

## **The Professional Development of Teachers in the United Kingdom in the 1990s: Evolution of Revolution?**

**By Bernadette Robinson**

My purpose in this paper is to depict the current state of professional development of teachers in England and Wales and to identify some of the issues surrounding it.

There are over 400,000 teachers in England and Wales (Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate education systems). Over 20,000 trainee teachers a year are recruited through Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to 94 institutions (colleges, polytechnics, and university departments of education). There are two major routes to teacher training; both are used by intending primary and secondary teachers. One is the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree course which integrates subject knowledge and education in a single three- or four-year course (four years for an honours degree). The other is the Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) which follows on from a degree (B.A., B.Sc.) in a subject area, usually one in which the teacher plans to specialise. The content of the PGCE is education, with the emphasis on practical aspects (in-school work accounts for roughly 60 per cent or more of the time; new requirements from September 1992 prescribe 80 per cent).

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s teaching in the

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United Kingdom became an all-graduate profession. The government has recently been considering alternative methods for training teachers; one of these experiments has been for “licensed” teachers who may be non-graduate or not qualified but who gain direct access to teaching in schools while at the same time having an extended period of probation and support. Another alternative is the Articled Teacher Scheme, which is an enhanced two-year PGCE course, 80 per cent of which is spent in school. Both of these have been for small number of teachers.

Approximately 70 per cent of all teacher training students enter teaching posts in the United Kingdom on course completion. Another 10 per cent enter posts within the following two years. Although recruitment is relatively buoyant overall at present (one effect of the current recession has been to reduce graduate opportunities in other fields) there remain shortfalls in recruitment targets, particularly in some subject areas. Bursaries were introduced by the Department of Education and Science (DES), a central government department responsible for education in 1986 to encourage students to take the shortage subjects of physics, mathematics, and CDT (Craft, Design and Technology). In 1989, chemistry and modern languages were added to the list; biology was added in 1991. By 1990, differentiated bursaries were provided according to subject, with physics being awarded the highest sum.

Even with the incentives of bursaries, targets have not been reached in all subjects and a serious shortfall of qualified teachers continues in physics and mathematics. The extent of teacher shortages is contested. The most commonly used indicator is an annual survey by the DES of teacher vacancies, but this does not provide information about hidden shortages (teachers teaching subjects in which they are not qualified). There are also geographical differences in teacher shortages, often related to inner-city areas. The teaching force in England and Wales replaces itself once every 12 years, according to Smithers and Robinson (1988); this is based on evidence of an annual wastage rate of 8.5 per cent. A conclusion from this is that out of every two entrants to initial teacher training, only one is still in a teaching post four years after qualifying. The wastage rates vary according to subject specialism; the highest are in physics and mathematics. Straker (1988) identifies factors contributing to this as lack of recognition and career prospects together with a perceived devaluing of the profession. Low pay is also a factor; teachers’ salaries have declined significantly in comparison to other graduate professions.

The pool of qualified but “inactive” teachers (commonly referred to as the PIT), under the age of 60, is estimated as greater than the number of teachers currently in post. In 1989, almost 60 per cent of new appointments in schools were returners from the PIT (DES Statistics, 1990). The proportion of mature entrants (over 26 years old) to initial teacher training was 32.4 per cent in 1989, an increase from 28 per cent in 1987 (DES, *ibid*). This trend is likely to continue, though mature students have more difficulty in finding posts because they usually have restricted mobility and have a higher starting point on the salary scale than younger students.

The move to devolved financial management in schools has made some schools unable to appoint more “expensive” teachers because of resource constraints. Staff salaries are one of the more flexible elements in school budgets when financial demand exceeds available resources. The pressure is to appoint “cheaper” teachers (often the less experienced) when faced with the need to stretch scarce resources.

Taken together, these facts indicate problems of retention and supply. The Select Committee (a cross-party body in the House of Commons) on the supply of teachers for the 1990s reported that in developing proposals to ensure the necessary supply of teachers for the 1990s it came to the conclusion that the priority must be to consider the low morale in the teacher force (Select Committee, Vol. 1, p. vii, 1990).

One of the recommendations for doing this was to restore teachers’ negotiating rights for pay, removed by the government in 1987 after a bitter and disruptive pay dispute in 1984-86. This has not so far happened.

## **Change and Progress**

The changes that have taken place are systematic and radical. The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced the largest structural reform to schools and the curricula since the 1944 Education Act. This prescribes a National Curriculum in terms of its content and mode of assessment and establishes attainment targets to be reached at key stages. It also introduces new subjects such as CDT. Other changes introduced include the following: devolved budgeting to schools to allow local financial management; provision for schools to opt out of the state system; new powers and roles for school governors and parents; new terms and conditions of service for teachers, including closer prescription of their work and pay; the introduction of teacher appraisal; changes in funding for education to local education authorities (LEAs); changes in the funding of in-service work; new requirements for the content and practice of teacher education; and new accreditation procedures together with their increasing prescription by CATE (Council for Teacher Education) for teacher education courses.

## **Inservice Education and Training for Teachers (INSET)**

INSET in the United Kingdom has a long tradition. INSET is used here to refer to:

all measures enabling teachers to carry out their job in school and contributing to their professional development. (Bude and Greenland, 1983, p.1 1)

In the United Kingdom context, INSET has until very recently referred to **further** professional development for **qualified** teachers, and not to initial teacher training for serving but unqualified teachers (a more familiar situation in developing countries where teacher shortages and under-qualification can be acute).

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However, new models of initial teacher training, (as in the Articled Teacher and Licensed Teacher Schemes) are beginning to redefine its meaning. The nature of INSET has changed. Until the 1980s, INSET was mostly provided through short courses held away from the teachers' schools, usually in term time, though a very small number of longer-term secondments for further study (a term or a year) were also available. In the 1960s particularly there was wide recognition of the importance of INSET in a number of major education reports and a policy of INSET expansion, especially on the part of LEAs, who are responsible for the administration and management of education at a local level. From 1965 onwards, LEAs set up teachers' centres; these acted as local curriculum development and inservice centres, had full-time centre leaders, and grew to over 500 in number by 1972. This period also saw the growth of LEA INSET advisory services and the appointment of staff with INSET as their job role. INSET courses were also provided by others: universities, institutions of higher education, and the DES (a central government department). The trend towards more INSET work was strongly supported by the James Report on Teacher Education and Training (1972) though not all of its recommendations were carried out because of economic restraints.

INSET provision continued to be increasingly important throughout the 1970s and 1980s as a means of accommodating to a series of changes in education and of improving the quality of teaching in specific areas. These have included, among others, the teaching of children with special needs, the management of schools, the teaching of mathematics and science, and the teaching of reading. Distance teaching has played a national role in this development. More recently, INSET has included the function of retraining teachers for shortage subjects, such as science, mathematics, and CDT; this too has included provision by distance learning through collaboration between the Open University and the LEAs (Tresman & Whitelegg, 1989). In terms of student numbers, the Open University is the largest provider of INSET by means of distance education though there are many other players in the field.

A major influence on the provision of INSET has been new government policy in the methods of funding it (DES, 1986). The new funding policy had immediate effects. Firstly, there was a large drop in the number of students seconded from schools to take "long" inservice courses (such as an M.A.). In 1986-87 there were 2,112 full-time one-year secondments of teachers to take "long" inservice courses at higher education institutions (Wragg, 1989). This fell to 439 by 1988-89 (McBride, 1989). Since the introduction in 1986, the LEAs have needed to secure value for money. One indicator used for this can be cost; for example, one teacher's secondment can pay for many more teachers' part-time or evening courses. In response to this has been an increase in the number of inservice part-time courses on offer by conventional institutions. There are now very few full-time secondments. The largest M.A. in Education programme is provided through distance education with 2,200 Open University registrations in 1991; this accounted for about 40 per cent of all part-time M.A. in Education registrations at universities (Prescott &

Robinson, 1992) So new kinds of INSET provision have resulted from the demands of legislation and also from dissatisfaction over the last decade with the ineffectiveness (and sometimes irrelevance) of much traditional inservice provision. Out of this has grown school-focussed INSET.

All higher education providers have been working to accommodate these changes and to develop new accreditation schemes for school-based study modules based on INSET activities, a trend which is growing (Brown & Early, 1990). There is so far no common currency of accreditation across providers, though the need for one is frequently discussed by LEAs, higher education providers (individually and in consortia), and teachers. One form of INSET work gaining accreditation and validation from individual institutions is an assessed portfolio of a teacher's school-based INSET work. Much discussion in higher education departments focusses on the value of this kind of work.

### **"Professional" Development?**

Unlike many other professions, teachers lack a coherent structure for professional development. INSET has been variable and unsystematic and is described in a recent DES report as an "entirely chancy process, subject to no national procedures or controls" (DES, 1992, para. 175). The individual profiles of teachers' participation in INSET vary greatly, though the development of school-based INSET has established some commonality at least. Professional development has been fragmented. There has been a divide in the past between initial training and INSET, with different agencies being responsible for each. Attention on the induction of new teachers, the developing of mentoring and other new INSET roles in schools, and the growth of partnerships between schools and higher education in initial teacher training have combined to start bridging the divide. Professional development for teachers is now being perceived as a continuous process starting from initial training.

A more fundamental question is whether, in fact, teachers are any longer a profession in the United Kingdom. A powerful argument can be made (Grace, 1991; Lawn & Grace, 1987) that teachers have experienced considerable loss of professional status since the 1980s. This is signified by several things: a reduction in workplace autonomy with an increasing prescription of what happens in the classroom; increasing specification of the contractual obligations of teachers including the number of hours of directed work a year (195 days; 1,265 hours, according to the Schoolteachers' Pay and Conditions Document, 1990, and DES Circular 6/90); abolition of negotiating rights (the Burnham Committee, a national body established in the 1930s with negotiating rights for teachers, was abolished by the government in 1987); lack of consultation with teachers' bodies; erosion of teaching as an all-graduate profession (achieved in the 1960s and 1970s). These can be interpreted as a radical change in teacher-state relations. Grace (1991) argues that

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a restructuring of relationships between the state and teachers will be necessary if problems of teacher supply and morale are to be solved.

### **Evolution or Revolution?**

Fullan (1991) identifies a tension in the educational change literature between the “fidelity” perspective and the mutual adaptation or evolution perspective. The fidelity approach refers to a situation where an already agreed innovation exists and the task is to get it implemented faithfully. This cannot be said to describe many of the educational changes taking place in the United Kingdom in the sense that agreement implies negotiation and consultation between the parties involved though faithful implementation is indeed being demanded. The present changes have involved little consultation. There has been little mutual determination between teachers and policy makers at the national level (that is, between teachers and state), though within the given limitations it appears to be developing more at school and local level. However, the rapidity with which the series of changes have been instituted has left little time for the reflection, review, and consolidation needed for evolution.

This must be one of the most rapidly changing systems in the European Community (although France too is currently reforming its teacher education provision, Blondel, 1991). It raises many questions about the process of harmonisation across European countries. The pace of change contrasts sharply with that of Spain, for example, where “the debate on the core curriculum started almost five years ago but negotiations are still in progress” (Morgenstern de Finkel, 1991, p. 244). Despite great hopes of reform in the teacher education system with the advent of democracy in Spain, little has changed over the last 16 years. Clearly two very contrasting time-scales are operating. If not evolution, then revolution? Certainly the upheaval is great enough. But most revolutions require a ground-swell of support from at least a significant proportion of the people. The initiation in the case of the United Kingdom is from the very top. Those following seem less than enthusiastic and “survival” as a goal is frequently cited by teachers.

### **Agenda for the 1990s**

The agenda for the 1990s now seems set for rapid continuation of the changes already begun. It is difficult to see how teachers might restore their professional status under the present policies. Some items on the agenda for teacher education in the 1990s are likely to be:

- a more coherent cycle of professional development;
- more contractual specification of services and relationships in providing it;
- a reordering of the initial training and induction content, to reduce the “frontloaded” nature of the current training cycle;
- development of partnerships between schools and professional teacher educators

(despite a case being made for the latter's abolition) in teacher education and development;  
further diminished role of the LEAs (though teachers are beginning to perceive their importance as facilitators and managers of information between school INSET);  
a reassertion of individual rights and entitlements to staff development;  
an increase in networking and sharing of resources in school clusters;  
INSET provision for returners from the PIT part-time initial teacher training through distance education (the DES has funded the UK Open University to train 4,500 teachers in this way starting in 1994);  
more school-based teacher education and competency-based teacher education and assessment together with a national curriculum for teacher education;  
a move towards national target-setting of continued shortages of teachers and measures to deal with them (substitution by new technology as one option).

This is not a comprehensive list, nor are the items of the same status. Despite its arbitrary nature, it may serve to give at least some indication of where professional teacher education is leading in England and Wales.

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