

Part 3

Education Policy, Reforms & School Leadership

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Disappearing Teachers: An Exploration of a Variety of Views as to the Causes of the Problems Affecting Teacher Recruitment and Retention in England

Abstract

This paper discusses the causes of the difficulties experienced in recruiting and retaining teachers to work in schools in England. The analysis begins with a report by the National Audit Office which blamed the Department of Education's actions as the main reason for the difficulties, then using other documented sources, reports, press articles, parliamentary committee information and news channels the paper explores the problem from a wider perspective. Despite the criticism of the Department for Education it appears that though its actions have exacerbated the problem and it has been slow to acknowledge that we are facing a crisis, the main concern it appears is the tremendous work load faced by teachers in England. This, combined with other concerns is not only making teachers think seriously about leaving the profession, but also preventing potential recruits applying to train.

Keywords: teacher training routes, teacher recruitment, financing teacher training, teaching profession

Introduction

In 2016 the National Audit Office (NAO, 2016) severely criticised the Department for Education (DfE) in its *Training New Teachers* Report, claiming that the multitude of routes into teaching, recently established by the DfE, is causing so much confusion amongst possible recruits that they are reluctant to apply to become teachers. This complaint had also been voiced by The University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) whose director pointed to the overlap between the training routes offered and the confusion caused by the National College for Teaching and Learning (NCTL) saying that it could be possible for recruits to change between programmes during training (Morrison, 2015). Certainly there is a problem in the recruitment and retention of teachers in England at present, a situation only just beginning to be acknowledged by the DfE, who were condemned by the NAO (NAO, 2016, no page) claiming, Ministers have a 'weak understanding of local teacher shortages'. The report claimed that the DfE appears to take a national view on teacher supply, rather than examining local problems. There were also further concerns about the massive rise in the numbers of providers entering the

field, as the DfE had not seemed to consider the increased cost of inspecting all those now engaged in teacher training. The NAO's conclusion was that the seven hundred million pounds spent yearly on recruiting and training teachers is not providing value for money.

Certainly there are recruitment and retention problems. Dickens (2016) reports that the shortage of teachers is increasing, as for four years, recruitment targets have been missed. Vacancies increased from 350 (0.1 per cent of the workforce) in 2011 to 3,210 (0.9 per cent) in 2014, though these figures are collected in November when vacancies are generally at their lowest. Burns (2016) points out that 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. To add to this problem government's action to cut funding for some programmes such as the new School Direct route, has seriously concerned schools and affected potential recruitment as training salaries have been cut. As many of the School Direct applicants are already employed in schools as Learning Support Assistants, they cannot train without a salary. The NAO (2016) continued its criticism of the DfE, questioning the judgements made about the numbers of training places required, as data was flawed and supply models used by the DfE were internal and had not been justified by the scrutiny of exterior review. Further concerns were expressed with regard to the lack of training places in areas of greatest need, for example the east of England, where an increasing rise in immigration from the EU had put tremendous pressure on school places.

Training place provision

The routes to becoming a teacher in England are many and varied including the most popular the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE), taken for one academic year after a subject degree, with an intense period of theory at the start of the training then practice in at least two different schools, increasing in amount as the year progresses. This route is for secondary, primary and early years teachers and is run in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The undergraduate route which qualifies students for a degree and qualified teacher status (QTS) (3 to 4 years in total) is also offered by HEIs and is popular with those training for primary and early years as it gives more subject input and a chance to specialize in maths, English or science and increases practice time in schools each year. Though the above are in many ways school based, the greatest number of trainees however, are now trained in schools on 'so-called' school-based routes, via the one year School Direct routes (paid and unpaid) run by groups of schools, with a lead school or by a School Centred Initial Teacher Training organization (SCITT) or via a PGCE run by a SCITT, with support from an HEI or through the Teach First Route. This latter, a two year programme for graduates with good degrees from top ranked universities, who undertake six weeks initial training then go straight into the classroom and qualify as teachers after two years. When qualified, the Teach First trainees can leave to follow another career or can expect rapid promotion to leadership.

In addition there are programmes for teachers of pre-school children (EYITT), for those who wish to work in secondary schools and further education colleges (QTLS), those wishing to teach English as a foreign language, for Doctoral students

who wish to undertake teaching and researching in schools, for troops who wish to become teachers and a primary physical education specialist route, plus a pilot programme for special needs teachers. The latest suggestion is for those who are concerned about the high cost of a university programme to be given the chance to follow a graduate apprenticeship scheme for four years based in schools after the trainee completes Advanced Level examinations at the end of schooling. This route would pay a small salary and combine degree level study and qualified teacher status whilst working in a school (Ward, 2016a). It is clear to see that with all this choice applicants might be confused about which programme to choose but the question must be asked, is this the only cause of the recruitment problem?

Other concerns affecting recruitment and retention

Reports from the press and government bodies point to a variety of problems which affect recruitment and retention of teachers in England.

Subject shortages

For years, there have been shortages in secondary specific subject areas such as maths, computer studies, and sciences particularly chemistry and physics, despite the government offering bursaries to prospective recruits in shortage subject areas. Now however it appears that other subjects are joining this group, for example, design and technology, modern foreign languages and business studies. The efficacy of the provision of financial incentives to highly qualified graduates to train for teaching has also been questioned by the NAO Report, which claims the DfE has no clear evidence that these financial incentives have any effect on recruitment. In maths the shortage problem has become acute, with schools reporting that many students are taught by non-maths specialists, so severe is the shortage of fully qualified maths teachers (Wiggins et al., 2016; Roberts & Foster, 2016). The main reason for this appears to be related to the fact that good maths graduates can demand salaries from business or financial institutions at a much higher rate than is offered to teachers (Ward, 2016b). Vaughan (2016) reports that head teachers are increasingly complaining about the quality of the teachers they are forced to appoint in order to staff their schools and that they are having to cut non-core subjects from the curriculum and/or increase class sizes in order to provide sufficient teachers for their rising school rolls.

Salaries

The curtailing of salary increases for teachers after the 2008 financial crash is affecting numbers of prospective trainees, as public sector salaries have been pegged at a 1% annual increase (Busby, 2016a). Coupled with this is the introduction of performance related pay, which has resulted in some teachers receiving no salary rise at all. In the private sector incomes have been rising at a rate of about 2% making teaching far less attractive as a career than it was previously, as teaching is an occupation seen as stressful and low in status (Coughlan, 2013). Ward (2016c) reports that students with good A Level grades are not considering teaching as a possible career, as other jobs are better paid and far less stressful.

Mistakes by government agencies

Despite the DfE's attempts to encourage more people into teaching, mistakes have been made, for example, misleading adverts on national television appearing to promise a starting salary of thirty thousand pounds for new teachers, when this incentive is only available to highly qualified physics graduates. It is possible that this much criticised advert has led to potential trainees perceiving the DfE's information as lacking credibility. Targets for recruitment are not being met and constant changes by the DfE in controlling training places available, even during the middle of recruitment periods, has caused confusion and consternation to providers, who also complain about the amount of paperwork required. The NCTL's actions in the 2015/16 recruitment phase were described as creating a 'free for all' (Ward, 2015, p. 18) as allocations to places were removed and a first past the post system installed mid-year. This resulted in all providers scrambling to interview and offer places as soon as possible, before the NCTL and DfE decided to prevent further recruitment. This resulted in some recruits being told that despite their being offered an interview; providers had been told to stop recruiting.

Increasing costs of the training routes

As a result of the DfE's widening of training routes the costs of training a teacher is rising. The most expensive route (£70,000 per trainee) is Teach First which is intended to either quickly project trainees into positions of leadership but also allowing them, after their two years to leave teaching and follow another career. As a result, this programme has the highest drop-out rate of all the routes into teaching (Allen et al., 2014). Further to this is the problem of the attempt by the DfE to recruit teachers from overseas (Stewart, 2015) and also train returning troops to be teachers. These initiatives have also been costly, particularly as they have failed to bring in the projected numbers of new teachers. Richardson (2016) points to the expectations as opposed to the reality, as after two years the troops' scheme had only produced twenty eight new teachers and the drop-out rate from training has been very high. The scheme which offered a degree and qualified teacher status in two years has been condemned by unions as many of these recruits lack the required subject knowledge and success in the military does not mean that becoming a good teacher is assured. As for the overseas recruitment staff arrive, but having experienced English schools, many either quickly return home, or convert to supply teaching where the demands are less. The causes for this failure to remain in the job appear to be the massive demands by government on teachers in England and the poor behaviour and attitude of many children (Busby, 2016b).

Teacher retention

Scott (2016) reported that the present leaving rate from teaching is at its highest for ten years, 9.5% of staff left in 2016. Rustin (2016) reports that one of the main teacher unions Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) has claimed that the role of a teacher prevents people leading normal lives and also noted the claim by the Chief Inspector of Ofsted that two thirds of recruits leave the profession during the first five years of their service, a disastrous loss to the profession professionally and economically. Additionally Santry (2016) and Ward (2016d) have reported that experienced teachers are leaving the profession in an attempt to lead less stressful lives and stepping down to become private tutors, Learning Support Assistants in

another teacher's classroom, or cover supervisors where the weight of responsibility and accountability were far less. Also she noted the numbers of teachers now retiring early, as they no longer felt able to cope with the expectations of government and inspectors. Many of those who leave either during training or after working in the schools go on to work in the education sector and often, as reported by The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), initially take a reduction in salary (Worth et al., 2015). In addition, a greater number of teachers than previously are now seeking work overseas in international schools, where pay is higher and the stress and demands on staff far less acute (Barker, 2016). Rustin's (2016) research on the reasons for leaving the profession raised the areas of the constant changes made by governments to the curriculum, the assessment process and the teachers' lack of control over their own work, coupled with the stultifying form filling and report writing all resulting in stress and a feeling of being exploited.

Teachers leaving the profession due to overwork

A report by ATL (Lee-Potter, 2016) claimed that four out of ten teachers leave the job within a year of studying to become a teacher. The causes were many but centre on poor behaviour in classrooms and the amount of time spent planning, justifying the choice of teaching method employed and the insistence on detailed reflections on every lesson taught which proved to be too much work for many trainees. An ex teacher claimed that teachers are overworked, undervalued and underpaid (Lee-Potter, 2016). Marsh (2016) claims that teachers enter the profession for a variety of reasons but mainly, according to a recent survey, to make a difference to the lives of the children (92%). Many however, are quickly disillusioned, with poor pay and bad behaviour being high on the list of complaints about the job. The workload issue however, seems to have come to the fore, as why so many teachers leave. Despite promises made by government to look into the problem, little has been done and the constant changes to the curriculum, assessment processes and demands for constant data gathering are making the job of a teacher impossible and unattractive. Woodcock (2016) suggested that Ofsted should look at teacher turnover figures when making judgements on a school's success levels. *The Times* article also reported that one of the groups examining teacher retention has suggested that schools should be held accountable for the well-being of their staff. However, as recently head teachers too are now leaving the profession early and good heads are becoming increasingly difficult to find this suggestion seems non-viable.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above that despite claims that the myriad routes into teaching are the main cause of a lack of recruits, that the problem is far more complicated. It is however, obvious that the profession is becoming far less attractive to potential recruits. It has taken a long time for the government to acknowledge and address this problem and it has certainly not solved the subject of teacher workload, which is central to many of the problems noted above. However, the lack of status of the profession, the micro-management by government of everything that happens in schools, lack of communication between government departments, coupled with the lack of trust of teachers; constant inspection and a loss of professionalism and the

low pay in comparison with other jobs are adding to the crisis. At present with rising school roles due to migration and an increasing birth rate, recruiting teachers is projected to become even more difficult in future. Nothing but better pay, more autonomy and less interference from government and a greater trust of teachers is needed, but this can only occur over the long term. The future for education of English children does not look promising, with larger classes, less well qualified teachers, shortages of staff in many subject areas and a lack of those wishing to take on management roles. Urgent government action of the right kind is needed but whether there is the will or the ability in government is at present in doubt.

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