

STAFFING OUR SCHOOLS: EXPEDIENT OR PLAN

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SYNOPSIS

There has recently been considerable media attention over the difficulty of attracting applicants to enter the teaching profession. While that difficulty affects England more than Scotland at present, there are indicators of a similar problem looming in Scotland. That difficulty is however only part of the problem of teaching standards in schools. Of equal concern is the lack of a requirement that teachers who take on new roles or new subjects have their competence to do so formally accredited. A new consultation paper from the Scottish Office about the continuing professional development of teachers may help tackle some of these concerns over standards, but a more comprehensive review of the recruitment, training, and employment of teachers would be preferable.

PRESENT OUTPUTS

In June 1998 around two thousand intending teachers left the six teacher education institutions in Scotland. These people from primary four-year degree and postgraduate one-year certificate programmes and their equivalent secondary programmes looked forward to immediate uncertainty over employment. That uncertainty, however, requires to be examined from a number of perspectives.

In employment terms, the uncertainty derived from a continuing squeeze on the funding of local authorities. Despite being elected in May 1998 on a manifesto which proclaimed a commitment to 'education, education, education', the Labour government was also committed to maintaining the previous Conservative government's tight public sector expenditures. While some public sector budgets had been re-arranged to ensure more money for education and health within the overall cap on the public sector, much of that 'new' money was given to high profile aspects such as Information Technology and new buildings. Little, if anything, had been allocated to the biggest item in the education budget, the numbers and salaries of teachers.

In job security terms, the uncertainty derived from a fashionable tendency among public and private sector employers to casualise the workforce. As a means of coping with uncertain budgets, employers make greater use of part-time and temporary staff. This is of particular relevance to education authorities who see low birth rates and small school rolls, together with a freeze on early retirement for their older teachers, as posing high risks if they recruit new teachers on full-time, permanent contracts.

In labour mobility terms, the uncertainty was based on an unwillingness or inability to relocate elsewhere in the United Kingdom. This at a time when the national press was in panic over the large number of vacancies for teachers.

The Times Educational Supplement carries 77 pages of job advertisements this weekend, which is well down on its record 323 pages at Easter. But it is a sure sign of the yawning demand of schools for teachers that threatens to wreck the government's strategy for improving educational standards. (*Sunday Times*, 31 May 1998, p. 4).

The estimate of 20,000 vacancies for teachers in England sat uncomfortably with a Scottish Office estimate provided for the Minister of Education's short term working group on initial teacher education that over 4,000 of the recent (last seven years)

output from Scottish teacher education institutions was still on supply lists. While many intending teachers have personal and family commitments which require them to seek employment near to their home address, there nevertheless seems to be a lack of awareness among many Scottish prospective teachers of the opportunities available in England, and a lack of appreciation in England of the pool of trained teachers available in Scotland.

Finally, in curricular terms, the uncertainty derived from a mismatch between the subjects in which secondary trainees had qualified and the shortage subjects in schools. Still too many had been trained in subjects such as History and Biology and too few in subjects such as Mathematics and Technology. Although headteachers have some flexibility in the subjects they offer within each curricular mode, the mandatory nature of parts of the curricular guidelines makes it impossible for them to reduce or drop pupil access to certain core areas of the curriculum. It might be possible to reduce the number of European Languages offered or the number of Social Subjects, but Mathematics must be taught even when class sizes have to rise and teachers be over-timetabled.

While solutions can be generated to each of the uncertainties, these solutions can only be found in the medium-term. In the short-term only around 80% of the output from teacher education in 1998 are likely to find employment by the end of the year, in Scottish Office estimates, but the remainder still seem committed to teaching and willing to live with today's uncertainties.

PRESENT INTAKES

If seeking a post in teaching in Scotland is continuing to be a risky venture, is there any incentive which can be offered to those who may be seeking to enter teacher education now, and in the near future?

The first point which needs to be made is that, in Scotland, there is still a large excess of applicants over places. When, in England, *The Guardian* reports (27 May 1998, p. 3) that one third of vacancies to train as secondary teachers remain unfilled and the reduction in class sizes in primary schools will increase demand by a 10% which will be hard to fill, Scottish teacher education institutions are turning applicants away in large numbers. The larger, and more popular, institutions are receiving around nine applicants for every Primary place and around three applicants for every Secondary place. While there are still regional imbalances in demand and while Secondary places in Computing, Languages, Mathematics, Physics and Technology are hard to fill, the overall attractiveness of teaching as a career is sound, and talented people are continuing to apply to and be recruited into teacher education. The shortage areas are worrying and will remain worrying when the economy is healthy and higher-paid occupations in disciplines where applicants are few remain easily available. But this is neither a new nor a recent phenomenon and it will not be addressed only by raising teachers' salaries. Other approaches must be tried some of which will be discussed here.

There also seems little doubt that those who are seeking employment as teachers can look forward to a secure career. Not only is government investing heavily in education and thus eventually creating more jobs, but there is an accelerating exit from teaching by those who were recruited in the boom of the 1960s and are now reaching the end of their service. From the teacher census of 1994 and more recent data provided to the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) Committee on Teacher Supply, approximately 20% of all teachers are over the age of 50 and only around 10% are under the age of 30. This, taken together with the shortage of teachers already reported in England, suggests that an even higher percentage of those interested in teaching as a career will have to be recruited and can be guaranteed secure employment.

For the teacher of the future the worry is more about how to cope with the workload in an understaffed system than how to gain permanent employment in an overstaffed system. And for the system the question is how to find enough capable teachers when, in some subject areas, almost half of the total output in certain subjects from universities would need to be attracted into teaching just to fill today's vacancies.

In these respects, we can no longer rely on the present models for predicting the demand for teachers. New types of staff will be required, new forms of teacher education will need to be found, and the match of both of these with the school curriculum will have to be re-examined. Some of these concerns were addressed by government in the first part of 1998. The announcement that the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC, 1998) would play a greater role in setting teacher education numbers was directed at increasing the pool of potential teachers. The initiative to recruit classroom assistants, particularly to help in the early stages of primary education, was directed at reducing some of the burden on the scarce resource of teaching professionals. The consultation on continuing professional development (SOEID, 1998c) started the discussion about retraining existing teachers to meet new demands. But these, and many other aspects of ensuring the provision of sufficient teachers of the required quality, all deserve closer examination and a more coherent framework for implementation.

FUTURE NEEDS

As society's expectations of teachers change, so too do the demands placed on those who educate our teachers. Until a tradition of mandatory retraining or professional updating as a condition of retaining your licence to practise as a teacher is introduced, the Scottish Office is obliged to place an increasing burden on Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to fill as much of a teacher's portfolio of expertise as possible.

While not as prescriptive as their English counterparts, the latest draft guidelines on ITE from the Scottish Office (SOEID, 1998a) set out an extensive agenda not only in terms of mastery of major disciplines or subjects but also in terms of a growing range of cross-curricular and whole school areas of competence. And again, unlike England where ITE programmes are aimed at equipping teachers of a fairly restricted age range of children, Scottish primary teachers have to become competent to teach children from 2 and a half to 12 years of age, and secondary teachers have to become competent in teaching from S1 to S6.

The difficulties underlying such demands on ITE are considerable. Even a Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme of four years duration finds it difficult to overtake the academic and professional needs of beginning primary teachers. But it is almost impossible to meet the demands within a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme of 36 weeks, 18 weeks of which is spent on school placements. And meeting the competency demands in terms of professional education leaves little time for the intellectual preparation of the beginning teacher through study of core disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and psychology. Unlike some national systems such as those of Canada or France which are now allocating two years instead of one to their equivalent of PGCE, and unlike England which is proposing (DfEE, 1998) to reinstate the probationary year and make it more of a continuing professional development experience with a reduced workload, the SOEID answer is to seek to improve the intellectual and academic quality of entrants to teacher education.

The standards to be used by the relevant institutions when admitting people to teacher education courses are set out in a Memorandum on Entry Requirements (SOEID, 1998b). From the intake in 2000, SOEID has set higher standards in terms of requiring a credit pass in Mathematics at Standard Grade for entrants to Primary courses and higher standards in terms of extent and level of academic study in order to train in a specific Secondary

subject (120 SD points of which 40 must be at Level 3 or above).

While there is little doubt that every effort should be made to increase the academic and intellectual standards of entrants to teaching, care must be taken to avoid unexpected outcomes.

Scottish secondary schools have benefited from the ability of many intending teachers to train in more than one subject. This has meant some curricular flexibility being available to the school and some choice over employment for the teacher. While few teachers teach more than one subject once established in their career, the dual qualification has advantages, especially when seeking employment. From a present position of almost half of trainees taking two subjects, the revised Memorandum means that the proportion will decline after 2000 to around a fifth. And the position may get worse as tuition fees and the Garrick Committee recommendation to increase the proportion of undergraduates taking three year rather than four year degrees both come into effect. Then a number of people, suited to teaching, will complete three year degrees without being aware of the Memorandum on Entry and thus find themselves ineligible to train for teaching. The overall effect of these changes will thus be a further reduction in the pool of people available to meet the growing demand for teachers.

Meeting the needs of the schools for high-quality teachers and of the curriculum for well-equipped specialists could, however, be addressed if more emphasis was placed in the post-initial phase of a teacher's professional development.

At present there is a concern in both England and Scotland over the agenda for continuing professional development. In England, Michael Bassey (1998) has drawn attention to the technical rather than professional agenda of the Teacher Training Agency, whose post-experience funding is skewed towards their priority for school improvement rather than their priority for "long-term development of the teaching profession". In Scotland, the recent priorities have been more about management— of schools, of school plans, and of curriculum change—rather than about the development of the people to lead these changes.

More recently and in a very welcome way, SOEID has extended its concerns (SOEID, 1998c) by recognising that teachers 'have a duty to maintain their professional learning and keep up-to-date with development(s)' (para. 1.3), by proposing that standards be established for determining when a probationer is competent to receive full registration by the General Teaching Council (GTC), and even by suggesting that 'the attainment of particular standards, for example by the award of advanced professional qualifications, (should be) a condition of appointment to certain posts in schools' (para. 8.2). Since proposals are now well-advanced to introduce a qualification for serving and aspiring headteachers, it would seem logical to extend the same concept to all teachers who are changing role, but also to include the need for all teachers to keep up-to-date even if they are remaining in the same post for a significant period of time.

Since at least 1989 the GTC has been expressing its concerns over the quality and provision of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities. Furthermore, it has proposed that it should have a prominent role in approving and recognising CPD provision.

There are a number of contexts in which the formalisation and regulation of CPD needs to be considered.

Registration with the General Teaching Council is a condition of employment in schools in Scotland. But it is peculiar that such registration is based on demonstrated expertise in one or two subjects during initial teacher education and probation and then remains in perpetuity even as the individual's role and remit changes to the point where their principal teaching duties are no longer in the subjects which they were registered to teach.

During 1998, the minutes of the Council of the GTC show two instances of this peculiarity. Firstly there was a report from a Guidance Task Group proposing mandatory training for guidance teachers and secondly the Council proposed to the SOEID that teachers of Media Studies should be obliged to undertake a course leading to an Additional Teaching Qualification (ATQ). While it was implicit in these proposals that registration conditions should be attached to such courses and qualifications, that issue will require a great deal of further discussion and approval by government before it can become a routine expectation on teachers who change their role and status within schools.

Furthermore the two examples above point to the range of issues which require to be addressed in considering the means by which an appropriate number and quality of teachers can be maintained in Scottish schools.

PROVISION REQUIRED

At present then there is a surplus of applicants over places in teacher education. That surplus could, however, turn into a deficit before long particularly in secondary teacher education, due to a combination of circumstances such as low salaries, heavy workload, attractive alternatives and more rigorous entry requirements.

At the same time there is an imbalance between the subjects which teacher education institutions are allowed to offer to graduates and (a) the subjects in many contemporary degree programmes, and (b) the subjects in the school curriculum. That latter phenomenon will increase with the Higher Still curriculum introducing even more subjects to schools for which initial teacher education is not available. Either existing teachers will teach without requiring to demonstrate competence other than within their schools or FE lecturers who do not require GTC registration will be imported.

And finally, there are large groups of teachers in areas of provision such as support for learning and guidance who are not required either to train or to register in order to carry out their duties. How then will it be possible for government to achieve its goal of staffing schools with well-trained people of high quality? If it is a legal requirement that teachers entering employment can only teach subjects for which they are trained and registered, then surely that requirement should be extended to cover every occasion when teachers change subject or function.

A first step, already taken in hand by government, is to give more authority to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council over numbers in teacher education programmes. This is likely to result in a system with greater variation in types of programme and lead to the numbers, especially in undergraduate study, rising in accordance with student demand. The risk of oversupply is worth taking if students can take a combined degree in an academic discipline and education together with a teaching qualification. So long as this increase in the numbers entering teacher education courses but not necessarily being committed to teaching as a career does not create problems for schools who offer placement experiences, a modest expansion through this route would be helpful. Then not only would the pool of those available to enter teaching rise, but we would avoid the criticism that stand-alone or dedicated teacher education courses which over-produce simply add to teacher unemployment. That certainly seems to be the message in Circular 6/98 (SHEFC, 1998) which acknowledges that attempts to plan outputs precisely at a national level are bound to be unsuccessful. But changes in the nature and structure of 'combined' courses will only occur if the funding regime makes investing in their development sufficiently attractive to universities.

A second step would be to revisit the Memorandum on Entry. Over the last fifteen years, as more undergraduate degrees have become modular and diverse, it has become increasingly difficult to show a good fit between content of undergraduate

study and content of the school curriculum. If the present entry proposals are implemented in 2000 we can anticipate large numbers of applicants to teacher education, who are otherwise well-suited to teaching, being rejected because their course content does not match the curriculum in level and extent.

This difficulty could be overcome in a number of ways. The state could fund a number of applicants to take additional classes in order to become eligible for training. Greater use could be made of only offering some people provisional registration with the GTC until they have completed additional undergraduate units while in post. Or we might face up to the perennial question of what necessary relationship there is between undergraduate course content and ability to teach a particular secondary subject well by a more systematic examination of the nature of the school curriculum and the competences to be overtaken in the initial teacher education programme. This might well show how there are many generic skills required of teachers in secondary schools just as there are of teachers in primary schools and that these skills can be acquired in a range of undergraduate courses. This would then reduce the specific, subject, element required by individual school curriculum components and make it easier for more undergraduates to become eligible to enter initial teacher education.

A third step which would help is to continue the periodic review of teacher education courses, particularly PGCE Secondary. That review would ask important questions about the balance between education and training in initial courses. The present output from most secondary courses have had significant practice in schools and have had a reasonable introduction to the craft of teaching their subject, but are not necessarily well equipped to think about education or about learning. Some of that further development could, and should, come while in post, provided that the new CPD plans of SOEID set standards in terms of educational improvement as well as technical mastery, but the alternative of three years of academic study followed by two years of professional education deserves serious consideration. The present model of initial teacher education seems based on the premise that you are training students for today's school curriculum. That does not then give them adequate pedagogical skill to cope with changes in the curriculum or in schooling. A preferable model would be to impart to students the skills which will enable them to acquire new subject knowledge and integrate it with their learning and teaching expertise. Such a step forward would also fit well with making the requirements for entry to initial teacher education more relaxed, and place a greater emphasis on continuing professional development.

To complete the process of raising standards in schools through raising standards among teachers, a fourth step is essential. As the curriculum changes, new subjects appear whether these are modern languages in the primary school or media studies in the secondary school. At present, staff are required to volunteer to deliver these new subjects either without training or without qualifications or both. While, in many schools and local authorities, training is provided or release given to undertake the necessary qualifications, this is not mandatory. There is therefore no way of ensuring that those delivering new subjects or undertaking new roles are reaching a national standard of competence. In that respect and in respect to entry to initial teacher education, the CPD proposals from SOEID in July 1998 are crucial. Whether or not they are linked to re-registration with the GTC, it would certainly seem essential that GTC accredits CPD courses and CPD training against course content and performance standards agreed with SOEID. Then, just as there is accountability in respect of the initial education of teachers, there would be career-long accountability in respect of the continuing competence of teachers to undertake new roles and maintain quality of performance in existing roles.

CONCLUSION

There has been much concern expressed by teachers over some of the mechanistic approaches by government to improving standards in schools. While there is some justification in the complaints that league tables of school examination results or school development plans do not of themselves improve standards, there should be few complaints about the need to raise standards.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that there is an alternative approach which relies on ensuring that teachers are expected to maintain their professional standards by a process of continual professional development, and to be accountable for this.

It is not uncommon in a profession for the licence to practise to be renewable and to be revalidated in each new job. If teaching is a profession, it would not be unrealistic to accept the same discipline.

NOTE

This paper draws its data from a range of sources. Some sources are in the public domain and are acknowledged. Some are based on the working papers and minutes of bodies such as the General Teaching Council and the Scottish Teacher Education Committee which, although not secret, are not widely available. Some are through membership of professional groups and committees which do not normally make their papers available. And some are based on membership and observation of the workings of the numerous bodies to which a head of a teacher education institution has access.

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