

A 'ROYAL' COLLEGE OF TEACHING

On Monday November 17 a group of people gathered for a discussion evening on the question: 'A 'Royal' College of Teaching': what difference could it make'. The event was organised jointly with the College of Teachers, the Prince's Teaching Institute (PTI) and the Worshipful Company of Educators (WCoE). The event formed part of a consultation series on this topic held around the country and the WCoE agreed to hold a London event at Gresham College. In 2013 the Educators had held a first event on this topic so for many the interest was in how the idea is developing. The event was filmed so that other groups may watch it at a later date.

The scene was set with presentations from Angela McFarlane Registrar and CEO of the College of Teachers, Sir John Holman from the University of York, John Coles, Group Chief Executive of United Learning and Eugene Dapper, a teacher at Kingsford Community School. The PTI published in February 2014 a blueprint for a new College of Teaching which would be a chartered body. The question as to whether it became a 'Royal' college is a separate decision.

The reasons for a new chartered college include:

- The profession would take charge of its own destiny and able to set its own standards. The college would be governed by teachers for teachers.
- The body would be independent of government and would be protected by a royal charter.
- The body would be a strong college to speak independently the truth about education.
- The time is appropriate for this development.

Membership would be voluntary but teachers would have access to: good practice in teaching and learning; an understanding of standards; high quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD); an understanding of relevant research. An injection of funds will be needed for set up costs and this may have to come from government but the aim is to be self-sufficient over time. However, it will take time to build up and some parts of the teaching profession may move more quickly. It is important that quality is the main driver and not rapid growth.

In the discussion the following points were covered:

- Teachers have been deskilled over the last 20 years by the different government initiatives. They are more like technicians now rather than higher level occupations. A body governed by teachers for teachers would help them regain their own confidence and ideas. It would help bring about more stability for the profession.
- The college must be voluntary as the General Teaching Council failed partly because it was imposed and there was no ownership by teachers.
- It will be important that any new college is not dominated by one sector of teaching such as higher education or by the trade unions.
- A strength of the college could be a chance to break down any barriers between different phases of teaching.
- The new college is not seeking to be a replacement for unions. It will need to convince teachers that it is worth belonging to at least two bodies as many teachers join the union to ensure they have legal advice if any problems arise.

- Under a charter there could be grades of membership to encourage members to improve and maintain their skills. The college could also have different sections for different phases.
- If the new college is to succeed there must be a demand to belong. One possibility is that schools could recruit against different levels set by the college.
- If a school makes a commitment to CPD then teachers will be encouraged to work there.
- Teachers want leadership from other teachers and the new college could provide this.
- A professional body is the voice of a profession and can make a contribution into the public arena as a collective view. There is a danger at present that there are too many voices in teaching which enables the government to ignore them all.
- A new body has to start doing something if it is to gain respect and begin to be taken seriously.
- The royal colleges of medicine admit members by setting examinations as entry standards. The new college will need to create authority, respect and commonality of purpose if it is to be taken seriously.
- The new college should consider a regulatory function. Why should a teacher join unless it gives a license to practice? Some other functions suggested such as CPD are available elsewhere.
- The new college should think carefully about what it means to be a professional. Professional bodies have this as a core feature as well as good technical knowledge and good delivery skills.
- Study of examples from other professional bodies will be helpful in developing the next stage.
- There is a volume of research evidence in teaching but teachers have overall not been good in asking questions about the evidence. There is a need to develop a changed culture among teachers and to make evidence more accessible.
- It would be good if the college were to help young teachers understand career paths that lead to good teaching positions and not just to management as is mainly the case at present.

The Master concluded the evening by thanking all the contributors to the good level of discussion. One of the aims of the WCoE is to provide a safe space in which a number of views can be out forward and tested. He wishes the presenters well with the next stage of development of the college.