



# **LISTENING TO TEACHER VOICE: A research study for the Chartered College of Teaching**

## **Introduction**

This is a summary of the research report submitted to the Chartered College of Teaching by Dr Tim O'Brien in November 2016.

The Board and Trustees of the Chartered College of Teaching appointed Dame Alison Peacock as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) designate in August 2016 and she will assume her new role in January 2017. Since her appointment, Dame Alison has emphasised the urgent need to consult teachers on the Chartered College's role and mission to become a profession-led organisation. As part of this consultation process, a research study was commissioned involving a series of in-depth focus group discussions with teachers. Dr Tim O'Brien, Visiting Fellow in psychology and human development (Institute of Education, UCL), and Dr Dennis Guiney, an educational psychologist, conducted the research. To protect the independence and integrity of the study, the researchers were not given access to existing outcomes from the Chartered College consultations until after the research had been completed. The study represents the culmination of a consultation process which has involved over 15,000 teachers to date.

## **The Study**<sup>1</sup>

A total of 112 teachers participated in the focus group sessions which were held in three regional centres: Manchester (October 2016), London (October 2016) and Birmingham (November 2016). Participating teachers came from a broad range of educational settings including primary, secondary, pupil referral units, special schools, further education and higher education institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Further details of the research methodology are taken directly from Dr Tim O'Brien's report and can be found on page 7-8

### *Focus group questions*

Three questions were used to frame the discussions:

1. What can the Chartered College of Teaching do for you now?
2. How can the Chartered College of Teaching make a difference to teaching and learning?
3. What would being a 'Chartered Teacher' mean to you – why would you want chartered status?

### **Analysis**

Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach adopting a constant comparison procedure to interpret and interrelate data in order to validate emerging themes. All themes emerged through a rigorous process of generating and comparing the properties and dimensions of data.

### **Findings**

#### **1. *What can the Chartered College of Teaching do for you now?***

Although centred on the immediacy of respondents' needs, this question also elicited medium and long term ambitions that teachers held for the Chartered College. The following themes emerged:

- supporting and enhancing teacher professionalism;
- offering access to high quality research;
- demonstrating credibility and sustainability;
- facilitating the sharing of practice;
- teacher wellbeing; and
- representing and amplifying teacher voice.

Each theme is outlined below.

#### *Supporting teacher professionalism*

It is evident that teachers in this study conceptualised professionalism as enabling them to be respected as a highly qualified community of practitioners who have expert and specialised knowledge and skills. Acknowledgment and validation of specialised skills were seen to have the potential to increase the status of the teaching profession itself. It was also recognised that accountability was integral to professional responsibility. It was argued that a restoration of professionalism would equate to a restoration of teacher confidence and pride. Being seen as professionals, with the Chartered College as a representative body for the profession, was also believed to have the potential to impact positively on recruitment and retention of new teachers.

### *Offering access to high quality research*

A common theme in all focus groups was that the Chartered College must enable teachers to have 'easy access' to research. This refers to the Chartered College helping to make quality research readily available to teachers. The Chartered College was perceived as having the potential to bridge a gap between schools and the research community, and create a partnership that enables access to, and active engagement with, educational research. Teachers wanted research that allowed them to ask 'how can I apply this?' and 'what does this mean in my classroom or my school?'

Published research was seen as important if it was relevant to need, but the nature of the type of research requested by teachers varied. Critical components of what constituted quality related to clear indications of how validity and reliability are being claimed by the research, explanations of methods and methodology and why these were chosen, and integrity relating to what is considered as evidence. There were requests for specific and specialist research: for example, SEND was a key area of specialist request. Teachers did not want the Chartered College to promote a particular pedagogy or ideology and therefore a broad range of high quality research, reflecting differing theoretical perspectives and pedagogical approaches, should be made available in easily accessible formats.

### *Demonstrating credibility and sustainability*

The sustainability of the Chartered College was felt to be a key issue for the participating teachers. It was suggested that the Chartered College's role would be to provide stability, countering the sense of flux which currently prevails in profession. To do this, the Chartered College must adopt clear, long-term goals, and it must seek to establish a distinctive position, demonstrating what it offers that is different to other education bodies.

### *Facilitating the sharing of practice*

Sharing of practice was identified as an important mechanism for encouraging reflective teaching. As well as helping to connect teachers as part of a collegiate, non-judgmental community, it was suggested that sharing practice could offer an effective structure for evaluating and assessing the impact of innovative practice across different school and classroom contexts. The notion of the teacher as a reflective practitioner, sharing their own thought processes as well as their teaching and learning outcomes with others, was felt to be an important facet of teacher development and professionalism.

### *Teacher wellbeing*

Issues affecting children and young people's wellbeing are causing increased concern and rightly so according to teachers in this study. However, it was felt that teachers' wellbeing has been largely overlooked and unreasonable workload demands and stress were having a negative impact on teachers' lives and health. Teacher wellbeing was regarded as having a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning and was also seen to be critical to teacher retention, especially at senior level.

When prompted about what the Chartered College could do to support teacher wellbeing the concept of supervision was referred to, participants described this supervision as being open conversations about teaching, learning and pastoral issues which would enable teachers to discuss their concerns. The Chartered College was seen as being in a position to offer high

quality individual or group supervision through providing access to expert facilitators.

### *Representing and amplifying teacher voice*

Teachers wanted the Chartered College to provide an independent voice for the profession and for this voice to play a role in public debate about the teaching profession.

Concerns were raised regarding a perceived loss of respect for the teaching profession in society at large and therefore the Chartered College's potential role in becoming an independent voice for the profession was seen as an important way of restoring professional pride and status. It was emphasised that the notion of teacher voice must be inclusive and teachers were clear that the Chartered College should be open to the entire spectrum of the teaching profession, including teaching assistants.

Four qualities were highlighted as being essential to the notion of a voice for the profession: it must be independent, research-informed, unifying and trusted. There was an insistence, rather than a preference, for teacher voice being represented in this way and it was felt that the extent to which the Chartered College tunes into and genuinely conveys a voice for the profession would determine teachers' willingness to join the Chartered College and make a sustained commitment to its mission. In particular, being independent (politically and intellectually) and research-informed were regarded as critical to the Chartered College's platform as a credible, trusted public voice for the teaching profession.

## **2. *How can the Chartered College of Teaching make a difference to teaching and learning?***

Two over-arching themes emerged through the focus groups:

- assuring quality in continuing professional development and
- creating collaborative communities.

### *Assuring quality in continuing professional development*

Participants described a largely fragmented CPD landscape. To improve this, teachers said they would like the Chartered College to become a provider of CPD in the longer term to make a positive difference to teaching and learning. There were also requests for the Chartered College to become established as a provider or a mediator of particular types of CPD as soon it can do so. Calls were also made for the Chartered College to assume a role in quality control and regulation of CPD.

It was suggested by many focus groups that the Chartered College could provide CPD that is similar in structure to the focus group meetings: a seminar type approach where issues could be discussed in depth. Such opportunities were seen as examples of 'deeper learning' which empower teachers to develop their own learning and the learning that takes place within their schools. The Chartered College could ask its members for topics of interest, enabling its CPD programme to be tailored to teacher needs. CPD in relation to Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) was identified as an urgent need, for example, and teachers in this study wanted to develop their knowledge and understanding of psychological aspects that drive challenging behaviours, rather than simply being trained in how to 'manage' behaviour.

Many teachers in this study use social media to share ideas and information for personal and professional development but there was concern that online communities could sometimes generate hostile exchanges. It was suggested that the Chartered College could create its own online learning platform for CPD with a code of conduct to ensure that dialogue is respectful to all. This platform might also be used for other CPD media such as short video clips for use by individual teachers or for meetings.

#### *Creating collaborative communities*

The concept of collaboration was seen as essential to enabling long-term developmental change within the profession. There is an evident appetite amongst participating teachers for continuing professional dialogue.

It was noticeable that willingness to share practice was a feature of the discussion amongst almost every focus group. Teachers saw collaboration as a means of initiating change and providing an impetus to continual development. The Chartered College could facilitate the sharing of practice by establishing new structures and systems for teachers to use. For example, the Chartered College could create spaces for collaborative communities through 'hubs'. These hubs were conceptualised as social media spaces established to promote the exchange of knowledge, reflection and discussion which lead to improved practices. Collaborative communities were seen to require delivery structures – such as something similar to, but not the same as, TeachMeets. It was suggested that the Chartered College's Advocates could liaise and co-ordinate hub activities and that each hub would generate its own content needs. It was also noted that whilst sensitive to regional needs, hubs must have national links too, providing a mechanism to connect similar schools nationally.

There is an emerging theme that the Chartered College should begin to engage in 'in-reach' activity – seeing schools in action or conducting research in collaboration with schools.

### **3. *What would be a 'Chartered Teacher' mean to you – why would you want chartered status?***

Responses to this question centred on:

- perceptions of what chartered status would represent and what achieving chartered status might entail; and
- other considerations such as costs, organisational membership, and possible dilemmas and tensions that may need to be addressed.

#### *Perceptions of chartered status*

Chartered status was perceived to be professionally advantageous in terms of it being an indicator of a level of professional development and a depth of professional commitment. Being a Chartered Teacher was often described as something that should be aspirational for teachers. Teachers in this study considered chartered status to involve a professional pathway focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as improving the lives and life chances for children and young people. This would include a commitment to career-long CPD. The debate about chartered status was grounded in terms of status, autonomy and professionalism, rather than pay, financial reward or career trajectory.

The key definition of what chartered status means to the teachers in this study has two components: a Chartered Teacher cares about their practice (evidenced by a commitment to practitioner-based enquiry) and a Chartered Teacher cares about their profession (evidenced by a willingness to share practice). Assumptions were made that being chartered might be similar in meaning to a level of credible professional status or to a level of continuing professional development and learning, or both, that exists in other professions with chartered status.

There was uncertainty about whether chartered status is achieved by one 'scholarly' activity such as an in-house piece of action research or whether regular CPD is required to achieve and maintain chartered status.

#### *Other considerations*

The main attribute of chartered status was that, whilst it should be available for all teachers, it validates a teacher who wants to remain in the classroom and does not want to move into a leadership position. It also enables them to create a personalised learning and development pathway.

A Chartered Teacher is interested in evidence, is a reflective practitioner and responds to changing contexts. A Chartered Teacher is a specialist teacher who cares about their practice and their profession. It was evident in the focus group discussions that providing clarity on the question of chartered status is an urgent priority for the Chartered College.

## **Summary**

Amongst teachers participating in this study there was robust support for the Chartered College and optimism about its new phase. There was appreciation of the way in which the Chartered College had rapidly engaged in a consultation process with teachers: participants saw this process as an important opportunity to contribute to raising the status of teaching as a profession. Overall, there were several key messages emerging from this study about what teachers want their Chartered College to be and to do.

Teachers wanted the Chartered College to:

1. be instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and learning through supporting and enhancing teacher professionalism and status, enhancing teachers' pride and confidence in their professional standing;
2. enhance the professionalism of teaching through its chartered status and via more effective, responsive CPD (providing quality assurance for currently available CPD provision and by initiating its own CPD programmes via a range of different networks, formats and contexts);
3. provide easy access to a resource base built on a broad range of relevant, high quality educational research presented in a format which teachers can readily engage with and use;
4. establish its own, distinctive platform as an independent, research-informed, trusted and credible voice for the teaching profession, holding clear, long term objectives and

acting as an advocate for teachers' professional interests within political and public arenas; and

5. be an inclusive organisation for all teaching practitioners.

The study also identified a 'wish-list' that teachers wanted the Chartered College to fulfil, including: a communal learning platform for CPD; opportunities for partnership between schools and the research community; access to group or individual supervision as means of supporting teacher wellbeing; and a code of conduct for engaging in professional dialogue and sharing practice.

With regard to chartered status, teachers recognised the potential advantages of achieving chartered status in terms of their own personal and professional aspirations as well as its important contribution to raising the status of the profession in the public domain. Chartered status, it was argued, could also help to attract and retain new teachers. Pathways to chartered status should be personalised and clearly grounded within the profession's core mission to improve teaching and learning and outcomes for children and young people. Questions raised about the possible implications of chartered status in terms of financial, career development and organisational issues add further insights to support chartered status planning.

The themes which have emerged from this rigorous, in-depth, grounded process have now been mapped against analysis of the existing dataset from over 15,000 teachers and clear points of connectivity are apparent. Synergies from the larger database are evident in relation to professionalism, the creation of communities where teachers can collaborate, voice and the importance of raising the Chartered College's profile. These consultations have set an agenda of short and long term priorities and objectives that teachers now want their Chartered College to address.

### **About the research process**

The geographical location of each teacher who wished to participate was mapped nationally and three regional centres for running focus group sessions were selected accordingly: Manchester (October 2016), London (October 2016) and Birmingham (November 2016). Each wave of data was collected on these dates. Teachers were represented from a very wide range of educational settings including primary, secondary, pupil referral units, special schools, further and higher education. Two independent researchers, Dr Dennis Guiney and Dr Tim O'Brien, designed and conducted the complete research process. Dennis Guiney is an educational psychologist. Tim O'Brien is Visiting Fellow in Psychology and Human Development at UCL Institute of Education. They moderated the focus groups in all three geographical locations. Dennis Guiney moderated all secondary level focus groups and Tim O'Brien moderated all primary level focus groups. Each focus group session lasted for approximately one hour. Field notes were taken throughout. In their role as moderators, the researchers asked for clarification of meaning from participants whenever required.

#### *Focus group questions*

The collective focus of the groups was the Chartered College of Teaching. Interaction is critical in focus group research as it enables data to consistently emerge and meaning to deepen. Focus group sessions also need to be socially oriented in order to promote conversational interaction that explores lived experience and meaning-making processes. They must create the time and capacity to build upon opinions and ideas. Therefore, three questions were posed to each focus group within a semi-structured framework: an in-depth approach that enables a researcher to focus on reality and meaning rather than on information coverage. The order of questioning was always the same for every group. Each

group was given the same orienting introduction by the researchers, covering issues of purpose, methodology, process and anonymity.

The three questions were:

1. What can the Chartered College of Teaching do for you now?
2. How can the College of Teaching make a difference to teaching and learning?
3. What would being a 'Chartered Teacher' mean to you – why would you want chartered status?

These questions were generated after consultation with the CEO and a group discussion with the Trustees of the Chartered College.

#### *Analytic Methodology: Grounded Theory*

The chosen methodology for data analysis was grounded theory. Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1998) is a methodology that incorporates an a posteriori approach in that it enables theory to be inductively generated from data through a method of constant comparison. The application of grounded theory provides a tool for understanding and validating lived experience and social reality as well as generating theory about that reality. Rich and valid theoretical foundations can be gathered from the analysis of focus group data by using comparison-driven analytic methods (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014; Charmaz, 2014). This makes grounded theory suited to the nature and context of this specific research study. It is important to emphasise that theory is actively generated rather than verified. The Chartered College of Teaching did not set out with an agenda to promote and nor did it have any hypotheses to test. 112 teachers participated in the focus group sessions, a large number for grounded analysis.

As the researchers are involved in inductive analysis of data the role of reflexivity becomes fundamental in relation to enhancing or diminishing the validity of outcomes that occur as a result of empirical grounding. Both researchers have engaged in research at doctoral level where philosophical theorising about personal construction of reality is embedded in the act of research, particularly in how construction influences the interplay between researcher and data in the interpretation process. Their engagement in such deep reflexivity enhances validity. However, due to the grounded nature of the research process, the researchers make no claims to generalisable validity.

Validity and authenticity within research that applies grounded theory is also enhanced when the researcher has professional knowledge and personal experience of the empirical field (Glaser, 2016). This enables the researcher to be placed in a robust position of theoretical sensitivity towards the field. Both researchers are former teachers. Dennis Guiney has taught in mainstream secondary education and, as an educational psychologist, works in mainstream primary and secondary, special education, alternative provision and in multidisciplinary education and health teams. Tim O'Brien has taught in mainstream secondary education and has taught primary age children with severe learning difficulties (SLD). He was also deputy head teacher of an age 4 - 16 special school for children and young people who experience social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, where he taught all age groups.

Throughout the process the researchers accepted the data as it appeared in itself in its own context (Giorgi, 2009). Constant comparison procedures associated with grounded theory, such as coding and categorisation, were used to interpret and interrelate data in order to validate emerging themes. Final thematisation was arrived at through refining and theoretical saturation. All themes emerged through a rigorous process of generating and comparing the properties and dimensions of data. Themes were generated. They were not forced.

## **References**

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