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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 thus 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 Second World War of the McNair Report (Board of Education, 1944). This was 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 was itself 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 (Goldsen, 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 or of an equivalent qualification". It advocated 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 1980; 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 took the step of bringing collectively seven regionally based colleges of education. It was not however until some twenty years later that all those entering teaching would acquire a degree as well as a profession qualification. Robbins also advocated the notion of mergers and the idea that colleges should provide "courses ... for entrants to various professions in the social services" and "general courses in arts or science subjects".

There was relatively little alteration to the structure of the system during the next few years, though expansion continued throughout the 1960s. One fashionable change occurred in the curriculum, which was looked on with approval by HM Inspectorate at the time, but which sprang from academic rather than governmental initiatives. This was the movement to separate educational theory, as a field of study, into its "foundations disciplines" - held at the time to be history, philosophy, psychology and sociology (Hirst, 1966). The result was a tendency in colleges and university departments to appoint specialist lecturers in the fields concerned. Perhaps predictably, there were not nearly enough well-qualified candidates to go round, and many institutions made do with borrowed substitutes. The movement towards disciplinary fundamentalism died a slow but relatively painless death in the 1970s, partly at least as the result of adverse reaction by students to what they saw as meaningless and irrelevant theorising.

At more or less the same time as this was happening - in 1967 to be precise - a small-scale experiment (later to prove highly significant) was launched in the newly-established University of Sussex. This involved a mainly school-based PGCE programme in which the students spent three days each week in their 'partnership' schools and the remaining two in the university working on curriculum planning and reflecting systematically on their classroom experience. In some respects the Sussex scheme could be said to have anticipated that of Ronald Schoi (1983, 1987) in relation to 'reflective practitioners'. It remained the only programme of its kind until Oxford, in the mid-1980s, initiated a closely comparable course in a blaze of publicity.

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, in the wake of the Schools White Paper of 1968. The White Paper, in turn, had been prompted by a rapid rise in pupil numbers, a lack of teachers, and the assertion that the situation could not be worse than it was then - Margaret Thatcher. In characteristic style, she demanded that the Committee should make its recommendations within 12 months. In the event, its report was delayed for a further 14 months. The recommendations included the division of the teacher education programme into three cycles. The first, 'personal education', entitled academic study for a new two-year qualification, the Diploma in Higher Education (DipHE), the second embraced initial training followed by a year of induction; and the third constituted a minimum entitlement for all serving teachers to one year of "substantial 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 in-service 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 Diploma in Higher Education was abolished, the first framed 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 reform and contraction began in earnest. This continued all the way through 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 the 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 reassessment that ‘outside the universities, teacher education and further education should be assimilated into a common system’. The attempt at 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 period 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 Certificate of 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 a broad professional opinion, which could be 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 education”. 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 student to decide which structure is 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 providing opinion on official policy, 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 the development of 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 the universities and polytechnics, or conducted in 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 has been redefined as 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 entering secondary school by 1979, the need to draw down the numbers of teachers being trained. It was an ironic but telling demonstration that the ineffectiveness of such planning was not that it was not able to take into account the backwash effect on applicants. Much as the planning system has been derided, it is 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 teacher education 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 the supply of positions, appeared to lose any confidence it might earlier have possessed in specifying future needs.

The advent in 1979 of a government dedicated to promoting ‘market forces’ was in any case inimical to manpower planning - the recent tendency has been 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 able to compete on 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 central control 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 already been made, was followed by the recent launch of the first step in what now looks to have been a major attempt to reform the initial teacher education system. The DES Statistics Branch, which provided the data on which teacher projects were based, while continuing to publish periodic information on the supply of positions, appeared to lose any confidence it might earlier have possessed in specifying future needs.

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starting point of a review of all existing initial \textit{teacher} training courses. The implicit expectation was that DES approval would be withdrawn from those courses which failed to satisfy the conditions thus laid down.

In April 1984 the DES issued a circular which embodied a sharpened and amplified set of criteria (DES, 1984) and accepted a further recommendation from ACSET that a new Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) be set up "to advise the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales on the approval of initial teacher training courses in England and Wales". The Council was expected to review all existing courses, and to scrutinise any proposals for new courses, within three or four years, after which its future would be reconsidered. It was intended to take into account "evidence based on any visits made by members of the Council ... and in all cases the findings of HMI visits".

In the event, the Council organised very few visits to institutions (limiting them mostly to cases where there was a crucial ambiguity to resolve or a potential decision to close a significant area of provision); its reliance on HMI reports was in consequence extremely heavy, according the Inspectorate rather too much power for the good of the Council.

Among the requirements which went well beyond the 1983 White Paper proposals was one specifying a minimum length of 36 weeks for PGCE courses (the duration of which had previously been modelled on the understanding of the average GCSE (30 weeks). The then Secretary of State, Sir Keith Joseph, had apparently argued for 44 weeks, but he had been persuaded by his DES officials to accept the lower compromise (Gosden, 1989). The semimoribund local committees were also given a new lease of life, in that no course would be considered by CATE unless it had the blessing of a committee, meeting regularly, whose members must include local school teachers, members from the relevant local education authorities and individuals drawn from industry, commerce or the lay public. Another key requirement, affecting primary courses, was that there must be at least 100 hours to the study of mathematics teaching and 200 hours to the study of English language teaching. Other, perhaps less demanding, specifications in the seventeen paragraphs setting out the criteria dealt with professionalism (including, predictably, "understanding the dynamics of contemporary society"), entry requirements, and special shortened undergraduate courses for already partially-qualified applicants.

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 expected, Sir Keith Joseph, who 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 teaching experience" was 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 of recruitment and place numbers. 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 headings (including some individual programmes where there had been a significant number of proposals for new courses in the absence of any direct knowledge). The Chung-Hoon Chang (with a tradition of revision and reconstitution where necessary to include more than one but preferably not more than three institutions - would be given the task of scrutinising new courses and reviewing those which had not been looked at for four or five years, and forwarding their recommendations to the Council. This would free CATE members to a certain degree, enabling them to give more attention to development work and the identification and promotion of good practice within the system.

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 insufficiently 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 DES had to advise the 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 advise the Secretary of State as requested on other matters relating to ITT".

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 abandons them 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 system 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 may 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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