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Dear Professor Higgins

Thank you for your letter of 8 February about the new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) qualification that the TDA has been asked to develop and implement.

I welcome ACME's support, both for an increased emphasis on sustained and in-depth professional learning and development for teachers, and for the move towards a Masters-level profession. I also note your concerns about specific aspects of the MTL programme and I'm grateful to you for raising these in such a detailed and considered way.

ACME will, I'm sure, appreciate that we are still in the early stages of implementing the MTL. Although over a thousand teachers have already enrolled on the programme, none will actually begin their studies until next term at the earliest. The TDA, and our partners in schools and universities who have worked with us to develop the MTL, are confident that we have developed a high quality professional M-level qualification. We are confident too that it will achieve its aim of boosting the overall quality of teaching needed to improve the achievement of pupils. But we recognise that, as with any new programme, and in particular one as potentially transformational as the MTL, we will need to keep its content, structure, implementation and impact under review as it is rolled out.

With this in mind, we are in the process of selecting a contractor for an independent longitudinal evaluation of the MTL. We have also engaged extensively with a wide range of stakeholder groups during the development phase, including subject associations and those responsible for specific curriculum policy areas at the DCSF and in other agencies. We are keen to make sure that the MTL brings together and draws upon a wide range of national and local expertise: both to make appropriate resources available to teachers who choose to focus on the development of their subject knowledge and pedagogy during their MTL; and to seek feedback on the implementation of the programme.

In this context, it would be extremely useful to establish closer contact with ACME so that we can keep you informed about the development of the MTL and involve you in future discussions. In the short-term, if you think it would be helpful to meet with me or one of my TDA colleagues more closely involved in developing and implementing the MTL, I would be happy to arrange this.

In the meantime, and as a starting point for further discussions, it might be useful for me to touch on some of the specific concerns raised in your letter. Some of these would need to be addressed as part of a wider debate on the most appropriate way to develop teacher effectiveness: there may be some genuine mismatches between the current vision for the MTL

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and ACME's aspirations for such a programme. However, in other areas, fuller discussion may suggest that the MTL is less out of step with your vision than might at first appear.

You are, for example, concerned about the MTL's current focus on early career teachers. We understand these concerns and, whilst we believe that there is a strong policy and research basis for this focus, we have been aware throughout the development of the programme that it presents specific challenges.

We are, in fact, confident that the MTL will enable teachers to build on their initial teacher training and will provide structured support and intervention at precisely the time when teachers need it most. We believe that this additional early support will attract highly-motivated professionals into the profession, rather than putting them off, and improve both teacher recruitment and retention. It is worth noting that early career teachers are already choosing to undertake their development through accredited, M-level programmes. From 2005, when it became possible for PGCE students to gain Masters-level credits for aspects of their initial teacher training (ITT) there has been a growing interest from NQTs in continuing with M-level study through Masters programmes funded through the TDA's Postgraduate Professional Development programme. Around two thirds of teachers enrolling on those programmes are now in the first five years of their careers.

Our university colleagues, who already work with many early career teachers on these programmes, do not feel that MTL participants will be discouraged from the further study of their subject. Indeed, the development of an enquiry and evidence based approach to their professional practice will arguably encourage teachers to undertake further sustained and in-depth learning. Like many practice-based professional qualifications, in the education sector and elsewhere, the MTL learning outcomes, for each phase, will be assessed against the QAA M-level benchmarks as well as professional expectations (in our case, the Professional Standards for Teachers). You will be reassured that the programme has now been separately validated in around 50 universities. This offers reassurance that it will form a sound basis for subsequent study.

The central involvement of experienced teachers to act as in-school MTL coaches and facilitators of appropriate classroom-based activities is a unique and powerful element of the MTL. However, the coaching strategy is underpinned by a three-way relationship between the participant, the coach and the university tutor. University tutors with expertise in subjects and/or phases and with good understanding of regional, national and international developments, will support participants to develop their research skills whilst ensuring that their learning is evidenced at M-level.

The personalised nature of the MTL places significant weight on research-informed, evidence-based understanding of teaching and on improved pedagogical practices. It is well placed to support some of the recommendations in the reports to which you drew my attention. For example, 'Knowing What Counts' emphasizes (amongst many other things) the importance of designing and subsequently delivering professional development that is grounded in the practice of mathematics teaching as a means to raise teachers' mathematical knowledge for teaching. It emphasizes: the role of specialist mathematics teachers; the value of 'swapping' classes so that teachers can share their expertise and undertake research into the relationship between teachers' mathematical knowledge and pupil attainment.

All these practices could easily be accommodated within the MTL, which similarly encourages teachers to work together, to ensure that MTL outcomes impact on the wider school community and on pupil achievement and to generate communities of practice. It is true that the MTL does not provide an opportunity for participants to focus exclusively on the development of their subject knowledge and subject pedagogy, and because of its personalised nature and the range of options open to participants, the amount of subject specialist content in an MTL programme will vary from individual to individual, but it is worth emphasizing that the MTL Framework clearly argues that strong subject knowledge is at the heart of developing teachers' expertise, and the MTL supports the development of participants' subject knowledge in the pursuit of gaining 'mastery' in teaching and learning.

The specialism phase of the MTL will also give participants a significant opportunity to develop their interests and deepen their subjects and/or specialism in a personalised way. This has been a key focus in our existing discussions with subject associations. I do hope that it is a conversation we can now continue with ACME.

In the meantime, I hope this letter will have been some help in reaching a shared understanding of the MTL's role. I note that you posted your own letter on the ACME website, and I would be pleased for you to do the same with my response. I am also, like you, copying my reply to Vernon Coaker.

Yours sincerely



Christopher Baker, MBE

Cc Vernon Coaker Esq. MP

