

Further education based teacher educators, teacher education, and the policy context

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Teachers of teachers...are typically overlooked in studies of teacher education. (Lanier and Little, 1986, p.528)

A 'normative definition' of a teacher educator might be 'someone who prepares young adults to teach in primary and secondary schools' (Dennis, Ballans, Bowie, Humphries and Stones, 2016, p.9). Unlike those preparing future teachers for primary and secondary schools, further education (FE) based teacher educators in England are working with those who wish to teach, or who currently are teaching, within what is broadly known as the 'Further Education and Skills Sector'. Who are these teacher educators? How do they become teacher educators? Where do they work and what is the nature of that work? What is the policy context? As will be apparent from their stories which follow, policy influences their work and the development of their various identities as teacher educators (Swennen and Volman, 2018).

The English further education and skills sector has been variously known as further education, post-compulsory education and training, and the learning and skills sector; it has been described as an ‘important but invisible sector’ (Hodgson, Bailey and Lucas, 2015, p.1). It has traditionally been responsible for non-advanced post-compulsory education in England and has a reputation for giving students, 16–18-year-olds and adults, a ‘second chance’ (Orr, 2016, p.20). However, it has often been seen by politicians ‘as the sector for the education of other people’s children’ (Avis, 2017, p.196). It provides this ‘second chance’ education and training for about four million students (National Audit Office, 2015, para. 1.1, p.12) and, in 2015, had a budget in the region of £7 billion (p.5). The FE and Skills sector, at its broadest, comprises a number of different types of provider including general further education colleges; specialist further education colleges, such as land-based colleges; sixth form colleges; prisons and young offender institutions; independent training providers; adult and community learning; and voluntary sector organisations. This study, of course, is focussed on general FE colleges. Crawley (2016, p.2) describes the ‘working environment [for further education based teacher educators] as particularly diverse, complex, dynamic and challenging’.

Following Murray and Male (2005), FE based teacher educators can be described as second order practitioners in a first order setting, that is, their first order practitioner work was/is as a teacher of their original vocational or academic subject within the FE setting, so their work as teacher educator is ‘second order’. Their teacher education work is in a first order setting because it is undertaken in a further education college, rather than in a university (which would be regarded as a second order setting for such work). This is why the teaching professionals featured in this booklet are designated as further education based

teacher educators, though some of them may have ‘dual identities’ in that they may continue to teach their ‘first subject’ or they may undertake quality assurance or management roles within their colleges (Robinson and Skrbic, 2016). Whatever their identities, there has been, comparatively, something of a ‘scholarly silence’ in relation to their work (Dennis et al., 2016, p.9). Noel (2006) wrote about the ‘secret lives’ of further education based teacher educators, and Thurston (2010) described them as the ‘invisible teacher educators’ because relatively little was known about them, their work and their professional lives.

Loo (2020, p.49) helpfully suggests three ‘journeys/pathways to becoming’ an FE based teacher educator: ‘unintended, intended and miscellaneous.’ Those who find themselves on the unintended pathway initially had no intention to become a teacher educator. However, they become a teacher educator after being approached informally by a colleague to join the teacher education team. This informal approach by a colleague was also identified by Noel (2006). The intended pathway is pursued by those who have been inspired by a teacher educator who taught them, and they search out the role as part of their career plan. The miscellaneous pathway, Loo explains, has two routes. The first is ‘the cart before the horse’ (ibid, p.48), where the person becomes a teacher educator before they become a teacher. This is a route that is rarely taken, I would argue. The second route is ‘reluctance, refusal and intentional’ (ibid, p.49). This is characterised by the person initially turning down an informal offer from a colleague to teach on a teacher education programme. However, after a period of time, the person accepts the offer and enthusiastically embraces the role of teacher educator. It might be argued that this latter route could easily fit within Loo’s ‘unintended’ pathway.

Work by Noel (2006), Simmons and Thompson (2007), Harkin, Cuff, and Rees (2008), Crawley (2014), Eliahoo (2014), Springbett (2015), and Loo (2020) has contributed to what is known about further education based teacher educators, though it is worth bearing in mind that 11 of the 33 participants in Loo's (ibid, pp. 20-28) study were working in higher education institutions, not FE colleges, according to their 'details'. Noel (2006, p.163) identified that FE based teacher educators were then mostly 'older', white, females; that some of them had not been interviewed for their roles as teacher educators; and that there had at that time been some 'instances of inappropriate recruitment and selection practice, unlikely to promote equality and diversity in teacher educator teams.' Loo's (2020) more recent research reaffirms Noel's findings regarding gender balance and ethnicity. Loo provides data regarding where 32 of the 33 participants in his study were born, their first language and other languages spoken, and their qualifications. Reflecting Noel's earlier work, 26 (81% of Loo's participants were born in the UK, the others having been born in France, Jamaica, Latvia, Malaysia, Poland, and Tanzania.' (Loo, 2020, p.30). 28 (88%) of the participants identified English as their first language, the other first languages indicated were Cantonese, Gujarati, Latvian and French. Other languages spoken included 'French, German, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Bahasa Malaysia[n], British Deaf Blind, Hausa, Hungarian, Jamaican Patois, Kiswahili, Latin, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish, Urdu and Yoruba...' (Loo, 2020, pp30-31). 27 (84%) had a first degree and 25 (78%) held master's level degrees. Most universities require FE based staff to hold a master's degree in order to be approved to deliver their teacher education programmes. Two participants (6%) possessed a doctorate and four (21%) were working towards a PhD or EdD. Interestingly, 11 (34%) of the 32 did not possess a recognised level 5 or above teaching qualification, though Loo points out that these individuals had degrees or postgraduate degrees in Education.

Simmons and Thompson (2007) observed that the professional lives of further education based teacher educators were significantly different to the lives of those who were university based. They reported that teaching workloads in FE were heavier. FE teacher educators had less 'professional autonomy', they received significantly lower rates of pay, had limited agency in relation to the curriculum they delivered, had fewer 'opportunities for scholarly activity', and they were 'grappling with the problems imposed by limited resources...and an increasingly mechanistic, performatively focused model of teacher education' (Simmons and Thompson, 2007, p.530).

Harkin et al.'s (2008) study usefully analysed the initial or original subject specialist backgrounds from which 88 teacher educators had been drawn. This is presented in Table 1 on page 8.

Subject Specialism	No. of respondents
Skills for Life (literacy)	23
Business, management, law & finance	18
English literature & language	8
Health and social care	5
Science	5
Travel, tourism, sport, leisure & hospitality	5
ICT	4
Sociology	4
Psychology	3
Art & design	2
Beauty/complementary therapies & hairdressing	2
Motor vehicle engineering	2
Skills for Life (numeracy)	2
Advice & guidance	1
Agriculture & horticulture	1
Food studies	1
History	1
Special needs	1

Table 1: Teacher educators' subject specialisms
(n = 88) (Adapted from Harkin et al., 2008, p.19)

Noel (2006) also identified the original/initial subject specialisms of the teacher educators in her study, though she did not quantify them. Instead, she stated they were:

...concentrated in certain subject areas – particularly Business & Management Studies and Social Science and Humanities. Their representation in some subject specialisms far exceeds that of the trainees... This is particularly so in relation to ICT, which involves 5% of the teacher educators, 12% of the trainees, and is the subject area with the most learners in FE. Data analysis reveals that over half the centres involve teaching teams with more than one teacher with the same subject specialism, even where the specialism is one not very well represented overall. There are examples of teams with as many as five members from the same background. This evidence of the clustering of specific groupings of teacher educators might suggest that, in some cases at least, a word of mouth, informal type of recruitment is occurring in connection with membership of teacher educator teams. (Noel, 2006, pp.159-160)

Another factor might be the position of 'Education' as a curriculum 'subject' or, more properly, an academic discipline, in its own right within the social sciences. What was particularly useful about Noel's analysis was that it highlighted the clustering of teacher educators around certain subject specialisms and the potential mismatch between them and their trainees' subject specialisms. Powell (2016, p.37) asserted that this mismatch had 'potential implications for modelling and congruent teaching' and teacher educators' ability to enact the subject specialist pedagogies of their trainees within teacher education (Powell and Swennen, 2019).

Drawing on other research relating to transitions in education, Murray and Male (2005, p.127) asserted that the transition from (school) teacher to university based teacher educator was completed within three years. Based on this claim, Boyd, Harris, and Murray (2011) have suggested that inductions for new FE and HE based teacher educators should be undertaken over a period of up to three years; their proposed induction programme would be one that ‘deliberately goes beyond the initial year...and includes time to establish identities and roles’ (p.7). This might be contested. Another way of looking at this might be to consider the early career years as a teacher educator as an informal period of enculturation (as with most other academic fields). Academics do not normally get ‘inducted’ into their field in any mechanistic sense. Institutional and departmental inductions are, of course, a different thing (and are most necessary). Perhaps a difficulty with the word ‘induction’ in this context arises because it implies compliance with known ways of doing things. Views may depend on whether a teacher educator is conceived as some kind of practitioner who acquires a pre-determined skill set or is rather envisaged as an academic (who engages with and, through research and scholarly activity, contributes to an evolving discipline). They may be seen as a form of hybrid. However, it appears that further education based teacher educators may not even receive an induction into their specific role. Following her own empirical study Eliahoo (2014, p.221) observed that ‘...nearly half of the survey participants had not experienced any induction to the teacher educator role...’. Those inductions which had taken place sat on a ‘continuum of quality... from unsatisfactory to conscientious...’ (p.130). See also Van Velzen, Van der Klink, Swennen and Yaffe (2010) who have written about the induction of beginning teacher educators. Loo (2020) does not discuss his participants’ inductions.

Crawley (2016, p.1) notes that ‘within the world of teacher education...[further education based teacher educators] often have the lowest visibility of all.’ For instance, at the 2015 English Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) Annual Conference there were 9 papers presented on further education based teacher education out of a total of 52; 6 out of 56 papers at the 2016 conference, and 4 out of 44 papers in 2017. There were 4 out of 87 papers at the 2017 English Teacher Education Advancement Network (TEAN) conference. These numbers are low, though they need to be considered in light of the relative size of two sectors: schools and FE&S.

Crawley (ibid) adds that further education based teacher education and its teacher educators are ‘rarely mentioned’ in policy documents and/or by policy makers. Eliahoo (2014, p.224) asserted that further education based teacher educators might be seen as ‘the real victims of benign neglect (Lucas, 2004b, p.35)’ within teacher education. However, these teacher educators are responsible for developing the sector’s new teachers and trainers and a significant proportion of this work is undertaken in partnership with universities. There are broadly three types of FE initial teacher education (ITE) provision: further education colleges and private training providers offering awarding body qualifications such as the Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training; FE colleges delivering ‘franchised’ university validated programmes such as the Level 5 Certificate in Education, Level 6 Professional Graduate Certificate in Education, and Level 7 Postgraduate Certificate in Education; and the latter awards delivered directly by universities through their own staff on their own campuses. More rarely a Level 7 Postgraduate Diploma is offered, usually but not exclusively within universities. The teacher educators featured in this booklet are drawn from those who teach at partner colleges within a consortium partnership between more than 20 further education

colleges and the University of Huddersfield; it is currently the largest partnership of its type in England. However, the nature of where they work shapes their practice and it is useful to consider the nature of the work they do in comparison with that of university based teacher educators delivering the same or similar provision.

Lunenberg, Dengerink and Korthagen (2014) used data drawn from over 130 journal articles to review and categorise the work of university based teacher educators and classified it into six key roles: teacher of teachers; researcher; coach; curriculum developer; gatekeeper; broker. Drawing on this work and his own research into further education based teacher educators, Powell (2016) identified six primary roles and seven possible additional roles for the FE based teacher educators. These are presented in Table 2 on page 13.

	Primary roles
1	Teacher of teachers, this may be part-time or full-time
2	Gatekeeper
3	Coach
4	Curriculum developer
5	Broker
6	Administrator
	Additional roles
1	Researcher
2	Curriculum manager
3	Staff developer
4	Advanced practitioner
5	Teaching & learning coach
6	Subject teacher
7	Quality assurance

Table 2: Roles of further education based teacher educators
(Adapted from Powell, 2016, p.43)

Something is known of the likely job specifications of further education based teacher educators, and the nature of their work, though how many individuals are employed in this role is unclear. Crawley and Eliahoo have estimated 1,500 (Crawley, 2014, p.53) and 2,426 (Eliahoo, 2014, p.51) respectively. However, there has never been a national survey of these teacher educators to establish their number and their professional learning needs, though it has been suggested to the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), an employer-facing, quasi-autonomous national government organisation, that one needs to be done if the work of these teacher educators is to be understood and effectively supported.

The English Further Education and Skills Sector has been seen as ‘indispensable’ by successive governments which have regarded it as a vehicle for implementing their business and skills policies and creating a more skilled workforce (Orr, 2016, p.22); Avis (2017, p.196) described it as ‘the handmaiden of industry’. As such, its ‘teacher educators play a key role...’ (Machin, 2016, p.32) in supporting these aims by providing initial teacher education for new teachers and trainers, many of whom are enacting the government’s skills policies in the classroom by training, for example, electricians, plumbers, hospitality staff, health and social care staff, and agricultural workers. Coffield (2015, p.13) asserted that the sector had experienced ‘more than 30 years of policy hyperactivity’ devised by an ever-changing total of (then) 61 Secretaries of State from successive governments (Orr, 2016, p.19). For instance, Coffield (2008), drawing on research undertaken by Gemma Moss, stated that 459 documents had been sent by ‘government agencies to all primary schools in England on the topic of literacy during the years 1996 and 2004...which amounts to 51 per year or almost one a week for nine years’ (p.8). Whilst FE teacher education has not suffered the same intensity of governmental

activity the lack of political stability that has pervaded education (Orr, 2016) has meant the teacher educators in the sector have experienced ‘a permanent revolution’ (Coffield, 2008, p.9) that has created an ever accelerating ‘pace of change’ (ibid.).

Orr and Simmons (2010, p.78), commentating on ‘the permanent revolution’ (Coffield, 2008, p.8) of educational reform that the FE and Skills sector has experienced, noted that ‘virtually all aspects of FE are now highly mediated by the State’. Keep (2006) argues that the FE and Skills sector is now the most highly-regulated and centrally-directed education system in Europe.’ This led Hodgson et al. (2015, p.8) to remark that ‘England is increasingly an outlier’ when compared with other European countries’ VET systems as a result of successive governments’ neoliberal policies “tinkering and tailoring” (Jephcote and Abbot, 2005, p.181) with the Sector; a process Keep (2006, p.47) described as the educational equivalent of playing with the ‘biggest train set in the world’.

The 2007 legislative requirement that all teachers and trainers working in the FE and Skills Sector in England should possess at least a Level 5 initial teacher education (ITE) qualification led to a period of expansion as further education and higher education responded to this policy directive. This framework remained in place until the publication of the Lingfield Report of October 2012 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2012), which argued that the requirement to have a Level 5 ITE qualification had little impact on the quality of teaching by newly qualified teachers. The subsequent ‘de-regulation’ of ITE for the Further Education and Skills sector coincided with the introduction of the ‘new fees’ and student loans, seeing FE ITE fees for some part-time courses increase from c£900 per annum in October 2011 to c£3,000 per annum in September 2012. Many employers were

no longer able to, or were not prepared to, pay the fees for in-service trainees and would-be trainee teachers generally needed to apply for student loans. However, the 'de-regulation' did not remove the requirement that all ITE providers are inspected by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills). Awarding body provision within a college is inspected currently as part of the college's inspection, whereas the inspection of provision franchised from a university and delivered by partner further education colleges is inspected currently as part of a university's inspection. In recent years, the 'triple-whammy' of 'de-regulation', higher fees and student loans has seen a number of universities withdraw from further education ITE as the demand for teacher education courses has declined. Tummons (2020, p.17) asserts that 'within this complex and shifting landscape, it is important to acknowledge ...FE teacher training continues to rest on a curriculum that remains relatively resilient.' He adds (ibid) that any changes to the curriculum 'reflect changing discourses of what it means to be a teacher, most notably in the coverage of counselling and guidance, and in the provision of study skills.' On page 17, Table 3 presents numbers on enrolments on FEITE courses between 2010 and 2015.

Year	Type of qualification					Total
	Award	Certificate	Diploma, CertEd & PGCE	Learning & Development Award	Other	
2010-11	5,287	3,862**	22,730***	2,937	6,671	41,487
2011-12	36,750	8,600	16,170	Not reported	Not reported	61,520
2012-13	38,730	7,870	12,220	Not reported	Not reported	58,820
2013-14	34,340	6,250	11,450	Not reported	Not reported	52,040
2014-15	25,970	2,920	11,690	Not reported	Not reported	40,580
2015-16	24,170	3,470	10,760	Not reported	Not reported	38,400

Table 3: The number of FEITE enrolments by year and type of qualification between 2010-2015*
(Powell, 2016, p.31; Education and Training Foundation, 2018¹)

The future of further education ITE seems uncertain. Successive governments have continued to intervene in this ‘de-regulated’ landscape; the latest development being the introduction of apprenticeships in relation to ITE for the FE and Skills Sector in the form of a set of ‘Trailblazer’ Standards at levels 3, 4, and 5. To what extent these will be adopted remains to be seen. It is within the context that further education based teacher educators work. What follows are some of their stories which provide insights into their often ‘hidden’ professional lives, academic work, and career trajectories.

1 There have been no reports on FEITE enrolments from the Education and Training Foundation since April 2018