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“You shouldn’t be disposable”: Trainee teachers in voluntary teaching posts: roles, rights and responsibilities

Ron Thompson and Lisa Russell

Consortium Annual Conference

Abstract

Trainee teachers in voluntary teaching post have diverse experiences that shape their teaching journey. Structural contexts related to teaching employment landscapes, education policy, institutional cultures and circumstances in addition to the trainee teacher’s own characteristics, motivations and personal situations all interact to affect how teachers train.

Research funded by the Education and Training Consortium aimed to explore how trainees, course tutors and other stakeholders viewed the learning experience of trainee teachers in voluntary teaching posts. Fieldwork was undertaken from December 2014 – May 2015. Data was collected from a questionnaire completed by centre managers and 25 semi-structured interviews with centre staff, current Year 2 volunteer trainees and mentors, plus two focus groups of trainee teachers. Volunteer teaching posts can often be successful and offer valuable resources to both the trainee and affiliated institution. However, the balance between a trainee teacher’s learning experiences, their role, responsibilities and rights in their voluntary teaching post, and their developmental needs must be carefully managed as these can have important implications for a trainee’s professional identity and prospects of completing the course.

Introduction

Initial teacher training for the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector is conventionally divided into in-service and pre-service routes (Avis, Fisher and Thompson 2015). Because a teaching qualification has never been a pre-requisite for entry to teaching in FE, it is possible to obtain paid teaching employment in a college or other provider and then train as a teacher by part-time study, using one’s teaching employment as the basis for ‘teaching practice’. This in-service route remains the dominant process by which FE teachers acquire teaching qualifications. For intending teachers who wish to train prior to entering a teaching post – or who cannot otherwise obtain paid teaching employment – pre-service routes, normally full time, are also available. Typically, pre-service trainees are provided with a teaching placement by the institution at which they study, and undertake ‘teaching practice’ on an unpaid basis to acquire their qualification. However, a less well-known route exists, occupying a grey area between in-service and pre-service routes. People who teach on a voluntary basis, with varying degrees of integration within the organisations where they teach but teaching without pay, may also access in-service programmes in FE. It is these volunteer trainees who form the focus of this paper.

The volunteer trainee route is not new, and for many years unpaid teaching has been accepted by providers of FE initial teacher training as a basis for undertaking an in-service programme. At one extreme, often associated with registered charities, these 'volunteer trainees' have been well-integrated into the organisation, occupying established teaching positions and enjoying considerable security and autonomy in their teaching role. Such trainees differ very little from paid teachers, and indeed may have greater security of tenure than teachers working on a part-time hourly paid basis. At the other extreme, however, unpaid teaching has been used as a substitute form of teaching placement, nominally transforming an essentially pre-service trainee into an in-service one but without necessarily acknowledging that the needs of this trainee are likely to be very similar to pre-service trainees following full-time courses. Increasingly, teacher training providers are finding that the meaning of volunteer trainee is shifting towards this second extreme, with more and more trainees needing to access training on this basis.

The reasons for this situation are varied, but particular pressures in recent years have stemmed from the combined effects of austerity, de-regulation and marketisation within FE and Skills and in higher education. Competition between providers of initial teacher training for the sector has been increasing for some time, but was offset during the years of Labour Government by a regulatory approach which, by requiring FE teachers to be trained, boosted overall trainee numbers – a 'plenty for everyone' scenario. However, in the period after 2010, this situation was destabilised by three factors: increased university tuition fees and (albeit implemented more slowly) changes to funding of FE students; removal of the requirement for FE teachers to acquire a teaching qualification; and cuts to FE funding that have affected the supply of untrained teachers. Overall, the effect of these factors has been considerably to reduce trainee numbers in the sector, leading some providers to withdraw whilst those remaining face intensified competition. Furthermore, for individual trainees the prospect of a full time course has looked more unpalatable financially, leading to increased motivation for new teachers to enter FE through a part-time route. Although part-time pre-service courses do exist, pressures to accept unpaid teaching as a basis for an in-service programme have undoubtedly increased.

Volunteer trainee teachers (trainee teachers who teach on an unpaid basis and not on a pre-service course) are present within a number of institutions across the FE and Skills sector in England (Robinson and Rennie, 2012). Yet very little is known about how these trainees, course tutors and other stakeholders perceive the quality of the learning experience gained by volunteer trainees. This paper is based on the experiences of volunteer trainees in one large provider, an FE-HE partnership led by a post-1992 university in the north of England. The partnership has had long-standing arrangements enabling volunteer trainees who teach in registered charities to access the in-service route, but four years before the research described in this paper had revised its policy to accept unpaid teaching taking place in any organisation, provided certain criteria relating to the quality of the trainee's experience were met. The paper reveals the spectrum of roles and responsibilities

experienced and negotiated by trainee teachers in voluntary teaching posts and the complexity of structural and individual variables that character the nature of a trainee teacher's experience. The success of a trainees experience has significant implications for how they develop their teacher identity and sense of professionalism.

The project

The project used a mixed methods approach with the aim of answering three key questions:

1. How do trainees, course tutors and other stakeholders perceive the quality of the learning experience gained by volunteer trainees?
2. What are the outcomes for volunteer trainees, in terms of access to the course, retention, achievement and employment?
3. How effective are the current support arrangements for trainees, and how might they be improved?

Phase one involved a questionnaire sent to all centre managers to elicit information on the Consortium's trainee cohort and the approaches taken within the centres. Phase two included 25 interviews across seven centres. This included 2 focus groups conducted with trainee teachers who were or had been in voluntary teaching posts; 6 semi-structured interviews with centre managers, 5 with mentors, 1 with a centre staff member who had been in a volunteer placement and 11 with year two volunteer trainees.

Phase 1 – findings from the questionnaire data

Responses were obtained from 14 centres. The total number of trainees across these centres was 618, of whom 162 were reported as volunteer trainees. Across the centres which responded, volunteer trainees therefore represent 26% of total trainee numbers.

The total number of volunteer trainees in the network is estimated to be 208 (see Appendix 1), so that the survey has obtained responses from centres which together account for 78% of volunteer trainees on the course. It is therefore likely that the responses obtained in the survey are broadly representative of the views and experiences relating to volunteer trainees of centre managers across the network.

An immediate conclusion at this stage of the project is that data on volunteer trainees should be collected systematically by the University at the point of entry to the course. This would require being able to identify volunteer trainees from their application form, enrolment form or other data collected on enrolment.

The breakdown of trainee numbers in centres which responded to the survey is shown in Table 1 below.

	Total number of trainees	Number of volunteer trainees	Proportion of volunteer trainees (%)
Cert Ed Yr1	129	44	34
Cert Ed Yr2	154	25	16
PGCE Yr1	142	53	37
PGCE Yr2	193	40	21
Total Cert Ed	283	69	24
Total PGCE	335	93	28
Total Yr1	271	97	36
Total Yr2	347	65	19

Table 1: Trainee numbers 2014-15

It can be seen that there is little difference between Cert Ed and PGCE in terms of the proportion of volunteer trainees. There *is* a substantial difference between the proportions of volunteer trainees for Year 1 and Year 2; possible reasons include:

- Year 2 contains a significant number of direct entrants with advanced standing. These may be more likely to have paid teaching employment.
- Some trainees in voluntary teaching employment in Year 1 may obtain paid teaching by the time they begin Year 2.
- Centres are seeing an increase in the numbers of volunteer trainees, which is likely to show up initially in Year 1 trainee numbers

The trend over the last few years was generally regarded as towards increasing numbers of volunteer trainees, particularly in Year 1. However, the extent of this increase varied across centres and some reported little or no increase. Several centres gave extended responses which drew attention to changes in the sector and in the economy more widely:

There is a trend towards more volunteer teachers on the course ... Most tutors in FE colleges are already qualified and so there is a smaller number of new employees who need teacher training at the moment. In a few years time there will be a lot of older tutors retiring so the situation might change. In the meantime a number of tutors have been made redundant as college funding is cut back and they are re-structuring and not taking on new staff or only a few.

Demographic analysis

Age

A number of centres were not able to provide an analysis of volunteer trainees by age. However, responses covering 97 volunteers were obtained, with the age distribution shown in Figure 1 below:

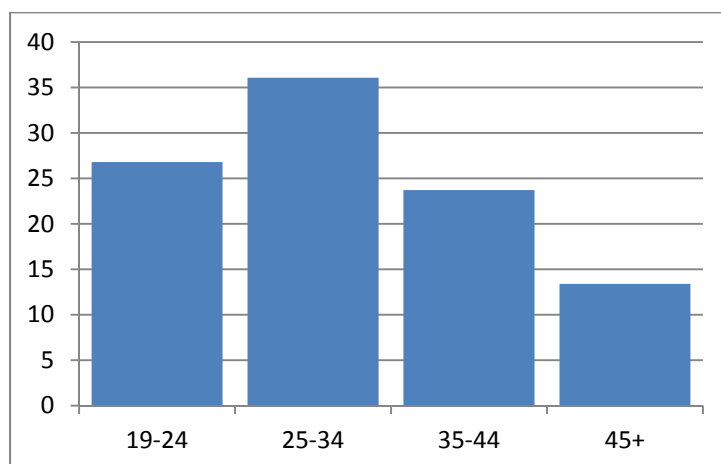


Figure 1: Age distribution of volunteer trainees (percentage based on N = 97)

Although there is clearly a skew towards younger trainees, there is a long ‘tail’ to the distribution and 13 of the 97 volunteer trainees were aged 45 or older. The volunteer trainee route therefore appears to be significant in terms of career change as well as career entry.

Ethnicity

As with age, data relating to ethnicity of volunteer trainees was incomplete but responses covering 107 volunteer trainees were obtained. Of these, 85% were White, 9% were of Asian background and 5% were of Black Caribbean or Mixed heritage. For trainees as a whole since 2011-12, the proportion of non-white trainees has been around 9-10%, suggesting that volunteer trainees are a little more likely to be from non-white backgrounds than trainees in paid teaching employment. The proportion of volunteer trainees who had declared a disability was approximately 6%, in line with non-volunteer trainees.

Disability

A total of 6 volunteer trainees were reported as having declared a disability in responses covering 13 centres and 150 volunteer trainees. One null response may have been incorrectly given, so this figure (4%) may be an underestimate; if accurate it would be somewhat lower than the Consortium average for in-service trainees who have reported disabilities (8-9% in the period 2011-14).

Previous teaching experience

Although the majority of volunteer trainees had no previous teaching experience, significant numbers had one or more years of teaching experience, as shown in Figure 2. As with age, the data for teaching experience covered 97 volunteer trainees.

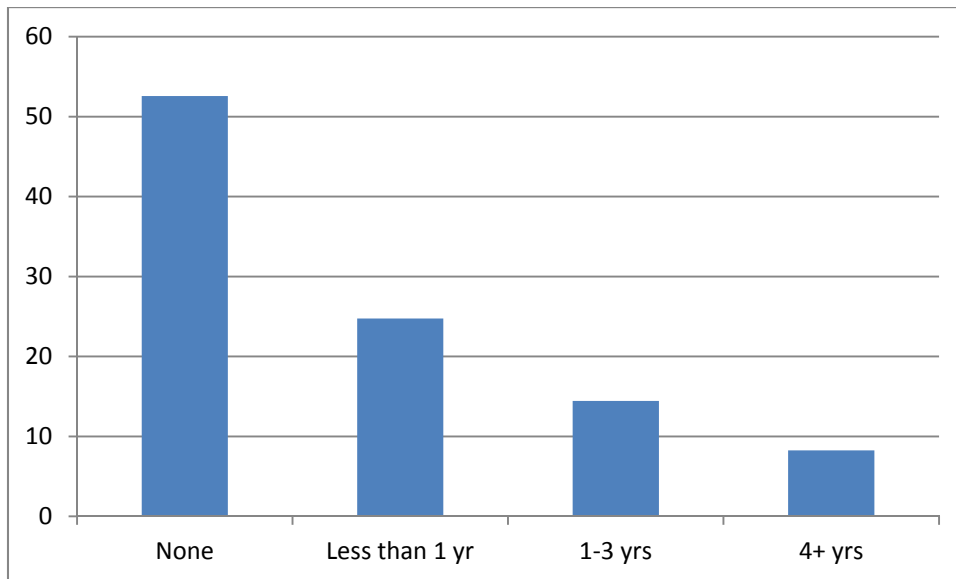


Figure 2: Distribution of the previous teaching experience of volunteer trainees (percentage based on N = 97)

Specialist teaching area

Again, data for 97 volunteer trainees were obtained (see Table 2). The distribution of these trainees across teaching subjects showed considerable variation, with the greatest concentrations in Beauty and Hairdressing; English, Communications and Expressive Arts; and Social Sciences and Humanities. Other subject areas strongly represented included Sport, Recreation and Leisure and Art, Design and Crafts. As might be expected – and reflecting the numbers for non-volunteer trainees – STEM subjects had relatively low numbers of volunteer trainees (a total of 8 out of the 97 volunteers covered by the data).

Subject Group	Number of Volunteer Trainees
Art, Design and Crafts	6
Beauty and Hairdressing	18
Business and Management	5
Construction	3
Engineering	1
English, Communications and Expressive Arts	13
Hospitality, Catering and Food Manufacture	1
ICT and Office Administration	3
Languages and TESOL	3
Learning Difficulties and Disabilities	2
Science and Mathematics	4
Social Sciences and Humanities	15
Sport, Recreation and Leisure	8
Other	15
Total	97

Table 2: Number of Volunteer Trainees by Subject Group

Policies on Volunteer Trainees

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the principle of accepting volunteer trainees onto the course. All 13 respondents who answered Q27, “In your opinion, should the existing University policy on volunteer trainees continue?” stated that it should continue, and in Q12 gave a number of key reasons why volunteer trainees are accepted (see Table 3). Some centres argued that admissions policy must be ‘employment blind’ in that any applicant meeting the admissions criteria must be considered on an equal basis, and this was no doubt implicit in the thinking of other centres.

Reason for accepting volunteer trainees	Number of centres citing this reason
Meeting recruitment targets	7
Developing new teachers for the organisation	7
Equality of opportunity with applicants without paid teaching	10
Supporting trainees who have lost paid employment	4
Other	2

Perhaps for this reason, only four centres out of 13 that responded to Q16 reported having specific support in place for volunteer trainees. Although this may be consistent with the ‘employment blind’ argument, other questions show that a significant number of centres do see differences between trainees in voluntary employment and those in paid teaching. In Q11, eight out of 12 respondents identified such differences. In some cases these were positive:

“on the whole they are more creative and dedicated and they seem to have more autonomy ...”

“Volunteers tend to also have a much closer relationship with their mentors”

Most responses, however, highlighted differences in the quality and quantity of background teaching and organisational experience that can potentially lead to differences in overall learning on the course:

“Differences refer primarily to the level of teaching experience, where volunteers are clearly far more inexperienced. Volunteers are also far less familiar with QA systems in their context (mainly FE)”

“Huge differences between these and the tutors that are working – those in work are much more confident during input sessions and draw on their current experience during discussions, the volunteers often are drawing on their own experiences as students rather than as teachers”

However, it is not necessarily clear that such differences are entirely due to the difference between volunteer and paid teaching employment, or depend rather on being new to teaching and/or on limited contracts (for example part-time hourly paid). As one centre put it:

They have more to learn as they are very new. However after a few months they are making excellent progress and I predict by the end of the year the difference will be less marked. They are new to planning and differentiation

Some anecdotal evidence across the Consortium suggests that the criteria to be met by ‘placements’ for volunteer trainees, which are contained in the Course Admissions Handbook (see Appendix 1), are not well understood. However, survey responses contradict this evidence, with the great majority of Centre Managers reporting both that they understand the criteria and that volunteer trainees do also. In each case, 12 out of 13 responses were positive and one was negative.

Quality of Learning Experience

Particularly with inexperienced trainees, learning to teach is about much more than practising teaching in a classroom with a group of students. The degree of responsibility trainees are given, the mentor support they receive, and the range of activities they become engaged in are all important, and contribute not only to the development of practical abilities but also to a trainee’s ability to make reflective use of their experience and to relate it to the theoretical components of the course. One centre manager outlined their approach but also the difficulties associated with providing volunteer trainees with a high-quality experience:

Where possible we wish them to be fully integrated into teams, but as most of the volunteer teachers have other jobs they can only commit to one day teaching in college so can't always attend staff meetings. They start by observing and work shadowing, then team teach and deliver parts of a lesson. Finally they take responsibility for delivering and assessing (with assistance) one or more units or modules.

As Figure 3 shows, all the volunteer trainees in the 13 centres responding to Q.15 were able to observe experienced teachers, but in two centres these trainees did not have the opportunity to teach in a fully independent capacity, as would normally be the case for an in-service trainee in paid employment. However, this perhaps reflects a trend in placements for pre-service trainees where pressures arising from external assessment and inspection regimes can limit the responsibility given to trainee teachers.

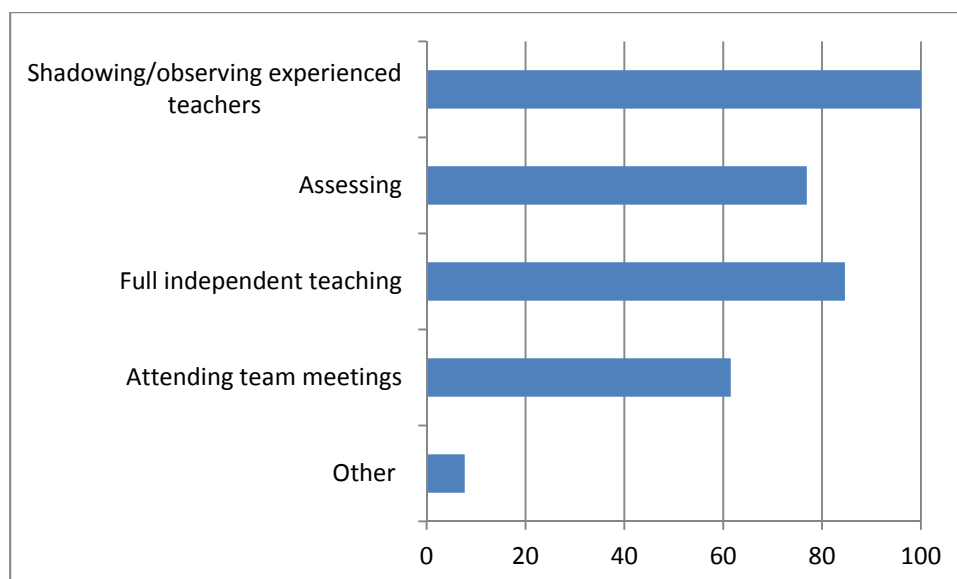


Figure 3: Percentage of centres reporting teaching opportunities for volunteer trainees

In three centres, volunteer trainees did not have the opportunity to carry out assessments of students – again reflecting difficulties with pre-service and even some in-service trainees, but a significant omission nevertheless. Finally, only eight of 13 centres reported that volunteer trainees were able to take part in broader professional activities such as team meetings, although one centre reported other activities such as project management had been undertaken by volunteer trainees.

The quality of mentoring is a perennial concern for initial teacher training courses in the FE and Skills sector (Hobson 2015), and problems with mentoring can arise for any trainee, not just volunteers. This was highlighted by one centre manager, who had experienced problems with mentoring for volunteer trainees, but ‘no more so than for paid trainees’. However, other centres reported that, where volunteer trainees are teaching outside mainstream FE colleges, cultural differences can exacerbate more general problems.

In certain cases in the private and voluntary sector general levels of mentorship can be insufficient. There have also been cases of volunteers being given low levels of priority and attention with regard to mentorship

In all, four centres out of 13 reported having experienced significant difficulties with the quality of mentoring for volunteer trainees. Nevertheless, 12 of these centres regarded the overall teaching experience available to volunteer trainees as largely of high quality, with only one centre reporting that this experience was often of low quality. One centre specifically attributed this to having ‘in-house’ placements for the majority of volunteer trainees, enabling them to ‘keep a close eye’ on the experience being gained by their volunteers. This strategy had also been adopted by another centre after having poor experiences in the past. However, this approach

does bring the in-service volunteer closer to being a pre-service trainee, as the implication of these statements is that centres are effectively finding placements for their volunteers.

Overall, the questionnaire responses support the view that, whilst the learning experiences of volunteer trainees can vary considerably, they are not fundamentally of poor quality. Although one centre manager reported that 'There have been occasional instances of volunteer trainees being used as free labour/teacher fodder with insufficient support of their development', the questionnaire responses do not give strong support to concerns about 'free labour' displacing paid tutors. Nevertheless, there is clearly potential for this kind of abuse of the volunteer trainee route.

Outcomes for Volunteer Trainees

In the context of this partnership, it is difficult to obtain a comprehensive picture of outcomes for volunteer trainees because the University does not hold information allowing volunteers to be identified in a statistical analysis of retention and achievement. For this reason, the questionnaire contained a number of items relating to trainee outcomes to enable centre managers to report their own experiences with volunteer trainees.

Half of the 12 centre managers who responded felt that retention and achievement of volunteer trainees were comparable with those in paid teaching, whilst five centre managers felt that these outcomes were worse for volunteers (one centre manager reported that these outcomes were better for volunteer trainees). However, the overwhelming majority of centre managers (11 out of 13) reported that grade profiles were comparable between volunteers and non-volunteers. This suggests that it is course completion, rather than the standards achieved by those completing the course, that needs to be addressed if outcomes for volunteer trainees are to be improved.

Figure 4 shows the proportion of centre managers reporting various reasons why volunteer trainees did not complete the course (more than one reason could be given).

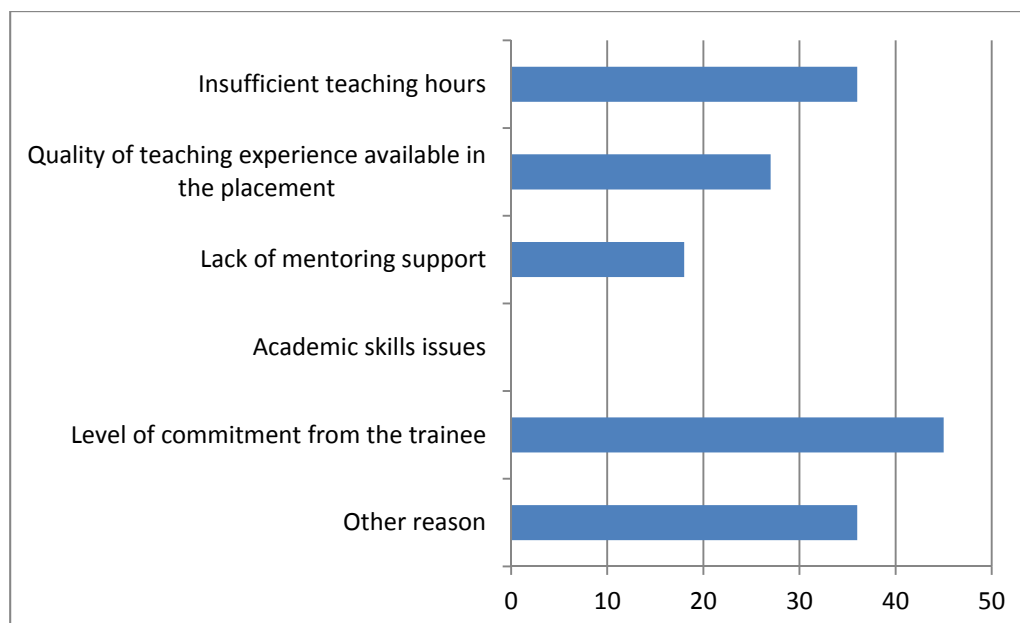


Figure 4: Percentage of centres reporting reasons for non-completion relating to volunteer trainees

Amongst the ‘other reasons’ given, two out of four were personal or health reasons that could also have arisen for non-volunteer trainees. One centre manager had experienced volunteer trainees with ‘unrealistic expectations’ who had dropped out early in the course. Another centre manager gave an example of one trainee who had moved from a volunteer role in Year 1 to paid teaching in Year 2:

I have recently experienced a previous trainee teacher who was originally volunteering in hairdressing within college in year one. In year 2 she secured paid employment within a school setting but the course was not purely hairdressing and as it was a level one there was not a lot of opportunity. Just this last year she obtained employment within a high profile academy to teach hairdressing but unfortunately she was ill prepared for this with regard to the amount of time that was required to put into planning, marking etc and she did not maintain the teaching role. She was asked to leave, after being observed twice and achieving a grade 3 on both occasions. In respects, due to her lack of experience she was not prepared for the teaching role.

Although an isolated instance, this example highlights the issues associated with range of experience that may be encountered by in-service trainees new to teaching, whether in unpaid or paid roles. It suggests that particular attention may need to be given to trainees (volunteer or otherwise) who take on new or expanded roles part-way through the course, as well as raising the question of how rigorously the course can prepare trainees in limited roles for full teaching employment in the future.

One of the key outcomes for trainees is the kind of employment they progress to on completion of their course. For paid in-service trainees, progression may take the form of greater confidence and/or responsibility in their existing role – or indeed,

greater job security – or moving on to more rewarding positions. In the same way, some volunteer trainees – particularly those working for registered charities – may well be happy to continue within their volunteer role. However, for many volunteers, progression to paid teaching is a key outcome. In this respect, volunteer teaching appears to provide a reasonable probability of success, with eight out of 10 centre managers reporting that more than half of their volunteers have obtained paid teaching employment in a full-time or substantial part-time capacity. Only one centre manager reported that it was rare for this kind of progression to be achieved.

Phase 2 – findings from the interview data

Why volunteer?

There is no ‘typical’ volunteer teacher (Robinson and Rennie, 2012). Each trainee has an individual background and different reasons for trying to enter the profession as a trainee or retain a position within it. The advent of volunteer posts has opened up opportunities to some trainees who may otherwise have been unable to find paid posts and consequently would not have entered the in-service course. Some trainees entered volunteer posts because there was no other option; others talk of the advantages of having less pressure and more support while in a volunteer role.

Sophia (a Spanish trainee) wanted to come to England to learn a new language and experience a different country’s education system. She now has a volunteer trainee placement teaching Spanish to AS level students but her initial qualification and experience was in primary education.

L R Why did you become a volunteer trainee? Did you try finding a paid placement?

S I think, for me, it wasn’t that easy to find a place where someone was going to pay me because I am studying as well so I didn’t have an option.

L R Do you have experience in primary schools as well?

S Yeah. I got my degree from a primary school. I’ve tried to find a job but without experience in England they won’t let me work as a teacher. I’ve been with five different agencies and they told me that I need six months experience in England teaching primary. I couldn’t find any voluntary placement as a primary teacher.

L R Have you come over from Spain?

S Yeah.

L R And you were taught in Spain.

S I did, like, my volunteer work with my degree so I didn't actually work as a teacher being paid.

L R Why did you move over here?

S Well I finished my degree and I was living with my parents and I just decided to learn a new language so I moved to England.

Tilly on the other hand preferred to embrace a volunteer trainee teaching placement so that she could gain a higher level of support, at a time in her life where she has a young family and childcare responsibilities.

L R Can you tell me what your role is as a volunteer trainee?

T I'm in my second year of doing it now and I've been in three different roles while I've been doing it.

L R In the same institution?

T No, I've moved into a secondary school now. I was at the Oakfield College all last year and just before Christmas I started at a secondary school.

L R Have there been any differences?

T Well when I was in Oakfield College it was pretty much my mentor who was the tutor and I would sit with him and, for a month or so, I would just observe and have mentor meetings and eventually I started taking over his lesson and then I was left to my own devices. September to October I was being paid so it was no longer voluntary and that was in the art department at Oakfield College and now, in my secondary school, I'm teaching design and technology and graphics. I'm teaching over a lot of different subjects so I am with a lot of different teachers.

L R So you're leaving a paid post to become a volunteer.

T I was a volunteer for a year and I was paid for a month and I'm a volunteer again.

L R How did that work? Why did you get paid for a month?

T I did it through Protocol at Oakfield College and I've got a little girl and I'm on my own and so I was trying to work it that way but it was costing me more money and it just wasn't worth it because I wasn't supported in the same way as an NQT would be. If I ever asked a question they made me feel that I was bothering them so I just thought there was too much stress involved in this and I'd rather be in a position where I am supported and can

get the most out of it which is what I'm getting at the minute and I'm really happy where I am.

L R So, in a volunteer placement, you feel that you are seen differently within the institution.

T Yeah. When I was in Oakfield College initially I was a kind of dogsbody and I would get given the students that they didn't want to work with and who needed that extra support. I saw that as a challenge and I knew what they were doing but I was finding the positives in it. Whereas now I'm fully taking over lessons and the teachers are being my assistants and they are really working with me and I've got a head of department who is now my mentor and I work with two other teachers and then I have my main mentor who is the assistant head who runs all the NQTs and she has me in for meetings and she wants to find out exactly what my qualifications are and she's put me in all different lessons right across the school so I can get as much experience as possible.

Here Tilly explicitly acknowledges the possibility of volunteer trainees being exploited, but is willing to 'trade off' this possibility against the opportunities the placement provides. Moreover, not all trainees equated volunteer posts with higher levels of support; some thought quite the opposite.

Paul I think that if they are getting paid by the institution then the institution is probably more organised with them and more supportive because they are actually putting an investment in them.

All trainee teachers, staff, mentors and managers expressed the importance or support with many deeming this the most important factor that if present effectively can make the post and experience for both the trainee and institution a success.

L R In your opinion what makes a volunteer trainee placement a success?

"Being supported by your placement"

"Being treated equally as the paid employees"

"Being able to put what you are learning into action"

"Showing all aspects of it and not just the nice aspects"

(Focus Grp 1)

In accordance with Huberman's (1989, 1993) renowned teacher's life cycle model, the vast majority of the trainee teachers were positioned in the first of three periods. Huberman describes this first phase as the 'novice' phase, whereby the primary concern is survival and clarifying the tasks of teaching and learning.

Trainees are expected to be highly motivated, open to new pedagogical practices and constructive feedback and must be excellent communicators. So it is not altogether surprising to learn that support matters. The type, duration and consistency of that support is also significant, and how supported one feels may be shaped by the quality of their teaching and learning experience within the placement institution (in addition to their mentor).

Perceptions of the volunteer trainee

How a volunteer trainee was perceived by staff and students alike seemed to be linked to how they viewed their own status and identity within their trainee teaching post. Increased time in an institution seemed to help the trainee feel a sense of belonging to a particular institution, which in turn had a positive effect on their professional identity. Identity in this context can be theorised as a social process which can be examined as participation in the community's or teaching posts institutions actions. How integrated a trainee felt impacted upon their sense of belongingness and their feelings of authority, responsibility and status. Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1999) refer to *communities of practice*, which in this case refers to the trainee's collegiate networks and sense of professionalism within their teaching institution. It is important that the trainee can gain knowledge about the institution's culture, practices and beliefs (Korhonen and Toma, 2014). Ability to participate in the collective experience of the host institution is vital (Wenger, 1999) – and this ability appears to be related to the quality of support trainee teachers are given, in addition to their own personal characteristics. A trainee teacher's identity formation goes hand in hand with their teaching journey – the two processes run alongside one another, each informing the other. Volunteer trainees tended to gain fewer hours of teaching experience, which was deemed in some instances as detrimental to how they were viewed as teachers and how the volunteers perceived themselves.

L R Did you feel that you had to justify what you were doing and who you were?

Beatrice Always. I had to constantly get my card out and say that I was a member of staff. I got asked to leave the staff room once! I'd never been spoken to like that and I didn't know how to respond to it and I said that actually I am a tutor here but I'm a trainees tutor. I didn't have any confidence in challenging this man ... *Once you're in the classroom you are the teacher and you have to step up and do it otherwise you've lost them (the students), but once you are on the corridor or in the staff room you're a volunteer.* So I just did my hours and that was it even though now we will say to the volunteers that they've got to be a lot more involved in the organisation but that is asking a lot of people's time (emphasis added).

Tales of not knowing the way things were done within a certain institution were present amongst some volunteer trainees. In addition to this being paid did impact on some trainee's feelings of being able to control and exert authority with regards

to students. With those describing how once they were paid they felt more able to exert independence, wield authority and exercise control. Knowing where things are, who to ask for help and having a 'space' to be within an institution also mattered. One of the centre managers reiterates this point.

LR How do you think other staff members within the placement view volunteer trainees? Are they known to be volunteers?

CM 1 Yeah because they don't have access to the photocopier; they don't have a key to the cupboards; they don't have a desk; they are very much like part-time teachers or agency staff but on less favourable terms.

However not all trainees experienced this. For those that felt supported and connected their placement was deemed highly successful for both the trainee and the institution. As the trainee's confidence and ability grows so too does their independence and sense of teacher identity. The institution gains extra support, fresh personality and ideas, and in some cases a fertile 'home-grown' growing ground for potential future employees. Applicants who are knowledgeable about the institution's structure, culture and ways of doing things are often deemed favourable, a safer option than an unknown candidate. Indeed in some instances this was described as a chance for the institution to see potential employees in action before making a true commitment to them by making them employed members of staff.

A volunteer trainee's rights

Many volunteer trainees felt that they had just as much responsibility as paid members of staff. For some less responsibility was a bonus and meant less paperwork and more time to spend 'learning' how to teach.

L R Can you say what it means to be a volunteer trainee and what it is that you actually do?

I'd say as a volunteer you get to spend a lot more time with the students and working on practical aspects of the course than I find I do now that I'm being paid because of all the extra planning and things you've got to do because if you are shadowing a teacher they do all the planning and the paperwork part of it. I found a lot of the things that they do on a daily basis, like paperwork and things, you don't get to see that part of it because it is the main teaching thing that you do. So when I got my paid position I wondered what this form or that form was for even though I'd done two years of voluntary teaching. It's sometimes quite confusing when you get into a paid position.

(Focus Grp 1)

Others at the same centre felt that they had the same level of responsibility but less authority which impacted upon their ability to conduct classroom management strategies effectively.

L R It might be to do with that. Is there any aspect that you didn't enjoy about being a volunteer?

Just not being paid!

If we are doing as good a job as a paid person but not being paid then that isn't great.

Because I am doing all the paperwork and everything because I have got to get my apprenticeship through this course.

I think it is a big thing not getting paid.

When I'm teaching here the lesson is only one and a half hours but I spend all week preparing for it and worrying about how to control the students because they are sixteen year olds and I've not been in this situation before and that's difficult.

L R Is that to do with volunteering or just getting used to //

For this one and being here as a volunteer I don't have access to the register and I don't even have a pass to get into the classroom so I don't feel as though I've got any authority so when I've got this class of fourteen students who are all screaming and shouting and jumping on chairs and banging things //

Yeah it's like you're trying to keep them under control and tell them what to do when you feel like they are going to turn round and say 'why do I have to listen to you? You're not a teacher!'

L R So they know that you are volunteering?

Yeah.

(Focus Grp 1)

In some instances the students and indeed other staff members appeared not to be aware of the trainee teacher's volunteer status. For some this was an individual decision consciously made to help ascertain their professional status, for others it was simply how they were introduced to other staff members and students within the institution. Yet despite these overt or indeed covert volunteer identities these trainees had to manage, their rights were not the same as a paid trainees or employed member of staff. For some this was a real issue that compromised the security of their placement, with some describing themselves as 'disposable' or

'insecure'. In addition to a trainee's volunteer identity, their level of responsibility and sense of belonging whether or not they get paid has serious implications for them in terms of their employee/volunteer rights.

L R Are there any other issues that you think are important regarding the training of volunteers or placements and processes?

I haven't had a bad experience but I know some people did because you had a bit of trouble last year so what would you say needs to be done?

I think more protection for volunteers so that they can't get rid of you as they please. If they agree to take you on for a certain time then they should be held to that.

L R So some policy or law in place so you do have some rights as a volunteer.

A bit like the unfair dismissal thing but in a voluntary capacity. I got my placement taken away from me last year for something that I didn't do.

L R What happened?

Well, basically, I worked in another salon and I had a placement here and I also work as self-employed and one of the people in the hairdressing department here took over the salon that I'd been working in for eight years and we didn't get on and so I left but she knew the head of the hair and beauty department at the college and she said that I'd done this and done that which was all lies and without the head of the department asking me for my side of it they just took my placement away. I complained and I got a letter of apology because she didn't do things properly.

L R So it's about rights and responsibilities because you want a certain degree of responsibility but not too much and, as a volunteer, you feel you should have certain rights.

You shouldn't be disposable.

If something goes wrong.....

The lady who took over the salon knew about this because everybody had got their placements and I lost mine after about three months and I was frightened that I wouldn't get another one because everybody was in a placement.

L R What did they say here about all that?

They just apologised and said that she should have asked me my side of it. They did offer to give me a placement but in Drumsberry rather than Roselands and that wasn't practical for me.

There have been a couple of people who have had to leave the course because they lost their placements.

(Focus Grp 1)

However (in retrospect) some thrive on this, view it as a test of resilience, a skill developed, being able to manage in the unknown and unpredictable territory that is the world of teaching.

L R Do you think the fact that you did volunteering shaped that pathway?

Beatrice I talk to trainees about it now and I say what was really good about that time was that I was doing so many different things and I think, at one point, I even did aerobics and nutrition out in the community just to get my hours up. I'd just moved to Roselands from the South and I got married and moved up with my husband because we'd met in university and we had this romanticised image of the north that it was going to be wonderful and we came to Roselands and thought 'wow what was this?' I quickly got myself onto a course and I didn't know at that time that the pre-service in the university existed. I just thought that I needed to do a part time course in order to be able to teach and I initially contacted Beadley College and they said find yourself some hours. So I contacted what was then Roselands Technical College and they said that they did a course there and so it happened in that way. But I do tell trainees that my experience was so diverse that what happened was that, in the end, you could have put me anywhere – with hairdressers or construction students – and I probably would have been able to have done something. So it's made me a lot more flexible.

L R And resilient maybe.

B Yeah. The things I learnt in those first few years and I had to go and cover a GCSE English group who were teenagers and they were just so resistant to me and I just felt that I could do this and if I do it well it could bring in more work. I would never think ahead to what is going to happen in five years or where next month's money is going to come from. So it probably has paved the way in some sense because being at my last place of employment where I was for nine years and leaving there to go to nothing was a huge risk and then there was this memory that I've been here before and it will be alright. Yes it will be hourly paid but I will have variety and a breadth of different organisations and different teams so I will never be bored. And there is creativity as well in the chaos in the way that there isn't where you're in a secure job. It's about your working pattern and in teacher ed. our working patterns are so different especially with online portfolios and sometimes

the only time you can mark it is on a Sunday afternoon or late night on a Friday when the children are in bed. I can't believe I'm saying this but you've really made me think about it and that it's almost more enjoyable doing it this way even though it can be chaotic and there's lots going on.

L R Do you think employers view it in any kind of positive or negative ways?

B My assumption is that it's viewed as someone who is a bit non-committal who has done bits of this and bits of that. That's the really cynical view but, on the other hand, I think employers might think that this is someone who is quite adaptable and who has done lots of different things and you can only do lots of different things if you are part time because when you are full time you don't have the room.

Conclusions

The volunteer trainee has several different identities to manage within a field that is highly unpredictable. They are a volunteer, but not in the traditional sense; they usually undertake a volunteer post for instrumental reasons and not altruistic motives. They may lack the material and other forms of capital necessary for 'volunteering' to take on its traditional meaning. They may have little choice other than to take on a position with no pay, yet without the same securities and support mechanisms as a conventional pre-service trainee would feel entitled to. Nevertheless, they *are* trainees, learning their trade, with some further along this continuum (between trainee and teacher) than others.

Other identities further complicate matters. The volunteer trainee is also a teacher who engages in various roles and has varying degrees of responsibility and independence. They are a mentee, each having a different individual experience again with this relationship and they are an individual striving for professional status. There are many interacting variables at the individual level (personal circumstances, mentor/mentee relationship, personal motivation, 'other' staff support), the institution (support available, political climate), associated higher education institutions and wider political and policy contexts (how FE and HE are positioned and resourced, RPA) that interact to make each and everyone's 'journey' different. Like pre-service trainees, volunteer trainee teachers appear to occupy a shifting space in which the way in which the volunteer is viewed within the institution – most importantly by teachers and managers but also by students and other stakeholders – affect the opportunities they are given, the roles and responsibilities they take on, and their rights as a volunteer/unpaid trainee tutor.

It is clear from the data that the volunteer trainees in our research have a great deal of commitment and resilience, enabling them to transcend the difficulties and complexities of their situation. Together with the work of their tutors, this perhaps explains why the outcomes reported by centre managers are not greatly different from those of other trainees. Nevertheless, retention does seem to be a significant issue, meaning that the less resilient trainees are 'screened out' at an early stage.

Some centre managers felt that a rigorous and coherent induction process would help in this respect, ensuring that although trainees progress at different rates all are aware of the challenges facing them, their responsibilities and the degree of support and security they might expect.

In spite of the difficulties inherent in accepting 'volunteer' trainees into an in-service programme, most of the centres who took part in this research supported the continuation of this policy – at least in principle. Whether some of the issues raised in this paper can be effectively addressed is another matter, which perhaps requires a more explicit acknowledgement that an essentially pre-service cohort has been created within an in-service programme. This is not to say that there is a disjunction between the needs of conventional in-service trainees and volunteers, but that the continuum in experience, security and support that inevitably exists has been re-balanced in a way that makes increasing numbers of trainees vulnerable to a marginalised experience. Perhaps the key starting point is to make these trainees more visible: through more rigorous monitoring of course outcomes for trainees, both at whole course and local level; and by explicitly addressing the issue of role, rights and responsibilities with trainee *and* host institution.

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