

The beginnings of school-led teacher training: New challenges for university teacher education

The *School Direct Research Project* undertaken by a team of academics from Manchester Metropolitan University concludes five years of research into the effects of school-led training on the rationale and composition of university teacher education in England and considers the impacts of recent changes on the teaching profession.

Teacher education in England now comprises a vocational employment-based model of training located primarily in schools. This approach is in sharp contrast to models followed in the European Teacher Education Area where student teachers typically spend five years in university, followed by up to two years on school placement. Almost all countries introduced reforms in initial primary teacher education after the initiation of the Bologna Process (1999), similarly for secondary subject teachers, and half of pre-primary sectors of education. These two approaches reveal radically different conceptions of how teacher quality might be improved in the name of international competitiveness.

In the English model, teacher education has been wrested from its traditional home within the academy where universities play a support role to what has become school-led training where government funds for teacher education have been diverted to schools. Student teachers often spend as little as thirty days in university during a one-year postgraduate training course. Teacher professional identity has been referenced to skill development within this frame and the wider assessment culture. The wider European model, meanwhile,

similarly claims to be concerned with raising teacher quality in a way which responds to the challenges of lifelong learning in a knowledge based society. The model is characterised by reinvigorated faith in academic study and promotion of individual teachers, where a pedagogical dimension is included from the outset of undergraduate studies, but with relatively brief periods spent in school.

The report, written by Tony Brown, Harriet Rowley and Kim Smith, shows how the reconfiguration of how training in the English model is distributed between university and school sites consequential to School Direct altering how the content and composition of that training is decided. Most notably, local market conditions rather than educational principles can determine the design of training models and how the composition of teacher preparation is shared across sites. This contingency means that the content and structure of School Direct courses varies greatly between different partnership arrangements across the country, leading to greater fragmentation within the system as a whole. Thus, there is not only increased diversification in terms of type of training route but also diversification of experience within each route.

School Direct has also altered the balance of power between universities and schools, and in turn, their relationship with one another. The ascendance of school-led training has changed how the responsibilities of each party are decided and impacted on how the categories teacher educator, teacher and trainee are defined. In particular, the function of teacher educator has been split across the university and school sites, displacing traditional notions of what it means to be a 'teacher' and 'teacher educator'. The flux is leading to uncertainty across role boundaries and, in turn, changes in practice. Furthermore, as those in different locations negotiate territorial boundaries, this can activate anxiety and tension within the workforce. The particular impact on

different school subjects as a result of these contrasting approaches relates to the way in which conceptions of the subjects derive from where understandings of them are developed, whether in schools or in universities.

For those training in schools little more may be done than enable teachers to work through commercial schemes as implementers of curriculum, as opposed our European neighbours following university intensive courses where relatively low attention is given to the practical school aspects during the university element. Lower cost school-based teacher education may yet appeal to other countries in building and influencing the practice of their teaching forces. But four questions immediately present themselves:

- Does School Direct provide a viable alternative to university based teacher education?
- Does it alter the composition of the pedagogical subject knowledge it seeks to support?
- Is it low cost, or at least good value for money (National Audit Office, 2016)?
- How will it eventually impact on England's reputation in international comparative testing?

The full research report can be downloaded [here](#).