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Time for a Change? Teacher Educator's views on the current provision. (0159)

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The wider policy context and changes to Higher Education (HE) funding arrangements in the UK have resulted in a series of changes which are still in process across the sector. Within HE the structure and content of teacher education programmes are undergoing further changes. For the school sector Whitehead (2011:27) suggests the current situation in England maybe be characterised as 'turbulent times', identifying a gradual shift from provision based in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to the increased involvement of schools and a greater diversity of training routes. Whilst Lucas et al (2012) characterise changes to the training of teachers within the Further Education (FE)/Lifelong Sector (LLS) as amounting to a decade of 'almost continuous reform', echoing a comment made five years earlier by Nasta (2007).

Within the FE/LLS compulsory teaching qualifications are a relatively recent development, with increased regulation since the 1990s (Lucas et al 2012). A teaching qualification became compulsory for new entrants to the sector in 2001, with the introduction of professional standards (FENTO, 1999) and colleges were encouraged to provide training for existing staff without a teaching qualification (Harkin, 2005). New professional standards were introduced in 2007, existing teaching qualifications were reviewed and a revised framework introduced by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK, 2007). The existing system of qualifications was replaced by a new, 'highly prescriptive' qualification structure (Lucas et al, 2012:679), with three linked components incorporating not only the LLUK professional standards but also compulsory units of assessment which detailed learning outcomes and assessment criteria (Maxwell, 2009; Lucas et al, 2012). The new framework comprised an introductory qualification, 'Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), a Certificate (CTLLS) for associate teachers not holding a full teaching role, and the Diploma (DTLLS) for those holding a full teaching role. Unlike the school sector where Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is awarded on qualification, after qualifying teachers in FE/LLS must then submit a portfolio of evidence to the Institute for Learning (IfL) the regulatory body for the sector, to gain the award of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS).

More recently the Lingfield Report (2012) has recommended further changes, including revocation of the 2007 regulations on qualifications for staff and a simplification of the qualification structure, particularly because of confusion around the full/associate teaching roles. The Learning and Skills Improvement Service

(LSIS) was given responsibility for defining the new qualifications through consultation with the LLS. Their findings are based on a large scale survey, drawing on 355 responses from the sector, representing Colleges, HEIs and other training providers, local authorities and awarding bodies (LSIS, 2013).

While Teacher Education has been the subject of research and review, less attention has been paid to teacher educators themselves (Murray and Male, 2005). Although the complexities of the role are becoming well documented, the majority of research focused on the school sector, with the LLS largely overlooked (Korthagen et al, 2005; Murray et al, 2011; Boyd et al, 2011).

This paper reports an investigation of the views and experience of 24 teacher educators teaching on Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes for the Post-Compulsory sector, within a partnership network comprising a University and seven partner colleges. The teacher educators ranged in experience from 2 – 22 years, some would therefore have only known the post-2007 framework, whilst others had experience of a range of qualifications across different providers over extended periods of time. The study used a mixed methods design, with a questionnaire used to explore teacher educators' views and to select a sample of experienced teacher educators (having more than five years' experience) to participate in a semi-structured interview.

The teacher educators were asked to identify what they perceived as strengths of the existing framework and where they felt improvements might be made, both in relation to the national qualification and their local provision.

Findings

The most frequently identified strength of the post 2007 qualifications was seen as increased professionalism, expressed by one as:

'Recognition of teaching as profession, not a craft'

This was linked to the requirement for all teachers to be qualified and to the development of the QTLS status offering parity with the school-based QTS.

The central role of practice was also seen as a strength, with references to *'a greater practice focus'* and the *'highlighting of practice in assessment'*. Though the view was also expressed, that an increased emphasis on practice needing to be supported by *'stronger theory-practice links'*. A greater emphasis on practice was seen by some as a move towards skills based training, at the expense of theoretical knowledge.

Countering Lingfield's (2012) finding of confusion over the qualification framework, the range of qualifications available was seen as a strength, allowing for progression, although some problems were noted with the overlap between modules and

ambiguities around the CTLLS qualification. The flexibility of the qualifications, with pre-service and in-service training routes was also valued.

The use of workplace mentors, identified by Ofsted (2003) and introduced in the 2007 reforms, was also seen as a strength of the existing programmes, though this was also identified as an area where further improvements could be made within the local provision.

The prescriptive nature of the 2007 framework with its 'microspecification' of programme content (Maxwell, 2009) reflecting the wider rise of performativity within HE (Murray et al, 2011), was evident in comments about over-bureaucratic processes and the creation of a '*tick-box culture*', with the suggestion of '*a less performative approach*' as an improvement. While this undoubtedly reflects the nature of the national framework, it may also indicate recognition of over-zealous compliance with LLUK specifications as something which could be addressed in local provision.

In a climate of change teacher educators are clearly aware of ways which provision might be improved, at national and local levels. While the latest reforms undoubtedly draw on the wealth of experience within the sector, it is to be hoped that a period of stability may follow to allow time to '*run and reflect*' on new programmes.

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