



In Focus

Teachers at Academies and Free Schools: Qualifications

Overview

On 12 September 2016, the House of Lords will debate how the Government “intends to ensure that all teachers at academies and free schools are fully qualified”. [Academies](#) are publicly funded independent schools.¹ They are run by an academy trust, which employs the staff, and receive money direct from the government, rather than the local authority (LA). Unlike maintained schools, they do not need to follow the national curriculum and can set their own term times. However, they do need to follow the same rules as schools when it comes to admissions, exclusions and special educational needs. Similar to academies, [free schools](#) can choose not to follow the national curriculum and can set the length of their own school terms. According to the Department for Education, in January 2016 there were 20,179 state-funded primary and secondary schools in England.² Of these, as at 1 July 2016, 73 percent were LA maintained, 26 percent were academies and 1 percent were free schools, with 3,125 academies and 117 free schools providing 19 percent of primary education, and 2,028 academies and 120 free schools providing 66 percent of secondary education.³ In July 2012, the Coalition Government [announced](#) that new academies would be able to employ teachers who do not possess a teaching qualification, with the same policy already in place for free schools.

Qualifications Required for Teachers

At present, teachers employed by local authority maintained primary and secondary schools and non-maintained special schools in England are required to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).⁴ QTS is awarded to individuals after they have received initial teacher training (ITT) from accredited providers. To become a qualified teacher, there are a number of courses centred on school-led or university-led training. They include:

- [University-led training](#) offers teacher training courses for both postgraduates and undergraduates with all courses leading to QTS or a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE). Full-time postgraduate courses include spending a minimum of 24 weeks at placement schools.
- [School Direct](#) courses generally last for a year and result in participants gaining QTS, with most courses awarding individuals with a PGCE and/or Master’s level credits. They are designed by groups of schools in partnership with either a university or school-centred initial teacher training (SCIIT) provider and involve individuals receiving on-the-job training in at least two schools, whilst being supported by teachers and mentors.
- Similar to School Direct courses, [SCIIT](#) also lasts for a year, with many courses including the award of a PGCE and/or Master’s level credits. SCIIT programmes are designed by networks of schools that have been approved to run school-centred courses.
- Individuals can also gain their qualifications through Teach First’s [Learning Development Programme](#) (LDP). The LDP begins with a six-week intensive training session, followed by two years of training in schools, where participants have the opportunity to gain their PGCE qualification.⁵

- The [Researchers in School](#) programme is a training route into teaching for PhD graduates “designed to utilise their academic expertise to the benefit of pupils, schools and universities”.⁶

Government Policy on Teacher Training and Qualifications

On 27 July 2012, the Department for Education [announced](#) that new academies would be able to employ teachers without QTS. In addition, it stated that existing academies who already have funding agreements which include an automatic requirement that teaching staff with QTS must be employed, can apply to have the requirement removed. According to the Department for Education, the policy would “free up academies to employ professionals—like scientists, engineers, musicians, university professors, and experienced teachers and heads from overseas and the independent sector—who may be extremely well-qualified and are excellent teachers, but do not have QTS status”.⁷ It added:

As with the independent sector and free schools, the vast majority of teachers employed will continue to have QTS, as it will remain the highly-respected professional status for teachers—and one that all teachers training in the state sector must continue to meet. This new freedom for academies will allow them to bring in professionals who will offer a wealth of knowledge and new skills for our state schools.

The General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, Christine Blower, reportedly stated that the decision by the Department for Education was “perverse” and “a clear dereliction of duty”.⁸

According to the Department for Education, the percentage of qualified teachers with QTS in all state funded schools in England in 2015 was 95.1 percent; representing a decrease from 95.5 percent in 2014. The Department also notes that the total number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers without QTS increased between 2014 and 2015; from 20,300 full-time equivalents in 2014 to 22,500 full-time equivalents in 2015. This represented an increase in the percentage of FTE teachers without QTS from 4.5 percent in 2014 to 4.9 percent in 2015.⁹ In March 2016, the Government published a white paper, [Educational Excellence Everywhere](#), proposing to replace the QTS with what it described as a “stronger, more challenging accreditation based on a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom, as judged by great schools”.¹⁰ The Government’s proposals included putting head teachers in charge of accrediting new entrants to the teaching profession, a task which is currently the responsibility of the National College for Teaching and Leadership. The Government said that in the future full accreditation will only be achieved after teachers have “demonstrated their proficiency [...] over a sustained period in the classroom”. The white paper also stated that the Government would “shortly” be detailing its proposals for replacing the QTS.¹¹

¹ Gov.uk, [‘Types of School’](#), accessed 16 August 2016.

² Department for Education, [‘Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics: January 2016’](#), 28 June 2016.

³ Department for Education, [‘Open Academies and Academy Projects in Development: July 2016’](#), 9 August 2016.

⁴ National College for Teaching and Leadership, [‘Qualified Teacher Status \(QTS\): Qualify to Teach in England’](#), 15 April 2014.

⁵ Teach First, [‘How Does it Work?’](#), accessed 10 August 2016.

⁶ Researchers in Schools, [‘Researchers in Schools Programme’](#), accessed 10 August 2016.

⁷ Department for Education, [‘Academies to Have Same Freedom as Free Schools Over Teachers’](#), 27 July 2012.

⁸ BBC News, [‘Academies Told They Can Hire Unqualified Teachers’](#), 27 July 2012.

⁹ Department for Education, [‘School Workforce in England: November 2015’](#), 30 June 2016, p 7.

¹⁰ Department for Education, [‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’](#), March 2016, p 13.

¹¹ *ibid*, p 33.

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