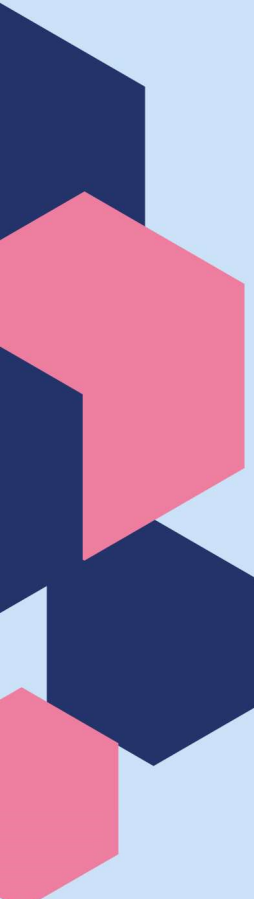




TEACHER EXPERTISE AND PROFESSIONALISM

A review of the initial teacher
training (ITT) market review

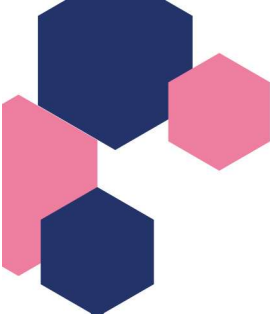


Dame Alison Peacock
Chartered College of Teaching

Di Swift FCCT
Director of Keele and North
Staffordshire Teacher
Education



CHARTERED
COLLEGE OF
TEACHING



In exploring what makes teaching unique as a professional endeavour, Lee Shulman states that 'The idea of a "profession" describes a special set of circumstances for deep understanding, complex practice, ethical conduct, and higher-order learning' (Shulman, 2005, p. 529).

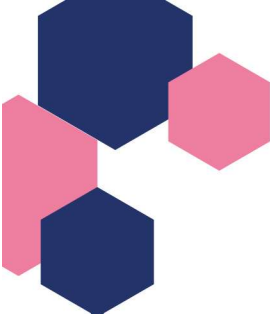
Teaching as a profession is indeed special, ethical and complex, and so not easily articulated or encapsulated in either curriculum or policy documentation. This perhaps helps to explain the intensity of some of the current debates and discourses around the current ITT market review. Our beginning teachers and their mentors deserve the very best support that we as a profession can offer. There will always be a range of perspectives on what that support might look like. Currently, schools and universities work in partnership to develop professional knowledge and understanding. Ours is a profession that cannot be fully appreciated through the observation of performed actions alone. What is seen in one context benefits from evaluation and elaboration in other contexts.

A commonly recognised essential feature of our profession is pedagogy. Professor Robin Alexander recognises pedagogy as being 'the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command, in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decision of which teaching is constituted' (Alexander, 2008, p. 47).

Making and justifying decisions is a key element of what it is to be a public professional, entrusted with the education of the young people that we are privileged to enable. To achieve this essential work well, a variety of forms of 'attendant discourses' need to be brought into our many and varied initial teacher education partnerships, which includes the essential nature of the work of both school and HEI based colleagues. It is the dialogic spaces that such partnerships enable that develop the profession's unique contribution to society.

Although some aspects of this review are to be welcomed, a well-reasoned justification for the overall rationale is lacking. We agree with the market review's prioritisation of the investment in the expertise of teachers. This will help partnerships to continue to improve the quality of teaching as a profession. Such an investment will enable teachers to reduce the barriers that social disadvantage can present. To sustain the transformational impact of education, teachers benefit from practical wisdom, which is sometimes likened to Aristotle's notion of 'phronesis'. Making practical judgments and taking action involves cognition, intellect and ethics; all features of a professional as well as an individual's identity. It is through engaging with debates and dialogues that individuals within our profession transcend their contexts and help to continually develop and refresh our profession's knowledge base. Teaching is in this sense a collective endeavour; one based on connections and relationships between schools, society, politicians and higher education.

Shulman reminds us that, 'if teaching is going to be community property it must be made visible through artefacts that capture its richness and



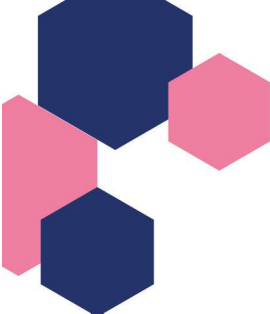
complexity. In the absence of such artefacts teaching is a bit like dry ice; it disappears at room temperature (Shulman, 2005, p. 457). Our profession must not become like 'dry ice'. The recognition of professional knowledge in the Early Career and Core Content Frameworks (ECF, CCF), helps to draw attention to aspects of such rich and complex professional knowledge and understanding. While these documents are aiding the development of various endeavours including the much-welcomed qualification for Teacher Developers, Masters level qualifications and the work of the Chartered College of Teaching, these documents on their own are insufficient. It will be teacher education partnerships, supported through the essential involvement of our universities, that bring these documents to life. In doing so, they will enrich and elaborate on them, so that Robin Alexander's fears that 'teachers risk becoming de-skilled by over-reliance on official prescription' are not realised (Alexander, 2008). Rather, teachers will be enabled to 'work towards a pedagogy of repertoire rather than recipe and of principle rather than prescription' (Alexander, 2008).

Practicing teaching is important but time must be given to developing subject/phase knowledge, curriculum design and assessment. Our university provision has much to offer in this regard through school partnerships. It is through knowledge exchange that experiences can be lifted from their contexts and evaluated in relation to wider understandings, so that our children benefit from teachers who are disciplined in their professional learning.

There is potentially a huge irony that the market review calls for the education of our teachers to be 'evidence-based' whilst neglecting to include examples of evidence of the efficacy of this reform. Research by Clarke and Hollingsworth, tells us that real learning in ITE needs careful sequencing but also needs to engage with trainees' values, beliefs and preconceptions, thereby combining the personal domain with the practical (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). It is also worth reminding ourselves that the CCF is very new and has been introduced during a worldwide pandemic when pressures on schools and placements have been intense.

The ITT Market Review report makes much of the importance of quality, consistency and coherence. The assumption here is that a greater commonality of teacher education would lead to better early career teachers. We need teachers who are adaptable, resilient and intellectually capable.

It is for these reasons that we support the continued involvement of our universities in initial teacher education. The current market structure in England supports the training of up to 30,000 teachers annually. We accept that the current process of applying for teacher education programmes can be confusing and difficult to navigate. We accept that over time it may be desirable to make this simpler, by amalgamating some providers regionally, for example. This policy approach of reconfiguring the market aligns with the rationalisation of over 1,000 teaching schools down to 83 teaching school hubs. There is, however, no evidence that significant financial economies of



scale would be achieved by reducing the number of ITT providers (Knight, 2021).

An unproven assumption of the market review report is that beginning teachers are underprepared. There is no quality problem with NQTs according to a survey conducted under the chairmanship of Lord Jim Knight (2021). Survey results from beginning teachers show high levels of satisfaction.

The market review calls for a new set of 'quality requirements' that all ITT providers can evidence following a 'robust accreditation process'. The existing accreditation resulted in all ITT providers receiving a judgement from Ofsted of good or better under the previous inspection framework. Presumably, this new process will be even more robust than the Ofsted six-day inspection of the previous framework?

The notion of mass intensive practice is introduced. This would take place over four weeks and would require teachers to experience lessons, observing in large groups. Has anyone considered the reality of intense scrutiny of children and young people? The goodwill of schools is endlessly tested. Does the DfE seriously think such reforms can be provided without funding incentives? The positive professional culture that we are all ambitious to enable needs the considerable investment of time and resources, far above that identified currently. Funding needs to be provided by the DfE not only for NPQTLTD scholarships but also, crucially, for release time so that 'Schools must consider themselves as responsible partners of universities' (Schrittesser, 2013). Unless this is attended to, burnout is a real possibility among both early career teachers and their mentors, despite the best efforts of the new Early Career Framework. The supply of teachers is of national concern and was the prime motivator for developing the ECF. The model of teacher training envisaged in the market review report seems not to account for rural and coastal districts where it may be more difficult to achieve a range of lead providers. Disruption to the market may well result in teacher shortages.

Some universities may decide that the process of reaccreditation by an unnamed body is something that they wish to avoid. We are not told how long this reaccreditation is for, or what the review process will be. The so-called 'golden thread' of career development should include opportunities for teachers to enhance their expertise via Master's level study at university. Globally, further professional academic study is understood to raise the status of teaching.



Summary

The timing of and rationale for this review are premature. The ECF needs to be fully embedded. The experience of the CCF needs to be fully embedded. Where gaps emerge or where nuance needs to inform the ITT curriculum and the ECF curriculum, time to reflect will be helpful. A review of the number of ITT providers could be reviewed to ensure local partnerships, thereby simplifying the application process. Mass re-accreditation will be costly and could result in the loss of some high-quality providers from the system. A rushed consultation process is unwise and unhelpful and risks significant disruption to a sector that is currently meeting the requirements of trainees, school partnerships and national priorities admirably.



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