

# Teacher Education in History

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## Introduction

The current landscape of teacher education in England is complicated and unstable. Rapid changes in policy are accompanied by equally rapid increases in the student population whilst the number of people applying to become teachers is shrinking. With the recruitment and retention of teachers at a premium and increasing evidence that subject expertise and research-informed knowledge are crucial dimensions of teacher effectiveness, it is more important than ever to establish *what* it is that teachers need to know in order to teach well and *how* that knowledge can best be nurtured. This chapter attempts to address both issues in relation to initial teacher education (ITE) and continuing professional development (CPD).

## Initial teacher education - the national picture

The recruitment and supply of teachers is set to become one of the most critical issues facing education in England with student numbers forecast to rise from seven million to just over eight million by 2022. The Department for Education reports that overall teacher numbers have risen, with a 1.2% (5,200 teachers) increase between 2013-14 (DfE, 2015a). However, recruitment of new entrants onto post graduate training courses declined between 2010-2014 with the total number of new entrants falling from 29,450 in 2010/11 to 25,753 in 2014/5 (DfE, 2015b).<sup>1</sup> In 2014/15, 94% of postgraduate secondary targets and 89% of postgraduate primary targets were met. Stories of schools' failures to recruit teachers abound in the national press (e.g. Harris, 2016), though the picture is a complicated one depending partly on the location of schools.

It is also important to retain qualified teachers, up to 44% of whom leave the profession within five years of qualifying (Orchard and Winch, 2015). Recruitment and retention of teachers will be particularly significant over the next six years as a million extra students will need to be educated.

Fortunately, history is not a subject beset by teacher shortages. Recruitment targets are routinely met and places generally filled with well qualified individuals. Nevertheless, we are not immune from the wider challenges. First, the challenge to continually attract high quality applicants – especially when the economy is more buoyant - and provide high quality provision in an increasingly fragmented system is not inconsiderable. Second, the challenge to retain fully qualified teachers has to be faced across all subjects.

## Becoming a history teacher

### Trends in history recruitment

Figure 1 outlines the target allocations for history ITE (initial teacher education) places over the last three years. One of the most noticeable trends is a shift away from HEI- (Higher Education Institute, or university) led routes in favour of a more school-led system. This shift was part of the coalition government’s education policy, with Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Education, declaring in 2010 that ‘too little teacher training takes place on the job’ (DfE, 2010: 19). The Conservative government has continued this trend since 2015 and is keen to increase the awareness and desirability of school-led routes.

The picture is certainly a complicated one, not least for prospective applicants trying to decide on the best route into teaching. Broadly speaking, there are two employment-based routes (School Direct Salaried and Teach First) and two ‘training’ routes (PGCE and School Direct Tuition Fee) which cost students up to £9,000. HEIs are involved with all the routes (though not all the courses within these routes) and remain the primary source of quality assurance and accreditation but the government is also keen to support the growth of SCITTs (school-centred initial teacher training) and to provide schools with more control over, for example, recruitment and course design.

Despite a drop in overall teacher recruitment, history remains one of the most popular subjects amongst new entrants and central government targets are routinely exceeded each year<sup>ii</sup>. There is variation across routes, however. School Direct providers did not fill all their allocated places for 2014-2016 and SCITTs under-recruited for 2015-16. HEIs were more successful, filling all their places. The profile of successful applicants varies across routes, too. HEIs are more likely than schools to recruit history trainees with a 2:1 degree or higher and are also more likely to recruit black and minority ethnic applicants whilst schools and SCITTs are more likely to recruit older trainees (DfE, 2015b).

**Figure 1: History postgraduate recruitment allocations<sup>iii</sup>**

	Initial allocation	HEI	SCITTs	SD (Fee)	SD (Salaried)	Teach First
2014-15	815	363	86	313		53
2015-16	1019	242	157	436	107	77
2016-17	816 (minimum)	248	424 (minimum recruitment)		67	77

### **Implications for teacher supply and quality**

The implications of this shift to a more school-led system at a remarkably fast pace are considerable, particularly given the national picture of looming teacher shortages

and the need for good subject specialists who can implement a succession of major curriculum changes. Undermining the stability of a system that has, by and large, provided a reasonably regular supply of high quality teachers, particularly when the evidence in support of a shift to more school-led provision is limited, is a high risk strategy. Many of the highest performing jurisdictions across the world such as Finland, Canada and Singapore invest heavily in teacher preparation programmes which are strongly knowledge-based and include a key role for universities. This is in contrast to countries such as the US and UK which have developed more 'market-driven' pathways into teaching such as 'on the job' training (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012: 153). Furthermore, between 2008 and 2011, 49% of HEI-led partnerships were judged outstanding by Ofsted compared with 36% of SCITT partnerships and 18% of employment-based routes (Orchard and Winch, 2015). There also seems to be limited support for the shift amongst history teachers, with 90% of all respondents to the 2014 Historical Association (HA) teachers' survey arguing that *all* trainees should receive a guaranteed minimum entitlement of university-based elements in their training (Burn and Harris, 2014).

It is, however, important to acknowledge that university-led ITE has not, despite its strong track record overall, consistently provided the same quality of provision and teacher supply across all subjects and institutions. The increased emphasis on schools' engagement in ITE could therefore be a positive step in further strengthening partnerships between schools and universities provided that capacity in schools is developed (which will take time) and the extensive knowledge and expertise in universities that has characterised much outstanding ITE provision over the last twenty years is not lost.

## **What do (new) history teachers need to know?**

### **Theory versus practice?**

These recent policy shifts in ITE tend to be characterised as a shift towards a more practical, 'hands on' training and one unfortunate consequence has been to create a false dichotomy between 'university training' and 'school training'. Since 1992, all routes into teaching have involved considerable amounts of time spent in school and much has been accomplished in terms of building effective partnerships between universities and schools, though there is more to be done. The PGCE – misleadingly characterised as 'university-based' on the DfE (Department for Education) website at the time of writing - comprises 120 days in school, about two-thirds of the total amount of time available. Associated with this notion of 'university versus school' is the notion of 'theory' as opposed to 'practice'. When Michael Gove spoke of 'on the job' training, he implied that people learn how to teach primarily by teaching. Of course, he is not entirely wrong: planning lessons, teaching classes of children and managing their learning all need practice. However, his characterisation is an unhelpfully simple one: learning how to teach well requires a complex blend of theory *and* practice: it is this complexity that leads some to favour the term 'initial teacher education' rather than 'initial teacher training'. At their best, both schools and university education departments are research and knowledge-rich

environments *and* deeply concerned with the practicalities of teaching and there are good examples both in the UK and beyond that show how the two environments can work together to good effect (Burn and Mutton, 2013).

### **What sorts of knowledge do successful history teachers have?**

In 1990, Lawlor argued that new entrants to the profession needed two things: a thorough academic grounding in their subject (i.e. through an undergraduate degree) and practical teaching skills. There was no new 'knowledge' or 'theory' to be acquired by fledging teachers – they just needed to practise ways of transmitting knowledge of their subject to children. This view was never widely embraced and more recently, the Carter Review, established by the government in 2014 to 'define effective ITT practice', argued for a more complex definition of the needs of trainees by calling for the inclusion of 'subject knowledge development' *and* 'subject specific pedagogy' as core content on ITE courses (Carter, 2015). Although this was a welcome acknowledgement of the role of subjects, Carter's definition of subject knowledge largely assumed an equivalence with content knowledge and there was little acknowledgement that academic subjects are often radically 'recontextualised' in schools (Bernstein, 2000), often in order to make 'procedural' knowledge (e.g. how do historians actually generate knowledge) more explicit. One of the ways history has been recontextualised is by making the disciplinary structure of history more visible to children, allowing them to understand the status of historical knowledge – what Lee describes as 'historical literacy' (2011; see also chapter five of this edition). So knowing your subject well from undergraduate studies is not quite the same as knowing your subject well in order to teach it.

Carter's use of the term 'subject specific pedagogy' is also unhelpful. In the UK, 'pedagogy' is generally understood to mean 'teaching strategies' and yet Carter includes within it knowledge about the kinds of misunderstandings pupils may commonly hold. Furthermore, whilst knowing about a range of teaching strategies is crucial, this is heavily informed by knowledge and understanding of subject-specific goals (Kitson et al, 2011). In both cases we are drawing on our *subject knowledge* as well as our *knowledge of pedagogy*. This may seem an odd thing to highlight: in practice, it is impossible to be too rigid about where 'subject knowledge' ends and 'pedagogy' starts. However, understanding what it means to know your subject *for the purposes of teaching it* is of critical importance in the preparation of new teachers. This is not simply a matter of knowing history's substantive (content) knowledge and a range of helpful teaching strategies (many of which are in fact pretty generic – we do not have a monopoly on card sorts!). It is also about 'knowing' history in disciplinary terms and appreciating the obstacles children might face in learning it.

There have been various attempts to characterise teacher knowledge. Husbands, for example, identifies three types of history teacher knowledge: knowledge about the subject of history, knowledge about pupils and knowledge about classroom practices (2011). The first of these, Husbands argues, comprises three aspects: substantive

content knowledge (Carter's main priority), procedural knowledge (namely, the second-order concepts, including evidence) and a 'conception of the discipline'. By drawing on models such as this and also Shulmans' (1986) novel category of 'pedagogical content knowledge' - which includes the likely misconceptions that pupils may have about a subject/topic and the kinds of analogies and explanations that might work best to overcome these - we can construct a more helpful and expansive definition of 'subject knowledge' around which programmes of ITE and CPD can be developed.

Figure 2 provides three possible scenarios in response to a situation a trainee history teacher might face. It explores the potential impact of a knowledge-poor versus a knowledge-rich learning environment, the interaction between theory and practice and the critical role of well informed and skilful mentoring in schools. In the first two scenarios, the outcomes will be different but neither will be wholly successful. Scenario two offers more hope in the longer term but it is difficult for the trainee to capitalise fully on a stronger knowledge base without the guiding hand of a good mentor. In scenario three, the mentor is able to help the trainee navigate his way through a series of complex decisions, enabling him to clarify and prioritise his goals and respond to the particular needs of a Year 9 class.

## **Figure 2: Knowledge into practice**

Imagine that you are a trainee early on in your first teaching practice and you are trying to plan a lesson for Year 9 on the causes of the First World War. Luckily you studied this at university and you eagerly dig out your lecture notes. Three hours later you have decided to tell the students the main outline of what happened between c.1870-1914 for the first half of the lesson before setting some mainly comprehension-type questions. For homework they will write an essay answering the question 'what were the causes of World War I?' The lesson does not go well. The students struggle to understand your points about imperial struggles, militarism and nationalism. A few seem to understand the alliance system a little better but by that point most students have switched off and a handful are misbehaving. With ten minutes left (your 'talk' overrun by twenty minutes) you set the comprehension questions and by the time you achieve quiet, the bell goes and there is no time to set the homework.

### **Scenario One: a weak knowledge-base and weak mentoring.**

Your mentor provides some general feedback about pace and behaviour management which do not explore specific goals within the second order concept of causation and make little attempt to unpick why the pupils struggled with much of the substantive knowledge (e.g. challenging concepts such as nationalism). You are advised to re-teach much of the original lesson using firmer behaviour management strategies and encouraged to reduce teacher talk in order to increase pace. You decide to make an initial presentation shorter next time and instead show the pupils a documentary from which they can make notes. You decide to retain the same essay question but when you read the finished essays you can see that the pupils have at best regurgitated the notes they made from the film. However, you are not able to diagnose exactly what is missing, nor how to move the pupils on. Your mentor offers further vague advice and suggests using writing frames in future without discussing different types or their pros and cons, whilst praising you for a brisker pace and better classroom management.

### **Scenario Two: a stronger knowledge-base and weak mentoring**

Your ITE course is providing you with different kinds of useful teacher knowledge and you start to evaluate your Year 9 lesson in the light of this. You can see that you paid no attention to the kinds of misconceptions about causation that were discussed in a seminar and also that you made a series of assumptions about pupils' prior knowledge but you are unsure how to undo any damage done so far and how to embed this knowledge in a future lesson plan with 9P. You wonder if you should incorporate the ideas of Chapman (2003) into your next lesson but you are also mindful that the pupils wrestled with substantive concepts such as militarism and empire and you are struggling to do justice to everything in the time available. You've just attended a session on enquiry and like the idea of a series of lessons knitted together by an overarching question as a way to allow the space and time to do justice to the topic, but your department doesn't teach in enquiries and your mentor isn't keen for you to try. In the end you attempt to do too much again in one lesson and the pupils are even more confused than before.

### **Scenario three: a strong knowledge-base and strong mentoring**

In the debrief, the mentor explores your goals for the lesson in three dimensions: in terms of substantive knowledge (e.g. what do pupils *need* to know and what prior knowledge did you assume?), the second order concept of causation (e.g. how do you want them to *think* about the causes of World War One?) and skills (e.g. what assumptions did you make when you set the essay?). It soon becomes apparent that there was simply too much in the lesson and insufficient time to develop a deep understanding of anything. It is agreed that this topic requires more than one lesson and the discussion then focuses on what should be placed where in that sequence to enable pupils to reach the desired learning outcomes. A discussion of the purpose of Chapman's Alphonse the Camel (Chapman, op. cit.) analogy, for example, helps you to decide where to place it within the sequence. Your mentor shares her lesson plans with you to demonstrate how she blends substantive knowledge with causal reasoning and suggest some collaborative planning to boost your confidence.

## **The role of subject mentors in schools**

### **Helping trainees to develop the right kinds of knowledge**

As has become apparent, teacher knowledge is complex. It draws on subject specific knowledge and other types of knowledge; it draws on research; it draws on observation of other teachers; it draws on one's own practice and it draws on the theorising of other practitioners. Any simplified notion of theory versus practice simply will not do. The role for school mentors is therefore to help their trainees to draw on and modify multiple kinds of knowledge derived from multiple sources. This requires mentors to understand these kinds of knowledge, to support trainees' attempts to respond to this knowledge in their teaching and to open up, analyse and adapt their own practice. Scenario Three in Figure 2 provides a sense of what this looks like in practice and builds on Burn and Mutton's (2013) model of research-informed clinical practice in ITE.

### **Supporting history mentors in schools**

The Carter Review acknowledged the critical role mentors play in ITE (as well as identifying the wider benefits to the school) but also acknowledged the variation in expertise. This hasn't changed: in 2000, three history HMIs, at that time responsible for the inspection of history ITE courses across England, wrote about the unacceptable variation in standards of mentoring, citing for example insufficiently subject specific lesson feedback. The most effective training partnerships, they argued, 'were those that were able to recruit able subject mentors from strong departments, provide them with good initial and continuing training, bind them closely to the course and secure their loyalty, furnish them with professional development opportunities and treat them with respect' (Baker et al, 2000:194).

Within strong partnership models, history mentors are supported in a number of ways, including subject specific, and 80% of teachers who responded to the HA annual survey in 2014 claimed that mentors benefited from such partnership arrangements. However, they were more positive about the subject support they received from university partnerships engaged in training routes than from employment-based routes (Burn and Harris, 2014). The challenge for school-led provision that isn't tied to a history education department in a university is to ensure strong subject specific expertise amongst its mentors, engagement in research-based findings, appropriate subject specific mentor development and rigorous measures of quality assurance.

In theory this is possible, particularly within the school clusters emerging around designated Teaching Schools, but in practice much harder to achieve in busy schools whose core business is not ITE and whose teachers are not generally engaged in research communities or history specific teacher communities beyond their school. Being the kind of mentor envisaged in Scenario Three requires a commitment to expand and embrace different kinds of research-informed teacher knowledge. Mentors who dip in and out of mentoring and regard it as peripheral to their job or

who receive inadequate support, especially as the role currently attracts no additional salary, status or even time, are unlikely to offer the quality of support envisaged by Carter.

### **And then what.....developing history teachers beyond ITE**

There are many types of professional development opportunities available to qualified teachers, from subject-specific to generic, from external to internal and from 'one off' events to ongoing provision. The general (though not exclusive) trend has been towards internal, generic provision organised around ongoing whole-school goals.

There are two particular gaps in CPD provision currently. One of these gaps is provision which is informed by research. The findings of the recent BERA/RSA inquiry into research and teacher education strongly recommended that teachers should be provided with opportunities to engage *with* research and *in their own* research to increase their effectiveness (BERA, 2014).

The second gap concerns subject specific support. A recent survey of international research findings found that professional development should consider both subject knowledge and subject specific pedagogy to be most effective. Indeed, there was evidence that professional development focused on generic pedagogy is insufficient, especially in maths (Cordingley et al, 2015). However, opportunities to engage in history specific development are diminishing as traditional sources of support – for example in the form of local subject advisors, history ASTs (advanced skills teachers) and local networks of department heads – disappear and high accountability structures in schools mean that external support for individual subjects is dominated by the three awarding bodies. The provision of history-specific CPD was of concern to just over half the respondents to the HA Annual Survey in 2014, a slight increase from the previous year (Burn and Harris, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are places to look for history specific support. The two principal professional organisations for history teachers – the Historical Association and the Schools History Project – both run annual conferences and provide web-based resources and guidance. The HA publishes a quarterly journal, *Teaching History*, which is an excellent source of support for practising history teachers and trainees (and includes a feature called 'Move me on' specifically designed to support history mentors) and provides free online CPD. Some local networks of history teachers still exist, others are developing within clusters and strong history mentor communities have developed around well established ITE provision. Beyond this there is a wealth of online material and advice now available, some of which is extremely useful and some less so. Not all of this subject-specific provision meets the criteria for effective CPD identified by Cordingley et al, however. They advocate interventions that last at least two terms, and more typically one year or more, to lead to 'profound, lasting change' and which provide a 'rhythm of follow-up, consolidation and support activities' (Cordingley et al, op. cit.: 12-13), suggesting that more sustained



programmes of subject specific (as well as more generic) CPD would be most effective in terms of teacher expertise and pupil outcomes.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of external history-specific CPD opportunities but it does serve to remind us that opportunities exist for those that look. This is a key point: engagement in subject-specific CPD is rarely a requirement for teachers who tend to seek out such opportunities despite a lack of encouragement by senior leaders in schools to do so. Drawing on her research into professional learning, Burn (2012) concludes that the different characteristics of school departments – for example the extent to which they have a culture of professional dialogue – and individuals' own disposition to take responsibility pro-actively for their own professional development both have an important role to play.

### **Summary**

We are fortunate to have a good supply of well qualified applicants wanting to become secondary history teachers and some high quality ITE courses available to them. The extent to which initial and ongoing teacher education is research-informed, knowledge-based and subject specific is currently at risk however, and it is more important than ever to identify what characterises effective history teacher education so we can best navigate our way through the current changes.

### **Questions**

1. What are the implications of the current changes to ITE for trainees, mentors and schools?
2. Why does knowledge matter when learning how to teach? What should this knowledge include?
3. To what extent does CPD currently meet history teachers' needs?

### **Further reading**

For more detail on international models of teacher education, see Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2012). Burn and Mutton (2013) provide a helpful explanation of what they mean by research-informed clinical practice, also with an international dimension. The references for both of these can be found below. For trainees and mentors looking for an accessible way to improve and hone their subject knowledge for teaching, see Harris, R., Burn, K. and Woolley, M. (2014) *The Guided Reader to Teaching and Learning History*, Abingdon: Routledge.

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<sup>i</sup> The provisional figures for 2015/16 are more positive but include Teach First numbers for the first time so are not comparable with previous data.

<sup>ii</sup> Note that 'targets' and 'allocations' are not the same thing. The target recruitment in history for 2015-16 was 815 whereas the allocations totalled 942. So it is possible not to fill all the allocated places but to still meet the target. It is too soon to know whether the allocations for 2016-17 will exceed the target but based on previous years, it is likely.

<sup>iii</sup> Teach First allocations were not routinely included in the overall allocations until 2016-17. I have included them here to provide a more comprehensive picture.