

Cambridge Primary Review Trust
Research Briefing 10
(new series)

POLICY AND RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN THE 'REFORM' OF PRIMARY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

Olwen McNamara, Jean Murray
and Rebecca Phillips

This briefing draws on the review of research reported in *Policy and research evidence in the 'reform' of primary initial teacher education in England* by Olwen McNamara, Jean Murray and Rebecca Phillips. It was commissioned by the Cambridge Primary Review Trust and is one of a series of surveys of published research designed to supplement those published in The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys (Routledge, 2010). In particular, this review builds on the CPR Primary Research Report 6/3 *Primary teachers: initial training, continuing professional development and school leadership development* (McNamara et al., 2008)

Our conclusions from a review of research and other evidence since 2010 in relation to the impact and implications of the reforms of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) have been as follows.

1. Education policy-makers' judgments are frequently based on ideology rather than robust scrutiny of the relevant research evidence; and in drawing up policy they often fail to consider primary phase-specific characteristics. This oversight is compounded by the significant lack of phase-specific research available to support a nuanced understanding of the differential impact of policy decisions. Policy-makers have also shown a marked lack of insight as to the likely impact of the radical nature and speed of implementation of the reforms on the principle of ITT partnerships; in particular, they have not considered the multiple, adverse effects of allocating only diminished roles as 'training providers' to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Such a threat to the sustainability of partnerships is likely to have a significantly greater impact on (particularly small) primary schools who rely to a greater degree on collaborative structures, and may have less capacity to take on the more extensive roles in ITT, especially mentoring work.
2. ITT reforms have meant that schools have become the key location both for learning and for the legitimisation of knowledge in ITT; as a result academic rigour has been reduced and practical knowledge of how to teach, gained through workplace immersion, has become more dominant. Where trainees spend more time in 'practice' than 'prepare and reflect' mode, it is possible that they will be inducted into localised, school-specific practices and norms *before* they develop the criticality and reflective skills to situate local experiences in a wider context. There are indications that, in many contexts, trainee learning is increasingly structured by variable forms of partnership and local pedagogies and curriculum practices mediated through the teaching and learning receive in those contexts from the diverse ITT educators or mentors working within them. The extent of this diversification means that primary trainees' actual experiences of the ITT curriculum now differ greatly across and between routes.
3. The model of the teacher-as-research-literate-technician now dominates formal government policy on the ITT curriculum. But some school-led training schemes still instantiate principles of a narrow, craft-based apprenticeship model of training, achieved through classroom immersion. We would suggest that an increasingly fragmented school system, involving disparate curriculum and pedagogic practices, means that beginning teachers need to have *more* versatile skill sets, knowledge bases and pedagogic practices than in the past. This suggests a more developmental model of training, as found within research-informed undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, particularly in school-HEI partnerships.
4. The formal curriculum of primary ITT is now strongly aligned with the curriculum of primary schools and in some curricular instances (e.g. the teaching of synthetic phonics) is effectively mandatory. The primary ITT curriculum, particularly on postgraduate routes, is therefore very full and often reactive in its efforts to 'cover' all current and emerging curriculum initiatives in order to develop broad and deep knowledge about primary schooling. Further, despite past concerns about the adequacy of subject knowledge preparation in primary

ITT, understanding of how to develop multi-subject knowledge, including the creation of meaningful, cross-curricular links, during training has barely been considered in recent policy documents. The development of such understanding is particularly important because, for many trainees there is no neat 'mapping' between knowledge acquired through a first degree – or even through GSCE or A level studies – and the contents of the primary curriculum. Capacity issues in the current postgraduate ITT curriculum means that it does not easily support the development of extended specialist skills alongside the traditional generalist training. The development of primary specialist routes, in particular, is still very uneven, perhaps reflecting on-going uncertainty about the place of such specialists in the primary workforce.

5. The relaxing of the requirement for mandatory teacher training has resulted in significantly more unqualified teachers teaching in primary academies and free schools than in maintained primary schools; and additionally considerable numbers of trainees are now following QTS-only training routes. The ambivalence that policy-makers display towards teacher training and, in particular, the apparent disregard in which they hold the added value offered by an academic qualification (PGCE/PGDE) over the professional (QTS-only) award has implications for teacher quality, the development of a world-class school system, the status and the regard in which the teaching profession in England is held, and the mobility of its teachers.
6. The on-line application process for postgraduate entry is complex, and marketing and recruitment information can be contradictory, thus leaving applicants ill-formed about important details. For example, the process promotes QTS-only routes without informing applicants clearly that the award only qualifies them to teach in England and Wales not internationally or even in Scotland.
7. The DfE teacher supply model does not factor in regional or sub-regional job markets, and indeed has limited intelligence about local supply issues, particularly in isolated rural areas where the primary recruitment challenge is greatest. This can lead to areas of both over-supply and shortage; to add a further complication, there are significant regional variations in projections of pupil numbers going forward. Additionally, the overall proportion of ethnic minority primary trainees has remained static overall at about 8% for 10 years, whilst the diversity of the British population (currently 17%) has continued to increase and the non-white British primary school population has risen to 31% (with wide regional differences from Inner London with 82% to the North East with 12%).
8. Recruitment criteria, audit measures and league tables currently incentivise and privilege applicants with first class degrees, although there is no evidence linking this to broader suitability to teach, and the evidence is equivocal, at best, as to whether this is likely to translate into teachers of higher quality. For primary applicants, in particular, personal qualities and criteria such as breadth of curriculum coverage at A level may be more appropriate indicators of potential.
9. The radical changes in ITT, and most particularly the speed with which they have been implemented, have undermined the short- and medium-term planning capability of training providers, particularly in HEIs. The changes have impacted on the professional identity, roles and work patterns of HEI teacher educators, leaving many feeling insecure and undervalued, both in their institutions and across the ITT sector. They have also led to increased casualisation of staffing and loss of capacity in key aspects of the primary curriculum and subject expertise, with an ensuing cumulative impact ultimately leading to the vulnerability of individual programmes, whole education departments, and aspects of the educational infrastructure including the generation of academic literature and text books.

Our recommendations for policy and practice are as follows.

1. Education policymakers should base their decisions on robust research evidence and always take into consideration primary phase-specific characteristics and requirements.
2. More phase-specific research should be undertaken on the effectiveness of primary ITT provision, the quality of the trainee outcomes and the impact of recent ITT reforms on primary schools.
3. Authentic school and HEI partnerships, and mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise, should be reinstated fully as core principles for all ITT routes. Schools and universities both have essential and complementary roles to play in ITT provision.

4. Further effort should be made to ensure that all primary schools have access to effective support in order that mentors extend their knowledge and understanding of both high quality learning environments and effective andragogical skills.
5. Strategies should be put in place to ensure the stability of the HEI ITT sector and enable it to engage as a full partner in the school sector supporting development work and sustaining education infrastructure and resources as well as playing a role in developing research-informed pedagogical content knowledge and supporting trainees' research engagement and broader perspectives on teaching and teacher knowledge.
6. Given the fragmented school system and disparate curriculum and pedagogic practices, policy makers should ensure ITT adopts a developmental approach that nurtures creative, flexible and reflective practitioners with critical thinking and practical theorising capability, deep subject knowledge and allied pedagogical skills, rather than a craft apprenticeship approach that privileges performativity and local practical knowledge.
7. A two-year PGCE/PGDE qualification should become standard for primary teachers, to include at the minimum substantive specialist subject and pedagogic knowledge training in all three core subjects and basic knowledge of all non-core subjects. This qualification should be offered alongside specialist routes which include some single and multiple domain courses in key subjects such as mathematics, SEN, science, PE and languages.
8. The Government should require academies and free schools to employ trained teachers and QTS-only routes should not be promoted as an adequate alternative to an academic postgraduate qualification. Trainees should be warned that QTS is accepted as a teaching qualification *only* in England and Wales, whereas a postgraduate teaching qualification is accepted in Scotland and most countries internationally.
9. The Government should redouble its efforts to recruit black and ethnic minority primary trainees in order to create a primary school workforce that is richly diverse and representative of the population. Government policy should also be better-informed by and more responsive to regional and local workforce labour markets, particularly those of isolated rural areas.

Related sources:

Cambridge Primary Review Trust, Priority 7:
http://cpitrust.org.uk/about_cpirt/cprt-priorities-in-action/pedagogy/

Cambridge Primary Review, relevant publications:

Alexander, R.J. (ed) (2010), *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge: chapters 21 'Teachers, expertise, development, deployment', 24 'Conclusions and recommendations'.

Alexander, R.J., Doddington, C., Gray, J., Hargreaves, L. and Kershner, R. (eds) (2010), *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys*, Routledge: Stronach, I., Pickard, A., Jones, L., 'Primary schools: the professional environment' (pp. 627-648); McNamara, O., Webb, R., Brundrett, M., 'Primary teachers: initial teacher education, continuing professional development and school leadership development' (pp. 649-701); Burgess, H., 'Primary workforce management and reform' (pp. 702-726).

FURTHER INFORMATION

The report on which this briefing is based: McNamara, O., Murray, J., and Phillips, R. (2017) *Policy and Research Evidence in the 'Reform' of Primary Initial Teacher Education in England* (CPRT Research Survey 10). York: Cambridge Primary Review Trust. ISBN 978-0-9931033-2-2

The report is available at www.cprtrust.org.uk. The website also contains information about other surveys in this series, and those from the Cambridge Primary Review.

Cambridge Primary Review Trust was established in December 2012 with the aim of consolidating and building on Cambridge Primary Review's evidence, findings and principles. Supported by Pearson Education, it is based at the University of York and chaired by Professor Robin Alexander.

The Trust has eight priorities (equity, voice, community, sustainability, aims, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) and four programmes (policy, research, school leadership, professional networking and development).

Enquiries: The Administrator, Cambridge Primary Review Trust, The Catalyst, University of York, Heslington East, York, YO10 5GA. Phone: 01904-435100.

Email: administrator@cprtrust.org.uk. Website: www.cprtrust.org.uk.

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