Design and Technology Teacher Retention: A Snapshot

Abstract

This case study provides quantitative data regarding retention rates in the teaching profession of one-year PGCE design and technology initial teacher training (ITT) students at Middlesex University. The findings appear to go some way towards disproving the received notion that the average length of time spent in the profession by a newly qualified teacher is three years.

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Introduction

There is no published information in the public domain about the retention rates of newly qualified design and technology teachers. In fact, there is surprisingly little information about the retention rates of teachers in general. The Teacher Training Agency has no information and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), although holding comprehensive data regarding inflow and outflow of personnel to the profession, has nothing specific concerning rates of retention. The aim of the study, therefore, was to set out to provide, perhaps for the first time from within a higher education institution, entirely quantitative data on retention rates of a sample of design and technology ITT trainees. This sample was drawn from trainees who had been trained at Middlesex University on the one-year PGCE programme during the decade 1990 to 2000. The objective of the research was to track the 227 individuals who comprised this sample, using annual first destination surveys as a starting point, to find out whether they were still working in the teaching profession. The study, which was funded by the Technology Enhancement Programme, was undertaken by telephone survey during the last academic year.

Tracking the sample

Annual first destination surveys were used as a starting point in an attempt to track individuals in the sample. These surveys, which are completed in June of each academic year at the end of the PGCE programme, detail individuals who have gained employment by this date and their respective first appointment schools. They are not, therefore, a complete picture of the total year cohort as in some years a few trainees will take up posts after June. However, the surveys were considered to be a large enough body of data to draw a representative sample from.

The telephone survey started by contacting each trainee's first appointment school to ascertain if they were still teaching there. This generally involved speaking to the design and technology head of department or the head teacher. If a trainee was not still in employment at their first appointment school, an attempt was made to find out where they had moved to. Some trainees had to be tracked through a number of schools before they were found. Some proved to be untraceable having left the school with, seemingly, no other employment to go to, or having left the local area (or the country). A very small number of schools listed in the first destination data no longer existed. However, the main reason a trainee remained untraceable was often due to the reluctance of schools to be forthcoming about where a trainee had moved to. Some schools refused to take part in the survey citing the data protection act and stating that they could not pass this information on to a third party. In all, tracking individuals proved to be problematic and very time-consuming. During the course of the research over 1000 phone calls were made in an attempt to trace the 227 individuals in the sample.

The findings

To an extent, the figures given in the following table speak for themselves. However, it is pleasing to note that, on average, 77% of trainees per year group are still teaching. Those that were tracked were tracked from school to school, which implies that they have been in continuous employment since finishing their training. It is also, of course, possible that some of the trainees who proved to be untraceable are also still teaching, especially female trainees who, for example, had taken time out to have children but may have re-entered the profession at a later date. DfES statistics show that approximately a third of all teachers entering the profession each year are returnees. (1)

Up to 1996/1997, it proved impossible to acquire definitive data on sample individuals who had left the profession, although it is probable that many untraceable trainees had. The data also indicates the surprising number of trainees that remain in their first appointment schools, for example, 25% from 1991/1992.

Recent statistics released by the DfES indicate there is a growing need for design and technology teachers:

However, overall the findings from this case study seem to indicate that the majority of design and technology ITT trainees from Middlesex remain committed to teaching, spending a significant period of time in the profession.

Vacancy rates for classroom teachers in maintained secondary schools from January 1996 to 2001 by subject in England

Design and technology:

Vacancies as a percentage of teachers in post:

1996	1997	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
0.2	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.7	1.3

Number of vacancies:

1999	2000	2001
99	110	206

Middlesex University initial teacher training design and technology teacher retention

Year Group	Number of trainees listed on first destination survey	Still teaching at first appointment school	Still teaching but at another school	Total percentage still teaching	Untraceable	Definitely left teaching
1990/1991	12	2 (16%)	8 (66%)	82%	2 (16%)	
1991/1992	24	6 (25%)	17 (70%)	95%	1 (4%)	
1992/1993	20	3 (15%)	13 (65%)	80%	4 (20%)	
1993/1994	27	3 (11%)	17 (62%)	73%	7 (25%)	
1994/1995	32	2 (6%)	20 (62%)	68%	10 (31%)	
1995/1996	22	5 (22%)	12 (54%)	76%	5 (22%)	
1996/1997	22	6 (27%)	11 (50%)	77%	5 (22%)	
1997/1998	23	4 (17%)	13 (56%)	73%	3 (13%)	3 (13%)
1998/1999	25	8 (32%)	9 (36%)	68%	3 (12%)	5 (20%)
1999/2000	20	11 (55%)	6 (30%)	85%	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
Totals	**227**	**50 (22%)**	**126 (55%)**	**Average: 77%**	**42 (18%)**	**9 (3%)**

Figures in brackets show results as % of trainees listed in first destination survey

References:

(1) DfES. 2002. National Statistics Volume. Statistics of Education. Teachers in England 2001 Edition. London. The Stationery Office. page 35.

(2) DfES. 2002. National Statistics Volume. Statistics of Education. Teachers in England 2001 Edition. London. The Stationery Office. page 88.

Note

This is a little research vignette. Further in-depth study is planned by the author.