'I came out feeling scared and pressured, and just like a number': undergraduate Education Studies students' perceptions of postgraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) routes and selection processes for 2016-17

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Abstract

This paper reports on one phase of a research project examining the National College of Teaching and Leadership's (NCTL) revised methodology for the allocation of postgraduate ITE places for the 2016-17 academic year. The paper's focus is the often-neglected voices of applicants as they negotiated this process, for whom this revised methodology 'pilot' year was their first and potentially only engagement with the ITE recruitment system, and doing so often represented a significant personal milestone on a life-long journey towards a career in the classroom. In all, 21 participants from a large Undergraduate Education Studies degree took part in focus groups or interviews during May and June 2016 about their experiences of applying and interviewing for a range of ITE routes and providers. The findings indicate the significance of (assumed) differences between University-based and School-based routes in shaping applicants' perceptions of their experiences; the impact of the frenetic atmosphere generated by the 'race' to secure a place during this recruitment cycle; and applicants' varied responses to providers' tactics and reported 'gaming' of the system. Implications and recommendations for ITE providers are made, set briefly in the context of the 'teacher recruitment crisis' and the direction of travel for ITE provision.

Key words

Introduction

In late June 2015, the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) announced that it would revise its methodology for the allocation of postgraduate initial teacher education places on courses beginning in September 2016 (NCTL, 2015). This change came in the wake of four successive annual recruitment cycles in which the NCTL had missed targets for recruitment to courses of initial teacher education (ITE) (NAO, 2016). In particular, recruitment for September 2015 had been regarded by the Department for Education as having been 'very tough', due to a falling number of graduates nationally and other sectors of the economy recruiting in greater numbers (HC Committee of Public Accounts, 2016:10).

Against this background, for a one year 'pilot' period traditional individual provider allocations were replaced with national quotas for places on primary and secondary postgraduate ITE courses. The NCTL informed providers that, subject to the imposition of a small number of controls, they were free to recruit as many applicants as they wished. Their stated intention was to encourage the recruitment of as many 'good quality' candidates as possible until national quotas were fulfilled (NCTL, 2015).

Initial responses to the changes from within the teacher education sector could be characterised

Citation

generally as cautious. For instance, members of the UCAS Teacher Training Advisory Group expressed concern at a 'potential backlog of applicant interviews' and noted that both 'applicant and provider behaviours were likely to change' (UTTAG, 2015:4). The Teaching and Related Professions Task Group of the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services concluded it was likely 'that providers [would] want to recruit early in the autumn and make offers as quickly as possible, at least in the most popular subject areas and phases' (TRPTG, 2015:2). A subsequent report for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust went further, describing the reforms as 'lamentable and badly thought through', and having resulted in 'highly predictable… sacrificing of quality by some providers, in favour of speed of recruitment before the recruitment cap was imposed' (McNamara *et al*, 2017:45).

Once the annual recruitment cycle opened predictions regarding early recruitment quickly proved prescient. Within a month concerns emerged about the speed of national recruitment in some Secondary subjects. The shock which followed the subsequent closure of recruitment to these subjects was felt throughout the teacher education community and amongst potential applicants. Headlines such as 'High-quality teacher trainees being turned away under new race-for-place system' and 'Postgrad teacher training shake-up causes meltdown'[1] added to general levels of anxiety surrounding the securing of a teacher training place for September 2016. Whilst it is probable that the 'experimental', time-limited nature of the NCTL's revised procedures was understood by many teacher educators, particularly those with more experience of the vicissitudes of government policy, the same probably could not be said for applicants, whose experiences during late 2015 and early 2016 were likely to represent their one and only engagement with the postgraduate ITE recruitment system. For those affected by these anxieties, and for whom a PGCE application may have represented a significant personal milestone on a long journey towards a career in the classroom, reassurances that the system could always be further 'tweaked' the following year may have provided little consolation (e.g. see Howson, 2015 and associated online responses). Probably the most persistent concern, however, was that the revised methodology favoured school-based routes over their University counterparts, potentially for ideological reasons (Ward, 2015; Millar, 2016; Ward, 2016).

Motivations for the research
As lecturers on a large BA Education Studies programme, and with the above context in mind, we undertook research intended to generate a broad and robust assessment of the ITE recruitment cycle for September 2016 entry. We conducted two phases of fieldwork during the summer term of the 2015-16 academic year, designed to explore two key groups' experiences of the recruitment process; the first phase focused on the applicants themselves, and the second was a web-based survey of ITE providers. The latter was important to address the way that this policy was perceived by providers to influence and challenge their practice. This will be the focus of a subsequent paper.

This paper, however, focuses exclusively on phase one of the research, the ITE applicants' experiences. Our motivations for this focus are two-fold. Firstly, we wish to contribute to the contemporary debate surrounding the presentation of 'school-based' and 'university-based' routes to applicants as though at opposite ends of a practice spectrum (Jackson and Burch, 2016). It seemed to us that the frenetic atmosphere which characterised the application process for September 2016 contributed to this sense of polarisation in the minds of some applicants.

Secondly, whilst contemporary media coverage suggested that there may well have been significant impacts of NCTL's changes for ITE providers (and for University-based providers in particular) we have observed that applicants' views were often absent from this coverage. Therefore, we wish to give maximum consideration to the experiences of a group of BA Education Studies students as they navigated the ITE terrain amid the circumstances. Taking our lead from Morrison (2014), we wish to

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[1] In the Times Educational Supplement on 25th November and 11th December 20th 2015 respectively.

augment the small body of research which deals specifically with the nascent self-identities of Undergraduate Education Studies students as they near graduation. We share Morrison's view that Education Studies degrees can occupy an 'unstable and ambivalent position' (p.187), specifically, the subject 'has its roots in teacher training yet does not offer [qualified teacher status]' (ibid.). Some students' responses to the perceived challenges associated with gaining an ITE place for September 2016 appeared, at least in part, to be fuelled by the liminality of Education Studies and its relative status as an archetypal 'post - 92' university[2] subject. Developing Morrison's conclusions, we surmised that during this recruitment cycle the presumed 'reputational capital' of students' undergraduate institution combined with students' social and educational backgrounds to influence preferred ITE route and their perceptions of likely application success.

The study
All BA Education Studies students undertaking their final year in 2015-16 at a university in the English Midlands (N=139) were invited to participate in interviews about the process of applying and attending selection events for Primary and Secondary school ITE courses. This paper reviews our findings from a thematic analysis of data from these interviews, and develops a discussion of their implications against the backdrop of the evolving ITE context.

The interviews were undertaken during May and June 2016 and the sample consisted of 21 participants, 13 of whom took part in focus group interviews and 8 gave accounts of their experiences through individual interviews. 19 of the sample were female and 2 were male. 4 were mature students and 3 of these had childcare responsibilities that impacted on their choice of prospective providers. 15 of the participants were White British, 4 were from South Asian ethnic backgrounds, 1 was Black British (mixed heritage) and 1 was originally from Eastern Europe.

Collectively, participants had applied for University-based, School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) and School Direct (SD) routes and had submitted applications at varying points in the cycle, from the day the UCAS system opened until well after the Christmas period. Most participants were on a single honours Education Studies BA course, reflected in the fact that 15 of our sample had applied for Primary ITE; however, 6 participants were joint honours Education Studies and Arts/Humanities students and had applied for Secondary ITE in those subjects. Many participants had extensive previous professional experience of teaching support work in schools. By the time of the interviews, all but 4 of the participants had been offered places by one or more provider.

Findings are grouped into two themes relating to (1) perceptions of differing training routes and (2) experiences of selection processes within these.

1. Applicants' perceptions of the differences between the ITE routes
First, this paper considers the applicants' perceptions of the different ITE routes because one key feature of our findings is the polarised perception of University-based training routes versus 'school-based' routes, reflecting the ongoing Government narrative that has worked to forge this distinction in particular ways (e.g. Gove, 2013; Skinner, 2015). A perfect storm of providers being somewhat on the back-foot regarding NCTL's revised allocations methodology and applicants feeling pressure to apply as early as possible and accept whatever offers they were given, meant that the established 'truths' of popular opinion and Government rhetoric over the preceding few years could be seen as driving the latent understanding that applicants in this research had of the different ITE routes in this recruitment

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[2] In the UK, the term 'post-'92 university' refers to a group of higher education institutions which attained 'university' status following the 1992 *Further and Higher Education Act*. Many of these institutions were formerly referred to as 'polytechnics', or colleges of further or higher education and had 'extended histories as vocational training organisations' (Powell and Dusdal, 2017: 74).

cycle. As such, the distinction between routes and providers became a significant part of the discussions in our interviews.

University-based PGCEs

These routes tend to be perceived as 'the most obvious route, the one that most [people] will assume you'll probably do, and I think teachers do as well' (successful, SCITT/SD applicant); 'everyone knows what a PGCE is, but if you turn round to someone and say yeah I'm doing a SCITT you'd have to explain it a bit more' (successful, female, secondary applicant). At the outset of planning to be a teacher, the University-based PGCE was often seen as 'what I thought I had to do. I didn't realise there were any other routes until I started this [Undergraduate] course. I thought it was the only option' (successful, male applicant).

The relationship between theory and practice was seen to be a prime distinction in the ITE market. The teaching on University-based courses was initially taken by participants to be based on a lecture format and 'theory-based' with less focus on the school placement aspect - although it was also acknowledged that overall the placements on these PGCEs provide similar in-school time as other routes. It was the balance and focus of taught and applied elements that made for the key difference:

> With SCITT, you are in a school so you are like an actual teacher from the first day of term
> (successful, SCITT applicant).

> [With University-based PGCEs], I just think of didactic, I think it's really negative like…if someone said to me they were going to do a PGCE just in a University I would be like well that's - you are going into schools, surely you should be in that environment?
> (successful, secondary arts SD applicant).

The established status, as well as the perceived teaching format, on such University-based PGCEs fed into the general sense that these courses are more academic and provide – as participants tended to put it - a 'broader' training compared with the more 'specific' school-based routes. And yet whilst many of these applicants felt quite negative about the University route as a suitable place for them, and in the face of sustained Government discourse that favoured a school-based route, University-based PGCEs retain a certain kudos. These were described variously by participants as 'traditional', 'academic', 'established' and 'high status'.

In these discussions with Education Studies students there was a definite sense that University-based PGCEs were seen as right for the high-achievers, for the 'clever' students. But for those who have experience in schools and feel they can *hit the ground running*, the University based route is not necessarily the first choice:

> If you enjoy the academic side of things then you're more likely to enjoy a [University] PGCE, whereas I'm just ready to be out of Uni and doing that sort of thing…I've gone for a School Direct because I just want to be in a school and get going
> (successful, SCITT/SD applicant).

The contrast that these school-based routes offer in this respect seems to emphasise some of the negative perceptions of an 'academic' University route, a point that seems particularly salient for many of these students, who have a distinct sense of their own academic identities:

> …Would our opinions probably not be acceptable or accepted at the University of [X]? There's an opinion that they think they are better than [our University] and they have these set ideas. When you go to their open days, it is very much 'this is who we are, and you've got to assimilate to

being like us... When I went to the [X University] open day at the end of Year 2, I came away
thinking 'I'm not applying there, they are all snobs'

(successful, mature female SD applicant).

SCITT and School Direct

Whilst it felt relatively clear to these applicants what differentiates a University-based PGCE from other
routes, there was general agreement that it was unclear not only what the differences were between
SCITT and School Direct routes, but also how they might be interrelated with other and indeed
University providers,

I applied for three as you do, but what I didn't realise was that I had applied for one SCITT place,
and I applied to two schools. What I didn't realise was the two schools were actually both a part
of the same SCITT...they didn't really make it clear

(successful, secondary arts SCITT applicant).

The commonality between these routes (which made them stand apart from University-based PGCEs)
was not only their 'school-centred' nature; these school-based options were seen to be a great deal
more supportive of trainees, and this compares unfavourably with perceptions of University-based
PGCEs as having large numbers of students and a less personalised approach:

[The University PGCE] is like 500 students where [SCITT/SD] is like 25 - your tutor's focused
on you so you got more support

(successful, female applicant).

From my perspective [of the SCITT] I just felt a little more than a 'figure' [a number]... It was more
like they cared about my progression as a practitioner, I felt like they wanted to help me become
a better teacher

(successful, male applicant).

Because you're working in that environment every single day, my son's head teacher says [a
SCITT] makes better teachers

(unsuccessful, mature University PGCE applicant).

Perceptions of these routes then feed into notions of what it takes to become a good teacher, and
then extends further to employment and career prospects too:

I found the SCITT really attractive to apply to. They made it sound as though it was something
really worth going into. There was more of a chance of me being employed if I went through the
SCITT...That's what I picked up from how they made their course sound

(unsuccessful, female applicant).

It is an intriguing initial line of inquiry that for some of our research participants (from BA Education
Studies at a post-'92 University), the emergence of school-based routes - which are seen to contrast
with 'academic' University-provided PGCEs - operates certain aspects of their fledgling teacher
identities. A vital factor in neophyte teachers' professional 'becoming' is how they perceive themselves
– how they identify with the role, how they feel it fits them – and this impacts on their initial training
experiences (Korthagen, 2004; Walkington, 2005). Such pre-dispositions are gendered and classed, and
it can be seen that these applicants' assumptions about the different expectations of trainees on
different routes generates a hierarchy of 'vocational habitus' (Colley et al, 2003) in which they can
keenly locate themselves. This implies a potential and iniquitous alignment of social background and
training routes, and problematises the apparently innocuous idea that particular routes will fit some

people and not others. The notion that you do not necessarily need particular academic ability or qualifications to make a great teacher - just the right personality, a certain way with children and a 'hands-on, get-stuck-in kind of approach to education' as one participant noted - is evident within perceptions of the current ITE nexus:

> ...you could be a student that gets a first in everything but have no connection with children, have no personality and you'd fly through [on a PGCE interview]'.... whereas the SCITT and School Direct are looking for more of a personality that they know would fit well with teaching
>
> (unsuccessful, mature University PGCE applicant).

2. Applications, interviews and selection events

The issues raised above are often echoed within the participants' accounts of attending interviews, where initial opinions and perceptions are sometimes changed and sometimes hardened. For example, it was often at the University-based PGCE interviews that associations of 'prestigious' turned to `pressurised' or 'pretentious':

> And then [my opinion about University of Y] changed because I went there thinking this is a really good Uni, this is a good place to get, and then I came out and I was like no, not a chance.... I came out feeling scared and pressured, and just like a number
>
> (successful, secondary arts University PGCE applicant).

> I found [the PGCE provider] very pretentious... just the whole environment... [at the interview] everyone's sitting there... this lady was like `no talking' and it was like being in private school...no opportunity to get your personality across
>
> (unsuccessful, mature University PGCE applicant).

In selection event scenarios where many interviewees were in attendance, some applicants felt the interview/selection processes were more about 'screening people out' within the University route; the criticism that they were just made to feel 'like a number' was common.

However, it is important to note that there were some similar experiences reported by those attending SCITT interview events. The initial positivity about the benefits of that route was sometimes dampened by the high-numbers approach to the interview process:

> [This particular] SCITT, I went to see them twice during the open [day] events; they said how much they care about the interview process and the discussion, and when I went to the first part of the interview and there were so many people and we had this discussion but you could only answer one [question]... they had too many numbers…
>
> (successful female applicant)

> … just the fact that they were interviewing so many people on one day; people were literally taking the test, giving them back in and then someone else would come and sit in their chair, just kept coming in and out
>
> (successful, SCITT/SD applicant).

In a marked contrast, some applicants who had experienced both SCITT and School Direct interview events considered the School Direct approach to be their ideal - again noticeably fuelled by negativity towards the 'screening' of applicants at larger events and influenced by the 'personal/personality' focus that such applicants crave:

> … you walked in, they knew everyone's names, they knew a little bit about you already

> which I just thought 'how good is that', and it makes you feel at ease. I think encouraging as well… they obviously have thought of you a bit more than like being a number (successful, SCITT/SD applicant).

And yet interviewing for a School Direct place was not a universally positive experience. One applicant was surprised to find that following successful initial interviews with these providers, they were required to undergo exactly the same interview/selection processes at the accrediting University as those applicants who had applied directly to the University. As such, the applicant felt that the University 'did not care' which route they had applied for and treated them all the same way.

It is clear that the applicants in this research experienced a range of varying interview styles, recruitment activities and selection events, which is perhaps to be expected given the range of routes and providers - but what struck a particular nerve for these participants was that they were faced with this variety within very short time periods and as such felt they were being pushed from pillar to post by providers (see below) who had initially professed to 'care' about them. In sum, there is a tangible sense here of applicants baulking when they feel treated like 'just a number' and when the process they're entangled in is opaque.

The 'race' for a place

It is worth noting here that the 'race' many participants felt there were engaged in during this recruitment cycle, driven by the way providers tended to respond to the imposition of national quotas and the resultant high degree of uncertainty, led to considerable stress for these prospective trainee teachers. Not only were providers asking applicants to prepare in sometimes significantly different ways for their selection events, but these often came so close together that the pressure could become unbearable:

> [Mine] were all at the same time, I had four interviews in four days like one after the other and by the last one you know you are not performing your best because you are just like, they tire you out don't they. You come home like oh my god. And I think yeah - it's just a bit intense!
>
> (successful SCITT/SD applicant).

Although some applicants in this research did express the view that getting the application and interviews over with early was a positive (before the most intense pressures of final year Undergraduate University work), arguably these applicants were those that were always going to find the system more straightforward to navigate. Overall, there was a strong sense from most participants that the added pressure of - in effect - having to compete for a place with the whole country was a cause of additional pressure to an already stressful experience:

> But there is this sort of scariness that there are so few places compared to how many people actually want it, and all the different routes you never know how many people are going for a certain route that year. And if you don't have the perfect [personal] statement or the perfect application you might not get the interview or a place at all. And then you're just 'that's my plan for my life finished for a year'
>
> (successful secondary arts SCITT).

It is important to add here that our interviews also revealed anecdotal evidence from these participants' peer networks that the pressures of the application process itself (including rumours of course closures and vicious 'The Apprentice'-style interview days) led some to stall even before submitting to UCAS, and perhaps potential teachers were lost to the profession as they opted for alternative opportunities at that crucial end-of-degree juncture.

Shifting power differential between applicants and provider

An early concern expressed following the NCTL's change of policy was that the new model of place allocations, combined with a growing number of school-based providers, would see the 'transfer of teacher supply to several thousand competing small businesses' (Chris Husbands, then of the UCL Institute of Education, quoted in Scott, 2015). Evidence from our focus groups suggested that applicants were typically very aware that there could be commercial implications for their choice of providers. Several explained that they had felt they were being 'sold to' when attending open days:

> They're always going to give you their best stats... they're going to tell you that 'we're the best in such and such field'...It made me feel like a customer but that's because I used to work in sales and I know all of their tricks
>
> (unsuccessful, female, mature applicant).

In at least one case, a participant felt that questionable competitive tactics were being used by a provider. In a bid to have her accept their offer of a place quickly, this participant told us that a University provider had 'lied' to her regarding the imminent closure of her secondary subject[3]:

> [University Y] rang me and they said something like 'you need to let us know as soon as possible because the Government have capped down on places for [this subject]' and I thought 'no they've not, you can't lie to me to make me make my decision' and that kind of influenced my decision, I didn't pick those in the end, because I just thought why do I want to go somewhere where I'm being made to feel like I'm being rushed about it
>
> (successful, secondary arts University PGCE applicant)

Whilst some expressed cynicism at this approach, others accepted that this was an inevitable outcome of the recent changes to ITE recruitment. Though, notably, it was the applicants who were feted by the providers – and chased by several – that found it an easier pill to swallow:

> Obviously it was about them selling it to me, I understand that. When I got my offer, they sent me their 'Outstanding' Ofsted report... They sent me a letter... it wasn't just an offer on UCAS, it was a letter. And it said 'we were really excited by what we saw, we saw great potential and would love to work with you.' So as much as it was marketing in a sense, it was very personal
>
> (successful, male applicant talking about his experiences of a SCITT application).

Indeed, for those applicants who found themselves within the system and holding offers, there were certain advantages. As providers 'gamed' the system, some applicants reported reaping rewards:

> And then luckily the place I eventually got into, they gave me like a 'premature' place because they were like 'we are going to offer it to you now before you get your interview so that if you get through then you can have it – because we can't offer it to you later if they are all gone'
>
> (successful, SCITT applicant).

Some applicants recounted being given incentives to secure their places with certain providers – a mutually beneficial arrangement:

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[3] Upon checking, we discovered that this particular subject did not close for HEI applicants until well over a month after this participant's interviews, suggesting that her assertion was likely to be broadly accurate.

> So I actually said at the interview, 'really my weakness is maths' so…they did proper maths [support] so they could help people pass the [prerequisite Numeracy and Literacy] tests… and they even offered, if you pass one test before May you get £600 and if you pass both you get a grand
>
> (successful University PGCE applicant).

Such tactics were attractive to those offered them, as were the images painted by some school-based providers of a tightly-knit, pastoral 'community' that was reflexive to trainees' needs and aspirations. Nonetheless, some participants reported being 'realistic' about the level of support and flexibility that might be ultimately available, should they accept an offer with a school-based provider:

> Somebody's getting a wage out of it and people are getting funding out of it. But it's dressed up as something different and they masquerade that you will be given choice and be part of the group... When you go to the interviews you are sold this package of: 'yeah, as soon as you are ready you can come in and be part of our team'. But you're not, actually
>
> (successful, female SD applicant).

This comment reflected a view, expressed by around a third of the participants, that whilst they initially had 'power' as applicants, free to choose their three target providers, this power quickly shifted to the provider once they had made a firm acceptance of an offer. This realisation was part of a broader consensus amongst participants that the oft-publicised differences between various University- and school-routes were, in reality, far less pronounced.

> In my experience of what's happening in School Direct, I don't think there is much difference [with University based programmes], to be quite honest... For me now, there is no difference.... [I thought at first] If I do it through School Direct, I'll be less 'under the thumb'… [but it was as though] 'once we've got you, we don't have to make the effort any more. We've filled our quota'. It's left a feeling of bitterness really
>
> (successful, mature female SD applicant).

Conclusion

Whilst this was a relatively small-scale, single-site study, we have indicated the strength of impressions that these research participants have about the various postgraduate ITE routes. University-based PGCEs are sometimes considered negatively when compared with school-based options, reflecting Government rhetoric during the preceding period. Whilst the differences between SCITTs and School Direct routes are apparently very unclear, these types of providers tend to be seen as suitable by these applicants since their practice-based (less 'academic') associations seem to articulate with these students' fledgling teacher identities.

Furthermore, in participants' reports of their interactions with providers during the application and interview process, these impressions are modified to some extent and it is noticeable that feeling 'like a number' within a less-than-transparent process is anathema to these applicants. As offers of places are received, considered and accepted some participants in our research describe particularly unexpected and disliked experiences which often lead to the realisation that, ultimately, they represent consumers to be sold to within a marketised system – a consequence of an extremely competitive and also uncertain terrain where providers are seen to be covering all bases in efforts to keep good applicants 'warm'. Unfortunately, a consensus amongst these applicants is that they paid the price for this. Yet it is also the case that where providers took positive measures to avoid losing candidates/places on their course, students reported reaping the rewards. A key point of concern remains, however, that such rewards were accrued by the applicants perceived to be 'strongest', and those with potential to be good teachers yet who

needed more support at this stage were at risk of being jettisoned by the system, or were discouraged at the outset.

This all suggests a number of implications. Despite the reversion to an (albeit modified) provider rather than national quota system in subsequent years, the conclusions remain relevant in what remains a competitive 'market' where applicants have a range of choices in terms of both ITE route and provider. In the context of a 'teacher recruitment crisis', supporting people with potential to teach into ITE routes that best fit their needs, and the needs of local schools and pupils, is of paramount importance.

To achieve this, firstly it seems clear that the distinctions between routes and also between providers must be communicated clearly and early. The timing of the NCTL announcement about the revised allocation system in June 2015 hardly allowed for this, but clarity around key distinctions is what applicants crave. This transparency is, of course, tempered by the marketisation of the ITE recruitment process whereby providers are 'competing' for applicants; candidates are acutely aware of this and – this is the second recommendation - the providers that can communicate their 'offer' in genuine and authentic ways, and sustain this beyond applicants' acceptance of a place, lay a foundation for strong trainee-provider relationships during the ITE year and a pathway to trainee retention and success. With more time to plan and prepare for trainee recruitment, it is hoped that this good practice becomes widespread again.

A final thought regarding the building of this genuine and sustained trainee-provider relationship (which feeds into a wider debate about the direction of teacher education) is the pertinence of candidates' *own sense of themselves as learners and teachers, in relation to their choice of route and provider.* In a context of what may be perceived as a de-professionalising trend towards apprentice-like 'on the job' teacher training (Skinner, 2015; and see also Whittaker (2017) regarding the recently-proposed non-graduate 'apprenticeship' route to QTS), there is a risk that this articulates all too easily with a 'non-academic' learner identity amongst candidates, and ultimately minimises the significance afforded critical enquiry and research-based reflection in prevalent images of what it means to be a 'good teacher'. The dismantling of the spurious distinction between 'academic' and 'practice' in teaching ought to be a goal of all teacher education, yet the support lent to this distinction by discourses that separate the priorities and roles of 'University-based' versus 'School-based' PGCE routes are ultimately unhelpful.

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