

The advanced skills teacher in England

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Chapter 4

The Advanced Skills Teacher in England

Carol Fuller

This chapter details the development of the English expertise model within the policy context and explores the process for assessment, funding, alongside initial reactions to the Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) designation. This chapter also reports on a national survey and follow up interviews with English ASTs in 2010 and 2012 to offer an illustrated picture of how ASTs experience being an expert teacher. The views' of these ASTs are used to exemplify the complex interconnections between professional development and practice and the intrinsic and extrinsic value of expert teacher awards in England. This is considered within the broader concern of teacher status and esteem within England and the ways that professional development models that recognise and reward expertise can contribute in meaningful ways to a significant elevation in these.

Development of the Advanced Skills Teacher role in England

In many western industrialised countries significant policy pressure has been directed towards the greater accountability of teachers in improving the quality of classroom education and student results. With the teacher also identified as the most important variable in any high performing educational system (McKinsey Report, 2007), a number of international policy initiatives now acknowledge and reward those teachers assessed and thus considered to be expert (SMHC, 2009). From the Highly Accomplished Teacher in the USA, the Chartered Teacher in Scotland and the Advanced Skills Teacher in Australia and England, what international policies share in common is an understanding that harnessing the skills of

expert teachers within the classroom is essential in educational reform and its development (Hopkins, 1996; Ingvarson, 2009).

Background

In response to a national and international context of sustained educational under-achievement, The Excellence in Schools White paper was published in England in 1997 by the then Labour government. Central to the key reforms proposed within the policy was a clear and targeted focus on teaching. The teacher was framed as being at the absolute heart of raising standards in schools and heralded as the ‘key to improving performance and remedying underachievement’ (1997: 45). Key within the discourse of improving outcomes in the classroom was the value placed on the dissemination of the professional knowledge and practice of expert teachers. At the same time, the white paper also acknowledged that ‘experienced teachers were reluctant to stay within a profession which does not offer rewards for the highest quality teaching standards’ (DfEE, 1997: 48). The Advanced Skills Teacher grade was thus proposed as a new model of teacher designation for expert teachers that would be well remunerated enough to keep teachers in the classroom and would focus very directly on the sharing of best practice. As a result, the AST grade was introduced into maintained schools in England in 1998 with the government’s ambitious intention that they would, in time, make up 3-5% of the teaching workforce.

Research by Berry (2008) suggests that whilst expert teachers should be well remunerated, policies that focus on salary incentives alone are not enough to attract and retain good teachers. To be most effective, expert teachers require, among other things, high-quality

professional development if they are to remain in the classroom. This view is also supported in the work of Day (2007). Thus, as well as this growing recognition of the need to attract and retain excellent classroom practitioners, the policy initiative also demonstrated an appreciation that until then, promotion into management had been the typical and often only career route available for many teachers. The AST pathway was therefore also positioned as an attractive professional development opportunity as well as an alternative career route for teachers who wanted to stay in the classroom. It meant it was possible for ‘excellent classroom practitioners to progress as class teachers without having to take on management responsibilities and to be rewarded accordingly’ (DfES, 2001:3).

As well as a need to raise standards in schools, the then UK government was also concerned with the professionalism of teachers and on-going issues with low morale. Despite teaching remaining the first choice profession for university graduates and public opinion positioning teachers second only to doctors and nurses in terms of their professional status and prestige (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2001), research in the UK suggested teachers still believed they have much lower status than other professions. Large scale research by the General Teaching Council (UK) in 2002 found that 65% of the 70,000 teachers surveyed believed that the public, media and government had little respect for the teaching profession, with more recent research by Hargreaves et al (2006) finding much the same. With teacher job satisfaction considerably lower today than in 1962 (Klassen and Anderson, 2009) and on-going issues with teacher recruitment and retention, there was also a clear drive to enhance the status of teachers both within and outside of the profession (Swann et al, 2010). In 2001 the then Secretary for Education Estelle Morris outlined the importance of addressing teachers’ low morale and the need to boost both their confidence and sense of professional status. Central to this agenda was what she considered to be the crucial need for teachers to

redefine and renegotiate their professionalism in line with other professions of the modern world. Her main assertion, however, centred on establishing greater trust between government and teachers; with an implied critique in her declaration that the days were long gone when “teachers could say with a straight face ‘trust me, I’m a professional’”(2001: 19). The purpose of the AST grade was therefore three-fold. It was a means to raise standards by sharing best practice, it offered a career and professional development route that kept teachers in the classroom but it was also a medium by which to recognise and reward teaching expertise, thus raising the status of the teaching profession more broadly – in time.

Fundingⁱ

Up to March 2006 most AST posts were funded by the dedicated AST Standards Fund Grant, a fund established to help Local Authorities (LA) and schools raise standards. Half of the costs were met by DfES and the other half by the LA. The grant was for the additional costs of the post i.e. salary enhancement and cover for outreach and an amount towards the LA costs of supporting and managing AST outreach (DfES, 2006)

Since April 2004 the AST Standards Fund grant has been designed to support existing AST posts in each LA. DfES notes that in 2006 this represented just over 1 per cent of the teaching workforce nationally. In 2005-06 the funding allocations were 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. In addition the total allocation to the LA included £300 per AST post (with a minimum of £5000) towards the cost to the LA of co-ordinating AST outreach work, supporting ASTs and monitoring the AST programme (DfES, 2006).

In March 2011 the ring-fenced funding for ASTs ceased. As from April 2013, the central

funding to Local Authorities for ASTs also ceased.

Assessment

Prior to the award of the grade of AST, candidates undergo a comprehensive assessment to satisfy a set of standards designed to demonstrate ‘an excellent classroom teacher’ (CfBT, 2004:4). Once appointed, ASTs move to a pay scale that is comparable to management and designed to reflect the expertise and challenges of the role, whilst offering a realistic alternative to the leadership and management routeⁱⁱ. Alongside a range of additional responsibilities geared towards increasing the quality of teaching and learning in their own schools, there is also a clear expectation that at least 20% of an ASTs time is spent on ‘outreach’ work in other schools, where the primary focus is on using their expertise to improve the practice of others.

In order to ascertain that potential applicants to an AST post have the requisite skills to carry out the role, all applicants must undergo a one day assessment, carried out by an external assessor. In addition, candidates complete an application form where they evidence how they met each of the required Standards for ASTs. The application process also requires that a candidate's headteacher provide supporting evidence under each of these Standards and further evidence, included in a folder and provided to the assessor on the day of the assessment, is also necessary. Once approved, AST need no further re-assessment.

There is no requirement that a teacher be post thresholdⁱⁱⁱ before applying to become an AST however, a main-scale teacher applicant must satisfy a set of 26 Standards. These Standards reflect the Core (C), Post-Thresheshold (P) and Excellent Teacher^{iv} (E) Standards alongside 3 additional standards specific to ASTs (A).

The Standards that a main scale teacher must demonstrate are outlined below:

Professional attributes

Frameworks

- P1** Contribute significantly, where appropriate, to implementing workplace policies and practice and to promoting collective responsibility for their implementation.
- E1** Be willing to take a leading role in developing workplace policies and practice and in promoting collective responsibility for their implementation.
- A1** Be willing to take on a strategic leadership role in developing workplace policies and practice and in promoting collective responsibility for their implementation in their own and other workplaces.

Personal professional development

- E2** Research and evaluate innovative curricular practices and draw on research outcomes and other sources of external evidence to inform their own practice and that of colleagues.

Professional knowledge and understanding

Teaching and learning

- P2** Have an extensive knowledge and understanding of how to use and adapt a range of teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies, including how to personalise learning to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.
- E3** Have a critical understanding of the most effective teaching, learning and behaviour management strategies, and including how to select and use approaches that personalise learning to provide opportunities for all learners to achieve their potential.

Assessment and monitoring

- P3** Have an extensive knowledge and well-informed understanding of the assessment requirements and arrangements for the subjects/curriculum areas they teach, including those related to public examinations and qualifications.
- P4** Have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the different types of qualifications and specifications and their suitability for meeting learners' needs.
- E4** Know how to improve the effectiveness of assessment practice in the workplace, including how to analyse statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning across the school.

Subject and curriculum

- P5** Have a more developed knowledge and understanding of their subject /curriculum area and related pedagogy including how learning progresses within them.
- E5** Have an extensive and deep knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy gained for example through involvement in wider professional networks associated with their subjects/curriculum areas.

Achievement and diversity

- E6** Have an extensive knowledge on matters concerning equality, inclusion and diversity in teaching.

Health and well-being

- P6** Have sufficient depth of knowledge and experience to be able to give advice on the development and well-being of children and young people.

Professional skills

Planning

- P7** Be flexible, creative and adept at designing learning sequences within lessons and across lessons that are effective and consistently well-matched to learning objectives and the needs of learners and which integrate recent developments, including those relating to subject/curriculum knowledge.
- E7** (a) Take a lead in planning collaboratively with colleagues in order to promote effective practice
(b) identify and explore links within and between subjects/curriculum areas in their planning.

Teaching

- P8** Have teaching skills which lead to learners achieving well relative to their prior attainment, making progress as good as, or better than, similar learners nationally.
- E8** Have teaching skills which lead to excellent results and outcomes.
- E9** Demonstrate excellent and innovative pedagogical practice.

Assessing, monitoring and giving feedback

- E10** Demonstrate excellent ability to assess and evaluate.
- E11** Have an excellent ability to provide learners, colleagues, parents and carers with timely, accurate and constructive feedback on learners' attainment, progress and areas for development that promotes pupil progress.

Reviewing teaching and learning

- E12** Use local and national statistical data and other information, in order to provide (a) a comparative baseline for evaluating learners' progress and attainment, (b) a means of judging the effectiveness of their teaching, and (c) a basis for improving teaching and learning.

Team working and collaboration

- P9** Promote collaboration and work effectively as a team member.
- E13** Work closely with leadership teams, taking a leading role in developing, implementing and evaluating policies and practice that contribute to school improvement.
- A2** Be part of or work closely with leadership teams, taking a leadership role in developing, implementing and evaluating policies and practice in their own and other workplaces that contribute to school improvement.
- P10** Contribute to the professional development of colleagues through coaching and mentoring, demonstrating effective practice, and providing advice and feedback.
- E14** Contribute to the professional development of colleagues using a broad range of techniques and skills appropriate to their needs so that they demonstrate enhanced and effective practice.
- E15** Make well-founded appraisals of situations upon which they are asked to advise, applying high level skills in classroom observation to evaluate and advise colleagues on their work and devising and implementing effective strategies to meet the learning needs of children and young people leading to improvements in pupil outcomes.
- A3** Possess the analytical, interpersonal and organisational skills necessary to work effectively with staff and leadership teams beyond their own school.

The Standards that a teacher must demonstrate relate to *Professional Attributes; Knowledge and Understanding* and *Professional Skills* and reflect the dimensions that Tsui (2009) suggests are the important qualities of ‘expert’ teachers: an ‘ability to integrate aspects of teacher knowledge in relation to the teaching act... and their ability to engage in reflection and conscious deliberation’ (2009:421).

From the 26 Standards there are three specific to an AST and are what distinguishes the expertise of an AST from the post-threshold or Excellent teacher. These are:

- A1** Research and evaluate innovative curricular practices and draw on research outcomes and other sources of external evidence to inform their own practice and that of colleagues
- A2** Be part of or work closely with leadership teams, taking a leadership role in developing, implementing and evaluating policies and practice in their own and other workplaces that contribute to school improvement.
- A3** Possess the analytical, interpersonal and organisational skills necessary to work effectively with staff and leadership teams beyond their own school.

These Standards relate to critical and analytical skills as well as the inter-personal and organisational skills required in managing others. Distinctive to the AST is the focus on the leadership and managerial characteristics required to support and promote change. When combined with the Excellent Teacher Standards, in particular those that are target focused and concerned with student ‘outcomes’ (E8; E15), the suggestion is that the core skill required of an AST is clearly one of impact; an ability to ‘change’, ‘improve’ and ‘promote’

As we saw in chapter 2, for Hattie (2003) it is the teacher who accounts for 30% of the variance in student achievement; it is what teachers know, do and care about in learning outcomes. For Hattie, the 5 major dimension of expertise in teaching relate to what a teacher can do. An expert teacher can:

- identify essential representations of their subject,
- guide learning through classroom interactions,
- monitor learning and provide feedback,
- attend to affective attributes, and
- influence student outcomes

(Hattie, 2003: 5)

When considered in relation to the 16 prototypic attributes within these, the AST standards appear to capture these. However, the inherent characteristics of expertise that Hattie also identifies as important; the unique qualities that relate much more to an expert's personal attributes, appear not to be reflected so well - a teacher's: passion; respect for students; autonomy; awareness of context; decision making and ability to anticipate. The traits, which appear to resonate far more strongly with the lexicon of a profession and, in combination, reflect both the cognitive and emotional aspects of an expert - and the ways these play out in practice; i.e., the important inter-connection of teachers' personal and professional selves (Day, Kingston, Stobart and Sammons, 2005) – appear to be neglected.

Unlike the Dreyfus model, expertise within the English context is recognised as non-liner, in that years of experience are not positioned as equating with expertise so does not determine when a teacher is eligible to apply to become an AST; a teacher does not to be post threshold.

However, the English Standards clearly suggest that it is outcomes that are the key indicator of expertise; that successful teaching is achieved with reference to Standards and is thus primarily concerned with demonstrating the achievement of end results (Berliner, 2001). The English model can therefore arguably be considered as far more prescribed and strategic than both the Australian and American, which are much more concerned with deep subject knowledge (USA) and pedagogy (Australian). This clearly makes sense within a political environment that strongly articulates an ideological framework of performance and accountability yet fails to make allowance for the fluidity and context specificity of teaching. As we will see later in this chapter, this onus also appears to have proved highly detrimental for ASTs in England and has implicitly been the death knell for the funding associated with the role. The English context resounds with the demands of performativity ‘a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions’ (Ball, 2003:216). The AST model of expertise encapsulates these ideas and rewards accordingly.

Initial reaction and the views of ASTs

Despite initial hostility from teaching unions and school principals in England over concerns that the grade would be divisive, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) studies in 2000 and 2003 and a more thorough review undertaken by CfBT in 2004 were all largely encouraging about the overall value of the AST role in terms of its impact and value. In interviews with 70 ASTs, headteachers and LA co-ordinators, Ofsted (2000) found that for half of the ASTs interviewed, their impact on teaching and learning in their own school was judged as good, and for just over a further third, was judged as very good or excellent. The impact of the outreach work of two-thirds of the ASTs was also ‘judged at least good and for two-fifths it was very good or excellent...where impact was judged to be less than satisfactory

this was principally because of the limited amount of work which had taken place' (2000: 6). In looking ahead, their research indicated that headteachers believed that there was an important role for ASTs in school, particularly in the area of performance management. In a follow up survey of 800 ASTs in 2003, Ofsted found that ASTs had significantly improved the quality of teaching and learning in over three quarters of the schools inspected in the survey and that headteachers felt that the improvements in teaching and learning attributable to the ASTs meant that they were well worth the extra cost of their employment. Whilst it is not clear from the report how the impact of AST was measured aside from self-report, it is interesting to note that Ofsted draw attention to the fact that '*procedures are rarely in place for schools to make clear judgements about the value for money ASTs are providing*' (2003:5). The justification and link between performance and financial investment is clear.

Chapter 2 discussed the competing theoretical definitions of expertise. Given the ideological context in which standards are framed, the often unconscious nature of expert practice as well as the pragmatic issues relating to an ability to demonstrate expertise and thus pass an assessment (Watkins, 1994), the use of standards to capture an expert teacher is highly problematic. Jackson (2006) argues however, that a teacher's ability to satisfy and meet performance indicators has become much more significant than qualifications and years of teaching experience within the teaching profession and certainly within England, performativity appears to be a key driver of changes within the teaching profession. In an increasingly globally driven market place, demonstrable skills via additional credentials have become particularly important. Competition requires people to advertise their 'individuality... uniqueness of their work and of their accomplishments' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001:33) and for Bourdieu, credentials provide a key source of status distinctions between groups (in Swartz, 1997). If, as Giddens (1984) contends, identities emerge through

standardised markers, such as age and gender, then awards such as the AST grade arguably work in the same way and are therefore an important means by which teachers are able to define their professional identities via a model that recognises their expertise; thus there are thus intrinsic as well as extrinsic values in achieving the award.

Because of the ‘objective’ criteria that must be satisfied prior to the award of AST status, in many ways the AST grade can be observed as not only establishing the parameters of teaching expertise in England but also that of a teaching professional. As to what a teaching expert should look like, the AST was in many ways positioned as the embodiment. However, despite the grade existing for more than 12 years, research on ASTs in England is almost none existent. Given that the emphasis of the role is very much one of ‘impact’^v this is rather surprising. In the following section I discuss the findings of a large scale study of 849 AST carried out in England in 2010^{vi} and a follow up study with 205 ASTs in 2012^{vii}.

The research

A comprehensive mapping of the literature in England indicated a real dearth of any large scale, in-depth study of ASTs. What did exist were either small scale qualitative, case studies or larger studies (as reported above) that focused on specific aspects of the role. Research that explored ASTs motivations for taking on the role, their experiences and views of the value of it as well as its use as a professional and career development opportunity was non-existent.

The two research projects reported here attempted to address this gap.

Study 1 - Data in the 2010 study was collected using a mixed method research design, through on-line survey and in-depth interviews with ASTs in England. Using a national database of 1,200 ASTs as our sampling frame, ASTs were invited to participate in the study via email. In total, 849 ASTs from across England participated in the online survey, giving an extremely high response rate of 71%. A further 40 follow up in-depth telephone interviews were then carried out.

Of those included in the 2010 survey, 75% were female and 25% male. Forty percent of ASTs work in secondary schools; 33% in primary and 7% in special and ‘other’ schools, for example Sixth Form, Pupil Referral Unit etc. All curriculum subject areas are captured in the survey, with science (12%), English (9.5%) and maths (9%) most frequently represented – this replicates the main subject areas for ASTs in the English secondary sector. Significantly 85% of AST posts are funded by their Local Authority (LA), with the remaining 15% being funded by their employing school^{viii}.

Study 2 - In the follow up snap shot survey carried out in 2012, the same sampling frame was used but the response rate was much lower, with 205 responding to the on-line survey. An interesting sub-feature of the research however, was the volume of email correspondence received. From the original survey, more than 40 made contact to inform us that they were no longer employed as ASTs, largely due to the cessation of funding for their role. In light of the Second Review of Teaching Standards published in December 2011 which recommended the discontinuation of the three existing Post-Threshold, Excellent Teacher and Advanced Skills Teacher standards, and the introduction instead, of a single higher-level standard called the Master Teacher standard, a particular feature of the second survey was therefore a far greater emphasis on more open-ended questions that sought ASTs viewpoints of this.

Of those included in this survey, 72% of ASTs were female and 28% male. Fascinatingly, all work in secondary schools (age 12 – 16/18). All curriculum subject areas are captured in the survey: with English (13%), maths (9%) and science (8%) most frequently represented and replicating the main subject areas for ASTs in the English secondary sector. Significantly 63% of AST posts are funded by their LA (local council), with the remaining 27% being funded by their employing school.

English Advanced Skills Teachers

Needing a new challenge was the primary motivating factor in deciding to become an AST for a quarter of the teachers surveyed in 2010. Other factors were also important including: an opportunity to stay in the classroom (21%) and a desire to share skills (19%). Teachers opting to undertake the AST route discussed having reached a point in their career development where they had needed greater challenge and responsibility; yet remaining connected to the classroom as well as their subject were also very important to the type of professional lives the teachers wanted. The AST role was thus seen as an important career opportunity offering professional development without the “*sheer administration...of the Senior Management Route (SMT)*”. This commitment to the classroom is clearly evident in AST future career plans. Although 27% of AST plan to move into management in the future, 66% of ASTs intend to remain in an AST role for the foreseeable future.

Eighty-five per cent of respondents enjoy being an AST “most of the time”, with more than two fifths stating that the role is what they expected it to be. However, almost all ASTs find the role demanding, primarily because of large workloads (24%) and the amount of time it

requires (33%). Levels and perceptions of support vary but primarily centre on practical issues that relate to the facilitation of out-reach work and appropriate preparation time. A key focus for the work of an AST is the 20% of teaching time spent on out-reach. However, issues around timetabling, lesson cover, as well as attitudes of the head and the SLT to the role, has an important impact on how well this requirement is facilitated.

It is difficult to definitively outline an ASTs role as much of their work is dependent on Local Authority and school priorities. Focus can range from 1:1 mentoring support for a struggling teacher, INSET training provision to departmental or whole school intervention strategies. Interestingly, only just over half of ASTs believed their schools were allowing them to make the best use of their skills. In addition, a shift in emphasis over recent years has seen far greater focus on schools on Special Measures:

“...the job isn’t what it was when I first started as an AST, it’s a lot harder now. I used to go into any school that asked for my support but now it’s just the schools on Special Measures...and it’s about dealing with either poor teaching or poor leadership...it makes it harder because often they don’t want you there, well not at first. It’s just a really challenging environment and I guess it’s that which makes the role harder than it was.”

Based on feedback, teachers were clear they are having an impact, with support of teachers (38%) and the training provision (31%) being their biggest contribution as an AST:

“...my greatest impact is with NQTs, because they’ve been successful...from the feedback...they stay in the school” Female, secondary

“...well, results have gone up, department wise and [when I work with individuals] teaching quality has gone up...from the informal feedback [I get] from teachers” Female, secondary

“...when you get asked to do things more than once, that feels like they value what I do and get a lot out of it. Some of my work comes as a request from people who have spoken to other people so, it’s sort of ‘word of mouth’. That feels like a way of measuring impact. The things I organise outside of school time; that are voluntary in terms of attendance, they are repeatedly well attended and people are keen to take part. This is informal evidence to show my role as an AST is effective” Male, secondary

Quantifying this ‘impact’ however, is clearly problematic given the diverse ways that ASTs are deployed and utilised:

“I can’t generalise on my impact because the role is so varied...and it would depend on how you measure these things” Female, secondary

In terms of the government’s policy initiative and the key aims behind the introduction of the grade of AST, almost all teachers agreed that the role was achieving what the government intended it to in terms of raising standards:

“...all I can say is that I do really think that ASTs are shaping educational policy in the classroom”

All teachers require support and instruction from expert teachers over extended period of times (Elmore, 2002: 18-19) for new practices to be incorporated into teaching styles and

adapted to subject requirements. Equally, a group of ASTs held strong views on the need for more structured and frequent CPD for expert teachers themselves. Training that focused on building their AST networks and collegiality while also regularly sharing their best practices and innovative pedagogical approaches were seen as essential to maintaining their professional excellence and the impact and credibility of the role.

Several core features of training were desired by ASTs. These were: a *focus on content* that deepens and improves the content knowledge of ASTs rather than focusing on generic methods of teaching. Some thought AST conferences were useful only in terms of its generic information and networking but not in specific curriculum and subject matters; *deliberate active learning opportunities* for ASTs to engage with other ASTs, creating new understandings of their role and an AST professional cultural by leading discussions, practice delivery sessions, being observed or observing others (Hawley and Valli, 1999); *coherent and aligned training* with system-based curriculum standards, and assessments (Ingvarson, 1998) and teachers own classroom and/or leadership goals (Porter *et al*, 2004: 133).

Just over 20% of ASTs surveyed did not receive any training either between assessment and starting the role or after. Over a fifth of ASTs (22%) did not attend any additional training since becoming an AST, primarily because it was not offered or available (49%). Others viewed the training scheduled as inappropriate to their needs (24%) or too difficult to find the time to attend (21%). Of these ASTs, the vast majority (76%) imagined it would be useful for their role.

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) Professional Standards for ASTs in England (2007) clearly states the important contribution ASTs make to other teachers training and CPD:

“ASTs provide models of excellence and innovative teaching and use their skills to enhance teaching and learning by undertaking school improvement activities and CPD for other teachers. They carry out developmental work across a range of workplaces and draw on the experiences they gain elsewhere to improve practice in their own and other schools.”

(TDA, 2007: 3)

While the survey and interview respondents largely agreed with TDAs premise and believed they fulfilled these responsibilities, the professional standards and contractual entitlement to “effective, relevant and professional development throughout their careers” (TDA, 2007: 3) was seen as much less structured and rigorously adhered to. This meant many ASTs enjoyed supporting other teachers but felt their own training and professional development was limited unless they created opportunities for themselves.

Although ASTs have successfully completed the external assessment process, not all felt suitably ‘prepared’ or ‘trained’ to mentor adult colleagues. Different skill sets are required for different learning relationships. Being a role model for one teacher at a Special Measures^{ix} school differs from facilitating a curriculum workshop for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) organised by a Local Authority. Some ASTs talked of a ‘taken-for-grantedness’, by Headteachers and Local Authorities, that being an expert teacher implied training was not as necessary and that expertise already featured in all aspects of their teaching life.:

“I thought there might be some training and there hasn’t been. It makes me laugh because I am supposed to know everything and I’ve had no official training ...nothing for me – only helping others.”

"I do all the delivering (of training). I would love some input and be delivered to. I would love to watch more experienced colleagues and the range of skills they have...most of it comes from gut feeling at this point. There should be standardised training that allows you to do a layer of development before you start. I haven't had that as an AST."

We were interested to explore how the title of AST was experienced in terms of the ways it was seen to encapsulate levels of expertise or not. Alternatives to the title of 'Advanced Skills Teacher', for example, 'highly accomplished teacher'; 'experienced teacher' or 'expert teacher' were preferable to almost 75% of ASTs. However, over half the teachers agreed that the title sums up well their level of expertise. From interviews it is apparent that the award of advanced skills teacher status confers a sense of professional recognition that was important to teachers, contributing significantly to their sense of professional self esteem and well being:

"I got through the assessment process so, I do feel recognised" male, primary

"...you feel you have status, you've got it on paper and they can't take that away from you. There is some pressure that comes with it but, in the end, you've earned it" female, secondary

"I feel more respected, because of my role" female, secondary

"...you are not in the same position as a deputy or assistant head but you have a range of knowledge and expertise so, yeah, your colleagues hold you with a certain amount of esteem"
Male, secondary

“...I feel recognised and rewarded. Outside of my school I get quite a bit of kudos before I meet anyone. It gives you a head start, which is good. I don’t feel I have to prove myself and people trust my word a little bit more” Female, secondary

“...my status has grown and I feel good for it” Female, secondary

“I know that the parents of my kids like the fact I am an AST, they feel that their children are being taught by an expert and they seem to respect me for it” Male, primary.

The AST route was clearly observed to be achieving one of the government’s key aims in that these highly skilled teachers remain in the classroom. The ASTs were surveyed and spoke to were adamant about their need for career challenges and for professional development. It is highly probable therefore, that without this viable alternative to leadership and management these accomplished teachers may well have been lost from the classroom. In terms of the policy initiatives, teachers are clear they are having an impact. Establishing this in quantifiable terms is exceedingly difficult however.

ASTs firmly articulate the ways that their AST role also contributes in meaningful ways to their sense of professional efficacy, satisfaction and enjoyment. The ASTs expressed a sense of enhanced sense of professional status yet there were some tension with this in relation to anxiety around possible misconceptions as to levels of expertise. Thus, whilst the AST award appears to impact in positive ways the benefit of this appears to be more in terms of its intrinsic value, especially in raised self esteem. Paradoxically, ASTs like feeling that the grade is recognising and rewarding their expertise but they are also reticent about being perceived as having all the answers; thereby exemplifying ‘expertise’:

“I am quite embarrassed by it to be honest with you, which is not necessarily a good thing. It shouldn't be embarrassing.”

“Because of the term ‘advanced teachers’, people think you are going to be goody, goody. You’re successful every time.”

“...everybody expects you to be perfect all the time.”

This reticence may well reflect ASTs’ understanding of the broader political issues within teaching, defined by standards, accountability and outcomes. It may also reflect a deeper concern with what an expert is. Yet, with a need to justify funding by proving ‘impact’, ASTs reluctance can also invariably be interpreted as reflecting concerns that they have ‘all the answers’ to the many challenges and issues experienced in the context specific classroom. An element of reserve allows for a circumnavigation around ideas of ‘magic wands’ and thus avoids the risk of ‘failing’.

As Beck (1992) notes, we live in an increasingly credentialised society and as the teachers in this research reiterate feeling increased status and more appreciated can result from being formally recognised in this way. Hence as ASTs feel their status as a professional is enhanced by objectivising their skills it is evident that credentials and therefore designations such as AST do matter, as Beck suggests. Exploring the ways that the objective shapes the subjective, in terms of teachers’ professional identities, it could appear then, to be in part understood as a process of social reflection. The enhanced sense of professional identity, the status and esteem of the ASTs included in this research reflects and resonates very strongly with

external/'objective' recognition of their skills and expertise. Thus, if policy is used to recruit and retain excellent teachers' in the classroom, awards such as the ASTs 'work'.

In our follow up study in 2012, nearly all ASTs surveyed still enjoyed their role despite it being very different than two years previously for 85% of these. In terms of impact, ASTs were still clear that the role retains value and makes a significant contribution to teaching and learning, primarily through 1:1 mentoring of struggling teachers (74%); subject specific support (71%) and coaching and mentoring of new teachers (68%).

In light of the changes to funding highlighted earlier in this chapter, only a ¼ of ASTs were confident of continued funding for their role post-2012 and as a result, 70% were unsure whether they would remain in their current post or even in the classroom. In terms of future career plans, 11% of ASTs stated that if their AST role ended they would seek a consultancy role; 13% would leave teaching and 42% would pursue a management and leadership role. Primarily, this is because the removal of allocated funding left little alternative in terms of choice:

I love being an AST and think it is a great shame that my role is being ended. I always thought that in the future I would seek a leadership role but instead feel that my hand is being forced as the alternative is to be a classroom teacher with no other responsibilities which given the skills I have is a waste

The only way to increase your pay now is to move into management and out of the class room- a very, very tragic fact for our children

In terms of the proposed Master Teacher standard, nearly all ASTs were familiar with the proposal yet only 10% felt this to be a potentially positive development for the teaching profession; most expressed ambivalence. However, with respect to impact on the AST role specifically, almost 60% felt it to be overwhelmingly negative:

AST status brings responsibility and financial rewards - which is what 'expert' teachers deserve. The Master Teacher role doesn't appear to offer those things

Interesting ASTs felt that the distinctiveness of the AST role, in terms of the rigour of assessment and pay rewards, meant it was an aspirational, exclusive route, not open to all. The notion of a Master Teacher standard, potentially more easily accessible and attainable and most likely without financial recognition reduced both its value and desirability. However, and more importantly, implicit in some teachers' comments was a sense that such a standard was patronising and left little in the way of career alternatives inside the classroom:

Why do the government think? that good staff will be motivated to go for this? For the kudos? Out of the good of their hearts? Unrewarded gives the clear message - unvalued!!...

This proposal has left me feeling highly demoralised in a profession and post that I used to love. This government seems to be doing everything it can to demotivate and demoralise young and ambitious members of the teaching profession. I do not see why I should take such a backwards step in my career, having achieved, and I believe contributed, a lot in my first ten years of teaching. I do not wish to leave

the classroom to go into management, but these proposals may leave me no alternative

The key aim of the introduction of the AST designation was to keep excellent practitioners in the classroom yet by removing the allocated funding, and potentially, and by default, the AST role, many ASTs are left feeling demoralized and disenfranchised. It is inevitable then that the only career progression route left open is leadership, management or consultancy.

As one AST noted, “*pay is not the only reason to become an AST but, in the current climate, it is a way of justifying your decision to stay in the classroom.*” However, rather more worryingly, is the planned exit from teaching altogether.

The future of expertise

In considering the model of teacher expertise advocated in England, the standards that must be achieved before one can be recognised as an Advanced Skills Teacher suggest that expertise in the English context is understood as a demonstration of a specific set of skills that produces particular outcomes. Expertise and consequently teaching thus appears to be framed as a skilled craft with characteristics that effect high quality results in the classroom – both for students and teachers. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in a theoretical debate as to how ‘expertise’ in teaching should be conceptualised, it is worth exploring none the less what a particular definition might mean, in terms of its potential consequences for the teaching profession.

In a report outlining the evidence presented to the School Teachers Review Board in May 2012, the Department for Education drew attention to the recommendations made in the Second Review of Teaching Standards published in December 2012. This review suggested that the existing standards for post-threshold, Excellent Teachers (ETs) and Advanced Skills Teachers be discontinued and that a new Master Teacher Standard should be introduced instead. The review recommended that the proposed Master Teacher Standard should not be linked to pay but could be used for schools to form a professional judgement and determine how they reward their top performing teachers: the DfE made clear it endorsed this recommendation.

There is clearly a case for linking expertise with outcomes. It is undeniable that student attainment is and will remain a core concern for every school and educational system around the world and invariably schools and governments will want to reward teachers that do this particularly well. However, models of expertise that focus solely on, and reward accordingly, these performance indicators miss the other important ways that expertise is evident. Models of expertise need to capture the juxtaposition of teaching qualities and skills and recognise that the intrinsic and extrinsic skills of expert teachers – and how these manifest – are not always so easily captured with measures of performativity. How does one capture the increased confidence of a previously struggling teacher who has been supported by an AST for example? Teaching expertise clearly involves a nexus of skills and a policy focus which is solely concerned with performance indicators – invariably student attainment – offers a clear message that within the profession, more inherent skills matter little. This is likely to have important consequences in relation to the prestige and status of the teaching profession in England as well as the recruitment, retention and career development of teachers.

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ⁱ Information included here is taken from DfES 2006 document

ⁱⁱ Salary range for 2010 is £37,461 to £59,950 for ASTs outside of London (TES Connect, July 2010).

ⁱⁱⁱ Qualified teachers who reach the top of the main pay scale can apply to be assessed against eight national standards and if they meet the standards, can cross the ‘threshold’ to the upper pay scale. The threshold provides an opportunity for good classroom teachers to progress from M6 to a higher salary range. Progression on the upper pay scale is performance based and governing bodies make the decisions on progression, based on recommendations from heads. Teachers don’t normally move through the upper pay scale more frequently than every two years <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6000193>

^{iv} The Excellent Teacher scheme is similar to the AST although there are two key differences: a sole focus on in-reach and less remuneration. An applicant for an Excellent Teacher applicant must be post-threshold in order to apply. Take up of this route however was very poor. AST in our 2010 survey cynically saw this as a cheaper option to the AST

^v Compared to the Highly Accomplished Teacher for example, that has a much broader focus on teaching and learning.

^{vi} This research was carried out with Goodwyn, A and Francis-Brophy, E.

^{vii} This research was carried out with Goodwyn, A.

^{viii} Prior to commencing both studies ethical clearance was sought from The University of Reading Ethics Committee and all ethical procedures and guidelines were complied with in carrying out the research.

^{ix} Special Measure is an Ofsted designation applied to schools in England and Wales that are considered to be failing and lack the leadership capacity necessary to secure improvements. A school on Special Measures will have regular short-notice Ofsted inspections to monitor improvement. A school usually has two years to improve and if poor performance continues the school may be closed