

RESEARCH BRIEF

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WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE TO BECOME TEACHERS AND THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THEIR CHOICE OF INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING ROUTE: EARLY FINDINGS FROM THE BECOMING A TEACHER (BaT) PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

The Becoming a Teacher (BaT) project is a six-year (2003-2009) longitudinal study of teachers' experiences of initial teacher training (ITT), induction and early professional development (EPD) in England. The project is jointly funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), and is being conducted by researchers at the University of Nottingham, the University of Leeds and MORI Social Research Institute.

This Research Brief presents early findings relating to:

1. Why people choose to become teachers, and whether this varies across different ITT routes (including university-administered undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, school-centred and employment-based ITT programmes)
2. Why student teachers¹ follow one kind of ITT route rather than another
3. Whether student teachers expect to enter teaching on completion of their ITT programmes, and to still be teaching in five years' time.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of trainees, regardless of their training route, were attracted to teaching by the idea of working with children or young people and helping young people to learn. However, there are some significant differences across training route, gender and teaching phase, regarding the factors which attracted people to teaching.
- Ninety per cent of trainees indicate that they are following their first choice of training route, though there is significant variation across routes, with those following BEd and BA/BSc QTS programmes most likely to be following their first choice.

¹ We use the terms 'student teacher' and 'trainee' interchangeably, to refer to those following various initial teacher training (ITT) programmes.

- Different factors attract trainees to different ITT routes. For example, the majority of university-administered PGCE students state they were attracted by the 'balance of in-school and out-of-school training', whilst trainees following GRTP programmes are most likely to have considered the route as 'the best option financially'.
- Across all routes, 87 per cent of trainees state that they are very likely to enter teaching after completing their ITT, and 80 per cent indicate that they expect to be teaching in five years' time. Trainees aged over 40 are most likely to expect to be teaching in five years' time.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The findings reported in this Research Brief are based on:

(1) The responses of 4,393 student teachers (who were due to complete their ITT in 2004) to a *self-completion questionnaire* which focused on their reasons for entering teacher training and their preconceptions and expectations about teacher training and teaching.² This total included those training to teach in both primary and secondary schools, and following a range of subject specialisms. The breakdown of respondents by ITT route was as follows:

- 1,571 university-administered Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)
- 138 Flexible PGCE
- 1,384 Bachelor of Arts (BA) / Science (BSc) with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)
- 399 Bachelor of Education (BEd)
- 564 Graduate and Registered Training Programme (GRTP)³
- 337 trainees based in School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) consortia.⁴

The primary aims of the sampling were to generate a representative sample of student teachers within

ITT route, and to ensure that sufficient people were recruited from among the smaller routes to enable viable analysis by this factor at the end of the project (allowing for attrition). ITT providers were stratified by route and a random sample of providers was then selected. In addition, a small number of providers were then purposively selected to boost the numbers of certain types of trainees, among the smaller routes. A total of 110 providers were approached to participate in the survey, of which 74 took part.

Comparison with the profile data currently available (i.e. TTA Performance Profile data for 2003) suggests that the achieved sample is representative of trainees by gender and ethnicity within university-administered undergraduate and postgraduate ITT programmes and employment-based routes.

(2) In-depth *interviews* with a sub-sample of 76 trainees, balanced across each of the ITT routes identified above and a minimum of three ITT providers per route (18 ITT providers altogether⁵). The interview sample was further stratified by phase, subject specialism, gender, age and ethnicity. The interviews were designed as an initial step in the rich case study strand to the research, which will seek to understand the lived experiences of participants as they go through training and their early years in the profession. The initial interviews also sought to examine in more depth some of the issues covered in the questionnaire, and these are the findings reported on here.

FINDINGS

1. Why do people choose to become teachers?

The questionnaire survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which a range of factors (26 in total) may have been influential in attracting them to or deterring them from undertaking a teacher training programme. Across the whole sample, the ten factors to which the highest numbers of survey respondents stated they were strongly attracted are listed in Table 1 overleaf.

A closer examination of the data reveals that the first two items in Table 1 ('helping young people to learn' and 'working with children or young people') were also the two features which attracted the highest numbers of trainees (and in the same order)

² The 4,393 respondents were those respondents who clearly stated their ITT route. Some questionnaires were returned after data analysis for this report had begun, and the ITT routes of all respondents are being verified in subsequent surveys.

³ Including GRTP trainees based in School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) consortia.

⁴ Including those gaining PGCEs via this (SCITT) route; excluding SCITT-based GRTP trainees.

⁵ Some providers were visited for more than one ITT route.

Table 1: Factors attracting student teachers to teacher training

	Strongly attracted (%)	Moderately attracted (%)	Total attracted (%)	N*
Helping young people to learn	78	20	98	4,330
Working with children or young people	60	32	92	4,322
Being inspired by a good teacher	49	36	85	4,317
Giving something back to the community	32	46	78	4,314
The challenging nature of the job	29	48	77	4,315
Long holidays	26	42	68	4,318
Staying involved with a subject specialism	25	32	57	4,301
Job security	24	45	69	4,314
Wanting to teach pupils better than in own experience	22	36	58	4,304
The professional status of teaching	19	44	63	4,310

* This is the number of respondents who responded to each item.

within each ITT route, and which attracted the highest numbers of female and male trainees, and those seeking to teach in both primary and secondary schools.

On the other hand, the data also reveal some interesting variations in response across training route, gender and educational phase.

Variation by ITT route

In spite of the similarity of response across ITT routes, reported above, data reveal that for some of the factors that were said to attract people to teacher training courses, there were significant differences between the responses of trainees following different training routes. This was most apparent in relation to the four factors identified below.

- 'Wanting to work with children or young people': seventy-four per cent of BEd respondents (and 68% of BA/BSc QTS respondents) state that they were strongly attracted by this consideration, compared to 50 per cent of university-administered PGCE trainees and 50 per cent of Flexible PGCE trainees.
- 'Staying involved with a subject specialism': thirty-six per cent of university-administered PGCE students say they were strongly attracted by this factor, compared to 14 per cent of BEd and 16 per cent of BA/BSc QTS respondents.

- 'Opportunities for career development': twenty-five per cent of university-administered PGCE trainees and 22 per cent of GRTP trainees indicate that they were strongly attracted by this, compared with 12 per cent of respondents from BEd and BA/BSc QTS routes and 13 per cent from Flexible route programmes.
- 'Giving something back to the community': forty-two per cent of respondents from Flexible route programmes and 41 per cent of GRTP respondents state they were strongly attracted by this consideration, compared to 23 per cent of BA/BSc QTS and 24 per cent of BEd students.⁶

Variation by teaching phase (primary/secondary)

On some issues, the responses of those trainees seeking to teach in the primary phase of education and those seeking to teach in the secondary phase were very similar⁷. For example, 14 per cent of primary trainees and 16 per cent of secondary

⁶ The differences between the responses of those following different ITT routes proved to be statistically significant (Chi square: $p < 0.01$) in all four of these cases, even when controlling for gender and teaching phase. In short, statistical analysis suggests that the observed differences between the responses of trainees following different ITT routes were extremely unlikely to have occurred by chance.

⁷ 'Primary' trainees (N = 2,192) include those who expressed in their questionnaire responses that they would prefer to work with primary or nursery/foundation children; whilst 'secondary' respondents (N = 1,941) include those who indicated a preference for working with secondary or sixth form/further education students. Those who stated that they preferred to work with middle school pupils and special school pupils, or who had no preference, were not included in this aspect of data analysis.

trainees were strongly attracted to teacher training through 'speaking to other teachers about the profession', and 23 per cent of primary trainees and 22 per cent of secondary respondents were strongly attracted by 'wanting to teach pupils better than in their own experience'. On other issues there were statistically significant differences between the responses of primary and secondary trainees. Most notably, more primary trainees were attracted by:

- *working with children or young people* (73% strongly attracted, compared with 45% of secondary respondents) and
- *helping young people to learn* (82% strongly attracted, compared to 75% of secondary trainees).

On the other hand, a higher proportion of secondary than primary trainees were attracted by:

- *staying involved with a subject specialism* (which was strongly attractive to 42% of secondary respondents but only 10% of primary trainees) and
- *opportunities for career development* (23% strongly attracted, compared to 15% of primary respondents).

Variation by gender

Survey data also reveal some interesting (and statistically significant) variations in the responses of male and female trainees. Most notably:

- a higher proportion of female respondents state that they were strongly attracted by the idea of '*helping young people to learn*' (81% female respondents, 69% male) and '*working with children or young people*' (66% women, 38% men)
- a higher proportion of men were attracted by the '*financial incentives attached to teacher training*' (52% state that they were strongly or moderately attracted by this, compared to 38% of women), and by the '*benefits package*' (e.g. *occupational pension*)' (36% of male respondents say they were strongly or moderately attracted by this, compared to 26% of women).

Negative influences on trainees' decisions to undertake teacher training

Whilst all survey and case study participants had chosen to enter teacher training, it was interesting to seek to discover what factors might have deterred them from doing so, or what factors, if any, caused them to have reservations. From the questionnaire survey, six factors were each said to have been (strong or moderate) deterrents to undertaking teacher training by over ten per cent of questionnaire respondents. These were:

- (1) Teachers' morale (17% moderately deterred, 4% strongly deterred)
- (2) Salary (15% moderately deterred, 5% strongly deterred)
- (3) How the public perceives teachers/teaching (12% moderately deterred, 3% strongly deterred)
- (4) Speaking to teachers about the profession (11% moderately deterred, 3% strongly deterred)
- (5) Spending more time in higher education (9% moderately deterred, 3% strongly deterred)
- (6) TV drama programmes depicting the profession (e.g. *Grange Hill*, *Teachers*, *Hope and Glory*) (7% moderately deterred, 4% strongly deterred).

However, in the first five of the six cases listed above, more respondents state that they were attracted by these factors than those who state that they were deterred. Only 'TV drama programmes depicting the profession' are said to have deterred more respondents than they attracted (2% strongly attracted, 6% moderately attracted), though the majority of respondents (56%) indicated that they were neither attracted nor deterred by these.

The case study data reveal that a further factor which gave rise to reservations about entering teaching was workload:

The only major thing I saw [as a drawback of teaching] was the amount of work out of school ... I didn't see that as a drawback enough not to do it, but it was more of a 'school doesn't end at half past three or four' [thing], you do have that extra bit. (Female, 20-24, BA QTS, KS2/3)

I think it was the workload ... one of the things which made me say 'well, hang on, do I want this job to be my life or my career?' I think with teaching, I mean you know people say teaching shouldn't be your life, but it is really. (Male, 20-24, SCITT, secondary)

For most trainees, a combination of factors came into play, as illustrated in the following quotation from another case study interview:

Why I chose here? ... I wanted to go back to ... where I did my degree but I couldn't afford it really so this was second best... It would have been a PGCE but I've done a SCITT because of the locality and finance ... GTP would have been my first option but I couldn't do it because of my age. (Male, 20-24, SCITT, secondary)

2. Reasons for choosing different ITT routes

Were trainees following their first choice of training route?

Respondents were asked whether the ITT route they were following represented their first choice of training route. Responses indicate that the majority (90%) of trainees were following their first choice of training route. However, there were significant variations by ITT route. Those following the BEd and BA/BSc QTS routes were most likely to be following their preferred method of pre-service training (95%), followed by those on PGCE programmes (92%). Smaller proportions of those on less traditional training routes state that they were following their first choice of programme: 81 per cent of GRTP trainees; 77 per cent of Flexible PGCE trainees; and 76 per cent of SCITT trainees.

The questionnaire responses of those stating that they were not following their first choice training route (N = 449), suggest that the main reasons for this were that:

- (1) Their application(s) to their first choice route were rejected (21%)
- (2) The programme(s) they applied to were over-subscribed (18%)
- (3) They applied too late (14%)
- (4) They did not achieve the standard of qualification required (11%)
- (5) Their preferred route was not available in their local area (11%)
- (6) Their preferred route was not available at the school/institution they wanted to attend (10%)
- (7) Their preferred route wasn't financially viable (7%).

The case study data also reveal that some trainees would have preferred to have followed the GRTP route but did not meet the (then) minimum age requirement of 24.

I think when you were applying you had to be over a certain age to do a GTP... and I wasn't. (Female, 20-24, SCITT, primary)

Motivations for choosing particular ITT routes

Questionnaire respondents indicating that they were following their first choice ITT route (N = 3,942) were asked why they chose that particular route. Overall (across all ITT routes), respondents state that the most influential factors were:

- (1) 'The balance of in-school and out-of-school training appeals to me' (47% of respondents indicated that this was an influence on their choice of route)
- (2) 'I thought it was the best option financially' (37%)
- (3) 'I wanted to be trained by qualified teachers in schools' (35%)
- (4) 'I thought that prospective employers may prefer applicants who have followed this training route' (35%)
- (5) 'I wanted to train alongside people in my peer group/in the same situation as me' (34%)
- (6) 'It was available in my local area' (32%)
- (7) 'It was available at the school/institution that I wanted to attend' (26%).

On all seven items listed above, there were statistically significant variations in the responses of trainees following different ITT routes, even when controlling for gender and phase. Below, we outline the factors which were most frequently mentioned by respondents within each training route, and provide illustrations from the case study data.

Within the GRTP route, 81 per cent of survey respondents state that they chose this route because 'it was the best option financially', whilst 64 per cent state that their choice was influenced by a preference for wanting 'to be trained by qualified teachers in schools', 61 per cent by the 'school-based' rather than university-based nature of the course, and 42 per cent by the availability of the programme in their local area. The importance of financial

considerations to GRTP trainees are highlighted in the following excerpts from case study interviews:

GTP is much better for a career changer like myself in that you get a small income to tide yourself through the year which I thought I could realistically subsidise for a year. (Male, 30-34, GTP, primary)

[T]o commit myself to four years [studying for a BA QTS] with trying to bring up a family and pay the mortgage just wasn't on, and I'd got a ... full-time job anyway. I was quite happy and quite prepared to study and train at the same time as I was working... I did look at the option of doing a degree and then doing GTP or PGCE but again it would have meant giving my job up at some point in time and I couldn't take that risk, so RTP fitted my needs perfectly. (Female, 40-44, RTP, primary)

For SCITT trainees, the considerations mentioned by most survey respondents were the preference to be 'trained by qualified teachers in schools' (66%), the availability of a programme in their local area (57%), and the 'balance of in-school and out-of-school training' (56%). One case study trainee explains that whilst she wished to train in a particular area, she also wanted to pursue a route which would maximise the time spent training in schools:

I went to university [in this region] and I knew I wanted to stay so I only looked at courses in this area. I looked at [the university] courses in the area, and they did seem really reflection-based but... less focused on getting me in a school and getting me some real experience of teaching. In [the SCITT programme] you actually get in a school and you're taught by teachers quite a lot of the time as well and you're looking at everything as it is, as opposed to a uni' course which is everything from a text book as it should be. (Female, 20-24, SCITT, primary)

The 'balance of in-school and out-of-school training' was also an important factor for a majority (54%) of PGCE students (the preference apparently being for relatively more 'out-of-school' activities than their SCITT counterparts), and this is the most frequently stated consideration for respondents following this route. The next most frequently cited factors by PGCE respondents are financial considerations (50%) and a preference for training alongside their peer

group or people in the 'same situation' as themselves (43%):

What I thought the PGCE would do would be going through the training with a peer group, [where] we were all going into the same pressures, the same things and in very much a team work environment. (Female, 35-39, PGCE, secondary)

Flexible PGCE trainees are, perhaps unsurprisingly, most likely to state that 'the flexibility of the programme suits my other commitments' (61%), followed by 'it was the best option financially' (40%), and by 'the balance of in-school and out-of-school training' (30%). In the case study interviews, a number of Flexible PGCE trainees explained the way in which these first two factors interlinked:

I was just going for [Flexible PGCE] for the fact that I could work in between. I needed some amount monthly to come in to pay my bills and mortgages and for my family. So I did Flexible because for me there was no other alternative because I put the calculator down and said 'well, if I do supply work for so and so a month this is how much I will earn in the year, but if I took the GTP it's not a patch on that, let alone the full time course. (Female, 40-44, Flexible PGCE, secondary)

Interestingly the factor cited most frequently by both BEd and BA/BSc QTS trainees as a reason for choosing these types of ITT programmes, is a belief that 'prospective employers may prefer applicants who have followed this training route' (59% of BEd and 44% of BA/BSc QTS respondents), followed by 'the balance between in-school and out-of-school training' (45% of BEd, 44% of BA/BSc QTS) and wanting to train alongside people in their peer group or 'in the same situation' as themselves (33% BEd, 31% BA/BSc QTS). The first point is illustrated in the following excerpt from one of the case study interviews:

I spoke to the head of my children's school. I didn't know whether to go down a [degree route] and then a PGCE but she said that she would take a BEd student over a PGCE student so I went down that route. (Female, 30-34, BEd, primary)

3. Do student teachers expect to enter and remain in the teaching profession?

Survey respondents were asked how likely or unlikely they were to enter teaching after completing their ITT programme and whether they expected to be in teaching in five years' time.

How likely did trainees think they were to enter the teaching profession after their ITT?

Eighty-seven per cent of all respondents (N = 4,371) indicate that they are 'very likely' to enter teaching after completing their ITT, and 12 per cent state that they are 'fairly likely' to do so, with only one per cent stating they are (fairly or very) unlikely to enter teaching. Comparing responses to this question across ITT route, the highest proportion of trainees stating that they are very likely to enter teaching on completion of their ITT programme came from the GRTP and SCITT routes (both 90%), followed by BEd (87%), PGCE (87%), BA/BSc QTS (85%) and Flexible PGCE trainees (78%).⁸

The data also reveal that a higher proportion of women than men indicate that they are likely to enter teaching at the end of their ITT programmes: 88 per cent of female respondents state that they are 'very likely' to do so, compared to 82 per cent of males; whilst one per cent of women indicate that this is fairly or very unlikely, compared to two per cent of men.⁹

Analysis of survey data suggests that the perceived likelihood that trainees will enter the teaching profession on completion of their training does not vary significantly by phase or by age. Eighty-nine per cent of primary trainees and 87 per cent of secondary trainees state that it is 'very likely' that they will enter teaching on completion of their ITT programme, and in both cases only one per cent feel it is 'fairly' or 'very unlikely'.

Did trainees expect to be in teaching in five years' time?

Eighty per cent of all survey respondents (N = 4,353) indicate that they expect to be in teaching in five years' time, whilst five per cent state that they do not expect to be, and 15 per cent state that they do not know. GRTP trainees are most likely to state that they *will* be teaching in five years' time (83%),

followed by PGCE students (82%), SCITT (81%), BA/BSc QTS (78%), BEd (77%) and Flexible route trainees (76%). BEd and BA/BSc QTS trainees are most likely to state that they will *not* be working in teaching in five years' time (6%), whilst Flexible route trainees are most *uncertain* about whether they will or will not, with 19 per cent indicating that they do not know. However, the variations in responses to this question across ITT route are not statistically significant. Nor do we find statistically significant differences if we compare responses to this question by gender and phase.

Interestingly, however, we do find statistically significant differences if we compare responses to this question by respondents' age. In general, younger respondents are *less likely* to state that they expect to be teaching in five years' time, as illustrated in Table 2. Those aged 40-44 years appear to be more confident that they will be in teaching in five years' time, which might be interpreted as signifying a greater commitment to teaching. As one case study trainee in this age group puts it:

it's a long term career change... it's longer than 10 years. This is the career change; I'm not now going to have a chance to do another one. (Male, 40-44, PGCE, secondary)

Table 2: Do you expect to be working in teaching in 5 years' time, or not?*

Age group (years)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't know (%)
20-24	77	6	17
25-29	79	6	15
30-34	84	3	12
35-39	84	2	14
40-44	89	1	10
45 or more	85	2	13

* N = 4,324. This figure excludes respondents who did not state their age and those who did not answer this question. Not all rows add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

CONCLUSION

These early findings from the Becoming a Teacher project provide some interesting insights into the motives behind student teachers' decisions to become teachers, their choice of ITT route, and their expectations of the likelihood of entering teaching on the completion of their ITT and of remaining in teaching in five years' time. The altruistic motives which appear to lie behind many student teachers' decisions to enter teacher training (which are well

⁸ The differences between the responses of those following different ITT routes are statistically significant (Chi Square: $p < 0.001$).

⁹ The differences between the responses of men and women on this question are statistically significant (Chi Square: $p < 0.001$).

triangulated by both survey and case study data) are particularly encouraging in terms of teacher retention as there is some literature which suggests that these are the kinds of factors which are most likely to keep teachers in the profession (Nieto, 2003).

NEXT STEPS

The next stages of the research will explore how some of the issues identified in this paper may relate to and interact with trainees' / teachers' actual experiences of ITT, induction and early professional development, and with their subsequent decisions about teaching, including whether or not to remain in the profession.

To explore these issues the research team will draw on data generated by:

- an annual telephone survey with respondents to the initial postal questionnaire, to the end of their fourth year in teaching (in 2008)
- regular in-depth interviews and e-journals with case study participants
- interviews with teacher educators associated with the ITT and NQT induction programmes of the case study participants.

REFERENCE

Nieto, S. (2003) *What Keeps Teachers Going?* New York: Teachers' College Press.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX08-04) are available free of charge from DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ (tel: 0845 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

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