

Teachers Matter

Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers

Pointers for policy development

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER POLICY

- As the most significant and costly resource in schools, teachers are central to school improvement efforts. Improving the efficiency and equity of schooling largely depends on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers, their teaching is of high quality and all students have access to high quality teaching.
- Many countries have an ageing teaching force and find it difficult to attract well qualified new entrants to teaching, or to retain them once they start, although some have relatively low rates of teacher turnover. There can be quality concerns even when teacher shortages are not readily apparent.
- Teachers themselves have concerns about the future of their profession: whether it is sufficiently attractive to talented new teachers and whether they are sufficiently rewarded and supported in their work.

MAIN CONCERNS

- Although the information is often patchy a broad picture of concerns across countries has emerged about:
 - “qualitative” shortfalls: whether enough teachers have the knowledge and skills to meet school needs
 - limited connections between teacher education, teachers’ professional development, and school needs
 - maintaining an adequate supply of good quality teachers, especially in high demand subject areas
 - the image and status of teaching -- teachers often feel that their work is undervalued
 - long term trends in the composition of the teaching workforce, *e.g.* fewer “high achievers” and males
 - sometimes high rates of teacher attrition, especially among new teachers
 - the impact of high workloads, stress and poor working environments on job satisfaction and teaching effectiveness
 - limited means in most countries to recognise and reward teachers’ work
 - in some countries, a large over-supply of qualified teachers, which raises its own policy challenges
 - inequitable distribution of teachers among schools, and whether students in disadvantaged areas have the quality teachers that they need
- Retaining effective teachers implies not only that all teachers have opportunities, support and incentives to continue to improve and perform at high levels, but also that ineffective teachers do not stay in the profession.
- School systems often respond to teacher shortages in the short term in ways that raise concerns about the quality of teaching and learning. They ensure that classrooms have teachers by some combination of:
 - lowering qualification requirements for entry to the profession
 - assigning teachers to teach in subject areas in which they are not fully qualified
 - increasing the number of classes that teachers are allocated
 - increasing class sizes

POLICY ORIENTATIONS TO MEET KEY POLICY OBJECTIVES

- Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need to recruit competent people into the profession, and provide support and incentives for professional development and on-going high performance. Teachers may not reach their potential if settings do not provide appropriate support, challenge and reward.
- Policy initiatives need to improve status and labour market competitiveness, and to improve teacher development, and school work environments for the teaching profession as a whole. They also need to focus on attracting and retaining particular types of teachers, and attracting teachers to work in particular schools.
 - Making teaching an attractive career choice by:
 - improving the image and status of teaching; teaching’s salary competitiveness; employment conditions; and capitalising on an over-supply of teachers
 - expanding the supply pool of potential teachers; making reward mechanisms more flexible; improving entrance conditions for new teachers; and rethinking the trade-off between student-teacher ratio and average teacher salary

- Developing teachers’ knowledge and skills by:
 - developing teacher profiles; viewing teacher development as a continuum; making teacher education more flexible and responsive; accrediting teacher education programmes; and integrating professional development throughout the career
 - improving selection into teacher education; improving practical field experiences; certifying new teachers; and strengthening induction programmes
 - Recruiting, selecting and employing teachers by:
 - using more flexible forms of employment; giving schools more responsibility for teacher personnel management; meeting short term staffing needs; and improving information flows and monitoring of the teacher labour market
 - broadening criteria for teacher selection; making a probationary period mandatory; and encouraging greater teacher mobility
 - Retaining effective teachers in schools by:
 - evaluating and rewarding effective teaching; providing more opportunities for career variety and diversification; improving leadership and school climate; and improving working conditions
 - responding to ineffective teachers; providing more support for beginning teachers; and providing more flexible working hours and conditions
 - Developing and implementing teacher policy by engaging teachers in policy development and implementation; developing professional learning communities; and improving the knowledge base to support teacher policy.
- Tackling one area without enough attention to inter-related aspects will lead to only partial results. But it is difficult to address all areas simultaneously, and resource constraints mean that trade-offs are inevitable.

COMMON POLICY PRIORITIES

- Most teachers are employed in the public sector in either career-based or position-based systems.
 - In career-based systems, teachers enter when they are young and the entry criteria are usually demanding. Teachers are normally allocated to posts according to internal rules and promotion is based on a system of grades attached to the individual rather than to a specific position.
 - Position-based public services select the best candidate for each position, by external recruitment or internal promotion. Entry from other careers is relatively common. Personnel selection and management is often decentralised to schools or local authority offices.
- Despite major differences between these public service traditions, they share some common policy priorities:
 - Emphasising teacher quality over teacher quantity
 - Developing teacher profiles to align teacher development, performance and school needs
 - Viewing teacher development as a continuum
 - Making teacher education more flexible
 - Transforming teaching into a knowledge-rich profession
 - Providing schools with more responsibility for teacher personnel management

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING TEACHER POLICY

- Teachers themselves need to be actively involved in policy development and implementation and feel a sense of “ownership” of reform -- otherwise it is unlikely that substantial changes will be successfully implemented.
- Teaching Councils provide teachers and other stakeholder groups with a forum for policy development and a mechanism for profession-led standard setting and quality assurance in teacher education, teacher induction, teacher performance and career development, combining professional autonomy and public accountability.
- Policy has a key role in helping teachers to develop professional learning communities within and beyond schools with teachers actively analysing their own practice in the light of professional standards, and their own students’ progress in the light of standards for student learning.

FURTHER READING

These general pointers for policy development are drawn from the Thematic Review on Teacher Policy and the findings are presented in *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, published in 2005. Country background reports prepared by 25 countries, country reviews of 10 countries and other documents are on the OECD website www.oecd.org/edu/teacherpolicy.