Buckingham Journal of Education 2025 Vol 6 No 1 pp 5–14, DOI: 10.5750/tbje.v6i1.2699

TEACHER TRAINING IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 1833–1994

*Anthony O'Hear**
University of Buckingham, UK

ABSTRACT

The development of teacher formation in England and Wales from the early 19th century until 1994 is traced. Throughout the period there has been oscillation between treating teaching as a craft best learned in practice and as a discipline requiring university based academic study in education. The apprenticeship schemes of the early 19th century were gradually replaced by colleges dedicated to teacher training and university departments of education, themselves somewhat distinct in emphasis. By the mid 1970s a university degree and a state teaching certificate had became mandatory for teachers in state schools. But following much canvassed dissatisfaction with teaching in state schools, by the 1990s there were moves back to a school-based system of teacher training.

Keywords: teacher training, educational studies, the craft of teaching, teaching qualifications

The formation of teachers is fundamental to any education, and even more so if a country's system of education is run and directed whole or in part by the government. Not surprisingly, when in the mid-1980s the Secretary of State began to take control of the curriculum and public examinations in schools, there were efforts to control teacher formation too. I say teacher formation because from the very start there has been an ideological divide here between those who want to speak of teacher education and those who prefer the term teacher training, between those who see teacher formation in terms of the imparting of bodies of academic educational knowledge to would-be teachers in a university setting and those who see teaching largely in terms of a craft that is best acquired in the actual practice of teaching in a school under the direction of experienced mentors. This divide was neatly encapsulated in 1994 when the governmental Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) was replaced as its successor body by The Teacher Training Agency

*Corresponding author: e-mail: anthony.ohear@buckingham.ac.uk

(TTA). This paper will trace the somewhat meandering route taken by formal teacher formation in England and Wales (Scotland always being different educationally) from its inception in the 1830s until 1994.

Prior to the 1830s there was virtually no formal training for teachers, unless one considered that the mere possession of an MA degree (Master of Arts) as a qualification for teaching. A college for teachers was apparently founded in Southwark in 1798, but it was not until the parliamentary education bill of 1833 that the landscape really began to change. After the 1832 Reform Act, reform was in the air! The education bill actually failed, but, anticipating the direction of educational travel, it proposed compulsory education for children from the ages of six to twelve and also 'normal schools for teacher training'. In its wake a Committee for Education was set up in 1839 which established Her Majesty's Inspectorate for education, and teacher training colleges began to be established in the 1840s. By 1850 there were some 30 of these, offering two year courses, including study of what was to be taught and school practice, but little educational 'theory'. In 1846 apprentice 'pupil-teachers' were given state grants to become elementary school teachers. These were 13 year olds who were trained in school until the age of 18, whereupon, if successful, they were regarded as qualified teachers. The best of these were offered two-year scholarships to continue their apprenticeships in the training colleges, and this route became the most popular entry to elementary school teaching.

Though the vast majority of children were already in largely voluntary schools up to the age of 11, the famous Education Act of 1870 established local school boards for local authorities to set up their own schools. This Act was pivotal in paving the way towards a state take over of the education of all but the 7% who are in what are now known as 'independent' schools, a process more or less complete by the early twentieth century. In 1880, following the impetus of the 1870 Act, education was made legally compulsory up to the age of 10 (raised to 11 in 1893, 12 in 1899 and 14 in 1918). In the 10 years following the Act the number of 'certificated teachers' and pupil-teachers in training nearly tripled. However, the system was not well regarded and in 1888 the government-appointed Cross Commission recommended that pupil teachers should have more advanced professional study (as opposed to practice). But it stopped short of following the lead of a minority of its members who advocated a wholly university-based model of training, which would have struck at the existing training college sector. Nevertheless in the 1890s the universities began to develop their own education departments for the training of teachers, and by 1900 there were 16 such departments training a quarter of new elementary teachers. In the new century the universities also started specialist courses for secondary teachers. Underlining the difference of approach between these university departments and the old training colleges, the former began conducting specific courses on the history, theory and psychology of education. Interestingly the university departments of education remained specialist units, separate from other university departments.

The 1902 Education Act placed the public funding of schools into the hands of newly created Local Education Authorities which set up schools, including grammar schools, as well as their own teacher training colleges. Of these 22 were running by 1914, alongside the 16 university departments and 50 mostly denominational voluntary colleges, which were coming under increasing pressure. In 1907 the government began to control their intake targets and curricula, while the pupil-teacher apprentice system had been effectively phased out by the government requiring a minimum age of 16 for trainee teachers and minimum educational qualifications. The universities concentrated on offering one year postgraduate education qualifications for candidates who already had degrees, while the colleges provided two or three year courses on the back of no more than a secondary school education, after which trainees would move straight into teaching. (Indeed they had to, as they had to 'pledge' some years of teaching service in recompense for grants for college fees and maintenance).

Within this variegated system of teacher training a clear distinction began to emerge between the university education departments and the non-university training colleges, with the latter concentrating on non-graduates for elementary and non-selective schools, while the former specialised in graduates for the grammar schools (where most of the post-14 school education outside the independent sector took place until after the Second World War). This distinction of cohort was reflected in difference of philosophy, with the colleges tending to favour progressive pedagogical approaches (Froebel, Montessori, etc.,), along with a stress on the individual psychology of the child, as opposed to the more classically liberal or didactic mentality of the university teacher trainers. This distinction was reflected in and reinforced by the influential Hadow Report on primary education of 1931, which, while admitting the need for 'drill' in arithmetic, reading and writing, also advocated thinking of the teaching of young children 'not in terms of subjects to be taught…but in terms of experiences to be undergone and activities to be engaged in'. The training colleges has a predominantly non-academic intake, many of them young women anxious to foster nurturing relationships with their pupils, who would be from the younger age groups. They were thus far more open to child-centeredness and discovery methods, in the traditions of Rousseau and Dewey, than were the university departments preparing teachers for selective academic schools.

The 1944 Education Act saw the end of elementary schooling and the restructuring of local education into primary, secondary and further, and also a tri-partite division of secondary education into grammar, secondary modern and technical (thought the technical sector never really developed). Also in 1944 there was the McNair Committee on teacher training, aimed at putting some order into what was regarded as a chaotic system: 87 training colleges, mostly with two year courses producing just over 4,000 teachers per year, 22 university departments of education producing 1,800 per year. This was for a

teaching force in the state sector of around 200,000. 20% of this teaching force, mainly in the elementary schools, had no certificate at all, while only 9% of teachers were graduates with training. (It is worth noticing here that independent schools were outside of all of this, and appointed whom they liked, with or sometimes without degrees or teaching certificates of any sort.) To put order into the state system McNair set up 16 regional Area Teaching Organisations (ATOs), bringing together all the teacher training providers in a given area, under the direction of a university based 'Institute of Education', which was responsible for standards and evaluation in its area.

McNair was, though, unable to do much to make the teaching profession all graduate, because of a chronic shortage of teachers post-war. To cope with this an Emergency Teacher Scheme was introduced, open to anyone between the ages of 21 to 35 who has served in the forces for a year or more. They were given an intensive year of training, to be followed by two years of teaching part-time while continuing to train. By the time the scheme was wound up in 1951, 35,000 teachers had qualified through it, around one sixth of the teaching profession.

The 1944 Act, McNair and the Emergency Teacher Scheme between them are evidence of a powerful political desire to centralise education and direct it from central government, in line with many other areas of national life. As far as teacher training goes, this desire led to a huge expansion, with 55 new institutions for the purpose founded. By 1951, 25,000 students were in training, with a minimum of 5 '0' levels being demanded of them. By 1961, as McNair had advocated, three year courses became the norm for non-graduates, and a further 24,000 training places were made available. In the training colleges, 85% were training for primary schools. However, somewhat contrary to later developments, in 1957 an HMI (Inspectorate) report had emphasized the need for academic standards in teaching and rejected the idea of giving more time in teacher training for educational theory (or what is called now pedagogical knowledge) at the expense of academic subject study.

In 1963 the Robbins Report on higher education appeared. Among its many proposals, teacher training was to be brought firmly within the higher education world by insisting that 'Colleges of Education', as training colleges were now to be known, should have at least 750 students and be associated with a university, who would award the students a new Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, which was to be four years in length, so as to accommodate academic study of the subjects to be taught, pedagogical knowledge and teaching practice. In fact the B.Ed took off slowly – only 10% of trainees taking it in 1972, because of reluctance on their part to spend four as opposed to three years in training. Nevertheless, certification proceeded apace. From 1969 a university degree alone was insufficient to teach in a state primary school. A one year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) would also be required, the demand extended to secondary school teachers in 1973. Teaching in the state sector would henceforth be an all-graduate profession with its own

certification. Teachers in independent schools – where some of the best teachers and best educational practice were and are to be found – were, of course, exempt, and continue to be exempt if their school is happy to have them without the certificate or even in some cases a degree. Critics will say that this means that they are unqualified, but this is a somewhat stipulative use of the notion of qualification, as referring only to the qualification afforded by the state bureaucracy, as opposed, say to a good university degree or other relevant experience. Whatever the truth of this one way or another, it remains true at the time of writing that some teachers in independent schools never work in the state sector, so never actually require the government's qualified teacher status, or QTS as it is now called.

Meanwhile in the 1970s, the attack on smaller colleges of education continued. Following another governmental report (this time by Lord James of Rusholme), the 160 colleges of education were to amalgamate with larger educational bodies, in many cases with the burgeoning polytechnics. This suited those in government who wanted more control and oversight of teacher training, because, unlike the universities, polytechnics were under direct governmental supervision, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) having been set up in 1964 to validate polytechnic degrees.

From the point of view of schools, one effect of this centralising governmental policy was the virtual disappearance of the primary school teacher of yesteryear – the all encompassing 'mother hen' who presided over early years' classrooms without either an academic subject or a formal educational qualification, but who sometimes (often?) ran her classroom with wisdom, experience and a degree of love, tough or otherwise. An unrealistic idealization of the past or not, teaching, even of the youngest children, was henceforth to be an all graduate and fully certificated profession, its credibility to be assured by government agencies. And conforming to the ethos of the polytechnics in which the colleges were subsumed, teacher educators (the lecturers and professors of education) progressively became more and more specialized, either in their subjects or, more likely in educational theory, in both cases often removed from the practicalities of the classroom. The theory in question tended largely to focus on psychology and sociology of education. Some of this 'theory', for example the psychology of Piaget, according to which the child has to move through distinct conceptual stages before ascending to a higher one (and analogous thinking in the moral theory of Lawrence Kohlberg) or the Deweyesque idea of the child as an active discoverer and the teacher as merely a facilitator of this process, may have chimed in well enough with the attitudes prominent in the earlier teacher training colleges, which, as already noted tended to be child centered and progressive in educational terms.

Further, the 1970s were the era of educational comprehensivisation, in which there was a sustained assault on the grammar schools and their academic ethos, and indeed on any idea of grading pupils by ability even within a comprehensive school. Selection and grading of pupils was seen as a

manifestation of unjust and oppressive inequality, an idea bolstered by quasi-Marxist thinking in the hands of influential academic professors of education such as Brian Simon, a professed communist, and Basil Bernstein, who insisted that language itself was socially stratified, with no stratification better or more intellectually sophisticated than any other. The writings of French thinkers of the new left such as Foucault (whose writings anticipated current ideas about the non-existence of real gender differences), Althusser and Bourdieu, became increasingly prominent on B.Ed and PGCE reading lists. The book *Knowledge and Control* was both symptomatic and ubiquitous in teacher training. In the introduction trainees were told that logic, 'good' reasoning, asking questions and other activities 'prescribed for the learner' may be no more than 'social conventions'; to counteract this, sociology of education must seek to explain how and why 'certain dominant categories (of thought and knowledge) persist and the nature of their possible links to sets of interests and activities such as occupational groupings.' (pp.5–6) Thoughts such as these chimed in with the egalitarian sensibilities of many trainee teachers and, more important, their lecturers. Apart from its political implications, this theorizing of the practical activity of teaching chipped away at the notion of teaching itself as mainly a craft based discipline, best learned through practice and experience. For many teachers from the 1970s and 1980s onwards teaching itself became part of a political drive towards social egalitarianism and leftist values more generally, critical of business and enterprise and also of Western colonialism, part of what the Italian leftist Antonio Gramsci called 'the long march through the institutions' (a phrase given a new lease of life in the 1960s by the revolutionary student leader Rudi Dutschke).

These changes to the nature and ethos of teacher training in the 1970s went largely unremarked at the time, in part because this was a period of change and turmoil in the sector as a whole, due mainly to the replacement of grammar and secondary modern schools by comprehensives, and further often bitter arguments about whether streaming was or was not permissible within them as their promised grammar school levels tended to erode. Further problems arose due to a falling birth rate, as a result of which in 1973 the number of teacher training places was reduced from 119,000 to 65,000, and again down to 45,000 in 1978. The ATOs were wound up in 1975, and prospective teacher numbers put in the hands of a national advisory council on teacher training and supply. 35 of the 160 colleges of education were closed. By the end of the 1970s a third of teacher training was in the universities and nearly all the rest in polytechnics. By the early 1980s teaching had become an all graduate profession supported by powerful trade unions, in state schools anyway.

However, while not a lot was understood generally about what was going on in teacher training in the 1970s, there was considerable worry publicly about standards and behaviour in schools. This crystalised around the notorious case of the William Tyndale School in Islington in 1974–5, where pupils had a great deal of choice in what they did in school, how they behaved, and even whether

they stayed in school or not during the school day. There were also the so-called Black Papers in which academics and prominent commentators lamented what they saw as a decline in teaching and education, reflecting similar adverse comments in the public media. All this disquiet, justified or not, led to the Labour prime minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech of 1976, in which he spoke of the unease felt by parents and others about 'the new informal teaching methods'. Preceding Callaghan's speech there was also an Education Department Yellow Book report which spoke of the abandonment of standards and lack of discipline in many schools, pupils learning what they pleased and the unaccountability of teachers at the time. The stage was set a new era of robust governmental intervention in education, which was no longer by government to be treated with benign neglect, as a Burkean institution autonomous of the state, whose members would run it largely themselves. While this new attitude manifested itself most notably in the introduction of s national curriculum and governmental control over examinations in the late 1980s, it applied to teacher training as much as to other parts of the education sector.

Thus, in 1984 what was now a Conservative government set up a Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), in order to regulate and standardise the formation of teachers, supposedly in line with government policy on the matter. Thus CATE insisted that four year B.Ed courses would have two years of academic study of the subject(s) trainees were to teach. Primary school teachers were to pay 'sufficient and substantial' attention to language and mathematics. Teacher educators were to demonstrate that they had had 'recent and relevant' experience of teaching in schools. Numbers of hours were specified for particular topics, for example 100 hours for the study of language in a Primary B.Ed (though, surprisingly in the light of later developments, phonics, which was unpopular in the world of teacher education, was not insisted on).

However, for all its theoretical power, which, of course, included the review of the accreditation of a teacher training institution, CATE did not itself inspect institutions, but relied on the reports of HMI Inspectors and the responses of institutions to CATE's demands for paperwork. So, while some *courses* were sent back for modification by CATE, for the whole of its life not a single one of the 92 *institutions* providing teacher education under its remit was ever threatened with closure. And while CATE's directions made it difficult for the institutions to provide free standing courses on psychology, sociology or philosophy, as many had done prior to 1984, other CATE directives insisted on teacher training courses paying due attention to issues of race and gender, as well as ensuring that trainees developed an understanding of 'the type of society in which their pupils are growing up, with its cultural and racial mix'. Due emphasis was to be given to the differences between pupils and the rates and ways in which they learn. In CATE's circular 24/89 these emphases were, if anything, stronger. 'Multi-cultural education' was to be a 'cross-curricular

dimension', while 'institutions may find it helpful to draw up a written equal opportunities policy and will also be interested in the report published in June 1989 by the Equal Opportunities Commission which relates specifically to initial teacher training'. Institutions 'may' have found these things 'helpful', but one can only speculate what inspectors would have concluded were the 'help' declined by an institution. No doubt the institution would in short order have begun to accept the 'help'. But there was actually little need for any of this nudging and cajoling, because these were attitudes already firmly embedded in the teacher training mentality.

More relevant to our analysis here is the point that the sociological and political underpinning of these attitudes (often neo-Marxist, almost invariably educationally egalitarian and certainly unconservative and at times anti-Western) were the very ones the government of the time (Mrs. Thatcher's) was opposed to and trying to root out. Equally CATE's prescriptions did nothing to counter-balance what critics (and not only Conservative ones) saw as the unproductive attitudes to literacy and numeracy and more generally the child-centeredness in teaching and hostility to testing and exams, which had taken root in the educational world, what Callaghan had referred to as the 'new informal methods of teaching'. In other words CATE, the body set up to change the climate of practice and opinion in teacher education, was actually fostering or at least protecting that very climate. After the initial shock of its creation, the providers of teacher training found that they could work very well with it. It made no radical change to their practice or ideology. Indeed it actually helped to preserve them, in part by imposing a standard model of what teacher training should be and what should go into it. CATE certainly did nothing to quench the flow of courses in teacher training 'tackling inequalities through the curriculum', insisting on promoting 'anti-heterosexist' curriculum provision, 'deconstructing' the 'common sense knowledge that surrounds the notion of youth' or examining the manner in which the concept 'child' is constructed by 'class, race, gender, disability and sexuality', to quote from some course materials typical of the time. CATE's embargo on specific course in sociology and the rest did not prevent such themes from being developed in what were supposed to be the study of the subjects to be taught.

Broadly speaking CATE did not do what its progenitors intended it to do, and this failure became obvious when in 1988 a report by HMI, a body not normally hostile to teacher training as it then was, reported that 25% of lessons taken by newly qualified teachers were unsatisfactory and 20% of probationary teachers lacked some or many basic skills. This was the context in which questions began to be asked in political circles as to whether the problem was not so much CATE or particular institutions but in the whole model of teacher education/training. Was the ability to teach effectively best developed through largely academic study, interspersed with only a modicum of actually teaching and work in schools more generally? And, going on from that, the CATE model was all in terms of inputs, courses studies, hours devoted to this and that. But

if the results of teaching are what matter, what good is it if someone has excellent academic or pedagogical knowledge, but cannot actually teach? Going back to the fabled 'mother-hen' of earlier years, might some people without formal university education still make excellent teachers in certain contexts? Equally mightn't the teaching profession be enriched by experienced people from other fields make good teachers later in their career, without formal training in a university or polytechnic?

Questions of this sort, with the occasional nod to the example of independent schools, began to enter a debate about teacher training. In 1989 Kenneth Baker, the then Secretary of State for Education made a significant move by introducing what was called the Licensed Teacher Scheme, whereby new would-be teachers who had degrees in the relevant subject could be employed by a school willing to take them on, and after two years in post, the school itself could apply for them to be awarded QTS. This scheme was bitterly resisted by the teacher training establishment, and Baker's proposal was emasculated by being restricted to people over the age of 26. Nevertheless HMI rather reluctantly admitted in a report on the scheme in 1993 that they could find no overall difference in quality between teachers qualified as Licensed teachers and others coming from the conventional routes. The scheme never really took root, in part because of the increasing amount of regulation in was subjected to in the later 1990s (a not a-typical fate of simple governmental initiatives unpopular with regulation-loving administrators). However within CATE itself there was a possibly more significant move, arising from some consideration of the questions raised in the previous paragraph and which also contributed to the demise of the Licensed Teacher programme.

Following the questions as to the efficacy and direction of university-based teacher training, in the Autumn of 1991 CATE had a weekend meeting to consider whether school-based teacher training should not at least be tried. In such a system the majority, if not all of the training should take place in schools, rather than in universities. And, equally significant, courses should be tested and judged not on their inputs, what went into them, but rather on the outputs. The competences expected of a teacher could be listed, and courses assessed on how successful their graduates were at fulfilling those competences. This is not the place to say exactly how that meeting went, though it is just worth noting that the officials and inspectors who attended CATE meetings, who spoke first, were wholeheartedly opposed to any radical change, whereas the actual membership (including myself) came round to a shift in the direction of more school based methods and competences. A sub-group of the members then met Kenneth Clarke, the then Secretary of State. Later that year, and in his North of England speech in January 1992, he announced that the government was now firmly committed to school based training, with schools, including independent schools, to be equal partners in training, and that in one year postgraduate course 80% of a trainee's time was to be spent in school rather than in university (later reduced to 66% after pressure from teacher training providers and others).

Clarke's 1992 structure paved the way for development in the future of a far more school-oriented system, in which teacher competences would be sought and tested through what came to be known as the Teachers' Standards. Perhaps over-excited by what seemed to be the direction of travel after January 1992, later that same year the Prime Minister's Policy Unit floated the idea that mature people could be inducted into infant teaching after just one year's training. The largely successful Emergency Teacher Scheme of the 1940s was forgotten. The proposal was immediately dubbed by critics 'Mum's Army', and faced almost universal opposition in the world of education. It died without trace, but Clarke's ideas for a more school-based approach were implemented over the years. In 1994 CATE itself was wound up, to be replaced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). Provision was also made for schools, individually or collectively, to set up their own teacher training programmes with or without university involvement. This is not the place to go into what happened after 1994, under the remit of the TTA (later to be the Training and Development Agency (TDA)), save to note that with the change in the nomenclature of those bodies from education to training in 1994, teacher training in England and Wales was circling back to its 1830 origins of apprenticeships and small colleges outside the university system.

REFERENCES

Godsen, P. (1972). 'The Evolution of the Teaching Profession', Oxford: Blackwell.

Jones, H. (1924). 'The Training of Teachers in England and Wales', Oxford University Press.

Judge, H., Lemosse, M., Paine, L. and Sedlack, M. (1994). 'The University and the Teachers, France, the United States, England', Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, Oxford: Triangle Press.

O'Hear, A. (1988). 'Who Teachers the Teachers?', London: Social Affairs Unit.

Rich, R. (1933). 'The Training of Teachers in England and Wales in the Nineteenth Century', Cambridge University Press.

Young, M.F.D. (ed) (1971). 'Knowledge and Control', Collier-MacMillan.