

Part 3

Education Policy, Reforms & School Leadership

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Routes into Teaching: Does Variety Aid Recruitment or Merely Cause Confusion? A Study of Three Different Programmes for Teacher Training in England

Abstract

This paper discusses the recent rise in teacher recruitment problems in England and examines possible causes. These are varied, but a main cause appears to be the increased variety of programmes on offer, which, it appears, is confusing applicants. Three different programme's trainees were asked to complete questionnaires at the start of their study, to ascertain why they had chosen that programme and what their expectations of it were. Follow up interviews of a small number of trainees was completed one term into the programmes to discover how trainees were progressing. Results showed that trainees lacked clear understanding of what the programmes offered and were very influenced by their previous experiences in education and employment when choosing a training route.

Keywords: teacher training, school direct, PGCE, teacher recruitment

Introduction

England is facing a teacher recruitment crisis demonstrated by articles in education papers claiming that schools are so concerned that they were, in December 2015, advertising vacancies for September 2016, something not normally occurring till the summer term (Busby, 2016a). The cause of this problem, which has resulted in the Department for Education (DfE) sending teams to Commonwealth countries to recruit teachers, whilst denying there is a crisis (Stewart, 2015) and the education press reporting that one in six new teachers in England is from overseas (Wiggins, 2015) has many roots. Firstly, as a result of the recent economic crisis, public sector pay in England has been frozen for some time and teachers now are subject to a performance related pay structure and many, it appears, will miss out on any rise in income this year. At the same time, the pay and available jobs in the private sector have risen, making teaching less popular as a choice of career, despite a much criticized advert put out by the DfE, detailing a starting salary of £30,000 not possible for most applicants to the profession. In addition, it appears that government moves to put training into schools and provide a multitude of routes to teaching has resulted in confusion amongst possible recruits, as there is so much choice on offer. Noble-Rogers, Executive Director of University Council for the Education of Teachers, though admitting that the variety of programmes offered choice to prospective trainees, pointed to the fact that there was a great deal of

overlap between the programmes and that the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) was suggesting students could change between different routes during training, to ensure places were filled, making it impossible to differentiate between routes (Morrison, 2015). Also, a recent change by government regarding the allocation of places for training, has led to a scramble to recruit early (Howson, 2015). The education press have labelled this a ‘melt down’ as allocations have been removed and programmes told to recruit freely until a national stop is applied by the NCTL (Ward, 2015a). This has led to further confusion, with applicants applying to programmes which have been informed there are no more places available for them to offer (e.g. secondary physical education and history) and a concern that better qualified applicants, who apply at a later date, may not be allocated places in the concern of programmes to recruit early. Despite shortage subjects (maths, chemistry, physics, foreign languages and computing) specialists now being offered pay rises far beyond those available to most teachers, there is a national problem, exacerbated by the numbers leaving the profession early, in some cases never taking up a post after training, seeing teaching with long hours and a lack of status, as a temporary career (Hilton & Tyler, 2015). The move towards school-based, as opposed to university training, has also had an effect as School Direct (SD), where schools lead in the recruitment and training of teachers, has not fully recruited since inception. This programme was introduced by the then Secretary of State for Education as a way of helping schools to train the teachers they needed, rather than a government department controlling numbers. He believed that it was better to learn to teach ‘as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman’ rather than through an academic programme, as teaching is a craft (TES, 2010, p. 10). Hilton (2012, p. 165) questioned this view of how teachers need to be educated, ‘who will be responsible for developing the professional aspects of a teacher’s knowledge’? However, NCTL still has the power to control the numbers of teachers trained and SD has, in the opinion of many been one of the causes of the recruitment crisis and is lowering standards of training due to the burgeoning numbers of training groups now being accredited (Howson in Ward, 2015c).

To add to the confusion the government slashed the budget for the training of primary teachers from 2016 and also the allowance affecting the School Direct programme, where many recruits receive a salary as an untrained teacher whilst on the programme. This has resulted in schools, who had offered a School Direct training place, now withdrawing that offer, as they cannot afford the salary for the trainee (Peacock in Ward, 2015b).

At present the options available for training include, the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) which includes Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and may have modules which count towards a Master’s qualification. PGCEs are run by a variety of providers and generally based in, or linked to higher education institutions (HEIs), School Direct training is run by a group of schools and offers QTS at the end of the programme and possibly a PGCE or even a Master’s qualification. This programme can be salaried or unsalaried, the former being intended for trainees with two or three years’ experience after obtaining a degree. School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) programmes are run by a group of schools or a training provider and offer PGCE or SD programmes and possibly Master’s credits. There are programmes for teaching early years groups (EYITT),

and teacher training for the post-compulsory sector, Teach First, is intended for high achieving graduates who are given a six week training course, then placed into challenging schools in inner cities. A two year development programme is followed, after which trainees can expect rapid promotion or leave and follow another career. There are also training programmes for teaching English as a foreign language, one to train teacher researchers in schools and an initiative to train members of the armed forces as teachers. It is easy therefore to understand why prospective trainees may be confused by all these options and be unsure of which route to choose. Certainly when global comparisons are made, the myriad ways offered to train as a teacher in England can appear daunting to prospective candidates and to providers of the programmes, It has to be asked is this over-complication self-defeating in a time of recruitment difficulties? Now NCTL has commissioned research into student satisfaction with the different programmes and alarm has been expressed at the experiential growth in the numbers of providers, putting pressure on Ofsted inspection teams and raising questions about how quality will be maintained.

Research

This research was with trainees following three different programmes training as primary teachers. Two different SD programmes and one PGCE, were used with the aim of discovering why trainees chose a particular programme to attend and their initial expectations of what the programme would offer. In addition questions were asked to attempt to ascertain, in the first weeks of the programme, the extent of trainees' understanding of how their training would be organized. School Direct 1 (SD1) was run by a well-established SCITT and used university tutors as visiting assessors and advisers. School Direct 2 (SD2) was a newly formed programme started by a group of schools who wished to provide their own teachers and had just been registered as a new provider by NCTL. The PGCE programme was run by a SCITT in conjunction with a local university which provided theoretical input and assessment support. An initial questionnaire was issued to trainees on all three programmes, with follow up interviews of one respondent from each group after one term of training, to discover trainee's thoughts on their experiences.

Respondents

Respondents of the voluntary questionnaire were SD1 25 females and 3 males, SD2 13 females, 2 males. PGCE 15 females, 1 male. These were fairly representative of the primary school workforce which is heavily biased towards females. Ages for those on the PGCE programme were concentrated in the 21-30 age group (only one in the 31-40 group) and the two SD programmes had a somewhat higher age range for trainees including 9 aged 31-40 and 3 aged 41-50. This is possibly due to the fact that many of the SD trainees had already been working in schools in the capacity of Learning and Teaching Assistants (LTAs) or Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). The vast majority of the respondents were white, with a small varied sample of Asians from Pakistani or Indian groups and black students from Africa and the Caribbean (under 2% for the combined respondents). SD1 had 26 trainees who were on the salaried programme and 2 who received no salary whilst, SD2 had 12 who were salaried and 3 unsalaried trainees. The PGCE programme is liable to the normal fees for study in England with no

salary, but some trainees do receive a bursary if they are training for shortage subjects. The groups were training for Early years/KS1 or KS1/2 with the bias in all three programmes to the KS1/2 group. All trainees have to study to work with two Key Stages but in both SD1 and the PGCE groups 2 trainees thought they were training for Early Years/KS1 and KS2 showing some confusion as to what programme they were following. PGCE trainees have a subject specialism but at this stage in the programme only eight had firmly chosen their specialist subject area, five chose English, 2 maths and one science. SD trainees do not have a subject specialism.

Reasons for choosing their programme

When asked why they chose the particular programme there were clear differences between SD1 and 2 and those on the PGCE programme. SD1 and SD2 had overall just under 45% saying they were already working in a school (generally as an LSA /LTA) so it was a natural progression. For the PGCE group only 1 of the group of 15 had already worked in a school (6.6%). In SD1 and 2 the response, 'it suits my learning style', that is, hands on in the classroom was very popular with over 45% of respondents ticking this option but for PGCE the response was even higher at 75%. As these students were on the whole younger and closer to their degree study, it is possible that, used to university theoretical approaches, PGCE seemed a more natural route to choose. In addition two of the PGCE group added an additional reason for their choice, that in their opinion a PGCE was more likely to enable them to work overseas rather than merely gaining QTS as provided on many SD programmes. It will be interesting to see if foreign employers begin to discriminate between these different qualifications in the future. For the two SD groups nearly 50% choose 'I need the salary' as one of their reasons for selecting to follow the SD route into teaching, whilst all groups when asked to consider as to whether school based or university based training was a better option, in the SD groups almost 80% considered school based training better, but for PGCE only 2 from 16 respondents selected the, university training is better than school based option. No reasons were given for these choices but the numbers of SD trainees who had previously worked in schools made their answers, to some extent predictable, though there is little evidence to support this choice.

Theoretical input

When all trainees were asked about the time they would spend on studying theory on the programme it was obvious that the PGCE group had a much clearer understanding of how their theory training would proceed. All respondents explained that they were, at the start of the programme, having intensive input on theory areas (as is the case on all PGCE programmes nationally), this group spending seven hours on three to four days a week studying theory at the time of questionnaire completion. Later, they all knew that would reduce to about one day per week of theoretical study. All these trainees were aware that their theory training would take place in the SCITT premises where SCITT tutors and visiting university tutors would be responsible for the input. Fourteen of the group thought that the theory training would be very useful, one was unsure and one not looking forward to it. The two groups of SD trainees were, in most cases, positive about the theoretical

input, only two feeling it would be a waste of time, but rather more than from the PGCE group, not looking forward to it. However, both SD groups were unclear as to how much time would be devoted to theory, one respondent saying almost no time, to others thinking ten hours weekly with others giving a variety of answers. As the time spent (one day per week) is clearly set out in the documentation this lack of understanding of the programme they have undertaken gives cause for concern. There was also confusion as to where the theory element would take place, several saying in different schools, others in the SCITT premises, even two thinking they would attend a university.

Staff involved in their training

When asked what other staff, in addition to their mentor, would be involved in their training, in most cases there was some lack of clarity as to who would be involved and for all three groups the 'don't know' category was chosen by around 50% of respondents, with others choosing a variety, headed by the class teacher who was not their mentor, followed by members of the senior management team and one or two in each group added LTAs to one from SD1 adding the SD Coordinator. There was equal confusion as to who would be available to help if the trainee experienced problems with their mentor. In this category most of the PGCE trainees were unsure 90% ticking 'don't know' which is understandable as at that stage they were still undertaking the intense theoretical part of the training with only a short time allotted for school visits. The SD groups 1 and 2 were more positive that senior staff would be available to help, but not particularly clear at this stage as to who that person would be. The PGCE group knew that they would be visited by a university based tutor as the SCITT providing the training worked closely with a university and SD1 also used some of these tutors. SD2 the new provider is not using university tutors to oversee training. Trainees working with this new provider were less sure about what their training would entail than those attending the PGCE and SCITT based routes.

Visits to other classes and schools during training

PGCE trainees were very positive about this as they would be visiting a variety of classes and schools only one respondent saying no to the visiting other schools category, though later this person ticked visits to a special school. Most of the SD trainees also believed they would be seeing other classes, almost 90% ticking yes to this question and the majority believing that they would be seeing other key stage groups as part of their training. PGCE trainees had obviously been informed that they would visit a special school as 100% ticked this option. It appeared from the SD groups that SD1 appeared to be more sure of what visits would be made than those in the SD2 group, whose answers were so varied they appeared to be guess work in most cases.

Follow up interviews

These were carried out after one term of training but only one trainee from each group responded due to the intense pressure of the training programmes. The PGCE trainee was on the whole positive about the experience, though finding it very hard work, she appreciated the initial theoretical input. To some extent the respondents

from SD1 and 2 were finding some things harder than they had expected ‘though the feedback is generally positive I often feel overwhelmed and stressed as the expectations are so high’. SD1 trainee suggested that they needed more input on completing assignments as, it was a long time since they had done academic work. She was also unhappy with the conflicting advice from different staff, but very happy with the visiting SCITT tutor. All three found time a real problem, especially finding sufficient time to discuss their progress with their mentor, who in most cases was under intense pressure. The trainee from SD2 admitted that she was in some cases struggling, as she had to do things very much at the last minute without sufficient time for preparation, asserting that she was often expected to suddenly take over teaching the entire class with little warning, which was very stressful ‘I feel like I am sometimes expected to just know things that I haven’t been told about or ever come across before’. However, she admitted that she now found the theoretical aspect of the training of real use and that it had been timely in its relation to her needs. Both the SD trainees appeared to be shocked about the responsibility and amount of work that had been thrust upon them, more than they had expected. This was not echoed in the response of the PGCE respondent, who appeared to have experienced a more measured approach to undertaking whole class responsibility. All three trainees admitted they had learned a lot from their first term, especially from seeing other teachers and a variety of methods and approaches used for teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The problems are deepening as, according to The National Audit Office (NAO) in a report for the Department for Education (2016) the shortage of teachers is increasing as, yet again, recruitment targets have been missed, following a four year pattern. The report suggested Ministers have a ‘weak understanding of local teacher shortages’ (National Audit Office, 2016, no page) taking a national view rather than examining local problems. The policy of broadening training routes is criticised and questions asked as to the costs of this diversity as it appears to confuse applicants who, it appears, lack the necessary information to make informed choices, so the seven hundred million spent yearly on recruiting and training teachers is not providing value for money. The shortages are particularly acute in the secondary sector with fourteen out of the seventeen secondary subjects failing to recruit to target, but now primary schools too are finding it impossible to recruit and retain enough teachers (Burns, 2016). It also appears that the bid to bring in overseas teachers has resulted in a high proportion quitting their jobs and returning home, or changing to supply teaching as they were unable to cope with the excessive work load placed upon teachers in England, with more marking, recording and planning than they were used to (Busby, 2016b) a problem also raised by teacher unions in response to the NAO Report. In addition the Troops to Teachers initiative is failing to recruit to target and also suffering a high drop-out rate (Ward, 2016). The NAO Report also details the massive rise in the variety of providers now training teachers and the resulting difficulty of assessing the quality of this provision, due to the large number of new groups working in the field. This field work research, to some extent despite its limited range, underpins what was found in the NAO Report, which questioned the sense of the varying types of provision.

Difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers in England, when compared to the rest of the world, show that this is a common phenomenon but one not experienced in England for several decades, apart from in a few subject areas. The question must be asked, is the crisis due, at least in part, to the plethora of routes into teaching which appears to be putting off applicants, as opposed to encouraging them into the profession? As yet this is difficult to prove, but the NAO has clearly raised this question for the DfE to consider. In addition, the government's decision to cut the funding available for trainee salaries for SD programmes is sure to have a detrimental effect on recruitment, as many of the SD trainees need to continue to earn a salary and schools are withdrawing offers of places as they cannot afford to pay trainees. The future for teacher recruitment in England is not encouraging.

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