

DOES TEACHING NEED A ROYAL COLLEGE?

A group of Freemen participated in an interesting discussion on September 30 at Gresham's College with the title 'Does teaching NEED a Royal College?' The discussion was led by Freeman Professor Derek Bell who is heavily involved in development work on the proposal. He has had a varied career in education which began with teaching in schools and subsequently included teacher education, research, curriculum development and policy work with a focus on science education. The Master was present and the discussion was chaired by the Chairman of Education Committee, Upper Warden Peter Williams.

There is a great deal resting on the shoulders of the teaching profession but ensuring that the quality of teaching is of the highest possible standard and that the teaching profession is given the recognition it deserves is a complex problem. Other professions, notably medicine, accountancy, the law and engineering, have a greater degree of self-determination in addressing the issues involved. So why not teaching? Are there lessons to be learnt from these other professions and models which could be developed for teaching? In particular is there the need and potential for developing "*a new, member-driven College of Teaching*" akin to "*the Royal Colleges and Chartered Institutions in other professions*" (Education Select Committee May 2012)?

The answer to the question might be negative which implies that the status quo is satisfactory. However, the current work is to assume a positive answer and to explore what the levels of complexity might be. There have been previous attempts to set up a similar body of which Derek highlighted two. The first was in 1846 when the College of Preceptors now the College of Teachers was formed. The second was in 1998 when the General Teaching Council was formed and this lasted until 2012. There is a difference between Teaching which is the function and Teachers who are the people. The proposal is to look at a Royal College of Teaching (RCT) and hence be concerned with the function as well as the people. The overriding objective of teaching is to improve the quality of learning and experience of the learner of all ages.

Aspects which an RCT might help to address include:

- Recruitment of high calibre teachers
- Quality of initial teacher training
- Unify profession of teaching
- Ensure consistency and sustainability of quality
- Availability and quality of Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Raise status of teaching relative to other professions
- Improve perceptions of teaching among the general public, employers, government and teachers themselves.
- Develop a culture in which professional expertise is thoroughly valued.
- Build an evidence base to underpin theory and practice of good teaching
- Enable the profession to take greater control of its own destiny
- Become independent of political ideologues but work with government to improve education nationwide.

As part of its operation the RCT would need to:

- Establish and maintain a register of members
- Set up and monitor professional standards with regard to knowledge expertise and conduct
- Set entry thresholds and requirements for up to date CPD and certification
- Provide advice.

Eventually it might lead to regulation of the profession with the maintenance of an accurate register and licenses to practice

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The present approach, as this will not happen overnight, is to consult widely and to engage teachers, while managing expectations. Any model set must be sound but not inflexible and have a sustainable business base. In building the vision details cannot be neglected. A series of papers which help to demonstrate progress to date are given at the end of the report.

The following points were made in discussion:

- It is important to engage headteachers and senior management teams in schools as they have responsibility for monitoring and developing quality among their staff.
- Teachers work hard on new initiatives which get changed by politicians. The concept of more independence for teachers who could help plan education in the country was welcomed.
- The College should be a Royal College of Education or Educators to encompass education at all levels.
- This idea is not one well established in other countries as the government often controls education closely. There is some work, for example, in Australia on professional standards and robust certification.
- There is a need to market the profession of teaching and this initiative might help.
- There is a need to improve the standing of teachers in society.
- Professions with a professional institute can demonstrate that members have been through training in high standards of behaviour including ethics. Teachers have to teach societal behaviour as well as their subject.
- Professional bodies can have a number of aspects including thought leadership and communities of practice.
- It is important that the improvement of quality is a key feature of the RCT and that it does not over concentrate on any regulatory function. The improvement of status for teachers will come about mainly by improved quality of teaching.
- Regulation also has a role and one of the criticisms of the General Teaching Council was that it did not remove many teachers.
- The union movement is strong among teachers unlike many other professions and this would need to be considered.
- With quality improvement through CPD it is important to have requirements to undertake meaningful CPD and not just a requirement to do a number of hours.
- There are different models of education so how easy will it be to set quality standards with different approaches? In some phases observation is not welcome. However, teachers need to be more outward looking to demonstrate to the public what they are doing and not be too inward looking.

- School governors could have a role in promoting this idea as they are important in their communities.
- The first step might be to set up a body to get a stronger voice for teaching and to make submissions to government. This is how a new Institute was set up in the last few decades with a small start and then gradually assuming more roles.
- In the banking sector there are moves to develop a new banking Institute.
- The title Royal College of Teaching is a working title based on the medical profession. The first step would be to get a charter and then look for 'Royal' as part of the title.
- There is concern that politicians would not want this. However, if teachers want this to happen it could do so. There is no need to wait for government approval.
- How might the Worshipful Company of Educators help this development?

The discussion drew to a close with this last point but the general view of the session was that people were in favour of the development and would like to hear more as it develops. The Chairman thanked Derek Bell for a stimulating presentation. For some the discussion continued in the nearby pub!

Links to background reading

1. www.princes-ti.org.uk/CollegeofTeaching/) is to the Princes Teaching Institute page which includes the discussion document prepared by the PTI Commission and to the two online surveys (one for teachers and the other for head teachers). There is also a link to lots of additional reading if any one wishes to follow it up.
2. <http://www.teacherdevelopmenttrust.org/rcot/>) is to the Teacher Development Trust which is hosting the booklet *Towards a Royal College of Teaching* and provides an opportunity for individuals to respond to that publication.
3. <http://www.collegeofteachers.ac.uk/publications/education-today/current-issue>) is to a special issue of Education Today which I edited, so any comments on this should come back to me.
4. The House of Commons Education Select Committee Report, May 2012: *Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best* This can be accessed at, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmeduc/1515/151502.htm>

NB The Select Committee commenced a follow-up inquiry in July 2013 and reports of witness sessions can be found in its website.