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Simmons, Robin and Walker, Martyn

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# **A Comparative Study of Awarding Organisation and HEI Initial Teacher Training Programmes for the Lifelong Learning Sector in England**

## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the changing terrain of initial teacher training (ITT) for the lifelong learning sector in England. Drawing on research with teachers and teacher educators at four different lifelong learning sites, it explores the 'relative value' of different forms of ITT, validated by higher education institutions (HEIs) and alternative awarding bodies. It reveals that both teachers and teacher educators perceive HEI programmes as superior to other forms of teacher training, both in terms of labour market currency and the quality of learning provided. Although the majority of respondents regarded awarding body courses as adequate, our data reveals that most believed that HEI provision offers a significantly richer training experience.

Drawing on our data, we argue that state-induced changes to the ITT qualification structure, combined with significant changes in funding and steeply rising costs for university courses, are likely to substantially reduce the likelihood of teachers in the lifelong learning sector accessing HEI-led provision in future. This, combined with the empowerment of employers and the shift back to voluntarism signalled by recent policy initiatives, may well end the involvement of universities with this provision – and drive a shift towards a narrower, more utilitarian regime of teacher training.

**Key words: initial teacher training, lifelong learning, Learning and Skills Sector, England**

## **Introduction**

**This paper deals with initial teacher training (ITT) for the lifelong learning sector in England. As arrangements differ in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the article's focus is English – although its findings will be of interest to practitioners, academics and policymakers across the United Kingdom and further afield.** The first two sections provide an overview of the development of this provision, dealing firstly with the early establishment and growth of training programmes after the end of World War Two, followed by the changing terrain of the last decade. It explains how government has become increasingly involved in ITT for lifelong learning and how a competitive marketplace has been engineered by the state – albeit now combined with a proposed return to voluntarism. The main body of the paper discusses findings from research carried out in four lifelong learning providers delivering ITT programmes. It compares and contrasts the relative merits teacher training programmes validated by higher education institutions (HEIs) and alternative awarding organisation through exploring the views of teachers and teacher educators at these sites. An overview of the research is provided before findings are reported. Whilst it is recognised that the viability of HEI-led ITT is increasingly questionable in the current financial and political environment, data suggests that, in most cases, both teachers and teacher educators would prefer to have access to university-validated programmes rather than alternative qualifications. The research finds that, in most instances, HEI ITT qualifications are perceived to be of a higher status and to provide trainees with a more rounded and valuable experience – not only in facilitating access to the labour market and career advancement but in terms of the nature of learning provided.

## **The Development of teacher training for the Lifelong Learning Sector**

In England the lifelong learning sector is made up of a diverse range of providers including further education (FE) colleges, sixth-form colleges, school sixth forms and what remains of adult education

services run by local authorities. Specialist colleges catering for subjects such as art and design, agriculture and horticulture, and performing arts also exist. Other institutions focus on particular groups of students such as adult returners or learners with special educational needs. Private and voluntary providers are also an important part of the landscape: since the 1980s, successive governments have driven the commercialisation and marketisation of post-compulsory education and training, and today the lifelong learning sector is effectively made up of a mixed-economy of public sector providers competing with each other and thousands of voluntary and private organisations. The lifelong learning sector is therefore complicated and difficult to navigate, not only for those with little direct experience of post-compulsory education and training, but also for many working or studying in the sector (xxx 2010).

Although further education and training has traditionally been neglected by policymakers this situation has changed substantially in recent years, and since the 1980s it has increasingly attracted significant government attention. Under New Labour higher levels of educational attainment and a more skilled workforce were, it was argued, essential to deliver the increased human capital necessary to compete on the international stage. 'Up-skilling' was promoted as the key to both economic success and increased social justice (Cabinet Office 2008). **Within this discourse, post-compulsory education became recast as 'lifelong learning', and far-reaching change took place across the sector.** One significant feature of this was a greatly increased emphasis on teacher training. There is, in many ways, a substantial degree of continuity between New Labour and the current UK Government and, although set within a discourse of austerity, the valorisation both of 'skills' and of market competition as the best way of delivering education and training persists (Avis 2011). There are, however, also differences between the **Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government's** approach to post-compulsory education and that of its predecessors - one of which is a peculiarly utilitarian and old-fashioned conception of vocational learning held by key figures within its Conservative leadership (xxx and xxx 2012).

**The Coalition's approach towards post-compulsory ITT is, however, only one example of a broader conception of teaching as essentially a skills-based 'craft' - as opposed to a professional practice underpinned by a body of principled, coherent knowledge (see, for example, Gove 2010). This underpins not only the Government's approach towards teacher training for the lifelong learning sector but a range of other 'reforms' to the English education system, including its decision to allow academy schools to employ teachers without teaching qualifications, and the empowerment of free schools to vary teachers' terms and conditions of employment according to local needs and priorities. The changing terrain for teacher training in the lifelong learning sector is also an example of the growing disparity between education policy in England and the other nations of the UK. Whilst current proposals are likely to increase the practical and philosophical differences which exist between the different teacher training regimes which exist across the UK and further afield (Avis et al. 2012), they may also have implications for the currency of 'English' qualifications and for the employability of teachers across national borders.**

The roots of the lifelong learning sector can be traced back to the mechanics institutes of the Victorian era but, for much of its history, teaching staff were not required to hold formal teaching qualifications (Lucas 2004, p. 36). Traditionally, the assumption was that vocational expertise was the key to successful teaching, and usually FE teachers regarded themselves primarily as plumbers, engineers or accountants who just happened to teach. Consequently, some were slow to adopt new educational ideas or to prioritise pedagogy (xxx and xxx 2010). Despite all this, ITT programmes for FE teachers have existed for more than sixty years. Initially, these were run by four specialist Colleges of Education (Technical), established following the 1944 *McNair Report*. Initially, one-year, full-time Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) courses were offered but two-year 'in-service' programmes became available following the 1963 *Robbins Report*, and eventually Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses were established too (Bridge, Fisher and Webb, 2003, pp.

305-306). Following the 1977 *Haycocks Report* the four training providers made provision available through extramural centres. The four training colleges eventually became part of the Universities of Bolton, Greenwich, Huddersfield and Wolverhampton and, in addition to offering their own awards directly, each developed extensive networks of partner colleges delivering PGCE and Cert Ed qualifications on a franchise basis. From the late-1980s onwards, increasing numbers of HEIs began to offer such courses and, by the mid-2000s, around 50 HEIs, mostly 'new' universities had become involved, although some older universities also entered the marketplace (Standards Verification UK 2006).

Despite the involvement of HEIs, alternative forms of ITT for post-compulsory education have long existed. Awarding organisations such as City and Guilds (C&G) and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) have always provided such qualifications, probably the best known of these being the C&G 730 series. Traditionally such courses offered a less academic, but nevertheless useful, introduction to teaching, and have always been offered directly by colleges without the involvement of universities. The fact that many FE teachers hold both awarding organisation and HEI accredited qualifications complicates matters further: traditionally many of those gaining C&G awards went on to 'top up' their teaching qualifications by gaining a Cert Ed or PGCE thereafter. In many cases accreditation of prior learning (APL) procedures facilitated accelerated progression onto the later stages of university awards (Thompson and Robinson 2008, p. 163).

### **The changing terrain**

For much of its existence teacher training for post-compulsory education has been a voluntary endeavour but, over time, it became commonplace for FE teachers to undertake ITT. But, whilst the vast majority of schoolteachers have always undertaken their training on a full-time basis before gaining employment, in FE traditionally most have gained their teaching qualifications on a part-time

in-service basis after securing employment in a college or other provider. This pattern remains the norm, with around 90 per cent of trainee teachers in the lifelong learning sector taking in-service courses (**Universities Council for the Education of Teachers** 2009, p. 1). Traditionally, central government assumed an enabling rather than a regulatory role: basically providers were left to get on with delivering ITT courses and government footed the bill. Government also assumed financial responsibility for individual trainee teachers by providing study and maintenance grants, administered via local authorities. Consequently, training was free at source whilst curriculum design and delivery was largely unmediated by the state (Lucas, 2004). The last fifteen years have seen radical changes: in 1997, the *Fryer Report* on lifelong learning and the *Kennedy Report* on widening participation called for an overhaul of ITT for the lifelong learning sector. Following the establishment of the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO), new standards for teachers in post-compulsory education were produced in 1999; and in 2001 FE teachers in England were, for the first time, required to obtain an initial teaching qualification within a specified period (two years for full-time teachers). Such developments were driven, in part, by a desire to professionalise a disparate workforce, and by 2004 over 70% of full-time FE teachers were 'fully qualified' (**Lifelong Learning UK** 2005).

Compulsion was accompanied by significantly increased regulation. A new inspection regime, led by Ofsted, using an approach based on arrangements for school-teacher training, commenced in 2002. *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (**Department for Education and Skills** (DfES), 2004) and the Further Education White Paper (DfES, 2006) signalled further change. In 2007, new qualifications were introduced for all teachers entering the lifelong learning sector, and a professional body for FE teachers, the Institute for Learning (IfL), was established. There were a number of relatively minor demands which providers were required to meet including the development of mentoring systems, and the introduction of 'subject specialist pedagogy'. 'Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills' (QTLS) status was also established by the reforms; however, this was not simply to be awarded QTLS upon

achievement of a recognised qualification. Registration with the IfL and a period of ‘professional formation’ was also required and continuing professional development, monitored by IfL, became necessary to maintain QTLS status (Thompson and Robinson 2008, p. 165). Whilst such demands are not insignificant, broader curriculum change had much more far-reaching consequences. Initially, it was envisaged that two levels of ITT qualification would be introduced: a ‘threshold licence’ at level 3 (known as Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector [PTLLS]) and a level 5 qualification which would provide access to QTLS. However, an intermediate ‘associate teacher’ qualification was also introduced, the Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS). This qualification was made available at level 3 or level 4 and was intended for those with a limited range of teaching responsibilities. Those undertaking a fuller role were required to complete a level 5 Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS).

Historically, HEIs enjoyed a privileged position with the Cert Ed and PGCE regarded as ‘gold standard’ qualifications. However, the introduction of DTLLS programmes meant that it became possible for awarding organisations to offer qualifications in direct competition with universities. Furthermore, as Cert Ed and PGCE courses have always been more expensive to run, effectively a financial incentive for colleges to ‘go it alone’ was introduced. The subsequent removal of all public funding for HE teacher training programmes and the great rise in university fees from 2012 has brought this issue into particularly sharp focus – especially as the FE funding body, the Skills Funding Agency, will continue to subsidise ITT courses offered by awarding organisations for a year after the teaching grant is removed for all Cert Ed and PGCE courses. Set against this terrain, clearly the viability of university lead ITT becomes highly questionable.

The recent publication of Lord Lingfield’s Interim Report, *Professionalism in Further Education* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills (DBIS), 2012) adds a twist to the tale. Whilst the Report’s proposal to simplify the qualifications framework by effectively abolishing the unpopular CTLLS qualifications (Lucas et al. 2011) will be welcomed by many, the broader consequences of its



recommendations are likely to be viewed as highly problematic by teacher educators and ITT providers. Essentially, Lingfield signals a return to voluntary ITT for the lifelong learning sector; the Report recommends the revocation of the 2007 Regulations and giving employers the discretion to decide which qualifications – if any - are appropriate for their staff. Lingfield states that

... staff training, professional updating, competency and behaviour are essentially matters between employer and employee. There are sufficient statutory arrangements in place through, for example, employment legislation and the requirements for staff performance management and learner safeguarding set out in Ofsted's *Common Inspection Framework*, to ensure at least a threshold level of professional performance (DBIS, 2012, p.6).

The Report also argues that 'providers should have the freedom to stand or fall according to the service they offer to learners and the public accreditation they earn for the high quality of that service from Ofsted and others' (DBIS 2012, p.6). The role of government in this situation is interesting. Whilst, broadly, competition and choice are viewed as the key to driving up standards, the market over which the state presides is neither free nor neutral; nor is it any way natural. A market in ITT qualifications, loaded against HEIs, has been purposefully manufactured. A combination of voluntarism and the greatly increased cost of university courses are likely to have far-reaching consequences for the 'gold standard' Cert Ed/PGCE. The potential effects of this upon the quality of provision available to trainee teachers (and, in turn, the effect upon teaching and learning in the lifelong learning sector more generally) are an area of debate. It is against this backdrop that this paper explores the relative merits of university and awarding body ITT programmes for the lifelong learning sector.

## **The Research Project**

This paper draws on research undertaken at the end of 2011 and early 2012, a period during which Lord Lingfield was undertaking his review. Data is drawn from semi-structured interviews with teachers and teacher educators at four learning sites in the north of England. Two teacher educators and six teachers, all of whom were currently undertaking or had recently completed a teacher training programme, were interviewed at each site. The teacher educators were asked to focus on their perceptions of university and awarding body ITT qualifications in relation to three areas: course delivery and assessment; trainee experiences and expectations; and the relative 'market value' of university and awarding body qualifications. The teachers were asked for their views on the relative market value of different ITT qualifications, and why they had enrolled on the particular programme they had undertaken. They were asked to discuss what they perceived to be the strengths and weaknesses of their training. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data was hand-coded and analysed by two researchers.

As the lifelong learning sector is highly diverse we did not attempt to select a representative sample of providers – indeed, given the eclectic nature of the sector, this would be a difficult task whatever the size of the study. However, the four participating organisations were chosen with diversity in mind, and findings offer valuable insights into perceptions of the relative value of different ITT qualifications. The four participating organisations are described below, although we have changed each institution's name in order to preserve anonymity.

### *Cathedral College*

Cathedral College is a tertiary college based in an affluent medium-sized city. It was formed following a merger between a general FE college and a sixth-form college at the end of the 1990s. The College offers a wide range of subjects across different levels and, in addition to its core

business of providing FE, has almost 500 students studying higher education programmes. It offers Cert. Ed. and PGCE provision in partnership with a local university, and PTLLS and CTLLS courses validated by an awarding body. In January 2012 the College also began to offer DTLLS courses.

### *Pennine College*

Pennine College is a general FE college based in a post-industrial conurbation. It serves an ethnically diverse local population and delivers mainly vocational learning. The College has two main sites located in neighbouring towns and was, until a few years ago, two separate institutions. The majority of students are enrolled on foundation and intermediate level courses but Pennine College also offers some more advanced courses, including higher education programmes. Like Cathedral College, Pennine College offers Cert. Ed. and PGCE provision in partnership with a local university, and a significant proportion of its teaching staff have gained these qualifications on an in-service basis whilst employed at the College. It also runs PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS courses.

### *Fewbridge Education Centre*

Fewbridge Education Centre is one of over twenty learning sites run by Mid-Riding Adult and Community Education Service. It is run by a small core of permanent staff but most courses are taught by part-time staff employed on temporary contracts. Fewbridge offers a diverse range of provision including arts and crafts, languages, information technology, literacy and numeracy, and creative writing courses. In the past, the Centre has offered Cert Ed/PGCE courses, delivered in through a semi-formal partnership with a local university. This arrangement ceased a few years ago and it now offers PTLLS and CTLLS programmes, which are offered both to Mid-Riding local authority employees and external students. DTLLS courses may be offered at some point in the future.

### *Thorne Training Centre*

Thorne Training Centre is a work-based learning provider run by one of England's largest emergency services. It provides induction programmes for new recruits to the service, as well as training for more experienced staff in a range of specialist areas. The Centre also provides courses in areas such as information technology, leadership and management, health and safety, and diversity awareness. Most of these programmes are unaccredited but some are formally recognised by the service's national co-ordinating body, and NVQs are offered in some subjects. Until recently, Thorne Training staff were not required to gain teaching qualifications, although they were encouraged to do so, and many have undertaken a Cert. Ed or PGCE delivered through a semi-formal partnership with a local university. Two years ago the service adopted a policy whereby all new trainers were required to gain PTLLS and CTTLs qualifications. These are delivered 'in-house' by Thorne Training staff.

### **Findings: the teachers' stories**

**This section provides an overview of the views and opinions of teachers at the four learning sites on the relative value of different ITT qualifications for post-compulsory education. All participants had either completed or were currently completing an initial teacher training award, offered either by a university or an alternative awarding organisation. Reflecting the eclectic nature of the workforce, the participants had a wide variety of subject disciplines and vocational backgrounds ranging from business, engineering and information technology through to nursing, hairdressing and basic skills. Some had a substantial amount of teaching experience, whilst others were quite new to teaching. Although some participants were employed as full-time teachers or trainers**

**many taught on a part-time basis, sometimes alongside continuing to work elsewhere - as is commonplace across the lifelong learning sector. Reflecting the teacher workforce at each site virtually all participants were white and the majority (15 out of 24) were women. The identities of all the teachers that took part in the research have been anonymised.**

### *Diversity and choice*

Most teachers had a degree of knowledge about different forms of ITT and, where centres offered both forms of provision, many had completed a PTLLS or CTLLS qualification before enrolling on a Cert Ed or PGCE, often via APL. The exception was Fewbridge Education Centre where no teacher had direct experience of university ITT – although both teacher educators at Fewbridge had completed a Cert Ed themselves some time ago. Despite the notion of trainees acting as consumers choosing provision according to their tastes and needs, it was clear that, in most cases, they enrolled on particular programmes with less than perfect market knowledge - and in some instances trainees were allowed very little choice at all. At Fewbridge Education Centre, for example, three trainees employed by Mid-Riding were formally required to enrol on a qualification offered at the Centre rather than a Cert Ed or PGCE, although such alternative provision was available nearby.

At Thorne Training, new staff are required to complete an awarding organisation qualification although, over the years, many have voluntarily undertaken a Cert Ed or PGCE. At Cathedral College and Pennine College many teachers had been directed to complete PTLLS as a ‘threshold’ license to practice before going on to an ITT programme leading to QTLS but the particular role in which staff were employed affected the degree of choice available to them. At Pennine College, for example, Jacqui enrolled on an awarding organisation qualification because, as a support worker at the time, she was directed to do so by her employer. However, she said that ‘if the Cert Ed had been offered, I would have done it’. However, even where teachers were able to exercise a degree of autonomy their choice of qualification often this was not based on educational values or informed market

intelligence. A trainee at Cathedral College, for example, had enrolled on a PGCE rather than an alternative award simply because the course was offered near her home. However, the views of her colleague, Karla were quite different: 'the Cert Ed has credibility, and that's important when you're making a conscious decision to change career in later life'.

### *Comparative value*

Although teachers at Fewbridge were generally happy with their training generally they had little knowledge of alternative ITT qualifications, their reputation, or their relative value – either intrinsically or in terms of career prospects. Nevertheless, certain underpinning assumptions were evident. Whilst Cath, for example, claimed to have no knowledge of the Cert Ed/PGCE she saw them as 'for people in mainstream education'. She regarded her own teaching as an 'add-on' to her main role as a holistic therapist, and had no wish to become a full-time teacher. Sheila, currently working as a volunteer teaching numeracy, was aware of the existence of alternative provision but thought the Cert Ed/PGCE was offered only on a full-time basis. Sophie admitted to having little awareness of alternative provision but thought the Cert Ed was perhaps more suitable for teachers working at a 'higher level' than the programme on which she was currently enrolled.

The situation was more varied at the other sites but some teachers demonstrated a lack of knowledge about the different qualifications available. At Cathedral College, Dean admitted that he had 'no idea what DTLLS is', but he 'didn't mind' which route he took as long as he could obtain a recognised teaching qualification. **Reflecting long-held views about the relative merit of teaching qualifications and occupational or subject-based credentials (see, for example, Harkin 2005, p. 166)**, some regarded teaching qualifications as generally unimportant, especially in comparison to vocational knowledge and qualifications. Karen, at Cathedral College, felt that her nursing qualifications and experience outweighed the importance of any ITT qualification. Similarly, at

Thorne Training, Judith believed that her background in business was more important in giving her credibility in the classroom than the teacher training programme she undertook (an awarding organisation course). However, despite such views most of the teachers interviewed were able to articulate coherent views about the ITT qualification landscape.

At Thorne Training, one respondent felt that an awarding organisation qualification was more suited to her role as a trainer in a work-based learning organisation rather than a university course, which she described as more suited to 'mainstream teaching'. Most interviewed at Thorne Training, Cathedral College and Pennine College had quite clear views about the 'market value' of different qualifications.

- 'You feel this qualification (Cert Ed) is more recognisable and quite valuable in the workplace' (Jacqui, Pennine College)
  
- The university qualification is more marketable (Stephan, Thorne Training)
  
- A Cert Ed or a PGCE is known by everyone, even outside education. Nobody outside FE really knows what PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS are.... The Cert Ed is mentioned in job adverts for teaching in FE. I don't think they [awarding organisation awards] have the same esteem...knowing that you will graduate from a university helps you to keep going and it makes you feel you are very proud and it was all well worthwhile. The graduation is a statement that you have something worth working for and celebrating...(Karla, Cathedral College)

- The Cert Ed is the industry standard, it carries more kudos. A CTLLS or a DTLLS or whatever you call them wouldn't add any great value to my CV (Bernie, Thorne Training)

No trainee regarded awarding organisation ITT as having parity with HEI-validated provision, although Stephan thought that

- Different types of organisations value different qualifications, depending on if they are training or mainstream education organisations (Stephan, Thorne Training).

### *Comparative learning*

Most of those with experience of awarding organisation qualifications seemed fairly satisfied with their experience, particularly in relation to equipping them for the practicalities of teaching. All at Fewbridge thought they had gained relevant skills and knowledge, although one teacher, Sheila, found her course 'a bit repetitive'; and, whilst Sophie liked the relaxed atmosphere at Fewbridge, she saw 'not having to take work home' as one of the course's main strengths. Elsewhere, there was some evidence of a limited conception of teaching and learning offered by awarding organisation programmes. In general, awarding organisation qualifications were regarded as more focused on practice - 'right down to which sort of marker pen to use on the board' (Bernie, Thorne Training)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, HEI awards were generally seen as more 'academic' and concerned with theory as well as practice. Luke, at Cathedral College, had experience of PTLLS, CTLLS, and a PGCE programme, felt that awarding organisation qualifications were far more 'pragmatic and more hands



on' than the PGCE. Margaret, also at Cathedral College, believed the awarding organisation qualification she had done was 'very practical....I think the PGCE is harder because it is more to do with aspects that underline teaching and how to teach rather than the actual practice of teaching'. At Thorne Training, Bernie had experience of both awarding organisation and HEI ITT: he saw university provision as being 'knowledge-based', combining theory and practice, whilst he regarded awarding organisation courses as more 'technical'. Other trainees expressed similar views.

- The PGCE is far more academic with more theory, whereas the [awarding organisation] has more practicality and mechanics. The PGCE 'pushes you that bit further and I think it is probably the higher qualification' (Malcolm, Thorne Training)

Some views were more pointed. Susan had taken a CTLLS course at Thorne Training and felt that it simply accredited her existing practice 'rather than teaching me anything new'. Her colleague Barry stated that the same course contained 'more portfolio building than actual learning' and that much activity was 'formally documenting what I already knew'. Whilst Barry felt his writing skills had improved he was also critical of the amount of reflection required: 'reflecting on the reflections of how you reflected. I got a little bogged down with that'. Comparing his own experience with those of colleagues who had previously completed an HEI programme, Barry stated that he would prefer to go on to a Cert Ed rather than a DTLLS qualification in future. Another Thorne employee, Joan, thought that her awarding organisation ITT course had been 'adequate' **but - mirroring the dissatisfaction with 'intermediate' teaching qualifications reported elsewhere (see, for example, Lucas 2012, pp. 689-690)** - believed that '[awarding organisation] credits don't reflect amount of work required', and there seems to be 'a problem that credits don't articulate between CTLLS and the Cert Ed'. She also suggested that whilst Cert Ed colleagues seemed to get a lot out of their

classes there was less support in the way awarding organisation qualifications were delivered at Thorne Training.

- Many respondents commented on particular dimensions of the Cert Ed/PGCE which they believed enriched their learning. The subject specialist conference which forms an integral part of the ITT programme offered by a local university was highlighted by some. Cathedral College trainee, Suzanne, argued that this was 'much better than relying just on teaching observations to find out how well you are doing at teaching your subject'. Her colleague, Karla, found the subject specialist conference particularly enjoyable: 'nothing like that on the City and Guilds'. Margaret, also from Cathedral College, highlighted the opportunity to meet and work with colleagues from other organisations which the conference offered. Pennine College trainee Alexis thought that 'Being on campus for two days was wonderful'. Other features of HEI provision were also commented on positively. Bill from Thorne Training remarked that he had been taught to 'reflect properly' on the Cert Ed

I've always reflected but never really understood the process of reflection. But I realise now how important the ability to reflect is and I think what I've also learnt is that... it isn't about education but about life. You reflect on everything you do and I'm not saying spending hours and hours thinking about what you've done but just take a minute to think 'is there anything I could have done better'. The other thing I've learnt about reflection is, like everybody, when I reflect I tend to apply the critical eye but sometimes the reflection should be 'I did well' and accentuating the positives and enjoying the moment. But probably because of my personality I never really did that a lot and never got the value of the good and found the bad and worked on it believing that was the key to success. But, actually, mentally, I was putting myself down so now, when I do reflection, with

what I do well I enjoy the moment and not always looking for perfection because it doesn't exist (Bill, Thorne Training)

Thorne colleague, Bernie, believed the PGCE had helped him to develop 'a more questioning mind'.

- I really enjoyed the course and I found that it did equip me with everything that I needed. By using my day job as my practice and being assessed by various people, either external or internal to the organisation, verified that I was able to put my theory into practice. And also I had to submit assignments over a wide variety of topics to demonstrate my knowledge of theory. It was something to do things but it was also important to know why you are doing them. So I found that a good balance and it also allowed me to reflect on what I was doing and improve my practice – so much so that, by the time I'd completed it, I was able to turn it round from being a practitioner who did some training to a trainer who just happened to teach IT. And I think that has now equipped me so I can move into any other area either internal in the organisation or to another organisation altogether. I'm a qualified teacher so I would only have to learn the subject because I have full confidence in my ability to teach.

Many believed that an HEI ITT programme would prepare them for further higher level study. At Cathedral College, Margaret and Luke both saw the PGCE as a spring-board to studying for a master's degree. Teachers at Thorne and Pennine College also mentioned a desire to undertake 'higher level' study. Such ambitions were not mentioned at Fewbridge Education Centre.

## **Findings: the teacher educators' stories**

**Eight teacher educators (two at each location), each responsible for delivering ITT programmes at the four learning sites in our study, took part in the research. Reflecting the nature of the teacher educator workforce (see Noel 2006), all participants were white and six were women. Although they came from a range of different vocational backgrounds, all had substantial experience of teaching in the lifelong learning sector and of delivering teacher training programmes. As with the other participants, all the identities of the teacher educators have been anonymised.**

### *Diversity and choice*

All eight teacher educators taking part in the research possessed either a Cert Ed or a PGCE; all had experience of delivering awarding organisation courses; and the majority had also taught on Cert Ed/PGCE programmes. Only the two teacher educators at Fewbridge had not worked on a university-accredited course. However, despite this, their views were clear. Both teacher educators at Fewbridge, Sarah and Katrina, viewed the Cert Ed/PGCE as a more 'academic route' and perceived a tension between this and the 'vocational' nature of the staff teaching at Fewbridge. Katrina believed that many of those undertaking ITT at the Centre would find a university award 'daunting', whilst Sarah thought that many of 'her students' would 'not be intellectually equipped to do the Cert Ed'.

They have the practical ability and the ability to talk about their subject but actually transferring that into a university accepted format is really difficult for them and I think that if DTLLS was more widely available where we are then I do feel that more people would progress. I'm not saying that it's a lower qualification but I think that the stepping stones are better... I've got a chap in there who has been a builder for thirty years and he's now delivering a training programme for sixteen-year-olds coming out of school wanting a vocation, so he's got to get a teaching qualification.

Now his skills are practical skills and not academic and I think that kind of person would be completely fazed by a Cert Ed and that's no disrespect to him, and I could quite easily say that to that person. But we see a lot of people from that sort of background who have very good practical skills and experience but lack the academic ability, possibly, to aspire to going on to a Cert Ed (Sarah, Fewbridge Learning Centre).

Sarah believed that awarding organisation courses 'suit our type of learners' and saw the PTLLS/CTLLS/DTLLS qualifications as offering 'stepping stones' to trainees. She regarded 'bite-size learning' as particularly important. Interestingly, such views chimed with the experiences of the two teacher educators themselves.

I wouldn't see myself delivering the Cert Ed. I don't know why because I'm probably capable of doing it... It just feels like a much more academic route and so I'd feel that I'd have to be more working that way myself. But I've come through an NVQ assessing route and I gained my qualifications as I've gone along so I lend myself better to that type of awarding body qualification... I'd feel more confident taking on a group of CTLLS learners than Cert Ed learners and I don't know why that should be. Maybe it's because I'm familiar with the awarding body requirements and standards and unitized approaches; portfolio building and things like that so maybe that's just where I'm most comfortable (Katrina, Fewbridge Learning Centre)

There was some evidence of similar views at Thorne Training where the teacher educators believed that university-validated ITT programmes were more suitable for certain individuals undertaking particular roles, especially those teaching 'higher level' provision. Their advice and guidance to potential trainees was based upon these assumptions. In contrast, the teacher educators at Cathedral College and Pennine College were in favour of all trainees undertaking a Cert Ed or a PGCE

rather than an awarding organisation programme. Nigel, a teacher educator at Cathedral College was quite open about the advice he offers to prospective trainees: 'I tell my students that... an HE qualification is much better to get'. However, he was also aware that cost was likely to play an increasing role.

We need to win the argument with learners that the Cert Ed and PGCE are better and has more kudos, and therefore worth paying more to achieve them. But, realistically, not many will do this as they haven't much income. If people are serious in getting the best qualification and interested in teaching and doing a subject knowledge and access to up to date journals and books and so forth than it is the best (Cert Ed/PGCE) (Nigel, Cathedral College)

However, Nigel's colleague, Jo, pointed to a changing climate within Cathedral College: 'managers are looking towards cutting corners due to the lack of funding elsewhere, and they can do this with the [awarding organisation provision]'.

At Pennine College the growing disparity in fees between university-validated courses and awarding organisation ITT programmes was seen as likely to produce particular outcomes:

Cert Ed and PGCE have value but the fees for DTLLS are only £850 compared to £3,000 for PGCE and the students I have spoken to would obviously go for the cheaper of the two...if the cost was the same they would probably say they would go for the university one because it does carry more kudos, I think. But when you actually ask them to put their hands in their pockets then they won't. And especially if their employers are paying ... where they got their qualifications from doesn't matter. So a manager from a local training agency said to me 'I can either put three people through a Cert Ed or I can put seven people through City & Guilds' - so they will put the seven through (Karen, Pennine College).

### *Comparative value*

All the teacher educators taking part in the research perceived university-validated ITT as having more market value than awarding organisation qualifications. Katrina from Fewbridge Learning Centre described the Cert Ed as the 'gold standard' and, whilst her colleague, Sarah, was more equivocal, she thought that many teachers might regard a university qualification as more valuable. Both Katrina and Sarah believed that most employers favour HEI ITT qualifications but also thought this derived, at least in part, from a lack of familiarity with acronyms such as CTLLS and DTLLS. The teacher educators at Thorne Training also believed that most employers are more familiar with Cert Ed/PGCE qualifications, which Barbara described as being a 'pinnacle' award, and as having labour market credibility.

Like Katrina, Jo from Cathedral College described the local university's qualification as the 'gold standard'. Her colleague, Nigel, argued that possession of an HEI award provided a labour market advantage, giving an example of a former colleague who claimed she had recently secured a job because she had a PGCE. He did, however, believe that, over time, the new awarding organisation qualifications would more accepted by employers. More generally though, Nigel gave a salutary insight into current prospects for employment in the lifelong learning sector - 'whichever qualification students take there is no guarantee now of getting a job or even some teaching hours'.

Those with experience of delivering HEI awards expressed concerns about losing the support infrastructure offered by their partner university.

Were we to move fully over to DTLLS then we wouldn't have access to the kinds of materials that the university can offer. I think in terms of support and the training days and the opportunity to get the moderation and the breadth of the other providers who would be at those meetings I just don't think that the other awarding bodies could offer that in the same way (Nigel, Cathedral College)

From a delivery point of view I would say that we get a lot more support from the university than we do from the other awarding bodies in terms of the regular network meetings, the conferences and the stuff that's on Blackboard and that sort of thing (Karen, Pennine College)

Such comments contrasted with views on the support offered by awarding organisations.

'Their (awarding organisation) externals don't really know what they are doing. Delivery-wise, the awarding organisation has a long list of topics and you don't have enough time to get through all the work. On the Cert Ed there is time to investigate in more detail and understand theoretical perspectives and how they relate to teaching and learning' (Jo, Cathedral College).

Jo also stated that there was much more work involved in preparing awarding organisation courses than university programmes as the HEI offered better administrative and academic support. Whereas the Cert Ed/PGCE is accompanied by structured curriculum documentation, on-line materials and liaison tutors offering advice and guidance to partner colleges, Jo's employer gave her sole responsibility for designing and running the [awarding organisation] diploma - 'I did suffer having to write and deliver it, it was all a bit of a travesty'

### *Comparative learning*

**It must be acknowledged that some of the teacher educators' views about the superiority of university-led ITT may derive, at least in part, from long-entrenched, and especially English views about the relative merits of academic and vocational education (Hyland and Winch 2007).**



**However, a number of clear and tangible concerns were voiced about the potential effect of losing the Cert Ed/PGCE by teacher educators at both Cathedral College and Pennine College.**

If we were to move more fully to DTLLS then they [the trainees] would not have access to the kind of materials that the University can offer, the library resources, the on-line materials. It would be a real pity, a real shame (Nigel, Cathedral College)

Well I think the university one is much better resourced because we have access to Metalib, access to Blackboard; all the module handbooks are there online and ready (Karen, Pennine College)

All the teacher educators taking part in the research were able to identify significant differences in the learning experience offered by different forms of ITT. On one level, this related to awarding body qualifications being perceived as 'more practical' or 'hands-on', which was not unexpected. However, this was not viewed as unproblematic

The Cert Ed will have the application of theory to practice, and I don't think that is the case with some of the other courses which tend to be more practical... and they (the trainees) don't always have to critically analyse theory in the same way (Julie, Pennine College).

Barbara, a teacher educator at Thorne Training, thought that an HEI programme 'gives a much broader, more strategic view of education', in comparison to awarding organisation provision which she regarded as overly bureaucratic - 'lots of forms filling and portfolio building and that sort of thing'. Echoing this, Jo at Cathedral College mentioned the amount of 'ticking boxes' both they and trainees were required to undertake. More explicitly her colleague Nigel said 'There is more understanding on the Cert Ed and the PGCE around *why* as opposed to just doing things, which the awarding organisation asks for'.

Nigel also viewed assessment as problematic on awarding organisation courses

In my view [the awarding organisation] 'tends to overdo the assessment whereas Cert Ed and PGCE have always been a more balanced in comparison ...yes, it is challenging for some students but it's more meaningful [assessment on the HEI programme] (Nigel, Cathedral College)

Although they did not necessarily regard the contrasting assessment regimes as problematic, the teacher educators at Fewbridge Learning Centre also noted differences between HEI and awarding organisation programmes – 'there's more portfolio building and less theory. The [awarding organisation] qualifications are more like NVQs, more unitized, than being like open-ended developments' (Sarah, Fewbridge College).

Jo's views were perhaps most stark

They (Cathedral College) are going to throw out the PGCE and the Cert Ed and force everybody to go down the PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS route because they think it's easier to deliver, its less esoteric and less ivory towered but it's all wrong. The students won't get the same support, they'll lose out. They just don't get the big picture with [awarding organisation] courses. They get told how to do it but not why they're doing it and, you know, that's a big difference, a real difference (Jo, Cathedral College)

## **Conclusion**

Teacher training for the lifelong learning sector has undergone a series of radical changes since the end of the 1990s, and providers are now entering an environment of unprecedented uncertainty (Lucas et al. 2012). For HEIs in particular the combination of increased competition, steeply rising

fees, and a return to voluntarism offers a clear threat to the viability of their provision. Although the Cert Ed/PGCE appears to be regarded as a market leader by most teachers and teacher educators its position appears highly precarious. Despite popular rhetoric about markets and choice, in the lifelong learning sector the ITT market is shaped by local peculiarities and employer preference as much as informed consumer choice – and increasingly employer preferences are shaped by their ability to access funding. Whilst a series of policy decisions about both funding and the nature of the curriculum have undermined the privileged position of universities in the marketplace, the Lingfield Report combines an empowerment of employers with a step back to voluntarism – **despite evidence which suggests that employers’ commitment to workforce development is often weak in the lifelong learning sector (see, for example, Lucas and Unwin 2009)**. Either way, the return to voluntarism is motivated not only by an ideological opposition to labour market regulation and a desire to cut costs for employers, but also stems from certain views about vocational education rooted in utilitarian conceptions of learning divorced from underpinning knowledge or criticality (xxx and xxx, 2012). The findings of this research show a certain congruence between this position and the nature of ITT offered by awarding bodies – provision which, on one level, appears to offer a satisfactory technical training but which lacks the sophistication and depth of knowledge and understanding offered by HEI-led teacher training (**xxx and xxx 2007, p. 173**).

The central aim of this research was to ascertain the views of teachers and teacher educators in the lifelong learning sector about the comparative ‘value’ of different forms of ITT. Although not always based upon concrete evidence, clearly most respondents have firm views about the relative merits of certain provision. Although enrolment was not always shaped by logic or clear reason, it appears that most of those undertaking the Cert Ed/PGCE do so because of the prestige university qualifications are believed to offer, and the labour market advantage conferred by these qualifications. More importantly though, we have found that both teachers and teacher educators believe that HEI-led ITT offers a significantly different learning experience to that provided by

alternative awarding bodies. Whilst, in most cases, respondents believed that awarding body courses offer a foundation of practical and useful skills, the intellectual rigour and criticality of such programmes is limited. That Joan from Thorne Training described her own course as 'adequate' is telling. In some instances, however, those with experience of awarding body ITT believed that, rather than opening up new learning, such courses accredited or documented existing knowledge and skills.

Both teachers and teacher educators believed that HEI-validated courses offered a challenging experience combining theory and practice, although some thought that such programmes were more suitable for those focused on 'higher level' work and that some learners would struggle with the demands of a university course. There was evidence that the Cert Ed/PGCE offered 'additional value' over and above the experience of awarding body ITT. From the teachers' perspective, the university-led subject specialist conference, and a belief that an HEI teacher training programme prepared them effectively for higher level study were common features. Teacher educators with experience of both forms of provision particularly valued the level of curriculum and administrative support provided by their partner university and contrasted this with that offered by awarding bodies.

In summary, it appears that a significant majority of the teachers and teacher educators that took part in our research believed that the Cert Ed or PGCE offered a richer, more holistic teacher training experience in comparison to other programmes. Those who were more equivocal appeared to have limited knowledge or experience of HEI validated programmes. Despite all this, there was a clear sense of inevitable change. In particular, the teacher educators seemed to recognise a changing terrain. Many believed that the forthcoming changes in funding would have a significant effect and that, in future, financial considerations would increasingly shape the decisions made both by employers and individual teachers. Whatever its merits, the future of university-led ITT for the lifelong learning sector seems uncertain, at best.

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