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**‘Endless patience and a strong belief in what makes a good teacher.’  
Teacher Educators in Post Compulsory Education in England and  
their professional situation.**

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their professional situation.**

This research explores the professional situation of teacher educators in Post Compulsory Education. The article reports on a project which included the largest online survey of this particular group to date, and the results provided rich insights into their values, experiences and particular working context. The results significantly extend our understanding of the characteristics and beliefs of this under-researched professional community, and they have a powerful resonance as we move into a new era for UK teacher education.

Keywords: Further education; teacher development; teacher training; teacher education; initial teacher education; trainee teachers; professional development; teachers

## **Research framework**

The research questions addressed by my project were:

- (1) What is the professional situation of teacher educators in Post Compulsory Education (PCE)?
- (2) What could be considered to be the essential characteristics needed to be a good PCE teacher educator?
- (3) How do PCE teacher educators view themselves in relation to these characteristics and their development needs?

My overarching objective was to highlight the importance of teacher education for PCE and in doing so enhance its professional well-being. I also wanted to provide insights into the way that PCE teachers are supported to become better teachers through teacher education and therefore help their learners as members of the community. The research accordingly has resonance and value for the greater national and international teacher education community.

In order to answer the research questions, I adopted a qualitative approach, and combined methods to provide a variety of opportunities for the teacher educators to reflect on their work and professional situation. This yielded a robust, rich and illuminating range of data about PCE teacher educators.

Two sources particularly influenced my research design. In her study of teacher educators in one university PCE partnership, (Noel 2006) suggests routes into PCE teacher education are varied and somewhat haphazard, and induction / support systems for this group are limited, if they exist at all. Research by (Harkin, Cuff and Rees 2008) articulates with Noel's. A number of the questions in my survey were modelled on those

used in Harkin, Cuff and Rees (2008), which provided a sound structure for generic information, as well as enabling a degree of comparison.

Research by Boyd, Harris and Murray (2007); Crowe and Berry (2007); Korthagen and Verkuyl (2007); Loughran (2007) and Murray (2008, 2010) has highlighted the work of the broader community of teacher educators, their characteristics and their professional situation. The depth of engagement my research has had with a large number of PCE teacher educators and the emerging insights into their characteristics, personal values and beliefs add significantly to the national and international understanding of teacher education, and in particular PCE teacher education.

### **Project activities**

The first stage of the research project was a series of 'workshop sessions' involving professional conversations designed to produce a set of 'essential characteristics' for PCE teacher educators. These sessions involved a wide range of professionals who fitted the project's definition of PCE teacher educators, which is:

any teaching professional supporting the learning and development of trainees on any of the currently recognised Initial Teacher Education (ITE) awards in Post Compulsory Education.

The sessions took place at conferences, teacher education forum meetings, national, regional and local events including the Post-16 Committee and annual conference of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) and a major conference at the Eden Project, Cornwall. The workshop sessions engaged 250 practitioners including ITE course teams, Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training

(CETT) members, UCET Post 16 committee, and the researcher's own ITE colleagues.

The sessions discussed two questions:

- what is the difference, if any, between a good teacher and a good teacher educator in PCE?
- what are the essential characteristics of PCE teacher educators?

The resulting feedback and contributions confirmed the appropriateness of some survey questions, suggested others were not necessary, and added new ones.

### **Definition of Post Compulsory Education**

My research used Crawley's (2010, 14) definition of Post Compulsory Education:

If you are teaching in further education, community development learning, workplace learning, 14-19 provision, public services training or offender learning which is not delivered by school teachers, you are working in post compulsory education

### **The online survey**

An online questionnaire was selected as the most efficient and effective way of gathering the qualitative and quantitative data. A series of PCE teacher education networks agreed to share the online questionnaire and 161 responses were received, making it the largest survey of its type to have been carried out in England to date.

### **Findings and discussion**

#### ***Project reach***

A total of 756 engagements with practitioners took place during this stage of the project. This included all who attended workshop sessions, completed the online questionnaire

or were involved in other project activity. On hundred and forty organisations, 180 current teacher trainees, 250 new or experienced teacher educators, 25 prospective teacher educators and 161 survey respondents (all teacher educators) made up the total. 436 of these engagements were with teacher educators. Some practitioners were engaged on more than one occasion. To assist with establishing the proportion of PCE teacher educators reached I have made use of PCE workforce data for 2007/8, 2008/9 and 2009/10 collected by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK 2009 and 2010). Overall enrolment on PCE teaching qualifications over these three years was

2007/8 46,504 (18%) (LLUK 2009, 34)  
2008/9 45,305 (16.9%) (LLUK 2010, 28)  
2009/10 45,590 (18.4%) (LLUK 2011, 31)

The figures in parentheses represent the percentage of ‘contract holders’ in further education on each of these years, which is the most accurate figure for the total PCE workforce available. This indicates a substantial amount of ITE activity.

No official data on the number of teacher educators in PCE is available and other research has highlighted this fact (Clow and Harkin 2009); (Harkin 2005); (Harkin, Cuff and Reese 2008); (Noel 2006) and (Noel 2009). Using the LLUK figures relating to college staff registered on teaching qualifications (over 45,000 staff in each of 2007/8 and 2008/9), I estimated the community of PCE teacher educators who would be training these staff in England at 1500 (i.e. an estimate of one teacher educator for approximately every 30 trainees). Fifteen hundred teacher educators is a potentially significant community of practice, but this professional group has been the focus of relatively little government attention, and a surprisingly small amount of previous research. My project has engaged with approximately 29% of that group with 436 interactions, and the survey return of 161 represents 11% of the estimated workforce.

The size of the sample and the robustness of the evidence combine to make a significant new contribution to research in this field, as I now intend to make clear.

### ***Teacher educators' personal and professional profile***

Three English regions contributed the majority of survey responses (South West 32.9%, London 18.6% and the South East 12.4% - making 63.9% of the total). The survey originated from SW Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SWCETT), covering the SW of England, which is why most respondents are from that area.

### ***Gender, age and ethnicity***

There was a significant majority of female respondents (124 or 77%) as against males (37 or 23%). These figures are higher than (Noel 2006) - 66% female and 34% male, and (Harkin et al 2008) - 60% female to 40% male. Given the larger size of the sample, and its recency, it can be argued this data is more current and representative. The ethnicity of respondents was overwhelmingly white, which repeats the results of previous surveys (Noel 2006); (Harkin et al 2008), demonstrating there is work to be done in relation to improving the diversity of the PCE teacher educator community. One hundred and thirty eight or 83.8% of respondents were aged between 45 and 65 years of age, also broadly in line with the findings of (Noel 2006) and (Harkin et al 2008). Overall, Noel's statement that PCE teacher education 'involves a workforce which is largely female, white and middle aged' (Noel 2006, 154), could be updated by my survey which indicates it is 'largely female, white and moving past middle age'.

### ***Professional situation***

The survey contained a question asking about the organisations that respondents worked for, and multiple responses were allowed, as many PCE teacher educators can be

employed by, for example, a Further Education College, but working within a university validated HE ITE programme. The largest groups identified worked in Further Education Colleges (104 responses or 51.7%) and Higher Education institutions (58 responses or 28.9%), but around 25% of responses were from those outside of FE or HE. To engage teacher educators outside HE or FE was particularly gratifying as they feature even less often in research than those in HE or FE.

With respect to other aspects of their professional situation, just over 85% of respondents have been teaching for more than 10 years. Approximately 31% have spent more than five years and almost 31% more than 10 years as a teacher educator. 'Most teacher educators combine the role with other work roles' (Harkin et al 2008, 25), with 51% of respondents spending less than 50% of their time supporting students on teacher training programmes. Management takes up 46% of the remainder of our teacher educators' work, whilst research takes up 23% of their remaining time This echoes (Harkin et al 2008) and (Noel 2006) which showed PCE teacher educators as also having multiple roles. (Noel 2006) suggested balancing this many roles can be problematic, but found the teacher educators she interviewed were often becoming involved with teacher education for a growing proportion of their employment. The data from this survey indicates that greater involvement has not in fact taken place to the degree suggested by Noel's work. Respondents indicated their overall ITE involvement was rarely above 50% so balancing the teacher educator and other roles remained a challenge.

### ***ITE programmes worked on***

At this point it is helpful to explain the current situation in terms of ITE programmes in Post Compulsory Education. A series of government initiatives in 2007 introduced Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

reforms including new requirements for both beginning and experienced teachers in the sector and the establishment of the status of Qualified Teacher (Learning and Skills) or QTLS.

### ***PCE ITE Qualifications***

Legislation passed in 2007 (DIUS 2007) introduced three new qualifications for teachers in PCE in England, helping them to become 'licensed teaching practitioners' in the sector. These awards include the short Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), which is a gateway qualification seen as a minimum requirement for all teachers. PTLLS does not confer any teaching status. If their teaching role is as an 'associate' - a title for a more limited teaching role defined by LLUK (2007, 6) teachers undertake the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS), or the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS), if they are in a 'full teaching' role (LLUK 2007, 6).

As the ITE reforms were underway when my survey was carried out, I was able to gather data about which of the new awards respondents were working on. Multiple responses were allowed for this question, and 425 responses were made by the 161 respondents overall. 101 or 25.6% indicated they were involved in delivery of PTLLS and 91 or 23.9% on Cert Ed / PG Cert (part time in service programmes); 65 or 16.5% on CTLLS, and 79 or 20.1% on DTLLS. These figures suggest two aspects of PCE teacher education which are unusual in ITE. This is the degree to which trainees are studying part time whilst already in employment (i.e. in service) for their teaching qualification, and the degree to which teacher educators are teaching on short courses, sometimes as short as one semester or as small as 6 credits (PTLLS). Part time in-service is by far the most significant mode of operation of this phase of teacher education. Only 29 or 7.4% of the responses indicated practitioners were working on

full time pre service courses, whereas the overwhelming majority (92.6%) of responses indicated staff were working on part time in-service provision of one type or another. This is a unique characteristic of PCE teacher education within UK teacher education

### **Teacher educators in PCE**

It is striking how rarely items about PCE teacher educators feature in the academic literature. There is a selection of well-known items such as (Harkin, Cuff and Rees 2008) and (Noel 2006), but the first of these was never formally published, as it is an 'interim report' which never emerged as a final publication. There is more literature addressing teacher education in other parts of the education sector, but a relatively small proportion features teacher educators themselves, and very rarely those working in PCE (Boyd, Harris and Murray 2007), (Murray 2008); (Noel 2006); (Thurston 2010).

Thurston's (2010) suggestion that this group of teacher educators is to some degree invisible in the teaching and learning community appears well founded. The presence of Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETTs) has encouraged research in the field of teacher education in PCE, and examples are now moving through into publication so there is some sign of this changing. This article is an example of that growth.

A clearer, deeper and broader picture of the professional situation of teacher educators in the PCE sector has emerged from this section of my data. There are significant numbers of teaching professionals involved, many working in further education colleges and universities, but also others in broader PCE. They tend to move into teacher education with considerable experience in the sector, and the proportion of their time spent on teacher education is often less than 50%. The ITE provision on which respondents work includes short courses and the majority of PCE trainees are on

part time in-service programmes lasting from one semester to two years of part time study.

***The working context of PCE teacher educators***

PCE encounters frequent change and government intervention, the context within which teacher educators operate is often hostile, and support for their work and their own professional development largely absent (Harkin, Cuff and Rees 2008); (Lucas and Nasta 2010); (Noel 2006). Many teacher educators, particularly PCE teacher educators, are already experienced teachers (Harkin, Cuff and Rees 2008), (Noel 2006) and commence their involvement in teacher education with some powerful accumulated experiences of and expectations about teaching and learning. Moving from their role as teacher to one where they are 'teaching about teaching' (Boyd, Harris and Murray 2007, 13) often involves a significant personal journey.

***Essential Characteristics of a 'good teacher educator'***

The next section of the survey featured the set of 'essential characteristics of a good teacher educator' generated during the first stage of my research, and are listed below in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they 'already had' each characteristic and the degree to which they need to 'develop it further'. The four characteristics which respondents most often indicated they 'already had' were being 'passionate about teaching and learning' at 95%; 'flexibility, adaptability, availability' at 90.7%, 'gaining the professional respect of other teachers' at 87.6% and 'the ability to model good practice in teaching - knowingly' at 86.3%. The 'even more' quality (a term

suggested by a discussion group participant in first stage of the project, which is about the something extra that is needed .. or is 'even more' the case for teacher educators than teachers) was the highest rated area needing further development at 49.7%, followed by being 'innovative and charismatic' at 32.9% (perhaps out of modesty!). Just one of the 16 characteristics listed was rated below 60% in the 'already had' category. This data indicates respondents were confident that they already had the 'essential characteristics' of a good teacher educator. Given most have been operating as teacher educators for some years a high degree of confidence in this area could perhaps be expected. Each section of the questionnaire also provided opportunities for free comments, and a majority of respondents made comments. Comments from respondents on essential characteristics concentrated on two areas:

Responding to questions with two fixed choices as answers was difficult when their work situation was not fixed and was indeed constantly developing and changing. Two respondents summed this up with the comments:

'none of them (the statements) can ever be met "fully" by an individual'

'This section was not really meaningful as I do not see myself as fixed ... but constantly developing and changing'

Despite those reservations, a strong sense of the values of teacher education as responsive, responsible, creative and courageous emerged. Additional characteristics suggested by three different respondents included:

'Endless patience. A strong belief in what makes a good teacher'

'The empathy and critical ability to judge the balance between support and facilitated autonomy, as needed to help the trainee move successfully towards their goals as trained professionals.'

'The capacity to understand/empathise with a wide variety of teaching and learner support roles within a changing education context. The ability to help others make sense of the external and internal factors that impact on their teaching/learner support roles... leading to understanding, political awareness and empowerment.'

Thurston (2010) encouraged teacher educators to support independent and critical analysis of debates about teaching and learning in PCE and one respondent appeared to recognise this by suggesting another useful characteristic would be

'Thick skin - ability to 'package' government initiatives so as not to appear as simply an unthinking messenger!'

and another suggested teacher educator should have the

'courage to stand firm amidst changes that are not always wise. Ability to provide multi-culture and internationalist perspectives and to challenge received views. To be centred in Equal Opportunities but know the complexity of same Ability to set appropriate limits and boundaries Ability to deal sanely with inspections'

There are ongoing debates about differences between teachers and teacher educators, but there are particular aspects of the work of teacher educators which unite a number of writers. Teacher educators teach about teaching whether they are specialists in subject-based or generic teacher education, and this is a central part of what they do. Teacher educators directly contribute to the development of the teaching workforce in ways which other teachers generally do not (Boyd, Harris and Murray 2007); (Mayes 2009); (Murray 2008); (Thurston 2010). Thurston (2010) and Mayes (2009), both PCE teacher educators, also make the case strongly that teacher education has a more broad and pivotal role in preparing teachers to teach. They express a vision which goes beyond the instrumental preparation of teachers as deliverers of learning, and which doubts the value of a limited vision of teaching as encompassed by national standards (Nasta 2007). They argue that teacher education supports the consideration of

alternative approaches, risk taking, innovation and inclusivity and that it makes a significant contribution to community cohesion (Bentley 2009; Crowe and Berry 2007; Thurston 2010). Teacher educators can be seen to have a positive and developmental relationship with the specialised area of teaching and learning for the benefit of other teachers and their learners. This extra emphasis on developing and teaching and learning as specialism is a recognisable difference between teachers and teacher educators.

PCE teacher educators work across all components of the education sector, all contexts in which education takes place, with all types of educational organisations and institutions, and with all the variety, breadth and challenge of the education system. They work with and support groups of new, or, as often in PCE, experienced teaching staff, and provide support which enables them to make sense of, and accommodate government policy, multiple initiatives, quality assurance regimes, financial restraint and frequent reorganisation, in addition to teaching them about teaching. It is suggested that to engage successfully with this range of challenges, teacher educators 'need to be in touch with their mission' and possess a sound sense of self-worth (Korthagen and Verkuyl 2007, 120), so that they have a stable base to work from in order to 'help move individuals forward in their thinking as teachers' (Crowe and Berry 2007, 41). The responses to the set of essential characteristics from the questionnaire indicate this group of PCE teacher educators do indeed consider they possess this self-worth and sense of mission. (Pandolfo 2009, 56) encapsulates this when suggesting teacher educators should encourage their trainees to develop:

a 'personal perception of what education should be and that perception is a self-governed developmental process which enhances a feeling of worth and not simply a means to an end'

*One key factor*

To provide a final opportunity for further comment on the themes of the survey, a question was included asking for ‘one key factor which is the difference between a good teacher educator and a good teacher’. This question produced 140 comments from the 161 respondents (85%) and some further powerful insights into the values of this group. Three themes featured prominently in the responses, and these add further to the understanding of the values of PCE teacher educators. Firstly 50% of responses used language which is aligned with student-centred, facilitative, flexible, responsive and supportive teaching and learning approaches of the type championed by Rogers (1983), (Boud and Feletti 1997) and (Brandes and Ginnis 1986). Words such as ‘empathy’; ‘empower’; ‘student centred’; ‘passion and belief’; ‘acknowledge and respect’; ‘open minds to possibilities’; ‘inspire’ and ‘listen sympathetically’ all featured. Four examples follow:

‘facilitating the 'handover' to a student centred, active, self-regulated mode of learning’

‘a good teacher educator must inspire but be able to appreciate & respect the trainees’

‘Mutual respect and ability to communicate effectively with other professionals’

‘The acknowledgment, utilisation and celebration of the wide range of experiences that lifelong learners bring’

Secondly, 30% of responses mentioned the way in which teacher educators wish to model best practice in teaching and learning to their trainees. This includes modelling different approaches to teaching and professional behaviour and creating an accessible model of practice which trainees can adapt and use for their own benefit.

‘The teacher educator's concern goes beyond merely facilitating learning to include creating a model of practice that trainees can take forward to their practice’

‘A MODEL - a good teacher educator must practise what they preach throughout the process.’

The most frequent theme raised in response to this question occurred in some 80% of comments. The issue is arguably the key difference between PCE and other teacher educators, and could be called ‘*the diversity and breadth of PCE*’. Respondents mentioned the bewildering range of situations, contexts, theories, approaches, methodologies, policies and dimensions of practice they work with in the PCE and the equally diverse range of trainees they support. Not only do they need to absorb and make some sense of this complexity, they also have to help their trainees make sense of it, gain confidence from the experience and become better teachers.

These comments sum up the challenge very well:

‘A wider perspective of pedagogical and andragogical theories and how these can be applied to different settings. This enables a teacher educator to ... be accessible to a wide range of subject specialist teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector’

‘The ability to understand the amazing range of subjects and delivery modes that LL tutors have to deal with’

‘while good teachers have to be dual professionals, good teacher educators have to be triple professionals, in their original specialist subject, in teacher education and in their teaching skills’

### **Concluding comments and next steps**

What has my research told us about the professional situation of PCE teacher educators? By estimating a community of some 1500, I believe I have for the first time provided a good indicator of the number of teacher educators across PCE. The role involves

supporting trainees who are almost all in-service and also being involved in the delivery of short and long teacher education programmes.

The working environment for the PCE workforce in general is recognised as challenging, complex, at times hostile, and one which involves a great diversity of learners and range of teaching contexts (Avis and Bathmaker 2005, 2006); (Crawley 2009, 2010); (Lucas 2004); (Shain and Gleeson 1997); (TLRP, 2008). This environment is bound to impact on a group working so directly with PCE professionals (i.e. PCE teacher educators) and this research confirms that is the case. The results of the research indicate that providing a stable and supportive learning process for teachers working in such challenging circumstances is crucial to PCE teacher educators, in addition to recognising the need to positively model best practice in and across the sector.

Achieving these professional goals tests the resilience and significant life and working experience of PCE teacher educators to the full. Despite recent and ongoing reforms in PCE teacher education, the professional situation of teacher educators remains loosely defined, lacking in support and at times isolated (Harkin 2005); (Harkin 2008); (Clow and Harkin 2009); (Noel 2006); (Noel 2009). The results of this survey suggest that PCE teacher educators do not allow that to affect their commitment and efforts to support their trainees and it may even be the case that it spurs them on.

The results of the research also strongly suggest that an engaged debate about enhancing teaching and learning involving PCE teacher educators could take place, and that agreement could be reached on what the essential characteristics needed to be a good PCE teacher educator are, and how professionals could be supported to develop those characteristics.

Finally, how do PCE teacher educators view themselves in relation to this set of characteristics and as a group overall, and what does this tell us about PCE teacher

education? PCE teacher educators perceive themselves as professionals who are mainly confident in the essential characteristics they possess and their subject knowledge, and they are ready to comment on their values and working situation. They have a powerful desire to enhance the learning, teaching and community values of their trainees, and a readiness to contribute to activities which they feel will improve their situation and that of their trainees. Bentley (2009); Crowe and Berry (2007) and Thurston (2010) echo these results. With respect to PCE teacher education, it is bound within the sector it serves, and this means it is cast as one of the main ways in which a professional workforce is trained and developed. If there are defining characteristics of PCE teacher educators they could be argued to be the 'diversity and breadth of practice' they engage with in terms of trainees and the sector overall, and the degree to which this demands an 'even more' quality, or requires them to be 'triple professionals'.

Hillier (2009, 3) sums up well the way PCE teacher educators appeared to approach this research and from my experience, how they approach their work overall:

their reflections are full of opportunity, suggesting ways to engage their learners, or creating ways to experience the feelings that their learners have when confronted with the academic demands of the current series of teaching qualifications.

### **What next for this research?**

Partly as a result of the work undertaken by this research, a new project started in early 2010, funded for two years as a Learning and Skills Information Service Innovation project. The project developed and delivered an induction and support programme and produced associated materials for new and inexperienced teacher educators, and this will be reported on through further publication.

One final comment from one of the teacher educators involved in my research underlines what it is hoped it can help teacher educators achieve.

‘A teacher educator needs to see beyond his / her own approach / preoccupations / good practice etc. to appreciate that there are many valid routes to successful teaching & learning’

My research has highlighted the particular commitment, values and experiences of a group of teacher educators who can often appear to be the ‘outsiders’ of the teacher education world. They are revealed as a sizeable and committed community of professionals, driven by powerful motivations and working to support significant numbers of PCE teachers each year to become better teachers. It is time this group gained the recognition and understanding they deserve.

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## Appendix 1

Table 1 – Essential characteristics of a good teacher educator

<b>Essential characteristics of a good teacher educator</b>
The ability to model good practice in teaching, and knowingly – praxis
Flexibility, adaptability, availability
Gaining the professional respect of other teachers.
Capacity to challenge self and others' actions and values / philosophies.
Skills in developing professional beliefs, values and practice in others.
Capacity to empower other teachers.
Acknowledging / respecting / using others' skill sets / contexts.
Encouraging independent / critical thinking in others.
The ability to relate the taught elements of Initial Teacher Education to a wide diversity of workplace settings.
Broad range of teaching experience.
Innovative and charismatic.
Passionate about teaching and learning.
Capacity to work with a wide range of teachers to challenge and inspire their development.

Ability to step outside own comfort zone and enjoy that challenge.

The 'even more' quality (demonstrating a wide range of professional confidence as a good teacher, but 'even more' so)