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## Competence and Quality in the training of teachers for the post-compulsory sector in the UK

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the development in a United Kingdom university of a curriculum for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in the Postcompulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector, based on a modular framework, generic outcomes, and principles of reflective practice. Using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, it evaluates the first three years of the programme, and explores the impact on the students' quality of learning of the speed of the transformation and the structural changes necessitated by the new framework. Also discussed is the extent to which the quality of learning of ITT students is dependent on elements of experience which are impervious to curricular change.*

### INTRODUCTION

The move towards competence and outcomes based models of curriculum and assessment, initiated in the United Kingdom (UK) to support the development of youth training programs (Jessup, 1991), has recently accelerated, and has also been reflected in developments outside the United Kingdom, as in the transformation of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) in Australia (Raggatt, 1995; Smyth and Dow, 1998). In the UK this growth has consisted of the development of competence and outcomes based assessment in the postcompulsory education and training (PCET) sector in the form of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQS) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQS) (Burke, 1989, 1995; Bees and Swords, 1989), and the more gradual acceptance of the relevance of the model in higher education (Otter, 1995). The higher education sector in which the outcomes based model was adopted earliest was teacher education (Attwood, 1998), since in 1992 the competence model was endorsed by the Department for Education (DfE, now the Department for Education and Employment or DFEE) in Circular 9/92 (DfE, 1992). Subsequently efforts have been made to carry the developments through into education and training in the 'true' professions (Bell and Johnstone,

1998). The developments have, in all sectors, been closely associated with a discourse of 'national standards', and the rationale behind the introduction of Circular 9192 exemplifies this concern (and see Hyland, 1994, p. 89).

Architects of reform have argued that competence based qualifications provide better information for potential employers and a guarantee of relevant curriculum. In addition, the assessment model is thought to provide additional benefits for learners, in that the separation of the mode of assessment from the learning which leads to attainment of competencies or outcomes will reduce the 'backwash' effect of assessment on learning, and enable the learners to take greater responsibility for their own learning (Jessup, 1995). However, the impact of these innovations on quality of learning is a relatively under-researched area. Moreover, the research which has been published tends to support some of the theoretical critique of the curriculum as the educational equivalent of post-Fordism (Edwards, 1993; Gee et al., 1997), and identifies negative effects of the model. These include criticisms that the approach leads to atomisation of tasks and that the character of the assessment framework can tend to work against the intended improvement in relevance, since students' attention is diverted from the learning to the end goal of the assessment (Helsby et al., 1998). One commentator has even argued that the regulatory aspects of these initiatives is a sign that the State is taking an approach which is not post-Fordist enough, in that it is failing to encourage the development of teachers as highly skilled internationally competitive knowledge workers (Graham, 1998).

This paper uses evidence from an evaluation of an outcomes based initial teacher training programme for the PCET sector in the UK to explore some of the issues raised above. In particular, we examine the impact of some of the practical consequences of the assessment framework and the recording of achievement on the quality of student experiences of their training. We also try to take account of the effect on the programme and the quality of learning of the

rapidity with which the curriculum was transformed. Finally, we evaluate the extent to which it is the enduring features of the experience of training to be a teacher (such as the depth and intensity of the 'work-based experience' element, or the beliefs and values which a student brings to their training), rather than surface structures of the curriculum, which have the greatest impact on the quality of learning.

## **COMPETENCE, OUTCOMES AND QUALITY LEARNING**

The standing of outcomes-based models of learning and assessment has been a matter of fierce controversy in the UK (Jessup 199 1; Barton et al., 1994; Hyland, 1994; Burke, 1995), Europe and Australia (Smyth and Dow, 1998). Proponents of the competence based model have argued that it represents a revolutionary approach to curriculum and provides a degree of access, flexibility and relevance not characteristics of older forms of curriculum which were tied to the institutional delivery of educational goods (Jessup, 1995, p. 36).

It has been argued that the development of outcomes-based models of education and training provides many benefits for 'professional' workers (and we will include PCET teachers in this category in spite of question marks against their status), as well as for the craft and technician levels at which they were initially aimed (Mitchell, 1995). In part, this is the result of a recognition that professions have been swept along in the wake of the post-Fordist developments in manufacturing and services. The opaque character of the 'professional knowledge mandate' has been challenged by the perceived need for the State to be able to guarantee the performance of those it directly or indirectly employs, also seen in the 'true' professions such as Law (Sommerlad, 1995). This can be seen as a major influence behind the development of Circular 9/92, which argued for the desirability of a 'cradle-to-grave profiling system, going from initial teacher training, through induction, to further professional development, including appraisal these criteria being compatible with the competence-based NVQ framework developed by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications' (DfE, 1992).

The notion that the outcomes based model of assessment should be applicable to teacher training met with scepticism and opposition from an early stage. Some of these doubts were specifically rooted in the notion that professional work was distinct in character from much of the craft and technician training to which the model had previously been applied. Eraut (1995) has argued that the outcomes to be considered in professional education needed to be longer term and to range wider, encompassing the needs and views of the clients of those professionals. Embedding these outcomes into the training process would increase the significance and effectiveness of the process of reflective practice, and the metacognitive process of developing learning strategies, but this implied for Eraut a greater involvement with practice during the training period.

On a more critical note, Hyland has referred scathingly to Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) as 'conceptually confused, epistemologically ambiguous and based on largely discredited behaviourist learning principles' and asked 'how could the use of such a model possibly enhance the quality of teaching in Further Education or contribute to the enhancement of professionalism for lecturers?' (1994, p. 89). In particular, he identified a contradiction between CBET and the model of 'reflective practice' which had in the 1980s achieved a position of moral dominance in the curriculum of many initial teacher training courses (1994, p. 90): 'this cyclical process of learning and development is totally negated by an approach which is concerned only with collecting evidence to satisfy competences based on a functional analysis of work roles' (1994, p.92). The analysis that this downgraded model of assessment is associated with a parallel deprofessionalisation of teachers has become widespread (see for example, Hutchinson, 1993; Hodkinson, 1998; and for a review see Carter, 1997).

Wolf (1993;1995) has identified criterion referencing in itself as a major problem in the assessment model. The claim of outcomes based models to provide transparency of judgement criteria leads, Wolf argues, to a 'spiral of specification', where, in order to avoid the necessity for normative judgements on the part of

assessors, the assessment instruments become ever more detailed and unwieldy (1993). However, as she notes, even minutely detailed specifications cannot obviate the need for normative assessor judgement, particularly in relation to performance based activities, such as teaching: 'the actual performance which one observes directly, or in the form of artefacts, is intrinsically variable: one person's playing of a piano piece, one person's operations plan, is by definition not exactly the same as another's and cannot be fitted mechanistically to either a written list of criteria, or to an example' (1994, p.35). The necessary consequence of accepting this perspective is to raise the profile of measures which improve the reliability of the ratings of groups of assessors: these are largely measures which work towards the socialisation of assessors, such as regular and consistent moderation meetings based on common judgements of sample materials. We note below that the time scale for introducing this model to the initial teacher training schemes under discussion appeared to exclude the possibility of embedding such procedures, or undertaking staff appropriate staff development.

Another critical issue in CBET is the degree to which learning processes might be trivialised by a 'backwash effect' from highly specified assessment criteria. In effect, the very transparency of the assessment criteria might result in a goal displacement on the part of the student: instead of the learning leading naturally to the collection of evidence of competence, the collection of minimal evidence becomes the goal, and, as Hodkinson notes, the ingenuity of students might mean that 'unintended' means are found of producing evidence (1992, p.32).

The final issue we shall touch on in this brief review is the role of values in teaching 'professionalism'. Schon has pointed to the centrality of values and value conflicts in the 'indeterminate zones of practice' which have become increasingly significant in professional activity (1987, pp. 67), and which 'technical rationality' is poorly equipped to deal with. Whilst Mitchell argues that values are possibly better accommodated within an outcomes framework than in a more traditional scheme of assessment (1995, pp. 105-7), Smyth and Dow note that

'values are difficult to measure in outcomes terms, and are regarded as being incapable of being readily rendered either true or false, and as such cannot be regarded as legitimate knowledge claims' (1998, p.298). The problem in relation to the legitimate assessment of values is not solely the property of outcomes-based models, for as Fullan notes, 'personal beliefs are a critical part of teacher education that has been neglected both in the design of programs and in research on how teachers develop' (1991, p.297). However curriculum designers using an outcomes based model have the option of building in devices such as 'personal outcomes' which can embrace values, or of 'embedding values in criteria statements by which the achievement of outcomes will be based. As we note below, both these ingenious strategies were employed in the curriculum design under discussion. In terms of the quality of learning, however, these strategies may cause problems both for the students who genuinely wish to achieve development in value components of issues like equality of educational opportunity, and for the assessors who wish to track 'unacceptable' values and render those who hold them ineligible for qualification as a teacher.

We will now move on to examine how these problems in applying the outcomes based model to initial teacher training were addressed by the institution in which we undertook our research.

### **EMBEDDING OUTCOMES: THE NEW MODEL OF INITIAL TRAINING FOR POSTCOMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING AT 'CHERRY HILL'**

'Cherry Hill', a site of one of the UK's 'new' universities, houses a School of Education which has been involved in the initial training, of teachers for the post compulsory sector since 1947. Prior to 1993, provision in this area had existed in the form of two separate 'courses', a Certificate in Education for non-graduates with technical and vocational qualifications externally validated by a local 'old' university, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, validated by the Council for National Academic Awards. The two courses had distinct curricula and cultures, and communication between the students on them was limited and unsatisfactory. A number

of factors combined to increase pressure to transform this existing provision. The demand for non-graduate teachers in the sector declined alongside the demand by unqualified students for places, rendering, the existence of two separate courses impractical. The incorporation of the University as an independent Higher Education Corporation with authority to validate its own courses coincided with the quinquennial review of the two existing courses. The emphasis on competence in Circular 9/92 and the initiation of discussions concerning the development of a lead body for NVQs in Education in the UK (with the implied threat of an externally imposed system), and the awareness of the need to match training, and assessment methodology more closely with that prevalent in the post-compulsory sector generally implied the need for a wholesale revision of the curriculum. Partly as a result of the intention of the University to move to a general Credit Accumulation Transfer Scheme, the model which emerged was modular, with each of the twelve modules designed around an aspect of the teacher role as elicited from research undertaken by one of the course designers (Cook, 1992). Adherence to this model was considered a necessary consequence of its adoption by the in-service Certificate of Education and Postgraduate Certificate of Education run by the same institution through a network of satellite centres in Colleges of Further Education which also provided most of the opportunities for work-based experience for the ITT courses.

The in-service course, designed to be compatible with the Preliminary Teaching Certificate offered by the City and Guilds Institute, was influenced by the competence model. The initial teacher training team however, opted for an outcomes based model which would enable them to incorporate elements of Donald Schon's 'reflection in action' model (1987) to professional development (through the mandatory requirement for students to maintain a personal learning diary), as well as elements of the educational theory which they regarded as important to the success of reflection, and which a rigid competency based model would have excluded from the curriculum. This decision did not, as we shall see, enable them to escape from the tensions, explored above, implicit in applying the competency based model to teacher training, particularly as the mode of

assessment was through the presentation of separate portfolios of evidence, cross-referenced to a Record of Achievement, for each of the modules undertaken. The issue of values was partly addressed by the application of 'General Criteria' across all modules, which in addition to functional issues like communication and numeracy, included professionalism, and, during, the early stages of the course, environmentalism. The weight to be accorded to these 'criteria' as opposed to the outcomes attached to the modules was never clarified however.

The process of designing the course, now to be known as a Pathway, and its accompanying courseware, was undertaken by a team of seventeen over a period of eight months, though the team tended to do most of the spadework for the design in smaller groups of between two and four. The majority of the modules included in the two areas of the Pathway which allowed for optionality were designed by individuals. The courseware, which included the Record of Achievement (known to Students and staff as the ROA) which was to be the central assessment instrument for the course, and which initially listed all the competencies included in the validation document, was written by two core members of the team in the seven weeks between validation and the first cohort arriving on the new Pathway. The speed of the transformation allowed little time for staff or institutional development, and we shall explore the implications of this later.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The approach to evaluating the new Pathway was characterised by data and methodological triangulation. In both of the first two years of the innovation, a questionnaire designed to test 'approval ratings' (based on a five point Likert Scale) for all the various aspects of the Pathway was issued to all students on the Pathway in its closing stages. The structure of the questionnaire enabled us to measure responses to specific modules, to specific aspects of all modules (like the quality of resources or availability of tutor time), and to general aspects of the programme, such as the assessment model, the quality of communication, the balance between curriculum elements concerned with educational theory and practice. It also enabled us to look at the

differences between the experiences of students according to their membership of the graduate or non-graduate element of the Pathway, according to their reasons for electing to undertake teacher training.

The response rate in the first year was 78 per cent (182 out of a total of 234 students) and in the second year 68.5 per cent (138 out of 202 students). The design of the questionnaire was based on a 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) of informal student responses, tutorial views of key aspects in the construction of ITT courses, and previous course evaluations. It also included the option for respondents to write substantial qualitative responses to open questions. The data resulting from this questionnaire (analysed using SPSS for Windows) was supplemented by discussions with groups of students (one group of fourteen and one group of nine), and individual interviews with a small sample of eighteen students and approximately 50 per cent (nine) of the tutorial team who initiated the new Pathway.

## **FORM AND STRUCTURE IN THE CURRICULUM AND QUALITY LEARNING**

The modular structure of the course, while intended to increase flexibility within the CATS framework, actually led to unexpected rigidities and difficulties in establishing boundaries between the different locations on the course where learning might take place. In particular, the two modules concerned with basic preparation for teaching, 'Designer' and 'Planner', overlapped with each other and with 'Subject Specialist': this problem was so acute that in the second year 'Designer and Planner' was redesigned as one 'double' module. Student approval for the length of modules was lower than for any other area of the course apart from the Record of Achievement, and the overwhelming majority of students interviewed felt that in the assessment process far greater weight should have been attached to the modules associated with work-based experience. However, the modules which occurred later in the Pathway, such as 'Evaluator' and 'Enterpriser' which were often criticised as irrelevant and over-weighted, may have been received in this way because they encompassed non-classroom based aspects of the teacher role, the value of

which students might not be expected to appreciate until they had been in full employment for a while. Nevertheless, many students volunteered the comment that the uniform weighting of modules had given rise to asymmetries and a lack of balance.

Some staff and students emphasised the impact that the modular approach had in fragmenting the teacher role. They argued that this ignored the fact that teacher competencies were actually practiced as 'ensemble' (Lecturer 8). As one student put it in a synopsis of his experience: 'the modular framework does not suit my approach to learning. It is simply too fragmentary. It decomposes experience into little units of evidence but these are difficult to reform into a tangible whole.'

One of the features of the outcomes base of the curriculum, particularly given its grounding in research on the role of the contemporary postcompulsory teacher, was the extent of the coverage of aspects of the role: in a sense the Record of Achievement represented a 'tool kit' for the beginning teacher. The benefits of this approach were recognised by several members of the team, including some who had not initially accepted the model, when they were preparing students for job interviews at the end of the year:

*'Initially I didn't feel comfortable with the new model, the breakthrough for me came towards the end of the first Year when people were going for interviews...at the interview they were well informed about wider issues ... and now I think this was the right thing to do. In today's Further Education people are needed who are well prepared.'*(Respondent 6).

Empirically affirming this feature as a benefit of the 'new' model is difficult, since the students who responded to questionnaires and gave interviews had not experienced the old model. However we interviewed members of the 'old' Postgraduate Certificate of Education, currently working in Further Education, about their experiences of the 'old' course, and one of the criticisms raised was the very fact that some core aspects of the day-to-day role of the teacher had not been covered systematically, since each tutor tended to allow the work to reflect either their own preoccupations, or that of the particular group they were working with in a particular year. One

former student identified work on assessment as a particular 'gap' in his learning:

*'...and how to read the syllabus as regards marking schemes, and creating things like that, which I have just found out I have to do. I'm preparing an assignment that has to have my marking scheme, and it has to fit in with their marking scheme, so it's all cross checked Well we never did anything like that at Cherry Hill and for me that is a big gap.'*

The view of those members of the development team favourable to the outcomes model of assessment reflected that voiced by Burke: that since, in the 'Jessup model' learning outcomes are not expressed as instructional objectives, they need represent no straitjacket on the curriculum (1995, p.69). Some lecturers on the team felt however that the outcomes structure did represent a constriction on their ability to shape an appropriate needs-based curriculum. One commented that 'I think we have an industry linked competency course - we haven't actually written a programme that is about developing teachers' (Lecturer 2) while another felt that they had become 'almost a bureaucrat, "ticking people through" the course ... diverting energy and learning, from the core of the teaching activity' (Lecturer 3). Another Lecturer echoed Alison Wolf's argument (1994) that the definition of outcomes still leaves the central problem of assessor judgement intact, while creating artificial walls between what should be integrated aspects of teacher performance:

*'I had grave doubts about a competency, based model of looking at the processes of performing as a teacher Not because I don't think teaching can't be described in terms of a range of competencies, but simply, that not all there is ... competencies are organised in a repertoire - you don't use them one by one -you use them in an ensemble - the really skillful teacher will use them in combinations in response to specific situations, and when you are looking for a threshold level .... it's very difficult to predict what is going to be a "fail" performance the only criteria you can be certain are very objective are those that are trivial e.g. can the person actually, switch on or off the overhead projector - these are trivial things - the really, important things are ones which are very difficult to describe' (Lecturer 8).*

The responses of members of the team to the model were conditioned partly by their disciplinary background. Those from a scientific or technical background tended to view the model as relevant, well suited to the task of producing 'the competent teacher' and especially relevant to the needs of teachers entering the post compulsory sector, since it gave them the opportunity to become thoroughly familiar with the vocabulary and practice of a system which they would have to operate with their own students. Those from an arts or social science based background tended to have an ideological predisposition towards hostility for the model, arguing that it rendered difficult the task of presenting teaching as an holistic process. This latter position echoed (often in similar words) the critique by Helsby and colleagues of the model as employed in Advanced Level GNVQ in the UK: 'the atomisation of content which is encouraged by the complex course specification and exacerbated by the introduction of end-of-unit tests may militate against holistic understanding by students' (1993, p.71).

As we noted above, the development team had attempted to mitigate the worst aspects of this apparent defect of the model by adopting a set of outcomes rather than competences, and by including 'cognitive' and 'personal' outcomes. However, the very fact that the curriculum had been developed in small teams and at considerable speed led to the embedding in the assessment framework a set of heterogeneous outcomes. Some outcomes embodied philosophical and value positions on teaching, as in '1.5 explores the ways in which students' open-ended capacity to learn can be liberated' (outcome from the initial 'Teacher as Planner' module), and were clearly likely to be assessed according to unspecified normative criteria. Other modules succumbed to what Alison Wolf has described as the spiral of specification (1993) as in this example from the Teacher as Practitioner module which provides a 'check list' of teacher activities in a practice setting:

'7. Creates and maintains an environment conducive to learning:

7.1 controls levels of heat, light and ventilation in the learning areas

7.2 checks availability of board writing materials

7.3 checks availability and function of audio-visual equipment

7.4 implements safety regulations'.

This variety of approaches also led to wide variation in the number of outcomes confronting students. The module last referred to specified sixty-four outcomes, the Assessor module which attempted to incorporate the NVQ derived TDLB standards specified sixty-seven outcomes, ranging in level of specificity from 'understands that there are deep structure/surface structure issues in any type of assessment' to 'records are legible and accurate'. Teacher as Professional, on the other hand, specified only seven outcomes, of which six were in essence disguised criteria, rather than outcomes. In the first year of the Pathway, the outcomes as specified in the document presented for validation were presented to students in their Record of Achievement largely undiluted. They were expected to present evidence and cross-reference each piece of evidence to all the relevant outcomes. Students undoubtedly found this complex, and many argued that the Record of Achievement had been a serious impediment to quality learning. In the first year it was regarded as 'less than adequate' by more than 70.1 per cent of respondents, and there was a similarly hostile response to the whole process of claiming credit. In part, this was because tutors had developed no uniform approach, either to the guidance to be given to students as to how to claim credit, nor to the threshold criteria to be applied to students' work. As one team member noted:

*'I think in those early days we were getting the message (from the students) that "well, so and so says we ought to do it this way .. and you are saying we ought to do it this way"...it could have been improved by having more staff development, looking at what we might mean by ROAs and reflective diaries and so on - so that we did all sing off the same hymn sheet' (Lecturer 1).*

A large number of students made critical reference to inconsistency in the qualitative comments appended to their questionnaires: 'poor grasp of ROA by tutors'; 'some tutors said "do this" others said "do that"\*; 'inconsistencies between tutors regarding interpretation of outcomes'; 'some lecturers required more evidence

than other to fulfill criteria'. However it was not merely the inconsistency of interpretation which students found difficult about the Record of Achievement. Students themselves picked up the points prevalent in the critical literature: the degree of specification rendered the procedure cumbersome, bureaucratic and time consuming. It appeared that even the least complex outcomes were difficult for learners to understand in advance of the achievement of mastery learning, (as opposed to competence), and often appeared to bear no relationship to the learning, that students felt they had achieved; the outcomes became a kind of template for minimal necessary learning, rather than a framework to record the optimal exploitation of learning opportunities. Amongst student comments were the following: the ROA was largely incomprehensible to most students and took up far too much time'; sadly a great deal of time was spent during, the first two modules on ROAs, and this more detailed critique:

*'The number of outcomes to be achieved and the level of detail with which the), are specified is too great to realistically produce evidence for each one or correlate the detailed outcomes with single pieces of evidence in an meaningful fashion. The student is more likely to feel overwhelmed by, the scale of the task, or in the later stages of the course rather blasé about paying much attention to the detailed outcomes as he realises that for tutors to check the satisfying of the detailed outcomes is not realistic.'*

In part, the extremely hostile reaction to the ROA in the first year could be partly attributed to the haste with which it had been put together- in subsequent years, the number of outcomes in all modules was drastically reduced, the wording was modified to bear a greater resemblance to 'Plain English' and guidance notes as to the kind of evidence which was suitable were provided. This never entirely eased the problem however: students continued over the next five years to complain about having to grapple with evidencing outcomes when they were more concerned with the basics of preparing to teach, and remained sceptical about the extent to which portfolios and ROAs were assessed uniformly by the team, in spite of an internal moderation system. Although the approval ratings for the ROA rose in the

second year, it remained the most unpopular aspect of the Pathway.

### **INNOVATION EFFECTS: OWNERSHIP, RESISTANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Fullan argues that the key message for those wishing to ensure the successful involvement of teachers in chance projects is: 'understand the subjective world - the phenomenology - of the role incumbents as a necessary precondition for engaging in any change effort with them' (1991, p.131). In developing this position, he points to the distinctive features of teachers' occupational experience: the manner in which their work is undertaken between the opposite poles of individualism and collegiality. This aspect of the character of teacher training work emerged clearly from our interviews with the staff involved in teaching the new course. Firstly, members of the team tended to respond positively or negatively towards the initiative in general, and some of its key features in particular, depending, on the extent of their involvement in the planning and development of the curriculum: the failure to observe principles of collegiality clearly had an adverse effect. Secondly, the staff who had worked on the 'old' postgraduate certificate had clearly taken the opportunity to develop a highly individualistic style and approach, and found the process of surrendering autonomy problematic. Finally, several staff were hostile to the very philosophy and practice of outcomes based assessment on which the new programme was based. The team member responsible for leading, the development acknowledged that it had been difficult to involve fully all the staff who were to teach on the new programme, perhaps because the core team were themselves uncertain about key features of the scheme:

*'I have to accept that the change was rapid, and probably there wasn't sufficient staff development... on the other hand maybe those of us who were developing the curriculum and the whole system - the scheme if you like - ourselves felt less certain than we might have done about giving development and guidance ... we felt that we were learning, and perhaps we should have shared that more.'*

The potential for confusion was increased by the fact that change embraced an unusually wide number of aspects of the lecturers' work: not simply 'curriculum content' but also group organisation student support materials (the course required, in addition to the Record of Achievement discussed above, a lengthy student handbook, and work-based experience), assessment guide to work methodology and the recording of credit. The stress caused by the rapid initiation of the Pathway allowed little time for team meetings to solve problems like the common approach to the ROAs and led members of the team on occasions to retreat into an individualist mode: 'it wasn't something we were doing well as a team .... had we talked about it more it would have been better... there is a tendency for people to just go off on their own, and not to, you know, hammer things out' (Lecturer 4).

However, it should be noted that even in this first year, response to the five point approval ratings produced no mean rating for the whole group lower than 2.7 (which would indicate slightly less than adequate', and the vast bulk of ratings for course organisation, content and tutorial support were between 3.4 and 4.3. For individuals, it appeared that substantial learning and development took place, and the support they received was important for this development. This leads us to consider whether in fact the students' most important experiences of training were only marginally affected by the curriculum chance.

### **UNDER THE SURFACE: PERSISTENT INFLUENCES ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING**

In addition to all of the issues discussed above, which might be seen as a direct function of the change process itself and the structures, procedures and instruments initiated by the chance process, we would argue that a number of factors which influence the quality of learning persist throughout, and despite, the constant processes of curricular change. These include: the reasons trainees have for entering teaching and their professional motivation and beliefs (Hollingsworth, 1989, p. 172; Stoddart and Gomez, 1990); their previous educational experience; institutional quality, as embedded in

processes of communication and management; the personal idiosyncrasies of 'key players' who control aspects of a trainee's experience, most importantly the personal tutor figure at the University end of training and the mentor at the work-based experience end; and perhaps most importantly the character of the work-based experience itself. Those who commented negatively on their work-based experience (very much a minority) often personalised their comments: 'I had problems with one member of staff at my placement college. This person felt threatened by my qualifications and made life difficult for me by asking questions of me in front of the class I was teaching and telling me off in front of them'. Others referred to the demoralising, atmosphere of staffrooms where the main topics of conversation were industrial disputes and redundancy payments. For others, it was clear that individual tutors or mentors had 'made' their experience of the Pathway. The qualitative data concerning the importance of the tutor, the work based placement or the composition and functioning, of the groups students belonged to was borne out by the quantitative data which indicated significant differences in approval ratings correlated with these variables. The issue of matching students to groups in which they feel at home is an extra-curricular one, and was addressed by staff through clear and open procedures for changing groups. It was substantially more difficult to change placements however, since these were dependent on inter-institutional arrangements, so the 'match' here could be harder to find.

Our data indicated that students whose application for entry to the course had resulted from a sudden career change, or from a lack of other career prospects, and who might therefore be expected to be less highly motivated, gave lower approval ratings to the course in general, and were also less optimistic about their career prospects. The Certificate students without previous experience of Higher Education gave higher approval ratings than postgraduates for the course, and were more likely to find the balance of theory and practice appropriate, whilst the graduates were more likely to be critical of the lack of theory. The prospect of designing a curriculum which would suit all potential entrants would be a daunting one, and data from interviews and group discussions

indicated that many students' feelings about training to be a teacher were radically affected by the rapid change in college organisation, and pay and conditions in the profession.

## CONCLUSION

Stronach and Morris characterised the 'vocationalist' reforms of the 1980s and early 1990s as 'policy hysteria', a combination of shortening cycles of current reforms, multiple innovation with a consequent endemic problem of credibility, an erosion of professional discretion and untested and untestable success claims (1994, p.6). The introduction of the CBET model to initial training for the PCET sector can comfortably be accommodated within this description, and this paper has represented a modest attempt to at least explore some of the success claims of the model. There appears to be evidence both for and against the model, in that whilst many aspects of the teacher role were incorporated within the core of the curriculum which might previously have escaped the notice of student teachers, and many of them found the outcomes framework a secure basis for learning others experienced the 'atomisation' of their learning so often referred to in the critical literature.

However, it seems equally clear that the students' quality of learning in the initial stages of the programme would have been enhanced if the transition had not been so rapid, so 'hysterical', and more extensive opportunities for staff and student involvement in the shaping of the new programme had given all the participants some sense of ownership over the structure, the content and the courseware. Michael Fullan argues that the solution to the problems caused by inappropriate change programmes is for 'all individuals' to 'get into the change business; if individuals do not do this they will be left powerless' (1991, p.353). However, he also crucially points to the fact that individuals can only achieve this project within a framework of institutional renewal and development (1991, pp.348-9). The feverish atmosphere in which change was initiated in this instance was clearly inimical to institutional development, but nevertheless it continues to be characteristic of

much of the curricular reform taking place in the 1990s.

Finally, the data indicates that some of the most significant aspects of the experience of students on ITT courses may be unrelated, or impervious to the surface structure of the curriculum. The relationships which students develop with individual tutors at the University, or mentors at their work-based experience, may be a filter through which their entire experience of the course is viewed. The lottery of the precise location or composition of their teaching practice placement, and the promptness with which it had been possible to achieve a placement could make or mar their entire experience of training to teach. In spite of efforts to ensure quality control in this aspect of training, cataclysmic events in the PCET sector nationally or locally, such as the merger of colleges, the announcement of large scale redundancies in a long term collaborator, or structural inequities in the funding for student placements between the schools and PCET sector can instantly transform the experience of individuals or cohorts of student. In his critical analysis of the hegemony of auditing public services since the 1980s, Michael Power (1997) links the growth of external auditing to the decline of personal relationships of trust, and argues that the prevalence of conformance verification procedures has privileged 'observing' over 'doing'. Both students and tutors on the competence based PGCE/Cert Ed felt that the sheer mechanics of observing and verifying competence had detracted from the relationships of trust which are at the heart of the supported development of trainee teachers. Tutors felt that the increasing pressure on them in terms of numbers and assessment burden rendered the generation of relationships of trust between all parties to the development of teachers problematic. It is this combination of a 'verification' as opposed to developmental approach to teacher development, alongside the withdrawal of tutor support time, that may present the greatest challenge to the effective development of teachers.

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