

# Teacher Expertise for Special Educational Needs

## Filling in the gaps

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### Executive Summary

Special Educational Needs (SEN) can be one of the most controversial aspects of our education system. For decades there has been significant debate about the best places in which to educate children with SEN and what 'inclusion' ought to mean in practice. However, amongst many practitioners there is a consensus developing: that 'inclusion' is not a question of place and that what truly matters is the quality of the education received, regardless of setting. There is still a debate to be had about how decisions are made as to where we educate some children with SEN, but there is also an urgent need to concentrate on the standard of the education these children actually receive.

Children with SEN represent 20.5% of all children in our schools and received £5.1 billion last year in additional expenditure and yet the evidence suggests that they are seriously underperforming:

- For pupils aged 11 in 2008, 84.6% with no SEN achieved the expected level (according to the National Curriculum) in English and Maths. 33.7% of pupils with SEN achieved this.
- Children with SEN are twice as likely to be persistently absent from school.
- Children with SEN are 8 times as likely to be excluded from school.

One key reason for the underachievement of these children, and the inadequate functioning of the SEN system as a whole, is the lack of core or basic understanding of SEN amongst the teaching workforce. A second, and related reason, is the lack of teaching expertise and specialism in SEN. It has become a truism that no education system can be better than the quality of the teachers who operate within it and this holds if we look at SEN provision in particular. Despite the fact that the issues around teacher training and SEN are hardly new, governments have proven unable or unwilling to get to grips with the scale of the problem. According to one academic, "*successive governments had done nothing to enhance the nature of training in respect to SEN issues.*" Many in the sector subscribe to the view that the situation amounts to "*groundhog day*", with the government perpetually recognising the need for action, without ever taking it.

This report focuses on the issues of teacher training and teacher expertise in relation to SEN, and seeks to make recommendations aimed at ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped to provide all children with the education to which they are entitled.

### Specialist skills in special schools

With the help of the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN), we conducted a survey of 45 special schools, covering a wide range of impairment. 73% of respondents told us that they found it hard or very hard to recruit staff with the requisite skills whereas only 5% found it easy. On average, per school, 52% of teachers had any qualification in SEN and just 30% had a qualification which was relevant to the particular needs of the children they were teaching. On average, per school, 34% of teaching support staff had any qualification in SEN. The survey also found that, in order to provide on the job training for their staff, some special schools are operating as “*permanently overstuffed*”. One respondent suggested there was a culture of “*university protectionism*” in relation to the delivery of SEN training.

Our survey shows a serious problem with teaching expertise in special schools. They reflect the findings of the recent Salt review into the *Supply of teachers for children with Severe Learning Difficulties and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties* (SLD/PMLD) which highlighted in particular, the impact of the disappearance of specialist routes at ITT level. Importantly, they show that the problems which were identified by Salt are common to all special schools, not just those which cater for children with SLD/PMLD.

We recommend that the proposals made by Salt with reference to expertise in SLD/PMLD are expanded to cover all other major areas of impairment catered for in special schools. We also recommend that the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) cash entitlement proposed in a previous Policy Exchange report, *More Good Teachers*, be introduced and that teachers in special schools receive a top up payment which recognizes their greater need for training. There is also a need to recognize that special schools must be able to build and maintain their own training capacity, largely because much of the expertise in relation to SEN now lies in special schools as opposed to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In light of this we recommend that training school status should be offered to all outstanding special schools and/or specialist special schools and that special schools with training school status should be enabled to seek accredited status for the provision of specialist qualifications in their field. Provision would be accredited by, and the qualifications designed by, voluntary bodies or trusts in the relevant field. Finally, in recognition of the potential for a leadership crisis in the sector, the National College should pilot Head Teacher ‘internships’ for special schools who wish to secure succession.

### Skills in the mainstream: core skills for all teachers

The vast majority of teachers will spend their entire career in a mainstream setting and the vast majority of children with SEN are taught in mainstream settings. Given that the prevalence of SEN is 20.5%, it is to be expected

that all teachers will teach children with SEN. It therefore makes sense that rather than attempting to react to demand on a relatively ad hoc basis, all teachers should be equipped with a certain basic understanding of SEN which allows them to identify and deal with problems in a productive manner when they first occur. This basic understanding should also equip all teachers to deal, themselves, with some of the most prevalent but least severe forms of SEN.

There has been a recognition of this need for perhaps 30 years, but successive governments have failed to act decisively enough. Improving the core skills of all teachers requires action at two levels: Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to ensure that new entrants to the profession are appropriately equipped; and CPD, to ensure that in service teachers can keep their skills up to date.

At ITT level, the government needs to force the hand of ITT providers who currently do not provide enough coverage of SEN issues in their courses. One recent survey found that many institutions offer as little as one afternoon dedicated to SEN in the entire duration of an ITT course. With a view to this, the requirements of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) should be strengthened to include: a section dedicated to SEN alone; a requirement to understand theories of child development; basic knowledge of all major areas of impairment; knowledge regarding the identification of special needs within these broad categories of impairment; and the ability to adapt the curriculum in their subject areas in relation to the key areas of impairment.

With regards to CPD, the government should retain a commitment to a scheme along the lines of the Inclusion Development Programme which aims to deliver core skills to in service teachers. The scheme should be adapted in such a way to reflect the approach to core skills at ITT level, represented by the strengthening of QTS. Finally, the 'What Works Clearinghouse', also recommended in a previous Policy Exchange report (*Rising Marks, Falling Standards*) should be expanded to encompass research into interventions for children with SEN.

#### [Advanced and Specialist skills for mainstream teachers](#)

From the basis of core skills, teachers should be confidently able to identify when their skills and knowledge are not sufficient to provide for a child and at this point they should have easy access within their school to 'advanced' knowledge. From here, if the advanced skills are not enough - all schools should have ready access to 'specialist' skills, although the teachers with these skills will not be found in all schools.

Providing these 'advanced' and 'specialist' skills requires a certain amount of strategic planning. Whilst core skills are to be provided for all teachers, in all schools, advanced and specialist skills are only required of a minority of teachers in the mainstream. Providing certain teachers with advanced and specialist skills requires a different approach to ensure that the right teachers get the right skills at the right time.

To date, however, this planning has on the whole not been forthcoming. There have been piecemeal measures, most notably the Rose review which recommended the funding of 4,000 specialist Dyslexia teachers and the government's decision to fund accredited training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs). However, as with the approach taken to specialist skills in special schools, there needs to be a clear commitment to providing advanced and specialist skills in all areas of impairment in the mainstream.

In order to go about providing these skills, there needs to be a clarification of exactly what advanced and specialist skills are in an SEN context and how teachers with these skills fit within a broader framework of career development which includes 'Excellent Teachers' and 'Advanced Skills Teachers'.

We recommend that teachers taking on advanced and specialist roles should be required to acquire or be in the process of working towards the achievement of an accredited qualification in their relevant field. As with qualifications for teachers in special schools, these would be approved by national voluntary bodies or trusts – in the same way that specialist qualifications in Dyslexia already are. Courses could be provided by a variety of routes, including by local special schools. Local authorities and schools should be required to develop and contribute to audits of expertise, using nationally agreed, standardized criteria in order to build a clear picture of supply and demand in relation to SEN teacher expertise. We also recommend that data be collected nationally and locally regarding specialisms in SEN. This is already done for subject specialisms and it should be replicated across all major areas of impairment with a view to introducing appropriate financial incentive schemes if necessary.

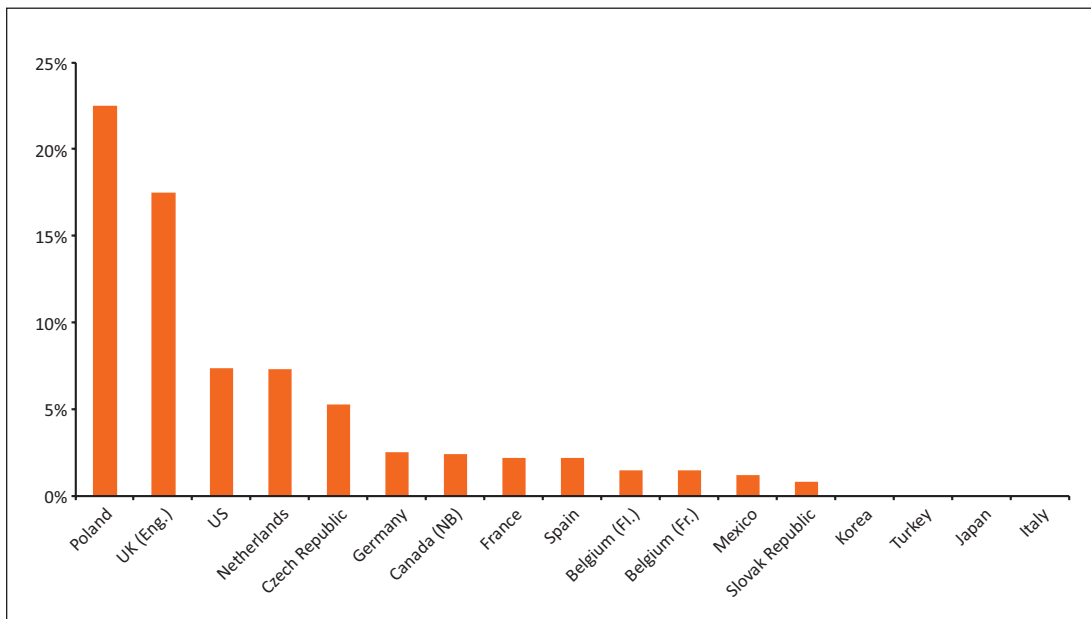
In the context of major budget cuts, to which the Department for Education is not immune, the money for specialist training will need to come from existing funds. In light of this, there should be a major review of the existing SEN allowance which should seek to understand whether or not it works effectively as an incentive for teachers to specialize in SEN. The conclusions of this review may mean that the money currently spent on the allowance can be refocused, some of which could contribute to extra training for SEN specialists.

## Introduction

According to the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice, a child is defined as having SEN when *"he or she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her."*<sup>1</sup> A child is considered to have a learning difficulty if they have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age or have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age. The definition of special educational provision is provision which is additional to or otherwise different from that made generally available for children of their age in schools, other than special schools, in the area.

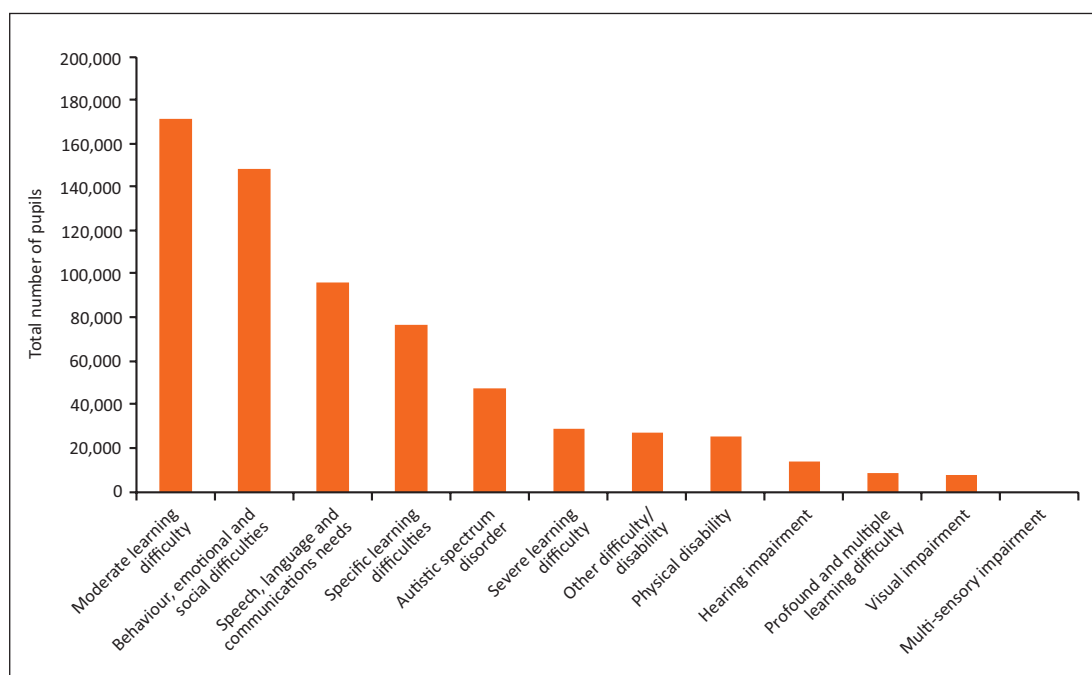
This broad definition means a significant proportion of pupils are identified as having SEN at any one time. There are currently around 1,656,000 pupils in England identified as having SEN.<sup>2</sup> This is equal to 20.5% of children in our schools and represents a significantly higher proportion of children identified as having SEN than that identified in other countries. The proportion of children identified as having the most severe needs does not differ much, with each country identifying around 3% at this level. However, the UK identifies a far higher proportion of children as having less severe needs than other countries do, as can be seen in the graph below:<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1. Percentage of children receiving additional resources in OECD cross national category B



The graph shows that we identify fewer children as having less severe SEN than all other countries surveyed by the OECD apart from Poland. This is at least partly a reflection of the breadth of the definition used. As a result of this there is also a very wide range of needs and difficulties amongst the population of children defined as having SEN. The graph below shows the numbers of children in state funded primary, secondary and special schools who fall within the 12 key areas of impairment.

Figure 2. Prevalence of need amongst children at School Action Plus and with Statements<sup>4</sup>



The graph shows the wide range of impairment, as well as identifying those categories which might be termed 'high incidence' and those which are 'low incidence'. What the graph does not show is the range of impairment *within* these separate categories. For instance, a child with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder may require anything from only a small amount of additional assistance in a mainstream setting to highly specialist, and expensive, provision in a special school.

In an attempt to recognise this breadth of needs the education system is designed to provide a graduated response. There are three levels of provision for children with SEN: School Action, School Action Plus and a Statement of SEN. School Action requires schools to provide additional help and/or interventions for an individual child from within their own resources, drawing on expertise and specialisms within their school. If this fails to work, the child can be put on School Action Plus, at which point the school accesses external help from the Local Authority or other agencies. For some children, this will still not be enough support and the school or parents can request a statutory assessment of needs on the part of the Local Authority. If the Local Authority then decides that the child's needs are of a magnitude or severity that the school cannot reasonably be expected to provide adequate support for him or her through the usual means available through School Action or School Action Plus, the child will receive a Statement of SEN. This statement will specify the provision to which that child is now entitled and the requirements which the Local Authority has a duty to meet. Included in this statement will be a decision as to which school the child will attend.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of children identified as having SEN are supported through either School Action or School Action Plus, with 222,000 pupils holding a statement, out of a total of 1,656,000. Correspondingly, the vast majority of pupils involved with School Action and School Action Plus are educated in the mainstream. In addition around 62% of children with statements also currently attend mainstream schools.<sup>6</sup>

Children with SEN represent a significant 20.5% of the school population and the provision of a high quality education to this group should, obviously, be considered as of equal importance to the remaining 80%. However, it is also the case that in some instances the time and attention which children with SEN can demand of teachers and other staff can affect the education of other children in their class. Furthermore, from an expenditure point of view, money spent on children with SEN will not only include the standard per pupil funding associated with every child's education but often higher levels of expenditure to pay for additional and specialist support. In the case of pupils with statements, and in particular pupils at special schools, this expenditure can be very high indeed. Although costs vary to a large extent, a placement in a special school can cost the local authority as much as £40,000 a year, by comparison to typical per pupil funding at a secondary school level of around £5,000.<sup>7</sup>

There is not a ring fenced SEN budget and so it is not entirely clear how much is spent every year on this group over and above normal schools expenditure but it sits at around £5.2 billion.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, the direct cost of educational provision to these children is not the only issue. There is a great deal of evidence regarding the long term cost to the state and society which can arise as a result of difficulties faced by children in school, including those relating to unemployment and criminal activity.<sup>9</sup> For those children with the most severe needs there are high costs in later life owing to the need for ongoing care.

Finally, and most importantly, the 20.5% of children in our schools with SEN often represent some of the most vulnerable in our society and this applies not only to the children themselves but very often to their parents and siblings. Providing them with an education that gives them the greatest chance to fulfil their potential should be the index of a healthy and socially just society.

While it is certainly true that some children will always provide challenges to the educational system, and to individual schools and teachers, which will be very difficult to meet, there are a number of reasons which mean that currently children with SEN in England do not always receive the quality of education they deserve. Too often, children with SEN are underachieving in comparison to their peers:<sup>10</sup>

- For pupils aged 11 in 2008, 84.6% with no SEN achieved the expected level (according to the National Curriculum) in English and Maths. 33.7% of pupils with SEN achieved this.
- Children with SEN are twice as likely to be persistently absent from school.
- Children with SEN are 8 times as likely to be excluded from school.

One key reason for the underachievement of these children, and the inadequate functioning of the SEN system as a whole, is the lack of core or basic understanding of SEN amongst the teaching workforce. A second, and related reason, is the lack of teaching expertise and specialism in SEN.<sup>11</sup> It has become a truism that no education system can be better than the quality of the teachers who operate within it and this holds if we look at SEN provision in particular: the provision for children with SEN stands or falls on the quality of the teaching they receive in the classroom.<sup>12</sup> It can be argued that many of the problems with the SEN system could be remedied with the right teaching expertise: teachers could be trained to deal with problems faced by children at home and could be trained to identify and stop bullying for instance. Moreover, teachers could also be trained to be able to identify, in a timely fashion, the problems faced by a child and to react accordingly. As part of this reaction, the teacher and the child would adopt a realistic but ambitious set of expectations and the teacher would have the requisite skills and expertise to enable the child to achieve accordingly. There is much truth and importance in this.

However, despite the fact that the issues around teacher training and SEN are hardly new, governments have proven unable or unwilling to get to grips with the scale of the problem. According to one academic, “*successive governments had done nothing to enhance the nature of training in respect to SEN issues.*”<sup>13</sup> Recent years have seen much official recognition that there is a problem, with numerous reports criticizing policy and practice, including by Ofsted and the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee. Nonetheless, these reports have not resulted in any significant policy changes. As a result, many in the sector would probably subscribe to the view that the situation amounts to “*groundhog day*”, with the government perpetually recognising the need for action, without ever taking it.<sup>14</sup>

This report focuses on the issues of teacher training and teacher expertise in relation to SEN, and seeks to make recommendations aimed at ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped to provide all children with the education to which they are entitled. It should be noted that there are issues with the supply of training for other experts or specialists who work with children with SEN including Educational Psychologists and Speech and Language Therapists. Both areas need to be considered when assessing how to improve provision for children with SEN, and indeed have roles to play in the training of teachers. However, in order to gain from a sustained focus, this report will concern itself only with the expertise of teaching staff in schools. In order to do this, the report has been split into three main sections. While it is true that in practice all three of these areas are interrelated and the report will highlight where this is the case, they are nevertheless independent enough to be discussed separately. The first section will focus on special schools, whilst the second and third sections will analyse the needs of teachers in the mainstream. Firstly the ‘core’ needs that all teachers have, and secondly the need to ensure an appropriate supply of advanced and specialist skills covering a range of areas of impairment.

- **Teaching expertise in special schools** – An assumption that teacher training should prepare teachers for the mainstream and the disappearance of specialist courses for teachers wishing to teach in special schools, along with other factors, has resulted in a decline in teaching expertise in special schools. Steps



must be taken to ensure that special schools can recruit teachers with specialist knowledge relevant to the particular needs of the children they teach so that some of the most vulnerable children with the most complex and severe needs can be adequately provided for.

- **Core skills for all teachers** – SEN is not represented strongly enough in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses. This has been a problem for decades, and has yet to be remedied. The result is that teachers are not prepared when they enter the profession to provide for children with SEN. There need to be measures which improve the teaching of SEN in ITT, and a commitment to providing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to those teachers who missed out when they undertook ITT.
- **Advanced and specialist skills for the mainstream** – In order for the graduated response described earlier to work, mainstream schools must be equipped with differing levels of expertise across a range of ‘types’ of SEN. At the moment, although there is a policy commitment to this in theory, it can be difficult to ensure in practice.

### Specialist skills in special schools

89,000 children were educated in special schools in 2009.<sup>15</sup> Special schools cater for a range of needs, although their intake almost exclusively comprises of children with statements of SEN, issued by the local authority. This means that children in special schools are more likely to have needs which are difficult or complicated to provide for. The number of children in special schools has fallen in recent years and in some areas special schools have closed. There is much debate about this trend and to what extent it is the result of a ‘bias’ towards inclusion in the mainstream, communicated by central government and enacted by local authorities. This is a separate debate but what is clear is that, for whatever reasons, in the last 20 years insufficient attention has been paid to the training needs of special schools.

Special schools are, by definition, providing a specialist service to a group of children whose needs are so particular or challenging that it is difficult or inappropriate to meet them in a mainstream setting. Despite this, the approach to teacher training has tended to assume that all teachers should be prepared for the mainstream and that any specialisms can be built on top of this foundation. The result has been almost the complete loss of specialist routes for teachers who wish to teach in special schools, in particular bachelor and masters level degrees in Severe Learning Difficulties/Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, with only a very small number of places left.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, as some special schools have closed, those left have been required to take in pupils with needs they did not previously cater for. The result is that special schools have become increasingly ‘generic’ which adds further challenges when trying to equip teachers with the right skills as they may have to teach children across a wide range of needs, all of which in practice require a different specialism. It also makes it more difficult for schools to plan the development of their staff in a coherent manner.

Special schools should not be considered in isolation from the rest of the school community. A strong, sustainable and dynamic future for the sector must be predicated on greater and better cooperation with the mainstream. Indeed, the key area in which this cooperation should be seen is in special schools sharing their expertise and helping train teachers in local mainstream settings. In this sense, special schools should be seen as part of a strategic approach which seeks to ensure an appropriate degree of expertise across a community of schools – special and mainstream. However, whilst remembering this, it should not be forgotten that special schools have very particular needs of their own in order that they can provide the best education for their pupils.

The recent *Review of Teacher Supply for Pupils with Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties* conducted by Toby Salt at the request of the then Secretary of State for Children Schools and Families, Ed Balls MP, did attempt to address the issue of expertise in special schools but only in relation to teaching children with Severe Learning Difficulties and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD).

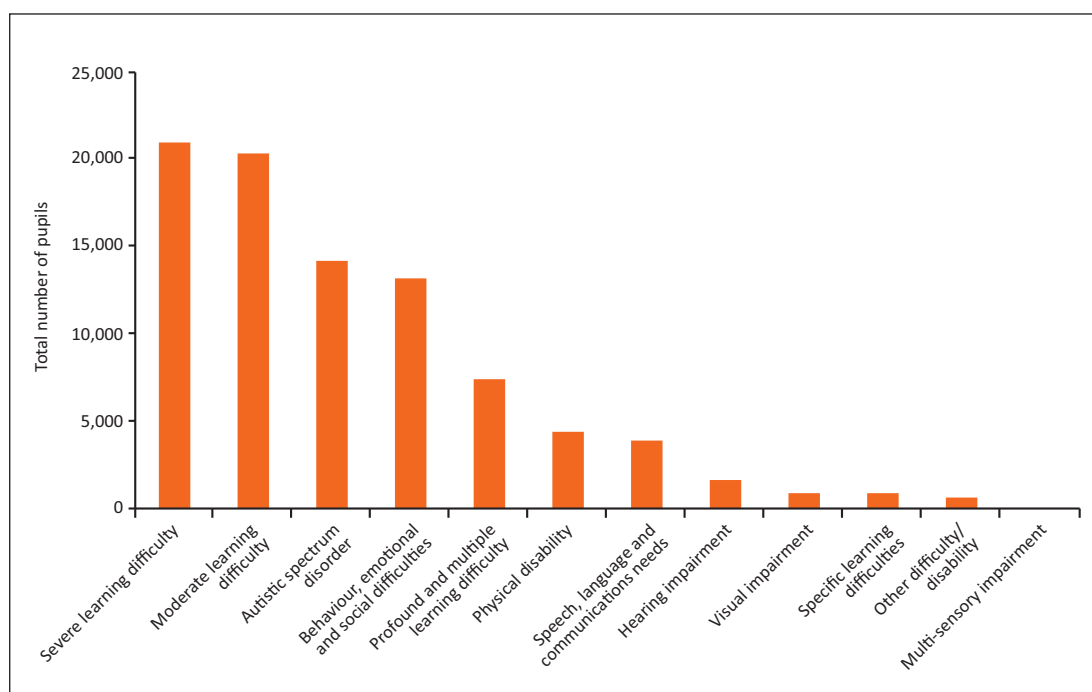
Salt recommended that the shortage of supply of teachers with specialist knowledge in SLD/PMLD could be remedied in a number of ways. Many of his recommendations are very sensible but few of these issues should be considered as exclusively relevant to the area of SLD and PMLD and where appropriate should be extended to other areas of expertise within special schools.

The evidence which Salt used to illustrate the problem of a shortage of supply in SLD and PMLD teachers is actually relevant to the whole special school sector. For example, he highlights that 45% of head teachers and teaching staff in special schools are aged 50 or over compared with only 27% in the mainstream and that the number of vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post is more than twice as high in special schools as in the mainstream.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover Salt explicitly states that *“The published data is not detailed enough to indicate whether vacancies are specifically for teachers of pupils with SLD/PMLD.”*<sup>18</sup>

There are two possible reasons for the focus on SLD/PMLD. The first is that there is evidence to suggest that the incidence of the types of complex needs encompassed by this definition is increasing.<sup>19</sup> The second is that, one effect of the increasing placement of children with statements of SEN in the mainstream is that the cohort of children remaining in the special sector are increasingly identified by the complexity of their needs.

Figure 3. Distribution of need in special schools<sup>20</sup>



However, as figure 3 shows, although SLD/PMLD form a significant proportion of the current special school population there is a much wider variety of needs present. In particular, children with Moderate Learning and Difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties represent a large minority of children in special schools.

Some argue that increasing trends towards inclusion will mean that special schools begin to almost exclusively cater for these severe and complex needs. However, there remains significant debate as to whether this would be desirable, with others arguing that a broader spectrum of SEN children should be catered for with specialist provision, or that parents should be presented with a choice of special or mainstream placements.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the merits of each side what is not questioned is the fact that the current, more diverse, special school population should not be denied adequately trained teachers and teaching assistants in anticipation of any further trends towards inclusion.

#### Policy Exchange survey of special schools training requirements

It is clear that there are a wider variety of needs beyond those so far considered by government and the types of problems Salt addressed throughout the sector. The results of our survey of special schools, conducted in partnership with the National Association of Special Educational Needs (NASEN) illustrate this point clearly. 45 schools responded to our survey, which was sent out to the heads of special schools by email. Our methodology is set out in Appendix 1.

## 1. 'Type' of school

Although there are some general categories into which special schools fit, there are not clearly delineated 'types' of special school. As outlined earlier, increased inclusion in the mainstream and the closure of special schools has meant that many schools are left to 'mop up' a wide variety of needs in their local area and, in this sense, have become less specialised. This was certainly reflected in the responses to the survey, which were extremely varied, with few schools identifying themselves in a consistent manner with other schools. Nonetheless, broadly in keeping with the fact that only 32.1% of the special school population are defined as having Severe Learning Difficulties or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties:

- Only 17% of respondents identified themselves as schools catering purely for SLD/PMLD
- However, a further 39% did mention either SLD, PMLD, or Complex Learning Difficulties (CLD) in response to this question and in conjunction with other types of need including ASD and MLD

The remaining respondents were varied. Those with specialist school status identified themselves on this basis:

- Cognition and Learning: 7%
- Communication and Interaction: 2%
- Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: 4%
- Sensory and/or physical needs: 2%

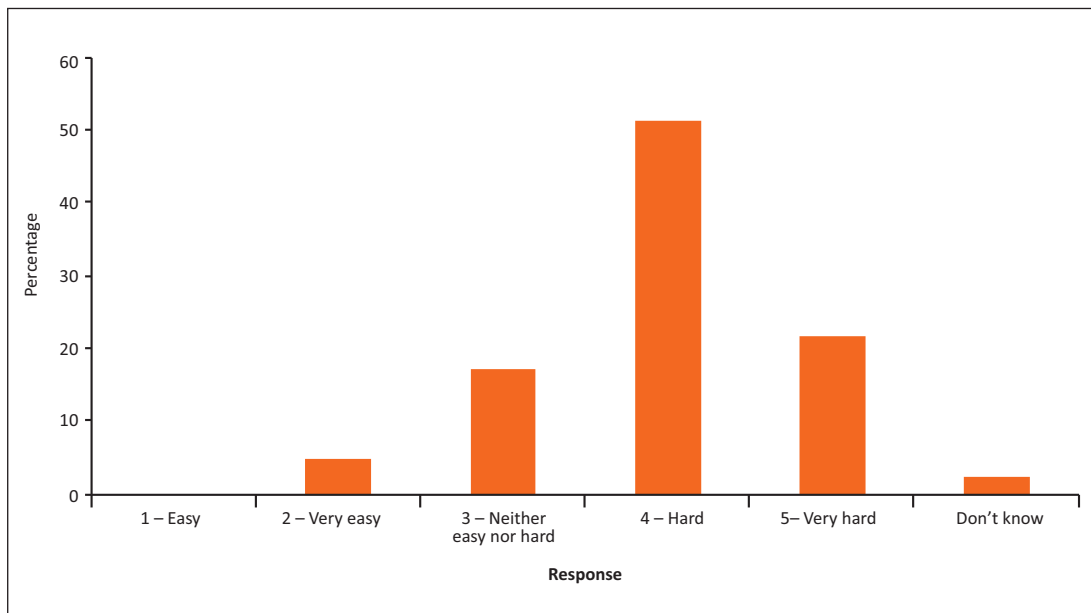
Importantly:

- 12% identified themselves as being 'generic' special schools, or having 'no' specialism.
- A further 10% identified themselves as dealing with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

## 2. Ability to recruit appropriately trained staff

We asked respondents to answer on a Likert scale how easy or hard they found it to recruit staff with appropriate skills. The results here were stark:

Figure 4. Ability of special schools to recruit appropriately trained staff



- 73.2% of respondents either found it hard or very hard to recruit staff with the requisite skills whereas only 4.9% found it easy.
- Importantly, there appears to be no significant correlation between the type of school and their experiences of recruitment, although some 'generic' schools did suggest that accommodating for a wider range of needs made it more difficult to recruit appropriately trained staff.

### 3. Existing qualifications of teaching staff

We asked schools about the levels of qualifications, of any sort, in SEN:

- On average, per school, 52% of teachers had a qualification in SEN
- 23% of respondents said that *all* of their teaching staff had a qualification in SEN
- 26% of respondents reported that less than a quarter of their teaching staff had any sort of SEN qualification
- One school reported that only 1 teacher, out of 11 of their staff, had any sort of qualification in SEN

### 4. Teaching support staff

We also asked schools about the levels of qualifications in SEN held by their teaching support staff:

- On average, per school, 34% of teaching support staff had any sort of qualification in SEN

- 55% of respondents reported that less than a quarter of their teaching support staff had any sort of qualification in SEN
- 24% of respondents told us that none of their teaching support staff were qualified in SEN
- At the other end of the scale, 13% reported that all of their teaching support staff had a qualification in SEN

Taking the levels of qualifications of teachers, and teaching support staff together, we can get a picture of the training of all staff involved in the teaching of children in those schools surveyed. As a result of the fact that special schools tend to have far more teaching support staff than teaching staff, and that teaching support staff were less likely to have a qualification in SEN, the percentage of all staff qualified is significantly lower than that for teachers alone:

- On average, per school, 39% of teachers and teaching support staff had any sort of qualification in SEN

## 5. Specialist qualifications

We were also interested to know to what extent the training received by teachers was what might be termed 'generic' SEN training, and to what extent it was specific or tailored to the needs of the children they taught. We found that:

- On average per school, 30% of teachers had a qualification which was relevant to the particular needs of the children they were teaching
- Only two schools told us that all their teachers held specialist qualifications

## 6. Problems faced by special schools

We felt it was important to give respondents the chance to comment freely on any issue surrounding SEN and training, as well as the opportunity to give more detail and background to the answers they had already given. Most respondents took up this opportunity and it was interesting to see both the breadth of the challenges faced, the particular nature of individual schools circumstances, as well as the areas of agreement amongst them.

Many of the comments made were of a general nature, expressing dissatisfaction with the current arrangements. One school complained that the approach by the previous government to training was underpinned by an assumption that *"all teachers can teach any student regardless of need."* Another claimed that recent years have seen special schools becoming more generic and that as a result staff were increasingly finding themselves *"out of their comfort zone."*

These sorts of comments accord with the general trends outlined earlier in this report. Numerous respondents bemoaned the historical impact of the cessation of a specialist route at Initial Teacher Training (ITT) level to SEN in

the 1980's. This meant that those teachers who knew they wished to pursue a career in special schools could choose to do so at the earliest opportunity. Some called for it to be reinstated, whereas others felt that expertise now lay in schools rather than universities. Moreover, several respondents wished to stress that they felt 'on the job training' was more valuable than the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, suggesting that staff developed their skills *"through working with children rather than on 'courses'."*<sup>22</sup>

Apart from calls to strengthen the SEN element in ITT, the most consistent theme was the vital role of CPD in training staff. This was viewed as a very positive thing, with schools wishing to emphasise the fact that as a result of the training received on the job, their staff were well prepared for their role. However, there was also a sense from several respondents that they were not adequately supported either financially or in terms of time to provide good quality CPD to their teachers and teaching support staff. This meant that a proper commitment to CPD would involve a *"huge proportion of...budget, after staffing costs"* spent on training. Once again, this reflected the view that in many areas, expertise resided in the schools amongst experienced teaching staff, rather than in the education departments of Universities. All of this suggests that any expansion of specialist training will need to heavily rely on the training provided within special schools themselves.

#### **Case Study – A School for Social Communication Difficulties and Associated Learning Difficulties**

In their response to the survey this school was very keen to highlight the efforts they made to ensure they had well trained staff:

*"We have a strong commitment to CPD within the school and feel more work can be done in conjunction with Universities at the ITT stage, or via on the job training to raise levels of expertise and competence in those developing their teaching career. The ability to develop this further is limited by time factors, cost, and flexibility within the school and within accrediting bodies."*

In particular, the head of this school emphasised that a strong commitment to CPD meant that the school had to be permanently overstaffed, in order that time could be freed up for teachers or teaching assistants to go on courses, with all the cost implications associated. Moreover, the head believed that the school was at a disadvantage to mainstream schools in the area that did not need to spend so much of their budgets on CPD. The extra money the school needed to maintain their commitment to training was not reflected in their delegated budget, or in the money they received via statements. The head further argued that there was nothing in the manner in which budgets were allocated which suggested the school was being encouraged to plan for the future in terms of training needs.

The head also felt that the burden which resulted from the need to send teachers and other staff on courses could also be alleviated if there was more flexibility on the part of course providers. In particular, he said that he had recently appointed two Higher Level Teaching Assistants, both of whom needed additional training. However, the lack of flexibility meant that both would need significant time out of the classroom. He argued that schools should be able to deliver training themselves, on site and be assessed for this by independent bodies. This particular school was already able to do this for an NVQ level 3 for care workers, in partnership with City and Guilds. However, schools are currently unable to do this for educational qualifications.

The head expressed bemusement that special schools were considered unable to deliver this sort of training and went as far as to suggest that there was an element of “*university protectionism*” in relation to teacher training and SEN.

### Expanding on Salt

It was noted earlier that the recent Salt review attempted to address the needs of special schools in relation to SLD/PMLD. The results of our survey and our follow up conversations with respondents clearly indicate that all special schools face the issues which the Salt review addressed, not just those who primarily deal with SLD/PMLD. It follows then that the recommendations made by Salt which can be expanded to cover other needs, should be.

We believe the following recommendations made by Salt could be expanded to cover other areas of impairment without difficulty:<sup>23</sup>

- Raising the profile of a career teaching children with SLD/PMLD
- Exploring a specialist route in the Employment based initial teacher training scheme – Teach First
- Incentivising Higher Education Institutions to provide special school placements
- An option of a 6 month specialism in SLD/PMLD to be appended to existing ITT arrangements, funded through bursaries.
- A bespoke induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT's), focusing on SLD/PMLD – run by local authorities
- Clarification of the routes open to teaching assistants to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
- A greater focus on outreach amongst special schools which specialise in SLD/PMLD
- A consideration of the extension of the remit of school clusters to deliver structured CPD to schools
- Special schools to be made aware that they can apply for Training School status



One of the other key issues that came out of our survey was the lack of recognition that special schools have expensive and time consuming training requirements. In a previous report on teacher training *More Good Teachers*, Policy Exchange recommended that money for CPD should be ring fenced by giving each teacher an individual entitlement of around £500.<sup>24</sup> If this policy were pursued, it might be possible to recognize the greater needs of teachers in special schools by providing them with extra funds on top of their core entitlement. These funds could in turn be ring fenced for use only in training which leads to specialist skills in teaching children with SEN.

In addition we recommend the Government consider extending any CPD cash entitlement to Teaching Assistants (TA's). Whilst there should be a recognition that teaching assistants may well require less, or less expensive forms of training, there is significant evidence to suggest that TA's (both in the special sector and in the mainstream) are severely undertrained.<sup>25</sup> The recent Lamb Inquiry concluded that there should be a review undertaken to discover best practice in the use of TA's.<sup>26</sup> This is long overdue and any review should certainly consider the way in which the best schools manage the CPD of their teaching assistants and the difference in circumstances between special schools and their mainstream counterparts. A greater knowledge of how much it takes schools to train their TA's adequately will aid in any attempts to decide how much money should be made available for a CPD entitlement to be extended to these staff.

It should also be noted that TA's often perform very different roles not only according to the type of school, but according to the type of need of the pupils they are working with. A review of best practice should recognise this level of variability within the overarching term, identify any patterns and attempt to provide a better and more consistent framework than that already existing in the form of 'Higher Level Teaching Assistants'.

It will be important to ensure if the Government move to a cash entitlement for CPD that the need for head teachers to strategically plan the expertise amongst their staff is not neglected and that the operation of the entitlement is properly managed and allocated, probably through the performance review system. In particular, the cash entitlement may not adequately take account of the practice of many special schools in helping their teaching assistants attain QTS. This is because the entitlement is designed to pay for the CPD needs of qualified teachers rather than to pay for ITT. Moreover, as was suggested by respondents to our survey, the expertise and training that could be most useful, in many cases lies firmly within the schools themselves and no longer within universities. The training of teachers and teaching assistants is likely to increasingly occur within schools themselves and although a boost to the CPD entitlement may account for some costs, it is necessary to recognize the need of schools to develop capacity and infrastructure to deliver these sorts of services on a more sustained and less ad hoc footing.

Another recommendation in *More Good Teachers* was that there should be an expansion of the training schools programme. It argued that *"the development of schools as centres of training will enable them to offer much more CPD themselves rather than relying on external suppliers."*<sup>27</sup> The Salt review recommended that special schools be made aware that they can become training schools, but it is unlikely that this alone would be enough to encourage any serious upsurge of special school participation in Employment Based Initial Teacher Training provision. Nor will making special

schools aware of this possibility necessarily create an immediate impact on the roles of special schools in providing outreach or in developing expertise within their own schools (both facets of the training school programme.)

In order to better facilitate this process, we recommend all outstanding special schools and all special schools with specialist SEN status as part of the 'Specialist Schools' programme should be invited to become training schools with access to the relevant funding immediately. Training schools receive £60 per student so if every special school in England were to become a training school, funding for this programme would amount to £5.4 million.

Moreover, special schools with training school status should be allowed to seek accredited status for the provision of specialist qualifications in their relevant field. These specialist qualifications would be certified by independent bodies with expertise in the field. The British Dyslexia Association already does this for specialist qualifications in teaching children with Dyslexia and other Specific Learning Difficulties for example and the government should consult on which bodies would be most appropriate to perform the role for other categories of impairment.<sup>28</sup>

Importantly, a push to make specialist qualifications available to teachers and schools should take into account the extent to which many teachers will already have relevant skills but are unlikely to have the relevant qualifications. There is a danger that too rigid an approach will result in teachers and schools wasting money on accrediting existing skills. Although these specialist qualifications would not be mandatory (as is the case for qualifications in Visual and Hearing impairment and Multi Sensory Impairment currently), it should be acknowledged that teachers will not wish to be seen to be less qualified than their peers and potential competitors in the market place. It is likely then that many, if not all teachers, will seek this training and so there should be a cheaper fast track to assessment and accreditation for those teachers who do not need extensive training as a result of their prior experience.

A final, and very important point raised by our survey was the question of leadership. Several respondents pointed out that their headteachers were due to retire in the next five years or so and many also pointed out that deputy heads or other senior leaders were also due to retire. As with many of the other issues, this was a situation raised by the Salt review and it recommended that the National College should provide targeted support and intervention to boost the supply of leaders for the sector. This is undoubtedly a good idea. In considering the options for targeted support, the National College ought to pilot a programme of 'internships' for prospective headteachers. As the expertise lies firmly in the hands of the current cadre of senior leaders it makes more sense for them to pass this on directly. Some independent special schools have begun operating an internship model to ensure effective succession and this could certainly be fruitful for other schools.

## Recommendations

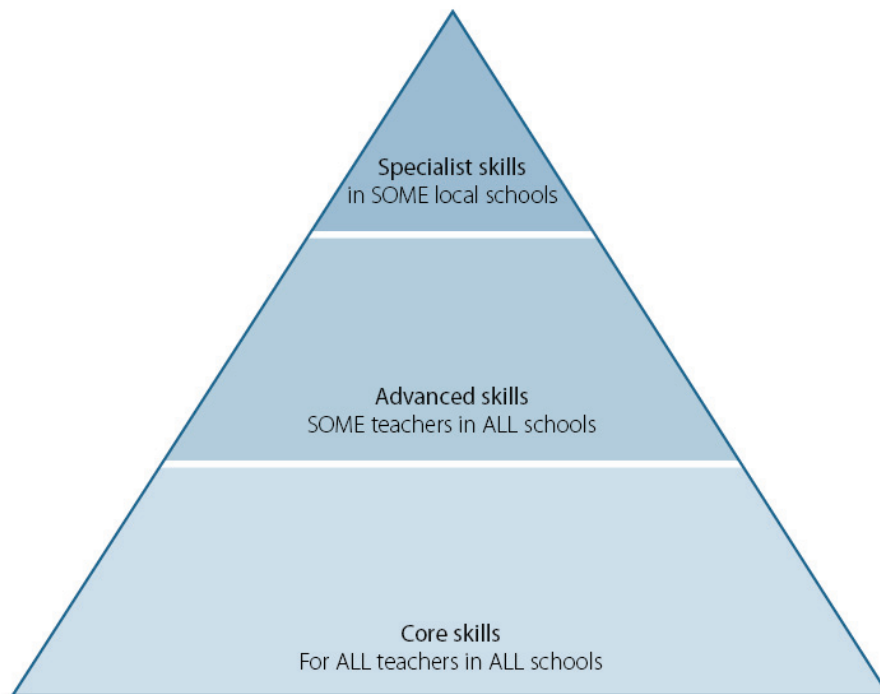
- All recommendations made by Salt which do not relate solely to SLD/PMLD should be expanded to cover the remaining major areas of impairment dealt with by special schools
- A CPD cash entitlement should be introduced (as recommended in the Policy Exchange report *More Good Teachers*) and boosted for all teachers in special schools
- There should be an extension of a cash CPD entitlement to all Teaching Assistants in special schools
- Any review of the use of Teaching Assistants should consider best practice in relation to their CPD
- The need for special schools to build and maintain training capacity should be recognized financially. One mechanism by which this could be done would be to extend training school status to all outstanding and/or specialist special schools with a view to extending the programme to all special schools in due courses
- Schools with training school status should be enabled to seek accrediting powers for specialist qualifications in their field, in partnership with voluntary bodies or trusts
- There should be a fast track route to accreditation for experienced teachers
- As part of its efforts to increase the supply of leaders for Special Schools the National College should pilot a programme of Head Teacher 'internships' for special schools

## Skills in the mainstream: core skills for all teachers

The previous section made recommendations to ensure that those teachers who wish to teach in special schools are adequately trained to do so. The vast majority of teachers however, will spend their entire career in a mainstream setting and indeed, as was outlined in the introduction, the vast majority of children with SEN are also taught in mainstream settings. Given that the prevalence of SEN is 20.5%, it is also to be expected that all teachers will teach children with SEN. The previous government's SEN strategy, *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, recognised this and proposed a model to provide teachers with the right skills. It asserted that:

*"Every teacher should expect to teach children with SEN - and we must ensure that they are equipped with the skills to do so effectively. This will require action at three levels."<sup>29</sup>*

The three levels set out were:



Source: Department for Education and Skills, *Removing Barriers to Achievement: The Government's Strategy for SEN*, 2004. [http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/5970/removing%20barriers.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/5970/removing%20barriers.pdf)

The model sensibly recognises the limits of the ability of the individual teacher in the average classroom to deal adequately with the learning needs of every pupil they encounter. One result of the increasing attendance in mainstream schools of children with SEN is that individual teachers can potentially encounter a wide variety of types of SEN, and on the whole it cannot be predicted when they will do so.

In other areas, teacher training can be informed more easily by the relationship between supply and demand. If there is a shortage of Maths teachers in a certain area, measures can be taken to increase the supply of trainee Maths teachers. However, a 'shortage' of SEN teachers is not quite so simple. The factors effecting 'demand' are far more complex and fluid. Whereas the supply of Maths teachers relies on factors which are relatively constant and easy to measure (the number of pupils who will need to be taught Maths, and the number of teachers available to do so), the demand for a teacher with the requisite knowledge in a certain area of SEN may appear suddenly, depending on the movements of the pupils concerned. This problem is exacerbated in the areas of SEN which are particularly low incidence.

It therefore makes sense that rather than attempting to react to demand on a relatively ad hoc basis, all teachers should be equipped with a certain basic understanding of SEN which allows them to identify and deal with problems in a productive manner when they first occur. This basic understanding should probably also equip all teachers to deal, themselves, with some of the most prevalent but least severe forms of SEN. Often these are difficulties which are remediable in a relatively short time by good teaching.<sup>30</sup> There is of course a separate discussion to be had about what these skills are and how they should be imparted but it is relatively unproblematic to assert, as *Removing Barriers to Achievement* does, that all teachers should have a base level of core skills.

This section will focus on the bottom layer of this 'pyramid' model, the core skills which all teachers should have as a minimum. These skills should be provided by two means. The first, and primary means, is at ITT level. Changes need to be made to the approach to SEN in ITT in this country so that Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) enter the profession ready to deal with the children who will be in their classroom. However, not all in service teachers will have benefited from an adequate approach to SEN, and so changes at ITT level must be combined with a commitment to CPD aimed at boosting the core skills in SEN of in service teachers.

#### Core skills provided at ITT level

The issue of SEN and teacher training came to prominence after the implementation of the Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970, which transferred responsibility for educating children with severe and complex disabilities from the Department of Health to the Department of Education. Prior to this, many of these children were in hospital schools, or not in education at all. In response, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) introduced significant, although mainly optional, SEN elements into their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes.<sup>31</sup> This approach didn't work as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) often reported feeling unprepared for their duties in relation to children with SEN. These concerns were picked up by Mary Warnock in her 1978 report which recognized that the integration of pupils with complex needs into the education system had placed significant demands on teachers and that increasing their knowledge base was of the utmost importance. This was particularly important given Warnock's recommendations for greater inclusion of children with SEN into the mainstream system. As a result of this she suggested that an SEN element should be a condition of the approval of all ITT programmes.<sup>32</sup>

The 1980's and 1990's saw a further change in focus, from SEN being a standalone element in ITT, to it being covered instead within 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD). The quality of SEN training at ITT which did exist tended to be determined by something of a postcode lottery, partly because of the lack of central direction from government.<sup>33</sup> The introduction of the national curriculum in 1989 compounded the shift away from a sustained focus on SEN in ITT programmes as Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) were tasked with spending more time on improving the subject knowledge of trainees, in line with the requirements of the new curriculum.

In the past 20 years the content of ITT courses has largely been determined by the particular expertise prevalent in the relevant HEI, or in their partner schools (as ITT has become increasingly more placement based.)<sup>34</sup> The last Labour Government generally pursued a policy which aimed at even greater inclusion in the mainstream and it was made clear that all teachers should consider themselves teachers of children with SEN, and be appropriately prepared to meet these needs in mainstream settings. In 2001, this requirement was formalized within the Code of Practice for SEN. Nonetheless, this period arguably saw a greater reduction in focus on SEN at ITT level as the government chose instead to promote programmes such as the National Strategies for literacy and numeracy.

Despite the fact that the Labour Government began exerting an unprecedented level of control over the content of ITT, the approach taken to SEN did not markedly improve. In 2002, new standards were introduced for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) but these standards were hardly any different from those set out by Warnock in 1978.<sup>35</sup>

In 2004, the government yet again recognised the need to improve matters at ITT level in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* which set out plans for how to provide core skills. It promised that the government would:<sup>36</sup>

- Work with the Teacher Training Agency (now the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA)) to ensure ITT provides a good grounding in core skills
- Work with Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) on ITT
- Introduce materials for the induction year of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and encourage more to take placements in successful special schools.

It also recommended numerous ways to engage the TTA (now the TDA) in improving the coverage of SEN in ITT. It is difficult to unpick which of the plethora of pilots and other initiatives the TDA has been involved in since have come as a direct response to these recommendations. However, the most decisive steps taken to date have been:

- Encouraging ITT providers to build on their coverage of SEN and disability by offering specialist units for primary undergraduate ITT.
- Similar units for secondary undergraduate courses and for the PGCE

The upshot of all this has been the development of 18 SEN modules which the TDA disseminates amongst ITT providers to deliver. However, these modules are not compulsory and evidence suggests that their use is varied and often limited. One survey found that the time given over to SEN in ITT courses at HEIs varied from just one afternoon to one week in total.<sup>37</sup> Although institutions providing teacher training should not be dictated to by government, it is clear that one afternoon cannot be an acceptable amount of time to spend preparing future teachers for this vital aspect of their work. Serious thought needs to be given to how institutions can be encouraged or incentivised to pay more attention to the needs of their trainees in this respect, without also

excessively reducing their freedom to design their courses in the way they see fit. The alternative is to remain in a "groundhog day", where the need to emphasise the SEN element in ITT is perpetually recognised but never properly addressed.

Thus, there is a tension between the value placed on the freedom of HEIs to design their own provision and the need to ensure certain minimum requirements. One of the great benefits of our teacher training system is that it is uniquely diverse, with a wide range of routes to becoming a qualified teacher (gaining QTS). However, at the same time and as with so much else in the education system, recent years have seen ITT being increasingly open to interference from government. In theory, the government exerts control over the content of ITT through two sets of guidelines: 'QTS standards' and the 'Requirements for Initial Teacher Training'.

The 'Requirements for ITT' are largely concerned with entry requirements and detailing the time to be spent on school placements. Apart from this, providers are instructed that they must design and deliver their programmes in such a way as to fit with the QTS standards. The standards do not specify how training should be designed or managed but do set out what a trainee teacher must know, understand and be able to do to be awarded QTS. They cover three areas: professional attributes; professional knowledge and understanding; and professional skills. There are three QTS standards which explicitly relate to SEN:<sup>38</sup>

- Q18: Specifies that trainees must understand how children develop
- Q19: Concerns personalisation of the curriculum, including for children with SEN
- Q20: Require trainees to know and understand the special roles and responsibilities of colleagues, including those with responsibility for SEN.

The standards themselves are brief and relatively vague but the TDA also issues accompanying guidance, including lists of suggested questions which training providers should keep in mind when assessing whether or not a trainee meets the relevant standards. An examination of the questions which relate to Q18, 19 and 20 illustrates how easy it is for some training providers to approach SEN issues in a merely cursory manner.<sup>39</sup>

As the current approach is not working, QTS must be strengthened in relation to SEN in order to force the hand of training providers and improve the coverage of SEN in ITT. The TDA has attempted to disseminate SEN best practice but the knowledge and skills which NQTs take into their first job is still, to a large degree, determined by the particular institution at which they train.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, although the standards require teachers to be aware of the professional responsibilities of others, they do not do enough to encourage teachers to think of their own career opportunities in relation to SEN. This is partly because career structures and the acquisition and use of advanced and specialist skills are fractured and poorly understood, a concern which will be tackled later.

Rather than the QTS standards relevant to SEN sitting in a section entitled 'Achievement and Diversity', as they currently do, there should be a new section created entirely dedicated to Special Educational Needs. The standards currently described in Q18 should also include a requirement to have an understanding of theories of child development. Numerous bodies in the sector have called for this and they were given a boost by the recent Salt review which called for QTS to include basic knowledge of the definitions of SLD/PMLD. This principle is sound but should be extended and QTS should require teachers to have knowledge of the four main areas of impairment as identified by the government. Beyond this, the standards should also require that teachers have knowledge regarding the identification of specific needs within these broader areas which can be seen below:

#### Cognition and Learning Needs

- Specific Learning Disability
- Moderate Learning Difficulty
- Severe Learning Difficulty
- Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulty

#### Behavioural, Emotional and Social Needs

- Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulty

#### Communication and Interaction Needs

- Speech, Language and Communication Needs
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder

#### Sensory and/or Physical Impairments

- Visual Impairment
- Hearing Impairment
- Multi-sensory impairment
- Physical Disability

Beyond identification, it is also imperative that NQTs know how to adapt the curriculum in their subject areas in relation to the key areas of impairment. ITT providers could well develop specialisms according to their expertise, and the expertise of the schools with which they have partnerships. They could pay particular attention in their ITT



courses to one area of impairment for instance. This could serve as a taster to students who may wish to develop a specialism either as a 6 month appended course as recommended by Salt, or later on in their career. In addition, it is vital that there should be a corresponding increase in the focus of Ofsted in these areas when inspecting ITT providers.

The TDA will review the QTS standards in 2010 which provides a timely opportunity to look again at them in relation to SEN and it ought to be a priority to consult widely with the sector. What is more the TDA and consultees would not need to start from scratch as a great deal of thought has already been given to the issue of the standards, not least by the Special Needs Training Consortium who were commissioned by the Conservative Government in 1996 to report on *'Professional Development to Meet Special Educational Needs'*.<sup>41</sup> The consortium suggested a list of core competency areas with respect to teaching pupils with SEN. These core competencies were presented under the headings of 'Context', 'Curriculum Design', 'Access and Delivery' and 'Managing Professional Responsibilities'. This report may well prove a useful staging post in the development of the QTS standards under the heading of SEN.

When reviewing QTS, the government should also examine the outcome of the *Achievement for All* pilots which are currently on-going. Announced in the *Children's Plan Progress Report* in December 2008 and backed by £31 million of funding, the project is designed to enable schools and local authorities to reflect on existing strategies deemed effective for children and young people with SEN and Disability and which provide the capacity to strengthen provision in areas which will have the most impact for this group of learners. These aims are achieved primarily through three key strands:

- assessment tracking and intervention;
- structured conversation with parents;
- provision for developing wider outcomes

*Achievement for All* aims to produce positive outcomes by engendering a 'whole school' approach to SEN, trying to embed thinking about SEN at every level of the school. In part, therefore, it is about achieving 'culture change', a phrase which may well send shivers down the spines of civil servants who are well aware that this all too often translates into very little real impact. Nonetheless, if the lessons learnt from the pilots can be incorporated into the revised QTS standards then this will at least go some way to ensuring that NQTs are prepared to work in an environment which takes SEN seriously, and aspires to allow all children to reach their potential.

#### [Core skills provided through Continuing Professional Development](#)

In service teachers will not be able to benefit directly from the strengthening of QTS so there must be a parallel commitment to strengthening CPD in relation to core skills in SEN.

The Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) was the previous government's attempt at providing core skills in SEN for the workforce through CPD. According to *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, the IDP was designed to help schools develop inclusive practice by supporting partnership projects involving education, health and social care, HEIs, special and mainstream schools and early years settings to develop and pilot effective practice. However, despite this early ambition the programme has in reality become a more conventional exercise in the promotion and provision of CPD. In 2007, £2 million of funding was announced for the IDP, to be run by the National Strategies.

The National Strategies have embarked on a four year programme of CPD aimed at supporting schools and Early Years settings through web-based materials. This includes teaching and learning resources; training materials; guidance on effective classroom strategies; models of good practice for multi-disciplinary teams and information about sources of more specialist advice.

The programme was launched in 2008 with the materials aimed to support teachers seeking information on Dyslexia and speech, language and communication needs. The second year focused on the autistic spectrum and the third year on Behavioural, Emotional and Social Disorders.

To date, there has been no formal evaluation of the programme and so it is difficult to pass judgment on its success or otherwise. In our discussions with a variety of stakeholders throughout the sector feedback was broadly positive. The IDP is seen as a significant step in the right direction, largely because it appears to embody a commitment to CPD in relation to SEN. However, positive comments generally focused on the fact that the IDP existed at all, rather than on the merits of the programme itself.

Some people we spoke to expressed misgivings about the operation of the programme and the difficulty with which materials could be used and accessed, particularly in the first year. It was also commented that limiting a programme aimed at 'continuous' professional development to just four years seems counter intuitive. Moreover, the fact that the National Strategies will no longer exist from 2011 casts the future of the IDP in doubt. It is now unclear what plans for the fourth year, which was to cover Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) will constitute.

The IDP fits into the pyramid model described in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* very well, attempting to provide all staff with a basic, core level of understanding. As such, the government should ensure the future of the IDP in the absence of the National Strategies with the TDA well placed to take on this role as it already has responsibilities for CPD more broadly.

However, the IDP must be adapted to reflect the strengthening of the QTS standards as recommended earlier. Ideally it should be designed in such a way as to chime with the approach to core skills that would be taken at the ITT level: ensuring an understanding of the four main areas of impairment and the various types of need within

them. In this sense it should be a direct attempt to provide in service teachers with the core skills which will be acquired by NQTs but which they did not necessarily have the chance to develop themselves.

Despite the strengthening of the QTS in this area, the framework at ITT level would still allow providers to approach the issues in their own way, leaving room for innovative practice to develop. By contrast, the danger with a programme such as the IDP is that, because it is created centrally, it relies too heavily on a 'one size fits all' approach. This problem has been evident in much of the work of the National Strategies which has tended to promote a single way of doing things, and denied teachers the freedom to choose from amongst various methods and resources which have been proven to work.<sup>42</sup>

In order to ensure a diversity of approaches and room for innovation, we referred back to a previous paper discussing literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools in which Policy Exchange recommended that the Government should fund a national research database. This proposal was based on the 'What works clearinghouse' model developed in the United States. The research database would be funded by the Department of Education and maintained by a new Standards Agency (replacing OFQUAL).<sup>43</sup>

The Government should ensure that this research database includes research on methods and interventions for children with Special Educational Needs. All teachers would be encouraged to access the resources within it but it would be of particular use to teachers at advanced and specialist levels, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators and those with responsibility for co-coordinating CPD within schools.

#### **Recommendations**

- **The requirements for the achievement of QTS should be strengthened to include:**
  - **A section dedicated to SEN alone**
  - **A requirement to understand theories of child development**
  - **Basic knowledge of all major areas of impairment**
  - **Knowledge regarding the identification of special needs within these broad categories of impairment**
  - **The ability to adapt the curriculum in their subject areas in relation to the key areas of impairment**

- **The TDA should consult widely with the sector on how best to fine tune these requirements and on current best practice in ITT concerning these areas**
- **The TDA should also consider how the outcomes of the Achievement for All pilots could be fed into the strengthening of QTS**
- **The government should retain a commitment to a scheme along the lines of the Inclusion Development Plan, which aims to deliver core skills in SEN to in service teachers**
- **The scheme should be adapted in such a way that it reflects the approach to core skills at the ITT level – represented by the strengthening of the requirements for QTS**
- **The ‘What works clearinghouse’ – recommended in a previous Policy Exchange Report, *Rising Maks, Falling Standards* should be expanded to encompass research into interventions for children with SEN rather than solely literacy and numeracy challenges**

### **Advanced and specialist skills for mainstream teachers**

Core skills are designed to allow all teachers to deal with relatively minor problems, relatively quickly. They are also designed to allow them to anticipate and identify larger problems with children’s learning. In particular, they should include knowledge of when it is appropriate to seek specialist expertise and advice. The graduated response to SEN, described in the introduction, of School Action, School Action Plus and Statementing assumes that teachers will have access to this expertise at the appropriate time. This expertise may be found within the mainstream school itself, or it may be found in another mainstream school or a special school which provides an outreach service. Alternatively it might be found in a centrally run service on the part of the local authority. The issue of specialist skills in special schools has already been covered in the first section of this report and the expertise in these schools should certainly be utilised by mainstream schools. Moreover, it is also right that local authorities should run central services where they see fit. However, it is vital that some expertise is also in mainstream schools themselves. This means that teachers and children can have more ready access to expertise, and that the teachers who have skills and knowledge in relation to SEN will also understand the broader approach of the school to the curriculum and other issues.

*Removing Barriers to Achievement* recognised this in its pyramid model, described in the previous section. It asserted that from the basis of core skills teachers should be confidently able to identify when their skills and knowledge are not sufficient to provide for a child. At this point they should have easy access within their school to 'advanced' knowledge. From here, if the advanced skills are not enough, all schools should have ready access to 'specialist' skills, although the teachers with these skills will not be found in all schools.

Providing these 'advanced' and 'specialist' skills requires a certain amount of strategic planning. Whilst core skills are to be provided for all teachers, in all schools, advanced and specialist skills are only required of a minority of teachers in the mainstream. Providing certain teachers with advanced and specialist skills requires a different approach to ensure that the right teachers get the right skills at the right time.

To date, however, this planning has on the whole not been forthcoming despite a promise made in 2004 to do so. In relation to advanced skills *Removing Barriers to Achievement* promised to encourage local authorities to create a new cadre of staff with particular expertise in SEN within the Advanced Skills Teacher programme. These teachers would be able to act as 'change champions' in mainstream schools, special schools and pupil referral units and across local authorities.

For specialist skills, it was promised that the government would work with HEI's to support the development of specialist qualifications covering the theory and practice of working with children with particular needs. However, despite the ambitions articulated in *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, the picture 5 years later is not radically different. The recent Lamb Inquiry essentially reiterated precisely the same ambition in its key recommendations regarding teacher training.<sup>44</sup>

Nonetheless, there have been some attempts to address the need to develop strategies for the provision of advanced or specialist skills in SEN amongst the teaching workforce. These attempted to approach SEN provision in a disaggregated fashion, looking at different areas of impairment. Some were decidedly more proactive and useful than others. The first attempt was the Bercow report into provision for children with speech, language and communication difficulties.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately Bercow merely stressed many of the common themes which had been borne out by the work since *Removing Barriers to Achievement* and suggested no new initiatives, although it was useful that he drew attention to the need to develop specialist capacity for children with speech, language and communication difficulties in particular.

Other attempts were more successful. One of the most welcome developments since *Removing Barriers to Achievement* has been the recognition of the importance of the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO): the key teaching leader responsible for the learning and support of all children with SEN within a mainstream school. The SENCO role varies enormously from school to school, often according to the broader approach to SEN within the school. Previously, there had been a growing trend in some schools to give the SENCO role to a teaching assistant who too often found themselves divorced from the rest of the teaching staff and as a result, was unable to raise SEN issues to their due prominence. The Labour Government took steps to ensure that all SENCOs are qualified teachers, and introduced the new National Award for SENCOs. Both measures have been roundly supported by the sector. According to the TDA the National Award gives SENCOs advanced skills and the department has committed £10million a year to this training.<sup>46</sup>

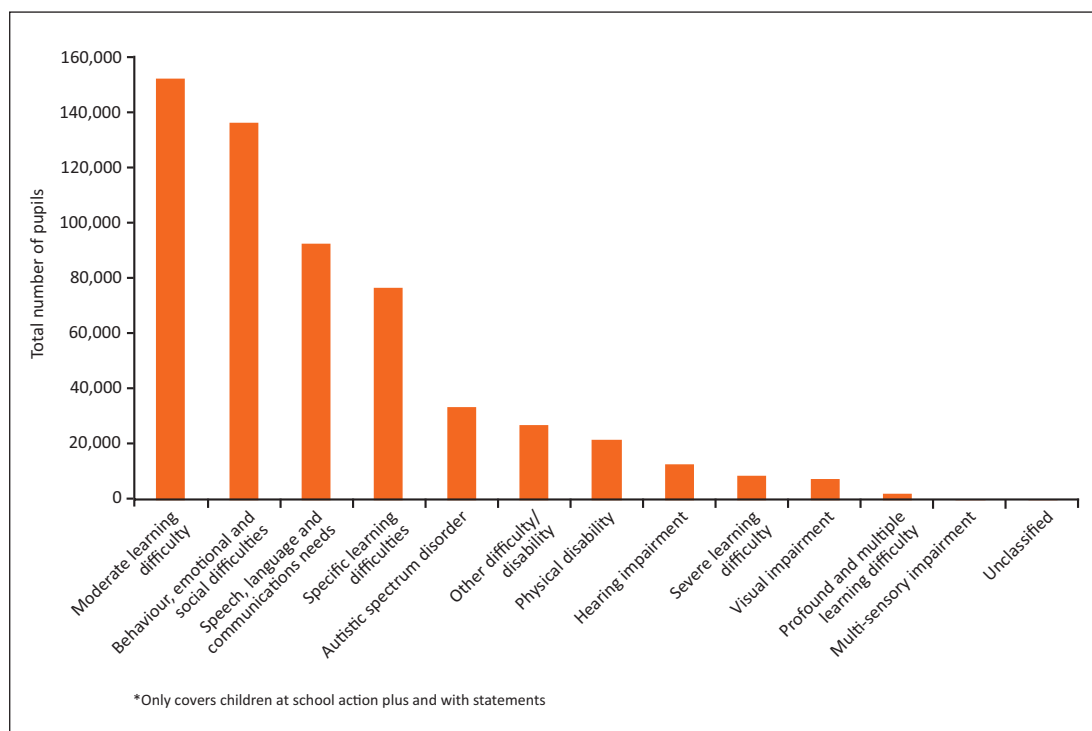
Perhaps the most developed attempt to boost the supply of advanced or specialist skills in an area of SEN was Sir Jim Rose's independent report on *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy*

*Difficulties*. He asserted that at the advanced level, all schools should have at least one of their teachers (or have ready access to such a teacher through partnership agreements) with the expertise to select, implement and evaluate bespoke literacy interventions. He also recommended that the DCSF as it then was should fund a number of teachers to undertake specialist training in teaching children with dyslexia, in order to provide substantially improved access to specialist expertise in all schools and across all local authority areas. These specialists may well serve a number of schools and be experts in a number of areas. In particular, they might have knowledge about a range of specific learning difficulties and not just dyslexia.<sup>47</sup>

What is most important about the Rose report is that it instigated real and decisive action from the department. Although Rose did not specify the number, DCSF announced that they would be taking measures to train 4,000 new Dyslexia teachers. This number is meant to equal one specialist for every local group of schools, although it is not entirely clear what 'local group' means in practice. The department has dedicated £10 million to the scheme and charged the TDA with implementing it. The TDA will cover the costs of teacher's fees for those who take courses recognised by the British Dyslexia Association from September 2010 until February 2011 following on from an initial scheme run by the Dyslexia-SpLD Trust in 2009-10.<sup>48</sup> This would certainly appear to be a sensible and encouraging approach. However, it remains to be seen what kind of uptake there will be for these courses, especially given that the funding does not extend to aiding schools with teacher cover. It is also not clear what will happen once the funding runs out in 2011 and it should be noted that the assertion that these 4,000 will all be 'new' Dyslexia teachers could be misleading. Many of the teachers taking these courses may well be doing so because they are already performing some of the relevant roles and welcome the opportunity to get an accredited qualification.

Despite these issues, the Rose review was highly welcome. However, as with the Salt review in the case of skills for special schools, it only covered one area of impairment amongst many which are equally or more strongly represented amongst children in the mainstream, as can be seen in the graph below.

Figure 5. Distribution of need in mainstream settings<sup>49</sup>



The graph shows that children with Specific Learning Difficulties, a category which includes Dyslexia, are far outnumbered by children with Moderate Learning Difficulties, BESD and Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties. Therefore, there is a parallel argument for the mainstream to that put forward in the first section regarding special schools: that there needs to be a real commitment to developing skills for all areas of impairment.

There certainly needs to be a more strategic approach than that taken in the past. The recommendations made by Rose were unusually proactive for a piece of work on teacher training and SEN but it is not clear what the real levers are to encourage teachers and schools to take advantage of the money that is available. In this sense, it is similar to the situation with regards to ITT where training is made 'available' but no decisive steps are really taken to ensure that it is actually undertaken.

The most recent developments in this area are typical of this inertia. Brian Lamb made two recommendations in his inquiry which referred explicitly to the need to develop advanced and specialist skills. The first required that the TDA develop materials for training at an advanced level for the 5 main areas of SEN. The second was an assertion that the TDA should commission specialist skills across groups of schools.<sup>50</sup> Both essentially draw out the implications of the plan put forward in *Removing Barriers to Achievement*. Although these recommendations are to be applauded, and were accepted by the then Secretary of State Ed Balls, the details of the subsequent implementation plan are by no means inspiring. With regards to skills at an advanced level, the TDA has been tasked with making modules available. For specialist skills the implementation plan rightly proposed that the TDA should support provision of specialist SEN CPD across groups of schools and which takes

account of existing expertise.<sup>51</sup> However, more must be done than merely making modules available and the broader approach to specialist skills must be improved before the TDA can effectively do what is required of it.

There are perhaps two interconnected reasons for this inertia. One is that it is not entirely clear what advanced or specialist skills actually are, the other is that it is not clear how advanced and specialist skills fit into the wider framework for career development presented to schools and teachers.

### What are advanced and specialist skills?

The plans for implementation described above suggest that teachers acquiring advanced skills will not require a qualification or accreditation for these skills. However, confusingly, the TDA describes the new training for SENCOs as being at an advanced level and that this training does lead to a qualification. The same is true of the specialist skills that Rose describes.

This confusion is exacerbated when we look at the wider career structures in place for all teachers, such as the opportunities to attain Excellent Teachers and Advanced Skills Teacher status and the role of advanced and specialist skills in SEN in relation to these positions.

In theory there is a relatively clear progression route for teachers, which attempts to link progression up the pay scale with the attainment of experience and the development of extra skills and responsibilities:<sup>52</sup>

- Qualified Teacher Status
- Teachers on the main pay scale
- Excellent Teachers
- Advanced Skills Teachers

This is a relatively new framework and as such has not yet become fully entrenched in the way teachers and schools operate. As the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee reported, this is *“without a doubt...a developing model...”*<sup>53</sup> However, despite the existence of this framework, the Select Committee also commented that what *“was striking about the evidence that we received in relation to teacher professional development was the absence of clear and recognised pathways.”*<sup>54</sup>

Furthermore, it is not clear how this structure fits into the model of teaching expertise for SEN which is put forward in *Removing Barriers to Achievement*. As described, the specialist dyslexia teachers recommended by Rose, the advanced and specialist teachers put forward by Lamb and the newly trained SENCOs all differ slightly in their characteristics. Frustratingly, the use of the term ‘Advanced’ in the AST program introduces a further contradiction because these ‘advanced’ teachers actually correspond more clearly with what, in *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, were termed ‘specialists’. The specialist SEN teachers would be shared across a number of schools, and as such would be performing an outreach function from their core school (or from the local authority). This is also one of the key roles, and characteristics of the AST programme.



## Advanced Skills Teachers

ASTs were designed to encourage the best teachers to both stay in the profession and more specifically, in the classroom, with the addition of outreach work in other schools promoting good practice and helping struggling teachers. Initially ASTs had a mixed reception. Some local councils, such as Kent, embraced them almost immediately but others were less receptive. This pattern seems to have continued with Kent and Birmingham being the biggest recipients of funding for ASTs.

ASTs are deployed in a variety of ways. They spend most of their dedicated time advising other teachers on classroom management and teaching methods, producing teaching materials, disseminating materials relating to best practice, and advising on the provision of in-service training (INSET). Many of them give support to teachers who are experiencing difficulties. Both secondary and primary ASTs, the latter to a more limited extent, participate significantly in initial teacher training (ITT) and in work with newly qualified teachers (NQTs).<sup>1</sup>

Generally, response to the programme has been very positive. Most head teachers seem to think that ASTs have been a benefit to their schools. Ofsted has also praised the scheme:<sup>1</sup>

- *“ASTs have significantly improved the quality of teaching and learning in over three quarters of the schools inspected in the survey”*
- *“Procedures are rarely in place for schools to make clear judgements about the value for money ASTs are providing. Head teachers, nevertheless, often state their belief that the improvements in teaching and learning attributable to the ASTs are well worth the extra cost of their employment.”*

Originally, ASTs were paid for through a Standards Fund grant to each Local Authority, according to the number of ASTs they supported. Since 2006, this money has been rolled into the School Development Grant.

Funding is based on an average annual cost for each AST post of £15,500 made up of £6,200 for outreach costs and £9,300 for salary related costs.

There were 4,030 ASTs as of late 2009, which amounts to a cost of around £60 million a year.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the latest allocation of the School Development Grant included a ‘New Opportunities Fund’ targeted at National Challenge schools. This was designed to encourage them to create new AST and Excellent teacher posts.

There is a structured pay scale for ASTs with a five point range of pay. The AST should progress within the range annually based on their performance.

AST pay range:<sup>1</sup>

- £36,618 to £55,669 nationally
- £37,627 to £56,681 in the London Fringe
- £39,523 to £58,577 in Outer London, and £43,538 to £62,596 for those in Inner London.

The AST programme is clearly a very good one although there is a need for a formal evaluation soon. Furthermore, there has been speculation in the media recently that the financial constraints which schools are expecting as a result of the efforts by central Government to cut the budget deficit will see roles such as the AST being cut.<sup>55</sup>

The AST has been described in some quarters as a luxury post but this is to misunderstand their potential role in developing a more structured set of career opportunities and progression routes for all teachers and especially those teachers who wish to stay in the classroom rather than extend their managerial responsibilities. The AST should not be seen as a luxury but as an integral part of a structured teaching workforce and as a clear example of a commitment to both a culture of CPD within individual schools and within communities of schools.

Nonetheless to ensure that the opportunities to improve and make use of advanced and specialist skills in SEN are realized, the links between the TDA's professional framework, as described above and the model for SEN in *Removing Barriers to Achievement* need to be clarified and formalized.

The recent Children, Schools and Families Select Committee report recognized the need to improve the clarity of the professional framework more broadly, rather than specifically in relation to SEN. Their model, the 'Chartered teacher Status framework' was instructive although it relied too heavily on a rigid system of accreditation.<sup>56</sup> In particular, it would have required all teachers to gain a masters level qualification in education to move on to the post threshold pay scale. Teachers would also have been required to renew a 'Licence to practice' on a five yearly basis. Both the requirement for a masters level qualification and the licence to practice have been heavily criticized and the licence to practice is unlikely to be pursued by the new government.<sup>57</sup>

However, the Chartered teachers Status framework also included the provision that:

*"Demonstration of competence against subsequent professional standards—excellent teacher and advanced skills teacher—would be linked more explicitly to completion of relevant accredited training. A ladder of different career pathways should be put in place."*<sup>58</sup>

This idea should be pursued and in particular, the government should commission relevant bodies in each area of SEN impairment to develop relevant qualifications. This would not be an entirely new phenomenon: the Dyslexia Trust was commissioned to do this on the recommendation of the Rose review. However, as can be seen in figure 3 (above) Dyslexia (and other Specific Learning Difficulties) is only one of a wide range of impairments amongst children in the mainstream. The skills of teachers should be addressed in a manner which recognizes this diverse range of needs.

The approach taken by the Rose review should be instructive for developing a range of qualifications at the advanced and the specialist levels for each of the four main areas of impairment, including Dyslexia. It was recommended earlier that special schools with training school status should be allowed to seek accrediting powers

for specialist qualifications in their relevant field and that these specialist qualifications would be certified by independent bodies with expertise in the field. The Autism Trust, Communication Trust and Dyslexia/Specific Learning Difficulties Trust are already in existence and may be well placed to perform this function for their areas but there may need to be new bodies set up to provide for Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties and Sensory impairment if it is decided that bodies of this sort are best positioned to provide accreditation. However, there may be organisations already in existence which may be equally well placed to perform this role.

It should be noted that there are already mandatory qualifications in place for children with sensory impairments and as such, a more formal and separate structure has developed for specialists in this area. The previous government expressed its commitment to retain the mandatory qualification requirement in this area - the new government should commit to reviewing this in light of the new requirements for advanced and specialist skills in other areas of impairment.

In a sense, the qualifications for advanced and specialist levels in SEN are mandatory in that holding them, or working toward them, would be a pre-requisite of attaining these levels. However, they would not operate as a strict licensing arrangement – in other words, teachers would be free to teach children with SEN without attaining advanced or specialist qualifications but, unlike now, they could not hold a dedicated advanced or specialist position without having relevant accreditation, as per the model articulated in the Rose review.

In terms of paying for it, it seems sensible to use the Rose review as a rough model once again. If the £10 million dedicated for specialist Dyslexia teachers is intended to pay for the course fees of all 4,000 teachers, and we assume that this 4,000 is a relatively accurate assumption for the numbers of teachers required in other areas of impairment, then we can conclude that there would be an extra £40 million required to fund specialist skills in the remaining 4 areas of impairment. However, it should be noted that Rose was perhaps wrong to assume a standardized cost for providing specialist qualifications. He ignored the fact that some teachers will already have specialist skills, or will be further on their way to reaching a particular level of expertise than others. The system of accreditation ought to be designed so as to ensure that previous expertise and experience is accounted for fully and to avoid unnecessary expenditure. Therefore, the costs may well be less than the total £50 million for specialist skills estimated. Furthermore, there is already a requirement for mandatory qualifications in visual, hearing and multi sensory impairment, therefore this training would not be incurred as an extra cost.

Finally, it is likely that the figure of 4,000 specialists for every group of schools refers to one teacher for every secondary school and its feeder primary schools. This may not be the model which fits for all areas of impairment and this may mean that there will be a need for fewer specialists in some areas. This situation is also compounded by the fact that not all areas of impairment have the same level prevalence. For instance there is a particularly high incidence of Moderate Learning Difficulties and Behavioural, Emotional and Social difficulties in mainstream settings. It does not make sense to require individual schools or groups of schools to have specified numbers of

teachers in certain areas of expertise. Rather, they should be allowed to access funding for specialisms according to the characteristics of children in their schools.

Moreover, these costs would be spread across a number of years in which to develop specialist capacity meaning that the Department would need to find, for instance, £10 million a year for 5 years initially.

As suggested in relation to special schools, as these qualifications will be delivered to in service teachers, they should be thought of in the context of the CPD entitlement recommended in *More Good Teachers*. However, with regards to teachers in special schools we recommended that the government should consider providing teachers in those schools with a top up on their core entitlement to reflect their additional needs. This would not work for paying for advanced and specialist skills in the mainstream as it would not be clear which teachers would require these funds and when. At the same time, it would not be appropriate to ask teachers to pay for advanced and specialist qualifications out of their core entitlement. As such, it would be best to retain the system currently in place for specialist dyslexia teachers of a central pot to which teachers can apply.

Another possible way to ensure that these skills are provided would be to place a requirement on the schools themselves. For instance, it could be a condition of receiving an ‘outstanding’ report from Ofsted that schools prove they have teachers with expertise at the requisite levels. However, there are likely to be problems with an approach of this sort:

- Those schools not immediately in a position to receive an outstanding grade at inspection may therefore not feel a strong enough incentive to develop expertise in these areas.
- Under new plans, outstanding schools may be freed from the strictures of Ofsted inspections – as a result, such a requirement would not impose a direct incentive on them.
- It also might be seen as sending a message that meeting such requirements would be a sufficient condition for meeting broader commitments to SEN and CPD, whereas in reality it must merely be seen as a necessary condition.
- Not all schools would have the same needs.

In light of this it would appear that the best solution would be a targeted grant scheme for schools to develop their skills in this area – building on the model currently being used by the National College for School Leadership to develop ‘middle leadership’ expertise. Information about the grant should be published as widely as possible. A separate grant would challenge the inertia which is inevitable when merely making a set of training modules available for schools to use. One individual we spoke to described this approach as *“The TDA filling the trough and waiting for local authorities to drink from it.”*

### Strategic planning – where are the skills needed?

Following the Rose review, the department identified a need for 4,000 Dyslexia specialists and asserted that this would mean one specialist for every ‘local group’ of schools. However, it is not clear what this actually means in practice. If a strategy is to be developed which ‘fills in the gaps’ of the pyramid model for SEN expertise, there must be a much clearer understanding of what is meant by ‘groups’ or ‘clusters’ of schools.

The current variety in forms of co-operation should be seen as a positive. Policies designed to encourage schools to co-operate are still relatively new and so the structures which have developed are in many ways still in the experimental stage. As a result, there is a lot of innovative practice and some forms will be found to work effectively whilst others will not. In light of this, it would potentially be counterproductive to attempt to formalize or codify the arrangements for school co-operation. It must be hoped that, over time, more consistency emerges and that it will be easier to address a relatively stable notion of school clusters when planning central government initiatives. It may still be the case that schools will be involved in separate clusters with different aims, as different models may be better suited to certain objectives. As such it would be inadvisable to attempt to formalize or codify the mode of school co-operation.

However, it remains vital to ensure there is a mechanism by which the supply of specialist and advanced skills can be adequately monitored. As a start there needs to be a comprehensive audit of teachers skills in relation to SEN in every school and local authority. It is constantly asserted that there are shortages in certain areas of SEN expertise but it is not known if these shortages are more or less acute in certain geographic areas or in certain types of school. The importance of data was highlighted in recent research on local variation in SEN provision:

*“To plan services effectively local authorities need reliable data. Yet only a few of our case study authorities said that they had databases that could provide accurate information on numbers of children with SEN...and there were also reported differences across authorities in their auditing of need.”<sup>59</sup>*

The Salt Review recommended that information be gathered on specialists in SLD/PMLD in the same way that it is for subject specialisms.<sup>60</sup> This is a long overdue measure and should be expanded to cover all areas of SEN specialism rather than just SLD/PMLD.

Requiring Local Authorities to develop audits of expertise as part of their SEN strategy should help build a far greater understanding of supply and demand in relation to teachers with specialist expertise in SEN. However, in order that each local picture can be combined to form a coherent national picture there must be a commitment to making these local audits consistent and compatible. Recent years have seen improvements in the collection of data in relation to SEN, but as with so much else, it is too often subject to a postcode lottery. Best practice in this area should be identified and disseminated. The SEN Information Act (2008) could be amended to reflect this requirement.

In the past it was possible to develop an understanding of how much investment was being made in particular areas of expertise, as the graph below illustrates. Equally then, there should be comprehensive audits of the levels of spending on CPD in relation to SEN expertise. If shortages of expertise occur in a particular area, there should be readily available and accurate data which can give a picture of the levels of current investment in that area.

Figure 6. Percentage of GEST funds spent on special needs teacher training, 1993-95<sup>61</sup>

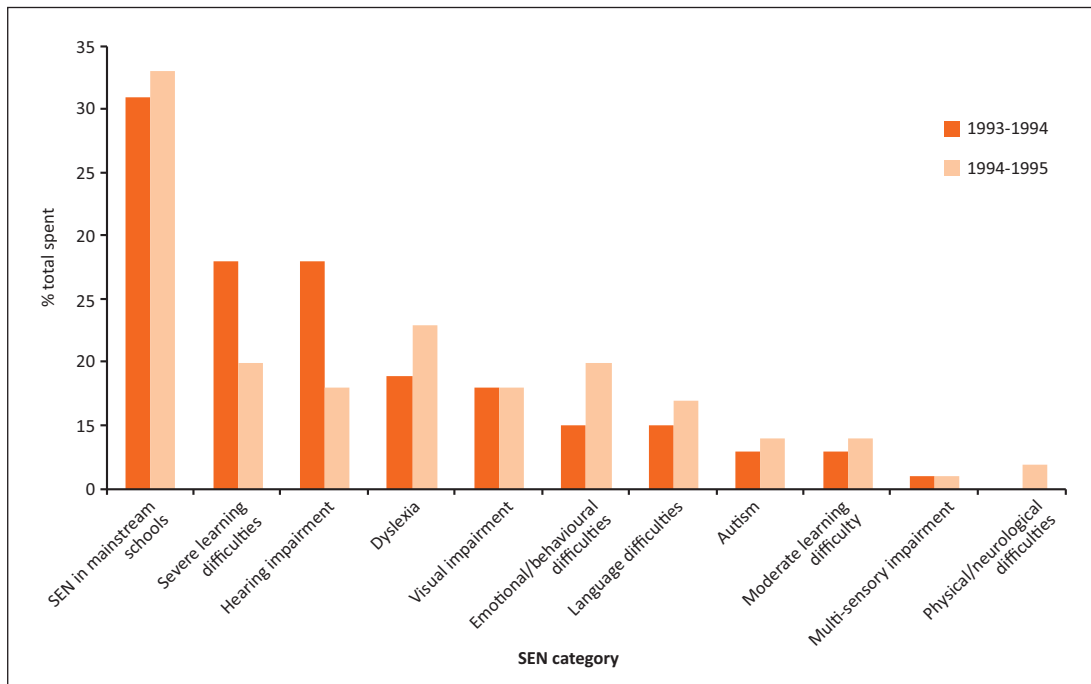


Figure 6 shows the level of funds designated for training, spent on SEN, across a range of areas. The graph also compares data across two years. It is far more difficult to develop a picture such as that shown in this graph today, because of the delegation of funds for CPD to the school level. Much has been written about the problems this delegation has caused, with some worrying about the lack of accountability that schools are subject to with regards to money which is intended for the professional development of their staff. The CPD entitlement, already mentioned in this report, combined with a more effective system of performance management should make it easier to develop a clear understanding of the way in which CPD funds are spent, including in relation to SEN. Other countries already have access to data like this. Importantly, many countries are experiencing very similar situations to that currently experienced here, namely, a shortage of teachers with specialist knowledge and skills in SEN. However, they have been more able to respond to these shortages in the same manner in which we respond here to shortages in subject areas: with financial incentives of different kinds.

For example, the state of Florida operates such a system whereby data on subject specialisms and SEN specialism are collected, and areas of teacher shortage are targeted with financial incentive schemes. Each year in Florida

areas of 'critical teacher shortage' are identified. The data is finely grained and collected across a number of categories for each subject or SEN specialism, including:<sup>62</sup>

- Number of new hires compared to total number of teachers;
- Percentage of new hires not certified in the appropriate field;
- Estimated number of Full Time Equivalent Teachers not certified in the appropriate field; and
- A range of indicators on leavers from ITT programmes

Once a critical area of teacher shortage is identified, teachers seeking certification for that area become eligible for one of two separate incentive schemes. One offers to repay tuition fees, the other offers to repay student debt.

#### SEN allowance - a financial incentive?

In theory, we already have such an incentive scheme in place in England. The SEN allowance is paid to all teachers:<sup>63</sup>

- In posts that require a mandatory SEN qualification
- In special schools, and in designated special classes or units in schools and/or local authorities
- In non-designated settings, including Pupil Referral Units or in units where the post involves a substantial element of working directly with children with SEN; requires the exercise of professional skills in the teaching of children with SEN; and has a greater level of involvement in the teaching of children with SEN normal throughout the school or authority.

Recent changes mean that the SEN allowance is now on a range starting at £2,001 a year with a maximum allocation of £3,954 a year. One estimate puts the cost of the SEN allowance in 2009/10 at £56.1 million.<sup>64</sup>

The School Teacher Review Body (STRB) recently turned its attention to the SEN allowance in its 19th report, at the request of the then Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls. In it they suggested a number of minor changes, including that the allowance ought to consist of a range rather than two separate levels as had previously been the case. However, what was striking about the report was the lack of a sense that the SEN allowance was designed to act as an effective incentive to teachers to take up posts where they had special responsibility in relation to SEN. Importantly, there was also no particular attempt to approach the manner in which the SEN allowance acted as an incentive to teachers to develop their expertise.

This is not to say that the allowance does not help attract and retain teachers who take the types of roles in which the allowance is received. Importantly, it is also not to say that the removal of the allowance would not have a

detrimental effect on the retention of teachers or on the attraction of new talent. However, the point is that no one knows in what way removing the allowance or modifying it might affect teacher supply.

Some of the bodies consulted for the STRB report did address the issue of shortages of supply:

*"BATOD said that a suitable rewards framework was essential to address shortages of specialist teachers...It is believed that there was a need for a realistic professional scale for committed teachers who choose an SEN career pathway rather than leadership and management responsibility."<sup>65</sup>*

Others even suggested that the SEN allowance was an outdated measure given the extent of inclusion and the requirement, in theory, that all teachers develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to SEN:

*"NAHT told us it could not see the justification for paying teachers an additional allowance for what should be regarded as 'core skills'. It maintained that in SEN contexts, the key issue was often appropriate levels of support for the teachers concerned rather than additional payment.....ASTs would have specialist SEN skills and take a leadership role with regard to SEN policy and practice in their own and other schools."<sup>66</sup>*

Importantly, both of these views chime with the earlier recommendation in this report that the professional and progression framework for teachers be clarified and the position of advanced and specialist skills in SEN be more formally integrated into the existing structures such as the Excellent Teacher and the Advanced Skills Teachers programme. It is currently not possible to receive the SEN allowance if you are an Excellent Teacher. It is not clear why this is the case considering it is possible to receive the allowance as an AST. The comment from the NAHT also belies the lack of a consistent understanding in the sector of what constitutes 'core skills' in SEN, and what amounts to advanced and specialist skills.

When acting to clarify this broader professional framework and the position of SEN within it, the government should seriously consider the role of the SEN allowance. They should conduct a review of the allowance's effectiveness as an incentive to teachers both to take relevant posts and to develop expertise in relation to SEN, with a view to progressing their careers in this manner.

Importantly, any review should consider how the money which is currently spent on the SEN allowance might better be used. Interestingly, research conducted for the Salt review found that a lack of financial incentives was not a significant factor affecting the supply of specialist teachers. It may therefore be the case that removing the SEN allowance would *not* have a significant detrimental effect on supply, and that the money saved could be re-invested either in a different form of incentive, focused in a particular way, or to help pay for specialist and advanced training. Nonetheless, as stated above, a careful review needs to be undertaken to get a grip of the evidence in this area.



## Recommendations

- There should be a clearly articulated commitment to develop and accredit advanced and specialist skills amongst the mainstream workforce in all major areas of impairment, not just Dyslexia
- There should be a clarification of what amounts to advanced or specialist skills in an SEN context
- There should be a clarification of how advanced and specialist SEN teachers would fit within a broader framework of career development which included the Excellent and Advanced Skills Teacher schemes
- Teachers taking on advanced and specialist roles should be required to acquire or be in the process of working towards the achievement of an accredited qualification in their relevant field
- Voluntary bodies or trusts could certify the qualifications and the training which could be delivered by HEI's, private providers or special schools or a combination of these bodies
- A targeted fund should be made available, which if the Rose model is followed should amount to around £50 million
- Local authorities and schools should be required to develop and contribute to audits of expertise using nationally agreed, standardized criteria
- Data should be collected nationally and locally regarding specialisms in SEN in the same manner as it is for subject specialisms, across all major areas of impairment
- There should be a major review of the SEN allowance which should consider:
  - How effectively it currently operates as an incentive to teachers to specialize in SEN
  - How it interacts with other pay awards for the development of teaching expertise
  - Alternative models of financial incentives such as those pursued abroad and for subject specialisms in this country

## **Appendix: Policy Exchange and NASEN Survey of special schools training need - Methodology**

The survey was sent out in email format to 500 special schools in England. NASEN generously shared the email addresses of the 250 special schools in their membership. We contacted the remaining 250 by telephone to inform them of the survey and obtain the email address of the head teacher, using the details provided on the OFSTED website to contact a random sample of schools. The survey was also publicised on the website of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Federation of Leaders in Special Education (FLSE).

The survey consisted of 9 questions, including one giving respondents the opportunity to make general comments about SEN and training. The broad aims were to gain an idea of the levels of training in SEN amongst teachers and teaching support staff in special schools. We also attempted to gain an idea of the extent to which teachers in special schools who did have training in SEN had received specialist training which was particular to the needs of the children they were teaching.

Many factors made the design of this survey difficult. In relation to training for SEN, there is not necessarily a precise and consistent nomenclature on which to draw. As a result, the questions were open to a degree of interpretation. However, schools tended to answer in such a way which indicated their particular interpretation of the question, which allowed for a compatible set of results.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>7</sup> Knapp et al, *The Economic cost of autism in the UK*, 2009
- <sup>8</sup> <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/sen/faq/funding/fundingfaq7/>
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- <sup>22</sup> For evidence that ‘on the job training’ is in general more effective see, Schon D, *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*, Basic Books, 1983; and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*, Jossey- Bass, 1987
- <sup>23</sup> DCSF, *Salt Review: Independent Review of Teacher Supply for Pupils with Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (SLD and PMLD)*, 2010, pp. 7-9.
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- <sup>26</sup> DCSF, *Lamb Inquiry: Special Educational Needs and Parental Confidence*, 2009, p. 7.
- <sup>27</sup> Policy Exchange, *More Good Teachers*, 2008, p. 8.
- <sup>28</sup> <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/quality-mark-and-accreditation.html>
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- <sup>31</sup> Hodkinson A, *Pre-service teacher training and special educational needs in England 1970- 2008: is government learning the lessons of the past or is it experiencing a groundhog day?*, 2008, p. 278.
- <sup>32</sup> *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*, 1978, see <http://sen.ttrb.ac.uk/viewarticle2.aspx?contentId=13852>
- <sup>33</sup> Hodkinson A, *Pre-service teacher training and special educational needs in England 1970- 2008: is government learning the lessons of the past or is it experiencing a groundhog day?*, 2008, p. 278.
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