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CHAPTER NINE

The National Institute of Teaching and the claim for programme legitimacy

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Many questions about how teacher education is conceptualized and enacted as a ‘policy problem’ (Cochran-Smith, 2005) are raised by the establishment in England in 2022 of the government-funded, non-university National Institute of Teaching (NlOT). The questions arise from the ways in which policy discourse positions the role of the university in teacher education as problematic, to be addressed by the reallocation of legitimacy, resource and influence towards non-university providers. Questions provoked by such a policy initiative (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020) require examination of: *regulation*, that is related to conferring legitimacy on the professional knowledge base for teacher education; *accountability*, and the positioning of universities as deficit contributors to teacher preparation, posing a problem to be solved by independent non-university bodies; and contested ideas about the *integration of theory and practice* in teacher preparation and how the crucial role of practice in schools is defined by those who make and enact policy in teacher education. These questions help to explore the expansion of non-university teacher education in England via the NlOT; how it is justified by policy and the lack of evidence that such

a transformation is equated with increased quality of provision. Referring to comparable shifts in the United States, Zeichner has warned about the risks and consequences of significant growth in non-university providers ‘unless and until substantive credible evidence accrues to support them’ (2016, p. 4).

The National Institute of Teaching

The establishment of a school-led national non-university body for teacher education has been the goal of several stakeholders in the marketized landscape in recent years. In 2016, a new Institute for Advanced Teaching (IAT) was proposed by Matthew Hood’s policy paper for the think tank Institute for Public Policy Research (Hood, 2016), drawing on its enthusiasm for the ‘school-led (as opposed to academic-led)’ (p. 21) US model of non-university Graduate Schools of Education. An Institute for Teaching, with Hood as its Director, was opened as a ‘new specialist graduate school’ in 2017 with investment from Ark Ventures, the entrepreneurial arm of the international educational charity, ARK. Following failure to secure sufficient funding to operate its planned teacher education programme, in 2019 the Institute for Teaching merged with Ambition School Leadership to form a new education charity, Ambition Institute. Ambition Institute bid for the contract to run the NIoT and subsequently challenged the Department for Education (DfE) award of the tender to a collective of four Multi-academy Trusts (MATs), the School-Led Development Trust (SLDT).

The NIoT has thus emerged from the transformation of teacher education in England towards being ‘school-led’ and business-model oriented, steered by competition and collaborations among groups of education charities or trusts, engaging in new forms of ‘co-opetition’ (Adnett & Davies, 2003) as expanded market opportunities arose. Academies in England are publicly funded schools with high degrees of autonomy over the curriculum and independent of local authority control. Staff are employed by academy trusts, which are held accountable through a legally binding funding agreement with the DfE. MATs are single legal entities formed of groups of academies that have come together to form charitable companies. Each MAT is formed of a single group of ‘members’ with responsibilities for governance and finance, with

a single board of trustees. The formation of a ‘supertrust’ enabled four of the largest MATs in England to come together to bid successfully for the competitive tender for the DfE contract for the NIO T, to run teacher education programmes worth £121 million over six years. The NIO T expects to be granted degree-awarding powers for its programmes and is intended by the government to be its ‘flagship’ for implementation of its new specification for teacher education, the ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) (DfE, 2021). It has been declared as the forthcoming ‘national role model’ (Williamson, 2021, n.p.) for institutions, including universities, in how to provide accredited initial teacher education (ITE) (called ‘training’) and professional learning and development. The policy announcement by Gavin Williamson, then Secretary of State for Education, set out the government intention to establish the new provider as ‘an independent body’, to be run by a supplier or suppliers following the tender process (Williamson, 2021). This was a watershed moment for ITE in England. The successful body – unknown at the time – would exemplify how to deliver initial teacher preparation and teacher development, to ‘support other organisations to understand and implement best practice in the delivery of teacher development’. The other organizations include university education departments.

The establishment of a school-led institution intended as the national leader for initial teacher preparation reflects the deficit discourse of university teacher education departments that has underpinned Coalition and Conservative administration policy in England for over a decade. Part of this discourse attributes poor international test performance in schools to the role played by ‘academics’ in teacher education:

[W]ho is to blame for our education system slipping down the international rankings? The answer is the academics in the education faculties of universities.

(Nick Gibb, *The Guardian*, 23 April 2014)

In a context in which university education experts have been constructed as the ‘enemies of promise’ (Gove, 2013) the launch of the NIO T reflects teacher education as a persistent ‘policy problem’ (Cochran-Smith, 2005) for the neoliberal reform agenda in countries like the United States, Australia and England; a problem

to be resolved by transfer of responsibility from the public sector to non-state, private or charitable organizations operating as the ‘shadow state’ (Wolch, 1990; Ellis et al., 2021).

The NIoT in an intensively monitored system

The NIoT is one of 179 organizations approved by the DfE to become ‘accredited providers’ of teacher education from 2023, following the recommendations of a small ‘expert group’ it commissioned to carry out an ‘ITT Market Review’ of teacher education (DfE, 2021). The Market Review played a catalytic role in justifying an extensive reform agenda, formalizing the discourse of teacher education as ‘training’ within an intensively monitored system. Its central aims (p. 3) were ‘to enable the provision of consistently high-quality training’, ‘in a more efficient and effective market’ and to ensure that teacher education providers’ programmes would be ‘in line with’ the new government *ITT CCF* (DfE, 2021). A core responsibility of the NIoT is to be a role model for others in implementing the *ITT CCF*, which sets out a new formal knowledge base for teacher education in England, based on five areas – behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. The Framework consists of a series of statements that describe what new teachers should know and be able to do (‘Learn that ...’ and ‘Learn how to ...’) and was assembled by a small ‘expert group’ and ‘endorsed’ by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a charitable organization focused on breaking links between economic disadvantage and educational attainment. The EEF receives funding from the DfE, with the remit to generate evidence reviews and evaluations of educational interventions, alongside supporting the use of evidence to bring about change in policy and practice in education.

Fourteen recommendations were produced by the ITT Market Review, alongside a list of ‘Quality Requirements’ as criteria against which all providers of teacher education – university and non-university ‘led’ – were to be revalidated by a centralized government process. Recommendation 11 stated that ‘prospective accredited providers of ITT should go through a new, rigorous accreditation process to ensure that they are able to fully deliver the Quality Requirements’.

The accreditation process resulted in an overall reduction in the number of providers from 240 in 2021. Around 83 per cent of universities achieved accreditation to continue providing teacher education under the new model (including one new provider). The reduction in the number of providers included the de-selection of universities with track records of being graded ‘outstanding’ by the national body with responsibility for inspecting ITE, Ofsted. Controversy surrounds the haste and lack of transparency of the process (Noble-Rogers, 2022) by which universities with outstanding inspection reports failed to gain accreditation, at a time when the shortfall in recruitment to teacher preparation programmes is a major concern (Worth & Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). A process that restricted organizations’ appeal statements to 500 words resulted in no successful appeals.

A ‘shadow state structure’

The establishment of the NIO T alongside the Market Review reflects questions about the ‘distribution of power and privilege’ in the public education system, raised by Ellis et al., (2021, p. 606). Recommendation 8 of the Market Review made clear that the NIO T – whichever organization was to win the contract – would be successful in gaining accreditation: ‘DfE should facilitate any accredited providers which wish to do so, to partner with an institution, such as the Institute of Teaching when it is ready, to offer their postgraduate award.’ Its projected status as the national flagship provider culminates from interaction between policy and economic processes, by which resources are redistributed towards organizations with close ideological links to dominant government policy, such as large national academy chains. In this climate of intensive policymaking and implementation, the NIO T reflects in many ways a ‘co-created shadow state structure’, which Ellis *et al.* (2021) have identified as emerging from the ‘political moment’ where government requires dependable partners to fulfil its policy agendas. These structures may take diverse forms, with varying degrees of separation from government, but what they have in common is that they are a new construct, without an institutional or operational history, brought into being as a response to ‘a need within an area of responsibility the state wished to outsource’

(2021, p. 618). Co-created shadow state structures reflect the mutual dependencies of government and organizations they are close to. In this case, the reconstitution of four of England's largest school trusts enabled them to respond to the market conditions created by government and be resourced to provide high-profile implementation of its teacher education reforms. The creation of the 'supertrust' exemplifies the policy entrepreneurship that is essential to the fulfilment of neoliberal political agendas, and also essential to maintaining the self-directing capacities of such organizations within a marketized context for teacher education and schools. Ellis and others' analysis with reference to professional learning organizations argues:

[T]he state created opportunities these organisations could utilise to startup in the market ... Co-created shadow state structures arise out of the meeting of political need and policy entrepreneurship in a context where the state seeks reliable partners, not only (perhaps not even) in terms of a record of efficiency but, critically, in terms of being able to work with given political values.

(p. 618)

The US new graduate school of education movement

The policy initiative reflects key features of the new graduate school of education (nGSE) movement in the United States (Zeichner, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2020) over the past two decades, in how programme legitimacy is conferred on providers who sit outside of the university sector and occupy an enabling role in government reformulation and control of the knowledge base for teacher education. The nGSEs are 'not university based but are state authorized and approved as institutions of higher education to prepare teachers, endorse them for initial teacher certification, and grant master's degrees' (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020, p. 9). There is little independent, empirical research into these kinds of new and high-profile institutions in initial teacher preparation. Zeichner (2016) has provided extensive analysis of

what he calls the ‘apocryphal claims, illusory evidence’ of the claims to quality made on the websites of independent, non-university teacher education programmes in the United States. Cochran-Smith and colleagues’ current study in the United States is a main source of emergent understanding in terms of their relationship with wider policymaking, the characteristics of teacher education which they generate and how they impact on wider conceptualization of teaching and teacher education. The first stage of this study is again based on comprehensive analysis of website information as the prime source of extant information. Like the naming of *graduate schools* of education in the United States, the title of the English National *Institute* of Teaching confers ‘institutional ground and program legitimacy’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020, p. 10), previously ‘reserved for schools of education at university (drawing on [Labaree, 2004; Fraser & Lefty, 2018])’. The relationships among stakeholders in these experimental forms of teacher education institution is complex and the NIOt has a university partner that will bring a quality assurance role to master’s-level accreditation. Legitimacy is thus conferred by a complex reconfiguration of knowledge bases and expertise, alongside the redistribution of access to resources. Such a reconfiguration and redistribution enables the ‘policy problem’ of teacher education to be resolved by the New Public Management of education, incorporating business and private sector models whose key features are ‘marketisation, privatisation, managerialism, performance measurement and accountability’ (Tolofari, 2005, p. 75). There is no current, independently funded research programme examining the new phenomena in England that might provide credible evidence of the kinds of impact of the NIOt and of the newly accredited national provision under the conditions brought about by the ITT Market Review.

Policy problems

Programme legitimacy for the NIOt reflects how ‘policy problems’, identified in Cochran-Smith *et al.*’s (2020) analysis of nGSEs in the United States, have been managed in the English system.

A regulation problem – ‘a tug-of-war between deregulation and professionalization’ (p. 11). During the past two decades, this ‘tug-of-war’ has questioned the complex and nuanced professional knowledge base that integrates the intellectual, ethical and practical dimensions of learning to teach. It has involved the opening up and expansion of alternative teacher education models, routes into teaching and multiple provider organizations, to be regulated centrally by monitoring their adherence to standardized frameworks. The NIoT, as an independent body without an organizational history and no accumulated expertise as a teacher education provider, is now heralded as the model for others to learn how to educate teachers. Its credentials as a national authority on teacher preparation are enshrined in its remit to model the government framework for teacher preparation, the *ITT CCF* (DfE, 2019). It represents an extreme form of deregulation as a solution to the ‘problem’ of teacher education.

An accountability problem – policy positioning has built a discourse of lack of confidence in universities, attributing deficit analyses of pupil performance in schools to the quality of initial teacher preparation. Increased accountability is seen as the solution to this, via the datafication of teacher education, successive standardized assessment frameworks for student teachers and national inspection frameworks, including one that made direct connections between the performance of teachers in their first term in post and their initial teacher preparation outcomes (Ofsted, 2014). The NIoT pledges that it will link data on teacher and leader development on its programmes with data sets on pupil achievement, in a logic model that precisely aligns with this discourse as an indicator of quality teacher education. The values alignment with the ‘levelling up’ policy agenda in England (HM Government, 2022) is clear. Zeichner (2016) however prompts as-yet unanswered questions about the correlation of increased pupils’ scores (should they materialize) with genuinely transformed social and economic participation for marginalized and minoritized sections of society. Responsible policymaking requires analysis of the complex, multiple factors that constitute quality outcomes in teacher education and their costs and benefits.

A theory-practice problem – closely linked to the problems of regulation and accountability is the persistent scepticism about the relationship between theory and practice in the learning of teachers,

‘based on the critique that university preparation programs have not produced effective teachers because of the long-perceived gap between theory and practice (Zeichner, 2012)’ (Cochran-Smith et al., 2020, p. 12–13). The solution, according to the deficit discourse, is the need to increase the focus on practising teaching in school as part of initial preparation. The NIOt offers a clear break from university models of teacher education, with a main selling point that it offers ‘a fully immersive school-centred programme – aspiring teachers will be in the classroom from the very start’ (<https://niot.org.uk/programmes/initial-teacher-training>). It is unclear how ‘fully immersive’, ‘school-led’ teacher preparation offers advantages over teaching practices in schools which occupy two-thirds of the time on university models in England.

The role of research in teacher preparation is an aspect of this policy problem that has to be managed, where the distinctiveness of the NIOt from universities is essential to its programme legitimacy. The NIOt is establishing its own research agenda to inform its teacher education provision, ‘researching what works best in teacher and leader development. As soon as we have evidence showing practical ways to improve training or professional development, we will use that evidence to inform the programmes we offer’ (<https://niot.org.uk/research>). This claim to legitimacy positions the NIOt as a separate research entity, being ‘sector-led’ (indicating ‘teachers and leaders’ as sector leaders in teacher education) but with uncertain links to the international knowledge base. A core component of preparing a research literate teaching profession is access to a range of relevant, independent, peer-reviewed research of international standing that can support teachers to think critically and develop balanced, informed and ethical judgements about practice (BERA-RSA 2014). Research-engaged teacher education generates ‘practical theorising’ (Burn et al., 2022) as a core teacher learning pedagogy, located in a research culture that is broad as well as deep and which promotes critical thinking, independent analysis and the scrutiny of evidence as sources of teacher knowledge. Crucially, it counters self-confirming discourses and draws on rigorous, independent research to offer informed critiques of ‘what works’.

The NIOt is a key component of the rhetorical discourse that the ‘problem’ of teacher education will be solved by reducing the university role, in the face of a distinct lack of evidence of such a correlation. The point is not to question whether the NIOt can

provide quality ITE going forwards. Many variables will be at play here – most significantly, the expertise of teacher educators, the quality of the teacher education pedagogy, the expertise of mentors and the schools’ capacities as learning environments for a critically informed, research literate, graduate teaching profession. These variables are at play in all teacher education contexts. Several of the university providers who were required to apply for accreditation had been awarded successive ‘outstanding’ grades by the national inspection framework across primary and secondary education programmes at the time of Williamson’s announcement of the NIoT. The question must be asked – what is the problem to which the NIoT is the solution? There are serious challenges in the national arrangements for teacher education in a system that struggles to attract and retain teachers – but a lack of examples of strikingly high-quality provision within universities is not one of them. A large provider like the UCL Institute of Education, for example, has worked with around 1,400 student teachers each year and more than 600 schools, colleges and Early Years settings – managing quality provision that is maintained at scale, through successive inspection frameworks.

In her extensive analysis of political rhetoric underpinning the reform of teacher education in England, Brooks (2022) identifies the ‘precarious and partial’ use of the term ‘quality’ in political discourse in the Market Review, in conjunction with the *ITT CCF*. At the heart of the problem, according to Brooks, lies what kind of transformation from a lay person to a teacher constitutes ‘quality’. This invokes questions about the values, ethics and concepts of the knowledge and power that teachers need in order to make professional judgements and the ways in which authoritative sources of knowledge about teacher education pedagogy come to be legitimated, given authority and resourced.

‘Flagship’ legitimacy

Leadership of teacher education on a national stage is built through multiple forms of sustained expertise and extensive scrutiny. It is undoubtedly an ongoing moral and practical imperative for all teacher education providers to continue seeking ways to prepare new teachers to make the most difference to the lives of the children

and young people in their care. As Ell *et al.* (2017) remind the international sector, the outcomes of teacher education can indeed be disappointing in terms of producing teachers with the research literacy, professional resilience and critical insights that are needed to ensure that their practice makes a sustained difference to the experience and achievement of their learners. The need is for greater understanding of the holistic and nonlinear factors that impact on new teachers (including their belief systems and autobiographical factors) alongside rigorous analysis of teacher education as a *system* that needs to take full account of the ‘multi-layered contexts, schools, and policy/political environments’ (2017, p. 328) that help to constitute the learning of teachers. Of equal importance are ‘the larger structures of privilege and inequality that intersect with these’. A ‘flagship’ provider is recognized across the world for quality of provision that leads values-driven, research-informed ITE that is sustainable beyond the lifetime of serial initiatives. This prepares teachers with the depth and breadth of knowledge to make teaching a career that is based on intellectual curiosity about how best to enable learners to fulfil their potentials by making careful judgements about practice, in the face of multiple challenges in unequal societies. It comes with extensive responsibility for maintaining sustained provision and exchange of ideas with world-leading teacher educators in the face of these challenges for teachers and teacher education in contemporary societies. Crucially, ‘there are no examples of high-performing education systems that have relied heavily on the kind of deregulation and market competition, grounded in test-based accountability, that many supporters of independent teacher education programs promote’ (Zeichner, 2016, p. 6).

Flagship providers of ITE are renowned throughout the world as well as in their own countries – think of Teachers College, Columbia University in the United States or the National Institute of Education, Singapore. Think of England and, among others, the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), the Oxford Deanery and many others are such examples. World-leading teacher education institutions exchange knowledge about how teachers learn and can be prepared for a satisfying career in which they wish to remain.

Gavin Williamson did not remain long in post, with five education secretaries replacing him in under two years at the time of writing. There is indeed much work to be done to support

the teaching profession and to address the reasons why so many leave, so soon. There needs to be independent research into teacher education across a vastly complex system in which there are huge inconsistencies in the ways new teachers are prepared. The forecast for recruitment to initial preparation programmes in England is dire at the time of writing, with chronic shortages of new teachers envisaged in the majority of secondary school subjects and in the primary sector (Worth & Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). The reasons are complex and deserve attention to the professional lives of teachers and their need for enduring career satisfaction and role fulfilment. This is a high-stakes context for any government to assert that a new Institute will be a ‘flagship’, supplying a much-needed model for others to follow as a resolution to perceived problems of teacher quality, recruitment and retention. Such a claim takes on international as well as national responsibilities to education. The issues are serious regarding what constitutes accountability and what legitimate base is used to assume outstanding expertise in teacher education, both in the English system and on the world stage.

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