



'Letting the right one in': Provider contexts for recruitment to initial teacher education in the United Kingdom



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A model of relationships between context and providers' recruitment to ITE.
- HE recruitment criteria and processes similar in 4 UK jurisdictions.
- School-led recruitment to ITE emphasising 'classroom readiness' and school needs.
- Costs and benefits to providers the main source of difference in recruitment.

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ABSTRACT

We exploit policy differences within the UK to investigate provider context and recruitment to initial teacher education (ITE). We identify three dimensions of variation: conceptions of professionalism, universal or context specific preparation and costs and benefits to providers. University-led ITE programmes used similar criteria and processes in each jurisdiction, but there were differences between university-led and school-led recruitment. Our study suggests that the current shortfall in recruitment to ITE in England may be a product of the contextual constraints which schools experience. It also suggests that school-led recruitment may tend to emphasise short-term and school-specific needs.

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1. Introduction

Since individual teacher quality is central to school improvement (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011; McKinsey, 2007; Slater, Davies, & Burgess, 2012), the recruitment of new teachers is critical to the achievement of policy objectives on 'raising standards'. Policymakers may respond to this imperative through measures they believe will improve the quality of new recruits to teaching,

encourage 'failing' teachers to leave the profession, provide incentives to direct teachers' effort and focus, or provide professional development to raise teachers' capability. We focus on the first of these strategies and, in particular, on the recruitment of entrants to teaching.

Despite its policy salience, a review of research on teacher recruitment (Allen, 2005) for the Education Commission for the States in the US concluded that there had been no adequate studies of what makes a difference in the recruitment of new teachers. Whilst subsequent studies have added to knowledge, we judge that there is a place for fundamental research which maps out differences between recruitment processes in initial teacher education (ITE) which may be related to the context in which ITE is provided.

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To this end, we draw on interviews with Higher Education Institution (HEI) and school providers in each of the four jurisdictions within the UK to suggest a way of framing the problem which draws upon theory in social science. In recent years, the four jurisdictions within the UK have adopted sharply different policies towards recruitment to initial teacher education. However, trends in labour market conditions are similar throughout the UK. This encourages the view that differences within the UK in recruitment to ITE are attributable to policies. Therefore, analysis of variation in the UK offers the prospect of insights into relationships between policies, practice and recruitment outcomes that will be of international relevance.

In the next section we summarise policy differences within the four jurisdictions (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and explain why a comparison of practice between these jurisdictions offers a fruitful way of understanding relationships between context and recruitment to ITE. We review existing evidence of recruitment practice in teacher education in the light of theoretical perspectives drawn from economics and sociology. We continue with a description and justification of our method, followed by our results and conclusions.

2. The contexts for recruitment to teaching in the UK: policies and outcomes

In this section we aim to demonstrate the policy salience of this study and establish a rationale for comparing recruitment practice in different parts of the UK. General labour market conditions are routinely recognised as affecting the quantity and quality of applicants to teacher training (Applegate, 1987; Eide, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 2004; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Schallock, 1979). The gradual improvement in employment prospects for new graduates in the UK since the financial crash is shown in Table 1 (see also CIPD 2014). Given these data we might expect a slight increase in difficulty in recruiting to ITE in the UK over this period.

The UK is conventionally regarded as a single labour market and there is a long history of graduate labour mobility (not least for new teachers) between the four jurisdictions. Moreover, the percentage of first time degree graduates unemployed 6 months after graduation did not vary between the four jurisdictions during this period (HESA, 2015). Therefore, by comparing recruitment to ITE we aim to examine differences in perspectives and practice through a 'home internationals' comparison (Beauchamp, Clarke, Hulme, & Kennedy, 2015; Brisard, Menter, & Smith, 2007) whilst controlling for general labour market conditions.

In England, the ratio of actual recruits to target levels for recruitment to ITE fell steadily after 2010 (Fig. 1). Public concern about implications for schools and students has also noted even greater shortfalls in recruitment to ITE in some secondary subjects, including those prioritised by government (Husbands, 2015; National Audit Office, 2016). The trend in England contrasts with the other parts of the UK where recruitment to target fluctuated close to 100%. Although recruitment in Scotland followed a similar pattern to England between 2010 and 2013, the symmetry has disappeared in the past two years. Recruitment to ITE for secondary

education in Wales has also become more difficult in the last two years. This comparison suggests that it is difficult to attribute changes in recruitment to ITE entirely to labour market fluctuations.

The size of the school sectors in each jurisdiction might have some bearing on fluctuations in recruitment. In 2015/16, the total numbers of places on pre-service teacher education programmes in each jurisdiction were: England 43,516, Northern Ireland 580, Scotland 3,437, and Wales 1630 (sources as per Fig. 1). However, the annual target for new teachers in England varied very little (between 1 and 3%) from year to year. Annual change in targets fluctuated by a bigger proportion in other jurisdictions (notably Scotland). Moreover, it is the distinctive trend in the rate of recruitment in England which is our interest in this paper.

Therefore, the comparison in Fig. 1 encourages us to consider possible effects of differences in teacher recruitment policies in the four jurisdictions. Despite the devolution of administrative responsibility for education to the Scottish Office in 1885, teacher education was provided through HEIs in each of the countries in the UK throughout the bulk of the last century. Successful completion of 'initial teacher education' (ITE) was marked by the award of a 'Bachelor of education' degree or, for those who had already completed an undergraduate degree in a specific subject, a 'Post-graduate certificate of education'. Successful completion of HEI-led ITE led automatically to 'qualified teacher status' for state schools, awarded by government on the basis of its quality assurance inspection of providers. More recent devolution of education policy to Northern Ireland and Wales means that there has been scope for each jurisdiction to develop distinctive approach to the recruitment of new teachers. However, it is England rather than the other jurisdictions which has moved away from the traditional model of HEI-led ITE. We summarise the emerging differences in four related themes.

First, whilst the other jurisdictions have used the term 'profession' to express their view of teaching, the government in England has turned to the term 'craft'. One Minister of Education (Gove, 2010), declared that "teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman". In contrast, politicians in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have commissioned leading academics from other nations to review their provision of teacher education. Reviews of ITE commissioned by the Welsh Government (Furlong, 2015; Tabberer, 2013), emphasised the importance of providing a strong research context for preparation for teaching. An influential review for the Scottish Government (Donaldson, 2011) explicitly eschewed the term 'craft' whilst advocating a conception of ITE as *professional* preparation requiring (p. 42) 'exploration of theory through practice'. A similar view of professionalism has been at the foundation of the partnership-based approach to teacher education in Northern Ireland since 1996 (DENI, 2010).

Second, policy makers have adopted sharply different positions on which organisations should take the lead in ITE. Even in 2006 McKinsey described the ITE system in England as the most diverse in the world. 'TeachFirst' was introduced in England in 2002 to recruit and train high achieving graduates to teach in schools serving disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Following principles established in the 'Teach for America' programme (Ellis et al., 2016), participants were offered the incentive of a guaranteed a job in a 'blue-chip' company after a minimum of two years in teaching. However, the dominant change in England has been a shift towards schools taking the lead responsibility for recruitment and training. The Department for Education in England (2011) set out what it described as an agenda for reform of initial teacher training which asserted that schools should take a stronger role in the recruitment process. This 'School Direct' route was introduced in 2012/13 and

Table 1
Percentage of UK new graduates reporting that they are unemployed 6 months after graduation.

	2008	2009	2013	2014
Unemployment rate (%) for graduates	8.3	9.4	7.6	6.5

Source: Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education Data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency

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