

From the archive: Initial teacher education (ITE) – then and now

Melanie Norman

To celebrate the many years that Margaret Roberts has been associated with the GA Teacher Education Working Group (TEWG, now TESIG (Teacher Education Special Interest Group)) I looked back to see when the TEWG was first established. Margaret was a founder member, and although in October 2018 she decided to withdraw from the group after more than thirty years of service, I am happy to say she has agreed to remain a corresponding member.

Although I could find no record of the establishment of the TEWG, while trawling the GA archive I found a report of a 1993 TEWG conference entitled 'Issues and Challenges for ITE in Geography' (TEWG, 1993) which was a fascinating read. This article reviews the issues being discussed in 1993 and asks questions regarding the situation twenty-seven years later.

Brian Ellis (University of Warwick) chaired the conference; many of the participants are still well-known names in the geography ITE community. They are listed below as they were identified in the conference report:

- Andrea Tapsfield, Ofsted
- Bill Marsden, Liverpool University
- Nick Foskett, Southampton University
- David Lambert, Ian Flintoff, Peter Hillman, London Institute of Education
- Margaret Roberts, University of Sheffield
- Jim Moore, Liverpool Institute of Higher Education.

The conference comprised primary and secondary phase workshops. Most of the people named above participated in the secondary workshops. Participants in the primary workshops are not named, but details of the primary sessions can be found in the full report. In his summary of the primary workshops Brian Ellis noted that they had identified

... a number of issues which should be drawn to the attention of the Geographical Association, in that they affect the future of geography teaching in the primary school. (p. 19)

As well as concerns about the impact on geography ITE of the recently introduced National Curriculum (NC), the conference raised concerns about the suggested changes to ITE in Circular 9/92 (DfE, 1992):

... schools should play a much larger part in ITT as full partners of higher education institutions (p. 2).

It goes on:

Schools will have a leading responsibility for training students to teach their specialist subjects, to assess pupils and to manage classes; and for supervising students and

assessing their competence in these respects. HEIs will be responsible for ensuring that courses meet the requirements for academic validation, presenting courses for accreditation, awarding qualifications to successful students, and arranging student placements in more than one school. (p. 4, paragraph 14)

The impact of these changes is still being felt today.

Andrea Tapsfield opened the conference by outlining Ofsted's perspective on ITE after the 1992/93 round of inspections. Her session, 'The Developing Agenda: Challenges and Opportunities for ITE in geography', covered these topics:

- the quality of initial teacher training in geography
- the impact of the National Curriculum on initial teacher training
- partnerships for training.

It is interesting that Ofsted refers to 'initial teacher training' whereas the conference title uses the term 'initial teacher education'. A summary of Andrea's points on these three aspects can be seen in Figure 1 and her concluding remarks in Figure 2.

Melanie reviews ITE issues raised in 1993 and compares them to the current situation.



Accompanying online materials

Figure 1: Summary of Andrea Tapsfield's points (pp. 1–3).

The quality of ITT in geography

- secondary PGCE courses 'generally good'
- primary phase training 'at least satisfactory'

The impact of the National Curriculum on initial training

- some HEIs allocate 'more time to geography in primary courses'
- most new teachers, both primary and secondary, 'feel comfortable with the National Curriculum in their specialist areas'
- assessment is 'repeatedly noted as a weak area of training ... basic understanding of formative and summative assessment techniques and marking are rarely well taught'
- there is only 'limited emphasis to cross-curricular skills and dimensions'.

Partnerships for Training

- Circular 9/92 requires 'all secondary courses to be school-based'
- 'the best geography providers have always worked closely with schools, particularly in curriculum development'
- 'schools involved in training partnerships see professional development as an important benefit'
- for many HEI geography tutors 'a major problem is the isolation the job can impose' as they are one-person departments. Every geography mentor should 'contributed to at least one "taught" session'
- a challenge for all partnerships is finding time for subject teachers and mentors to meet to 'agree the rational and approach they should adopt'

My comments today have been more optimistic for secondary than primary training in geography. I do not apologise for that. It reflects both the strength of subject specialism in schools and the development of the subject within teacher education. For secondary trainers, partnerships with schools offer both challenge and opportunity. Several schemes are established and some are operating well, with geographers in the forefront. I certainly would like to hope that these emerging partnerships are the seedbeds of future geography curriculum development in secondary schools.

For primary training, the revised criteria and the new proposals will bring changes. I hope that courses where geography is currently weak might be strengthened by the addition of specialist staff either in HEI or schools. If the opportunities are taken to include the subject in the new alternative routes it could lead to better coverage of the subject and improved depth of training. However, the future of geography appears to rest in the hands of course designers whether in HEI or schools. It could either be marginalised or grow in importance. There is much for geography teacher trainers to fight for. My main cause for optimism in primary training is the positive response to the GEST initiative which has revitalised primary geography in some quarters. The geographers who have been involved could provide the foundation for future developments under new ITT arrangements. (p. 5)

Figure 2: Andrea Tapsfield's conclusion (p. 5).

The secondary workshops comprised examples of PCGE courses from the London Institute of Education, the University of Sheffield, Liverpool Institute of Higher Education and the University of Southampton. These are the issues they identified (my emphases):

- Teachers are **reluctant to commit time to training**; they see their role as teaching children
- **Reflective practice** underpins ITT courses but is **not an accepted practice in schools**
- Schools exhibit a **limited range of teaching styles** – this may conflict with the concept of entitlement of experience that student teachers might have
- What mechanisms exist for 'failing' students?
- The resource transfer to schools means **fewer tutor visits**. What will be the consequence of this development?
- Need to **retain the involvement of HEI in ITT** to ensure teaching is recognised as a profession, and is supported in training by an informed perspective based on research
- How will geographical education be led if the role of HEIs disappears?

The workshops produced a number of recommendations:

- 1 Coherence** between HEI and partner schools in terms of provision of experiences and shared philosophical perspective must be ensured through:
 - student entitlement, specified through minimum contact time with mentors and the range of student experiences
 - quality control systems in place to ensure experiences in one school match those in another.
- 2 Training** of school-based supervisors in the training of teachers and in the teaching of geography; also in the area of competence-based assessment.

- 3 Use of resources** – buying timetable time for mentors.
- 4 Operational issues** – the need for students to undertake fieldwork teaching with students. The need for the HEI base to retain a substantial range of teaching reference resources.
- 5 Partnership and Curriculum Development** – with the demise of substantial INSET work and the decline of advisory services within LEAs there is a clear recommendation that the groups developing ITT curricula might well be an effective focus for wider curriculum development work in schools.

Where are we now?

If you are involved with teacher training via any route into teaching, the following questions (Figure 3) might form the basis for a dialogue between students training to teach, HEI departments involved with ITE and those responsible for training subject specialist geographers via school-based routes.

The most significant issue in today's secondary ITE provision would seem to relate to question 7 in Figure 3: Where does the specialist subject training fit into the various training routes?

- 1** Are teachers reluctant to commit to teacher training?
- 2** Is there evidence of reflective practice in schools?
- 3** Is there a limited range of teaching styles in schools?
- 4** Are HEI tutor placement visits very limited?
- 5** Do you see your students teaching their specialist subject?
- 6** Is school-based training informed by evidence-based research?
- 7** Are school-based supervisors geography subject specialists?
- 8** Do students have opportunities for undertaking fieldwork with school students?
- 9** Are there opportunities for curriculum development?

Figure 3: Where are we now? What has changed?

Enquiry is an accepted approach to teaching in science subjects and history as well as geography. Planning activities that engage and motivate students is a requirement for all subjects. However, as David Lambert (2007) has said, teaching is not a 'pedagogic adventure'; it must be based on subject-specific knowledge and understanding. It is doubtful that this need is adequately addressed in the myriad of QTS routes, especially SCITTs, where there may only be one or two students who have geography as a subject specialism, though this is an issue for other subjects too. Andrea Tapsfield's research for the GA (2015) revealed:

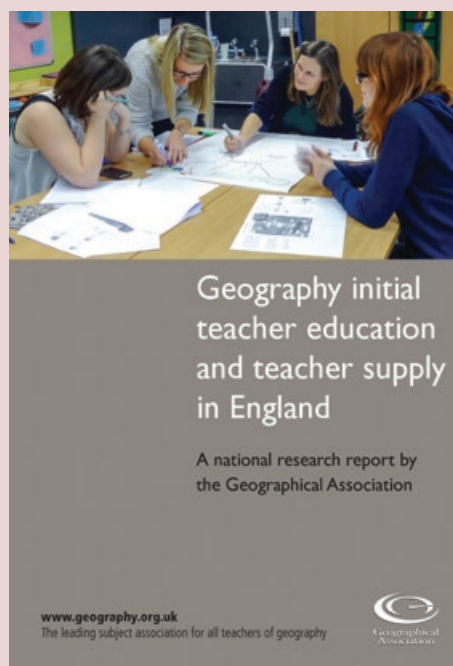


Figure 4: Research on geography initial teacher education and teacher supply from the GA.

The evidence in geography ITE is that the amount of subject-specialist input is very variable. Some school-led partnerships rely heavily on generic training because they have not secured the expertise of an ITE geography leader. (p. 3)

The 2018 update (Tapsfield, 2018) (Figure 4) revealed little change:

... some providers, in both universities and SCITTs, continue to accredit School Direct training in geography without the oversight of a geography specialist. These schemes focus on generic training and rely on geography mentors having the capacity in terms of time

and expertise, to provide trainees with a good grounding in subject-specific pedagogy it is a concern that such training may lack depth and scholarship and might fail to provide challenging training or encourage reflective practice. (pp. 2–3)

However, as Margaret Roberts (2010) points out, it is easy to see why geography lessons may not prioritise subject knowledge: only one of the eight Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) refers to subject knowledge. With this in mind, another question for discussion is whether it matters if the ITE curriculum places more importance on aspects of classroom practice rather than geography subject knowledge? | **TG**

References

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Online resources

The 1993 TEWG conference report is available to download. Go to www.geography.org.uk/Journals/Teaching-Geography and select Summer 2020.

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