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NEVER MIND THE EDU-, WHAT ABOUT THE CATE?:
THE BACKGROUND TO CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION

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If anyone were misguided enough to offer a prize for the sector of English education most subject to government intervention, the institutions concerned with initial teacher training would win it hands down. The intervention (a less polite word would be interference) has, over time, taken three main forms: alterations to the structure and organisation of provision; attempts to match student numbers to subsequent demand; and control over curricular content.

This paper is an attempt to take a relatively long-term view of relevant developments, setting the present situation in its historical context. It will therefore necessarily adopt a broad-brush rather than finely detailed approach. It will also focus on the scene in England. What has happened in Wales and Northern Ireland is broadly similar but Scotland has its own independent (and to envious southern eyes more congenial) system.

It is perhaps convenient to begin, by way of scene-setting at least, with the publication towards the end of the final report of the McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944). Concerned with issues of initial teacher training and qualifications (and hence indirectly of curriculum), but its most disputed recommendation dealt with the way provision should be organised. The McNair Committee itself was equally divided between regrouping and consolidation of the existing Joint Examining Boards and creating new university-based Area Training Organisations. Eventually, the argument was settled in favour of the ATOs, and these were set up between 1947 and 1951. The result was to link the many small, single sex colleges more closely with the universities, with a consequent tightening of standards and increase in public confidence (Gosden, 1989). By 1960, the case was successfully made to extend the basic course from two years to three, heralding a phase of rapid expansion.

Meanwhile, teacher supply had become the province of the National Advisory Council on the Training and Supply of Teachers, set up in 1949 to advise ministers on "national policy on the training and conditions of qualification of teachers, and on the recruitment and distribution of teachers in ways best calculated to meet the needs of the schools or other educational establishments" (Ministry of Education, 1949). The Council's Eighth Report (Ministry of Education, 1962) is of particular interest in its concern to look ahead "at least 20 years". Many of its recommendations anticipated those of the Robbins Report (1963). It called for a further increase in the length of courses to four years, which "should culminate in the award of a degree of or an equivalent qualification". It suggested the merging of some colleges with universities and other institutions, and the expansion of others to take on general degree work. It proposed the chartering of selected institutions or groups of institutions outside the universities to award their own degrees. And perhaps most significantly, it coupled these suggestions with a reference to "a grave and persistent shortage of teachers" as far ahead as 1985; with the assertion that "the crucial shortages will be in the primary schools"; and with the prediction that "the shortage ... is not merely a present but a chronic disability".

In the following year, Robbins, alongside its advocacy of a large expansion of higher education as a whole, advanced the proposal for a four-year B.Ed degree to complement the three-year Teacher's Certificate. The government of the day accepted this recommendation and also accepted the recommendation of the Robbins Committee that, symbolically renamed the training colleges as Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). It suggested a merging of some colleges with universities and other institutions, and the expansion of others to take on general degree work. It proposed the chartering of selected institutions or groups of institutions outside the universities to award their own degrees. And perhaps most significantly, it coupled these suggestions with a reference to "a grave and persistent shortage of teachers" as far ahead as 1985; with the assertion that "the crucial shortages will be in the primary schools"; and with the prediction that "the shortage ... is not merely a present but a chronic disability".

The next milestone along the tortuous route taken by English teacher training was the publication of the James Report (1972). The preceding Committee of Inquiry was set up in late 1970 by a Secretary of State who would subsequently come to be even more notorious than she was then-Margaret Thatcher. In characteristic style, she demanded that the Committee should make its recommendations within 12 months. In the event, its report, entitled 'Frame-up for Expansion', was not published until 14 months later. The recommendations included the division of the teacher education programme into three cycles. The first, 'personal education', entailed academic study for a new two-year qualification, the Diploma in Higher Education (DiHE); the second embraced initial training followed by a year of induction; and the third constituted a minimum entitlement for all serving teachers to one term of "substantive courses" in every seven years of service, in addition to "short-term third cycle activities".

The Committee had been invited to consider, among other issues, whether a larger proportion of intending teachers should be educated with students who have not chosen their careers or chosen other careers. Within the Department of Education and Science, opinion had been hardening against 'monotechnic institutions', on the grounds that they could not easily absorb fluctuations in demand. The Report came out instead in favour of acknowledging "the enhanced status and independence of the colleges", and argued for the abolition of the Area Training Organisations in favour of a system of regional councils in which university departments of education would participate but not predominate, under the overall authority of a National Council for the Training and Education of Teachers.

The James Report was given a mixed reception at best. The proposals for a third cycle of inservice education were widely welcomed, but many teacher educators in the colleges strongly opposed the move towards a consecutive, as against a concurrent, pattern of academic study and professional preparation. The proposed maintenance of teacher education as a third distinct sector, alongside the universities and the polytechnics, was not what the Department's civil servants had wanted or expected. In retrospect, although it helped in certain respects to modify - or at least to stir up - professional opinion, the James Report must be deemed to have been a failure in policy terms.

In any case, it can be said to have been overtaken by events. The fall in the national birth rate, starting in 1964 and continuing well into the 1970s, meant fewer pupils for the schools, and hence fewer teachers. Eleven months after James, in December 1972, the government published a White Paper entitled 'A Framework for Expansion', which was aptly retitled "A Frame-up for Contraction" by the teacher education community. While the expansion of in-service training was accepted as national policy, and the DiHE qualification retained, the recommended award not necessarily tied to teacher education, the White Paper's central concern was to accelerate the reshaping of the system by mergers to form larger institutions, amalgamations with "polytechnics or other colleges of further education" (not with universities), or by closures. A year after this warning shot, the process of ruthless retrenchment and "substantive courses" began to earn its plaudits. This continued all the way into the next decade, resulting in the outright disappearance of a quarter of the colleges in the 1970s and finally, by the 1982 round of cuts, of nearly a half. Despite the considerable numerical reductions of 10 years earlier, the numbers of places for initial training were cut from 114,000 in 1971-2 to 65,000 in 1973; a second tranche of cuts announced in 1977 reduced this in stages to under 47,000 by
1981. Only a society now hardened to massive redundancies and persistent unemployment can look back at these events with equanimity. The financial arrangements for severance of employment were relatively generous, but the costs in terms of human misery and blighted careers were high.

The government's concern to disengage initial teacher education from university control was signalled in 1975 by the abolition of the Area Training Organisations and the reassertion that 'outside the universities, teacher education and further education should be assimilated into a common system'. The alternative to the ATOs was to be a network of 'Professional Committees' organised on a local or regional basis: but these were not given any real functions to perform, and were for the most part inoperative until some ten years later (see below).

Meanwhile, the National Advisory Council had gone into abeyance; it was replaced by a new Advisory Committee for the Supply and Training of Teachers in 1973. During the latter part of the 1970s, ACSTT's main concern was with questions of supply. Towards the end of the decade, however, stimulated at least in part by the decision to phase out the old Certificates in Education in the move towards a fully graduate profession, the debate returned to curricular issues. In 1978 a Working Group of the Council reported on the extent to which the aims, nature and structure of the existing and planned new-style BEd courses [need to be reconsidered in the light or recent developments ... which [have] emphasised the need for intending teachers to acquire knowledge which is both professionally adequate and marketable outside teaching. (ACSTT, 1978)

Its report was critical of the wide diversity in the content and organisation of BEd courses, noting the reference in the earlier Green Paper, Education in Schools (DES, 1977), to the lack of satisfactory arrangements for "the development of the content of teacher training", in reviewing the respective merits of concurrent and consecutive courses, the Working Group came down firmly (if uncomfortably) on the fence, noting that "the arguments...are fairly evenly balanced. It must be for the individual institution to decide which structure is the more appropriate for it". It also noted, however, that the proportion of newly qualified teachers with a PGCE (the main 'consecutive' route) would have risen from 24% of the total in 1974 to an expected 53% in 1981. The fragmentation of initial training programmes between educational studies (the general theory element), professional studies (the consideration of issues relating to school practice), subject studies (covering the aspects of required academic knowledge) and teaching practice was one of the main curricular concerns at this time. Two particular issues - the problems of reconciling academic and professional goals and the difficulties of relating theory to practice in the secondary PGCE - were the subject of a timely publication by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (1979). UCET, incidentally, has been an important medium for the exchange of information on professional practice - representing a voluntary association of all university departments of education and playing an active role in shaping and not merely reflecting professional opinion. (It has, in the past worked largely through informal channels, though recent events have forced it to adopt a more public and political stance.)

In retrospect, the 1970s may be seen as a high point of governmental intervention in what was essentially the initial teacher education system. The earlier network of mostly quite small and often highly specialised colleges was replaced, in a more or less drastic manner, by a system in which much of teacher education was incorporated into larger, amalgamated colleges of higher education or further education colleges which also provided a range of other degree and sub-degree programmes. Now that the BEd had been assimilated through the system it might seem as if further large-scale structural reorganisation is not on the current agenda. Nowadays, however, to make any such assertion is to offer a hostage to fortune.

The reshaping process was in large part itself a consequence of manpower planning: as noted, the reduction in the projected numbers of pupils choosing to take teaching as a career necessitated a reduction in the number of teachers being trained. It was an ironic but telling demonstration that the inefficacy of such planning was that it was not able to take into account the backwash effect on applicants. Much as the government and its agencies may have sometimes exercise a significant influence on voter behaviour, and thus falsify their own confident predictions, the measures which signalled a dramatic worsening of employment prospects in the teaching profession had the consequence of reducing applications out of all proportion to the intended decreases. By 1980 there was estimated to be a shortfall of just under 60% in the BEd places available - this being the case even after nearly all the required reductions had been made. Perhaps not surprisingly, the DES Statistics Branch, which provided the data on which teacher projects were based, while continuing to publish periodic information on all supply by position, appeared to lose any confidence it might earlier have possessed in specifying future needs.

The advent in 1979 of a government dedicated to the promotion of 'market forces' was in any case prima facie to manpower planning - the recent tendency has been to allow for a relatively loosely controlled allocation of training places coupled with special incentives (in the form of bursaries) offered to applicants for subjects where there is thought to be a shortage of already qualified teachers. Even this policy has had its limitations, with initial employment rates in some cases lower for 'shortage' subjects than for those which are thought to be better staffed. The government's line of argument, however, seems to be that graduates with a teaching qualification, even if not subsequently engaged in teaching, ought to be a well-qualified, trainable and serviceable workforce in the open employment market, and to that extent their higher education and training is not in vain.

The net effect of the government's withdrawal from the traditional planning role and of the completion of its programme of restructuring was to leave curricular issues as the most obvious remaining focus of attention. The initial moves in this direction in the late 1970s, to which brief reference has been made, the DES paper, considered by ACSET in 1982 and subsequently published in the following year (DES, 1983). This argued that "there is a widely recognised need for agreed guidelines on the content of training", and quoted an earlier survey as showing that in concurrent courses "the time allocated to subject studies ranged from 22 to 50 per cent of the total undergraduate taught programme". It concluded by calling for a "minimum standard of effective mastery of the main teaching subjects" and "an agreed minimum range of professional content, appropriate to the phase in which the student will teach". The DES report was seen by some as ironic in the light of what followed - the proposals may have been accepted by HMI and acquiesced to by the members of ACSET, but there was a minimal degree of systematic or formal consultation with the teaching profession directly concerned with initial teacher education.

ACSET's response to the HMI proposals was made public in 1983, as an annex to the White Paper. The responsibility, then, for agreeing the curricula (the new Green Paper now had the Secretary of State closely reflected the ideas put forward by the Inspectorate. In endorsing these proposals, the White Paper itself suggested that various criteria of acceptability should be determined of all initial teacher training programmes. Among the most significant of them were that at least two full years of the student's higher education programme should be dedicated to relevant subject studies: that teaching method work in the main subjects, differentiated by age of pupils, should be provided at an adequate level; and that there should be closer links between training institutions and schools, involving the participation in the initial training programme of the local schools in the area; and that the proposal for a corollary, the staff of training institutions who were 'concerned with pedagogy' should have regular contact with classroom teaching. It was also recommended that procedures for selecting students would be strengthened, and should involve an input from the schools. The next step would be to require ACSET to work further on the criteria, which would then be published as the
The Council's membership was appointed on a personal rather than a representative basis, and reflected the government's concern to ensure that teacher educators had only a marginal role. As a result, the Council, which had had a long and distinguished involvement, including a Professorship of Education at Bristol University and the Directorship of the London Institute of Education - but he had then moved into academic administration, first as Principal of London University and subsequently as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull. Other founding members of CATE included two businessmen and a journalist, two local politicians, two academics (not associated with teacher education), two teacher union officials, three local education authority officers, two heads and a senior teacher, three principals of non-university institutions providing teacher education, and one member of university staff (the present author) currently engaged in the process. (A detailed account of CATE and its activities between 1984 and 1989 is to be found in Macintyre, 1991).

In the early stages, several representations were made to the Council about the inequity or inappropriateness of particular criteria. For example, the requirement for 'recent and relevant experience', for which no specific definition of version was made, and to which were applied conditions specific enough to demand the equivalent of one term in every 15 spent teaching in schools - yet no budgetary provision whatever was made for institutions having to face the consequent reduction in existing teaching provision. However, the Council's constitution merely imposed the government's criteria upon it, and left it no scope to alter them. This limitation was not always recognised by its critics, who were both numerous and vocal.

Once it go into its stride, CATE developed a method of working and a style of procedure which could be seen to be fair and reasonably rigorous without seeming punitive. To get through the very sizeable agenda that had been set, the decision was taken to divide the membership into three working groups, each of which was given responsibility for reviewing courses in particular subject areas, and which met periodically to consider the recommendations of the groups and to ensure an appropriate comparability of standards. Reviews took a more or less standard form: the working group would examine the documentation (which was necessarily quite extensive) in the light of the accompanying report of the required visit by an HMI team, and would

The pace of work was heavy, with full-day group or Council meetings often as frequently as twice a week (perhaps partly for that reason, the industrialists and local politicians were sporadic in their attendance). Even so, the review of courses was not concluded within the stipulated three to four years, and the Council's first term of existence had to be extended until the end of 1989. By that time it had scrutinised 394 courses in 93 institutions. In only three of the latter had the Council considered it inappropriate to approve a substantial part of the existing provision - though a number of courses had had to be revised and resubmitted, and some individual programmes had had to be discontinued. The low failure rate could perhaps be seen as a vindication of the quality of the teacher education programmes which existed when CATE was set up - though the experience of the early years was to prove to be less than the most optimistic members of the original Council had expected.

The outcome was that, when the question arose of a possible reconstitution and continuation of the Council, the teacher education community tended towards the conclusion that CATE had done more good than harm and had established a system which had some individual programme standards. It was perhaps seen as an example of how to establish and get into action a system of accreditation. The change was to be implemented by September 1992. The government had in fact earlier introduced an experimental scheme under which school-based 'articled teachers' followed a two-year programme including some systematic study and practice, while some individual programmes were laid on by the National Advisory Council on Teacher Education. The government thus spoke of a 'systematic' scheme to provide a professional qualification for school-based 'articled teachers' after two years of initial training. The Secretary of State, Sir William Taylor, had apparently argued for 44 weeks, but the Secretary of State, Sir William Taylor, had apparently argued for 44 weeks, but

The Chairman - by this time dubbed Sir William Taylor - was to continue, as were four other politically correct members of the original Council. Among the other 12 (the total of 16 being two fewer than before) were at least two of the right-wing opponents previously mentioned. They included the present author, who was kept on as the Chairman, and the present author, who was kept on as the Chairman, and who was the moveable feast of the second stage of the Council. The first stage, however, was to be very short-lived, as the new secondary PGCE courses were laid on by the National Advisory Council on Teacher Education. The government thus spoke of a 'systematic' scheme to provide a professional qualification for school-based 'articled teachers' after two years of initial training. The Secretary of State, Sir William Taylor, had apparently argued for 44 weeks, but the Secretary of State, Sir William Taylor, had apparently argued for 44 weeks, but
Shortly afterwards, a consultative paper was issued spelling out the details and calling for responses from interested parties. In the last few years, the notion of governmental consultation has experienced a change under which those, however numerous, who responded by commenting on proposals are rewarded by seeing the original intentions faithfully maintained. This case offered a rare exception to the rule, partly perhaps because the consultation period was interrupted by a general election, followed by the appointment of a new Secretary of State. A face-saving modification of the original proposals proved possible, and was certainly desirable in the light of the overwhelming volume of objections, not only from the universities, polytechnics and colleges concerned, but from the teachers' associations and individual head teachers (who did not consider their schools equipped to take on the task) and from parents' groups and school governors (who did not want inexperienced teachers launched into taking classes unsupervised). Even within the DES, two senior civil servants were transferred from responsibility for teacher education to other duties because they were seen to be insufficently enthusiastic about the policy that had been proposed.

The new Secretary of State's decision was not announced until the end of June. Meanwhile, in the expectation that all institutions would need to implement the change in a very short time-span, the higher education funding bodies called for each training institution to put in bids for a fund set aside to meet the transition costs from the existing to the new system. Given that no-one knew the ground rules, this was a spectacular pointless exercise. The whole bidding process had to be repeated when the revised arrangements were announced, allowing a week for the necessary costings to be worked out and submitted. Even the normally moderate UCET Annual Report commented on the process as a whole that "real problems have been caused by the speed at which the training is supposed to be put into effect and the generally disorganised way in which it has been imposed" (UCET, 1992).

In the event, the proposals for school-based training activity were scaled down from the original four-fifths to two-thirds - not far off the already established pattern of the Sussex and Oxford courses. The requirement for 24 weeks in school was also applied to two and three year secondary undergraduate courses; part-time PGCE courses had to allow 18 weeks, and four-year undergraduate courses 32 weeks. The necessary changes had to come into effect not later than 1st September 1994 - another significant modification of the earlier demand. At the same time, the system which CATE was instructed to operate was substantially altered. The local committees were disbanded: instead institutions were to be accredited in respect of all their courses every five years, on the basis of a development plan and full inspection. Under new terms of reference, perhaps because the consultation period was interrupted by a general election, followed by the appointment of a new Secretary of State on whether or not institutions should be accredited; to "identify and disseminate good practice"; to keep the criteria under review and advise on possible changes to them; and to arrange for the Secretary of State to request on other matters relating to IT.

The criteria themselves were completely rewritten, a number of them in the currently fashionable form of 'competency' statements. In the preamble to Circular No. 9/92 (DES 1992) which set out the new arrangements, it was noted that "primary phase courses ... are currently under review". Their turn for massive disruption is expected to come early in 1993. It is also noteworthy that the only specific reference to the role of higher education institutions accredits them as an administrative rather than a pedagogic function: they are designated as "responsible for ensuring that courses meet the requirements for academic validation, presenting courses for accreditation, awarding qualifications to successful students, and arranging student placements in more than one school". By implication, they are not actually expected to teach students anything during the 40 days in which they are not in one 'partner school' or another.

It remains to be seen how the new arrangements develop, as institutions make the substantial transition involved for many of them to predominantly school-based courses. Only a handful of teacher training departments are expected to begin new-style provision in the 1992/93 academic year, but many more will be gearing themselves for this change in 1993, while the remainder - if they are to survive - will have to fall in line the year after. Meanwhile, two observations on the present situation can be made with some confidence, the first concerning the recent past and the second the short to medium term future.

On the first, the government and its agents - the Higher Education Funding Council and the Department of Education and Science (now renamed, somewhat misleadingly in view of its record, the Department for Education) - have managed the events between January and June 1992 with a degree of ineptitude bordering on the spectacular. If a teacher training institution had shown anything approaching the same capacity to mishandle its affairs, it would certainly have been closed down without the option of an appeal. It seems clear, however, that in contemporary politics, the buck does not stop with the Minister, but is instead passed neatly back down the line. Demands for accountability are not taken to apply to Westminster and Whitehall.

On the second point, those who campaigned so strenuously to replace teacher education with teacher apprenticeship saw, under Kenneth Clarke's generally unloved leadership, their prize almost within their grasp. Although they must have felt some degree of frustration and disappointment at the turn events have subsequently taken, it should not be assumed that they have given up the struggle. Their campaign has never been one that paid needless or inconvenient attention to the facts, and it will doubtless be possible to convince their political masters in due course that things have not yet gone far enough. The longer the present administration survives, the greater the prospect of continuing future reform. UK-watchers should keep any eye open for yet another new dawn.

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