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TECHNICAL REPORT

Perceptions audit for the General Teaching Council for England

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Sponsored by the General Teaching Council for England

The research described in this report was sponsored by the General Teaching Council for England.

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Published 2009 by the RAND Corporation
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Executive summary

The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) commissioned RAND Europe in 2008 to undertake a perceptions audit, to take the temperature on its current status and to inform its future work with teachers, organisational partners and the wider public. A perceptions audit is a method for gathering opinions and views of selected informants about how they see the topic in question, and analysing the range and aggregation of those views to present a snapshot at a moment in time. This report presents the findings of that perceptions audit.

The GTC is a statutory body set up in 2000; it is responsible for maintaining a register of qualified teachers in England, regulating registered teachers and advising government and others on issues affecting standards of teaching and the quality of learning. The GTC's intention is to enable the confidence, capability and standing of the teaching profession to be strengthened, by raising standards and improving the profession's accountability in the public interest.

The perceptions audit is based on 15 interviews selected by the GTC among the GTC's key organisational partners (see Appendix 2). In spite of the differences in knowledge and expertise among interviewees, there was significant consensus about three key messages:

- the GTC has failed to engage with the teaching community; the GTC is not yet seen as relevant to teachers' needs, concerns or aspirations
- Keith Bartley is providing a very positive and welcome lead, driving the organisation "in the right direction"
- the role and remit of the GTC are seen as problematic.

While there was a significant degree of convergence on these points, there was greater variability among interviewees regarding the specific reasons for these views. Membership of the Council did not appear to be a differentiating factor between the views of those interviewees who were or were not members. This suggests that there may be scope for the GTC to clarify how Council members can best accommodate the interests they hold as stakeholders in the issues that GTC deals with, as partners of the GTC and, in some cases, as competitors of the GTC.

This report analyses the messages about the GTC's current status and future focus, and makes some suggestions for addressing the challenges that the audit has raised. Below we present the key findings from the interviews.

The remit of the GTC is seen as problematic

The difficulties are thought to originate in the scope and mix of roles and responsibilities that were established for the GTC at its inception in 2000. This is seen as the source of many of the GTC's current and persistent difficulties. The GTC is not yet seen to be activating equally all aspects of its remit. In particular, it is not seen to be operating as a convincing professional body for teachers. Problems include possible overlaps with the remits of some other bodies, such as the teachers' unions, the Training and Development Agency and other organisations delivering continuing professional development. Though the GTC was seen as having carried out the registration function reasonably well, it was regarded as "not tough enough" as a regulator, and insufficiently rigorous or timely. This left room for doubt in interviewees' minds about whether the GTC is adequately mindful of the interests of the people that the profession serves.

The Chief Executive of the GTC is widely perceived as very positive, but the Council is seen as unwieldy

There is a widespread perception that Keith Bartley is providing a very positive and welcome lead as Chief Executive of the GTC, driving the organisation "in the right direction". Interviewees see significant progress over the last 12 months in the performance of the organisation. On the other hand, the GTC itself is seen by some as too large and unwieldy an entity to provide the strategic focus and clarity that interviewees think is required. Some interviewees advised that its membership and ways of working need to be rethought. Some doubted whether, even if the Council were reformed and the Chief Executive continued to drive performance positively, it would really be possible to turn the organisation round. The GTC told us that, in recognition of these concerns, some changes to the Council's ways of working are already agreed and in place. The GTC is also seriously considering what would be involved in proposing further changes that would need alterations to the primary legislation establishing the GTC (which lays down the size and constituencies of the Council and other aspects of the Council's working).

Interviewees believe that the GTC has not won teachers' hearts and minds

Overall, there was a widely held perception among the interviewees that the GTC has not won teachers' hearts and minds by focusing sufficiently on teachers' professional concerns, needs and aspirations. The interviewees all think it has failed to engage with the teaching community, that it is not yet seen as relevant to teachers' needs, concerns or aspirations and that it lacks grassroots engagement in teachers' professional lives. Several interviewees referred to the GTC's troubled relationship with teachers during its first years of operation, and the legacy of mistrust to which they think this has contributed. Some interviewees regard the GTC as being too close to government, funded via government, not independent of it and therefore not committed to teachers' professional agenda as a matter of priority.

The GTC is perceived as limited in its ability to influence policy development

The GTC is seen as demonstrating limited effectiveness in influencing policymakers. It is not seen as being vociferous enough in its pronouncements. However, there are sensitivities about its relationships with various other organisations, particularly where there may be an overlap and an element of competition, for example, concerning

continuing professional development. The GTC is also seen as not yet sufficiently proactive and open in its dealings with its organisational partners.

The GTC's Vision Statement is seen as innocuous

Interviewees tended to agree that the Vision Statement is like “motherhood and apple pie”. They feel it is too broad and should be more detailed and clearer about what it means in practice. To them it seems not to provide a clear definition of the role teachers will play in 2012 and beyond. The statement would need to be sharpened up for the interviewees to see how they could contribute to its achievement.

Interpreting these findings

While some of the views and perceptions reported here may be interpreted as misunderstandings or misrepresentations of the GTC's role and remit, the findings from this perception audit merit careful consideration by the GTC as they provide indications of the ways in which stakeholders perceive and relate to the organisation. The GTC may want to consider whether any useful signals can be derived from interviewees' views and, if so, where and how the signals could usefully inform and guide the GTC in taking wise next steps. The GTC is a young organisation, still actively developing its strategy and priorities. This gives the GTC further opportunities to adjust the balance and emphasis across all of its areas of responsibility. We explore this further in Chapters 3 and 4.

In addition, some of the reported views do not match the generally more positive response the GTC tends to hear from the same organisations when dealing with them directly. This might be a reflection of the fact that the research presented in this report was conducted by independent researchers, to whom interviewees might be more prepared to express critical views. Furthermore, while some of the interviewees are from organisations that the GTC regards as its stakeholders, it is also possible that the organisations in question view themselves in some respects as competitors of the GTC, which may colour some of their views.

Next steps

The findings from this perceptions audit provide “signals” to the GTC about how stakeholders view and represent them. These findings can therefore inform the development or strengthening of an engagement and/or communication strategy with GTC stakeholders. Some options in this direction are provided in this section, as an aid to thinking about the choices that face the GTC in its future work. In addition, a number of options for future action for the GTC to consider are included, which derive from challenges that the interviewees identified as facing the GTC. The options are some possible ways to consider what the interviewees' signals to the GTC imply for more structural or organisational changes, such as to the Council's constitution or for altering the GTC's role in specific areas. In terms of continuing to build relationships with the stakeholders, a crucial point for the GTC is that even if some of these stakeholders' views do not coincide with the GTC's own sense of its priorities or of its role and remit, the GTC has this basis for deciding how it wants to engage with those organisations from now on.

- The options might extend from *No change* to *Reconsider the whole remit of the GTC*. In between could be a range of other possible measures, such as *Intensified collaboration with stakeholders*.
- Revise 2012 Vision Statement involving teachers and other stakeholders.
- Develop awareness campaign about the role and remit of the GTC.
- Improve communication with teachers.
- Emphasise independence from government.
- Make clearer, louder statements on issues affecting teachers' professional lives.
- Make changes in GTC governance processes and structures.
- Reconsider GTC's role in specific areas.

These options are not exclusive; they could be combined and modified depending on priorities, the resources available and other factors. It helps to think of them as choices for change, which might contain other options not even mentioned here.