

Move over Nelly: lessons from thirty years of employment based initial teacher education in England

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Abstract

Recruiting, preparing and retaining high quality teachers are recurrent themes of local, national and international education agendas. Traditional university-led forms of teacher education continue to be challenged, and defended, as nations strive to secure a teaching force equipped to achieve high quality learning outcomes for all students. One commonly adopted policy solution has been the diversification of teacher preparation routes: the alternative certification agenda. In this paper we examine the entire history of one alternative route in place in England from 1997-2012, the Graduate Teacher Programme. Using one example of an employment based programme we argue that opportunities to engineer innovative and creative spaces in the face of the current teacher preparation reform agenda need to be seized. This case study, which is contextualised in both the international debates about alternative teacher certification routes and the current policy agenda in England,

demonstrates the extent to which successive administrations have failed to learn from the lessons of the past in the rush to recycle policies and claim them as their own.

Key words: teacher preparation; teacher education policy; alternative certification; employment based teacher preparation

Introduction

The economic imperative for education systems to achieve high quality outcomes for all students has led many countries to diversify teacher preparation routes. This agenda, often referred to as the alternative certification agenda, is underpinned by two principal drivers: broadening the pool of potential teachers to meet persistent recruitment challenges and the perennial contestation about whether schools or university departments of education are best placed to lead teacher preparation programmes (e.g. Cochran-Smith, 2008; Menter et al., 2010). The teacher education landscape in England has been particularly affected by these debates, with successive governments implementing policy agendas to challenge the dominance of universities as leaders of teacher preparation programmes. Allied to the latter driver is the long-standing debate about whether teaching is a craft or a profession (Gove, 2010; Maguire 2014). In this paper we examine an employment based route to qualified teacher status offered in England between 1997 and 2012: the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). We use this programme first as a vehicle to illuminate recurrent themes in the policy drive to recast the initial teacher education landscape, often borrowing from other contexts for short term expediency, and secondly to demonstrate how one interpretation of this programme sought to simultaneously work against and within the new system (Cochran-Smith, 2008). We also argue that the move to diversify teacher education routes in England over the past three decades has created spaces for innovation in teacher preparation that have been largely overlooked by teacher educators preoccupied with ongoing battles to defend the status quo.

Alternative certification: international context

Since school is an institution that is constantly reformed, the teaching profession is a profession characterised by an almost constant discontent with teachers. The 'desirable' teachers are always different to existing teachers. (Carlgren, 1998, p.616 cited in Reid 2011, p.295)

The quotation above written by the Swedish educator Carlgren and cited by an Australian educator, exemplifies the commonality of dissatisfaction with teachers and teacher preparation programmes in an international context. Indeed, teacher education programmes across different jurisdictions have been subject to ongoing debate around a generally common set of inter-related themes including: ‘ownership’ of teacher education; teaching as a profession; regulation of teachers and the economics of supply and demand’ (Menter et al, 2010, p.17). In the US context, Cochran-Smith (2008) identifies a similar range of themes: the conflict between diversity and selectivity of the workforce; valorisation of subject matter over pedagogy; competition for the sites of teacher preparation and the contradictions of simultaneous regulation and deregulation. Thus the international context of teacher preparation reveals common tensions and issues that have surfaced with dogged frequency for at least the past 50 years.

Cochran-Smith, Ell, Ludlow, Grudnoff & Aitken identify three themes in teacher education that nations have grappled with in the transition from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy: a focus on teacher quality and accountability; changing conceptions of how, and what, students learn; increasingly mobile and diverse student populations accompanied by growing inequality (2014). Ongoing debates about the status of teacher preparation are therefore also entwined with the imperative to inclusively educate increasingly diverse populations of students, which in turn increases the need for an expanding force of flexible

teachers. These two factors have led jurisdictions to enact policies intended to increase the attractiveness of teaching as a career for ‘highly qualified’ new graduates and career changers (Barber and Mourshead, 2007) often referred to as the ‘alternative certification’ agenda (Bullough, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2017). A particular focus of this agenda is to address teacher supply and retention issues in the so-called high-status subjects (e.g. science, mathematics), and in schools located in areas of high deprivation and diversity. This has included early entry programmes such as those under the Teach for All umbrella where ‘elite’ graduates commit to working, initially as unqualified teachers, with a full teaching assignment in schools in challenging circumstances before moving on to careers in other sectors (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This expansion of routes has been accompanied by a proliferation in providers and sites of teacher preparation making the sector increasingly difficult to characterise.

Writing from a United States (US) perspective Kretchmar and Zeichner (2016) developed a framework of positions towards teacher education reforms in the US which offers a helpful lens through which to view this changing landscape: the positions are those of defenders, reformers and transformers. The defenders locate teacher preparation in the university as maintaining a professional teaching force, thereby defending the increasingly fragile status quo. Reformers advocate a cost-effective and more pragmatic route into teaching viewing the teacher primarily as a technician, thus supporting non-university based alternative certification programmes. Transformers privilege an asset perception of learners and the role of communities in educating teachers (ibid).

In essence therefore, alternative certification is an approach where traditional forms of teacher preparation as ‘education’, in which education theory is taught alongside the practical

knowledge and clinical experiences needed for teaching, is eschewed in favour of a practice led 'training' approach to teacher preparation, which may or may not pay attention to theory (e.g. Evans, 2010). The debate polarises around criticism of a 'disconnection between theory and practice' in university led teacher preparation (Kretchmar and Zeichner, 2016, 418) and the affordances of teaching as 'craft' where it is seen that 'the most important learning occurs in the classroom' (Evans, 2010, 184). The latter view is underpinned by an ideology that views teaching as technicist work with a concomitant deprofessionalisation of teachers' work (Furlong, 2013).

Alternative certification: English context

Discussions about initial teacher preparation policy in England often begin with the impact of the policies of the Thatcher years (1979-1991). Whilst these years did see major reforms introduced into the sector, it would be a mistake to assume that prior to this time beginning teacher preparation was an uncontested area. A review of the history of teacher education in England quickly identifies that the location of teaching preparation, and the type of teacher desired, were issues of contention as far back as the beginning of the 19th century (Bell, 1807, cited in Dent 1977, 5). In the years leading up to the Thatcher era the James Report (1972) criticised 'theory heavy' teacher preparation programmes and made far-reaching recommendations, teachers in state schools were required to hold a postgraduate teaching qualification, and a sharp fall in pupil numbers led to a significant contraction of the teacher education landscape. At that time the sector was autonomous with only higher education institutions (HEIs) able to offer teacher preparation programmes: until 1991, 99% of teacher training was managed by these HEIs. The end of the Thatcher era coincided with a dramatic increase in the student population in schools: between 1991 and 1997 the number of teachers

needed increased by almost 30% (Furlong et al, 2000). Thus, again, the twin drivers of an impending recruitment crisis and ideology were very much to the fore when, a quarter of a century ago, in its third term of office the Conservative government embarked upon a concerted drive to wrest control of initial teacher education from universities and move towards a 'school-based' model of teacher preparation. This time period also witnessed a move away from national commitments to comprehensive education laying the foundation for an accompanying shift from humanistic to technical conceptions of good teaching (Connell 2009). This explains the parallel agenda to drive through changes to manipulate the nature of teachers' work to accommodate the dominant policy driver of economic imperatives with schools increasingly positioned as businesses (Menter, 2009).

At the start of the 1990s a number of alternative routes to the traditional one year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and four year undergraduate course were already on offer. These included flexible variants of these two established courses and two new schemes introduced in 1989: the Articled Teacher Scheme (ATS) and the Licensed Teacher Scheme (LTS) (DES 1989). The LTS caused an outcry when announced as it rescinded the requirement for all teachers to hold graduate status (Furlong et al, 2000). Beginning teachers on this route were employed by a school with some release for training and after two years assessed for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The ATS was also a two year programme yet conceived as a new form of school-based PGCE with 80% of time spent in school and 20% of time at university (Furlong et al, 2000). At the time one national paper reported: 'the government is committed to moving teacher training out of universities and colleges and into the classroom, the Articled Teacher Scheme...is seen as a forerunner' (Macleod, 1993). Although abandoned after five years, both programmes were significant in informing subsequent developments in initial teacher education. The legacy of

the ATS in particular was to show that it was possible for schools to lead the preparation of teachers in collaboration with an HEI.

The preceding overview of the diversification of routes in England is important to understanding the provenance of the case study programme, the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP), which amalgamated elements of the ATS and the LTP. Although transient and small scale, these programmes were adduced as evidence that schools could take on the majority of teacher training programmes despite no attempt to systematically evaluate the programmes (Furlong et al, 2000).

The Graduate Teacher Programme in England

The GTP was launched in 1997 replacing the Licensed and Articled Teacher Schemes as an alternative employment based route to teaching. The GTP can also be viewed, at least in part, as a response to the less than successful launch of another alternative pathway to certification: the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) scheme. This was the first ‘school-administered’ scheme, intended to encourage consortia of schools to offer postgraduate courses with no involvement of universities (Evans, 1997). The first courses were introduced in September 1993 with 250 places nationally available for secondary provision. The scheme did not herald the hoped for transformation in the system; indeed some 18 years later 30 SCITT providers prepared only 4% of the national secondary teacher training cohort each year. The paucity of uptake for the SCITT¹ was at least in part due to the time-consuming and burdensome process of accreditation as an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provider. The newly launched GTP circumvented this hurdle by allowing schools to sponsor individual trainees

¹ For the purposes of this discussion the term SCITT refers to the programme from 1993-2011.

without themselves becoming accredited providers. This proved to be a more palatable approach for schools and the numbers on the route increased quickly.

The GTP was launched by the Teacher Training Agency² (TTA); as

a high-quality and cost-effective route into the teaching profession for suitable graduates who do not want to follow a traditional pre-service route, such as the PGCE, but would prefer a tailor-made training route coupled with employment as a teacher (DfEE, 1996:1)

The GTP, like its precursors the LTS and ATS, targeted mature graduate career changers in an attempt to broaden the pool of new entrants to the profession. It was also promoted as an individualised route, and dependent on prior experience, could take as little as 13 weeks to complete. The bespoke element of the programme started with an initial needs analysis that was intended to be the first step in the ‘tailor-made training’ process (DfEE, 1996).

The route got off to what can fairly be described as an inauspicious beginning. Building on the experience of the LTS, the system was designed to meet the needs of individual schools to recruit teachers they wanted to train. In practice this meant that schools generally worked with people known to the school and who were already experienced educators (Foster, 2000).

The piecemeal nature of the programme in the early days made it difficult to monitor the quality of the experience trainees were receiving. The cumbersome regulatory framework for teacher preparation in England to ensure compliance and uniformity by university departments of education in turn led to some challenges for the new programme. Although schools could recruit who they wanted, they did still have to work in collaboration with a ‘recommending body’ whose role was to devise an individualised training programme and undertake assessment for accreditation. Such recommending bodies were drawn from a

² the then government agency with responsibility for recruitment and standards in teaching

range of organisations including universities, schools, local education authorities, teacher employment agencies and charitable organisations (Office for Standards in Education [Ofsted³³] 2002).

For the first three years of the programme GTP trainees filled a teacher vacancy in the school and were paid a salary by the school and a training grant was devolved to the school by the TTA. Trainees were attracted by the promise to ‘learn while you earn’ (Evans, 2010, 199). However, early concerns about the quality of the route, including the unsurprising fact that a significant number of trainees had full teaching timetables, led to mandated changes to the programme in 2000 (Foster, 2001). The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) undertook to fund most of the employment costs directly to schools, who in return were expected to ensure trainees were supernumerary to the normal staffing of the school. The reasons for the changes were threefold: to make it possible for trainees to have an integrated teaching and training programme; to boost recruitment in the so-called shortage subjects (e.g. mathematics and science) and to recruit from groups not adequately represented in the teaching force (Ofsted, 2002). These changes were accompanied by a significant expansion in the programme attracting the headline: ‘more graduates are being encouraged to bypass teacher training courses and head straight for the classroom as a fast track route into teaching is expanded’ (BBC news archive, 2001). Foster reflected widespread doubts that the GTP would be a suitable training model for applicants without an education ‘track record’ of prior work experience in schools (2000).

The first national evaluation of the scheme, undertaken by Ofsted, was highly critical about many aspects of the programme including that ‘management and quality assurance procedures have not kept pace with the rapid expansion of this route into teaching’ (Ofsted

³³ The national education inspection body

2002: 4). In the early days schools worked in an 'ad hoc' fashion with a known individual trainee; the increase in numbers created a diverse and unregulated sector of teacher training which ran counter to the prevailing agenda of uniformity, accountability and compliance (Furlong et al., 2000). Although initially there was no intention to extend the remit of the high stakes inspection framework that applied to university based provision to the GTP, as the programme expanded it too fell under the same accountability measures and management structures as university-based routes into teaching (Brookes, 2005).

By 2003 the GTP had expanded to a scale of over 2800 trainees nationally, overseen by a network of 80 Designated Recommending Bodies (DRBs) (Brookes, 2005). These DRBs had been created as part of the process of integrating the GTP into the national sector; DRB was an interim status towards full accreditation as a provider of ITT. DRBs became subject to Ofsted inspections from 2003-04 with full status being conferred following a satisfactory Ofsted report, at which point a DRB became an Employment Based Initial Teacher Training (EBITT) provider. The political imperative for this route to succeed resulted in significant investment from the Teacher Development Agency (TDA, the successor to the TTA) to ensure successful navigation of the accreditation process by new providers.

At first the GTP was generally met with opposition from HEIs as it was seen as an attack on their monopoly of provision and counter to traditional conceptions of initial teacher education. However, the potential impact of the route on the teacher preparation landscape, and in particular the potential loss of finance, meant that for some HEIs the opposition was short-lived. Browne and Reid (2012) analysed HEI responses to education policy changes and identified five types: reactive; proactive; semi-responsive; research-focused and observers. HEIs in the reactive and proactive categories tended to be institutions that had large student teacher numbers, therefore relying heavily on teacher preparation as a source of

funding for institutional security. Those in the research-focused category tended to be departments with a broader portfolio and so less reliant on teacher training income and therefore in a position to be more critical of new programmes or to observe and adopt a ‘wait and see’ approach. Most of the initial universities involved in the GTP could be assigned to the reactive and proactive categories. Offering a GTP course provided a useful source of income and a ‘safety net’ at a time when there was a possibility that the GTP would become the main route into teaching. Where HEIs did decide to get involved, the provision tended to be ‘bolt-on’ to their mainstream courses with little intention to integrate the provision or to offer an academic award. Over time some HEIs considered to be in the research-focused group succumbed to market forces and offered their own variants of GTP.

The GTP was intended to offer an alternative to traditional routes into teaching. Following two damaging Ofsted reports on the route (2002, 2005), the changes introduced to the GTP served to align the programme ever more closely to mainstream provision. This meant that by 2007 positive outcomes at the national level for the GTP were more secure, with ‘better and more consistent quality’ (Ofsted 2007, 2). The programme was evaluated as ‘successful in recruiting good candidates into teaching, particularly in secondary shortage subjects’ (Ofsted 2007, 1). Some concerns remained, for example at secondary level trainees were ‘generally less skilled than their peers on PGCE courses in applying their subject knowledge to teaching and devising strategies to support and assess pupils’ learning’ (Ofsted, 2007, 1).

Thus ten years after its launch, the GTP was an established presence in the teacher preparation landscape preparing 20% of all new teachers each year. It was fully integrated into the accountability and inspection framework alongside traditional mainstream provision. This meant that the route could only be offered by accredited providers, EBITTs; trainees

were expected to be fully supernumerary, and were entitled to at least 60 days' worth of training along with the opportunity to study for an academic qualification as well a professional training programme.

We now analyse one particular case of the GTP led by the University of Nottingham (UoN) to illustrate how one provider in entering this market reframed the provision based on an analysis of known problems with the programme and with different ideological convictions.

The University of Nottingham Graduate Teacher Programme (UoN GTP) (2004-12)

At an institutional level the university had a large, well-established partnership with local secondary schools offering a suite of traditional academic subjects for a mainstream postgraduate teacher preparation course. The partnership was underpinned by a commitment to reflective practice and inquiry and to a model of teacher education which valued academic, professional and practical knowledge (Author, 2014). The UoN had historically criticised, and rejected, developments in the 'reformers' approach' to alternative pathways to teacher preparation which eschewed the contribution of academic knowledge (Kretchmar and Zeichner, 2016). In this way the university initially positioned itself as a 'research-focused observer' of the new programme (Browne and Reid, 2011). However, there was a commitment across the partnership to diversifying the profile of the teaching force and to supplying local schools with well-qualified teachers. To this end, a part-time, blended flexible postgraduate route had recently been developed (Sorensen et al, 2005). Key school-based colleagues in the partnership knew of potentially good teachers who would prefer an employment based route and they were keen that this teacher preparation should be undertaken in a principled way. It was within this context that in 2004 the partnership submitted a bid to the TTA to become a DRB and to offer a GTP that specialised in the

secondary shortage subjects of the time: English, mathematics, science and modern languages.

The treatment of all potential DRBs equally, irrespective of whether they were a university with decades of successful teacher preparation experience, or a single high school wanting to work with one or two beginning teachers, was part of the policy ensemble to promote the GTP as a distinctive school-led employment route and to reduce the influence of universities. However, the UoN conceptualised DRB status as offering the freedom to design an innovative course that could be managed discretely in terms of the high stakes external accountability framework. This was important because it meant that inspection of the UoN GTP would not pose any threat to the quality rating of the partnership's overall provision.

In designing the programme, the partnership sought to counter the criticisms of the programme and to reconceptualise what employment based teaching could look like. The intention was to develop a programme that retained a rigorous academic focus, provided alternative viewpoints (Goodwin et al, 2015), privileged the concept of community and worked collaboratively with partner schools. The first piece of work undertaken was an analysis of the known problems with the GTP, drawing on research and Ofsted evidence.

For the university the prevailing expectation that GTP programmes only offered professional accreditation, QTS, uncoupled from the academic award of PGCE was problematic. The first underpinning principle of the UoN GTP therefore was that all beginning teachers on this route would study for the award of PGCE.

The second fundamental principle was that provision would be fully integrated into the partnership's well-established secondary provision and partnership so that it became part of a suite of courses designed to offer access to a broad pool of prospective teachers, taught by

experienced staff and with management structures planned to facilitate learning across courses. This meant the UoN GTP was distinctive but strengthened by common principles. The partnership committed to protecting the supernumerary status of all beginning teachers with the teaching load increasing incrementally over the year. This provided space for the beginning teacher to work in a developmental way with an individual mentor and to undertake planned activities across the whole school and in the community.

A third key principle was the commitment to the beginning teachers working collaboratively both within their schools and as a UoN GTP cohort in the university. This was a deliberate strategy for trainees to become part of a professional learning community outside of their training school in order to counteract identified problems experienced by GTP beginning teachers learning to teach almost exclusively in school (Smith and McLay, 2007). To this end, the course adopted the ATS model of four days per week in school with one day at the university. During the middle third of the course, pairs of beginning teachers took turns to professionally host each other in their placement school. The aim of this innovative, and locally unique, phase was to engineer a focus on team planning and teaching and so generate a space for genuine collaborative learning to take place (Zeichner, 2010). The outcome of this collaborative phase of the course was frequently described by students and evaluators as having a transformative effect on the beginning teachers' practice (External Examiner, 2010).

A distinctive feature of all GTPs was that beginning teachers were employees of a school. Thus from the very start of the academic year they were part of the school community bringing contemporaneous opportunities and challenges. Beginning teachers potentially were well-placed to situate their learning within their placement school and its community (Lave

and Wenger, 1991). Conversely, being so embedded in one school could be reduced to becoming 'acculturated to the existing practices of the setting with an emphasis on the reproduction of routinized behaviours and the development of bureaucratic virtues such as compliance and the collection of evidence' (Ellis 2010, p.106). The UoN GTP therefore included learning spaces for both academic and practical knowledge (Eraut, 2008). Smith and Hodson in examining the role of theory on a GTP argue that in addition to formal learning spaces in school beginning teachers also need access to spaces that 'allow distanced and cross-school discussion in ways that challenge and extend the specific in school-based and employment based settings' (p 265). The UoN GTP provided structured spaces in school and in the university for beginning teachers to reflect on personal growth and to access perceptions of peers, schools and tutors to situate practical and professional learning within academic learning. University teaching was predominantly as a mixed subject cohort, supporting cross-curricular dispositions and nuanced appreciation of teaching and learning across the four subjects; academic assignments included presentation as an alternative to written assignments and encouraged collaborative working.

All elements of the curriculum were designed to foster beginning teachers' engagement with their school and its community. This learning was enhanced by a focus on understanding the nature of the school community located within an appreciation of its wider community rather than simply 'parachuting' in to a placement school (a criticism often levelled at the more traditional PGCE route). A deliberate focus on understanding the contribution of the community to the school with an assets model was at the core of the academic programme (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), rather than the deficit perception of schools in challenging circumstances often encountered in alternative programmes (Kretchmar and Zeichner, 2016). This approach chimes with Kretchmar and Zeichner's teacher education

category of transformers (2016). Transformers privilege an asset perception of learners and the role of communities, and positions teachers primarily as community activists rather than as professionals with professional interests to maintain or technicians with craft techniques to acquire and then implement. These differing positions of teachers imply different subject positions for learners. As a community teacher, drawing on ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzales, Moll and Amanti, 2005), this transforming conceptualisation of teacher education resonates with Cochran-Smith and colleagues’ desire to put ‘practice for equity’ for all learners, including those who are disadvantaged, ‘front and center in initial teacher education’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016, 68).

To be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) all beginning teachers in England are assessed against a collection of mandated standards (TTA/DfE 1999). In practice the requirement for GTP programmes to tailor courses according to individual needs, often translated into a reductive approach where providing hard copy ‘evidence’ (often three pieces of evidence per standard) became the easily measurable goal of a training programme. This atomistic approach of onerous completion of checklists became known as the GTP ‘shopping trolley’ model, similar to unwieldy trainee nurse portfolios (Endacott et al, 2004; Timmins and Dunne, 2009), where trainees literally used a shopping trolley to transport their many files of evidence to the final assessment. This approach exemplifies the audit culture in education where teachers are positioned as technicians merely enacting predefined methods of teaching for which skill rather than intelligence is required (Connell, 2009). A ‘discourse of truth’ had developed around the GTP that this was the accepted way things should be (Maguire, 2014). This portrayal of the programme led to a view that it was little more than a pupil-teacher apprenticeship route, where ‘sitting by Nelly’ was the main mode of learning; a technicist approach to teaching. The confident approach to assessment adopted by the UoN

GTP mirrored that on our mainstream programmes to ensure record keeping was succinct and proportionate (Ofsted, 2010). That is an holistic approach where evidence generated through teaching, reflection, presentations and assignments was used progressively to assess and to challenge the beginning teachers to move well beyond the minimum prescribed by the teacher standards

There was a commitment to diversifying the nature of the local teaching force and to working with partnership schools located in particular areas: inner city and former coalfields. Our experience throughout the life of the GTP was that all cohorts on the programme routinely included a considerably higher proportion of mature career changers than the traditional PGCE. A significant proportion of trainees each year had worked as para-professionals in schools, often in their training school, and had strong links to the school and its community prior to the start of the course. The course also attracted ‘second chance’ trainees; those for whom schooling the first time around had not been a positive or enriching experience but who had subsequently invested significant personal resource to gain the required entry qualifications for training to teach. Thus the programme offered the potential for a route where under-represented groups flourished and made a significant and sustained contribution as qualified teachers in partnership schools. In an era of increased diversity of the school student population this programme contributed to a diversification of the teaching force; it challenged the notion of one preparation route for all, to contribute significantly to attracting teacher candidates into the profession from a variety of academic backgrounds and prior experiences.

The outcomes from the UoN GTP were high from the start of the course in 2004-05. This was often the case for GTP programmes, but this particular programme only recruited secondary trainees in traditionally difficult to recruit subjects and who were placed in schools in challenging circumstances:

I have lead, taught on and examined many Initial Teacher Education courses in the last 15 years and the standards reached by the students I observed are the highest I have experienced (External Examiner, 2010).

The course was rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted with the inspection report highlighting the strengths of the partnership, 'consistently high quality' training, the balancing of 'equality of opportunity with the recruitment of high quality teachers', trainees 'fully prepared for teaching in a culturally diverse society' and personalised training suited to individual needs (Ofsted, 2010). Student evaluation data, both internal and from the nationally administered survey of Newly Qualified Teachers, also testified to the exceptional success of the programme. Beginning teachers graduating from this programme were very successful in gaining employment, most in one of the schools where they completed their GTP. The programme continued to be successful and contributed significantly to deepening understandings in the university department of beginning teachers' learning.

Our experience of the GTP challenges the commonly held perception that the route only offered an impoverished preparation for teaching. Rather than an apprenticeship route characterised by 'sitting by Nelly', we argue that an immersive teacher preparation programme, nested within a mature partnership, offers the potential for a transformative approach to teacher education (Kretchmar and Zeichner, 2016). The inclusion of collaborative experience in a second setting, complemented by weekly engagement in a university-based academic programme provided crucial enhanced spaces to share and reflect on learning with peers and experienced teacher educators (Eraut, 2008). Furthermore the programme successfully championed increasing diversity of the teaching force and privileged sensitive and respectful understandings of community (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Zeichner,

2014). Importantly the UoN GTP also provides an example of how by working within and against the system new understandings about beginning teacher learning can be generated even when university involvement is not invited (Cochran-Smith 2008).

The demise of the GTP

From 1997 to 2010, the GTP became an established, and significant, contributor to the preparation of beginning teachers in England. It evolved from a maverick programme deliberately positioned outside the teacher education establishment and accountability structures, into a version where quality assurance was in place, diversity criteria were being met and it also directly addressed the political agenda of involving schools in a more substantive and sustainable way in the initial training of beginning teachers.

The first indication of the impending demise of the programme was signalled by David Cameron in the months leading up to his election as Prime Minister of England in 2010, echoing the repeated discontent with current teachers (Connell, 2009). Pledging to make teaching a ‘noble profession once more’ his proposed solution exemplifies, at its crudest, neoliberalist tendencies to seek a ‘quick fix’ to a persistent and complex challenge: ‘we just need to learn from abroad’ (Cameron, 2010). Citing some of the best performing education systems in the world, he went on to say:

They are brazenly elitist – making sure only the top graduates can apply...We will replace the Graduate Teacher Programme with a new one – Teach Now’ (Cameron, 2010).

The Teach Now programme never materialised. The positioning of the GTP as being part of the problem with teacher recruitment was significant however in signalling future policy

developments. The publication of the coalition government's pivotal White Paper fleetingly offered a reprieve for the GTP:

‘we will provide more opportunities for a larger proportion of trainees to learn on the job by improving and expanding the best of the current school-based routes into teaching – school-centred initial teaching training (SCITT) and the graduate teacher programme’ (DfE, 2010, 23).

Just one year later, in the Implementation Report, the bold headline, ‘we will reform the Graduate Teacher Programme’ resurrected doubts about the future of the programme (DFE, 2011, para 18). A hastily undertaken consultation exercise had concluded that the offer of a salary was key in attracting trainees to the programme, but in order to extend the programme schools would be expected to make a greater contribution to the salary. The report attempted to rationalise this change as follows: ‘there is a careful balance to strike between assuring the quality of training, giving providers more flexibility and finding a sustainable approach to funding trainees’ (DFE, 2011, para 18). One cannot but conclude that the driving force out of the three factors was finance. Quality was assured by this point, the providers had flexibility, therefore the key issue was finance.

There had been an abrupt shift from the GTP being considered by the TTA as ‘good value’ for money to it being viewed as an expensive route (Foster, 2000). Indeed in subsequent paragraphs in the report, the desire for expansion of school-led training akin to the GTP is restated, and the solution proposed yet another structural change: this time the GTP metamorphosed into ‘School Direct Salaried’ (SDS). The SCITT that had survived but not thrived since its inception in 1993 was to be reinvigorated by priority allocation of training places, and the cumbersome accreditation process was to be streamlined to ensure schools would engage. At this juncture the GTP reform was to ‘narrow the focus of the remaining

GTP to target high quality career changers for whom a salary is particularly important as an incentive' (DfE, 2011, para 18). In other words, the number of places allocated to the GTP was to be drastically reduced as a cost-saving exercise. Two years later the demise of the GTP was complete:

Whilst the GTP has delivered some superb training, and recruited some brilliant teachers, it has also suffered from serious flaws. Recruitment has not always been targeted at high-fliers, it has been difficult to access and apply to the programme, and some schools have been left frustrated by restrictions over salary and training and the introduction of a new employment-based training programme for high-calibre career changers (DfE 2012).

In the years since the launch of the GTP a commitment to making the teaching force more representative of society had been overtaken by Cameron's 'brazenly elitist' approach where degree classification trumped all else (2010). This focus on qualifications countered research evidence showing degree classification not to be a reliable predictor of teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

With one hasty political policy change, disregarding the accumulated body of evidence, and with no evident consideration of the need to reflect student diversity in a suitably well prepared and informed diverse teaching force, a successful route was rendered redundant to be replaced by yet another hastily constructed route.

Conclusion: lessons from thirty years of employment based teaching in England

The GTP was closed on financial grounds with no analysis of its history before launching the replacement School Direct schemes. This decision was short-sighted on a number of levels.

First, as we have demonstrated the GTP prepared teachers committed to the profession and to their community. This is in contrast to other alternative certification programmes such as Teach First, where teaching is actively promoted as a transient career phase (Wigdortz, 2012). Such policies offer short-term, cost-effective solutions but ignore the complexities of the issues and the need for an experienced and committed teaching force. Contrary to their stated underpinning principles in practice they thus tend to ‘sell disadvantaged students short by condemning them to inexperienced and less effective teachers who leave long before they reach their potential’ (Fullan and Hargreaves 2012, 76).

From 2012 the GTP was replaced by the School Direct Salaried (SDS) programme: trainees on this route are salaried and a proportion of the salary is funded by government. The SDS programme is a much reduced and reductive endeavour returning to the problematic ‘grow your own teachers’ (NCTL, 2010) approach of the early days of the GTP (Ofsted, 2002). Many of the criticisms levelled in the early days of the GTP are in danger of being repeated. In 2015-16, fewer than 10% of national training places were allocated to the SDS route (Whiting et al, 2016). This is fewer than half of the number of teachers prepared via the GTP. This latest iteration of an employment based ‘learn as you earn’ route seems set to be even shorter lived as it is already being phased out in favour of a school-led postgraduate teaching apprenticeship that ‘combines paid work with on- and off-the- job training, qualifications and progression’ (NCTL, 2017). When examined through the lens of current policy initiatives in England the demise of the GTP offers a somewhat sobering case; there is more than a little evidence of policy recycling, and policy amnesia, from previous iterations of employment-based teacher preparation.

Viewing the debates examined in this paper at a macro level, it is evident that contestation around the binary of traditional and alternative routes to teacher preparation has consumed significant resource on all sides for far too long. The incessant reforming of the teacher preparation landscape in England has only served to further sediment historic prejudices about the nature and location of teacher preparation (Childs, 2013). The landscape in England at the current time is as fractured as ever and prospective teachers are confronted with a bewildering choice of routes into teaching. Further, the debates too often focus on political and structural issues rather than on generating deeper understandings about learning how to teach in alternative programmes (Smith and Hodson, 2010).

As teacher educators an uncomfortable truth to confront is that during this period of overt political intervention the voices of the teaching profession and the academy have remained quiet (Childs and Menter, 2013). We would also concur with Zeichner and factor into this stasis a defensive protection of the status quo that has compounded the lack of advocacy for inventive alternative programmes thoroughly grounded in research evidence (2014). A diverse teacher education landscape has been carved out and there is no return to the gentler and more uniform terrain of thirty years ago when university provision dominated the sector. Despite repeated efforts on both sides of the debate to evidence the superiority of one route over another, the consensus is that there is no single ‘best’ route (Carter, 2015; Gorard 2017).

As England embarks upon yet another hastily conceived employment route, the Postgraduate Teacher Apprentice scheme, we argue for a move away from short-term, piecemeal and self-interested initiatives towards a systematic approach to beginning teacher preparation at a national level (Darling-Hammond, 2016). Darling-Hammond’s analysis of four successful education systems identified the common denominator as a commitment to a well-funded,

sustainable national system of teacher education (2016). In the case of England the first step towards a sustainable national system needs to be an acceptance, by all parties, of permanent diversity of provision and that alternative certification routes are here to stay. The next step needs to be a concerted focus on understanding how best to support the range of new teachers to enter and commit to the profession. Both stages would require all politicians and providers to work collaboratively and systematically for the common good in order to build an inclusive and mutually respectful system of beginning teacher education. This vision would require a level of selfless collaboration that seems highly unlikely in what is currently a highly competitive marketplace. In summary what is needed are ‘models of teacher education that will support creative, diverse and just teaching practices in an educational future that we can expect to look very different from the educational past’ (Connell, 2009, 226).

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