the effective orientation and ongoing mentoring of YANTs (see recommendation 5).

Obviously, support and guidance material is useful, but PRTs need to know of their existence in order to access them. This raises the question of how the Association might raise the profile of its resources for new teachers.

Although knowing their entitlements can help (at least they know what to question), we have to recognise that these members are in a very vulnerable position – they are often employed on a fixed-term basis and rely on the school to recommend them for full registration. They can have little individual leverage in the school. They need the support of the branch. A proactive branch could make a significant difference to the provision of appropriate conditions for PRTs.

6. Conclusion

Since YANTs started to investigate the current experiences of PRTs and to consider what the ideal induction experience would look like, the final stage of the Teachers Council's *Learning to Teach* research (*Success Case Studies of Teacher Induction in Aotearoa New Zealand*) has been published. It doesn't reveal much more than we already know about what good induction looks like, but it does provide sound evidence to back the changes that YANTs are recommending.

The evidence shows that a key outcome of effective induction is PRTs who are enthusiastic about their role in teaching and learning. It shows that successful induction programmes include trained

¹⁸ www.ppta.org.nz

mentors who are ‘matched’ to the needs of their PRTs, and that the working conditions that enable success include tenure and limited responsibilities.

Branches, schools, the Teachers Council and the ministry all have a part to play in improving induction experiences for PRTs and improving the retention of teachers.

Recommendations

- 1 That the report be received.
- 2 That PPTA call on the government to adequately resource, with professional development and time, comprehensive, high-quality mentoring for all beginning secondary teachers.
- 3 That PPTA call on the Teachers Council to ensure that all schools are able to provide a personalised programme of orientation, advice and guidance during the registration process that is consistent, rigorous and effective.
- 4 That PPTA call on the Teachers Council to more effectively inform secondary teacher graduates of the requirements in the professional path to registration.
- 5 That PPTA develop advice for branches about how to provide high-quality and appropriate collegial support and advocacy for provisionally-registered teachers, paying particular attention to Secondary Teachers’ Collective Agreement provisions.