

Innovation, or returning to the Victorian era, when preparing teachers for the classroom? An evaluation of the School Direct training programme for teachers in England

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the School Direct route into teaching, introduced in England in 2012, questioning its claims for innovation as a school-led, as opposed to university-led initiative. The paper compares this route into teaching with other programmes, where higher education institutions are routinely involved in training and with the pupil-teacher programme introduced in the nineteenth century, which also trained new teachers in schools. Questionnaires were issued to early years primary trainees and newly qualified teachers, in order to examine their experiences of the training whilst visiting tutors were questioned and mentors on training programmes underwent group interviews to ascertain their experiences. The drawbacks of this school-led approach to training are examined and possible consequences explored. The authors conclude that previous errors in preparing teachers are being repeated, possibly due to the ignorance of politicians who appear unaware of previous training approaches and who seem to consider the School Direct route an innovation in teacher education. In particular there is a serious lack of subject knowledge and pedagogical theory underpinning the practical training and mentors lack the time and the knowledge to fill the gaps left by the change to a programme which is skills based. In addition, the initiative is failing to recruit to target resulting in a possible teacher recruitment crisis.

Keywords: school direct, teacher training, pupil-teacher- school-led

Introduction

In 2012 the then Secretary of State for Education introduced the School Direct Programme (SD) as an innovative way of preparing teachers for work in English schools. The idea of school-led training was presented as a movement to give schools more influence over the development of the teaching workforce. The programme was a move on from the earlier *school-based* programmes, such as the Graduate and Registered

teacher programmes (GRTP), where schools and universities worked together to train teachers, mostly in schools but with higher education institutions' (HEIs) involvement. The move towards *school-led* training however, was seen as an exciting innovative change, giving schools more power to train the teachers they needed. The question raised in this paper asks if this is really the innovation claimed, or a return to early training efforts common in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Are we innovating or returning to a previous system that was deemed inadequate?

Pupil-teacher scheme

According to Keating (2010) the first national pupil- teacher scheme was established in England in 1846, though earlier, teacher training had taken place via the establishment of training colleges, most of which were allied to Christian churches. Hand-picked students with suitable ability and moral character were chosen to be trained by head teachers before and after a full day of teaching. That is, they worked untrained and learned by copying the performance and teaching styles of the other teachers in the school. They were apprenticed for five years, providing that they passed an annual examination by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (IoE, no date). Successful training resulted in the student teacher being certificated and allowed to sit an exam for entry to training college, or to work immediately as an uncertified teacher. This latter option was popular with women, who were not expected by their families to leave home and would be barred from teaching once married. Whilst in this 'apprenticeship' trainees were paid at low rates. The popularity of the pupil-teacher route rose massively after the 1870 Education Act made elementary education compulsory and there was an urgent need for more teachers. However, questions began to be asked at the beginning of the twentieth century about the standards of these 'unqualified' teachers and how their training could be improved. Gradually, the system was adapted, as after the 1870 Act the proportion of elementary teachers who were pupil-teachers and therefore unqualified, was at least one quarter of all those employed in the sector (Keating, 2010). Dent (1977) praised Morant, who was to become Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education in 1903, for his attempts to improve the standard of elementary school teachers, raising the age for beginning the pupil-teacher scheme to fifteen, unless HMI gave permission for an earlier start to training, for example in rural schools where there was an urgent need for new teachers. Attempts to raise standards continued; Morant demonstrating a determination to provide more and better instruction for potential teachers, including more subject theory. His 1903 regulations demanded thirty hours per year of instruction, a limit to the time each day these pupil-teachers could be in front of a class and the discussion of different approaches to learning, but questions continued to be asked if this was the best way to train teachers and if school staff had the time or expertise to undertake the job. As a consequence, with the encouragement of Morant, more regulations were introduced to enable teachers to be instructed in pupil-teacher centres run by the local Boards of Education. Gradually teacher training began to move into colleges and universities and bursaries were established to help with expenses of training. However, the pupil-teacher programme as a route into teaching was not completely removed until the end of the 1930s.

After the second World War the urgent need for teachers, as so many had been killed or wounded in combat, resulted in the establishment of emergency training colleges administrated by Local Councils, through Local Education Authorities. The McNair Report in 1944 (HAD, no date) had suggested that the way to meet the urgent need for teachers was to establish organisations in different areas to bring together the work of training colleges and universities and establish Education Departments or Institutes in universities. In addition a central examination board was established to control the final examination, which enabled the trainees to become qualified teachers. The report also recommended that training should last for three years, but this was not implemented until 1960.

By the 1970s (Furlong et al, 2000) most teachers were trained for the primary phase and for some secondary subjects by a 3 or 4 year course in a Higher Education Institution and rapidly a solely graduate profession was introduced, with Bachelor of Education (BEd.) or Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees with Qualified Teacher Status. Gradually, the old teacher training colleges were absorbed into polytechnics or universities, or became universities in their own right and were responsible for the teaching of theory, whilst growing cooperation between schools and HEIs, improved practice and involved the training of school based mentor

The majority of teachers were educated in universities by the 1990s (Tomlinson, 2001), most taking a first degree and following this with the one year Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) (Douglas, 2012). Indeed Douglas (2012:3) describes this phase as one where teacher education was 'school based' as PGCE programmes involved a minimum of 24 weeks (18 in primary) in at least two schools to give students practical classroom experience. PGCE also involves academic study and understanding of how to teach successfully and an assessment of teaching skills in the classroom. For primary and early years training, the BEd. or BA were still popular, though these students also had the choice of a PGCE programme. The 1994 Education Act established the Teacher Training Authority and the training of teachers underwent a huge transformation, including the commencement of the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) with the intention of providing high quality training for trainee teachers whilst working in the school environment. Programmes for teacher training had historically been rigid in their content, but the varied expertise of the potential applicants to this programme required the necessity to maximise their potential and formulate a path around their expertise and this was viewed as an innovative approach by New Labour, who came into government in 1997. Applicants came from industry, law, medicine and also the programme attracted teaching assistants who had aspirations to become teachers, but needed to retain a salary. The aim of the GTP was to enable trainees to decide and control their own direction and process of training, within a carefully constructed framework. Whilst the trainees participated in sixty days of teacher centred training, the role of the plan was to promote learner-centred training and acknowledge the variety of learning styles and experiences of the trainees, so that by outlining the process and resources available, they would then become the experts in managing their programme and become empowered to determine their training path. Further to this the Registered Teacher Programme (RTP) was developed for those who did not possess a first degree, with co-operation from higher education to provide pro-

grammes which enabled candidates to build onto their existing higher education credits and earn a degree and qualified teacher status. This route was popular with teaching assistants many of whom had some higher qualifications but not a full degree. However, this move to more practice-based programmes has been criticised by Spendlove et.al. (2010) who assert that in recent years in university and school-based training programmes, practice is being prioritized and that theoretical pedagogical knowledge is losing favour in teacher training, because of the rising demand for trainees to spend more time in front of classes and less time in lectures.

In the new century the Teach First programme was introduced. This route was intended for high quality graduates with leadership potential, who would initially serve as inspirational teachers in low income communities, swiftly moving onto leadership roles in the profession. Following 6 weeks intensive training, students are placed in school for 2 years with a possibility of a PGCE award and a Masters degree. At the end of that period trainees can expect fast promotion or leave teaching for careers in other professions.

School Direct, the “new initiative”, enables schools to recruit and select the trainees needed, with an expectation they will be employed within the group of schools in which they were trained. A network of Teaching Schools based on the model of Teaching Hospitals leads the training and professional development of teachers and head teachers and bids for places for the training in the partnership schools (Ratcliffe, 2014). Schools can also negotiate how they want their teacher training programme to be delivered, in partnership with an accredited Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provider, such as a university or School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) who remain accountable for the quality of training and ensuring that it meets the government ITT standards. A proportion of the funding for the trainee is paid to that provider. However, it is possible for the lead school to take on the role of trainer and provider using mentors in the partner schools to deliver most of the training.

The features of the School Direct programme are:

- Partnerships of schools under the umbrella of The Teaching School request training places from government
- Schools are allocated training places for School Direct
- Trainees are employed by schools as unqualified teachers paid or unpaid
- The programme should attract high quality graduates with at least 3 or 4 years career experience

The training is highly differentiated to meet the needs of the school in which employment, following training is expected, although this is more relevant to secondary schools because of subject specialisms. However, this factor can be a disadvantage, as if when they are qualified, trainees move to work in a school with a different ethos or style they may find their new position difficult. The plan for SD was to increase the proportion of time trainees spend in the classroom and to attract well-qualified graduates who wanted a career change after several years working in other areas (Ratcliffe, 2104).

School Direct focuses on mentors who provide the catalyst for change, enabling the trainee to learn within the school environment. However, as in the pupil-teacher route trainees stay in one school for the majority of their training and research carried out by Hilton & Tyler, (2015), with School Direct primary trainees, successful SD qualified teachers, mentors and visiting tutors showed that for many of the 22 trainee respondents, there was a limited experience of other school environments, or exploration of different approaches to teaching and learning. This is similar to the limited experience of pupil-teachers who could spend five years in the same school. In addition the amount of theoretical input experienced by the trainees studied was extremely varied for both subject and pedagogical theory. Some trainees had input from a SCITT or university, but for some, most of the theory had to come from the lead school of the consortium or their host school. This scenario is similar to that of the pupil-teacher route where school heads were responsible for theoretical training. Hobson & Mallderz (2002) question whether mentors or even senior teachers are sufficiently up to date with recent research studies on teaching and learning, or if the time allotted to theory in the SD programme is sufficient. In other educationally high performing countries the move has been for more input from higher education not less (Universities UK, 2014). Sadly, the trainees questioned, in most cases were happy with the less theoretical approach of School Direct than would have been the case on a PGCE route, as they believed 'learning on the job' was the best way to train. Some however, did question the lack of theoretical input in areas of subject knowledge and teaching approaches, but many did not seem to realise there is more than one way (their school's way) to carry out the learning and teaching process. In PGCE programmes the amount of time spent studying theory is much greater and this was also true of the GRPT schemes. Those following BEd. and BA programmes also have a greater time spent studying subject and pedagogical theory as they follow a three or four year course. Trainees on many of these programmes were expected to undertake research in the schools in which they train. This is not present in all SD programmes, mainly due to restricted time limits.

Hobson et al's (2009) research has a number of implications for teacher educators and policy makers; in particular, it highlights the necessity to adopt a collegial approach in training teachers, not always present in the fragmented methods of delivering the SD programme (via school/university partnerships, teaching schools, school consortia, SCITTs and online providers). The focus of their findings also centres on the need to ensure there is provision, not only to address the developmental needs of the trainee teachers, but also those who support them. Mentor training and the choice of the right mentor is crucial and though many respondents praised their mentor, in some cases respondents clearly lacked support in this area. Some complained of mentors who had been forced to accept them and did not follow correct procedures for the programme. This lack of good support from experienced staff was further noted in the responses of some trainees, who rarely or never saw a senior member of staff, or a visiting tutor from outside the school. Even more worrying was that they did not appear, in many cases, to understand what they were missing. Due to the fragmented forms of delivery of SD mentor training, a consistent approach is not possible, even though in many cases the mentor was almost the sole guide for the trainee. When questioned about the theoretical knowledge they had received, subject and pedagogical knowledge was recalled

by only around half of the respondents though 100% remembered being taught about behaviour management (a present government concern). Most agreed that there was, in the programme delivery, insufficient input on assessment theory and how to apply it. Although the sample size here was small 22 (19 trainees and 3 successful SD teachers) this gives rise for concern.

In addition, visiting tutors who were asked their opinions on the SD programme were concerned about the lack of theoretical understanding underpinning practice in SD trainees, their belief that their school's way was the right, and possibly only way to approach teaching and learning and that mentors often were not sufficiently trained with a wide understanding of the implications of educational research and did not possess sufficient up-to-date subject knowledge to train others in the profession.

Effects of recent changes to teacher training in England

So what has been the result of this 'initiative to 'train on the job'? Despite Hobson et al's (2009) research, which showed that school-based routes, such as the GRTP resulted in trainees being more confident about their preparation for teaching, than those trained in by university based courses, SD cannot be added to this list, as in many cases there is far less theory input on SD programmes than with its predecessors. However, the majority of respondents in this research considered that they were well or very well prepared to become a qualified teacher, though of course they had no experience of other types of training programmes with which to compare SD. Visiting tutors however did have that experience and one experienced university tutor explained that he had to accept that SD was not an academic, but a skills-based programme, similar to the pupil-teacher training in previous centuries.

Questions are now being asked about whether all this innovation of, and changes to, routes into teaching is confusing applicants and lowering recruitment. There is serious concern over the effects of the SD initiative on the recruitment of teachers. The intention, to make training more school-led and practical has coincided with a drop in the numbers of applications for teacher training. University programmes have been savagely cut to allow for more school-led training to take place. Elmes (2013a) underlined the drop in numbers allocated to university training, a 12.8% reduction from the previous year. For example, Sheffield University had received cuts of 76.2% over the past two years in its intake to teacher training and Cumbria University, as a result of a massive cut in its intake was discussing reductions in numbers of staff (Elmes, 2013b). Richardson, (2013) reported that only two thirds of the SD allocated training places had been taken up and that, at the last minute, universities had been asked to cover the short fall. This is resulting in a considerable drop in the applications to teach subjects which were already under-recruiting, such as chemistry, Design and Technology and computing. Certainly, there has been an overall reduction in the numbers applying to train and Howson (2015a) draws attention to the drop in applications to primary schools for SD training places, which may result in some schools pulling out of the scheme altogether, as it is no longer financially viable. This concern over low recruitment to SD and other programmes, is compounded by the closure of some successful university PGCE programmes (e.g. Cambridge University, Anglia Ruskin University)

as universities have not been allocated sufficient trainee numbers to make courses financially workable and must raise serious concerns for the future of the numbers in the teaching workforce. Howson (Morrison & Ward, 2014) believes all these changes could lead to a serious teacher shortage particularly in the hard to recruit subjects and in areas of the country, such as the South East where there is a large population increase. Elmes (2015) also questions the sense in removing trainees' places from highly successful university departments and giving them to groups of schools, who are not recruiting to target, with little evidence that this 'so called' innovation will produce better teachers. Yearly, the National College for Teaching and Leadership has had to ask, late in the run up to the start of the training year, university departments and SCITTs to bid for an increase in their allotted training numbers as SD is failing to recruit and as Howson (2015b) points out in his blog, *Grim news on teacher training*, a crisis in recruitment looms.

The other major concern for the SD initiative is about the role and training of school mentors on whose shoulders rests much of the training of the SD workforce and this together with the lack of theoretical underpinning of the heavily practice based course and the potential disappearance of university education research departments, due to cuts in their numbers of trainee teachers, is causing alarm for recruiters. So the question must be asked, is this a real initiative, or the repeat of the pupil-teacher programme under another name? Students of teaching rarely study in detail the different programmes provided to train teachers over the last two centuries. Maybe this is for a reason; to prevent them realising we have been here before. Pupil-teachers sat at the feet of the Master to learn and watched other teachers work, ditto SD trainees. Pupil-teachers worked as unqualified teachers but were paid less than their trained colleagues, ditto SD trainees. Senior staff and other teachers provided subject input to pupil-teachers and for many SD trainees this is the same, little other theoretical input is provided, despite the vast increase in the curriculum required and the underpinning knowledge of learning and children's development which as Carter (2015) asserts is essential for all teachers. Pupil-teachers worked in school for five years and were required to pass inspection yearly and only then, were they allowed to attempt to go to a training college, or they remained as an unqualified teacher. SD trainees get one year only of training and are then deemed, after completing their assessment, to be fully qualified; however, unlike pupil-teachers they start with a degree qualification. Like the pupil-teachers SD trainees have only limited experience of how other schools work. Visits are made but this is not like PGCE and other university based programmes where attempts are made for trainees to experience variety in school placements. Unlike Morant's scheme to ensure a set number of hours the pupil-teachers were allowed to work and the training hours that had to be provided, it appears that from the variety of SD schemes studied by Hilton and Tyler (2015) there is much less consistency in the experience of the SD trainees, depending on who is providing the training and if there are links to a SCITT or university.

Conclusion

Innovation means new, improved, advanced, modernised. The School Direct approach does not appear to have any of these characteristics, but is rather the antonym of innovation—stagnation. It appears we are indeed going backwards, despite all the fears that our education system does not measure up to those in other countries, more successful in international ratings wars. Why has the government decided to remove universities from a major role in teacher education? What is this fear of filling students' heads with odd ideas about learning? Why, when so often in the press and in government circles our education system is found wanting (despite Ofsted awarding outstanding to many university training programmes) is there this determination to let schools and teachers, who are constantly criticised for 'failing' pupils or 'drifting' to train the next generation of teachers? How can they be more successful than higher education? All the research points to a pending crisis, into which we are walking, with closed eyes. Why are we supporting the use of salaried, therefore accountable, untrained teachers for our children? We would not be happy to do this with other professions. The pupil-teacher route was clearly seen as inadequate, so why, is a programme so similar supposed to succeed? Fragmentation in a tightly accountable education system seems to be counter-productive. However, there is nothing new in an old initiative being presented with a new name as so many are not aware of what has gone before. Here we go round again!

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