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# **“Two Speed Training” – The Divisive Impact of the New Standards in Post Compulsory Teacher Training**

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## **Abstract**

The article looks at the way in which the new standards for initial teacher training within the post-compulsory education sector are being implemented and how they are being interpreted.

The desire to meet the requirements of the Institute for Learning (IfL) has led to a divergence of culture within colleges in the PCE sector. The definition of “success” within a teacher training qualification appears to have been narrowed to a pass/fail decision with little thought to the ongoing professional development of the tutor that should occur.

This narrowing of the definition of success has led to an increase in the headline success rates for the qualifications but, a feeling that the qualification is becoming a “hoop” to jump through. This is aided in many centres by the presence of the Human Resource Department who police the requirement. Centres that take a broader view of “success” suffer from lower success rates in the short term but, the benefits in the long term can be considerable.

## Introduction

The current Certificate in Education/Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (Cert Ed/PGCE) qualifications run within the University sector, have their roots in the DfES's 2004 publication "Equipping our Teachers for the Future: Reforming Initial Teacher Training for the Learning and Skills Sector". The report identified weaknesses in the processes used to train teachers within the Post-Compulsory Education (PCE) Sector and proposed that the previous standards (written in 1999 by FENTO – the Further Education National Training Organization) should be replaced.

As well as setting new standards for teachers, the report also outlined two key objectives driving the change, namely to "develop the skills of trainee teachers within a professional framework....and to invest in providers and partnerships that demonstrate high standards of support for trainee teachers in the workplace" (DfES 2004:4). The report went on to note that "The quality of training a teacher receives affects their teaching throughout their career. It (also) affects the achievements and life chances of their students" (DfES 2004:4). Clearly, this drive to improve and regulate standards impacts critically on any programme offered by any providers of initial teacher education (ITE) and given the stated aims, it should lead to a commitment to professional development for new entrants to the profession. "Demonstrating high standards" is perhaps the most important phrase at this point as providers have generally taken this to refer to enabling successful completion of the programme.

The praiseworthy aims of the new standards were matched by the guiding principles and objectives of the newly formed Institute for Learning (IfL) with its stated desire to "(ensure) that FE practitioners will be truly recognised for excellent teaching and training for learners" (IfL 2010). Whilst it is difficult to argue with the sentiments behind either of these driving forces, there is growing evidence that at "ground level" this drive to professionalise and improve quality has been transformed within some organisations into a short termist, "tick box", exercise which is changing the ethos and the nature of the qualifications, as well as altering the relationship between the teacher trainers and the management of further education colleges.

Before investigating the changes in success rates since the introduction of the new standards, it is vital to remind ourselves of the key role that quantitative measures of success play within the further education sector.

Firstly, all success rates from Further Education establishments are published and they are viewed as the most important determining factor in assessing the success of a course and hence, high standards are demonstrated in crude, quantitative terms. Reviews carried out at the end of the year require that success rates have increased year on year, a process backed up by the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) process. The stated purpose of IQER is “(to review the) performance of (the college’s) responsibilities for the academic standards and quality of its higher education provision” (IQER 2008). This form of monitoring again leads colleges to focus on what are seen as controllable factors rather than trying to monitor the experience as a whole and judge the more qualitative elements of the programme.

This narrow definition of success contrasts sharply with Kirkpatrick’s (2006) view of achievement, where the reaction of the student, the learning undertaken by the student, the change of behaviour in the student and the impact of the training on the achievement of institutional goals are all used to measure effectiveness. This rather more comprehensive approach to evaluation does not fit comfortably within the narrow strictures of benchmarking and target setting that typifies the further education sector under the current evaluation guidelines. As mentioned, the end result of the course is seen as a measurable and indeed controllable factor whilst Kirkpatrick’s four variables might well reflect a more subjective view of the success of a programme. Although further education colleges might well attempt to measure a student’s reaction (typically under the headline of the “Student Voice”) their primary measure of success remains the end result.

Within the ten centres surveyed for this research, there are significant variations in success rates between cohorts. Given that the entry conditions are the same and that quality assurance processes are in place to ensure consistency, this diversity is surprising.

The headline increase in success rates between 07/08 to 09/10 was a rise from 86.5% up to 88.4%, however, this improvement is not uniform within each centre. Three centres have seen their success rates decline by more than 10% in the last year (the greatest fall being 19.9%) whilst conversely, two centres have seen rises of greater than 10% (the greatest being a 13% rise).

A key issue that appears to have had an influence on the perceived variation in success rates, is the culture within each participating centre. Although all teachers within the PCE sector are governed by the same basic rules - "All teachers that have had their first teaching position within the sector since September 2007 are required to undertake and complete Professional Formation within 5 years of their first appointment" (Institute for Learning, 2009) the degree to which their organization interprets the rules leads to a variation in provision.

The majority of institutions require their new teachers to complete the initial teacher training qualification in their first year of teaching. This qualification, "Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector" (PTLLS), is generally a 12 week course and its objective is to provide a good starting point for teachers who are just starting their careers within PCE. It also acts as a good grounding for the Cert Ed/PGCE qualification, in that it teaches people the basic theories of teaching and allows them to think about its impact on their teaching without the worry of starting a 2 year course alongside their first year of work. Once this is completed, the Cert Ed/PGCE will be started in the following September. This is generally viewed as the most effective method as it means that not only do students have the 12 week introduction course completed but they also have a full year of teaching to enable them to reflect on the issues. However, as mentioned, not all centres follow this model. Some ask that new teachers start the Cert Ed/PGCE as soon as they are appointed; hence, they are doing the course as well as teaching their first year. This can have an impact on success rates.

## **The stages of research**

In order that the reasons behind this statistical variation can be examined, an interview has been conducted with each Centre Leader. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to students in each centre. The purpose of the questionnaire was to look at the students' attitudes to the course and also their view on the benefits they are gaining from their studies. To ensure that there is adequate coverage of all centres, each stratum consisted of the centre, the level and the stage (e.g. a student might be part of Centre A, PGCE, Stage 2) This created 30 strata. Each Centre Leader was asked to distribute the questionnaires to a given Stage 1 and Stage 2 group they taught. A check on returns confirmed that the final two strata (Cert Ed students and PGCE students) were represented.

## **Analysis of the Data**

In general, centres that have a high percentage of students progressing to Year 2 have a lower percentage of overall completers at the end of the course. This suggests that "borderline" candidates have been supported through the first year and then struggle to cope with the greater demands required in Year 2. Examples of this are Centre D (where 87.5% are retained into Year 2, yet only 81.3% complete) and Centre G (86.4% progress, yet only 77.1% complete) Indeed the only centres that have higher than average percentages in both years are Centre B and Centre A.

There are significant, organisational and cultural differences between the two years. Year 1 is generally viewed as a broad introduction to the issues that arise within post-compulsory education and is often characterised by high levels of tutor support and a clear structure within which students can progress. Year 2 narrows the focus and aims to deepen the understanding of post-compulsory education within the narrow focus of the student's own specialism. This is reflected with an increase in level for the Cert Ed qualification (from FE Level 4 to FE Level 5) Year 2 is also characterised by an understanding that the student is an independent learner and hence, there is less overt support. Students have to develop a higher degree of autonomy and hence, a different culture is exposed.

The interviews reflect on this and it is vital that students are prepared for the change in approach. The development of the reflective practitioner (as outlined by Schon (1983)) should be a key tenet of any Year 1 study programme.

This point is backed up by the fact that centres that have lower than average retention rates from Year 1 to Year 2 generally have higher success rates at the end of the course. Notably amongst these centres is Centre F where the retention rate through to Year 2 is only 78.4%, yet 92.3% of those progressing succeed in achieving their primary qualification at the end of Year 2. Centre E (64.3% progressing and 87.5% succeeding in Year 2) and Centre H (71.9% progressing from Year 1, 94.7% succeeding) also follow a similar pattern.

### **Key Findings from the Interviews with Centre Leaders.**

When investigating variations in success rates, it is quite clear that the role of the Human Resources Department within the college can be viewed as of absolutely crucial importance. Their stated aim (“to search for the equilibrium between the needs for financial viability and ... The need to maximise human capital” (Torrington and Hall (2005:4)) appears to have been subverted in many centres by the overriding objective of ensuring that the college meets the demands of the Institute of Learning (IfL)

The fixed demand does not differentiate between teachers. Given that not all teachers within FE colleges are graduates, this means that there is an uneven playing field before teachers embark on their studies. Some colleges have taken this into account when structuring the course. Centre H recognised that some students on the course lacked the necessary study skills for the course and to combat this problem, a three day introductory course was introduced in the summer preceding the start of the course. The course leader reported that

“The course was introduced after analysis of previous years’ data suggested that teachers who had not studied at HE level before had a significantly lower success rate than teachers who were qualified to degree level. The HR department was very keen to ensure that extra support was introduced as otherwise teachers tended to drop out of the course. This meant that they were either treated as unqualified or,

more often, they dropped out of the profession. Given that recruitment in a lot of the manual professions is very difficult in the area this was something that HR were trying to avoid”

The Centre Leader went on to report that all students who had attended the course passed Stage 1 of the course.

However, it does appear that the role of the HR department varies between centres. This appeared to relate to the prevailing culture present within the Centre. At Centre B the Centre Leader worked very closely with the HR department to ensure that students stayed “on track” with their course.

“I have constant meetings with HR, we talk about students who are contractually obliged to do (the course) within two years.... If students are lecturers or trainee lecturers the college will support them, fund them and therefore have an integral role in their progress, so if students fall behind I inform HR, who inform their line manager and then their mentor and then the work seems to turn up a week or so later”.

Students who do not complete work or who fail one of the submissions are often subject to disciplinary procedures and if they fail to pass the course first time they are effectively “demoted” a grade and become “Associate Lecturers” – a move which sees a reduction in their salary and status, naturally this results in additional pressure on students. This “Theory X” (McGregor 1960) approach of viewing students as being in need of control, has clearly been a success if viewed in purely quantitative terms with the success rates for Centre B being amongst the highest in the study in both Stage 1 and Stage 2 (95.8% of Year 2 students completed and 91.4% of Year 1 students).

In contrast to this “hands on” approach to the management of Human Resources relating to the programme, another centre (Centre C) has adopted a far less prescriptive approach, instead leaving all decisions down to the Centre Leader.

“My only contact with HR is at the start of the year when they pass on the list of starters and at the end when I pass on the list of completers to them”

This laissez-faire approach to the course can be seen as inferior if we compare the relative success rates of the two centres. However, it is clear that the contrasting approaches have raised some interesting questions.

The culture engendered by the Human Resources department appears to have fed through to the students on the course. 84.6% of students at Centre B responded to the question “Please explain the reasons why you are undertaking the course” by saying that it was a requirement of the job. Contrasting with this, are the answers from students at Centre C where 40% mentioned this as a response whilst, 60% gave “To become a better teacher” or “as part of my professional development” as their response (the corresponding figure for Centre B was 7.7%) This seems to indicate that teachers from centres where HR departments have taken a very “hands on” approach to the success of the course, view the Cert Ed/PGCE in a very instrumental manner whilst centres where students are left on their own rather more, are viewing it in a far more developmental manner. This leads us to the conclusion that the initial variations in success rates should not be viewed as the only measure of “demonstrating high standards” and perhaps alternative models that defined “success” could be developed.

Centre leaders are also keen to adapt a more cautious approach to the qualification. The Centre Leader for Centre H reported that “Students who have completed PTLLS generally have more confidence in themselves as teachers and can also gain study skills that will help them with the Cert Ed. Apart from the obvious benefits for new teachers, it is likely to have an advantage in terms of the motivation of students. Success on the PTLLS course is likely to lead to an increased awareness of their own abilities and hence a virtuous circle can be started (Tanner and Jones (2003)) Given that a lot of new teachers have not experienced higher education before, it is often the case that they come into the qualification with low expectations of themselves and this is reflected by their need for support during Stage 1.

Revisiting the initial purpose of the IfL suggests that this more cautious approach to the qualification can be of benefit when centres are meeting the IfL demand for “excellent teaching and training for learners” (ibid)

## **Analysis of the Results of the Questionnaires**

Results were obtained from 153 students across 8 centres. Of these students 81 were in Year 1 and 72 in Year 2. Cert Ed students made up 49% of the sample whilst the balance between male and female was split 35/65 in favour of female students. The sample used matches the proportions of students on the course and hence, can be viewed as a fair and accurate representation.

59% of students completing the questionnaire were employed by the college that they attended. This has a key significance as it links to their reasons for taking the course. As mentioned previously, the role of the HR department is of vital importance in the running of the course as this tends to reflect on the motivation of students within the course. A good example of this would be at Centre B where 77% of their Stage 1 students are employees of the organisation. When asked why they were undertaking the course, all students that fell into this category answered that they were completing the course as it was a requirement of their job. This approach to the qualification is also reflected in the research by Nasta (2007), "The trainees that I interviewed were overwhelmingly concerned with gaining their teaching qualifications and often adopted a very instrumental attitude to the role of standards in the curriculum" (Nasta 2007:13).

This approach was not universal in nature. At Centre J, where no students were employed by the host institution, only 31% mentioned that it was a requirement of their job, whilst 69% stated that their motivation was either to improve their teaching or they were taking the course as part of their professional development.

These results provide an interesting reflection on the motivation of students and it appears apparent that students who are not employed by the college and hence, are not "pressurised" into the course, tend to have an intrinsic motivation for taking the course, whilst those who are employed by the college tend to have extrinsic motivation. This is backed up by the interview with the Course Leader at Centre B who explained how any students who did not stay on track were demoted and suffered financial penalties. Rogers

(2002) suggested that the internalisation of goals set by others would not lead to as high level of motivation as if the goals had been set by the individual student. This suggests that those students with an intrinsic motivation are more likely to succeed. Evidence to back this up remains patchy, indeed Centre B's success rate of 93.3% is significantly higher than Centre J's success rate. However, it is important to note Rogers's further assertion that motivation is highest when students enjoy their learning. This is likely to be the case when students have actually volunteered to participate in the course rather than when they are merely informed of their duty.

Clearly these twin approaches are likely to have significant impacts on the teaching of the programme. A goal oriented approach (Bruce et al (1999)) is likely to be (at least initially) the preferred teaching method at Centre B. However, this is likely to be deemed inappropriate at colleges where students are looking to further their own professional practice. This is backed by evidence from the research that suggests that only 23% of Centre B's students believe that their teaching has improved as opposed to 33% at Centre J, whilst a further 50% responded at Centre J by saying that they felt they now had a deeper understanding of teaching and hence, understood why they taught in a particular way.

The goal orientated approach is clearly visible at Centre F where 85% of Year 2 students' prime reason for taking the course is because it was a requirement of the course (as opposed to 10% who suggested that the main reason was for professional development). This links in to the perceived culture of the college – the website makes clear mention of their “outstanding” status and this clearly transfers to the students attending the course. Their expectations appear to be that there will be a clear link between the course being viewed as “outstanding” and statistical “success”. When this is not explicitly the case, the course is queried.

The results suggest that there is a clear split between students who have gained extrinsic and intrinsic factors from the programme. 50% of students in Year 2 at Centre H answered “a qualification” when asked what they had gained from the programme. Whilst important for their careers, this is not in keeping with the ethos of ITE and indeed it calls into question how they will approach the Institute for Learning's requirement for teachers to reflect on

the profession as part of an ongoing developmental process. The success rate for Year 2 at Centre H currently stands at 94.7% which indicates that this instrumental approach to the course is productive at least in terms of end results. By contrast 64% of students at Centre A answered the question by saying that the key things they have gained have been a greater understanding of the profession and that their teaching has improved during their time on the course. Only 7.1% of students answered a “qualification”. Centre A’s current Year 2 success rate is 93.4%. Hence, when looking at the raw statistics you would view the centres as being of a similar level. Looking behind the headline figures however, brings a different perspective.

### **Conclusions and Implications Resulting from the Research**

In summary, a number of trends are clear from the research completed. Firstly, it is quite clear that the differing success rates hide a rather more complex picture that reveals differing interpretations of the IfL requirements.

It is clear that the programme can be viewed from two separate, but not mutually exclusive perspectives. Firstly, there remains the necessity for teachers to ensure that they are appropriately qualified ([www.ifl.ac.uk](http://www.ifl.ac.uk)) This extrinsic motivation alters the initial (and in some cases, ongoing) motivation of the students undertaking the course. Coon and Mitterer (2008) note that most of the activities we see as “work” could be viewed as part of the extrinsic motivation. This can be supported by the responses of students through the questionnaire. 62.7% of all students answered “to get a qualification” when asked for their key reason for undertaking this programme of study. Whilst this in itself is not necessarily a problem, (although it is disappointing if this is the only reason) it does contradict the ethos of the course which relates to the concept of promoting lifelong learning rather than seeing the course as an end in itself.

The second perspective focuses on the intrinsic motivation of the student. “We simply enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn and actualize our potential” (Coon and Mitterer 2008:339). Evidence to suggest that students adopt this approach, can be found when looking at students’ answers to why they were undertaking the programme of

study. As noted before, the majority suggested that their key reason was contractual. However, 37.3% responded by saying that they “wanted to become a better teacher” or they wanted to “further their professional development”. This indicates that a degree of intrinsic motivation is present and by extension, this should aid the structuring of the course. This commitment to the learner’s own development is also a key conclusion when looking at the answers to the question as to what students got out of the course. Of the Year 2 students questioned, 134 out of 153 respondents were able to answer that they gained something that improved their teaching. Indeed the most interesting figure was that 24 students (15.7%) gave the prime outcome of their course as being increased confidence and improvements in other related attributes.

This leads us to the conclusion that demonstrating high standards is being viewed in different ways by the different centres and this is being driven, in many cases, by the HR department. The renewed focus on the simple question “how many passed?” has seen the overall success rates increasing in each of the last three years and are now at a level where eight out of every ten students who start, complete the qualification within two years. Whilst this is clearly of benefit when it comes to the implementation of external quality assurance mechanisms, it does not necessarily fulfil all the objectives the course is trying to meet.

It is clear that a variation exists between the various centres and this appears to be transmitted to the students. There is a positive correlation between centres that have high success rates and those where students respond that it is a requirement, when asked why they are undertaking the course. Centres with lower overall success rates have far higher responses where students answer “to improve their teaching” when asked why they are taking the course. This suggests that success is being viewed in far broader terms than a simple pass of the course and is a key issue to be addressed by centres.

This view is reinforced when we review the second overall conclusion obtained from the research. That is that the role of the Human Resource Department has become critical in the delivery of Initial Teacher Education within a Post-Compulsory Educational setting. Although “many commentators have argued that the role of the Human Resources department

should be more strategic, enabling the organisation to gain a competitive advantage” (Brewster et al 2004:208) it is clear that in colleges with the highest success rates, the interaction between the teacher trainer and the Human Resources manager exists on a rather different level. Brewster et al (ibid) argue that because this integration of the function into the overall strategic view is difficult, many departments end up focusing on administrative functions and helping to achieve small, recordable targets. This clearly links in to the results obtained from the interviews with centre leaders.

The Centre Leader at Centre B who worked very closely with the HR department, typifies the increased integration between the various functions at an FE College. Students who are not completing their submissions in the time deemed allowable, are pursued by the department and have the threat of a loss of status (and pay) put to them if they do not comply.

This integration has certainly been a contributory factor in the increasing success rates amongst centres (it is a common thread that links those centres with the highest success rates) and in crude terms, it has proved a success. This goal oriented approach can often be helpful for organisations as it helps them achieve organisational objectives. It can also be useful for students who have a clear objective towards which to work. “Students who are extrinsically goal oriented engage in an academic task to achieve some type of reward (e.g. a grade, money, praise, a gold star)” (Alexander and Wynne 2006:372) However, as demonstrated by the research, there are dangers in adopting this instrumental approach to the course.

Clearly, the most obvious problem from the increased link between the course and the HR department, is that students appear increasingly to see the course as merely another part of their continuous professional development which they can use to meet the IfL requirements. In that way, it could be viewed as no different from any other course that the college provides for their staff. Hence, it will be grouped with the various courses (both certificated and uncertificated) that are offered to college staff. This approach is not likely to prepare new teachers for either the rigours of the academic study or for the andragogically

led approach adopted on the course. As seen by the responses from the questionnaire, it also appears to lead to a failure to maximise the benefits of taking the course.

In short, it appears as though Centres have a decision to make – go for a short term, statistical gain, or try to maximise the long term gains by sacrificing the established, instrumental approach and focus on the long term benefits of teacher training.

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