

'Last among Equals: Perceptions and Prospects of Further Education Trained PGCE Holders in the Age of 'Parity'

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Abstract

This study explores how Further Education (FE) lecturers are perceived in secondary school settings and their professional prospects in the context of the UK parity status Act of 2012. Designed as a mixed method research, it sought the views of FE-trained teachers on their experience of working in secondary schools, the perceptions of recruitment agencies that work directly with FE-trained teachers and of mentors in secondary schools within a case study framework. It found that in spite of the widely acclaimed parity status, the prospects of FE-trained teachers of developing their career via the secondary school route were very limited. It also found that secondary school colleagues have a perception of their FE-trained counterparts as less professional than themselves for some reasons, thus raising a form of intra-professional group conflict. The study recommends policy and curriculum intervention in order for the parity condition to fulfil its full potentials.

Keywords: parity, QTLS, perceptions, teacher education, further education

Background

Since the FE and skills sector has become the responsibility of the Department for Education (DfE 2016), it could be argued that there has been some sort of unification of all phases of education. However, despite this amalgamation funding, policy and perceptions of these phases vary significantly. The FE sector is seen as less respected and labelled the ‘neglected middle child’ (Kelly 2015, 1). Indeed, a one-time Business Minister, Vince Cable (2014) emphasised this inequality when he noted that the ‘killing off’ of FE would not matter because “nobody will really notice.” (1). This perceived inferiority of the FE sector has impacted the perception of those who work and teach in it. Despite the effort of various bodies such as Society for Education and Training (SET) to raise the status of lecturers in the FE sector, there is evidence to suggest that they are not regarded as ‘professionals’ in the same way as teachers in other sectors are. According to the SET (2017), professionalism is recognised as being a fundamental element of professional identity. Recognition of being a professional in the challenging FE sector is often related to the contentious element of being a ‘qualified’ teacher. FE lecturers (with an ITT certificate) are qualified to teach yet this is not as transparent to other phases of education because the FE PGCE does not automatically come with teacher status.

Both SET and the DfE (2012) associate professionalism with being a ‘qualified’ teacher. FE lecturers are able to gain Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status after successful completion of their PGCE programme. Lecturers need to be a member of the SET, which is the FE sector’s professional body, an affiliate of the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). Since 2012, QTLS awards have been ascribed a status of parity with QTS which is held by teachers trained in the secondary sector. The underpinning driver for parity

is a perception that QTLS enables FE-trained teachers to achieve equivalent professional status as their counterparts who hold the QTS awards.

The journey towards professionalism for FE-trained teachers began with the establishment of a professional body, the Institute for Learning (IfL) in 2002. However, it was the government's Skills for Growth (2009) policy which recommended parity of pay and conditions for QTLS and QTS holders. By 2011 the move towards ascribing equal status between QTLS and QTS (Wolf 2011) was enshrined in a legislative Act "Statutory Instruments" (Education England 2012). This meant that schools were now able to recruit from a wider pool of qualified teachers for positions in both primary and secondary schools and QTLS holders are eligible to work as qualified teachers in schools in England and will be paid according to the qualified teachers' pay scale (SET 2014). More importantly, QTLS holders will not be required to complete a statutory induction period (NQT year) as they have already completed a period of teaching and professional formation, verified by the Foundation.

Perhaps because of the potential opportunities offered by parity, many FE-trained teachers have applied for QTLS. 79.5% of Newly Qualified Lecturers (NQL) apply for QTLS status in order to increase their overall professional status (SET 2016). Furthermore, two-thirds of applicants stated that they undertake the professional formation process because they wanted the flexibility to be able to work in schools as opposed to solely FE environments (SET 2016). Given that many teachers no longer take the traditional secondary PGCE QTS route, and that schools are now investing in agency staff, it would seem that the parity status is a win-win for both the FE-trained teachers and secondary schools, which are in dire need of

teachers. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence, both from FE-trained teachers with QTLS and agencies that work with FE-trained teachers to seek employment suggest that this has not been the case. This, in essence, is the primer for this research and underpins the research questions which are outlined in the next section of this paper.

Professionalism and Tension

The discourse on teacher professionalism, both in the specific context of the United Kingdom and in general across Europe, is rife with contestations and tensions (Hökkä 2012; Mausethagen & Granlund 2012; Demirkasmoglu 2010; Evans 2008; Gray 2006 and Shain 1999). Tensions in the context of teacher professionalism are seen to have manifested in various spheres and amongst several variables and are seen to contribute to the various teacher professional identities (Black 2010). Such tensions manifest in a perceived conflict between individual development and organisational development (Hokka 2010), between prospective and retrospective identities of teachers, between teachers' expectations of professional status, and centralised and highly regulated inspectorate regimes in the UK and between vocation in the teaching profession, and how this comes into conflict with issues of self-interest amongst teachers. Other manifestations of tension are reported in the context of the notion of teacher autonomy and imposed accountability (Evans 2008), and between unions as the face of teacher professionalism on the one hand, and policy on the other (Mausethagen & Granlund 2012).

While several dimensions of tension continue to emerge, it seems clear that the dominant context of tension is that which manifest between policy and teachers' perceptions of their own identity as professionals, and therefore, policy-induced. In this context, tensions have

been reported as originating from policy mobility (Jones and Alexiadou 2001), an ‘increasing search for the ‘best fix’ solutions by policymakers (Black 2010), and a mismatch between policy-imposed conditions and the perceived goals of teaching professionals including in particular, social justice and equity (Whitty 2006). Policy-induced tensions have also been reported in the context of policy-driven managerialism which stands in conflict with teacher professionalism, as well as the tension between professional autonomy of teachers and policy (Sachs 2003; Furlong 2005).

Although these different conflicts are copiously recorded and explored in the literature, one thing that these relationships hold in common is the fact that they all emanate from an interaction between what can be classified as external factors and elements of the conceptualisation of teacher professionalism. In essence, conflicts have emerged because of what some have described as an attempt to ‘re-professionalise’ rather than ‘de-professionalise’ teachers’ profession (Whitty 2006, 11).

In this paper, however, we track a different source of tension that seems to be emerging and possibly unnoticed. We suggest that there is an element of internal tension which is surreptitiously evolving within the teaching profession in the UK. The goal of this study, therefore, is to see if the manifestations of this new form of tension within the teaching profession can be mapped. We use the term intra-professional tension to describe this conflict and the tension emerging between different sub-groups belonging to the same teaching profession.

Black (2010), while looking at tension emerging from the policy agenda for integrated and inter-agency working, identified what is labelled ‘transprofessionalism’. Black notes that the transformational change in practices that emerged in the wake of the policy ‘poses significant, multi-faceted challenges for all practitioners involved’ (2). However, this form of tension is slightly different from the concept of intra-professional tension we aim to explore in this study because while the former involves a tension between different professionals working together, the latter involves tension emanating from professionals within the same profession. In this study, we aim to explore this phenomenon in the context of the ‘Parity policy’ originating from the Lingfield review (2012), which conferred the status of parity between teachers trained in the further education context and those trained in the secondary education context. Anecdotal evidence suggests that although there is a notion of parity in theory and on paper between the two groups, recognition, prospect and perceptions have been anything but at par. Developing from the on-going, therefore, this study aims to answer two research questions. First, what are FE-trained teachers’ self-perception and experiences of accessing and working in school settings? Second, what are the prospects, strengths and weaknesses associated with FE-trained teachers who aim to teach in the secondary sector?

Methodology

Along with Yin (2009), we conceptualise case study from two perspectives of its scope and technicality. In this context, we see the subject of investigation as converging with Yin’s description of case study as “an empirical inquiry that...investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (18).

Data collection

The data collection method consists of a questionnaire using open and closed questions. Open questions contribute to the qualitative data while closed questions provided quantitative representations of FE-trained teachers' perceptions. Mentors completed a survey. Interviews were also held with FE-trained teachers and mentors/teacher training coordinators, who guide induction for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in the schools where these FE-trained teachers are employed. In addition, recruitment specialists from four large teacher employment agencies were interviewed. The combination of data sources promoted the philosophy of a mixed method approach which helps to explore both the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers and also to compare data, thus drawing valid conclusions and achieving 'Concurrent Triangulation' (Cresswell 2003, 211).

Data collection was phased into two stages. This structure was imposed in a sense. Given that the potential number of participants, who can relate the experience we were interested in were limited, we were initially compelled to embrace the notion of self-selection and convenience sampling. This yielded a small number of potential and real participants. We, however, recognised the limitations to convenience sampling particularly the difficulty of generalising findings (Check & Schutt, 2012). We, therefore, identified the opportunity to further improve the quality of the research by extending the time for data collection. In this regard, our initial data collection was treated as a pilot study which we used as a feasibility study. This was treated as a "small-scale version[s], or trial run[s], done in preparation for the major study" (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001 & Polit et al., 2001: 467). It also offered us the fortuitous opportunity to carry out a pre-testing or 'trying out' of our research instrument (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001, p1 & Baker 1994: 182-3). This gave us the advantage of knowing the

potential weaknesses of our survey instrument in this instance. For example, we found out that the mentors we surveyed needed further clarifications on the meaning of some of the sector-specific terms we used in the earlier version of the survey.

The numbers available to us compelled us to re-conceptualise the study as a quasi-longitudinal study, as we had to wait for another year to see if we could identify and secure the participation of more NQLs. In addition to helping to improve the quality of our research, it also offered us the chance to identify themes through which we can investigate our research questions in subsequent interviews. Drawing on the arguments of (Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998), we were able to use the analysis of our initial interviews on what was essentially a relatively unexplored topic, to fine-tune our interviews with the larger group of participants we interviewed later.

The participants

FE-trained teachers/NQLs

In what we now classify as a pilot stage, we interviewed five NQLs. Subsequently, we interviewed a further eleven NQLs. These additional interviews enabled us to move the findings of the research towards generalisability and to create relevant themes through which we initiated interview questions with our subsequent participants. Our survey respondents in both phases totalled twenty-seven (27). Although, we had identified forty potential participants, the requirement for them to be placed in a school setting limited the number of suitable participants. The acceptable return rate for paper-based survey is 56% (Nulty, 2008). Therefore, we considered our response rate, 27 out of forty (67.5%) a reasonable representation of the larger group. All our NQL participants were holders of the PCE or PGCE for teaching

in the post 16 sector (FE-trained). They had all attended a teacher training course in the last three years and had secured teaching positions in the secondary education system.

Mentors

The second group of participants were designated mentors, who represented secondary schools where the participants in the first sample had gained employment. A different survey was administered to this group (22) to gain their perceptions of FE trained teachers.

Employment agencies

Representatives of four employment agencies were also interviewed to find out their views about the prospects of FE-trained teachers who are registered with them. Although the overall number of participants appears small, three factors enhanced the study's validity based on the generalizability of our data (Check and Schutt 2012). First, FE-trained teachers all experience the same form of training and as such, limitations and strengths could be assumed to be similar. Second, the perceived limited employment of this category of teachers is nationwide. Therefore, our participants can be seen as representative of the national cohort. Third, the recruitment agencies we interviewed recruit from all over the country. Their views are, therefore, informed by the wider population which includes our participants.

Data analysis

Our analysis prioritised and sought to develop the conversation between our qualitative and quantitative data. A 'convergence coding matrix' was used to display findings emerging

from each component of the study to assess whether there is agreement, partial agreement or dissonance between findings from the different components, thus generating meta-themes (Farmer 2006). Our initial analysis of the quantitative component of the survey data produced themes which were linked to our survey questions. These themes were then tracked across the other components of the data, largely interviews, in line with Moran-Ellis' (2006) concept of 'threading'.

Findings and Discussions

Our findings and discussions are framed and presented within the context of our research questions.

RQ1: What are FE-trained teachers' self-perception and experiences of accessing and working in school settings? To answer this question, we explored interview and survey data collected from FE-trained teachers (NQLs), who have had some experience of accessing and teaching in secondary schools.

From the questionnaire to NQLs, we focused on answers to questions Q1, Q3, Q4. These questions sought to establish FE-trained teachers' experiences of working in secondary schools and how this might have informed their self-perception, as professionalism is something constantly under construction (Dalli and Urban 2008). What we hoped to establish was the extent to which these participants' experiences might have positively or negatively reconstructed their self-perceptions as professionals.

Survey findings

Overall, there appears to be a strong convergence between the findings at the initial stage and the subsequent findings from additional participants. A significant percentage of our

participants felt that their experience was negative. The major sources of this negativity were the work environment, the perception that they were less-qualified, which manifests in the demand for them to take on additional training, and their self-perception of inferiority. In particular, in response to the issue of problems they encountered in their quest to work in school settings, the theme of lack of acceptance emerged clearly. This notion was reflected through a range of terms in a synonymous relationship. There is also an indication that agencies were reluctant to accept that FE-trained teachers were qualified to teach in schools. This reluctance on the part of the agencies, however, appears to have been instigated by the schools that engaged them. One participant commented that “the greatest problem is just to be listened to and considered a qualified teacher. I used an agency and they kept saying the schools were asking for my teacher’s number. I just feel like I am not seen as a teacher” (Survey (S) 1, 2018). The extent to which they encountered total rejection even with QTLS aspirations was further reflected in comments such as; “the schools were not interested” (S2 2018) and “they wanted teachers who have trained as a secondary teacher and not FE” (S3 2018).

Another emergent theme relates to the notion of inferior classification. This manifested mostly in the context of remuneration. Participants noted that; FE-trained teachers “did not get paid at the same level as other teachers” (S1 2018) even if they had a Masters degree. This inferior classification generated another sub-theme of humiliation. This emanates from knowing that although they believed they were doing the same job, both the school and their school-trained colleagues considered their qualifications so inferior that they do not think they merit the same level of pay. Essentially, it is the perception of the school and their colleagues that fuelled the sense of humiliation. One participant commented; “I felt

humiliated, they took me on and just paid me like a TA” (S2 2018) while another noted; “not recognised as a professional” (S4 2018).

A final theme emerging from the survey was the theme of exclusion. Though, expressed by a few, it seems significantly impactful on those who highlighted it. Participants suggested that, perhaps because they were usually agency staff, FE-trained teachers felt excluded particularly because they were sometimes told “not to bother attending the departmental meetings” (S5 2018) as a result of which they were unable to integrate into the team. They found this “quite depressing and professionally draining” (S5 2018). However, there was a minority acknowledgement of positivity. Specifically, one FE-trained teacher, who was placed in a school acknowledged that they had a very positive recognition when they returned to work in the school where they had their placement. The school, it was noted, usually offers employment to FE-trained teachers. This raises the important issue of awareness. Perhaps the school, because of its experience of hosting FE teacher trainees, recognises their worth. However, even with this positivity, one FE-trained teacher found working in a school to be “an awful experience” (S4 2018) and another noted that their first experience as a NQT “was horrible” (S2 2018). This experience was mainly related to “not having sufficient support, being bullied by the Head of Department” (S4 2018) and a general lack of backing from management. The notion of being bullied was something rather strange and we felt that it was worth further probing. This was further explored in the interview with this participant.

Interview findings

From our initial interviews, three themes emerged which resonate with our findings from the survey: rejection/ reluctance to accept them as professionals, inferiority and humiliation. However, the theme of exclusion which emerged minimally in the survey findings did not

have any prominence in our interviews, as only the one survey respondent alluded to it during our interviews. Similarly, there was little reference to the issue of bullying which was only mentioned briefly by the participant, who had introduced the notion in our survey. Based on the limited reference to these issues, we concluded that they were not sufficiently widespread for them to be considered as emergent themes.

The three emergent themes provided the impetus for our further interviews with 11 other participants in the second stage. Overall, the themes from both interviews converged with those of our survey findings.

Rejection

A sense of rejection came through in our dialogues with most participants. Many referred to their experience of being turned down at the first hurdle. More importantly, the sense of rejection was felt both from establishments and colleagues. The mandatory requirement to have QTS cuts through much of these conversations as; “secondary schools and agencies keep asking for it, otherwise you are classified as unqualified” (FE-trained teacher telephone Interviewee (FETT) 13, September 2018). Even when placed in a secondary school, rejection, they feel, persisted and is encapsulated in the claim that; “I don’t feel accepted. Almost like I was of no worth. Still continues even after 2 years of QTLS...reminds me of the way foreign quals are treated sometimes. The main problem is recognition. I went in on the back of the parity policy, but it is a waste” (FETT 6, September 2018).

Overall, there was a sense of exasperation experienced by FE-trained teachers which sometimes led to resignation or acceptance. The teacher above, for example, revealed that the incessant lack of recognition of parity led them to apply for QTS so that they were no longer just considered as “substitute agency staff” (FETT 7, September 2018). Other comments such as ‘I just felt unwanted and there was a difference between the management and the

other teachers” (FETT 14, September 2018) and “The management gave positive impressions but the other teachers resented me” (FETT 15, September 2018) further reinforced the sense of rejection that these participants felt. This theme was further reinforced in our interviews with recruitment agencies while trying to get their views on the prospect of FE-trained teachers seeking to work in school settings and is further explored under our Research Question 2 (RQ2).

Inferiority

The theme of feeling inferior came out clearly in the comments of our participants. This was fuelled mainly by what they considered to be a form of lower classification of their status. Many refer to their experience of being taken on and given a role less than that of a professional teacher. Another strand to this is the constant requirement for them to gain additional qualifications. The inference from this requirement was that their qualifications are inferior. This type of sentiment resonates in the comment; ‘Now I am working in a school which was not my intention I wish I had just done the school route –save me doing the QTLS’. (FETT 12, September 2018). Another participant paints a vivid picture noting, “didn’t need to apply for QTLS if a supply teacher...I was exempt from marking” (FETT 8, September 2018). In other words, his/her qualification was considered merely suitable for the role of a ‘supply teacher’ which does not rank at the same level as a full teacher.

The depth of feeling generated by this seeming classification as inferior colleagues is captured in one comment in which the participant considered a variety of reasons for being classified as inferior. Some of the ideas were particularly alarming although the participant ameliorated this when probed further at interview by saying that there was no evidence for his/ her suspicions but simply expressed what she/he thought about during the turbulent

period of being made to feel inferior. This participant commented that, “Sometimes I thought it was jealousy and at other times, I thought it was racial. To be honest, I still do not know why. I just know that I was not wanted....Even teachers who trained in my own university...I think it was mainly about QTS and where I trained” (FETT 7, September 2018). What this comment reflects is the profundity of the impact of some of these interactions.

Humiliation

Though emphasised in our survey findings, there was little addition to this theme during our interviews. Essentially, it was presented as a fallout of other factors. In essence, rejection and classification as inferior elicited a sense of humiliation from our participants. Two comments from our interviews reflect this feeling of humiliation. One participant alluded to the notion of cheapness, commenting “I felt I was a cheap option for them” (FETT 7, September 2018). Another elicited the sense of self-worth noting, “Almost like I was of no worth...Agency asked about QTS, but if you don’t have it they just say ok you’re looking for a school with training and they put you on the NQT route” (FETT 6, September 2018).

Underpinning the three themes highlighted above was a general sense of self-deprecation. The suggestion was that our participants’ experiences created a lasting feeling of inadequacy. A comment by one interviewee captures the essence of this notion of self-deprecation; “You sometimes do not know what to think. Are you a teacher or not? You are treated like a beginner, asked to do more courses and hardly ever given room to work on your own. I will not be doing it again” (Further Education trained teacher (FETT 1, 2017)

Discussion

The general slant of responses from FE-trained teachers regarding their experience is negative. Crucially, the negativity appears to have permeated the consciousness of the FE-

trained teachers themselves. In the context of the FE-trained teachers and their views on their experiences in various secondary schools, the issue of self-esteem in relation to the perception of the self as a professional is crucial. Research has shown that self-esteem is a significant factor in workers' performance and professionalism and that the more roles people fill, the more sources of self-esteem they have. Therefore, meaningful work has long been one of the important ways to feel good about oneself (NCU 2014). The salient question, therefore, is what happens if the working environment does not provide the boost you need to succeed?

For FE-trained teachers in this study, their secondary school experiences appear to have impacted negatively on their self-image. Therefore, it is conceivable that their self-esteem might have been severely damaged. The implication, we argue, is that they are now likely to see themselves as 'lesser professionals' in the teaching profession. Thus, the perception of FE-trained teachers as 'inferior professionals' has surreptitiously ensnared FE-trained teachers themselves. This resonates with previous studies that have identified improvement in confidence as an impetus for a robust professional identity (see e.g., Crawley [2014] and Dimitriadou, Koukourikos & Pizirtzidou [2014]). In the context of the experiences of FE-trained teachers in secondary schools, it is probable that their confidence and self-esteem and therefore, their professional identity must have been eroded, thus creating a perception of the self as inferior.

Finally, this raises the age-long issue of the perception of teachers as professionals. Paradoxically, in this case, the negative perception originates from 'the victims' through a form of learned behaviour. It echoes the traditional perception of teachers as being in a semi-

professional category as the traditional attributes of professionalism – high pay and status do not apply (Etzioni 1969; David 2000). It would seem that the core factors in creating this perception are the perceived lack of autonomy and the micro-management (Bee 2016, 17) imposed on the FE-trained teachers in their secondary school workplaces. They were, therefore, seen as ‘last among equals’ by both their counterparts and themselves.

It is pertinent to explore the possible drivers for the perception of FE-trained teachers held by secondary school mentors. On the face of it, it is easy to conclude that this was because they did not have an awareness of the decision around parity of status. However, based on the publicity given to the decision, and the response from schools and their unions, it is improbable that the issue of awareness can be the only reason. Two issues emerge from the literature with regard to the characteristics of professional groups. First is the issue of self-protection. Sachs (2003) identified a feature of old professionalism which is consumed with exclusivity, conservative practice, self-interest, and is slow to change. This contrasts with new professionalism which is characterised as being inclusive, collaborative and collegiate, self-regulating and policy active. It would seem that secondary-trained teachers are quite willing to sacrifice, even denigrate their FE-trained counterparts, in an attempt to self-protect. Perhaps at the heart of this is the notion of exclusivity and reluctance to change.

The argument above is borne out by the responses given by various secondary school union members in the wake of the decision to award parity status to FE-trained teachers. *The Guardian* of March 22nd, 2011 trumpeted the tension created by the decision. It was noted that; “unions representing schoolteachers are not so happy, claiming any change in workforce regulations will drive down pay and disregard training that staff undertake to gain qualified teacher status (QTS)”.

In a way, it resonates with the argument of self-protection. Pushing a similar line of argument, 'Chris Keates, general secretary of the NASUWT claimed that the government is aiming for a "freefall", where school heads and governors could employ anyone they wish. "We would be bringing in people to do the same job on extremely different pay and conditions with different professional standards," (*The Guardian*, March 22, 2011).

A different argument against parity was provided by Amanda Brown, assistant secretary for employment conditions at the National Union of Teachers, who says: "To teach in a school, you would expect people to have different training. It's a different age group with different pedagogical issues." (*The Guardian*, March 22, 2011). Amanda Brown's argument appears to draw from the concept of exclusivity. Given that FE-trained teachers not only trained for a similar duration of time but also had to provide employment-based evidence to gain their QTLS, it would seem that this might be a case of giving a dog a bad name to hang it. What is significant overall is the fact that the sub-group made up of secondary school trained teachers are not willing to see or indeed permit their FE-trained counterparts to function as professionals on equal footing.

A second explanation is hinged to the notion of intra-professional tension which tends to see the notion of collaborative professionalism as a step towards de-professionalism. Hargreaves (2001) suggests that the development of teachers' professionalism tends to conflict with the idea of collaborative professionalism. He argues that groups are reluctant to work with different groups and institutions, as this might lead to de-professionalisation. This view is similar to Black's (2010) trans-professionalism, which highlights how teaching professionals resented the requirement of collaborating with other professionals in the teaching

environment. It also echoes the age-long argument of Banks (1971) and Hargreaves et al. (2006) that barriers to teachers being accorded professional status include a range of factors such as sections of society teachers are recruited from, qualifications, autonomy and mystique. It would seem that secondary-trained teachers in the wake of the parity pronouncement have tapped into these barriers to deny their FE-trained counterparts professional status.

RQ 2: What are the prospects, strengths and weaknesses associated with FE-trained teachers who aim to teach in the secondary sector?

To answer this question, we drew directly on the data collected from teacher recruitment agencies, indirectly from our interpretation of the data collected from secondary school mentors, who have considerable input into teacher recruitment processes in secondary schools, and indirectly from data collected from FE-trained teachers who have worked in secondary schools. From the responses provided by the teacher recruitment agencies, there was a clear indication that the prospect of FE-trained teachers, who aim to work in secondary schools was very bleak indeed. Survey responses indicate that it has been problematic for agencies to get those with QTLS to work in secondary schools. An emergent theme from the interview with these agencies was that despite their familiarity with QTLS status, there remains a continual lack of parity regarding job opportunities for FE-trained teachers in secondary school. One Agency stated that “QTLS was not respected... and only a few schools who would consider teachers with QTLS and insist on QTS holders” (Recruitment Agency, interview (RECA) 1, 2017). Another comment that; “Schools just don’t think your lots are equally trained and that is those who know about your award, because many schools do not know” (RECA 3, 2017). Another commented; “When we send your lots [FE-trained

teachers] to schools, they just demand for qualified trained teachers. You try telling them they are trained too...” (RECA 2, 2017).

It is, therefore, instructive to recognise that the prospect of our participants is rather limited if the mediating organs like recruitment agencies do not accept that they would be recognised as professionals from the onset. Effectively, therefore, they do not even get a chance to interview for these positions, as they do not even get put forward.

Findings from mentors

The survey findings show that mentors had little awareness of the parity status originating from the White Paper (Lingfield 2012) and do not consider QTLS as a professional award, and therefore, do not see QTLS holders as professional equals. Based on these classifications, we might come to a preliminary conclusion that most school mentors are unlikely to offer FE-trained teachers opportunities in their school. By implication, therefore, their prospect is limited. The open-ended component provided us with a fuller insight.

Three main themes emerged from the responses of mentors to the open-ended component of our questionnaires. First is the notion of inferior training and limited experience. A typical illustration of this is the comment that; FE-trained teachers “do not have the other experience teachers have as outstanding professionalism” (Mentor 1, 2017). Some respondents referred to examples of ‘*poor quality of training*’ with a presumption that FE trained teachers have less experience of these during their ITT programme. This theme is reinforced in other comments such as; “are not subjected to the same number of observations that QTS teachers are” (Mentor 2) and that “the nature of accreditation is quite different but might be fit for the purpose of post 16, I think” (Mentor 3, 2017).

Ironically, a few secondary school mentors contradicted this perception of inferior training. One noted; “my understanding is that QTLS requires post qualification experience and reflection on practice – unlike QTS” (Mentor 4), thus considering FE-trained teachers as equals. Other positive comments include aspects of similar time and effort and motivation “required for both QTLS and QTS teachers...those who have QTLS have made a conscious effort ... [to] provide hard evidence of good practice and have given own time” (Mentor 5, 2017) and finally, “I have employed teachers trained for FE and they have been competent and this extra qualification will be an asset” (Mentor 6, 2017).

A second theme relates to the lack of awareness on the part of secondary school teachers in respect of the QTLS status. The vast majority simply stated that they were unaware of such an award. A final theme relates to pedagogical concerns including ‘concerns about behaviour management expertise’; ‘limited knowledge about qualifications in secondary schools’ and ‘not having to pass tests in English and Maths’ (Mentors 7, 8, 9, 2017).

Interview findings

We tracked this further in our interview, and the dominant themes were as follows. QTLS holders lack the experience or *‘The same outstanding professionalism’* as QTS holders; QTLS holders are not adequately trained because they have not completed the English and mathematics tests that QTS holders complete, and, QTLS holders lack expertise in classroom management skills. These are significant views which imply that these powerful people in the secondary school sector will not consider recruiting FE-trained teachers in their schools. This position, it can be argued, implies that the prospect of FE-trained teachers working in secondary schools is very limited indeed.

Views from NQLs

Interestingly, some NQLs recognised the limitations to their training. They acknowledged that there might be gaps in the knowledge of FE-trained teachers in areas such as taking a register, health and safety aspects, teaching students with special needs and behaviour management techniques. The recognition of their limitations raises the possibility that they might, after all, be inadequately trained. Drawing from these sources, it is clear that the prospect of FE-trained teachers of working in secondary schools is very limited indeed.

Some NQLs, however, felt that they have significant strengths which should ordinarily place them above their secondary-trained counterparts. This argument is anchored to the notions of a deeper academic context of pedagogic knowledge and the structure and content of their programme of study. Some of the comments that reflect this perception of strength include; “we have a better grasp of theoretical language such as meta-cognition ... I was able to explain how they are applied” (FETT 10, 2018).

Another participant commented; “my knowledge on [sic] theories helped me to argue my own positions” (I7 2018). The same participant referred to knowledge of discipline-specific pedagogies, commenting “I also remember the subject-specific strategies that I discussed in class with my tutors. Yes, many people listened when I talk about these things” (FETT 12, interview, September 2018).

Another participant claims, “To be honest, I used these theories almost like a show-off...., to make them feel that there are things I know that they do not. I also like to refer to my knowledge of learning traditions and when I started to teach vocational students in years 11 and 12, I dropped terms like andragogy, experiential learning and so on” (FETT 6, September 2018).

In terms of the structure and content of training programme, one participant noted, “it gave me the basics I needed such as learning to do SOW, lesson plans etc. It gave us the chance to research students’ behaviour which I feel is the biggest factor in teaching more than anything else” (FETT 7, September 2018). It is interesting that this participant highlighted preparedness based on research, to manage behaviour, given that this was one of the reasons cited by mentors for not accepting Fe-trained teachers as equals. Also, many NQLS highlighted this as an area of weakness. Perhaps this is a reflection of individual perceptions and suggests that there is a need for caution when generalising claims from this type of study. Overall, there is an indication here that the feeling of superiority is not limited to secondary-trained teachers alone. Rather, there is an indication that whoever is better placed is likely to claim superiority.

Discussion

One potential rationale for the poor prospect of FE-trained teachers can be related to the financially deprived state of the FE sector itself. Belgutay (2016) revealed that colleges’ budgets were ‘blamed for a drop in the total number of trainee teachers’ with more than four in ten newly trained FE teachers failing to secure a job in the sector within a year of completing their training”. She argues that this might be because of Lingfield’s (2012) recommendation of a ‘more relaxed’ approach to teaching qualifications”. Thus, quite a lot of people are seeking jobs in schools” (Belgutay 2016, 1). In the context of this study, what might be pertinent is the possibility that secondary schools might be reluctant to employ FE trained teachers because of the perceived rejection by their sector (FE). The question they are

likely to be asking is if they are good teachers, why are they not employed by the FE sector, which is also in dire need of teachers?

Furthermore, the lack of a government regulated database of NQTs or DfE number for FE-trained teachers highlights the difference in perceptions of the various sectors and many schools which employ them pay these teachers as unqualified. This provides a natural route to inequality and perhaps is responsible for the perception of FE-trained teachers as lesser professionals. Considering the fact that the factors such as raising of the school leaving age, the provision of some vocational education by schools, and the shortage of teachers in many subjects has meant there is a real demand for teachers with post 16 expertise, this omission becomes very significant. However, the complexities of the present system confirm that the system of qualifications and regulations for FE teachers reflects the ‘neglected middle child’ (Foster Report 2005) status of the sector.

Thompson (2014) outlined perceptions of FE PGCE as ‘a cultural tendency to undervalue Initial Teacher Training’ (5) which might also be seen as fuelling the disparity between QTLS and QTS holders. This tendency, we argue, can also be seen as one of the reasons for the perception of FE-trained teachers as not being ‘suitably trained’ professionals (Hodgson 2015). This, in spite of the fact that, generally, PGCE programmes are seen to inform professionalism not only through the development of pedagogy but the profession itself and the importance of ‘professional status’ (Hodgson 2015).

A further insight is, however, provided through the comments of some of the mentors in this study. According to them, most mentors do not recognise the fact that QTLS status requires

post-qualification experience and reflection on practice. The inclusion of the reflective element, in a way, makes the award professionally superior to QTS. Secondary school mentors tended to assume that unlike QTS, QTLS is 'fit for purpose post 16' but not necessarily for secondary schools. This is surprising because the PGCE FE includes training and practice similar to the PGCE secondary consisting of pedagogical and theoretical application which underpins practice. Perhaps a hint at consolation, one mentor stated that 'now that 16-19 education is in effect compulsory, QTLS should have higher recognition and respect' (Mentor 10). After all, QTLS is voluntary which for some mentors, demonstrated 'commitment'.

What becomes clear from all of the on-going is the fact that the poor prospect of FE-trained teachers cannot be faulted for the quality of training. The PGCE programmes studied by both secondary and FE-trained teachers are structured similarly, with much of the content overlapping, it is, therefore, logical to argue that the lack of recognition and the attendant limited prospect in the context of parity is more attributable to the attitude of a sub-group within a professional group than the quality of training. If this argument is accurate, it evokes the notions of exclusivity and self-protection which we have visited in our discussion of Research Question 1.

Conclusions

Our goals in this study were two-fold: first to establish the perceptions of FE-trained teachers by their secondary-trained colleagues and themselves; secondly to establish their prospect of working in secondary schools in the context of the recent parity status. In the context of the first goal, our study shows clearly that FE-trained teachers are viewed as less than equals by

their secondary-trained colleagues and that there is an indication that they might also hold a perception of self as inferior to their secondary-trained colleagues.

Considering that our deterministic positions essentially inform our perceptions, it could be argued that in the formation of our perceptions, we are likely to mould our interpretation of what we see and hear around our perceptions. As CReducation (2017) noted, ‘When people view something with a preconceived concept about it, they tend to take those concepts and see them whether or not they are there’. Evidence from this study offers us a viable platform to argue that the perception of FE-trained teachers by their secondary-trained colleagues might well be a product of preconceptions. The crucial question here is; what is responsible for this pre-conception?

While there could be a number of reasons, including the urge to ensure group survival, the search for exclusivity, we suggest that there is a cognitive process that precedes the formation of preconception. In this context, we refer to the concepts of mindreading and stereotyping (Sagar and Schofield 1990; Burnham and Harris 1992; Condry et al. 1985; McGlothlin and Killen 2006, 2010; Westra 2017). Westra (2017) demonstrated that these twin concepts could come together in shaping our perceptions.

Mindreading is the precursor that lays the foundation for stereotyping and is hinged on our ability to mentally predict what other people will do, and how they will react to us. According to Westra (2017), this is not reliant on any form of hard evidence. Rather, it relies on our brains “to generate complex models of other people’s beliefs, desires, and intentions, which we use to predict and interpret their behaviour” (1). Based on our findings in this study, we suggest that the process of mindreading extends to generating belief about others’ capabilities

and qualities. From this point of view, therefore, it might well be that the perceptions of FE-trained teachers by their secondary-trained colleagues might well be a product of their collective mindreading.

In the context of our second goal, it was clear that the prospect of FE-trained teachers regarding being employed in secondary schools is rather bleak. As we have suggested in the study, this might well be caused by several possible factors including what we called intra-professional group tension, the yearning for exclusivity and a drive for group survival. Of particular importance in this study is the potential impact of intra-professionalism. Similar to what Black (2010) labelled trans-professionalism, the limited prospect of FE-trained teachers might well be a product of intra-professional strife. We consider this as important because the notion of survival is not particularly applicable to secondary school teachers in this context (Ward 2017). When juxtaposed with the limited job opportunities for FE-trained teachers, it becomes necessary to ask questions about why schools that are in dire need of teachers (House of Commons Education Committee 2016/17) are not taking the opportunity to recruit FE-trained teachers? Statistics show that only four out of ten FE-trained teachers are able to gain any form of teaching related employment within the first year of graduation (SET 2016-17). In our view, the three stakeholders, secondary schools and FE-trained teachers and the government/policy makers stand to benefit from parity recognition. It is clear, therefore, that the situation needs to be reviewed.

Potentially, there is a role to be played by policymakers, who need to identify that why FE-trained teachers are not readily offered employment in secondary schools. Depending on what they find, it might well be that policymakers need to impose conditions that are

transparent in each phase of education, although that might not immediately remove intra-professional tensions.

Given that some of our participants highlighted the possibility of shortcomings in training, this might well be an issue for programme developers and FE-teacher trainers. Perhaps there is the need for FE training providers to review their programmes and if need be, include aspects of equivalent training in areas of preparedness such as managing challenging behaviour in different settings. This brings into context the argument of Hodgson (2015, 1) who suggests exploring the uniformity of teacher status which draws from the same standards. The uniformity of teacher status, it can be argued, should facilitate the achievement of one of the goals of parity which is to ensure that “consideration for all PGCE graduates studying with any phase of education” is given and that they should be treated and valued equally.

Finally, in the current climate of teacher shortages and limited employment prospect for FE-trained teachers, it is clear that a fruitful way to go would be to work towards an improved and more positive perception of FE-trained teachers as professionals, who can add value to the work being done in secondary schools.

(7795 words)

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