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Government Policy in England on the Financing of ITT: Value for Money or a Waste of Resources?

Abstract

A recent report by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2016) has criticised the Department of Education's organisation of Initial Teacher Training programmes in England as not providing value for money. This paper explores recent reports from government agencies, Parliament and the press on this issue. Further to this, leaders of various programmes for teacher training, including those run by a university, a School Centred Teacher Training organisation and a lead school in an Academy consortium, between them providing a wide variety of programmes, were questioned on the recent actions of the Department for Education and the National College for Teaching and Leadership with regard to how their actions have affected providing programmes for prospective teachers. The paper concludes that the NAO's claim that the DfE is not providing value for money is correct and that in order to prevent further wastage a more measured and coherent approach to teacher training in England is required.

Keywords: financing teacher training, organising teacher training, training effective teachers

Introduction

Hanushek and Rivkin (2006) question why so little research has occurred on what costs are entailed in training new teachers. There has been a great deal of discussion in England and in the USA about the varying effectiveness and quality of teachers produced by the different routes into the profession (Decker et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2005; Kane et al., 2008; Allen et al., 2014), and yet there is no systematic comparison of the costs associated with each training type. Teacher training programmes in England have for the last four years, failed to recruit to the target set by the Department for Education (DfE) and controlled by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) (NAO, 2016). Roberts and Foster (2016) in a House of Commons Briefing Paper record that in the year 2015-2016 for the first time, more than half the post graduate Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes (51%) were based in school as opposed to university. There has been a massive increase in ITT providers of school-centred routes, up from 56 in 2011/12 to 155 in 2015/16. These authors raise the point that this has resulted in university staff feeling 'that their training expertise is being side-lined and that the changes risk creating imbalances in the supply and demand for teacher training places' (Roberts & Foster, 2016, p. 3). Further to this has been the refusal of the DfE, (at the end of 2016) to issue information on how the ITT places had been allocated for 2017. This has caused anger and resulted in The University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) to question why the national figures have not been published, as individual providers have known their own numbers since September 2016. In previous years the national allocations were available in October. UCET chair,

Nobel Rogers accused the government of covering the specific recruitment figures in a 'veil of secrecy' (Ward, 2016, no page).

The move to the domination of school-centred programmes had come about as a result of the introduction of School Direct (SD) programmes after 2010, rising from the belief by the then Secretary of State for Education that teaching is best learned at the feet of a master, not from theoretical input from university staff (TES, 2010). However, SD has not recruited to target and the whole training process is further complicated by the tremendous rise in providers of ITT programmes, resulting from the change from university based to school centred programmes. The inspection of those programmes is a cause for concern, as it is resulting in ever increasing costs. Since 2010 there have been significant changes in ITT programme provision with a marked increase in numbers of trainees following the Teach First (TF) route, initially in secondary schools, followed by an expansion into the primary sector. In these programmes top graduates from 'good' universities are given intensive six week preparation programmes, then put into schools in 'difficult' areas and supported for two years while they work to gain qualified teacher status. After this service they can move to other careers or may expect rapid promotion in schools.

Funding as a result of these changes has been targeted towards programmes where schools are at the forefront. In addition, more financial support was targeted at specific shortage subject areas such as secondary physics, computing and maths which has also been strongly criticised by NAO (2016), as there is no independent evidence that these payments actually result in trainees being recruited and then taking up teaching jobs after qualifying. These concerns are set against the knowledge that school budgets are reducing and pupil numbers rising. An answer to a parliamentary question revealed that more than one thousand Local Authority schools and one hundred Academy Trusts are in debt and head teachers have to spend large amounts of money, that they cannot afford, in attempts to attract staff (Coughlan, 2016).

The main routes provided for potential trainees are, School Direct (SD) (salaried and unsalaried), Teach First (TF salaried), School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) offering PGCE and/or SD routes, consortia of schools led by a lead teaching school offering SD and TF, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) offering the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), SD and Bachelor degrees (BEd/BA) and SD.

A rising tide of criticism directed at the DfE and NCTL was targeted at the costs of financing the constant changes and the confusion the repeated interference of these two bodies was creating for providers of ITT. The DfE (2015) produced the following figures: new trainees in 2015/16 in England, 28,148 to post graduate programmes, including TF numbers (included in the overall figures for the first time). This is a rise from the academic year 2014/15. There were also 5,440 undergraduates, compared with 5,936 in the academic year 2014 to 2015. The cost of training new teachers for English schools was estimated by DfE at £700 million per annum. Despite this expenditure, vacancies are rising and schools finding it difficult to appoint and retain teachers with a rising tide of resignations from the profession. The year 2015/16 saw 6% of training places for post graduates unfilled, with specific areas of real problems, for example a 29% shortfall of trainee physics teachers. The recruitment round for 2016/17 has shown an overall reduction of two

percent in those beginning training programmes. Although primary recruited to target, there were fewer applications and take up of secondary subject places in a wide range of subjects, including those part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects, down five per cent and considerably more in the non EBacc subject areas (George, 2016).

Costs of ITT routes and benefits to schools

A report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) on ITT costs (Allen et al., 2014) had pointed to the great variance in the costs of training around 20,000 new teachers annually, related to the different routes offered. Costings arise from ‘a combination of student finance (tuition fees and maintenance loans and maintenance grants) and direct grant funding’ (Allen et al., 2014, p. 1). These vary in different parts of the country and the subject and degree classification of the trainee. The IFS claimed that the 2014 report was the first evidence presented as to the cost effectiveness of the different routes into teaching and that no particular route attracted the ‘best’ most effective candidates. The average cost to government at the time of the IFS report for providing this student finance was large (between £13,000 and £18,000 per trainee for postgraduate ITT and between £10,000 and £27,000 for undergraduate ITT) (Allen et al., 2014, p. 2). Student loan finance is available for tuition fees and living costs to be repaid with interest, whilst working (DfE, 2016). However, the majority of teachers will never pay off the loans (undergraduate and post graduate) before they are written off (Allen et al., 2014). Non-salaried routes cost less than those paying a salary as for some trainees, the school contributes to the earnings of the trainee and student loans are not available for salaried trainees. TF is the most expensive route into teaching and the one with the highest drop-out rate as only two years; service is demanded. Reform, a right wing think tank claims that TF provides 7% of new secondary teachers but consumes 11% of training costs (Hazell, 2017). In addition for all routes, there is the cost of staff time to mentor, support, observe and provide feedback to trainees. This is calculated at around eighty to one hundred pounds weekly for each trainee in term time.

An initiative introduced by the government as a pilot project at the beginning of 2016 the *National Teaching Service* (GOV.UK, 2016), attempted to recruit one hundred teachers and middle leaders to volunteer to work in schools in difficult areas, where recruitment was a problem, with the intention of recruiting one thousand teachers. The only incentive offered was removal expenses. The launch cost the NCTL a considerable amount money but only twenty four teachers volunteered to join the initiative and as a result the pilot was cancelled in December of the same year (Kirk, 2016); another demonstration of the ineffective leadership offered by the DfE and NCTL.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

The Institute for Public Policy Research IPPR criticised poor and sporadic CPD offered to teachers in many English schools, often unsupported by theoretical evidence of its efficacy (Lightfoot, 2016). Annually around one billion pounds is spent on developing teachers after their initial training, but the IPPR report claims that CPD offered to teachers does not appear to improve the quality of their work (Hood, 2016). IPPR also pointed to the ‘one-off’ nature of CPD, rather than a

developing programme and that provision is not based on well tested research theories. As a result, there is little improvement in teacher quality five years after training has ended. Good consistent CPD aids teachers in developing and becoming experts, who can support colleagues to reach similar goals (Hood, 2016).

Research

In order to discover the effects of the changes made to ITT by the DfE and NCTL, leaders of various ITT programmes were questioned on their experiences in recent years of working with these two bodies and the consequences of the changes to their programmes. The respondents included an Education School Leader at a university, a PGCE SCITT leader, a SCITT primary SD leader and representatives of about twenty schools involved with School Direct and Teach First Programmes. The programmes run by these groups were varied; PGCE (primary, secondary and early years) and SD run by the university and the SCITT and undergraduate programmes at the university. The schools involved in the research were also involved with PGCEs plus SD, TF and some were closely involved with universities or the SCITT for support on theoretical training and assessment of trainees' performances. However, some schools in large academy chains undertook all the school led training (SD, salaried and unsalaried) alone, believing they had sufficient expertise to provide all that was required to train new teachers, though many admitted they had not had much previous experience in this role. Some consortium lead schools had attempted to become SCITTs themselves, seeing this as another source of income. However, in the year 2015/16 funding for SCITTs had been cut and they were finding it difficult to manage their expenses, let alone make money, which had been their expectation.

The greatest changes had occurred in university education departments NCTL cutting numbers on PGCE programmes. This resulted, in one university, being forced to close three successful programmes for secondary subjects, one for a shortage area and the department being forced to agree to accept SD numbers to make up for these financial losses. SD is not as well financed as the previous graduate and registered teacher programmes which it replaced. Finance for undergraduate programmes had also been cut and early years numbers withdrawn for one year and restored in the following year. This caused great difficulty with staffing provision, as did reduction in allotted numbers in various secondary subjects. The university SD route included twenty full days of theory training, (professional and subject knowledge) and recently more schools had asked to be used by the university for placing SD trainees, moving from other providers or their own schemes. The university leader said it was impossible to compare quality of provision, as the programmes were so varied, with some including very little theoretical input. The leader expressed concerns that she had discovered through UCET that due to poor guidance from DfE, schools had been taking on salaried SD trainees without the requisite three years' experience, putting them straight into classrooms on their own and paying them as part timers. She believed this was due to the cuts in funding for SD salaries. This had resulted in DfE re-writing instructions to say that all SD paid trainees must be full time.

The SCITT had lost income due to NCTL cuts to the SD budget and one school and its satellite schools starting to train teachers themselves. When asked if they

were managing to cope, the response from the SCITT was ‘it is a constant struggle to provide a high quality programme on a decreasing budget we have lost thousands of pounds of income’. The respondent said that the SCITT was still financially viable but ‘only just’, due to the enormous competition from neighbouring lead schools providing their own training. They had no links with universities and all their training money was kept and used in-house. The SCITT however, had to charge schools for their input on theory, lesson observation, mentor training and assessment of trainees. However, the lead schools had also suffered from the vacillations of DfE and NCTL with trainee numbers being capped, then uncapped, numbers cut and payments reduced for salaried trainees, meaning the schools had to find more money to provide salaries for trainees.

A series of emails seen by the researcher, at the beginning of the recruitment drive for 2017 entry, castigated NCTL and clearly demonstrated the frustration of many schools and the SCITT, who were being instructed by NCTL to post their vacancies on the area of the University and College Admission Service (UCAS) website allotted to teacher training, before any providers had been allocated numbers. There was a total breakdown in communication between the main players in the recruitment process, causing anger and despair to those in schools attempting to attract new recruits.

The SCITT leader described the interference by the DfE/NCTL in the previous year’s recruitment round as ‘a fiasco’ as the normal method of bidding for training place numbers occurred; numbers granted, but then mid-year all providers were told to recruit as many trainees as they could without restriction, until told to stop by NCTL. All programme leaders considered this intervention as a disaster as it caused ‘a mad scramble to recruit as many as we could meaning we took on candidates who at other times we might have rejected, believing that better ones often come along at the end of the recruiting period’ (SD SCITT primary programme leader). This led to the SCITT being accused of inefficiency by prospective trainees who because of this action, had interview offers withdrawn. The SCITT leader spoke of the problems of dealing with the constant changes in the recruitment process caused by the ever-changing instructions received from DfE and NCTL.

When asked how the system could be improved and provide better value for money, the primary SCITT School Direct leader requested a return to former funding patterns with the SCITT being allocated funding to use with schools, rather than NCTL funding schools, who then could decide whether or not to use some training services of a university or a SCITT. This respondent thought, to retain high quality training there needed to be a concentration of funding on providers who offered it, rather than money being given to providers whose quality had, in some cases, not been proven. The university leader complained about the wording of the compliance documents Ofsted used to judge standards as they appeared to be written by ‘people at DfE who knew little or nothing about ITT’. Also, the DfE website no longer contains pages of advice for providers who are still waiting to find out the national picture for training place allocations, which the university leader believed was caused by to the ‘failure of the centres of excellence initiative’ where some chosen but unnamed providers had controversially been allotted three year numbers allocations.

Several respondents wanted more support from DfE/NCTL for CPD provision and funding Masters Degrees and expressed concern over the in-house efforts of some lead schools to provide all the CPD for their staff with little or no input from universities where education research is undertaken.

Conclusion

It is clear from the findings that all is not well in the relationship between the DfE, NCTL and training providers. As the critics of the ITT system point out, the high costs are not providing value for money and the needed trainees are not coming forward, nor is CPD being effective in improving teaching and learning. It is time that DfE, NCTL and education professionals, together with government agencies looked in detail at the evidence as to the cost effectiveness of the diverse and multi-faceted routes into teaching and the performance of these in providing the nations' new teachers and evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership of DfE and NCTL so as to improve effectiveness and a sensible use of scarce resources.

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