

Removing barriers, promoting opportunities

Shaping the future for teachers with disabilities in England

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disability”
Dionne,
Nottinghamshire

Background

The GTCE has been the regulatory body for teachers in England since 2000. It is due to be abolished in 2012 with some of its functions transferred to an executive agency within the Department for Education.

Our statutory duties include offering advice to government and other key decision and policy makers on a variety of issues, ranging from how pupils' learning should be assessed, to improving access to the profession for people with disabilities and advising on how schools should be accountable for their performance.

All of our work on equalities and diversity issues is based upon research and evidence. Our clear commitment is to promote and ensure equality, in the firm belief that equity of opportunity is a cornerstone of high quality teaching and learning.

Working in partnership with teachers, schools and a variety of organisations with an interest in equality and diversity in education, the GTCE strives to:

- encourage diversity, improving outcomes and experiences for all groups of children and young people;
- tackle discrimination in the workforce;
- offer advice on the introduction and maintenance of equality strategies and schemes; and
- generate increased understanding, engaging organisations and individuals in helping to further develop the GTCE's policy advice.

For example, the GTCE along with a range of other organisations has previously called for the government to revoke the health standard for teachers (Fitness to Teach) which has been applied in a discriminatory manner against those with disabilities. The standard acts as a barrier to those entering or remaining in the profession.

Disability and teaching – sharing experiences

In 2005, the GTCE established the Disabled Teacher Taskforce (DTT) to identify and address the barriers that those with disabilities may face. These include: inaccessible environments, poor staff support, inflexible employment procedures, and negative attitudes from some quarters. The taskforce's overall aim is to ensure fair access to the profession, tackling discrimination in the workplace.

Members come from a range of organisations including Government departments and agencies; regulators; professional bodies; teacher unions; disability charities and rights groups, alongside other interested parties and third sector organisations. A number of disabilities and impairments are represented.

In March 2009, the taskforce hosted a seminar, Disability and teaching: Sharing your experiences. Attended by teachers with a range of disabilities and impairments, several challenges and issues were identified. It was felt that these merited further exploration with a larger group of teachers and stakeholders.

To that end, the GTCE hosted an online conference, running for six weeks between November and December 2010. Centring upon several themes, the conference was designed to contribute to future policy thinking for disabled teachers in England, through the sharing of views, experiences and challenges.

Who took part?

- 156 people registered
- 60 per cent are teachers
- 67 per cent consider themselves to have a disability
- 57 per cent are teachers who consider themselves to have a disability
- 125 postings were recorded across the site

In the next section we look at some of the themes highlighted by those taking part.

First impressions count

Although there are a few cases where teachers felt they had been poorly supported in their initial teacher training (ITT), overall participants report a positive experience.

Positive experiences related to ITT providers' willingness to accommodate individual needs. The effectiveness of the university-based tutor tends to be crucial. Good practice examples include early discussion between student and tutor to identify specific needs and adjustments, alongside monitoring progress throughout the course, although it is unclear whether this was a formal or informal arrangement. Examples of specialist equipment provided include interactive whiteboards and specialist software.

“My experience so far has been very good. Staff at the department met with me before the start of the course to discuss how to help make sure the course was accessible to me, and so they could find a placement school that I could teach in.”

More severe impairments requiring specialist adjustments have proved more difficult to secure. This includes, for example, the installation of suitable blinds in the classroom for a visually impaired student teacher. Support workers have also been provided for teachers with severe impairments in the classroom, as a way of ensuring pupils' safety.

The majority of participants enjoy supportive and appropriate school placements as part of their training. However, in a few cases students had a positive placement experience and then an unsatisfactory one within the same course. Where there were difficulties with the school placement, it tended to be about the accessibility of the school, with some recounting mixed experiences with their school-based tutor. It is evident that where practice works effectively, the relationship between trainee and school-based tutor is strong. Experiences tend to be more positive where the university-based tutor plays an active role in securing an appropriate placement school.

Some student teachers acknowledge, and indeed accept, that not all school buildings are appropriate for them to work in, perhaps due to the age of their construction and the accessibility challenges this presents. There is also a sense that student teachers feel that, as they were not employed by the school, they cannot expect the

same adjustments as for an employed teacher. There appears to be a lack of understanding from some employers about what reasonable adjustments can be made to overcome accessibility issues - for example, teaching all lessons in one classroom to minimise the necessity to move around.

Teachers' experiences of support

Once in employment, experiences are mixed. A number of participants say they have been well supported in school. Where teachers have had less satisfactory experiences, these tend to involve accessibility issues, impacting particularly on those with mobility impairments.

The relationship between the teacher and school staff is often indicative of the sense of being supported. For example:

“As a teacher with a 'hidden disability' (chronic migraines), I have found staff awareness of the impact is the most important aspect of any support. Once staff are aware that there is more to disability than simply looking at someone and judging the impact of their disability, support and awareness are often easier.”

Teachers tend to report positive experiences where line managers, school-based tutors or head teachers are proactive in identifying and monitoring needs, alongside making adjustments.

Good examples of adjustments made by schools to meet specific needs include personal support to help the teacher during lessons; and classroom adaptations - for example, lights instead of a bell to signal the end of a lesson. In addition, teachers suggested other improvements such as more flexible use of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time; and better co-ordination of timetables to minimise travel between lessons.

CASE STUDY: Deborah

Deborah is a primary school teacher in Kent, who has been teaching for almost 20 years.

“From an early age, I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher. I taught in a mainstream primary school for the first four years and at this point I didn't have too much of a disability. I had tinnitus and mild hearing loss, which I knew was likely to be progressive but I didn't

think too much about it. It didn't impact upon my teaching at all.

“In my first year, the school became home to a new unit for hearing impaired children, who required sign language support. I was fascinated by this and loved having the deaf children integrating into my class, probably in part due to the likelihood of my developing significant hearing loss. When their teacher was off sick for several months I was asked to step in, and then offered the chance to train as a teacher of the deaf. This took two years of distance learning to gain a post graduate diploma. Since then, I have continued working with deaf children in the same unit.

“Today I am classed as severely deaf. Without my hearing aids, I cannot hear speech at all. With them, I am able to detect speech, but cannot always understand it, especially in poor acoustic conditions. It's very like listening to speech in a foreign language you learnt at school. You can hear someone is talking and can even identify who. You can hear quite a lot of the intonation, but you have to strain very hard to pick out individual words, and then try to piece together what might have been said.

“Listening can be very difficult if there is background noise or if the child has a quiet voice or indistinct speech. Staff meetings can be very hard work. At the end of a long day, to sit and try to follow fast moving discussion is almost impossible. Managers and colleagues are very patient at confirming key details if I've missed anything. If I am really struggling, several of my colleagues can use sign language. Acoustic conditions vary enormously. Things like fans being left on or blinds not being drawn can have a massive impact.

“When everyone suddenly laughs at an amusing comment, I never know what the joke is - and no-one ever wants to repeat an amusing comment, believe me! Socially, it can be quite isolating. I can't think of any way to improve this. It's part of being a deaf person in a hearing world, not just at work. It saddens me, but doesn't affect my ability to do the job.

“So far, I haven't had any negative responses from any colleagues when asking for simple adaptations. I'd say they're a pretty 'deaf aware' bunch now. The school has provided some physical support, such as a special telephone and equipment that allows me to access the school's radio aids.

“Any suggestion I have made to help me access school life better has been implemented. There is a willingness to listen and adapt if needed. It’s about enabling you to be the best teacher you can be. The most important thing is that they seem to see me as the person with the knowledge about my working needs. I have never been made to feel that my disability is a problem for the school. I am judged on my merits - as a teacher and colleague.

“Any new deaf child coming into our school is always amazed when they see that I have hearing aids, like them. Most deaf children are born into hearing families, so often think that when they grow up, they will be hearing too, just like all the grown-ups they see around them. To see a deaf adult who has a high status in their school is a fantastic thing for some. A deaf child refusing to wear hearing aids is often surprised to see an adult wearing them - it can be a good example.

“Parents’ responses have also been positive. Last year, one of my pupils was due to transfer to a mainstream secondary school. Her mum asked if I would go with the child to visit the school on open day. This was extremely useful in the transition process. I was able to look at issues such as which rooms would be best for her; where the biggest difficulties were likely to arise with listening and lip-reading; and where her sign language support person should stand.

“Looking ahead, I do have serious concerns about the future for specialist teachers. Deaf children are increasingly being sent to local mainstream schools, where support is often patchy and inconsistent. My unit faces falling numbers and won’t need the current levels of teachers of the deaf in coming years. As a mainstream teacher, I am too expensive for many schools and also have a disability, which may be daunting for new employers. I fear that I may soon face the discrimination I have been lucky to avoid so far.

“But for now, I do a job that I love, I hope I do it well and I would like to continue doing it. I care deeply about the life chances of the deaf children I teach, and love seeing progress, however small. I also work with a lovely bunch of people.”

Overcoming barriers

Participants identify a number of barriers that they have faced in their careers.

Practical challenges encountered by teachers include:

Workload management. This is particularly associated with teachers with dyslexia, who need extra time to prepare reports, read and assess work. This is exacerbated by an expectation that all new teachers ‘have it tough’ once they start their careers.

Fatigue. This is experienced by teachers with physical impairments and can be made worse by after school commitments, for example, staff meetings.

Accessibility. Issues include moving between classes and access to parking facilities.

Health and safety. This is particularly relevant for teachers with a hearing impairment, for example, when responding to fire alarms.

Some teachers report a dilemma about whether to disclose details of their disability or impairment to their colleagues. It was felt that disclosure was helpful in improving relations with other staff members, increasing their understanding and supportive for the necessary adjustments.

However, some teachers also want to reserve their right to confidentiality. These dilemmas tend to present themselves with those who have unseen disabilities – for example, mental health issues; dyslexia; or other physical impairments which may be not be immediately obvious.

“I only have part of my support package in place and the resentment that it causes from some staff who do not understand why I have a PA but it is my right not to have to share the reasons with them. It is bad enough when the staff who know ask how I am, and want to talk about it, thinking it helps. In reality it can reduce me to tears and has done so.”

Concerns exist around career progression, even where teachers have positive school experiences, since many regard their situation as ‘lucky’. Similarly, there are worries about the recording of sick leave for time-off related to their disability. It was felt that records showing a significant amount of time off as ‘sick leave’ could have an adverse effect on teachers’ employment prospects.

Some teachers’ experiences of the application of Fitness to teach highlight a disconnection between occupational health advice and the subsequent action taken by the school. Other issues relate to the length of time taken to conduct the assessment.

CASE STUDY: Dionne

Dionne is a secondary school teacher, who is currently head of physics at a school in Nottinghamshire.

“I have been teaching in the same school for more than 20 years. I have arthritis and now walk with the aid of a stick. I’m in pain all the time, which I try to manage with medication, although sometimes there are unpleasant side-effects, such as drowsiness.

“I disclosed my disability from the very beginning, as I didn’t think it was fair on the school to do anything else. I would always advise others in similar circumstances to be open and honest, otherwise it just creates a lot of problems further down the line.

“I’m lucky as this is a fantastic school that has been very supportive. Sometimes they may misunderstand what I need to help me, but their intentions are always good, even if the practice isn’t always up to the mark. That’s a lot more than many can say.

“The school moved buildings three years ago and since then my working life has become easier, as I now have my own room. Beforehand, the science rooms were in different buildings, which meant I had to move around the school a lot to teach. This was difficult and painful for me.

“My biggest daily challenge is whether I will be able to park my car in one of the school car park’s disabled spaces. In the old school there was only one space for those with a disability and often it was taken. When we moved to the new building, I thought all my problems were over, as there are 10 spaces and only three people in the school with blue badges. But it was not to be.

“Teachers without a disability regularly park here, as do the school cleaners and parents dropping off students. It’s pot luck whether there will be a space or not. If I arrive early, the cleaners are there; arrive later and other staff and parents are using the spaces. I keep asking those in charge to do something, and when it’s highlighted, it will be fine for a few days, but then it’s back to business as usual. People just don’t understand how painful it is for me to have to walk 100 metres, particularly in the morning.

“The one thing that would improve my life is for other teachers to understand what it is like to teach with a

disability. Sometimes I feel that staff don’t appreciate that I need help and begrudge me it. As teachers, we all work hard, but when you’re in great pain it is doubly difficult.

“But I keep going, as it’s not an option to do otherwise. Every day I feel I achieve something by coming to school and teaching. The most positive aspect is the support from the students. They are always considerate and often offer to carry my bag.”

Is Access to Work working?

Access to Work (AtW) funding is highlighted as a key area of support in the workplace. Overall it is well received, providing additional teaching assistant support or personal help; transport to and from school and specialist equipment. Generally, the personal assistant support is used to help with planning and preparation, as well as during lessons. However, there are concerns that the number of hours provided is not always sufficient.

Challenges associated with AtW centre on its administration. In particular, concerns were raised about the payment process. This can mean claimants incur large initial costs before being able to reclaim expenses that take time to process. This system discourages take-up of support in the first place. Other concerns relate to funding being tied up in the school’s financial system. Some issues also relate to employers’ responsibility, specifically whether it is the school or the local authority that is responsible for making any reasonable adjustments.

CASE STUDY: Tom

Tom is a secondary school maths teacher and a late entrant to the profession, qualifying 14 years ago after spending more than a decade in the construction industry.

“In 2007, nearing the end of a one-year teacher exchange to Australia, I damaged my spine. The injury was so severe that I had to be flown home on a bed for an operation. I was unable to work for the next seven months. After returning to the classroom, my spine held out for just over a year before I needed a second operation. This time the repair only lasted six months before a third operation was needed. I returned to school in January this year, but this time in a wheelchair.

“My disability means that I cannot feel my lower left leg. Walking and standing are difficult and painful, so I need a wheelchair to ease these problems. I also take nerve pain medication, which makes me drowsy in the morning. As a result, I have to get up at 6am to enable the effects of the drug to wear off. I have a 55-minute commute to school and need to be safe to drive.

“My school organised a phased return to work, taking place over six weeks. After this, I had a meeting with my head teacher, which was highly productive. I have been offered all the modifications to my working environment that I need to help me adjust to my new working life in a wheelchair.

“I’ve also had nothing but positive help from the pupils, who have been holding doors open and picking up any dropped equipment. They have asked lots of questions about what has happened; why I’ve been away from school and why I now need a wheelchair. Several pupils are intrigued about why I use the wheelchair like a zimmer frame. I’ve explained that this is on my surgeon’s advice - it’s to try and keep the leg working and keep the calories off. As I am very unsteady on my feet and my leg gives way, it’s easier and safer to use the chair to help support me as I move about. As yet, I’ve not met any parents, but I’m hopeful that they will respond in a similarly positive way.

“To date, I have not suffered any discrimination and I hope that people, staff and pupils are learning that people in wheelchairs can be effective teachers. I feel I am helping to educate them about the lives of disabled people.

“My current challenge is to make sure I get to work on time in the morning. At the moment, I’m only responsible for two classes, spending the rest of my time teaching small groups in preparation for their GCSE exams. But the big challenge will come in a few months’ time, when I’m given a full teaching timetable of six classes.

“My advice to others facing similar difficulties is: be strong. The fear I had of returning to work in a wheelchair was immense. But with the help and support of staff, it has not been half as bad as I was expecting. It is certainly better getting into work, and facing the difficulties, than it is sitting at home worrying about them. I think I actually became quite depressed at home. There is nothing like being in the classroom to take your mind off your personal pain and worries.

“Looking to the future, while I cannot see my career progressing beyond that of a classroom teacher, even before my injury I was also perfectly happy to just teach. Quite simply, I do not and did not want to leave the classroom behind.”

Tom’s head teacher, Jayne, says:

“When Tom was first appointed to the school in 2009, he made it clear from the very beginning that he had a back problem. But he got the job on merit, as he was by far the best candidate. Tom is very good at what he does and a real asset to the school.

“Following his operation, Tom was off sick for about eight months, but we stayed in contact throughout. When he was well enough to come back, we offered a phased return. Since Tom had been away, we had moved to our new school building, where accessibility was much easier.

“The local authority occupational health adviser visited the school with Tom to look at the environment and they made some recommendations. These include having a set room for Tom to teach in, with improvements in its layout. We also provided a parking space near the school, with someone to meet him, help carry his bags and loft his wheelchair.

“Understandably, Tom was initially very nervous about coming back and he didn’t know what the reaction would be from pupils and staff, particularly as he is now in a wheelchair. I did my best to reassure him and say that everything will be fine, but to be honest, none of us were really sure what would happen. Fortunately, both pupils and staff have welcomed him with open arms. His department has been very supportive and the children have been brilliant.

“Of course, it’s not been easy for Tom and he is in some pain still. We didn’t want to put too much pressure on him, so we have made some timetabling adjustments, including one-to-one teaching and team teaching. This way he has felt that he can add value and it’s helped him to build his confidence back up again. He has also had to adapt the way that he teaches.

“Tom is the first adult in a wheelchair in the school. This is sending a very important message to the pupils that disability doesn’t have to hinder someone’s ability to do a great job.

“I wanted to ensure that there was every opportunity to

succeed. As head, I would never discriminate against someone as long as we both believe they can do the job. I think Tom has had a very successful return to the school and I hope that continues into the long term.”

To disclose or not?

Participants report mixed views and experiences over the disclosure or non-disclosure of their disability to an employer.

Some teachers say that they would always disclose their disability to the employer to ensure they receive their entitlement to reasonable adjustment to their working environment. Others are more reluctant, believing that their previous job applications had suffered as a result, in some cases reporting they had more success at gaining a job interview by not disclosing their disability. Teachers feel frustrated that, in their view, disability discrimination is taking place, but believe it is difficult to prove.

A few comments relate to the importance of ‘full’ disclosure, that is, demonstrating proactivity to the employer about the management of the disability and the adjustments that are needed to support the working environment.

A number of teachers also report contracting a disability or impairment later in life, while in employment, or a deterioration in their health. Some had received good support, while others felt that the school was trying to ‘push them out’.

CASE STUDY: Nadia

Nadia is a newly qualified primary school teacher working in Yorkshire on a temporary contract.

“I wanted to become a teacher for many years, but failed most of my 'O' levels, so did nursery nursing instead. Once my children had grown up, I decided that I would still like to train and began studying for a foundation degree in supporting learning, alongside maths and science GCSEs at evening classes. I then did a top-up degree, qualifying in 2010.

“I have had a hearing disability since I was 16 years-old and wear hearing aids in both ears. Unfortunately an operation to restore my hearing was unsuccessful and I am left with constant tinnitus. Listening can be

exhausting. I have to concentrate quite hard to hear in some situations.

“My main difficulty is having phone conversations. If I use the 'speaker phone' facility I find that the person on the other end of the line cannot hear me. But if I don't use it, I can't hear very well. Any background noise in the office also has an impact. I haven't received any particular support for this, although other staff members will make calls for me, if it's appropriate. A user-friendly telephone, with a working volume button and speaker phone, would be really useful.

“My experience of training was excellent. I was contacted by the disability officer who assessed me, providing me with all I needed. My teaching practice schools were both supportive, and my first practice school in particular did everything they could to help me. However, my experience at university could have been better. Only one lecturer ever asked if I was coping okay. Some lectures were difficult to hear, either because of my seating position or the acoustics of the room. No-one ever wore a microphone and there was no loop system, which would have helped enormously.

“In the classroom, I cope well most of the time. However, if I get a cold and my ears and sinuses become blocked, it can be very difficult. In staff meetings I try and position myself close to the leader, but I have been known to miss important bits of information. Now I always ask a colleague afterwards, just in case. Written minutes would help.

“The early years' team know about my disability and are supportive. But because I have a hidden disability, I think sometimes people don't understand and often forget. As my hearing aids are usually hidden behind my hair, pupils and parents are mostly unaware of my disability. Occasionally a child does notice and I explain what they are. I also incorporate some sign language into the curriculum, whenever appropriate.

“I think that in the past I have definitely been discriminated against by employers because of my disability, but proving it would be difficult. I think that employers think that someone with a disability is perhaps 'poorly' in some way and will have lots of time off work. They may also worry about special and expensive equipment that may be required. Instead they need to think of the positives - such as how someone with a disability is empathetic and understanding with children who have special educational needs. They need

to realise that no-one is perfect and that just because someone is disabled doesn't mean they are untalented. Disabled people often have a lot of life experience to bring to the workplace too. Managers need to speak to their disabled staff and ask what could be made better for them - in my case, a good telephone system!

“Taking the decision to be honest on my application forms about my disability was a challenge, but didn't really work out due to a lack of interviews. I would still advise others to be honest about their disability at interview. Bring the subject up and be positive about it.

“I'm sure that some people think that I shouldn't be working as a teacher with such poor hearing, but I have been given the opportunity to do a job I have wanted to do for a long time, and my future plan is to continue teaching. Eventually I would like to train as an advanced skills teacher (AST) – but one step at a time.”

Staying positive – teachers' views on recruitment

Participants' views vary on positive discrimination. Some teachers do not want to be recruited because of their disability, so that schools can 'tick a box' and satisfy their duties. However there is also a sense of pragmatism - barriers exist and supportive treatment is needed in order to progress.

“So if I get a job through positive discrimination I will be glad and then once I start the job I can show them that I am more than a tick [in a box] through my performance. I know people will say I should have some pride and principles, but they will not pay my bills or feed my children, seeing as I am a single parent, and the last thing I want to do is start claiming benefits.”

Teachers also highlight the positive aspects that a disabled person can bring to a school. Many feel there is a lack of recognition of the positive difference that teachers with disabilities can make to children's learning. For example, disabled teachers are well placed to understand the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities, acting as role models to whom children can aspire.

“From my work with teachers of the deaf, I feel that it is very important to ensure that deaf people who have the skills and knowledge necessary are supported in becoming teachers of the deaf. They have much to offer, and experience shows that they can thrive with the correct

amount of support - and provide excellent role models to deaf and other pupils.”

However, there is a sense that the quality of teaching should always supersede any other such considerations.

“Seeing positive disabled role models is good for all kids, ... But the bottom line has to be good teaching - and the skills and strategies learned by those who have to overcome difficulties daily probably feed into and enhance their teaching anyway.”

CASE STUDY: Laura

Laura* is a primary school teacher, currently working as a supply teacher in Lancashire.

“I had never considered teaching as a career until my son's head teacher asked me to become a teaching assistant for a short while to help a group of pupils. I enjoyed the experience so much that I decided to train to become a primary school teacher.

“I have a long term condition that means I walk using elbow crutches. Day-to-day, my disability affects such things as putting up displays and playground duty - if a child falls over, I can't pick them up. In one instance, I had to accompany the children to their swimming lesson, which entailed a mile-long walk. It was very difficult for me, but no one asked if I was coping. There is also an expectation that you will attend after school activities, but all my energy has been used up during the working day and often I feel exhausted.

“Since training, I have had one full-time year-long contract within a school, where I had worked on supply. This enabled me to complete my NQT year, which was fantastic. Here I had help from a teaching assistant for 10 hours a week - two hours a day. I was glad for it and it was better than nothing but it just wasn't enough.

“For me, head teachers and managers need training to become more aware of what teachers with disabilities need. I don't like to make a fuss and the last thing I want is to be asking for help all the time, because you would just be perceived as trouble. But there are good examples too. One head teacher came up to me in the corridor recently and asked if there was anything they could do to make my life easier. There wasn't, but it was great to be asked - and often that's all you need.

“Unfortunately a falling roll and merging classes meant

that the school was unable to renew my contract and now I can only get work as a supply teacher. Schools request me and I know I am a good teacher, but I have had no success with securing another full time position. I must have applied for between 30 and 40 posts in the last year alone. I have glowing references and when I get interviews I've been told that I was a strong candidate – but I don't get the job.

“I think head teachers are wary of employing teachers with disabilities. I think it's partly that they don't know how to cope with a teacher who has a disability. And I also think it's about finances. They expect that you will have to take lots of time off, but in two years' of teaching full-time, I didn't take one day's sickness leave.

“It's very disheartening and I must admit that I got to a point recently when I came very close to leaving the profession all together. I love what I do and I've got a lot to give, but I need the opportunity. When I started teaching, I felt that it gave me my life back and I felt energised. Now all I want is a permanent job.

“What I'd like to see are paid placements for teachers with disabilities. I think they would help to allay head teacher's fears about what it might be like to have a disabled teacher on staff. This might really help things to change.

“As a society - and especially in education - we are very good at welcoming and embracing differences and minority groups. However I feel that disability has fallen by the wayside. We rarely discuss disability with children. I can't think of one topic in the primary education curriculum that teaches children about disabilities. Moreover, children are rarely exposed to disabled adults within the education system. In the tens of primary schools that I've worked in, I've never seen another physically disabled teacher. Yet more and more children with disabilities are attending mainstream schools.

“I think disabled teachers have a lot to offer in terms of helping children understand disability; the capacity to overcome difficulties; and make a valuable contribution to society as a whole. I think that disabled teachers are important role models, helping children understand the effects of disabilities on people's lives and how they can help. It is also valuable for disabled children in mainstream education to see teachers with disabilities encountering similar difficulties as themselves, but who are able to achieve and contribute as much as their

able-bodied colleagues.”

What next?

Participants have shared a variety of experiences that raise many issues and challenges. Now the GTCE plans to share these findings with key stakeholders - including the taskforce - with the aims of both raising awareness and informing future action.

The GTCE has identified possible priorities for future action and these are to:

- improve equalities training within school leadership programmes which should include a focus on staff as well as children and young people;
- strengthen ITT providers' practice in identifying the suitability of placement schools for disabled student teachers, perhaps through the ITT requirements;
- support ITT providers to identify, assess and then monitor student teachers' needs;
- create a robust system to enable continuing monitoring of the representation of disabled people within the profession;
- produce further guidance for schools to help them identify practical strategies to make reasonable adjustments for disabled teachers;
- provide better information for disabled teachers to make informed decisions about where they work and the support available for them through Access to Work funding and occupational health;
- streamline the administration of Access to Work funding to enable teachers to access funding efficiently and without inheriting large costs; and
- support teachers to provide full disclosure of disability to the employer, promoting the benefits that a diverse workforce can bring to a school.

***In the case studies, all names have been changed to preserve anonymity.**