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

School Direct Research Project Final Report

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Partnerships between English schools and universities in support of teacher education are long established, having been developed in response to successive policies increasing the proportion and influence of teacher education taking place in schools. The latest initiative in England, School Direct, which was formally commenced in 2012, has resulted in teacher education becoming school led as well as school based. This new and expanding one-year postgraduate route often runs in parallel with the previously existing one-year university-led model but has demanded that the academic element of training is fitted more directly around the demands of immediate practice in schools. Here trainee teachers spend most of their training period in schools under their direction, with universities providing accreditation but a smaller component of training.

The reconfiguration of how training is distributed between university and school sites consequential to School Direct has altered 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.

Recent policy changes including School Direct have also altered the balance of power between universities and schools, and in turn, their relationship with one another. Although teacher training has long been compositional through a partnership model between universities and schools, the ascendance of school-led training has altered how the responsibilities of each party are decided. Those new arrangements are impacting on the relationship between university and school-based personnel and 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 tensions within the workforce.

Those teacher educators located within universities have witnessed major changes in their professional roles and responsibilities as a consequence of the shift in power towards schools. In particular, recruitment patterns have often favoured candidates with recent or extensive school experience. Within this climate, longer serving university teacher educators are being encouraged to adjust to ever-changing conditions and new job descriptions but can feel displaced. Newer entrants to the profession may continue to define their practices with reference to their own expertise in schools, rather than feel obliged to develop the more traditional academic capabilities mentioned in their new job descriptions.

From the other side, the new models of training also substantially change the requirements of students aspiring to join the teaching profession and the demands that they make on their tutors. Ironically, however, university tutors, both new and old, are now less able to compete with school-based teacher educators in meeting the demands of immediate practice. This redistribution of teacher education has eroded key elements that have previously distinguished the university contribution. Moreover, the new priorities of practice in universities have been supportive of schools in reducing their need for a university input as they expand their own provision of teacher education. This is having substantial impact upon the basis upon which universities can defend a distinctive contribution to teacher training.

The push to a greater emphasis upon school-based practice and knowledge is also recconfiguring how trainee teachers experience and understand practice-based pedagogical knowledge, or put more simply the relationship between theory and practice. Increasingly, teaching is conceived in craft-based, technician terms strengthened by increasing prescription and performativity measures, which require teachers to present and shape knowledge in particular ways. Within this context, conceptions of the relationship between theory and practice have been progressively replaced by conceptions of practice that integrate situated conceptions of theory responsive to the needs of practice. Furthermore, many re-conceptualisations of teacher education have privileged practical components to the detriment of theory and analysis.

University and school-based teacher educators are aware, to differing degrees, of how this situation affects trainees’ conceptions of how to teach. ‘Those in different locations also hold differing beliefs and enact various understandings of ideal notions of breadth and type of professional experience. Those who are critical of such changes often believe that such conceptions are leading to a narrowing field of expertise and professional basis. Changes in the structure, length and type of school placements are further strengthening such fears. Trainees are forced to assimilate, not only, these often incongruent conceptions of what makes a ‘good’ teacher or pedagogue, but also navigate conflicting structures within partnership arrangements between schools and universities which such beliefs are producing. The complexity of the situation is heightened further because of how local market conditions dictate the modus operandi of different training models, rather than efforts to build a consensus between teacher educators.
Conceptions of substantive subject and pedagogical subject knowledge are also varied amongst teacher educators in different locations; there are also differing understandings of how such elements of training are being satisfied within more recent models of school-based teacher training. Traditionally, subject knowledge has occupied a distinctive part of the university input and is conceptualised as the adjustment that the trainee makes from their own academic study of a subject within a university degree to a more pedagogically oriented conception of that subject for teaching in schools. However, within a school-based model progression to pedagogical knowledge is increasingly shaped by demands of the regulative policies and highly structured frameworks as enacted within schools where trainees spend the majority of their time. In this scenario, teachers craft their understandings according to the legislative framework in which their practices have become ever more strictly articulated, rather than being educated so much in universities to engage critically with evolving demands.

With respect to subject knowledge, university-based teacher educators also face longer-term changes as academic priorities in schools change the curriculum structure and the relative inclusions of different subject areas. For example, tighter specification of core subjects such as mathematics, English, and science has led to a compression of staff specialising in music, drama and art as student recruitment in those areas has been reduced. Subjects such as psychology, sociology, and law have become even more difficult to support by university tutors as they have often been conflated into generic social science due to demands made by the National Curriculum. Tutors have become increasingly wrested from the support they are able to offer in terms of meeting the reduced specialist subject needs of ‘their’ students. Thus, this set of challenging circumstances makes it more difficult for universities to defend a distinctive contribution on the basis of subject knowledge input.

Alongside these changes, attitudes towards research are also changing whilst the function of research is also being crafted as ‘evidence’ that can be used in a straightforward manner to improve narrowly defined educational outcomes, rather than progressing critical or analytical ideas of what it means to educate. Such conceptions are concurrent with the increase in external specification and surveillance, which conceives teaching in particular ways and, in turn, has an impact upon how teacher professionalism and agency is understood and enacted.

This report details the results from the School Direct Research Project undertaken by a team of academics from Manchester Metropolitan University. It concludes five years of research into the effects of school-led training on the rationale and composition of university teacher education and considers the impacts of recent changes on the teaching profession.
The School Direct Research Project began in May 2013 and was funded by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). Led by Professor Tony Brown with Dr Harriet Rowley and Kim Smith, the work builds on earlier practitioner research studies undertaken by the team members which were concerned with how conceptions of theory had changed for teacher educators and trainees as a result of participation in an earlier school-based model (Smith and Hodson, 2010; Hodson, Smith and Broven, 2012; Smith, Hodson and Brown, 2013). The present research project began with an original purpose to better understand the implications of School Direct (SD) for university teacher education, towards rethinking the distinctive role of universities in teacher education.

The project is located within the activities of the Building Research in Teacher Education (BRiTE) group, at the Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI), MMU. The research group has a growing membership and comprises a group of around thirty researchers in the Faculty of Education whose work is centred on exploring the opportunities afforded by combining a world leading education research group with a substantial, ‘outstanding’ teacher education unit. In this sense, the School Direct Research Project is central to the Faculty’s efforts to maximise its position by using research to locate and drive forward improvement both in terms of the Initial Teacher Education provision at MMU and more broadly the higher education sector.

Introduction

This report cumulates the end of the School Direct Research Project and seeks to detail the knowledge we have gathered through undertaking this work. It begins with a brief review of the professional context, which gives an outline of recent policy changes and developments in teacher education together with key themes from the academic debate that is taking place within the field. The section following this outlines the methods that were used to gather data during this project. The analysis of the findings is presented through the use of six assertions; these statements have been formulated to describe what can be supported on the basis of the data we have collected and analysed. For each assertion, we provide a detailed discussion of the data relevant to each statement including supporting evidence. A conclusion summarising the main points and implications of the research project is offered at the end of this report.
The trend to practical school led training has been intensified student teachers in those countries. This can be seen as a further distancing from practical concerns for asserted. Yet, this intensification of the academic component been completed, rather more professional autonomy can be extended school placement after the academic component has periods spent in school. Once qualified, however, following an outset of undergraduate studies, but with relatively brief teachers, where a pedagogical dimension included from the beginning. Hodson, Smith and Brown (2012). The Bologna model, meanwhile, is characterised by reinvigorated periods spent in university (Hodson, Smith and Brown, 2012). The university component development within this frame and the wider assessment Teacher professional identity has been referenced to skill within the academy where universities play a support role what has become ‘school-led’ training where government funds for teacher education have been diverted to schools. Teacher professional identity has been referenced to skill development within this frame and the wider assessment culture (Ball, 2001; Lanksy, 2005). The university component with a specifically educational component can often be as low as thirty days in a one-year post-graduate course. Indeed, in an earlier pilot model, the Graduate Teacher Programme, in some instances student teachers could spend less than ten days in university (Hodson, Smith and Brown, 2012). The Bologna model, meanwhile, is characterised by reinvigorated periods in academic study and the promotion of individual teachers, where a pedagogical dimension is included from the outset of undergraduate studies, but with relatively brief periods spent in school. Once qualified, however, following an extended school placement after the academic component has been completed, rather more professional autonomy can be asserted. Yet, this intensification of the academic component can be seen as a further distancing from practical concerns for student teachers in those countries.

The trend to practical school led training has been intensified by recent UK governments of a range of political persuasions and is in keeping with the growing dominating culture within education. This places the importance of compliance and regulation on a predominantly practical, relevant and school-led curriculum and assessment framework (McNamara and Murray, 2010; Beaucamp, Clarke, Hulme, and Murray, 2015; Brown and McNamara, 2006, 2011). The prevailing ideology positions teaching as essentially a craft rather than an intellectual activity, meaning that teacher training is viewed as an apprenticeship, best located in the workplace (McNamara and Murray, 2010). It rests on the assumption that ‘more time spent in schools inevitably-and unproblematically-leads to better and ‘more relevant’ learning’ (ibid: 22). Conversely, there has been a declining focus on more academic elements of teacher preparation traditionally located within universities, which means that theory, subject knowledge and research-informed conceptions of pedagogy have become squeezed. Thus, the university contribution has been forced to fit the demands of immediate practice more snugly whilst university-based teacher educators have witnessed a diminished position of power.

When the coalition government came to power in 2010, they signalled their strong intent to expand school-based routes into teaching in the first White Paper, The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010). Later they issued an implementation plan Training our next generation of outstanding teachers, which introduced School Direct, a school-based and school-led training system where schools would be responsible for recruiting and selecting their own trainees. The government proposed two strands, a salaried employment-based route, which replaced the previous Graduate Teaching Programmes and a non-salaried route where students would be required to pay tuition fees but offered incentives in the form of bursaries for highly qualified graduates and subject shortage areas. In both cases, a strong feature of the marketing of School Direct was the idea that students would be employed at the end of the training. However, late the government had to issue guidance that this was expected rather than guaranteed. Schools were required to work in partnership with an accredited provider but as was the case with the Graduate Teacher Programme, this could be a School Centred Training Initiative Provider (SCITT). However, unless such SCITTs were working in partnership with a university, they would not be able to offer the PGCE qualification.

The involvement of universities in teacher education was further adjusted by changes to student allocations and the abolition of the Teaching and Development Agency (TDA), which previously was responsible for regulating teacher supply. In the case of universities, initially only those rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted received protected ability to offer the PGCE qualification. In the case of universities, initially only those rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted received protected ability to offer the PGCE qualification. In the case of universities, initially only those rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted received protected ability to offer the PGCE qualification. In the case of universities, initially only those rated ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted received protected ability to offer the PGCE qualification.
a ‘level playing field’ as these protections were dropped and are not provided equally across the country. However, as Estelle Morris (2014), a former Education Secretary recognises, with thecession of the TDA and the responsibility of recruitment given directly to schools through School Direct, effectively ‘no one was in charge’ of ensuring sufficiency in trainee teachers or school places. Furthermore, School Direct failed to recruit as expected whilst the majority of universities were forced into a reactive position.

The University Council for the Education of Teachers, (UCET) which represents all university education departments in the UK, has sought to defend the contribution that the higher education sector makes to teacher training. For example, when School Direct was first introduced, and indeed throughout its history, there have been concerns with regard to its impact upon recruitment and teacher quality. As this initial statement shows:

To impose ultimate responsibility and accountability for the commissioning and quality assurance of entry to the profession on 23,000 schools would destabilize a teacher supply and training structure that has demonstrated capacity for continuous improvement and development (UCET 2011: 1).

Browne and Reid (2012) carried out a small scale, desk-based investigation into teacher educators’ initial responses to the proposals and found that actions taken by institutions were extremely variable in nature and dependent upon the nature and locality of the existing/partnership arrangements. They found that the majority of institutions were under-going changes in teacher education under the new regimes and a wholesale restructuring, concern about financial viability and possible closure. The majority were actively seeking new partnerships whilst some were prioritising the training of ITT. Some institutions were more protected by their high Ofsted rating or by income from research activity and were less responsive to these changes.

The Carter Review was published in January 2015 and sought to address the quality and effectiveness of ITE courses. Andrew Carter, Headteacher, leader of a SCITT and ITT lead on the Teaching Schools Council was appointed as the independent lead whilst a range of specialists and non-specialists also formed the panel members. Whilst the report recognised the strength of school-teacher partnerships it also made recommendations that universities should be responsible for the majority of content in ITE and the majority of courses be delivered in the higher education sector. As such the report recommended that universities should be responsible for the majority of content in ITT and for the majority of courses to be delivered in university-based ITE.

Against this backdrop, universities have maintained a commitment to research-informed modes of teacher education and by working in partnership with schools have tried to reflect the professional reality of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ as something, which is a commodity that can be delivered and received according to external specification with impacts upon subject knowledge and subject pedagogy it recognised that quality was variable and subject to impact upon student recruitment and teacher quality. As such, universities made to ITT in the form of expertise in research activity and capacity in university-based teacher education research (Christie et al., 2012; Menter and Murray, 2013). Such trends increasingly threaten the financial stability of Faculties of Education and threatened the ability of universities to maintain grounds of a distinctive staff with research-informed knowledge and skills (McNamara et al., 2012; Menter and Murray, 2009). In summary, recent policy changes in how teachers are taught have resulted in trainee teachers actually teaching the subject.

In summary, recent policy changes in how teachers are trained coupled with increased surveillance and specification have meant that the landscape for those involved in initial teacher education continues to change at a rapid pace. The relationship between universities and schools within the traditional partnership model of teacher education continues to be reshaped by local market conditions and changes in responsibilities and personnel. As a consequence to these shifts, the composition and content of courses is also changing and this has implications for the ways in which teachers ‘do and think’ about their work.
The project comprises over one hundred and twenty hour long interviews with university-based teacher educators, school-based mentors and trainee teachers involved in the School Direct programme. The interviews span twenty universities and twelve MMU partnership schools. Additionally, faculty partnership meetings were attended and recorded whilst some trainee lessons were observed. To gain an international perspective, interviews were conducted with teacher educators from New Zealand, Japan, Germany, Spain and Sweden.

The university-based educators were interviewed across a range of sites in England and were sampled through our networks. We were able to achieve a geographical spread of institutions across the country whilst also interviewing teacher educators at a range of levels and different stages of their careers. Furthermore, the institutions also differed in terms of history, size, research capabilities and range of professional programmes. In this sense, they occupied different positions within the market and cultivated different suites of activities depending on the reputation they sought to promote. Interviews were designed to assess the impact of recent reforms on teacher educators across a range of areas including changes to job responsibilities/descriptions, influence of external apparatus upon their practice both in terms of institutional and governmental legislation, the perceived impacts of the market and competition from other providers, changes to their relationships with schools and the impact of these various factors on their academic work/identity particularly with respect to the use of theory, research and subject pedagogy. We were also concerned with broader questions about how they understood the distinctive contribution of universities to teacher education and how they sought to occupy different spaces to defend this. The interviews were transcribed and have been thematically coded using NVivo. To analyse the data, alternative theoretical lenses were applied depending upon the particular interests and expertise of the research team members. For the purposes of this report, the analysis of the findings is presented through the use of six assertions, which were formulated to describe what can be supported on the basis of the data we have collected and analysed.
Local market conditions shape teacher education provision

Local market conditions as well as educational principles dictate models produced and how the composition of teacher preparation is shared across sites. This effect on provision 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.

Across the data set we found repeated incidences of local market conditions being mentioned to explain why certain models of teacher education were being produced. Those located in universities also frequently reported reduced influence when making arguments on intellectual grounds because economic factors and how the market operated was said to dictate the product to a greater extent. The variety of factors at play within a given local context produced an array of responses meaning that the content and structure of School Direct courses varies greatly between different providers. This suggests that not only is there increased diversification in terms of type of training route due to the introduction of school-based programmes but also diversification of experience within each route. In consideration of how teachers are trained as a whole system in England, it seems that similar to school governance arrangements, there is growing fragmentation.

A variety of external factors were cited as contributing to this situation. Amongst one of the most common, was reports of how changes to trainee allocations had contributed to uncertainty and constant flux within university education departments meaning that the financial viability of courses had come to the forefront of concerns. As one teacher educator told us:

“The uncertainty is definitely one change…I’m facing the possibility of leading a large team next year, none of which have a permanent contract because the numbers of students are so unpredictable, so will they support me? Will they be loyal to the university?”

Thus, the unpredictability of income from ITE due to changes in allocations thus had direct effects on staff contracts whilst also raised concerns for those in management positions in terms of the quality of training experience they were able to provide.

Education departments which were judged by Ofsted as “grade two” or lower and thus did not have their core allocation of student numbers protected in the first year of School Direct, were forced into a reactive position where rather than being able to strategise or raise their position, they aimed to minimise damage and avoid closure. One teacher educator described how the numbers they received ‘was a massive shock, no one was expecting it, people thought the numbers might go down a bit, but not to the point where courses would have to close.’ She went onto describe how for some subjects such as mathematics, their numbers had been cut from thirty to ten whilst English had been cut completely for their core PGCE programme. This meant that they were obliged to engage with School Direct to a much greater extent than they had planned whilst in order to avoid closure, the university employed an ex-headteacher to ‘drum up business from his networks’ meaning that they were now offering places for subjects where they did not have existing subject specialists.

Some education departments were in stronger position than others because those judged as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted protected allocations for their core PGCE courses and were relatively able to withstand unpredictable and frequent pressures to adjust staffing levels to meet new requirements. This put them in a stronger market position and do could be more flexible and had the freedom to offer a School Direct programme, which was roughly in line with their core PGCE programme. For example, one teacher educator explained how they had been ‘fortunate’ because they could rely on their ‘Ofsted outstanding status’ and ‘therefore there are schools that want to work with us.’ Thus, she felt that management had ‘been really good at handling the difficult relationship with schools’ and offered a School Direct package that was roughly the same as their core PGCE programme. However, in the second year of offering School Direct this altered as the regulations changed so regardless of status, no departments had protected core student allocations. The same teacher educator described how this change had led to the department management to start offering different types of packages where ‘it’s up to the school about how much they’re buying in for the university input.’ Such changes meant redesigning courses, which for this teacher educator represented a ‘mammoth task.’

The degree to which the university relied on the income from the education department also had an impact upon how much pressure there was to make School Direct programmes viable and income generating. This in turn seemed to impact how School Direct courses are structured and what sorts of content are prioritised.

There was evidence to show from one education department that they were able to rely on their income from research, and due to the unpredictability of income from ITE courses, they
were looking to reduce their involvement. The department was situated in a research intensive university with a strong market position. Thus, even though the income of the education department was according to the Head of Department, a frustrated teacher explained that the income generated was greatly reduced, consisting of offering qualified teacher status only without PGCE. And, although they had tried to ‘hold the line’ on the basis of academic arguments, they had experienced ‘series of management malfunctions’ meaning that the ‘decision making isn’t with the people who know what is best for the student’ and that they no longer had an account of ‘opportunity in the market’ meaning that possible financial gains trumped those on academic grounds.

There was also a sense that due to the increased competition and position of power that schools now enjoyed, partnership schemes had the potential to be transient. Thus, university based teacher educators would have to be prepared to make changes to the demands of schools, which may choose to partner with another provider the following year. Furthermore, there was also evidence that schools were making demands on different providers, using their bargaining power and trying to get a more competitive price from the university by threatening to leave. As one teacher educator explained:

I had some very strange meetings last year with a particular school, quite a big mover and shaker. Every time I met them last year, they threatened to go with another provider because we knew what we were doing. Normally we stuck with us and I thought all that palaver, so they’re playing us off against each other and what are you going to give for that amount of money.

Thus, it seems the new model is changing the position of schools towards university-based teacher educators, as one person commented to act like ‘gas providers’.

The extent to which students were able to make an informed choice in terms of the differences between types of courses and providers was also variable. The majority of trainee teachers who had joined a school-based training route had done so on the basis that they believed that gaining more practical experience would be advantageous. Many also preferred the opportunity to apply directly to school rather than being subject to the wider degree of control in terms of where they would undertake school placements. However, apart from some logistical and structural differences, student feedback has also been described by one teacher educator as ‘the good old way’ where trainees had a greater degree of control over the actual differences between new school-based routes and the traditional PGCE programmes. It was common for trainees to comment that they had been able to make a more informed choice to opt for a school-based route possibly because of proximity of experience although some trainees later regretted their choice because of some of the teaching pressures of School Direct because of the newness of the course.

Overall, there was much variation in terms of how different universities were responding to the changing market conditions. Thus, there seems to be greater diversification in the way the universities and schools are competing in terms of the quality of assurance. As she further explained:

We are supposed to be here producing a whole generation of outstanding teachers, and that’s what we’re supposed to be doing, but we’re stumped, how do you do that, with funding models like that. It’s difficult.

Similarly, another university-teacher educator explained how departmental pressure made it difficult for the department to be able to ‘hold the line’ and refuse to partner with schools who were demanding greater flexibility or reduced university input. The department had been forced to succumb to the demands of the market and offer a variety of university packages which schools could choose from. In some cases, the university was greatly reduced, consisting of offering qualified teacher status only without PGCE. And, although they had tried to ‘hold the line’ on the basis of academic arguments, they had experienced ‘series of management malfunctions’ meaning that the ‘decision making isn’t with the people who know what is best for the student’ and that they no longer had an account of ‘opportunity in the market’ meaning that possible financial gains trumped those on academic grounds.

Changes to recruitment and the involvement of schools in the selection and interview process had also led to some tension between universities and school-based staff. For example, a number of university-based teacher educators expressed concern that schools were not equipped with the necessary skills to interview candidates and to see the potential in candidates. For example, as one teacher educator explained how schools only have the benchmark of interviewing NQT’s for ‘jobs’ and so they see their university colleagues as ‘completely incomprehensible’ because they don’t have the experience to judge the potential of what a beginning PGCE student looks like compared to an experienced teacher. Thus, it was somewhat a direct impact upon student recruitment and in turn the university’s income. Furthermore, the same teacher educator expressed concern in terms of how this area of university-based expertise was under recognised whilst she also felt that due to the present re-adjustments in responsibilities it had the potential to be lost. She added, ‘obviously there will be individual mentors who are very good, but actually if you add up the years of experience in a school of education like this, you’ll probably have several hundred years of experience between us.

There were also numerous incidences of disagreements between the university and schools, where the university’s position would have been to try to ensure that universities continued to carry the burden and possible penalties of quality assurance procedures such as Ofsted. In other cases, schools were asking universities to relax certain expectations which educators also reported in being under pressure from senior managers to do this in order to retain the business. For example, one teacher educator felt that the increased competition had led to a subject enhancement course despite not having the time or the access to research or theoretical models meaning that they had a less developed understanding of pedagogical concepts specific to their subject.

The diversity and breadth of university-based teacher educators’ expertise was also seen as enabling them to talk about classroom practice in a much more analytical and critical way than those who were part of school structures and processes. For example, one teacher educator described a scenario where a colleague was recounting what they thought they knew after twenty years in higher education that they didn’t know when they were a school teacher. ‘And he said, I’m not sure it’s that I know different things, but I’m able to talk about them. I’ve got a language to talk about them.’ The same teacher educator further reflected and said:

To ‘stand back’ and say as a university ‘this is the quality of what we offer you in support, this is the quality of the understanding that you have as a teacher that we will develop with you’ or say ‘we’ll do minimum input but then you’ll have to buy us back if you then need more input.’

She hoped that in terms of the former option, schools would buy into this model but recognised there was a risk of losing potential candidates. She hoped that in terms of the former option, schools would buy into this model but recognised there was a risk of losing students who don’t spend so much time in university because they are choosing to go with another provider ‘because they’re not the same teacher educator further explained:

We are supposed to be here producing a whole generation of outstanding teachers, and that’s what we’re supposed to be doing, but we’re stumped, how do you do that, with funding models like that. It’s difficult.

School led-training is altering the balance of power away from universities

The ascendance of school-led training is altering the balance of power between universities and schools and in turn their relationship with one another. ‘Another’ partner model and the responsibility that lies with both universities and universities are being altered and reshaped.

The shift towards school-led programmes has tipped the balance of power within partnership arrangements. Analysis of the data showed that this was having an impact on how responsibilities were being shared across universities and schools with the designation for different categories of different personal was also changing. Most notably, it was evident that schools have taken on increasing responsibilities with regard to the organisation of training courses and the delivery of teacher knowledge. However, within the data set, there was a prominent theme of doubt as to whether schools had the necessary expertise. For example, some university-based teacher educators felt that those in schools tended to have more context specific and shallower subject pedagogical knowledge. As one teacher educator explained:

I know far more about mathematics than I ever did when I was teaching or even when I was an undergraduate, because of my research but also because of my teaching about mathematics. I can remember when I was a very young mathematics teacher, I was working something about calculating miles per hour. And a teacher said to me, well how can you divide miles by hours? Now that’s something I don’t think about because that, but actually it’s really interesting question. And what does what mean when we say miles per hour? And what does it mean to divide one measure by a completely different measure?

Thus, in contrast to those based in universities, school teachers were positioned as not having the time or the access to research or theoretical models meaning that they had a less developed understanding of pedagogical concepts specific to their subject.

The diversity and breadth of university-based teacher educators’ expertise was also seen as enabling them to talk about classroom practice in a much more analytical and critical way than those who were part of school structures and processes. For example, one teacher educator described a scenario where a colleague was recounting what they thought they knew after twenty years in higher education that they didn’t know when they were a school teacher. ‘And he said, I’m not sure it’s that I know different things, but I’m able to talk about them. I’ve got a language to talk about them.’ The same teacher educator further reflected and said:

We see lots of schools and lots of classrooms. And most teachers don’t. And you do learn an awful lot by seeing different contexts and seeing that, most the trivial things that are a huge problem in one school are just dealt with in another. And you get more organisational they’re just different. But also you learn a lot by watching a lot of teachers, watching a lot of students. And that’s not an experience that a teacher in school can have even in the days when there is much more opportunity to observe other teachers. You’re usually only observing people in your own school, you’re not getting that breadth of experience. And you are under the same pressures and routines it is harder to step outside of that and view practice critically.

At the far end, the shift of power and responsibility moved towards schools converting to School Centred Initial Teacher Training Providers (SCITT’s). In some cases, these providers were still maintaining a relationship with a university whereas others were completely independent. Some teacher educators were fearful of what the increased competition might mean whilst they were also frustrated with the political intervention that had taken place. As one teacher educator explained, when schools are given SCITT status, ‘it’s like a pat on the back, it is like saying you are a good provider of a good service’, yet teacher educators were put in the paradoxical position of supporting schools to become
We lost a major teaching school alliance last year who we thought, ‘what School Direct could mean and what it could be about’... we were really looking at, ‘what’s our role in this, what School Direct research project final report...”
examples show that whilst universities were attempting to present an allied response, the very nature of operating in a competitive market changes such efforts.

One of the other challenges facing universities attempts to find a distinctive contribution is the variance of positions across the workforce in terms of their beliefs of what the university input should consist of and which elements are seen as distinctive. For example, some teacher educators we interviewed viewed themselves as expert practitioners and due to their relatively recent school experience were comfortable in negotiating with schools and essentially playing a support role. For those teaching educators it was essential to increasingly blur the boundaries between universities and schools by further experimenting with a partnership model whereby responsibilities were shared and divided across teacher educators based in universities and schools. For example, teacher educators within this group spoke of how they shared appointments across schools and universities whilst some were already working under such arrangements. Whilst teacher educators in this group had currency with the schools, they sometimes lacked capital within their host institutions as their expertise in managing relationships or meeting the needs of schools was not valued as much as other staff’s ability to maintain a research record for example. They also showed frustration at some university practices and traditions because they recognised how these acted as barriers to engagement with schools. For example, as one teacher educator explained:

_Sometimes there are things that we’ve done and I think, god, we’ve done a really good job here and then the way in which we present it to the schools...and you think why on earth have we said it like this, or this is just unutterably ridiculous or this/those things that we do and, you know, like there was a time where we’d put a sort of package for schools and we sent it out and, when I was looking at it, I said it hasn’t got any prices on and the response was well, we want them to express an interest and then we’ll negotiate the price, so if I’m a head, I’m going to want to see can I afford it – yeah. If there’s no price on, I’m going to put it in the bin because I’m busy. I’m not going to take the time to ring up and say I’m interested in this, but can I afford it, so we have to put a list of prices even if we then say this will drop if more people...so there’s been talk like that where we think we don’t do ourselves any favours in terms of how we necessarily present ourselves, so I do wonder about our marketing of ourselves with the schools as well._

However, at the other end of the spectrum there was also evidence to show that due to changing priorities within the occupational landscape, areas that some longer-term teacher educators had traditionally regarded as distinctive had already disappeared. For example, one teacher educator described how she had lost her role as a school-based English teacher than a university-based lecturer. Such themes within the data further mount challenges in terms of defending a distinctive university contribution on the basis of research-informed teaching.

The supporting data for this assertion shows that there are a variety of factors that impinge upon the central tenets that are often cited when defending a distinctive university contribution. Such findings present challenges for those seeking to retain significant involvement of universities within teacher training on the basis of these grounds whilst also showing that the changing policy landscape is altering the priorities and activities of those involved.

However, it was also not uncommon for university-based teacher educators to find it difficult to have the time to do research and present it and also to practice, instead administrative tasks meant that research had become a lower status priority. Ironically, one teacher educator remarked that she felt she had more room to manoeuvre as a school-based English teacher than a university-based lecturer. Such themes within the data further mount challenges in terms of defending a distinctive university contribution on the basis of research-informed teaching.

The composition of trainee pedagogical experience is being reconfigured

University and school-based teacher educators are aware, to differing degrees, of how School Direct trainees’ pedagogical experiences are being reconfigured as a consequence of school-led arrangements. This holds differing behaviors in terms of the breadth and type of professional experience that trainees need and this is having an impact upon the composition of student experience.

When analysing the data pertinent to this assertion it became increasingly obvious that not only course structures changed, but also the location of where trainees are taught but also the nature of their pedagogical experiences in terms of how the relationship between theory and practice is conceptualised. In particular, the emphasis placed upon practice seems to have progressively replaced the relationship with an understanding of practice that is integrated with situated conceptions of theory, which are reduced in terms of their utility or responsiveness to the needs of practice. These reconfigurations thus privilege practical components at the detriment of theory and analysis. For example, one university teacher educator explained there was neither the time of the expectation for ‘addressing whole piles of texts’ so that the pool of knowledge can be accessed.

Trainees are given ‘readers and things, which are potted summaries to give an overview of ideas. Papers, which are shortish, they can get their heads around … get to the crux of the arguments that people make that they can easily be applied to specific elements of practice.’

University and school-based teacher educators are aware, to differing degrees, of how this situation is impacting trainees’ conceptions of how to teach. For example, one teacher educator recognised how due to the emphasis on the importance of practice there is a danger that more practical elements are used as a descriptor to contrast more academic or theoretical elements, which are ‘being seen as not much use’. For him, this danger had ‘the potential to diminish the teaching profession because I think it has the potential for ignoring what’s been done or trying to understand what happens in teaching and learning… it simplifies what is actually a very complex business that we’re in.’

Such fears do not seem altogether unjustified when analysing this against what some trainees told us in terms of their opinions of school-based sessions. For instance, many of the trainees favoured the more practically-oriented training they received in schools which tended to focus upon the way that pedagogy of her subject has changed as a consequence to increased specification, her subject and how it is taught was now very different from her own pedagogical concepts and practice which had been acquired within the academy. As she further explained in relation to recent observations of trainees in schools:

_Nothing they seem to be doing bears any relation to any kind of research or ideas about learning or how kids learn...I think it’s really sad. [A really good student], said something like, ‘What I’ve learned is that if you’re doing an investigation (in mathematics), it can’t last more than twenty minutes’... I’ve seen some really lovely ideas I would have spent hours on with kids. He allowed three minutes for it, and did they do it? I’m a bit cynical really. Even my younger colleagues, they think that’s as it is now really - some, but not all._

For this teacher educator the changing circumstances meant that retaining was now the logical option. Incidentally, this is a recurring theme for teacher educators within this demographic group.

For other teacher educators that we spoke too, becoming more research active was an important way of managing the changing environment. As one teacher educator explained:

_For me, doing the PhD over 6 years, it’s given me this thinking — a bit of me time. Okay, there’s not time really in the system for me, but that gives me headspace to — because I’m having to change with that, that assists me managing some of the changes that are happening around me, because I’m pushing my own comfort zone ... I’m pushing myself out of who I was. So the fact that things are changing round me is... I’m finding it probably easier to work with because I have new tools through the PhD to even question and think about those and think, okay, that’s interesting._

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So far, these points show that there may be one million and one things to do, and by doing a Master’s it means... or if I'm a head, I'm going to want to see can I afford it – yeah. If there’s no price on, I’m going to put it in the bin because I’m busy. I’m not going to take the time to ring up and say I’m interested in this, but can I afford it, so we have to put a list of prices even if we then say this will drop if more people...so there’s been talk like that where we think we don’t do ourselves any favours in terms of how we necessarily present ourselves, so I do wonder about our marketing of ourselves with the schools as well._

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The supporting data for this assertion shows that there are a variety of factors that impinge upon the central tenets that are often cited when defending a distinctive university contribution. Such findings present challenges for those seeking to retain significant involvement of universities within teacher training on the basis of these grounds whilst also showing that the changing policy landscape is altering the priorities and activities of those involved.

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Conceptions of pedagogical subject knowledge vary between schools and universities. Conceptions of substantive subject and pedagogical subject knowledge vary between school and university teacher educators and this may affect coherence of provision across different locations. Traditionally, subject knowledge has occupied a distinctive part of the university input and is conceptualised as the adjustment that the trainee makes from their own academic study of a subject within a university degree to a more pedagogically oriented conception of that subject for teaching in schools. As the school-based model of teacher education is increasingly being adopted, the progression of trainee teachers is increasingly being shaped by the demands of the regulatory and highly structured frameworks as enacted within schools where they spend the majority of their time. As one trainee further explained:

I think I have learnt more about how to teach my subject at school rather than uni. I mean the uni sessions are interesting because it is making me think about my subject in different ways but it’s at school where I have really got to grips with what I have got to teach. My department is great because the unit specifications are all mapped out for you, it shows clearly how each of the topics should be set out, how it links to learning outcomes and how they will be tested so it all straight-forward. Thus in this scenario, the trainee crafts his understandings enacted within schools where they spend the majority of their time. However, it is not only the influence of increased specification and how this is used in schools, which seems to be shaping trainees’ pedagogical understanding of their subject. There was also evidence to show that within university-based subject specific sessions, the expectation to deliver lessons using a particular structure was also influencing how students were being educated so much in university to engage critically with evolving demands. Although, it is not only the influence of increased specification and how this is used in schools, which seems to be shaping trainees’ pedagogical understanding of their subject. However, it is also evidence to show that within university-based subject specific sessions, the expectation to deliver lessons using a particular structure was also influencing how students were being educated so much in university to engage critically with evolving demands. However, there was also an apparent reluctance and perhaps lack of confidence when we talked to school-based educators about the delivery of subject-specific pedagogy. For example, a school-based mentor said:

In schools we’re very good at teaching the teenagers and the students what they need to know. We are very busy doing that and we’re clearly experts in delivering that curriculum because that’s manageable for them. Perhaps what we’re not experts in is really the pedagogy behind it because we don’t have that time to reflect on what we’re doing and why we’re doing it, it’s very much in the moment. So I think universities are best placed to deliver subject specific training.

Despite this, due to a greater proportion of trainees’ time being spent in schools, many university-based teacher educators said that the number of university-based subject specific sessions were decreased with the expectation that this would be covered in schools. For one university the reduction was apparently more than two-thirds. However, the ability of schools to provide subject-specific sessions was in doubt particularly because the number of trainees for each subject was small with more generic sessions being the norm.

There was no evidence that the breadth of expertise in different subject areas was also reducing due to the prioritisation of particular subjects in specified curriculum structures and in turn in schools. For example, tighter specification of core subjects such as mathematics, English and science has led to a compression of staff specialising in music, drama and art in schools. Conversely, falling numbers of trainees choosing arts-based subjects meant a reduction of focus on music, drama and art in schools. Conversely, falling numbers of trainees choosing arts-based subjects meant a reduction of focus on music, drama and art in schools. Additionally, the reduced number of trainees meant that there was a lack of subject specialists available to work with trainees in schools. Furthermore, such subjects as psychology, sociology and law have become even more difficult to support by university tutors as they have been conflated with generic social science due to demands made by the National Curriculum. As one university-based teacher educator explained, for subject-specific training for her trainees specializing in social science, she needed to meet their generic subject needs whilst recognising that once they are qualified teachers it is likely that they would be expected to teach psychology, law or sociology at A-level (18+).

These findings make it difficult for universities to defend a distinctive contribution on the basis of subject knowledge inputs alone but also raise questions as to how trainees substantive subject and pedagogical subject knowledge is being developed within school-based programmes.

New research priorities are redefining teacher educator professionalism

Official specification and surveillance of teaching practice coupled with competing conceptions of what the functions of research is having an impact on how teacher educator professionalism and agency is understood and enacted.

Interviews with university-based and school-based teacher educators revealed that attitudes towards the role of research were changing. For those in university, research remained part of professional expectations and featured in performance frameworks. Many felt, however, that research valued in the academy was not consistent with that deemed useful to schools. Whilst more broadly they were perceived by other academics as the ‘rejection of the university, the people that don’t do real research.’ Such fears were also compounded by demands to make university sessions more practice focused and by prevalent discourses that conceptualised teaching as a craft. It was also common for university staff to feel like they did not have time to do research whilst maintaining their primary identity as an expert practitioner with ‘recent school experience’ needed to gain kudos from school-based colleagues.

Despite those issues, there was a growing interest amongst school-based educators in how research can be used to inform practice and how they could work more closely with universities for CPD purposes. As one university-based teacher educator explained:

I think that schools themselves have been told you have to find local models of improving teaching and learning and I think there’s been a shift. The schools are now seeing their own staff as being the people who can do their own research, who can go and reengage in university journals, who can do that. And we, one of my roles within School Direct, getting to know the schools even more, is that they are asking us to go in and work with their staff on doing some action research. Not just with the trainee teachers but with their own staff and I think that’s been quite a shift, and I think School Direct could actually get a closer relationship with us doing that and with all their staff and not just the trainees. So I think that’s a really good thing.

However, such opportunities do bring challenges, as the same teacher educator went on to elaborate.

There has been a recognition by the government of the importance of teachers doing their own action research and reflecting more in the classroom. You’ve got papers like ‘had enough’, have you seen that paper? And whether we flippany look at it and say ‘Well you know’... the question is do we have the capacity to do it, you know the funding models have changed, how are we going to sustain and be able to do that? Are schools going to have to, you know, buy the universities more in order to do that because I don’t think that will wash...” Here it seems that this teacher educator stops short of recognising some of the more complex issues associated with new research priorities. Furthermore, such issues reflect broader debates in terms of the professional basis of teaching and in turn the agency of teachers to influence educational change.
A distinctive role for universities in teacher education

Schools are now taking the lead in many areas of teacher education that had previously been the responsibility of university departments. With our data we have had access to the insider experience of practitioners addressing these new demands. We have provided little more than a snapshot of a highly varied and rapidly changing situation. Yet there are many commonalities in people’s experiences. The growth of teacher educators in universities from school backgrounds, perhaps with a different pedagogical understanding of subject knowledge, has added the new operationally oriented priorities. At the same time these teacher educators have become disconnected from the primary source of their own expertise in schools as they have become stranded in a newly defined space, whilst leaving their former school colleagues to pick up the spoils of newly located teacher education. It allows for a reformulating of the teacher educator’s sense of her identity and a potential distancing from the reductive discourses troubling subject knowledge construction.

The teacher educator and trainee each have an understanding of their own practice. Yet these understandings are referenced to discursive parameters that encapsulate particular ideological slants on the matters in hand. People are processed through the metrics that are compliant with structures rather than understood as humans in a standalone sense. The commodification associated with the economic metaphors (delivery, providers, quality, performance, account) changes connections of individuals to different areas of their practice. For example, subject domains and individuals assume a partiality towards each other in terms of assessment orientation, reshaping of professional roles and structural rearrangements of institutions, which are intensified as a result of market or regulative fluctuations (Brown, Rowley and Smith, 2015). An Ofsted result can redistribute local provision. Participants in learning encounters have often become programmed to speak, hear or see only certain words as understood within a particular register.

Future Implications

Perhaps ultimately the new role of universities is to provide a platform from where both tutors and trainees can critically analyse the issues arising in school practice. This new focus would be on building generic analytical capability that supports learning by the trainees in association with their school-based mentors. The challenge would entail supporting trainees in becoming more independent research-active teachers through building a productive critical relationship between university sessions and their developing practice in school. Here universities would assist trainees in developing practitioner-oriented research and connecting it with the broader body of research knowledge. That is, reflective practice would comprise a creative ongoing process of practitioner research that progressively defined the parameters of teaching, whilst negotiating a path through the external demands that trainees will surely encounter. Collaborative, reflexive, practitioner-oriented action research would underpin successive reconceptualisations of practice towards enhancing trainees’ abilities to claim intellectual space in these regulative times.

New priorities may require many aspirant teacher educators to remain in schools, or to change their practice to meet the new composition of work demanded of universities. For some, however, it seems that these demands are too great for some tutors currently in universities, such that the changes may be enacted by a new generation.
Publications

Allied Publications

Presentations
References


