

Extending initial teacher education to raise standards and improve teacher retention

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About the research

Teacher training in England is in a state of flux at a time when the recruitment and retention of high quality teachers are serious policy issues. Many new entrants to teaching leave the profession in their first few years. There are strengths to traditional provision, as well as challenges which need to be addressed. However, it is not clear that radical reforms intended to shift control over provision away from universities and into schools are the next best step.

The professional development which teachers need, if they are to do their job well, includes practical aspects that take place in school, on the job. However, teachers also need to know and understand educational theory which they can apply successfully to their practice. Universities, working in partnership with schools, are best placed to acquaint beginning teachers with theory of this kind and there are serious defects in the argument that the university based element of teachers' professional formation is unnecessary.

This research explores ways of improving initial teacher education to help solve the looming teacher supply "crisis".

Policy implications:

- The value of theory and the distinctive role of universities in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) must be recognised.
- Teaching in England should move to a profession where most entrants would gain a provisional teaching qualification through an undergraduate degree or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education followed by two years apprenticeship leading to full licensure.
- Following university and before becoming fully qualified, new teachers should successfully complete a two-year "apprenticeship", with a view to developing both their theoretical and practical understanding of teaching.
- During this "higher level apprenticeship", new teachers should devote a day a week to academic study at university, with the rest of the time spent in classrooms being mentored by senior colleagues and being "sheltered from the most severe operational pressures in schools". There should also be opportunities to observe colleagues in other schools, to help apprentices broaden their experience.
- Lengthening the time teachers spend training would not be cheap. However, the failure to retain teachers, once trained, suggests a false economy embedded in current arrangements, as well as a considerable waste of precious public resources. Introducing a longer training period would raise the quality of the teaching profession and help solve the looming teacher supply "crisis".

Key findings

There is a prevailing “anti-intellectualism” behind recent moves by ministers to try to move the management of many teacher education courses away from universities.

The view of teaching as a craft used by commentators to challenge the value of the university’s contribution reveals a serious misunderstanding of the relationship between the theoretical, research-based and craft elements of teaching.

Teachers’ practical judgement depends on successful integration of all elements of teacher knowledge and ability. This combines sophisticated theoretical understanding as well as practical expertise, developed through an approach to initial teacher education which offers new entrants the long-term foundations for a successful career. Current training affords trainees little time to build their conceptual understanding and to prepare themselves for the rigours of the classroom.

Models of teacher education along the lines of internship, or higher grade apprenticeships, can balance university and school based learning in ways that promote professional judgement over time, although these programmes currently do not give sufficient weight to ethical issues in teaching. The latter problem can be remedied by the systematic inclusion of an additional, ethical dimension to the professional formation of good teachers.

Further Information:

Orchard, J & Winch, C 2015, ‘What training do teachers need? Why Theory is necessary to good teaching’. *IMPACT 22*, PESGB, Wiley Blackwell, Oxford
<http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/>

Winch, C, Oancea, A & Orchard, JL 2015, ‘The Contribution of Educational Research to Teachers’ Professional Learning – Philosophical Understandings’. *Oxford Review of Education*, vol 41.

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