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Institutional conceptualisations of teacher education as academic work in England

Viv Ellis*, Jane McNicholl, Anna Pendry

OSAT, Department of Education, University of Oxford, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY, United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of job recruitment texts, and interviews with academic leaders, this article shows how the university-based teacher educator is produced as a category of academic worker in England. Focussing on the discursive processes of categorisation provides insights into how English universities conceptualise teacher education. Variations in conceptualisations are noted within and between institutions, with the teacher educator produced as a hybrid or exceptional category. Often, variations are produced around a practitioner/researcher contradiction. The article concludes by asking whether such variations and potential lack of coherence matter, in the context of national policy and funding constraints, and internationally.

1. Introduction

In this article, we examine how the university-based teacher educator is conceptualised as a category of academic worker at the institutional level in England. By teacher education, we are referring principally to pre-service work with student teachers in universities and in schools (an activity known in England as initial teacher education) and we are focussing on university-based personnel as we are interested in understanding the position of teacher education within higher education institutions more generally. England offers an interesting case internationally – as an example of a highly-regulated, centralised system subject to much more directive and frequent policy interventions than in other parts of the UK (Menter, Brisard, & Smith, 2006).[1] Initial teacher education in England has, at the graduate level, been mainly school-based since 1992 and has followed a competency-based model since 1997, with national Standards specified and monitored by central government.[2] In our analysis of both texts (job advertisements and job descriptions) and talk (interviews), our focus is on how the category *teacher educator* is produced in discourse and what that might reveal about the institutional contexts in which this categorisation is produced. Theoretically, our perspective is grounded in sociocultural understandings of language as a mediational means and of the production and negotiation of categories as essential aspects of the cultural–historical processes that enable individuals and institutions to think and to reason together (Mäkitalo & Säljö, 2002; Mercer, 2000). In the next section, we provide some background to contextualise our inquiry.

1.1. Teacher educators and work

1.1.1. A distinctive population of academic workers

In the UK Economic and Social Research Council's Demographic Review of the Social Sciences (Mills et al., 2006), Education was the second largest discipline under consideration and the report's authors noted the unique challenge of a large number of 'second-career researchers' – principally, school teachers who move into universities to work on teacher education programmes. More than half the academic staff in Education were found to be 50 or over at the time of the review; just under half were in the 46–55 age range, with the smallest proportion across the social sciences aged under 34 (8%). The funding of higher education in the UK is partly determined by audits of the universities' research productivity and research quality across disciplines. These audits have been known as Research Assessment Exercises (RAE) and, from 2013, the Research Excellence Framework. In the 2001 exercise, the Education report noted that two thirds of Education academic

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 1865 274009.
E-mail address: viv.ellis@education.ox.ac.uk (V. Ellis).

[1] England is one country within a four country United Kingdom. Scotland and Northern Ireland have long histories of separate educational policy-making. Since 1999, Wales has also developed its own policies following political devolution and the establishment of a representative assembly.

[2] The majority of teachers in England enter the profession through the one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course, having first attained a Bachelor's degree. The government in England requires that two thirds of the PGCE course (24 out of 36 weeks for the secondary PGCE, for example) must be based in schools.

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staff were not classified as 'research active' (Mills et al., 2006). The Review suggested that the structural challenges faced by those working in Education meant that 'there exists no clear academic career structure' (Mills et al., 2006) whereas both better career structures and higher salaries were apparent in the professional setting of schools.

Out of more than 100 UK universities and colleges with Education departments, 82 prepared submissions to the 2008 RAE, entering 1, 696 full-time equivalent staff or approximately 27% of full-time staff in Education departments (HEFCE 2009a; HESA 2009). Compared to the 2001 RAE, submissions for 2008 were more selective, with 404 fewer academic staff entered (Hazlehurst, Morris, & Wiliam, 2010). Indeed, 30% of submissions in 2008 represented the work of fewer than 10 full-time academic staff and 70% represented the work of fewer than 20 (HEFCE, 2009b).

The picture of Education as a discipline in the UK emerging from both the demographic review and the national research audits is of a large field of practice undertaken by a predominantly older population of academic workers strongly differentiated by research activity and with a large core of former school teachers for whom the possibility of developing a research programme and, indeed, progressing through a 'clear academic career structure' are fairly limited. Similar issues of research productivity and progression through the tenure track were noted in the US by Tierney (2001) in his analysis of the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty suggesting that rather than being a purely English phenomenon, the underlying issue arises out of wider tensions between teaching (teachers) and doing research that characterise the recent history of higher education overall (c.f. Cuban, 1999; Jonçich Clifford & Guthrie, 1988).

1.1.2. The distribution of teacher education work across universities in England

The higher education system in England has been subject to profound change over the last fifty years. A major force for change has been the imperative to widen participation beyond the relatively small percentage of the population that had access to higher education decades ago. Many institutions that have come to have university status in England (as elsewhere around the world) grew out of specialist training colleges and, in England, that is particularly true of what has become known as the new university sector.[3] And distinct from the US, there is currently only one private university in the UK (Buckingham); the rest are, at least in principle, state-funded, public institutions. However, the 1990s also saw a move towards diversification and the establishment of a quasi-market of teacher education 'providers' in England (Mahony & Hextall, 2000). Unlike in the US, where student (consumer) demand can determine the operation of the market – with each university having a demand-led 'production function' in terms of the 'output' of teachers (Turner, 2001) – in England's quasi-market, the consumer is the state that commissions specific outputs from each university. As a result, the situation in England in terms of where teacher education work is located is a complex one with programmes distributed across both old and new universities as well as in entirely school-centred (or early-entry) routes.

The key actor in the distribution of this work has been the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), established by central government in 1992 to fund, regulate and improve recruitment into teacher education. On the basis of inspections by another government agency – the Office for Standards in Education – and other evidence, the TDA allocates places (i.e. *per capita* funding) to providers on the basis of 'target numbers'. Universities are therefore obliged to compete for funding. The allocation of places gives some sense of how teacher education work is distributed at the national level in England.

Just over half of the secondary (high school) initial teacher education places in the 2008–2011 period were allocated to the new university sector (57.3%); old universities were allocated 37.5% and school-centred schemes[4] accounted for 5.2% (TDA 2009). Similarly, over 80% of primary student teachers during this period underwent their professional preparation in new universities (77.5%) and school-centred schemes (5.9%). Indeed, some new universities have secured a very large proportion of the places allocated by the TDA (e.g. up to 1392 places - or 4% of the total allocation – to one large institution with multiple programmes and flexible study patterns). In summary, however, most primary and most secondary teacher education work takes place in new universities, generally the sector that does less well in research funding terms and where research activity is much less concentrated. In the somewhat different US context, Tierney (2001) noted that the majority of teachers were produced in the state university systems rather than private research universities, even while those private schools may offer small or 'boutique' teacher preparation programmes. To that extent, what the UK and the US have in common is that the bulk of the work of teacher education is available in mass higher education systems that receive state funding.

1.1.3. Researching teacher education as academic work

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to survey the growing research literature on academic work across higher education, it is necessary to define some terms and examine the limited range of relevant or related research. Academic work is most commonly defined as the labour of people employed as lecturers or professors in university settings. Indeed, Tight (2004) has identified an increasing interest in 'what lecturers and other members of staff actually do, and how this is changing' as one of the key themes in higher education research generally (p. 4). The perspective on academic work in the higher education literature is mainly sociological and has become particularly interested in how changing patterns of academic activity and employment relations are related to transnational forces of globalisation and the marketisation of higher education (e.g. Marginson, 2010). Studies of academic work often focus on terms of employment, contractual activities and working conditions and there is a growing realisation in the literature that distinctions between categories of worker in higher education are being eroded. For example, in a study of employment and working conditions for academic staff across Europe, Enders noted that 'the concept of a single academic profession might be an illusion' (Enders, 2000: 7). It was important for our research that we kept in mind that academic work itself is not a homogenous and undifferentiated category.

Internationally, there is little research that focuses directly on what teacher educators do – their practical activities and the material conditions in which they labour. As Horner (2000) points out, this is not an unusual situation as academic work is often understood in an individualistic and narrowly intellectual sense

[3] Throughout the article, we use 'new'/'old' to refer to generally-understood groupings of universities in the UK. The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act allowed former Polytechnics and expanded Colleges of Education to apply for university status, creating what has become known as the new university sector. Universities described as 'old' merely had to exist as universities prior to 1992.

[4] School-centred routes into teaching in England might also be described as 'early-entry' programmes. For example, School-Centred Initial Teacher Training Schemes (SCITTS) are led by schools, usually in a particular geographic area, often in some form of collaboration with a university but with the schools taking full responsibility for academic and professional standards. Another school-centred route is the Graduate Teacher Programme, for which funding is allocated separately.

(e.g. the conversation-opener, 'what are you working on at the moment?'). There has been some attention in the US to the 'education professoriate' at the level of self-perceptions and life histories (e.g. Ducharme, 1993) and their somewhat precarious status within the universities generally (e.g. Labaree, 2004), and also, more generally, to the transition points between prior experience, graduate school and becoming 'faculty' (e.g. Schuster & Finkelstein, 2008). This interest in the 'becoming' of university-based teacher educators and the ways in which universities as employers might support these transitions is evident in recent research literature from the UK, north America, Australia and Europe (e.g. Acker, 1997; Berry, 2007; Carrillo & Baguley, 2011). Another line of research traces the tensions between teaching and research (e.g. Jonçich Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Tierney, 2001) that are also reflected across the university (Cuban, 1999; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

While the literature on teacher educators' identities and professional knowledge is beginning to grow (e.g. Swennen & van der Klink, 2009), research into how *universities* conceptualise teacher education as academic work is extremely difficult to identify. The few relevant studies discussed above are more often written from the perspective of trying to understand the teacher educator's subjectivity or professional development needs; the way in which institutions conceptualise and frame the work of teacher education is left implicit or is absent. Furthermore, other studies suggest that teacher educators themselves do not constitute a homogeneous group (Kosnick & Beck, 2008; Tierney, 2001). Despite this heterogeneity, the term *teacher educator* in much of the current research literature to date is treated as an undifferentiated category. A consequence of this limited conceptualisation of *teacher educator* and the dearth of research generally in the field has led to rather limited understandings of the position of teacher education *as work* in higher education. Our research was motivated by an interest in understanding how universities in England, at a particular historical moment, conceptualise teacher education as a form of academic work and therefore our perspective is different from other research in the field.

In order to examine how teacher education is produced as a particular category of academic work, we decided to analyse how texts and talk produce the category discursively. Our emphasis is on how ways of thinking about teacher education are actively produced and reproduced in institutional language so we are interested in how the work of the university-based teacher educator is conceptualised from the perspective of universities themselves – in the expectations and contractual requirements delivered by the job advertisement and further particulars texts[5] and in interviews with a small sample of academic leaders in university Education departments. Our guiding questions were:

1. How is the work of teacher education conceptualised in the job advertisement and further particulars texts of a sample of vacancies?
2. How do heads of education departments talk about the work of teacher education?

Our approach to answering these questions led us to collect and to generate text and talk data that would be amenable to analysis by a number of methods.

[5] 'Further particulars' is the generic name given in England to the texts that supplement the job advertisement. Further particulars usually include, at minimum, a description of the employer, their mission, a job description and sometimes a person specification (lists of essential and desirable qualifications and experience).

2. Generating texts and talk to understand categories and institutions

2.1. Design and methodology

We began by collecting job advertisements and further particulars texts for all teacher education vacancies at higher education institutions in England during two periods totalling eight months: July to November 2008 and March to May 2009. These periods were chosen as it was felt they represented the busiest recruitment periods for universities and colleges. The job advertisements and further particulars were drawn from the website *jobs.ac.uk* (the main academic recruitment website in the UK) and the institutions' own websites. Our sample criteria required the vacancies to be higher education-based and to involve regular face-to-face work with student teachers.

In the period immediately following the second collection of job advertisement data in 2009, we wrote to the heads of all the Education departments that had advertised the vacancies we had collected and requested a telephone interview. The interview was semi-structured by a schedule containing questions with common prompts and probes. We asked about the specific vacancy, the process of advertising and putting the further particulars texts together, how teacher education was organised and valued within the institution and other questions designed to elicit the head of department's reasoning about teacher education as academic work.

2.1.1. The sample of job advertisements and further particulars texts

One hundred and eleven (111) vacancies met our sample criteria, 64 in the first data collection period (July to November 2008) and 47 in the second (March to May 2009). The most frequent categories of vacancy were for generalist primary and secondary Mathematics teacher educators (both $n = 11$ or 10%). Forty-two universities and colleges were represented in the sample, of which 30 can be described either as new universities or colleges and 12 as old universities. Across our two samples, a greater proportion of work was available in the new university sector and, in at least one large institution, much of it on the basis of part-time and temporary employment. Proportionately, the availability of teacher education work in the old sector was quite small and, in our samples, mostly full-time and permanent. However, it is worth striking a note of caution over the representativeness of this data as recruitment in higher education can be both responsive to demographics and policy as well as idiosyncratic. Nonetheless, the sample of 111 vacancies generated a rich corpus of job recruitment texts.

2.1.2. The sample of transcribed telephone interviews

We wrote to academic leaders in all 42 institutions that advertised positions during our data collection periods and 8 finally agreed to be interviewed: six heads of department, one associate head of department and one director of teacher education. Although this response-rate was fairly low, our intention was not to construct a representative sample. Our 8 respondents came from a range of institutions: four new universities and four old, of varying sizes and in both the north and south of England. They also came from institutions that had achieved at different, although generally positive levels in terms of research output and quality (as measured by the 2008 RAE), something we have indicated in Table 1 below by referring to an institution's profile as greater than (+) or less than (−) the mean performance in Education (which was 1.95 on a 4 point scale). Six institutions offered initial teacher education programmes at undergraduate (UG) as well as the graduate (G) level; the remaining two offered graduate programmes only. Although we are not claiming that either data-set

Table 1
The sample of higher education institutions represented in the academic leader interviews.

Ashland	Belvoir	Chalfont	Dunmore	Eglinton	Finbury	Gebwick	Hawtree
Small, old university, south of England; UG & G	Medium-sized old university, south of England; PG only	Small, old university, north of England; G only	Small, old university, north of England; UG & G	Medium-sized new university, south of England; UG & G	Large, new university, south of England; UG & G	Large, new university, north of England; UG & G	Medium-sized new university, north of England; UG & G
RAE +	*RAE +*	*RAE +*	*RAE +*	*Not entered*	*RAE +*	*RAE +*	*RAE −*

(job advertisements or interviews) are representative they do begin to reflect some of the diversity of higher education settings in England. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

2.1.3. Analysing texts and talk

In seeking to account for the institutional, discursive production of *teacher educator* as a category of academic worker, we took a variety of analytic approaches to what constituted a relatively large amount of data in the form of texts (job advertisements and further particulars) and talk (research interviews). One approach involved Membership Categorisation Analysis, a method of understanding how certain categories are produced in texts or the jointly-constructed discourse of research interviews (Freebody, 2003; Hester & Eglin, 1997). Membership Categorisation Analysis involves identifying emerging categories in the discourse, understanding how attributions are made to these categories (looking at particular verbs and adjectives, for example) and how they are substantiated (e.g. through invocation of policy discourses or through personal narratives) and then analysing how these categories and attributions permit particular conceptualisations and lines of reasoning. Lists (such as 'main duties' lists in job descriptions, for example) are a significant way in which categories are produced and, methodologically, items in such lists were seen as primary attributions to the category, in this case, the category of university-based teacher educator. In analysing the interviews, our attention was focused on how the academic leader produced *teacher educator* as a category and how they used this category in their reasoning.

Although we did not set out to conduct a formal linguistic analysis, we nonetheless used a selection of analytic tools to interrogate the language data. One approach, derived from the computational strategy of corpus linguistics (McEnery & Wilson, 2001), was to generate word frequencies and key-words-in-context. For example, the interviews with heads of department were analysed using computer software to generate lists of high-frequency words and collocations. The software was then used to produce key-words-in-contexts – or the stretches of discourse in which the high-frequency words appeared. This strategy gave us some insight into how the word *research* was used, for example, revealing its context in the utterances of participants.

We also drew on a linguistic annotation strategy by tagging certain word classes (e.g. nouns and verbs) in specific sentences. So, for example, we examined the corpus of advertisements and further particulars texts to identify the ways in which the job category was introduced in the first sentence of the advertisement. Initially, we focused on the word(s) that usually took the object position in this sentence – *We are looking for a* [noun or noun phrase]. The function of this clause is to orient the potential applicant towards the way in which the employer categorises the work and the sort of knowledge, skills and experience being sought. These methods helped us to look in detail at language-in-use and complemented Membership Categorisation Analysis in order to understand how institutional conceptualisations were being built (c.f. Flowerdew, 2005).

Finally, with specific reference to the job advertisements and further particulars, we conducted an analysis of them as written texts, as instances of a particular genre that share a typified rhetorical purpose (Bazerman, 2004). Genres can be understood as historically-evolving cultural tools that seek to achieve the same social action (Miller, 1984). Further particulars are complex texts, emerging within institutions over often lengthy periods of time, with a recognizably similar social function. For example, while further particulars usually contain references to the specific duties of the advertised post within the Education department, they also refer to the expectations of the specific pay grade or rank across the whole-university. These documents can often reveal traces of earlier versions and how conceptualisations have changed between different drafts (e.g. two sets of further particulars for two different posts in the same department). In analysing the job advertisements and further particulars as instances of genres, we looked particularly for contradictions within the texts because such contradictions can reveal the diverse ways in which the job category is understood within institutions. In other words, we did not simply assume that the advertisements and job descriptions externalised how a university was conceptualising teacher education as academic work and our genre analysis of these texts (as well as our interviews with the heads of department) surfaced how the texts were negotiated within the institutions on the basis of different and sometimes competing priorities. Table 2 below indicates the different analytic passes made on each set of data.

Job advertisements and further particulars were collected by a research assistant under the supervision of the first author. The first and second authors conducted the research interviews with the academic leaders. All authors analysed the data using data analysis software (Wordsmith and Max QDA), with regular cross-checking at each stage, including how the data was being represented, displayed and coded, as well as interpretations. Findings from the different methods of analysis were integrated in analytic memos written by the research team with final interpretations subject to further cross-checking. All three authors also contributed to the writing of this article.

3. Findings: institutional conceptualisations of teacher education

Our perspective in this research was shaped by a sociocultural understanding of language as a mediational means by which

Table 2
Data sets and methods of analysis.

Data	Methods of analysis
1. Job advertisements and further particulars texts ($n = 111$)	• Membership categorisation analysis • Linguistic annotation (word classes) • Word frequencies and key-words-in-context • Genre analysis
2. Interviews with academic leaders from advertising universities ($n = 8$)	• Membership categorisation analysis • Word frequencies and key-words-in-context

individuals and institutions think and reason together (Mäkitalo & Säljö, 2002; Mercer, 2000). Moreover, the shaping of categories at the institutional level to some extent precedes individual sense-making, particularly when individuals are invited to align themselves with institutional motives and meanings in a job application process; to that extent, individual prospective employees are invited to 'join in' with the institutional language game. Our study did not collect and analyse work-place discourse but, consistent with a sociocultural theoretical perspective on categorisation, our analysis proceeded on the basis that understanding how and where the category of teacher educator was produced in texts and talk might reveal something about the broader sociocultural traditions of conceptualisation and argumentation that manifest themselves in the field of teacher education in England overall, as well as in specific institutional sites of teacher education activity. In other words, analysing institutional conceptualisations might allow us to get some sense of how teacher education in England – as a field of practice and as a type of academic work – is produced, culturally and historically, in language.

3.1. Producing the category I: job advertisements and further particulars texts

In analysing the written texts, we quickly became aware that sectoral generalisations (i.e. between new and old universities) could not be warranted. A complex situation was revealed, in terms of attributions to and substantiations of the *teacher educator* category, and in contradictions in the further particulars documents. In the discussion below we have used pseudonyms to refer to sources of job advertisements as well as indicating the institutional type (new or old).

3.1.1. 'We are looking for …': introducing the teacher educator as academic worker

In many of the advertisements (46 of 111), the phrase was focused on the noun 'practitioner'. The following examples were typical of the range:

> an experienced, highly skilled *practitioner* who is passionate about their subject and has an ability to explore ideas and pose questions (Alton University - new)
>
> a *practitioner* with QTS to work on primary ITT (Dowton University - old)

As 'practitioner' was rarely explained (as it is in the second example above – QTS [Qualified Teacher Status] being the professional credential in England), we inferred that what was being sought was a school-teaching practitioner. Other nouns used to orient applicants include *educator* and *pedagogue*, with *lecturer* accounting for just 3 instances out of 111. In other advertisements, beyond the academic job title in the headline, the role was not named and a different construction employed (e.g. 'In this role, you will teach on …'). If using an acronym, advertisements referred to 'ITT' – initial teacher training – the alternative preferred by UK governments to initial teacher education.

A wide range of verbs attributed activities to the job category. Teaching students is normally a significant part of the work of university-based teacher educators, as it is for academics in all disciplines. Most of the further particulars emphasised the variety of teaching required by the posts but there were many references to *training* and *delivering content*. The following examples were typical:

> *training* students on the BA course (Eldred University - old)
>
> *delivering* secondary ITT programmes (Windlesham University - new)

Initial teacher *training* has been the preferred term in policy in England since at least 1997 and *delivery* (e.g. delivering lessons) as a metaphor for teaching is common in professional discourse, especially since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1989 (Protherough & Pick 2002).

Personal qualities were important in a significant minority of the advertisements as well as in the further particulars, leading to the elaboration of adjectives attributed to the person, before the specification of the job's main duties. Advertisements that emphasised personal qualities tended to prioritise enthusiasm, dedication and resilience. The following examples reflect these emphases:

> an enthusiastic and dedicated person (Girton University - new)
>
> a colleague with energy, enthusiasm and vision (Rodmell University - new)
>
> an excellent communicator with a positive approach for this exciting role in our challenging environment (Windlesham University - new)

The nouns used (*person*, *colleague*, *communicator*) were also interesting and there was a strong, if implicit, sense in some of the advertisements, as in the third example above, that an unusual combination of positive personal qualities would be necessary to fulfil the role successfully.

3.1.2. Internal contradictions in further particulars texts – and intra-institutional variations

Variation between advertisements/further particulars from the same university but different academic units (e.g. two departments in the same large school or college of education) also revealed tensions between whole-university and Education conceptualisations. For example, many new universities' further particulars were characterised by elaborations of the distinction between Lecturer and Senior Lecturer grades. But *within* such institutions, there were also significant differences between whole-university and Education department discourse.

In further particulars from a new university's School of Education, for example, the main duties consisted of up to 10 bullet points organised loosely around the themes of personal qualities, teaching and administrative tasks. In the same institution's School of Physical Education, the main duties were summarised in two paragraphs, focused on the kinds of teaching expected, with the administrative work linked to the activities of the institution as a whole and presented as an opportunity for 'wider involvement'. In the School of Physical Education there were also specific references to research and encouragement to potential post-holders to develop their own scholarly interests, references absent from the School of Education text. The contrast between the further particulars from these different departments within the same institution was interesting for the way in which the School of Education posts were conceived of as somewhat separate from the wider institutional context whereas the posts within the School of Physical Education seemed much more aligned with whole-university expectations delivered in the common section on expectations of Lecturers/Senior Lecturers.

3.1.3. The position of research in the job description's main duties list

Overall, it was rare for universities to give research priority in the first half of the main duties list, and in only one instance (at an old university) did it appear consistently throughout the initial advertisement. In this particular case, 'research and teaching' appeared throughout the details and one of the selection criteria was a 'commitment to develop high quality research output'. Two vacancies at an old university indicated that research was expected,

but for one position, while research was mentioned as a priority in the job advertisement, in the main duties list 'willingness to engage in research' had fallen to 11th place. For the other post, research was at 9th place. Whilst the majority of advertisements (61 out of 111) did include research and/or scholarship as a requirement, its position in the main duties lists of the further particulars varied from 1st to 22nd. And, of course, this means that 45% of the advertised posts made no reference to research at all. For readers outside the UK, the implication that research might not be regarded as a key feature of the academic work of a university-based teacher educator may be surprising but gives some sense of the distinctiveness of the English system.

As we have already indicated, intra-institutional variations were often pronounced and this was also true with respect to the position of research in the main duties list. The main duties lists for the full-time, permanent vacancies in the large Faculty of Education at one new university gave research very different priorities. For example, in the main duties list for a Senior Lecturer in Primary Maths Education, the first priority was:

1. Lead advanced scholarship and research in the area of Primary and/or Early Years Mathematics and lead bids for research funding.

- whereas a Design and Technology position at the same level had a 'contribution' to research or 'scholarly development' as the second priority, with the field left open.

3.2. Producing the category II: the interviews with academic leaders in Education departments

Unlike the advertisements and further particulars texts, within our small sample of interviews with academic leaders, it was possible to observe differences along sectoral (new and old) lines although, as we discuss later, these differences will of course have been jointly-constructed in the interview talk.

3.2.1. 'You have to be both': the teacher educator as a hybrid category

In the interviews with old university academic leaders, the *teacher educator* was categorised around a tension between research productivity and quality and the potential and capacity of teacher educators to inform and influence the professional development of beginning teachers. The latter, more professional attributes were often expressed as personal dispositions towards working with teachers and with schools. This tension has been noted internationally (e.g. Berry, 2007; Ducharme, 1993; Jonçich Clifford & Guthrie, 1988).

The Dunmore University Head of Department spoke of teacher educators as 'bridges' between 'purely academic' staff (not defined) and professional staff who only worked on initial teacher education programmes. Teacher educators at Dunmore were positioned as a hybrid category of academic worker and one that was useful strategically in promoting the department to university senior management when Office for Standards in Education inspections resulted in excellent grades in published reports. The Ashland University Director of Teacher Education spoke about the importance of teacher educators' 'recent and relevant' school experience but also spoke of them in terms of a polarity between 'excellent teachers' and 'excellent researchers'. For the Chalfont Head of Department, teacher educators were also positioned between academics in 'very pure' disciplines (also not defined) and the 'awfully practical' world of school experience. In response to a question about what knowledge, skills and experience were privileged when making teacher education appointments, the Chalfont Head of Department gave a sense both of the hybridity of the teacher educator as academic worker and of his own positioning as a middle-manager in the university:

> I am in the middle of two very hard places. One is my director of research who goes scatty if I don't demand publications, PhDs etc … on the other hand these people have to teach on PGCE [initial teacher education] programmes, so they have to be practitioners. They have to have experience in schools …. And you cannot logically expect someone who's spent half a lifetime teaching in schools … usually getting to a post of responsibility, deputy headships, that sort of thing … to have also built a good research profile and have lots of publications in (…) journals.

The Belvoir Head of Department also spoke around the challenge this presented to universities when deciding how to conceptualise the teacher educator and their work but Belvoir was distinctive in our sample because research productivity and quality were clearly privileged and a recent appointment on this basis was given as an example. The Belvoir Head of Department was also distinctive in being the only participant who made an argument – at two different points in the interview – for the importance of teacher educators' research and scholarship in student teachers' learning. Responding to a question that asked how teacher educator as a job would be explained to the general public, this Head of Department said:

> … being a really good teacher educator has to be research-informed, because ideally you would want the next generation of teachers to be being taught by the leading edge in terms of knowing where the field is going. But they also need to be excellent practitioners. So I think you know you have to be both. […] Because often an excellent practitioner is heavily rooted in their own context and their own experiences. And the one real advantage of being a professional teacher educator, if you could put it like that is that, and a researcher, is that you see things from multiple perspectives … so that you can counterpoint things.

In the interviews with old university academic leaders, the teacher educator was produced as a hybrid category of academic worker requiring both research and professional credibility – an effective practitioner but one that was not situation-bound. Although the Belvoir Head of Department did make an argument for the importance of research attributes in relation to professional outcomes, overall it was interesting that the importance of teacherly credibility was assumed rather than argued for.

3.2.2. 'Quite different to other faculties': the teacher educator as an exceptional category

In the interviews with the academic leaders at new universities, teacher educator as a category was produced rather differently – as 'role models', capable of 'transferring best practice' as recognisably 'professional' figures subject to the tight constraints of policy. The Gebwick University Head of Department expressed it this way: 'our tutors have to model the best possible pedagogy, they have to be creative in their practice, set high standards of professionalism and integrity'. All four academic leaders emphasised the importance of 'successful professional experience' and all categorised the *teacher educator* by invoking official policy and managerial discourses more consistently than the old sector academic leaders. But research and scholarship as aspects of teacher educators' work were not entirely absent in these interviews. Thus, when the Eglinton associate Head of Department was asked:

> Interviewer: […] when you made the appointments what was it that you were privileging?

> Eglinton: We were looking for a particular academic and professional expertise in terms of a specific procurement area.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah.
>
> Eglinton: Um … we were looking for some middle management to senior experience within their existing organisation in terms of managing staff and in terms of managing curriculum development.
>
> Interviewer: Yeah.
>
> Eglinton: Um … we were looking for somebody who has got a research potential that might fit into our themed areas in terms of research within the school and within the faculty.

- the interaction illustrates both the eventual priorities that were apparent across the academic leaders in the four new universities as well as the development of the jointly-constructed talk in the interview. These academic leaders' reasoning about research and scholarly activity was relatively more difficult to elicit in the interviews with only one of them (Hawtree) offering a rationale and strategy for research and researcher development.

Conscious that their institutional context required organised developmental activity ('we grow our own'), the Hawtree Head of Department spoke of 'research clusters' led by a professor which all new teacher educator were required to join, where they were offered research mentorship and where research targets were part of annual appraisal. The Finbury Head of Department spoke briefly of 'currently reviewing strategies for supporting research development in advance of the 2013 REF' (the forthcoming audit of research productivity) but strategic development of teacher educators' research capacity did not figure in the other two interviews. Moreover, although all these academic leaders spoke in various ways of teacher education work being 'research-informed', other than in the Hawtree interview, in response to questions about how university-level expectations of lecturers might be addressed, there was no sense of how new teacher educators (mostly straight from school-teaching and without a Master's degree) would *become* research-informed nor sustain this capacity.

The interviews with these Head of Departments also showed the extent to which they regarded the Education department as distinctive within their universities – with very different expectations of new academic staff than in other academic areas and with different institutional aims. When asked whether what was privileged in making teacher education appointments was similar to what other faculties within the university privileged, the Gebwick Head of Department responded:

> Um, no I would think we're probably quite different to most other faculties. Because we um … along with the health faculty we are looking for experienced professionals to join an educational faculty which still has a large core of its business in training initial professionals, whether it's in teaching or youth and community work or early years work. So um … we are looking for academic qualification as well as professional qualification and experience professionally. That's quite different to most other faculties.

Across these interviews, Education departments were conceptualised by the academic leaders principally as sites of teacher education 'business' and this was presented as leading to somewhat different priorities to the rest of the institution. Teacher educators were produced as an exceptional category of academic worker in this sense and also in the sense of bearing strong personal responsibilities as professional role models and exemplary practitioners.

4. Discussion: the professional/researcher contradiction

In our sample of job advertisements and further particulars, it was common for universities to conceptualise the teacher educator as a 'super teacher' – an effective classroom practitioner demonstrating strong personal qualities of enthusiasm and resilience. *Training* and *delivery* described teaching, often relating directly to how teaching and teacher education were described in policy and professional discourse. No significant differences were observed between new and old university sectors but differences in the way teacher educators and their work were conceptualised were often apparent *within* the same institution. For example, some posts were clearly aligned with whole-university expectations of academic work whereas obvious discontinuities were apparent between other posts and these same expectations.

Some differences were observed between how teacher educators were being categorised in interviews with the academic leaders in new and old universities but it is important to acknowledge that these differences were produced in jointly-constructed talk of an interview throughout which our participants were aware of – and, in one case, explicitly referred to – our own institutional location as researchers. Nonetheless, in interviews with academic leaders in old universities, teacher educators were categorised around a contradiction between research productivity and professional credibility. The teacher educator was produced as a hybrid category of academic worker. In the interviews with academic leaders in new universities, the teacher educator was produced as an exceptional category, somewhat distinct from the rest of the institution, with different expectations made of them and different institutional goals. Although both sets of academic leaders, in several respects, appeared to be managing a similar range of work (e.g. the professional preparation of teachers, continuing professional development, research degrees) under similar resource constraints (national salary levels, national levels of student fee income) and experiencing similar kinds of personal pressure (Office for Standards in Education inspections, budgetary concerns, institutional reputation and prestige), the way in which teacher educators and their work was conceptualised in talk was different and these discursive differences related to questions of research and the capacity of teacher educators to develop a 'research profile'.

It is important for us to stress that we have been analysing publicly-available texts (job advertisements and further particulars) and research interviews with senior figures in the Education academic community in English universities. Although different kinds of conceptualisation and argumentation are at work in the different types of data (published writing and jointly-constructed interview talk), it is reasonable to assume that, taken as a whole, our data allows some insight into the ways a mixed sample of institutions conceptualise teacher education as academic work. This is not to say that our data makes institutional conceptualisations universally transparent; we do not claim that this is what these institutions think and argue always and everywhere. Given that we have to assume that decision-makers in the institutions thought seriously before publishing job descriptions and that the academic leaders who answered our questions did so carefully, it nonetheless seems fair to move forward on the basis that our analysis does make it possible to comment on the ways in which the categorisations were produced and how they were used to build arguments in the public sphere about university-based teacher educators and their work.

To this extent, it is perhaps surprising that the degree to which conceptualisations of teacher education as academic work are coherent is fairly limited, both within and between institutions. What *is* shared is the teacher educator's difficult positioning in universities, a positioning that is produced differently in the text

and talk data but reflected, for example, in a common reluctance to use the word 'lecturer' (the main academic career grade in the UK). Similarly, the institutions shared a commitment to teacher educators' credibility with the profession, usually demonstrated through significant professional experience. Indeed, this commitment to professional credibility was rather taken-for-granted.

What is not shared, it seems, is an argument for the importance of research as an aspect of teacher educators' work and for the relationship between research and teaching. Neither is an awareness of the need to develop research capacity in teacher educators, not only in relation to funding and issues of productivity but in relation to claims for research-informed teaching and student teachers' learning. In our sample of job advertisements and further particulars and in the interviews, we found some exceptions but they were indeed exceptional rather than systemic. We realise that one response to this interpretation of our findings is: does it matter? Perhaps wide institutional differences are what we should expect, each institution determining their own mission and values, recruiting staff and conceptualising teacher education as they see fit. It could be argued that there will inevitably be hierarchies of institutions like universities and colleges and hierarchies of departments, and staff within those departments, and perhaps there should be increasing acceptance of diversification according to institution-type (e.g. research-intensive and teaching-only) and of different categories of academic worker? Twombly, Wolf-Wendel, Williams, and Green (2006), for example, in their study of US faculty searches, ask whether the clinical faculty model – teaching staff without expectations of a research career but with a strong professional background – is worth consideration by the field as a whole. And Tierney (2001), writing from a reformist perspective, explicitly argues for increasing diversity in types of higher education institution and teacher education programme. One practical problem with adopting this model in England is that all higher education institutions and the work of all academic staff are regulated by the same criteria (e.g. Office for Standards in Education, research productivity and quality audits, national quality assurance frameworks, international comparisons and rankings, etc), with common expectations of research and teaching excellence as well as the relatively recent assumption that teachers undergoing professional preparation in one institution's programme will have an equivalent or even identical preparation to those qualifying from others. Such are the consequences of a national competency-based model of initial teacher education within a national system of (at least, partly) publicly-funded universities.

Another interpretation of our findings might be that the position of teacher educators reflects a wider situation across universities generally in England or at least in professional/vocational fields such as Management/Business and Health/Social Care. Both the ESRC Demographic Review and our interviewees referred to potential commonalities here. Further research might undertake the same analyses of vacancies in these disciplines and others. It may well be the case that differences in conceptualisation in professional schools reflect the increasing stratification of universities in England on research lines. Certainly, on the basis of our data, it appears that what Enders referred to as the international trend across higher education of 'the rise of a class of non-professorial teachers' and 'a group of externally financed contracted research staff' is increasingly true of Education departments in England, with all the potential conflicts that this trend entails (Enders, 2000: 23). That said, perhaps the situation of teacher education in England is indeed unusual: given its long history in institutions of one kind or another, teacher education's location continues to be under threat, whereas the position of relative newcomers to universities in England (such as Nursing and Health/Social Care) appears to be strengthening.

5. Conclusion: a future for the professional education of teachers in higher education?

When universities in England think about what they are 'looking for' when recruiting teacher educators, on the basis of our data, it seems reasonable to conclude that they want an expert 'practitioner' who can 'deliver' research-informed teaching or possibly develop a research 'profile', depending on the institutional context. This position is coherent insofar as it renders the teacher educator as a difficult or troublesome category, as hybrid or exceptional, and often the subject of some sort of truce with the university as a whole. The position lacks coherence, however, in that it doesn't attempt to reconcile what are presented as contradictory expectations nor does it argue a case for professional education in relation to higher education as a whole. Given that the future direction of universities in England is uncertain given a new policy and funding environment following the 2010 general election and new policies on schools, universities and teacher education, our view is that this question of coherence merits serious consideration. It is also a question, however differently inflected, that can be asked of teacher education systems internationally.

On the one hand, one could argue for the professional education of teachers as the cutting edge of higher education where knowledge has to meet multiple tests of rigour and relevance in intersecting settings for practice under public scrutiny (Ellis, in press). Hybridity, from this perspective, is a strength and might be the ultimate goal of all academic work where researchers/practitioners co-produce knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). Teacher educators, under this analysis, do not simply act as a conduit for 'research findings' to teachers, with straightforward implications for practice, but instead their research and teaching develops a theory of professional practice that informs and engages with the work of other researchers. So rather than accepting the potentially undermining distinction between 'basic' and 'applied' research, the academic work of the teacher educator potentially explodes such a polarity with a focus on practice-developing research that also develops a theory of practice (c.f. Chaiklin, 1993). The hybrid vigour of the teacher educator therefore arises from their capacity to develop new knowledge across multiple social settings and at different levels of specialisation and abstraction. This meaningful interpretation of hybridity is one that Zeichner is pursuing in the US context (Zeichner, 2010).

If, on the other hand, proximity to practice and 'professional credibility' are over-riding factors, there are at least two important questions to answer: first, given that initial teacher education in England is mainly school-based, do both partners (schools and universities) need the same forms of expertise? It seems reasonable to assume that, appropriately resourced, school teachers would win the credibility argument every time and initial teacher education would therefore need to be located in schools. Expecting university-based teacher educators to act as 'super teachers', as external facilitators of reflection, as quality assurance consultants or as 'enthusiastic' and 'resilient' accreditors of school-based, school-led inquiry is surely an unsustainable model of university's involvement in teacher education. Traditionally, at least, suitability for academic work has not relied on personal qualities alone. Second, when the teaching profession – in the way Evetts (2009) understands a profession as a knowledge-creating collective, built on principles of collegiality and trust – is being transformed through political reform, in England and internationally, what does 'professional credibility' and, more vitally, professional knowledge actually mean? When government seeks to specify the professional knowledge-base (for however laudable ends), then the highest levels of professional credibility can only ever be achieved by civil servants and policy advisors. The involvement of universities only slows down reform, from

a politician's perspective; professional credibility can only accrue to those who align themselves with the policy.

These positions might seem extreme – a new vision for the professional education of teachers in universities or acceptance of a transformed professionalism and a new arrangement for teacher education in schools. We are not arguing for either position here. But we do want to suggest the importance of a coherent position, whatever its direction. Coherence need not mean uniformity. Our view is that teacher education as an academic field of practice in universities in England needs to build an argument, to make a case. Whatever the specific details and variations, we suspect that these are some of the alternative conceptualisations of teacher education that governments, universities and the profession will have to confront in the years ahead, in England and elsewhere.

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