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## What is there to be learnt from the 1950s and 1960s for contemporary trainee teachers in Further Education?

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### Abstract

In this paper, some stories of staff who became Further Education (FE) lecturers during the 1950s and 1960s are reported upon. What emerges is that this period when FE was being established was heavily reliant on the imagination of the actors in their community settings. Moreover, these pioneers in the sector, often from strong occupational backgrounds but with limited formal qualifications, were employed because it was considered that they would be able to use their creative wisdom to forge the necessary links with local industry and other relevant stakeholders, so as to give the FE brand a high profile in its respective local communities. It is contended that in the current, most likely prolonged, period of austerity there is much to be drawn from these experiences of yesteryear, in that what is revealed in the following is very much a perspective that funding was not necessarily the be-all and end-all when these practitioners were endeavouring to deliver excellence. In particular, it is argued that lessons can be learnt from former times and thus, by recalling these and other such narratives and including them in FE lecturers' Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and ongoing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, we may stimulate our imaginations in relation to how FE can be further integrated into the local setting, despite the aforementioned contemporary financial constraints.

### Key words

Recruitment; Initial Training; 1950s – 1960s; National; Local Dimension.

### Introduction

The narratives reported in this paper are drawn from a larger research project that investigated the evolution of Further Education (1945-1996) in five towns and cities in England. Amongst a number of themes to emerge, that of professionalism provides the focus of this particular paper and, to inform this, the contributions of three respondents who were recruited to FE in the 1950s and 1960s are drawn upon. More specifically, their personal recollections during this era in relation to what their job entailed and what was expected of them by their line managers provide useful insights into the differences between what it meant to become a lecturer then as compared with today. Moreover, such a comparison allows for an assessment of the relevance if any of these past practices in today's FE context and whether any elements of these engendered opportunities for lecturers to flourish and yet are no longer promoted in the sector. In other words, what, if any, are the lessons of the era in question that can be learnt so as to enrich the experiences of those embarking on a career in FE or those currently in post and undertaking CPD in these straightened times?

### The background

The context for this analysis reaches back to 1944 when the central government asked education authorities to draw up schemes for Further Education and county colleges in their local areas; Further Education became established as the third sibling, positioned in between compulsory schooling and Higher Education.

Following in the wake of the plans, the perennial issue of staffing courses in technical instruction had to be addressed. Teacher training for staff in institutions which predominately offered teaching in non-academic subjects had to resolve the problem that '*a conventional academic education followed by a conventional teacher training [was] no preparation*' (Foden, 1992: p. 67). The practical reality of this was that: '*there had to be a means by which individuals with trade skills, and consequently older, could be enabled to train as teachers*' (ibid. p. 67). This situation applied to staff working in secondary technical schools as much as to staff in the various forms of technical colleges that were established in the immediate post war era. The policy documentation regarding training that specifically included FE staff training during the 1950s and 1960s centre on the McNair Report (BOE, 1944), the Willis Jackson Report (MOE, 1957) and the Russell Report (DES, 1966). With regards to the first of these, the McNair Report delivered the first post-war recommendations regarding training and, for technical teachers, introduced the idea that this could take place after the craftsperson had started to work in education. As a consequence, training colleges for technical staff were established at three locations and ran preparatory training courses for a very small proportion of prospective technical college lecturers (Williams, 1962; Bailey, 2007). Moreover, the regional advisory committees established for overseeing advanced level technical education under the Percy Report (MOE, 1945) gradually began to consider staffing issues as their remit expanded to include Non Advanced Further Education (NAFE).

The Willis Jackson Report (MOE, 1957) noted that increasing the quality was as important as increasing the number of staff in technical colleges. To attract staff it would be necessary to provide more research assistance to lecturers,

allow them to return from time to time to industry more easily, and give paid leave for pursuing further studies and participating in conferences. Whereas these particular recommendations were not carried out, the other major points of the review were put into action during the late 1950s and 1960s. The following were introduced and set up significant structures in the field of FE training and staff development: increasing the intake of the three colleges for training FE teachers and opening a fourth; establishing the residential staff college at Coombe Lodge; and creating the standing committee on teachers for FE as part of the national advisory council on the training and supply of teachers (NACTST) (established in 1958). In the following decade the common thread running through the recommendations of the Russell committee (DES, 1966) was the goal of having all entrants to the sector qualified as teachers. This recommendation was deemed impossible as it was seen as potentially cutting off the supply of technical staff because enforcing training could discourage skilled individuals from considering lecturing as a career at a time when there was actually a pressing need for greater numbers of applicants (Cantor and Roberts, 1976).

Notwithstanding the above developments, the progress in teacher training for college staff was marginal and beset by challenges that continued to set the tone and underpin training and professionalising agendas throughout the latter part of the last century (DES, 1972). The first of these challenges was that many colleges were reliant on large numbers of part-time staff teaching a few hours a week and who had other employment and interests outside of the college environment. Thus, undergoing teacher training was not a career priority for these staff. The second issue that beset training was the issue of funding. On the one hand, to expect potential lecturers who were skilled and experienced craftspeople to take a year out from earning to attend training before being employed by a college did not make much sense for them. On the other, it was demanding a lot to expect local authorities to second large numbers of staff for long periods to attend courses away from their place of employment.

As noted above, much additional policy guidance was issued in subsequent decades but for the purposes of this paper, the discussion is limited to the framework of post-war provisions for FE teacher training sketched above and identification of issues surrounding recruitment and work roles.

### **Evidence from lecturers' narratives regarding recruitment and training in the 1950s and 1960s**

For the decades that are the focus of this paper (the 1950s and 1960s) it is evident that a middle way regarding the acquisition of skills and qualifications amongst staff emerged in local arrangements and that these were driven both by practical necessity and contemporary notions of professional standards. As such, the staff corps in any one college could range across a spectrum including fully trained and qualified teachers who had transferred from the school sector, individuals who had achieved certification through attending part-time training programmes, and others who were unqualified in teaching but were highly skilled in a technical domain. Equally, staff could be graduates from academic backgrounds, craftspeople who had achieved graduate level equivalents in their own vocational field or, non-graduates (Venables, 1967). Over time, the role of the FE college as an institution changed. It held within its boundaries a patchwork of activities and programmes, offering a vast range of facilities. Services expanded; the layers of personnel comprising staff possessing different certification and experiences of teacher training built up. Furthermore it is evident that the range of available staff certification widened and expectations regarding the necessity for staff being trained to recognised criteria that provided uniformity to nationally-set standards intensified as colleges came to embrace an ever widening spectrum of work during the latter decades of the twentieth century (Lucas, 2004).

A selection of narratives, collected from one community where the evolution of Further Education was studied, are used in this section to explore the variety of teaching qualifications held by three lecturers who began their FE careers at different points in the 1950s and 1960s. More precisely, these chosen lecturers' stories show the different ways of entering teaching in the sector and the qualities and skills for which individuals were hired across different disciplines.

#### *Respondent A*

Respondent A was a lecturer in engineering who started part-time in 1950 and was qualified in various scientific and technical subjects to HND through on-the-job experience at his place of employment and attending college in the evenings.

*We had to go down to enrol and along the queue came Mr Roberts who was head of engineering and he spotted me and he said "Oh I am absolutely hard up for a lecturer on mechanics, could you do it?" and I said, "when do I start?" "Next Monday?" "Well," I said, "Is it a good rate of pay?" and he said, "Oh yes", he said, "£8" and I thought that's fairly good. I got £8... and I started at 19, in 1950, and I was still a student there.*

*The Master got in touch with me and said "we just can't hold the [numbers]. We need somebody who is good at teaching physics. You've done three years of [Saturday mornings]. I've heard you a couple of times through door you know". He said, "Do you want a job full-time?" So without even advertising or anything I went in full-time. I doubled my salary because you got one year [pay increment] for every year in industry so I had done 15 years at the works so I got a year [year's increment] for every year. I*

*went straight on the maximum salary as a lecturer and some people struggle for years and years to get there. That was 1973 when I went full-time and I stayed ever since.'*

#### Respondent B

Respondent B was a lecturer in nursery nursing, who started in 1965 and was a qualified primary school teacher and experienced nursery manager.

*'When I went for the interview there were about four other people there and two of them had got great big art portfolio things you know and I had got nothing and I thought well I am not going to get this. I wasn't a bit bothered and I went in and had a very nice interview and they asked me all sorts of things and I think I was relaxed because I just never expected to get it in a million years. Anyway at the end of the afternoon ... they invited me in and said the job is yours if you like and I was so shocked that the Principal who was a lovely man said, "I suppose I had better pour the tea".'*

*The first year I was more or less pushed into and my boss seemed to have faith in that I would do it. I can remember the very first lecture I had to take being absolutely terrified when I walked in. I had been given my timetable because before we moved in, in the September, I knew that my first lecture (as they were called then) was at such and such a time and on such and such a day and I had got it for three hours and that I had got to talk to them and relate it to sort of practical work in school and child development.*

*They just left it to us: there's a group here, it's your group, it's your responsibility during this three hours and you've got to teach them about whatever it was. I didn't have any other guidance. I had no training whatsoever. I just went straight from being head of a nursery department into Further Education. Then about a year after that the course tutor and her deputy went on a course and when they came back it was the new idea, no more standing in front of the students and talking to a whole lot of them. They were to be divided into groups and we had got to teach through discussion. So they had been off on this weekend course, came back full of this and delivered the ultimatum to us and we were all looking at one another saying, "How do you teach through discussion?" because it was so alien at that point.'*

#### Respondent C

Respondent C was a lecturer in general studies and humanities who started in 1963 and was a graduate in social sciences.

*I went for this job teaching day release engineers and English to foreign students and I am pretty sure the reason I got the job was that I was not a Catholic and the other man was. The Principal at the time was a strong Baptist and evangelical and you know the idea of having a Catholic on the staff... And I had to say quite honestly that the only party I had ever campaigned for was because a friend of mine was standing as a Liberal candidate on the council and so I said the only party I had actively worked for was the Liberal Party. It so happened that one of the other three people on the panel, my future head of department, was himself an ardent Liberal and so that probably helped. Well [there were] no qualms about it: where do you stand politically? What party do you support? And you know questions about my religion or whatever.*

*I don't think I was the best teacher by any means because I just was never prepared for that. I remember relying on the standard textbooks at the time, and I wasn't at all an imaginative teacher. One chap who started a little bit before I did came in; he had even less knowledge of what to expect and he said, "I just started by putting my gown on and addressing them as gentlemen". I knew that was a bit odd, they just, well many of them were pretty close to illiterate, others were highly intelligent and quite well educated but they all came for their practical technical training. Not for English and not for learning about other countries. I remember trying to teach them about current affairs, taking what was in the paper and going into it in a bit more detail than they got from the Express or the Mail or whatever it was.*

*I remember going to a course at Winchester or somewhere, it was the very same time as the Aberfan disaster because I remember that came over the radio while we were there. We all had to say how we would approach or what did we think would be the best way to tackle it... my teaching education was at Leicester which had a wonderful reputation, it was probably the most sought after department. We did have brilliant lessons from people like Professor Simon and Robin Headley. Professor Simon [would say] "Right this is your standard lesson and you do this, this and this" and it was just wonderful.'*

#### What was the skill set that lecturers needed in the 1950s and 1960s?

The above illustrate the narratives of three retired FE lecturers who recalled how they were recruited by their college managers at the start of their long careers in the sector. Moreover, their experiences of training and learning how to teach in their early years are also indicated here. As can be seen, recruitment ranged from a very informal approach to more formal interview processes both of which involved gauging whether or not the applicant was the right sort of person for the job. The training in teaching skills experienced by these individuals was equally as varied. One recruit, the qualified primary school teacher, was left to get on with it, being trusted to carry on in her role with little direction from her managers. Meanwhile, the general studies lecturer recalled eventually taking part-time training at university level having been relied on to figure out much of his work by using his initiative. The third, a lecturer in science and technology, muddled through relying on his years of instructing evening school classes and working in the same factory as many of his students to develop his repertoire of teaching skills.

The recruitment and training of college staff at this point in time has been dismissed in the relevant literature for never having amounted to what was termed ‘*systematic provision for the recruitment or training of technical teachers*’ (BOE, 1944: p. 108) and has been described as suffering from long term ‘*benign neglect*’ (Guile and Lucas, 1999: p. 204). Nevertheless, with reference to recruitment, it can be argued that these processes were undertaken in good faith by many college leaders who were in search of individuals endowed with suitable personal qualities and orientations. Although these qualities were seldom made explicit they formed the basis for these individuals being put into roles as described above where they were trusted to carry out their duties using a considerable level of initiative and self direction based in their personal knowledge, shoulder responsibility for their groups of students, and impart their extensive know-how regarding a technical craft or academic discipline. In these circumstances, the college principal or head of department, perhaps in liaison with the LEA representatives, would pick out those candidates who in their opinion measured up to the job. It is necessary to note that in the best of circumstances this could be interpreted as an effective way to figure out in practice the tricky problem of finding a person who had the calibre to become a trustworthy colleague in their college. However, it has to be admitted that at worst, this process could degenerate into a form of cronyism in spite of the maxim from McNair that: ‘*The good technical teacher is no mere technician; he (sic) is also an interpreter of the modern world*’ (BOE, 1944: p. 108) reminding all those involved of the need for sound judgement in the recruiting and training of lecturers.

It is useful to try to clarify the nature of those particular qualities and orientations that were seen as important for all good teachers. Although still fuzzy, a baseline regarding these was set out in the McNair report:

*Happy is the teacher who has*

- a) *a general education which fits him to be a teaching member of an educational institution and makes him an acceptable colleague*
- b) *a high standard of knowledge of his subject or skill in his craft*
- c) *the ability to teach...*
- d) *an appreciation of the relation of his own subject to other realms of knowledge...the relation of the institution to other educational institutions and to society at large*

(BOE, 1944: p. 108)

Moreover, the technical teacher required a fifth skill:

- e) *‘an intimate acquaintance with his subject in its industrial or commercial setting...’*

(ibid., p. 108)

When it came to technical teachers in colleges, the fifth point was an important consideration but evidently did not apply to the more generalist teachers in Further Education such as the lecturer in general studies referred to above in section 3. Moreover, the elements on this list did not all have equal weighting nor were they all mandatory. Thus, someone lacking in the ability to teach was not necessarily barred from practising if judged as competent regarding the other areas. This may well have been the case with the initial recruitment of the lecturer in engineering in 1950 on a part-time basis because he knew the technical content of the syllabus thoroughly and worked in the industrial environment in which it was applied. Moreover, the nursery nursing lecturer noted how she did not have a portfolio of evidence to show the interview panel, but she was still appointed to the post. Commenting on these ad hoc arrangements and the apparently largely arbitrary administration of recruitment and training, Bristow is one commentator who has reported that outsiders have often condemned college staff in terms of being ‘*untrained men and women with [...] unheard of and outlandish qualifications of dubious value, engaged upon vocational work of an elementary nature*’ (1976: p. 3). Such criticisms that stated that college staff were unprofessional when compared with school teachers or university staff, have served to misinterpret the very purposes for which the members of staff in this era were recruited: to self-manage the high levels of autonomy they were expected to exercise in their everyday practice, to live up to the responsibility they had as tutors to induct the students as the next generation of craftspeople into the ways of the workplace as it operated locally and not least, to impart the necessary knowledge base pertaining to their field of expertise (Furlong et al, 2000; Robson, 1998; Venables, 1967).

### **What has this got to do with today’s FE lecturers and their training?**

This paper has put on record the experiences of some lecturers in the 1950s and 1960s regarding how they were recruited to the college and what was expected of them in their roles. Furthermore, alongside the narratives, some of the relevant national policy documents that were in circulation at the time have been introduced in order to give a clearer insight into the skill set that was considered necessary for technical teachers.

One of the key findings that has emerged from the above is the weight that was given to the qualities and orientations of lecturers over and above the formal qualifications that they held. More specifically those skill dimensions comprising tacit personal qualities, which often remained intangible during the course of the selection process, were very important assets that managers looked for in appointees and subsequently expected new recruits to draw on once they were in post. Nonetheless, it has been revealed that there was very little guidance or support

explicitly given to the new recruits. Thus, those who had the wherewithal to be creative within the very broad job frameworks handed to them by their managers employed their high levels of resourcefulness, initiative and the ability to think on their feet. As such, this autonomy apparently operated on a day-to-day basis within boundaries of accountability that were as tacit as the criteria illustrated above for appointing individuals to their posts.

Notwithstanding the widespread acceptance that enhancing professional standards in the FE sector is essential, are there any lessons or ideas that could be drawn from these narratives that could be of contemporary relevance? It could be argued that in the modern era we have become preoccupied with standardisation of provision and prescription of lecturers' activities (Finlay et al, 2007; Edwards et al, 2001) to meet nationally set benchmarks. Given the likelihood of stringent austerity throughout education sectors for some years to come, it may be that now is the time to make a reassessment of what are the essential qualities we should expect to be fostered by teacher training in the FE sector and, indeed, suggest that some of the orientations of the lecturers of yesteryear will, once again, become important. Further, it is necessary to question whether the extant structures of initial training and CPD are allowing new recruits to be recognised for being creative individuals (Baldamus, 1961). The above narratives have indicated that one creative dimension for which some members of staff were hired in years past was their fit to the local community, in other words, their insight regarding the local labour market faced by their students. In light of the contemporary emphasis on rolling out national regimes, particularly with regards to ITE, one issue that can be usefully learnt from the past relates to revitalising local dimensions of staff know-how. More specifically, how is it possible to engage and sustainably involve today's trainee FE practitioners with the local community in which their students live and where, eventually, the majority will find some form of employment?

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