The findings of the ESCalate study on teacher educators’ induction into Higher Education.

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Summary

The research study reported in this paper was originally commissioned by ESCalate as part of its agenda for developing induction support for pre-service teacher educators. The study aimed to collect and analyse examples of the practices used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in inducting initial teacher educators into Higher Education (HE) work, and to identify and analyse induction provision from the perspectives of a sample of New Teacher Educators (NTEs). The study found that most induction provision occurs within teacher education departments, often at the micro levels of the teaching or subject team. The paper discusses the findings with particular references to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concepts of legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice. The conclusion draws on the study as a whole to suggest guidelines for good practices in teacher educator induction.

Keywords

Teacher Educators / induction to Higher Education / teacher education / communities of practice.

Introduction

There have been a number of recent developments by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to support teacher educator induction. Nevertheless, New Teacher Educators (NTEs) are an under-researched and poorly understood occupational group (John, 1996; Murray, 2002; Davison et al., 2005) whose induction needs in making the transition from schools to Higher Education (HE) have not yet been fully explored.

The research study reported in this article was originally commissioned by ESCalate – the Education Subject Centre within the Higher Education Academy (HEA) - as part of its agenda for developing induction support for teacher educators and other academics involved in working on education courses. The study aimed to investigate what might constitute good practice in the induction of teacher educators new to HE-based Initial Teacher Education (ITE) or pre-service work. This included the aim to produce for ESCalate an up to date account of current practices in the induction of new teacher educators. The project was designed to be investigative in nature, and to draw on a wide range of knowledge and expertise about induction practices within teacher education and the Higher Education (HE) sector. The objectives of the study were: to collect, analyse and collate examples of the
practices used by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in inducting initial teacher educators into HE work; to identify and analyse induction provision from the perspectives of a sample of NTEs; and to draw on the findings to suggest guidelines for good practices in teacher educator induction.

In this paper a brief review of relevant literature is followed by the methodological details of the ESCalate study. I then give an overview of the main findings of the study. (Fuller details of these findings can be found by referring to the study as published on the ESCalate website.) I then discuss the implications of the findings, particularly the fact that most induction provision seems to occur through non-formal learning within teacher education departments, often at the micro levels of the teaching or subject teams. I draw on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concepts of legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice and on some recent critiques of these ideas (see, for example, Fuller et al., 2005) to analyse the findings. Finally, I draw on the study as a whole to suggest guidelines for effective induction into HE.

Literature review

Teacher educators as academics

Teacher educators teaching on ITE courses in English HEIs are nearly always qualified school teachers, with considerable experience of teaching and of middle or senior management in the school sector. Entering HE they bring with them a wealth of professional knowledge and expertise accrued through school teaching. In the English teacher education system this is often the main reason for their recruitment, and it is frequently a major source of professional credibility during their early years in the university sector (Maguire, 1994; Murray, 2002). In making the career transition to HE they encounter the practices, norms and expectations of academic work, as instantiated in the settings of the teacher education departments of their universities or Colleges of Higher Education (CHEs).

Most new academics enter HE with very high levels of knowledge in their subjects or disciplines – typically gained through study for a PhD - but limited experience of teaching. In contrast, NTEs are a unique type of academic for two reasons: firstly, they enter HE with high levels of teaching expertise, albeit expertise gained in a different sector of education; secondly; they often enter HE without doctoral level qualifications in education, or other sustained experience of research and publication processes.

Induction support: making the transition from school to HE

Previous studies of new teacher educators in a number of anglophone countries (see Murray, 2005; Acker, 1996; Ducharme, 1993; Sinkinson, 1997; Hatt, 1997; Nicol, 1997) have identified that, while the transition between school teaching and HE work may look like a small shift of occupation and setting to the casual observer of education, individuals often experience the change as challenging and stressful. Many teacher educators have difficulties
in adjusting to the academic expectations of HE-based teacher education work (Ducharme, 1993). Uncertainty about the exact nature of their new professional roles (Wilson, 1990), finding it difficult to adjust to the pedagogical skills needed to work with adult learners (Kremer-Hayon and Zuzovsky, 1995; DES, 1987), and concerns about the adequacy of their professional and academic knowledge bases necessary for HE work (Kremer-Hayon and Zuzovsky, 1995) have all been identified as areas of tension in previous studies.

In a study of teacher educator professionalism (Murray, 2002) all teacher educators with less than three years experience of HE work were found to have similar professional biographies and attributes; these teacher educators were defined as *Novices* in a typology of teacher educators. This type constructed a model of professionalism termed *practitioner bond professionalism* in which the experience of school teaching was central. For these teacher educators, professional credibility centred on their identities as ex-school teachers, and they had strong senses of responsibility and commitment to the school sector. In a later study (Murray and Male, 2005:136-137) we argued that NTEs are positioned as the *expert become novice* in terms of their expertise for teaching in HE (because of their past teaching experience in schools), and as the *novice assumed to be expert* in terms of engaging in research activity (because, as previously stated, few pre-service teacher educators in England enter HE with established research profiles). We then identified two key and symbiotic areas for professional development during induction: developing pedagogy for HE work, and building on past scholarly activity in school teaching to develop personal research / scholarship profiles as academics.

Previous research on NTE induction in England over a period of forty years has identified that formal HE induction structures for this group of academics have often been very limited (Taylor, 1969; DES 1987; Maguire, 1994; Sinkinson 1997). Most induction is assumed to take place through informal (what Eraut, 2000 terms ‘non-formal’) work-based learning on an apprenticeship model, often characterised as ‘sitting by Nelly’ (Wilson, 1990). Such informal learning is seen as inadequate and often ad hoc. One of the induction issues identified in the sources quoted above is the assumption that knowledge and understanding of teaching acquired in the school sector can be ‘transferred’ to HE with few problems. Some studies have identified that generic institutional induction structures for new academics need to be more consistent, and tailored to the specific needs of teacher education (see, for example, Wilson, 1990; Sinkinson, 1997).

This perceived inadequacy of formal induction structures – and the de-emphasising of the potential of non-formal learning - may be placed within the context of the overall devaluation of pedagogical skills in British HE until the publication of the Dearing Report in 1997 (see NCIHE, 1997). This report identified the need for more focus on pedagogy across the whole of the HE sector, including better induction procedures for new academics. Since this date, formal induction provision has become more extensive, often requiring the completion of a PGCE in HE, and with probationary requirements and
structures specified through Human Resources and / or Staff Development units. There has also been an increased focus on non-formal professional learning during induction (see Trowler and Knight, 2004; Eraut, 2000; Akerlind, 2003; Boud, 2001) and on subject- or discipline-specific issues.

The recent developments by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to support academic induction address such issues, and have included the creation of discipline-specific, web-based resources by each Learning and Teaching Support Network Subject Centre (the Support for New Academic Staff or SNAS database). For teacher education, extensive SNAS resources are not available at the time of writing. Initiatives by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) have recognised the need for further research into existing policies and practices and the development of more extensive support materials for induction. These initiatives have included the commissioning of a national symposium on new teacher educators’ needs (Murray, 2003) and of web-based resources with a strong focus on the subjects of the school curriculum and the needs of ITE tutors preparing students for Secondary school teaching. These resources are designed to support NTEs working in schools as mentors, in SCITTs (School Centred Initial Teacher Training Schemes) and through DRBs (Designated Recommending Bodies for Graduate Teacher Training Schemes) as well as in HEIs. These materials have considerable potential value, but do not address many generic issues in ITE work or include focuses on some of the specific needs of HE-based NTEs.

**Methodology**

The ESCalate study was designed to include different perspectives on the research question through the following elements: firstly, an analysis of current HEI practices and principles for induction, which aimed to provide evidence of existing support structures across the HE sector in England; secondly, an analysis of NTEs’ perspectives of their induction experiences. This second element aimed to provide evidence of needs from practitioners’ perspectives, and some opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of current approaches.

For the first element an on-line questionnaire was sent to the Heads of Department (HoDs) of all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in England involved in ITE provision in the academic year 2003/2004 (n=75). The questionnaires requested a brief overview of the probationary requirements set for NTEs, and details of the provision designed to support induction at central university and departmental levels. After each set of questions, there was an opportunity for HoDs to add their comments. The overall response rate was 47% (n=35).

The methods for the second element of the research design included an on-line questionnaire sent to a purposive sample of 50 NTEs who had been working at a range of different types of HEIs for two years or less. The questionnaire was sent out either via the HoDs or through a subject group network list. The questionnaires requested some brief biographical details about previous time in the school sector and current work in HE, but its main
focuses were threefold: the probationary requirements the NTEs had been asked to meet; the formal provision at university level, including long courses such as the PGCE in HE; and the formal and non-formal induction provision provided within the education department. In the latter two sections, individuals were asked to use a Lickert scale to indicate which types of provision they had found most useful in supporting their development, and to comment on their answers.

Follow up individual and focus group interviews with 20 teacher educators from this sample were designed to enable issues arising from the questionnaires to be pursued in more depth. These interviews were also designed to enable the teacher educators to identify and discuss induction practices which they felt had or had not been effective for them. The interviews were planned to have the following characteristics (adapted from Cohen and Manion, 2002). They were semi-structured, based on a pre-set but not rigidly ordered schedule of questions, and developed from the literature review. Within this semi-structured format, the schedules were as open as possible, allowing me to pursue any unexpected responses, to follow each interviewee's train of thought, and to probe responses. With the permission of the interviewees, the interviews were taped and the resulting data transcribed. The transcript data was analysed drawing on a systematic coding system, developed in a previous study of teacher educators (Murray, 2002).

Findings from the study

The summary below provides an overview of the main findings from the study. Full details can be found in the ESCalate report of the study on the LTSN (Learning and Teaching Support Network) database.

- Probation requirements for NTEs differ across institutions, with the majority of new universities and CHEs (Colleges of Higher Education) setting requirements only for high quality teaching and contributions to academic administration. Old universities, however, added research related targets (for publications, funding or achievement of a doctorate) for NTEs appointed on full lecturer contracts.

- Most NTEs see probationary requirements as driven by the university’s agenda, rather than by their individual needs. For some NTEs in old universities, research related targets were seen as unrealistic.

- Procedures and targets for probation were planned, implemented and monitored in most HEIs. These procedures, and related processes such as the observation of the NTEs’ teaching, were routinely included in departmental induction ‘curricula’ in most HEIs.

- Most NTEs are exempted from the PGCE HE qualification, largely because they already hold Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for the school sector.

- The small number of NTEs in this study who had taken the PGCE HE qualification, however, defined it as a valuable learning experience. It
was generally agreed that starting points needed to be differentiated in order to acknowledge the existing levels of teaching expertise of NTEs.

- Because most NTEs did not take the PGCE HE and were unlikely to opt in to other centrally provided courses, the formal induction provided for them at the level of the university was effectively limited to short, initial orientation courses.

- Most induction provision for NTEs was situated within education departments, at the micro level of teaching or subject ‘team’. It was often implicitly characterised by both HoDs and NTEs as informal, context-specific and tacit professional learning, although the distinctions between what counted as ‘formal’ learning and non-formal learning structures (Eraut, 2000) were often blurred by respondents.

- The HoDs’ responses showed that the content of induction ‘curricula’ at this micro level varied, with activities which supported probationary processes – such as target setting and observation of the NTEs’ teaching - most likely to be planned and implemented. This approach is termed *induction by monitoring* here. Some potentially valuable collaborative learning opportunities – such as team teaching and observing experienced colleagues teaching - were less likely to be routinely included in induction programmes.

- Approaches to induction varied between HEIs, according to the HoDs’ responses, with some institutions formally planning, implementing and monitoring detailed micro level programmes, whilst others followed a less formal approach, relying on induction taking place through the inclusion of the NTE in the daily work of the relevant team(s).

- From the perspectives of the NTEs, the quality of micro level provision was variable. Some NTEs reported that they participated in a varied range of formal and non-formal induction activities which led to professional learning; this group felt well supported in general. For other NTEs though, provision was limited to the formal structures which met the requirements of the university’s probationary schemes (usually observation of teaching, other relevant auditing processes and probationary review meetings with the mentor or HoD). This latter approach was felt to have limitations, and to be for the benefit of the university rather than the individual. I have termed this approach *induction by monitoring*. A further group of NTEs experienced an approach I have termed *induction by immersion* where few formal learning opportunities were planned, and NTEs were expected to learn through participation in the normal, on-going routines of the department. The learning which resulted from this approach was seen by the NTEs as haphazard, often ad hoc, sometimes deeply puzzling and, ironically given the emphasis on participation, solitary.

- Responses from both HoDs and NTEs indicated that time and staffing pressures might be a factor in how induction policies are translated into practice. A number of NTEs, for example, reported having induction programmes planned, but not implemented. Generally, NTEs felt that
The quality of mentoring was stated to be an important factor in the overall quality of NTE learning. NTEs defined empathy and trust between them and their designated mentor as key factors. A good mentor provided invaluable feedback and support for the NTE during induction. Just as the boundaries between what could be counted as formal or non-formal learning were blurred in this study, so too were distinctions between formal and informal mentoring. Different types of mentors were discussed by the NTEs and by the HoDs. For example, NTEs referred to ‘formally appointed’ or ‘designated’ mentors who had been given that specific role within the department, but they also discussed different ‘mentors’ informally taking on different supporting roles for different purposes. In many cases such mentor support was not part of the HEI’s formal probationary structures, but was a more experienced colleague working alongside the NTE in one of more of her/his immediate work settings.

In other HEIs, HoDs reported that the roles of formal mentor and probationary appraiser were conflated and undertaken by one individual, often the HoD or a senior manager. Some NTEs found this conflation of roles unhelpful, especially where they were heavily dependant on the mentor for day to day support.

Both formal and non-formal induction provision at the micro level centred around academic administration and teaching activities. There was less emphasis on induction into research. But where this occurred, it was likely to come from different sources of support from the teaching and administration provision, being provided by key individuals (research ‘mentors’, ‘buddies’ or doctoral supervisors) or research teams.

Discussion

This study found that most induction provision for NTEs was situated within departments at the micro level of the teaching ‘team’, and through non-formal learning. For some – but by no means all - new recruits, such induction was perceived to provide a good induction into HE. Framing NTE induction as occurring through non-formal learning and predominantly and most effectively within the micro levels – or specific communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) - of teacher education departments would seem then to have considerable potential for developing effective induction provision.

This emphasis on the effectiveness of induction at the micro level is reiterated in previous research. Drawing on Wenger’s work, Trowler and Knight (2004) argue, for example, that this micro level is the most important context for induction to HE. In their view it is the university which provides the structural context for work, but the community of practice (variously defined as the
department, the research group or the teaching team) which develops the day-to-day behavioural and discursive practices for the new academic (p.159). Induction to HE is in their view essentially ‘departmental or team business’ (p.144). Gilpin’s work (2003:2) supports Trowler and Knight’s arguments in identifying this type of induction as often ‘contextually well aligned, (and able to) provide rich insights into variations in local procedures and culture … (because it) is people, rather than institutionally purposed’. Boud (2001) also reiterates that much learning for new academics will be informal and based around the immediate workplace settings.

The idea of learning through membership of and participation in the micro level of a community of practice offers a popular way of understanding induction then. But the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) which underlies much of this literature is very broad, and has a number of limitations (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004). These include the following: limited conceptualisation of how such participatory learning might occur (Edwards and Protheroe, 2003); a dismissal of formal learning or training as transmission (Fuller et al., 2005); a lack of emphasis on the way in which individual professional biographies and habitus (Bourdieu, 1987) play out in professional learning in the HE workplace (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004); the de-emphasis of the power relations embedded in specific learning situations (Fuller et al., 2005); and analysis of how induction occurs where the novice brings existing professional knowledge to a new workplace (Fuller et al 2005). Without a further consideration of these issues in understanding of NTE induction – and the acquisition of the expertise in teaching and researching as a teacher educator which it involves – I would suggest that the informal learning involved in micro level induction risks continuing to be misunderstood or dismissed as ‘merely’ apprenticeship learning or ‘sitting by Nelly’.

The existence of the induction by monitoring approach in a number of HEIs in this study indicates some of the problems in devising professional induction programmes within the current accountability-led system of HE. The emphasis placed on the production and judgement of individual performance during induction certainly raises questions as to who or what some of these structures might benefit, and about whether or not such an approach offers sufficient time and space for NTEs to learn.

In this study, induction by monitoring seemed to narrow the range of both formal and non-informal learning opportunities on offer to the NTE during induction, with collaborative learning opportunities – such as team teaching and observing experienced colleagues teaching - less likely to be routinely included in induction programmes. There are parallels here with Edwards and Protheroe’s (2003) identification of the lack of extended learning opportunities offered to student teachers by mentors on school placements. In that study student teachers had limited opportunities for learning through participation in and interpretation of teaching processes. Edwards and Protheroe argue that this was in part because understanding of how participatory learning might occur was undeveloped. I would argue that a similar statement could equally well be made for induction into teacher education communities in instances
where valuable collaborative learning opportunities are not routinely provided for NTEs. Part of the reason for such omissions may be that, to draw on the words of Edwards and Protheroe (p.229) what we lack at the present time is ‘a worked-out view of participatory learning that might draw on mentors’ strengths and enrich the learning experiences’ of NTEs.

In previous work (Murray, 2005), I have argued that, equipped with their personal knowledge and understanding of teaching and scholarship in schools, new teacher educators require support in ‘shifting the lens’ of their existing knowledge to meet the demands of HE-based ITE. Good quality induction support for NTEs needs to focus on analysing previous practices and their implications within the new setting in order to begin to build new pedagogical and research-based knowledge and understanding for teacher education work. Induction support in interpreting and understanding both the HE setting and the nature of ITE work therefore becomes essential. This induction into the specific setting(s) of teacher education, to the wider world of the university, and to the HE sector in general, needs to go far beyond the conventional and limited induction models which were reportedly on offer to some of the participants in this study. It needs to be tailored to the specific contexts of each education department and its missions, as well as attending to the *issues from academic practice*, which arise for each new educator as part of daily work as a teacher, researcher and scholar.

The challenge for ITE induction then is not to devise set induction programmes which will equip NTEs with a ‘bag of tricks’ full of generic pedagogical and research skills for HE work, but rather to give them the time, space and opportunities to reflect on and analyse their emerging practice as teacher educators and the questions, issues and dilemmas it raises. As Eraut (2000:133) states, ‘Tidy maps of knowledge and learning are usually deceptive’. This is in part because tacit knowledge is often developed, acquired and used ‘unobserved’ in the ‘interstices of formal learning contexts’ (p.133).

In the article cited above I have also posed some questions about centring induction only around specific, local teacher education communities of practice, identifying that this may lead to ‘insularity’, and fragmented and fractured provision. Such fragmentation may mean that we lose sight of teacher educators’ commitments to broader social goals and to communal discourses and practices valued within the wider, national and international teacher education communities. I would suggest then that, whilst acknowledging the power and importance of coherent and well planned induction into the immediate community or communities of practice within specific HEIs, care also needs to be taken to ensure that such provision does not become parochial, communally anecdotal, and limited in understanding of the broader social and moral purposes of HE-based teacher education. Induction provision clearly has to meet the needs of individual NTEs and of the departments within which they work, but it also needs to reflect the accepted discourses and practices of teacher education as a professional discipline in the university sector.
This study found that most NTEs are exempted from PGCE HE courses because they already have QTS for the school sector. This recognition of existing expertise may seem superficially beneficial, but could also be considered unhelpful in a number of ways. Firstly, it lends credence to the assumption that teaching skills acquired in the school sector can be ‘transferred’ to teaching in HE in straightforward ways. This is an assumption which this study and previous research (Trowler and Knight, 2004; Ducharme, 1993) question. Secondly, equating the skills of teaching in school with those for teaching teachers in HE fails to recognise the skills involved in teaching adults, the uniqueness of teacher educators’ pedagogy, and the consequent need for NTEs to develop their existing teaching and research skills and knowledge. Most NTEs in this study did not have access to the PGCE in HE as one type of formal learning structure which, if properly designed, could have assisted them in developing this new pedagogical and scholarly knowledge. Finally, lack of access to a PGCE in HE, together with limited engagement in other university wide learning opportunities, means that most of these NTEs had restricted early career stage opportunities for networking with new academics from other disciplines and with their wider university communities. The findings of this study would suggest that, if the practice of exempting NTEs from PGCE in HE qualifications is routinely followed, then alternative ways of ensuring high quality induction provision for NTEs into those academic communities need to be given enhanced consideration.

**Future research**

This study, as implemented, had a number of methodological limitations. For example, the size of the sample groups for the questionnaires and interviews with NTEs was small, and the use of questionnaires as a research tool to gather details of induction provision from both the NTEs and the HoDs may have resulted in tendencies to give normative responses or ‘thin stories’ about induction (Leonard et al., 2005). To address these limitations, further research could include larger sample sizes and a wider variety of research tools, particularly the more extensive use of focus group interviews. A more in-depth and detailed survey of departmental provision, for example, could include case studies investigating what provision is planned and implemented for NTEs’ learning when, how and by whom across a range of institutional contexts.

Research could also track the early stage career trajectories of individual NTEs to see how, when, and where learning occurs over time and across different work settings (for example, HEI seminar rooms and school classrooms where NTEs supervise students’ fieldwork). An additional element to such research would be to consider the part which individual professional biographies and habitus play in professional learning in the HE workplace (see Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004).
Towards guidelines for good practice in the induction of NTEs

This was a small-scale study, with some methodological limitations, as indicated; hence using its findings to draw up definitive guidelines for good practice in the induction of NTEs would not be appropriate. But the following questions about induction provision emerge as pointers from the study, and could be used by HoDs, other senior managers, mentors and NTEs in drawing up, implementing and evaluating induction programmes. Feedback from colleagues involved in NTE induction on the usefulness of these questions would be very welcome.

- Has the NTE been involved in a ‘needs analysis’ as s/he enters HE, identifying previous knowledge and understanding, existing strengths and areas for future development?

- Are probationary requirements challenging but achievable? Do they take account of individual starting points? Do they reflect the individual’s aspirations for career development as well as the departmental and institutional priorities? Do they relate to teaching, research / scholarship and service to the university as the three commonly accepted elements of academic work?

- Is induction provision tailored to assist new teacher educators in meeting the requirements set for their probationary period? Does the provision aim to match individual aspirations?

- Does the programme provide a good basis for further professional development, beyond induction?

- Does the PGCE HE provide differentiated starting points for NTEs who already hold QTS qualifications? Does it acknowledge the existing pedagogical knowledge and expertise of NTEs? Does it support the changes in the processes of teaching, research and scholarship during the transition from the school sector to HE? Does it include opportunities for structured personal reflection on personal pedagogical and scholarly practices within the particular learning and teaching contexts in which teacher educators’ work?

- If NTEs are exempted from the PGCE HE, does the induction programme identify alternative ways in which they can acquire the skills of teaching teachers in HE settings? Are there alternative ways in which they can become familiar with the broad HEI setting in which they now work? Are networking opportunities with academics in other disciplines provided?

- Is there a planned programme of induction activities within the department? Does it clearly relate to overall provision, to the probationary requirements and to the initial needs analysis? Is it clear within which specific micro level(s) of the department the various induction activities will take place? Is the implementation of the programme monitored and reviewed regularly? Is the programme flexible enough to take into account developing needs which the NTEs,
the mentor or appraiser may identify as arising during the induction period?

- Does this programme support the development of all three elements of academic work (research or scholarship, teaching and service)?

- Does the programme include a broad spectrum of activities to support professional development, as well as to monitor and regulate performance against probationary targets?

- Within the programme is there articulation between different ‘levels’ of induction (for example, between the requirements of a PGCE HE course and the departmental / micro level induction programme)?

- Does the programme include opportunities for the NTEs to gain experience of how other teacher education communities of practice work, beyond their own micro level context(s), and departments?

- Is the NTE encouraged to access research and scholarship of teaching on ITE courses, and to use relevant sources to inform her/his practices?

- Does the NTE have a mentor who is not directly involved in the formal probationary processes set by the university and the department?

**Bibliography**

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