

Anton Franks

Becoming a Teacher in England: Education or Training?

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Becoming a teacher in England: education or training?

di Anton Franks

1. Context: education or training

The status of teachers and school teaching as a profession in the UK has never been settled. At the centre of contention is whether becoming and being teacher is about acquiring sets of skills - the 'know how' technical aspects of subject matter and pedagogy - or whether teaching in schools can be regarded as an academic, intellectually led activity. Such ambivalence is discernible in the attitudes of educational policy-makers, in the nature of schools as institutions, in wider public attitudes towards teachers and teaching and, of course, towards universities and their involvement in 'teacher education', or 'teacher training'. Tension between the concepts of a skill, or competence and school based model of teacher training and an academic approach to initial, or pre-service teacher education is reflected in terminology – whether, for example, to refer to prospective teachers as 'trainees' or as 'students'. In fact, the preparation for teaching has shifted from being a main responsibility of colleges and universities. With greater emphasis placed on partnership between schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) student teachers spend more time practising teaching in schools and classrooms than they do in lectures and seminars thinking. An apprenticeship model of teacher training predominates over academic study. Routes into teaching have also proliferated and now make up a complex range of options and combinations. For the purposes of this paper, however, the range and scope of the description and analysis of teacher education will be narrower, setting a broad context to higher education involvement in teacher education going back to the early 1970s, then picking up again in the early 1990s and finally concentrating most on the last ten years.

2. A graduate profession

It was not until 1972 that a government commissioned report recommended that teaching henceforward should be a graduate profession (James, 1972). Broadly, implementation of the report over the years following resulted in there being two main graduate routes into becoming a qualified teacher – either to follow a four-year Bachelor of Education programme (BEd), or for those holding an undergraduate degree, to complete a one-year post-graduate programme leading to a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) following a degree. According to government figures, in 2010 67% of all teachers in England hold an undergraduate subject degree alongside a PGCE or other teaching certificate, whilst 14% have a BEd, which is reported as being 'a particularly popular route into primary teaching' (DfE, 2010).

3. Oversight and governance of teacher education and training

From 1984, the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), was the body that oversaw teacher education, its content and structure and, at the same time, had a specific role in fostering partnerships between schools, local authorities and colleges and universities involved in teacher training. CATE had representation drawn from schools, local education authorities, teacher training institutions as well as representatives from commerce and industry. By the early 1990s trainee teachers had to spend more of their training on placed in school and teacher educators were required to have ‘recent and relevant experience’ of working in schools. In the same period, a statutory National Curriculum for schools was for the first time being implemented in England and Wales, which of course had an impact on the content of teacher education programmes. At the same time, there surfaced an interest in the notion of teachers as ‘reflective practitioners’ in which they should reflect critically on and in action, drawing from the work of Donald Schön (1991). In this period, new teachers were encouraged to regard themselves as simultaneously teachers and practitioner researchers and to collaborate with each other on action research projects designed to enhance their practical teaching and students’ learning.

In 1995, CATE was replaced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), which, although it was supposed to have ‘quasi-autonomous’ status, arm’s length from government, it was in reality closely implicated in the implementation government policies governing teacher training and teacher supply. Established initially under a Conservative government, the New Labour administration elected in 1997 extended the life of the TTA. In 2005, the TTA was transmuted into the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), taking on the responsibility for the continuing professional development (CPD) of practising, qualified teachers alongside its role in overseeing pre-service training. From the late 1990s and into the early part of this century a General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) was also established in a bid to enhance the governance, status and practices of teaching as a profession in a similar way that the General Medical Council serves to govern the medical profession in the UK. In 2010, the current Conservative government announced that it would abolish the TDA, initially incorporating it as the Teaching Agency located within the Department for Education and most recently moving it to become a part of the National College for School Leadership, an institution established to provide management training for middle and senior managers for schools. The GTCE was also dissolved.

4. ‘Partnerships’ in teacher education

The history behind such ambivalence towards teachers and teaching is complicated. Tensions in the definitions of teacher professionalism have intensified alongside the rise of neo-conservatism in political thinking and neo-liberalism in economic strategies, with increased marketization of schooling and a perceived need to compete in a globalized economy (Furlong *et al*, 2000). In the UK, as in most north-western countries when manufacturing is on the decline, there is an imperative for education systems to provide for a ‘knowledge-based economy’. In part, this has contributed to a political desire to ‘drive up standards’ in schooling and to produce a better qualified and more highly skilled teaching workforce.

In practice, this has meant that the power and responsibilities of local authorities and higher education institutions has been greatly reduced and is more subject to central government education policy. At the same time, central government has set tighter statutory frameworks and standards for teacher education and training, policed by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). On the other end of the scale, schools have gained in their power to select entrants to teacher education, to make input into programmes of study and in the assessment of teachers in training.

5. Requirements for entrance into teaching

The process of becoming a teacher with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) requires entrants to hold a baseline of qualifications – A-C grades in national 16+ plus examinations in mathematics and English, with prospective primary school teachers having to have science as well. Every prospective teacher has to have an undergraduate degree in a specific subject area or group of subjects. For BEd and BA (education) students, degree curricula cover a range of studies including child development, psychology and sociology of education alongside a particular key school subjects such as science, mathematics, English and so forth alongside practical experience of teaching in schools. In addition, all prospective teachers are required to pass online ‘skills’ tests in numeracy and literacy. For other graduates, there are a range of routes into teaching, various in terms of recruitment, length of training, academic input and status of schools as the location of the classroom-based teaching practice.

In the private fee-paying and independent school sector, however, QTS is not required. In the past 10 years, independent state schools known either as academies or free schools have been established outside the control of local authorities with accountability only to central government and to their local board of directors or trustees, that will include representatives of industry, commerce or independent trusts who sponsor individual and groups, or chains, of these academies. Free schools can be established by any interested parties, including groups of parents or teachers and require no financial sponsorship. In academies and free schools, neither formal QTS nor first degrees are technically required (there is an move, for example, to encourage those formerly serving in the armed forces and without a degree into teaching). Whilst it appears to be difficult to ascertain the numbers of people teaching without degrees or QTS, a government website indicates that there are increasing numbers of teachers working in state-funded institutions without QTS¹.

A search for statistics for those teaching without degrees yielded no return. So, overall, the greatest majority of teachers in the UK continue to have a degree and a teaching qualification.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/academies-to-have-same-freedom-as-free-schools-over-teachers>, accessed 7 May 2013.

6. Teaching qualifications – components, emphases and support

Routes into teaching with QTS divide roughly into two broad categories - university- and school-based routes, although boundaries between the two are becoming increasingly blurred. Most routes sustain some kind of link with HEIs, if only for quality assurance purposes. Over the past two decades, there have been many permutations in these routes into becoming a teacher and some have been discontinued. School-based schemes such as Licensed Teacher and Articled Teacher have come and gone and, most recently, the Graduate Teacher Programme, whereby new teachers could be appointed to train on the job whilst being paid as an unqualified teacher, has been replaced by the School Direct scheme (see below).

It remains the case that most teachers in primary and secondary schools continue to be qualified to teach with a PGCE and most study for this full-time over the course of a year, although part-time and flexible courses, generally stretching over two years, are available. Currently, PGCEs are based in universities and colleges of education and there is input from school colleagues in recruitment, curriculum design, teaching, supervision and assessment of candidates. For those training to be primary teachers the practicum takes up half the PGCE year (19 weeks) and for those aiming to be secondary teachers, the practicum comprises two-thirds of the year (24 weeks). Forming close partnerships with schools are more than a policy requirement, however, they are a practical necessity as the structure of PGCE courses includes a requirement for students to be placed in schools. In recent survey of teacher education providers conducted by Viv Ellis and colleagues, a reported conclusion was that university-based teacher educators spend much of their time sustaining partnerships with schools (Ellis *et al.*, 2011).

Whilst on practicum, students have a school-based mentor responsible for day-to-day supervision their teaching experience. The mentor's role entails the allocation of classes and lessons for teaching experience, observation of lessons, giving feedback through discussion and writing, and feeding into the student teacher's formative and summative assessment processes. In the greatest majority of cases, however, mentors are unpaid for their role, neither are they likely to be allocated any extra time to conduct meetings and complete administrative tasks. Research into mentoring suggests that student teachers' experience of mentor support in schools is highly variable (Hobson, 2002; Christie *et al.*, 2004). The pressures of teaching in urban contexts added to a lack of recognition of the demands of mentoring on the part of schools' senior management, however, places some strain on teachers, making it difficult to maintain consistent support.

Up until the end of the 1980s, the curriculum for teacher education was likely to include 'educational foundations' such as the sociology, philosophy, or psychology of education, alongside the range of school curriculum subjects for generalist primary teachers and the subject specialisms of secondary teachers. Since the early 1990s, most PGCEs have had to concentrate on the content and application of subject teaching whilst also attending to wider educational and school issues, often under the heading of 'professional studies'. An additional layer of requirements, laid down by central government, emerged at this time under the label of 'competences' and which were renamed 'standards' in the mid-1990s. Although currently under review, these 'standards' remain in force today, encompass subject teaching covering the categories of 'subject knowledge', 'subject application', 'classroom management', 'assessment' and 'professional values' or 'attributes', the latter covering professional conduct, contribution to the life of the school and so forth. The standards are graded

and student teachers are assessed and graded against each area of the standards by the end of the PGCE year. As PGCEs are awarded by HEIs, university-based teachers are ultimately responsible for the grading of student teachers in consultation with school colleagues.

The PGCE qualification, both before and since its elevation to Masters status, is typically comprised of two elements of assessment – one, the assessment of practical teaching and the other an assessment of written coursework either in the form of long essays or, more recently introduced, portfolio collections of shorter written tasks. In some instances, grades can be awarded for the making of presentations, speaking to a poster or slide presentation. Commonly, written assignments and presentations are reflections on aspects of practical teaching, school curriculum, or current and on-going issues in schooling and education (e.g. special educational needs, sanctions and reward systems and so forth). Many PGCE courses require two such assignments, one that is a reflection based on a curriculum subject or specialism, and the other a reflection on a topic relating to whole school or education system issues. Students are required to reflect critically on their experience of school and teaching in the light of their reading of relevant theory and research.

7. School-based schemes

For some years now, schools and clusters of schools, both primary and secondary, have also offered PGCEs under the label of School Centred Initial Teacher Training schemes (SCITTs). School-based providers of teacher training are currently in favour under current government policy. Currently, the allocation of student numbers for direct entry via university admissions systems has been drastically reduced and a new scheme named as ‘School Direct’ is being implemented and expanded. Under the School Direct scheme, schools are granted allocations of numbers of trainee teachers whom they recruit directly, albeit with some input from and collaboration with HEI departments of education. Trainees in SCITTs and on School Direct schemes are awarded PGCEs accredited and awarded by universities, maintaining the role of higher education in the accreditation of new teachers.

An additional complication in the story of qualifying to teach in England, particularly in relation to the academic status of PGCE and of teaching as a profession, is that from 2008 almost all PGCE programmes in the country were awarded with Masters-level credits, typically to the value of 60 credits (one third of a Masters degree, which is normally valued at 180 credits). Many university departments of education have offered newly qualified teachers a route of progression from PGCE that enables them contribute their acquired credits from PGCE towards a full Masters in Education. At the same time, many institutions offer alternative routes that allow trainee teachers to qualify without Masters credits but can nonetheless gain QTS – such qualifications are typically and confusingly labelled as PgCEs.

The story about paths to becoming a teacher in England does not end at PGCE or School Direct, however. In 2002, the charity ‘TeachFirst’ was founded with the support and encouragement of central government and was largely based on the organisation ‘Teach For America’ which had been established in the USA in 1990. The aim of both organisations is to recruit the new graduates with top degrees into teaching. On its website, TeachFirst explains its mission is to ‘train and support

people with leadership potential to become inspirational teachers in schools in low income communities across the UK' (TeachFirst, 2013). Although it is an independent charity, TeachFirst operates in collaboration with HEI departments of education and university-based members of staff are most often involved in the scheme's operation. Applicants are contracted to the scheme for a minimum period of two years after which they can stay in teaching or, drawing on the experience of working in 'challenging' schools, might be expected to go on to take up leadership positions in commerce and industry. An intensive experience, TeachFirst launches the programme with six weeks of concentrated input in the summer immediately before candidates take up positions at the front of classrooms in schools. Like PGCE students, they are supported in school by mentors and are visited by tutors, many of whom are linked to university education departments. In addition, the first year of the scheme is punctuated by occasional university-based sessions and in recent years TeachFirst candidates have been awarded PGCEs.

8. Financial support over the year of training

Up until 2008, all students enrolling on a PGCE course paid no enrolment fees and were entitled to grant or bursary funding with higher rewards to those with degrees in hard to recruit subjects (namely, Science, Languages and Mathematics and, at one time, English). Not large grants, they would nonetheless cover basic expenses. For hard to recruit subjects (as before) and for those with the very top degree grades, some bursaries are still available, albeit on a much more limited basis. However, in 2010 the present administration allowed universities to charge fees whilst reducing grants from central government with the result that those bursaries awarded are usually completely swallowed up by fees and teaching students survive only with the provision of loans provided by a Student Loan Company.

9. After training – gaining employment and 'Qualified Teacher Status'

Unlike the system in many other European countries, teachers in the UK do not have the status of civil servants and are not directly employed by the state. In the early 1980s, teachers were employed by a Local Education Authority and assigned to a particular school. Since the early 1990s, however, budgets and contractual powers have increasingly been devolved to schools and teachers are directly employed by the school, or by a group of schools, as is the case with some 'chains' of state supported academies. New teachers coming to the end of their university-based PGCE year respond directly and apply to posts advertised in the educational press or sign up with recruitment agencies acting on behalf of schools. Those on the new School Direct scheme who have been recruited by schools might have a job at that same school, but as the scheme rolls out, there is uncertainty about how strong the commitment to employment of the recruits will be.

Academies and Free Schools, the independent state-funded schools, are able to set their own terms and conditions, but other schools have still to employ teachers under nationally negotiated terms and conditions of employment – although this arrangement is currently under attack. Every new teacher, however, has to serve at

least one year as a Newly Qualified Teacher, through which they are subject to at least three observations by senior members of staff at which their standards of practice are scrutinized. When NQTs are seen to measure up to acceptable standards, they are granted full Qualified Teacher Status and are able to progress up the scale of promotion. Throughout their professional lives, teachers are subject to policing, both internally from senior members of school staff and externally from the schools inspection service, Ofsted. There is currently talk of linking pay to performance, usually judged by examination results.

10. Education as a discipline, teaching as a profession?

I opened with a statement about the ambiguous status of teaching and teachers in the UK. Such ambivalence is manifest in saga of continual change, shifts in the control of the processes of teacher education from higher education departments of education. Here, there are paradoxes: on one hand, there appears to be a devolution of power to schools to control the process of teacher training and, on the other hand, central government have been keen to impose codes, legislation and to send in inspectors to police the system from the centre. There is increased emphasis on knowledge acquisition on one hand and resort to skills-based apprenticeship models on the other.

Over thirty years ago, Brian Simon wrote a well-known chapter entitled ‘Why no pedagogy in England?’ Broadly, in this chapter he traced a vein of anti-intellectualism in British culture, particularly its political culture, which feeds a distrust of educational professionals (Simon, 1981). Under New Labour, between 1997 and 2010, government made its own venture into pedagogy, prescribing not only a curriculum for schooling, but also teaching strategies for both schooling and thereby, of course, affecting the design and implementation of teacher education programmes. This too, as Robin Alexander has pointed out, reflects again a sense that education is not safe in the hands of academics, but requires centralised control (Alexander, 2004). On another view, there has always been ambivalence about the status of education is an academic discipline and its place in the academy. It is an attitude that might be perceived not only from the outside, coming from the professional political sphere but also, perhaps, from within the university system itself (Furlong, 2013). The issues of and debates around whether entrance into teaching deserves training as an entrance into craft knowledge or an education into an intellectually led profession continue to this day. In a government White Paper issued shortly after the last UK election, the Secretary State for Education, Michael Gove, issued the opinion, «teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or -woman. Watching others and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom» (DfE, 2010). There is encouragement in this document for schools to take the lead in teacher training partnerships with universities not only to be responsible for recruitment via the School Direct scheme, but also to apply for ‘Teaching School’ status, through which schools will become recognized providers of teacher training. Although the intention to maintain a role for universities in teacher training is sustained, their role is downplayed in this document. A lack of trust in university education departments is not made explicit, but it is apparent that distrust of academic involvement in teacher education is implied. Recently, tensions

have risen to the surface in the public domain. A group of a hundred academics recently wrote a letter to a national daily newspaper, *The Independent*, decrying proposed changes in the school curriculum and assessment². These educationalists stated that they regard the proposals to be detrimental to students' learning, progress and development whilst narrowing the conception of learning and schooled knowledge³. Writing a column in another daily newspaper, Michael Gove responded accusing education academics as being 'enemies of progress' who are motivated by a commitment to Marxist ideology. Universities' involvement in teacher education is clearly a contended, ideological issue in the UK. From my perspective, however, sitting in a university school of education and working with new and experienced teachers is that there continues to be a thirst for knowledge, and from schools a continued desire to think carefully and critically about teaching and learning – pedagogy – and to collaborate with universities in various ways.

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² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/100-academics-savage-education-secretary-michael-gove-for-conveyor-belt-curriculum-for-schools-8541262.html>, last accessed 9 May 2013

³ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2298146/I-refuse-surrender-Marxist-teachers-hell-bent-destroying-schools-Education-Secretary-berates-new-enemies-promise-opposing-plans.html>, last accessed 9 May 2013

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Anton Franks is Associate Professor in Creative Arts and Education at the University of Nottingham, School of Education. Prior to this he taught drama and English in London schools and then for 20 years was a teacher educator and researcher at the Institute of Education, University of London. Publications include «Playing a part: the case of theatre in education in the professional education of English with Drama teachers», in R. Heilbronn, and J. Yandell (eds), (2010), *Critical Practice in Teacher Education*; «School drama and representations of war and terror», *Research in Drama Education* 13/1'; «Drama in teaching and learning, language and literacy», in Wyse *et al*, (eds) (2009), *Routledge International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching; English in Urban Classrooms* with Kress *et al*; «The Meaning of Action in Learning and Teaching» with Carey Jewitt in *British Educational Research Journal*, 27/2.