

## B.ED AND PGCE TEACHERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: DOES THE TRAINING ROUTE MATTER TO HEADTEACHERS?

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### SYNOPSIS

The BEd and PGCE teacher education courses constitute virtually the only current routes into primary teaching in Scotland. Little systematic study has taken place of the comparability and perceived relative quality of those routes and this paper reports evidence upon which to make such a comparison across a country-wide sample of teachers. Under scrutiny were the teachers' background characteristics, their early experiences in post and their quality as perceived by the headteachers who employed them. It is specifically the part of the study which focused upon the data from the headteachers which forms the substance of this paper. The prevailing view of the headteachers was that the BEd and PGCE trained teachers were not distinguishable in terms of quality and this may be because other factors were as significant: some headteachers suggested that personal characteristics were more important and this was reinforced by their difficulty in generalising about training route. Alongside this majority view of having no preference there was a contradictory view held by one-third of the headteachers that BEds were better. Notable is the fact that unlike the majority, which comprised headteachers who themselves came from both routes, the minority group contained only those trained in the BEd or the earlier BEd-type courses. This paper presents evidence which may call into question the strength of the basis on which the views of this group are founded.

### INTRODUCTION

What constitutes the best initial teacher education for primary teachers is one of the more widespread debates amongst concerned academic, professional and lay groups. Within Scotland the ongoing merger of the previously independent teacher training institutions with local universities, and the predicted crisis in the supply of new teachers for an ageing profession, have directed attention even more acutely to issues of teacher supply and training. Yet comparison of particular routes into teaching does not feature prominently as a research topic.

In 1997, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (SOEID) funded a research project to compare primary teachers trained via the two main routes, namely the four-year Bachelor of Education Degree (BEd) and the one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). Data were collected on the teachers' background characteristics, their early experiences in post and their quality as perceived by the headteachers who employed them (Draper, Fraser, Raab, Sharp and Taylor 1997). This paper reports only the findings from the headteacher data derived from questionnaires designed to gather perceptions on the different training routes and whether headteachers preferred to employ BEds or PGCEs.

#### *Measures of competence*

'Quality' is a highly relative term. The main indicator taken at the end of initial teacher education is that of 'competence'. It may be useful to think of measures of competence at two levels. In teaching, at a formal level, there are criteria drawn up by government and, in the case of Scotland, also encapsulated in the official regulations of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC), with whom teachers are required to register prior to employment. The broad concerns of such

criteria, just as of those for the award of qualified teacher status elsewhere in the UK (Department for Education and Employment 1997), are to ensure that teachers taking up teaching posts have suitable academic qualifications, appropriate personal qualities and the professional and practical knowledge and skill which are developed in training. Professional and practical knowledge and skill are, in Scotland, drawn up in the form of a list of competences in the Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education (SOEID 1998). These competences cover subject knowledge, planning, teaching methodology and various aspects of professionalism. All students in training must be deemed to have achieved these competences in order to qualify for certification and provisional registration with the GTC. The competences are also achieved at a grade level from A to E, a further 'quality' refinement. Later professional assessments by headteachers for final registration with the GTC are also made, using criteria that are largely similar in substance to those baseline measures of competence. However they are not graded.

#### *BEd and PGCE courses and quality assurance*

A great deal of effort is entailed in validating and reviewing each institution's teacher education courses through the procedures of both the SOEID and the GTC. The final competences of completing students are assessed and graded by both institutional tutors and by schools. The different training routes are therefore each seen to have to conform to the same quality assurance procedures. Quotas are applied at the intake point of training to ensure a balance of teachers coming through the two routes. Present quotas are intended to achieve a balance, on exit from training, in the order of 55% BEd and 45% PGCE each year.

Questions however remain in the general educational 'culture' about the relative quality of teachers coming through the different routes and this has led to a number of research studies. Cameron-Jones and O'Hara (1997) analysed the final grades of BEd and PGCE students at the end of initial training and reported that the two courses might differ in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of their respective products. BEds were stronger on classroom communication and classroom management, while PGCEs were stronger on assessment and subject content. More commonly, research into the comparative effectiveness of the training routes tends to focus on the earliest experiences of teaching during the probationary period, and, although differences are reported, the evidence is that these are short-term. The study by Cains and Brown (1996) in one Education Authority in England reported differences in favour of the BEd one term into work. Teachers trained via the BEd felt they were better prepared than did their PGCE counterparts, particularly in behaviour management and working with aspects of special needs. Significantly higher levels of stress were reported by PGCEs, but the findings suggested that these concerns were well addressed in schools. A national study in Scotland (Draper, Fraser, Smith and Taylor 1991) concluded that although BEds and PGCEs began with different concerns, and for the PGCEs these were located more, and for rather longer, in aspects of organisation and planning, such differences did not continue and were not evident after the two years of probationary experience. The question of whether training route, despite this kind of evidence, affects the career development and promotion prospects of teachers is of course an interesting one which may be further complicated by the training route differences of the headteachers who contribute to promotion decisions.

#### *Headteachers' own training route and preferences*

Despite no strong research evidence that there are lasting effects from training route, competition for first jobs is likely to create some tensions amongst the respective

groups of students in any one institution, particularly at times when there are fewer jobs than there are qualified applicants. The relative shortness of the PGCE initial training is the most cited feature in comparative commentaries. Students may also meet some polarised staff-room views as they experience different school placements. There will be teachers and headteachers in all schools who themselves are products of the different routes, whether or not they share their views with students on the differences or similarities as they see them. Furthermore, many teaching staff, including headteachers, will have entered training prior to 1984 and will hold a three-year Diploma rather than a four-year BEd degree. Changes too have taken place in the PGCE course, which, prior to 1986, was referred to as the Teacher's Certificate (Primary).

Mythologies build up in such circumstances and these are likely to focus on two aspects: the relative length of school experience and the question of academic status. Some are likely to prize more highly the greater length of training and anticipated depth of professional development of the BEd; others would point to the advantages seen to be attached to the PGCE, with the allegedly more intellectually demanding standards achieved by those teachers who have come into training through a more academic university course. Any assessment of the influence of training route must be seen within this complex context.

There is involvement of headteachers in making judgements on future teachers at all stages of the process. They join, in Scotland, with training institution staff in selection interviews. They contribute to the assessment of students during the training course. Later still, headteachers are central to interviewing and recruiting staff for their own schools. The criteria in use at this juncture, particularly in respect of training route, are perhaps rather more problematic and potentially ambiguous. Earlier judgements are of course not value-free in that they are still judgements made on people by people and are unavoidably subjective, but the degree of the subjectivity and interpretation can at least be partially controlled around criteria specified in published guidelines. Interviews and selection at school level are increasingly the norm at the point of employment, although traditionally in Scotland the role of the local authority as the main 'sieve' was greater than in the rest of the UK. Criteria in use at this stage are likely to become more weighted towards individual school priorities and the personal, subjective judgement of the interviewers. Questions then arise about the influence on such judgements of headteachers' general perceptions of the relative strengths and weaknesses of training route. Implicit within such comparisons may be academic status criteria, the professional knowledge and skill criteria and the potential influence of the training route taken by the headteachers themselves. Later still, headteachers play a role after two years of teaching, when they decide whether teachers are sufficiently proficient to be fully registered with the GTC. The assessment at this stage is the responsibility of the headteacher and once again particular competence criteria will operate to structure the assessment.

This paper therefore will look closely at whether headteachers report preferences as to training route into primary teaching, whether any such preferences are important to them as one of the criteria they use when appointing new staff and whether the assessments they make on the quality of teachers in their reports to the GTC reflect any such preferences.

#### METHODOLOGY

Two samples of headteachers were drawn up to collect data on headteachers' perceptions of probationer teachers coming into the profession through the two training routes. One sample, the larger, formed the group to whom a questionnaire was sent. The other represented those who had written interim and final reports for the GTC.

The first sample of headteachers was identified on the basis of the larger, randomly selected and representative (20%) sample of teachers (those fully registered between 1993 and 1996). These were the headteachers who had written the final report for each probationer. The total number of headteachers identified in this way was 316. To achieve a headteacher sample of 20%, as in the original teacher sample, a further 15.5 % (58 individual reports) was added to the sample to bring the total of headteachers to 374. Four of those were no longer headteachers in Scotland so were removed from the sample, leaving 370. Of those, 234 returned the questionnaire, a response rate of 63.2%. The main variables covered in the questions concerned the educational background and work experience of the headteachers themselves; their views on employment, deployment and support of probationers from the BEd and PGCE routes; how they viewed the respective strengths and weaknesses of probationers who had followed each of the two routes and whether any of them considered that differences persisted between the groups after completion of the probationary period.

The second sample, that drawn up for analysis of the GTC reports, comprised 53 PGCE first interim and final headteacher reports, 46 BEd interim and 47 BEd final reports, making in total 199 reports on 100 probationers. These reports were selected on the grounds that the headteachers who wrote the reports had also written reports for other probationers in the sample and thus some comparison of content was possible to evaluate the reliability of the data.

As was confirmed in the headteacher questionnaire data, headteachers differed in their length of experience, in their headteacher experience, in their experience of probationers and in the route they themselves took into teaching. It is conceivable that all of these variables might have influenced their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of BEd and PGCE probationers and teachers. The questionnaire was designed to collect all such background information, but analysis showed that the relevant factor, and the one then given closer consideration, was the training route of the headteachers.

It was recognised that strengths recorded in headteachers' GTC reports represent a summative measure at the end of a period of probation. It is important to note that, whilst training route may have a part to play in explaining any pattern of strengths in the reports, other factors are likely to make this only one amongst a number of explanations. The number of strengths recorded may be in the context of an easy passage with an easy class, the security of a permanent contract, or good support and accessible resources for teaching and learning. Fewer strengths may be the consequence of a very difficult class, limited support, an unhappy school or many other factors. Strengths are also no direct guarantee of professional development, and those labouring long and hard to handle complex situations may be learning a great deal which will stand them in good stead in their professional careers as teachers, but at the same time they may be finding it more difficult to excel at that particular stage in their career.

#### REPORTING THE DATA

##### *Background of Headteachers*

The headteachers in the questionnaire sample were asked how they themselves had initially qualified. The categories offered, and the numbers of headteachers placing themselves in each, were as follows:

Table 1: Initial Teaching Qualifications of the Headteachers

Teaching qualifications	No
Diploma in Primary Education	172
BEd (done jointly with a University)	11
Teacher's Certificate (Primary post-graduate)	19
PGCE Primary	13
BEd Primary	4
Other	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>

For the purposes of subsequent analysis, these data were reduced to two categories. The first represents routes in which the main subject of study in higher education was education itself. This group contained the Diploma in Primary Education, the BEd done jointly with a University and the BEd Primary. The second category, containing the Teacher's Certificate and the PGCE Primary, represents routes that involved graduating first in a subject other than education and taking a one-year specialist teaching qualification later. These pooled categories are respectively referred to as "BEd-type" and "PGCE-type". The "Other" responses, which did not fit into either of these pooled categories, were discarded. In total, those from a PGCE-type background were very much a minority, 32 as against 187 or 14.6% as against 85.4%.

#### Headteacher Preferences

The headteachers were asked whether they had a preference for employing teachers from a particular type of training. Their responses, cross-tabulated against their backgrounds, were as follows:

Table 2: Headteacher Employment Preferences and their own Background

Background	prefer BEd	no preference	prefer PGCE	Total
BEd-type	78	100	0	178
PGCE-type	1	30	1	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>210</b>

What is most striking about Table 2 is the almost complete absence of any preference for the PGCE route, even amongst the headteachers whose own background was of this type. Instead of dividing into six groups, corresponding to the cells of this table, it appears that the headteachers fall into only three categories: those from the BEd-type background who feel that this is the preferable route, those from the BEd-type and the PGCE-type background who do not distinguish between the routes. These groups, preference and non-preference, will respectively be labelled BEd (p), BEd (np) and PGCE (np), and a consistent thread in the analysis will explore differences between them.

The overall position is, however, that 62% of the headteachers said that they had no preference for one training route over another. It is also noteworthy that the majority of the headteachers with BEd-type backgrounds, 100 out of 178, expressed no preference. When asked to comment on their preference or lack of preference,

some comments were about the greater strength of the BEds. Others made clear that the individual traits and abilities of the teachers mattered more than training route.

We feel that BEd students have had the opportunity of gaining a fuller insight into and understanding of all the issues surrounding teaching.

The PGCE trained teachers need more support in the areas of classroom organisation and in the breadth and knowledge of the curriculum.

Difficult to ‘pigeonhole’ a type - I have experienced very talented teachers from both BEd and PGCE.

‘Personality’ and ‘rapport’ with the pupils are two important factors when teaching children. Often the ‘person’ matters more than the qualification.

#### *Support During Probation*

Headteachers were asked for their views regarding the amounts of support required by different categories of probationers. As the following table shows, the three headteacher groups (BEd(p), BEd(np) and PGCE(np)) differed markedly in response to various statements about support needs:

*Table 3: Support needs of BEd and PGCE probationers as perceived by the different groups of headteachers*

<b>Support needs</b>	<b>BEd (p)</b>	<b>BEd (np)</b>	<b>PGCE (np)</b>	<b>Total</b>
BEd probationers require more support than PGCE	0	1	0	1
PGCE probationers require more support than BEd	43	15	4	62
Both require very similar amounts of support	9	20	7	36
Cannot generalise about amount of support	23	59	17	99

While most of the BEd(np) and PGCE(np) groups were reluctant to generalise, or were more likely to see the two types of probationers as requiring similar amounts of support, a minority, 19 (25%) of headteachers was of the view that PGCE teachers required more support. As to the BEd(p) group, 43 (57%) tended to see the PGCEs as needing more support. The converse is of course that a sizeable minority 32 (43%) of this consistently ‘pro BEd’ group did not see the PGCEs as requiring more support. This pattern persists when the headteachers were asked about the type of support as well as the amount:

Table 4: Headteacher Group and Type of Support

Types of Support	BEd (p)	BEd (np)	PGCE (np)	Total
BEd probs require different types of support from PGCE	37	21	3	61
BEd probs require the same type of support as PGCE	3	7	4	14
Cannot generalise about types of support	32	69	22	123

Two-thirds of the headteachers said either that they could not generalise about type of support or that the type of support required was the same. The BEd(p) group was more willing to generalise with more than half seeing the types of support needed as being different. In contrast, in the other headteacher groups, a small minority of the ninety who commented mentioned the greater support needs of PGCE probationers, with several qualifying their comment by referring to the greater maturity of the PGCE teachers and their willingness to learn.

#### *Deployment in School*

The questionnaire asked whether headteachers preferred to deploy probationers from the two routes at different stages in the primary school. They were asked about all stages from Nursery to Primary 7. They could respond in each case that they preferred BEd, had no preference, or preferred PGCE. One hundred and sixteen headteachers responded fully to this question and a coding system was used to analyse the responses. What preferences were expressed tended to be in the younger stages and in favour of the BEd route, but the effect was slight. The BEd(p) group however showed a marked preference for the BEd route at all stages, though its size diminished slightly from over 50% in the first four stages to around 40% by the last two. This is hardly surprising in view of what is already known about the BEd (p) group. There was an overall difference between the upper and lower halves of the primary school. For each of the 116 teachers in all three groups combined, who returned a complete set of responses to this question, the responses were averaged from nursery to P3 and from P4 to P7. Comparing the two halves shows that the headteachers were more likely to prefer BEd probationers for the Nursery to P3 classes (mean = -0.24) than for the P4 to P7 classes (mean = -0.13). This difference is highly significant ( $t = -4.11$ ,  $df = 115$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and reinforces a common perception among primary teachers that the BEds are better for the younger classes.

#### *Strengths and Weaknesses*

There were two main sources of data for this section - the questionnaire, returned by the sample of 234 headteachers, and scrutiny of the 199 GTC reports written on 100 probationer teachers. The final reports analysed were written by 46 headteachers who had written two or more final reports because they had employed more than one probationer from this group at the time the probation was completed. Eight headteachers had written reports on three probationers.

The questionnaire asked the headteachers to rate probationers trained on the two routes on a number of criteria relevant to teaching competence. The ratings were on a scale of 1 (very strong) to 5 (very weak). For each criterion, the BEd rating was subtracted from the PGCE rating and the differences were averaged over all headteachers who had provided ratings for both groups. A resulting value

of one would mean that on average, the headteachers felt that the BEds were one point out of five better than the PGCEs while a value of minus one would mean that the PGCEs were thought better by this margin. The following table gives, for each criterion, the mean difference, the number of cases on which it is based and where there is significance, or nearly so, the statistical significance level (p) on a paired t-test. The calculation was performed separately for each of the three groups of headteacher opinion.

*Table 5: Headteacher Group and Specific Strengths of Probationers*

Strengths Criteria	BEd(p) (N=46)		BEd(np) (N=56)		PGCE(np) (N=16)	
	mean diff	p	mean diff	p	mean diff	p
classroom organisation and management	1.0	<.001	0.2	n.s	0.3	n.s
control and discipline	0.6	<.001	0.2	n.s	0.3	.055(n.s)
differentiating for the varying needs	0.8	<.001	0.2	n.s	0.3	n.s
responding to special needs	0.7	<.001	0.1	n.s	0.3	.055(n.s)
dealing with parents	0.5	<.001	0.3	<.05	0.1	n.s
relating to colleagues	0.8	<.001	0.0	n.s	0.1	n.s
contributing to the school	0.9	<.001	0.0	n.s	0.0	n.s
IT competence	0.8	<.001	0.1	n.s	0.1	n.s
breadth of curriculum knowledge	1.2	<.001	0.4	<.01	0.1	n.s
depth of curriculum knowledge	1.2	<.001	0.2	.051(n.s)	0.2	n.s

A systematic pattern of response can be seen when the three headteacher groups are compared. There were no instances of any group preferring PGCEs on any criterion, but the BEd(p) group preferred BEd probationers by much bigger margins than either of the two other groups. Indeed, only two of the BEd(np) differences were significant at the 5% level ('dealing with parents' and 'breadth of curriculum knowledge'). 'Depth of curriculum knowledge' approached significance. None of the PGCE(np) differences reached significance at all, though 'control and discipline' and 'responding to special needs' nearly did so. All ten of the BEd(p) differences on the other hand were very significant. This group held particularly strong views in respect of 'classroom organisation and management', and 'breadth and depth of curriculum knowledge', where they rated the BEds a whole point or more ahead of the PGCEs. This pattern however was not nearly so marked in the case of the other groups, though the BEd(np) group felt that BEds had a definite advantage on 'breadth of curriculum knowledge'.

If these responses on the 1-5 scale are summed over the ten criteria, the resulting score of between 10 and 50 provides a global indication of how each headteacher perceived the overall strength of probationers trained on the two routes. These global scores were then averaged over each of the three groups of teachers with the following results.

Table 6: Headteacher Group and Overall Strengths of Probationers

Strengths	BEd(p)	BEd(np)	PGCE(np)
Mean global scores for:			
BEd probationers	20.7 (N=62)	22.0 (N=78)	23.6 (N=21)
PGCE probationers	30.5 (N=43)	23.8 (N=56)	25.6 (N=18)

\*Low scores indicate more positive perceptions

As regards perceptions of the BEd probationers, the three groups differed in the direction which might be expected. The BEd(p) group returned the lowest mean (which corresponds to the most positive perception), followed by the BEd(np) group, with the PGCE(np) group having the lowest perception of the strengths of these probationers. These differences however are very small and are not statistically significant at the 5% level.

As for the PGCE probationers, all three of the headteacher groups regarded them as being less strong than the BEd probationers. In the case of the BEd(np) and PGCE(np) groups, this difference in perception was small (and, by definition, not sufficient to cause them to express a preference between the routes when invited directly to do so). The group which stands out is the BEd(p) group, which has markedly weaker perceptions of the PGCE probationers.

Comments were sought from those headteachers who perceived any significant difference between training routes in terms of depth of curriculum knowledge. Ninety-two headteachers made 117 separate comments with 69% of those comments identifying weakness in the PGCEs. About 16% of comments were actually about probationers being 'individuals' or 'more similar' than 'different'.

Science, expressive arts and language are well understood in relation to 5-14 guidelines by BEd trained teachers.

These trained BEd have deeper curriculum knowledge. However my PGCE is an excellent teacher.

PGCE do not have thorough knowledge of teaching of reading. Their course cannot possibly fulfil all that is required. However if, as in my case, you have a gifted teacher she learns as she goes. Attitude to the job is of paramount importance.

#### *Evidence from GTC Reports*

Forty-six headteachers had written the 100 final reports, 25 having employed a mix of BEd and PGCE-trained probationers and 21 having employed only BEd (8) or only PGCE (13) probationers. Interim reports on these teachers were also scrutinised. Key findings only are summarised below.

There is an overwhelming emphasis on strengths rather than weaknesses for both groups at both interim and final report stages. The patterns of strength identified in the final reports show considerable consistency across the training groups. From Table 7 it can be seen that the same five strengths feature as the most commonly identified strengths for both groups at both interim and final reporting stages. Differences between numbers of mentions recorded are generally small and so rank order is not significant. What is most significant is the similarity between the strengths recorded for teachers from both training routes.

Table 7: Most Commonly Mentioned Strengths Ranked by Percentage of Mentions

<b>Strengths: all reports</b>			
<b>PGCE</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>BEd</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Class organis'n and mgmt	78	Planning	81
2. Relationships with Pupils	78	Relationships with colleagues	79
3. Relationships with colleagues	76	Class organis'n and mgmt	75
4. Planning	69	Relationships with pupils	72
5. Control and Discipline	67	Control and Discipline	65

New teachers in general were seen to have particular strengths in relationships with pupils and colleagues, planning and class organisation and management. Control and discipline was also an area very positively noted.

#### DISCUSSION

##### *The effects of training route*

Our key research question was whether training route into primary teaching is a significant variable in the minds of headteachers as they employ, support and assess new teachers. The findings of this study are clear that the prevailing view is that PGCE and BEd trained teachers are equally good. The headteachers' own training was taken to be a potential factor in this equation. PGCE-trained headteachers did not perceive a distinction between the routes. A majority of the BEd-type trained headteachers equally did not wish to distinguish either training route as superior.

However there is no doubt that one-third of headteachers did express a preference for the BEd and all of them had themselves trained through BEd or similar courses. These headteachers proved, on the whole, to be those who had the most positive view of BEd trained teachers, especially on the primary curriculum, and some saw differences also in support needs and later development needs.

There is a substantial minority view (32%) therefore that BEds are better and are preferred over PGCEs and such views may be a contributory variable in influencing selection of teachers at the school level. Findings in the other part of our study (Draper, Fraser, Raab, Sharp and Taylor 1997), that PGCE trained teachers have a longer probation with more temporary contracts, would tend to support this argument.

What is difficult to gauge is the extent to which this perception is governed by objective professional judgement and how far it might be a sub-cultural 'myth'. The data from this study do allow us to look more closely at some of the detail of those perceptions and to explore whether the perceptions persist when headteachers are asked to be more particular, or to make assessments of individual teachers.

Looking at specific competences, the headteacher group who expressed a preference for BEds stood out as taking the most sceptical view of PGCEs competences. All areas of expertise came out as significantly different in this group with classroom organisation and management, and breadth and depth of curriculum knowledge, particularly so. There were only two areas showing up significantly amongst the other and larger group of headteachers, namely 'dealing with parents' and 'breadth of curricular knowledge'. Not all headteachers made additional comments but the majority of those who did added to the picture of strengths and weaknesses. In terms of perspective they tended to corroborate the views of those who felt that PGCEs were weaker. Other areas emerging in the comments, such as

the teaching of reading, might link with the preference for deploying BEds at the early stages of the school.

From the questionnaire, however, it was clear that considerably fewer of the headteachers who preferred BEds perceived PGCEs as requiring more support. Many of this group reported that there was no difference in the amount of support required or that it was not possible to generalise about support. Several pointed to the maturity and life-experience of PGCEs as offsetting any training disadvantages. So, when pressed to be more specific, a section of this group did not give substance to their avowed conviction that PGCEs were weaker.

The data we have here also include findings from the reports on probationer teachers written by headteachers at the interim and final stages of the two-year probationary period. Nothing in these reflects the very persistent views of our minority group of headteachers. Strengths reported in the GTC reports far outweighed weaknesses and although the samples here are less robust, the finding that headteachers only very rarely report specific weaknesses, and on the whole write these reports blandly and positively, is confirmed by previous findings (Draper, Fraser, Smith and Taylor 1991). Named strengths were also remarkably consistent across the reports and were very similar for the BEds and PGCEs.

The picture that emerges is of primary headteachers holding different perspectives on the relative adequacy of BEd and PGCE training. Overall, there is evidence that BEds are seen as being better prepared to start teaching, and where the groups are compared on their need for support during probation, those who indicated a difference selected PGCEs as requiring more support. However the relationship between particular views on classroom competence and support needs on the one hand and preference for employing BEd or PGCE teachers on the other is not straightforward. The two-thirds who had no preference as employers included both headteachers who saw BEds as more competent overall, and also headteachers who saw PGCEs as requiring more support. The one-third of headteachers, themselves BEds or similar, who preferred to employ BEds were in no doubt about these teachers' superior competence, but were split on whether the PGCEs needed more support, with 43% of the view that more support was not required. This suggests that there is more to statements of preference than an assessment of the readiness for teaching.

A further complication in the stance of these headteachers with a strong preference for BEds is the analysis of final reports on teachers to the GTC. It seems that headteachers did not, when appraising individual teachers, voice views that PGCE-trained teachers were weaker. Gradual implementation of new reporting formats, which were only beginning to be used at the time of this study, may eventually encourage reporting to be more discriminating. However, no evidence as yet exists that headteachers are prepared to distinguish between teachers on the basis of training route in their recommendations to the GTC. These findings may be interpreted as confirming an element of sub-cultural 'mythology' or shared occupational attitudes, comparable with the Caplow (1954) study which noted the formation of occupational attitudes within a professional group with common background characteristics. Whatever the explanation, there is evidence of an element of selection of like by like which may blur any debate on the best way to train a primary teacher.

#### *The Influence of 'personal qualities' on Judgements of Quality*

As to other factors in the quality of primary classroom teachers, it appears that more of the headteachers than not would agree with the respondent who said:

The bottom line is the quality of the person - whether they are academically bright, have the right attitude and commitment, are conscientious and willing to 'go that extra mile' and of course are genuinely interested in the children

they teach and can relate well to them and their parents.

Along similar lines, Cowan (1984) set out to demonstrate the extent of the reliance of promoted staff on instinctive judgement and personal priorities amongst a group of primary school deputy headteachers. Two factors stood out in the analysis of 1,244 statements made by 70 deputy heads on a training session: enormous diversity of views in the full statements made, and emphasis on personal qualities to the relative neglect of professional skills directly related to the post. Cowan's concern is that without internal consensus, even as in this case on the attributes of an experienced teacher applying for a post, there is more likely to be an increasing imposition of external control. It may be that the smaller and more centralised Scottish system with its less complex two-route training, agreed controls and General Teaching Council registration, would not lead to this degree of diversity. It is nevertheless worth noting the extent to which the headteachers in the survey reported here made reference to the importance of personal qualities. How far such views actually influence selection of staff is a question not answered here, but when headteachers are dealing with newly trained teachers with no previous post and references, evidence upon which to base decisions is limited to initial training results. The likelihood of personal qualities having a central place in selection decisions might be greater when judgements must rely on grade results and understandings or beliefs about training route experience. Reliance on interviews, when assessing personal qualities, may also have a gender dimension. The work of Greaney, Burke and McCann (1987) analysed interviews for entry into primary teacher training in the colleges of education in Ireland. Female candidates were generally better prepared for the interview than males, and interviewers also rated females more highly on a series of personality variables such as talent, vivacity, interest and enthusiasm for teaching.

The emphasis on personal qualities and the importance of relationships and interactions is seen by some research (Nias 1989; Goodson 1991) to be highly relevant to teacher job satisfaction and by implication to any construction of criteria for the job. Research on teachers' views at different points in their career (Fraser, Draper, Taylor 1998) confirms the consistency with which such views are held over time and across the profession. Yeomans (1985) argues the case for taking teachers working relationships more specifically into account with less emphasis on line-management concepts derived from industrial models. "Inter-personal, staff group dynamics are an important influence on a primary school's success as an organisation ... and may be critical in doing a job well."

Apart from at the point of entry to training, personal qualities *per se* are not assessed. Obviously they are integral to whole-school and professionalism competences assessed on student placements, but they do not otherwise have prominence. Perhaps it is at the last selection step that individual schools (and education authorities) favour personal qualities as criteria in selecting a new member of the profession. Contrary to a view that this may be inappropriate and subjective, the evidence seems to be strongly suggestive that personal qualities occupy a central place in selection procedures for teaching posts, notwithstanding the differing perspectives held by headteachers in Scotland as to the adequacy of the BEd and PGCE routes into primary teaching.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In summary, therefore, the findings of this study suggest that, despite considerable acknowledgement of the better-preparedness of BEds, the training route taken by prospective teacher employees is not likely to be a factor in the employment decisions made by most headteachers. The personal qualities of teachers are seen by some headteachers to be more important than route. However, whether the candidate is

a 'BEd' or a 'PGCE', may indeed influence a significant minority in their staffing decisions. This position, or general orientation, looked at more closely, seems from the findings of this study to be less robust than might be judged from stated preferences. Many do not 'follow through' to seeing the need for extra support for PGCE-trained teachers and there is no sign that interim and final reports to the GTC reflect any lack of confidence in this training route. This does not of course mitigate the potential harm of voiced, generalised views about differences. The question is to what extent sub-cultural myth is the dominant factor, operating at a general level, but not sustained in particular instances, or whether in fact headteachers are convinced of a difference, and have evidence to back it up, but are not prepared to say so in formal appraisals. After all, only one headteacher (PGCE trained) out of 210 respondents preferred to employ PGCE teachers, a fact which might give pause to any advocates of limiting primary training to the PGCE route.

Training route and perceptions of training route are complex factors in the decision-making process as teachers enter the profession. There is more to being accepted into the profession as a potentially good teacher than perceived preparedness for teaching, and there is more to the voiced preference of the profession than a considered judgement of the relative value of the BEd and PGCE routes. Such considerations need to be addressed as universities and policy-makers look to future developments in primary teacher education.

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