

# Whatever happened to teacher training colleges?

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In England a complex range of organisations provide education and training for adults and young people over the age of 16, including school sixth forms, sixth-form colleges and further education colleges. Specialist institutions also exist, for example those dedicated to art and design or land-based studies, whilst some colleges focus on adult learners or those with special educational needs. In addition, thousands of voluntary and private-sector providers offer various forms of work-related learning – for example business administration, childcare or so-called employability programmes. There are also 130 ‘public sector’ universities and university colleges, and over 200 FE colleges offer some form of higher education; meanwhile, there are currently over 120 ‘alternative’ HE providers in England, many of which may soon be able to call themselves universities. The post-compulsory education system (if system is the right term) is therefore complicated and confusing – not only for the general population but also for those studying or working in further and higher education. Unlike some other nations, though, separate institutions dedicated solely to teacher training do not currently exist in England. Yet this was not always the case: it is often forgotten that a whole set of such establishments – the colleges of education – once some 160 strong across England and Wales, was effectively abolished during the 1970s and 1980s.

England’s first teacher-training college was established in 1789 by Quaker philanthropist Joseph Lancaster, and a few other colleges, also run by voluntary and religious bodies, opened in the early

19th century. The Church of England then established its first teacher-training college in 1840, and some twenty Anglican colleges were soon in place. The Catholic and Methodist Churches soon followed suit and opened their own teacher-training institutions soon thereafter, as did the Church in Wales, and voluntary bodies such as the British and Foreign Schools Society and the Froebel Society. It nevertheless soon became evident that such organisations were not able to meet the growing demand for teacher training, which accelerated rapidly as a consequence of the expansion of schooling following the 1870 Education Act – legislation driven, at least in part, by the threat to Britain’s industrial and military supremacy posed by nations with more well-developed systems of education and training. The 1888 Cross Commission then recommended involving the universities in teacher training which, it was argued, would both increase the supply of training places and make provision more academically rigorous. There was then a series of attempts to increase the involvement of the universities, at least until the late 20th century, when the state began to encourage more instrumental and ‘practical’ forms of teacher training. This has, of course, accelerated significantly of late and there is now a concerted attempt to force teacher training out of universities altogether and relocate it in schools – a movement driven by claims that teaching is essentially a practical skill best learnt ‘on the job’, as well as a desire to cut costs. Teacher training is therefore increasingly dominated by work-based learning programmes such as School-Centred Initial Teacher

Training, Teach First and similar initiatives whereby training is stripped of much of the underpinning theory and knowledge which traditionally characterised university-led provision and is based largely on notions of learning by 'sitting next to Nellie'.

Whilst the role of the universities grew after the Cross Commission, especially in relation to training secondary school teachers, the majority of teacher training continued to take place in specialist colleges run by voluntary-sector bodies until the beginning of the 20th century – although this would soon change. The 1902 Education Act established local education authorities (LEAs) to supply or aid the supply of education across the country, and the first municipal teacher-training colleges were established shortly thereafter. By 1938, some 28 LEA training colleges had opened and municipal involvement increased considerably after World War Two. Most of the nineteen emergency training colleges set up after the War were soon taken over by LEAs and, by the end of the 1960s, 113 teacher-training colleges were under local authority control. LEA power further increased when five of the newly-established polytechnics then opened departments of education. Institutional arrangements were therefore complex and the mixture of undergraduate, post-graduate and certificated routes into teaching arguably lacked both consistency and coherence. The quality of provision was, moreover, quite variable. Entry qualifications were often low and undoubtedly some colleges were rather pedestrian and parochial, a situation sometimes reinforced by the small scale and geographic isolation of many teacher-training colleges. This, combined with the continuing pressures of educational expansion and the changing demands of schooling more generally, meant that there was, by the end of the 1960s, a growing feeling that substantial reform of teacher training was necessary.

### Integration

The Conservative Party pledged to undertake a review of teacher training in the run-up to the 1970 General Election and the incoming Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, appointed a committee under Lord James of Rusholme to review: the content of the teacher training curriculum; the integration of teacher training with other parts of the education system; the role of the maintaining authorities – the LEAs, voluntary bodies, and universities.

The government's response to the James Report, the White Paper *Education: A Framework for Expansion*, accepted a number of its

recommendations, including the introduction of a more consistent system of in-service teacher development and the aspiration to make teaching an all-graduate profession. The other theme covered by the White Paper – creating a wider range of opportunities in higher education – would, however, have profound consequences for the colleges of education: most would in fact disappear as autonomous institutions soon thereafter.

*A Framework for Expansion* envisaged five possible futures for the colleges of education: continuing as an independent college concentrating on teacher training; a broadening of role and remit, either singly or through amalgamation with another college of education, to become a more generalist institution of HE; merger with a university, polytechnic or FE college; redesignation as a professional development centre for in-service teacher training; closure.

This may sound quite reasonable but the way in which change was enacted was deeply problematic, and it soon became evident that, for most colleges, it would not be possible to continue as a mono-tech teacher-training institution.

Almost immediately it was announced that the number of teacher training places outside the universities was to be slashed by a third – but figures were then reduced on four further occasions between 1974 and 1977, effectively cutting the pre-White Paper total by two thirds. Meanwhile, local authorities, the bodies charged with managing reorganisation, were forced to act with great haste; LEAs being required to submit interim plans for reorganisation by November 1973 and final proposals by April 1974, or as soon as possible thereafter. Yet no coherent national plan or regional coordination machinery to guide the decisionmaking process was established. LEAs were effectively left to work in isolation without full and accurate information, or knowledge about developments in neighbouring authorities. Essentially the process was both rushed and half-baked but matters were also complicated by the fact that LEAs were themselves in a state of transition – the redrawing of municipal boundaries following the 1972 Local Government Act meaning that plans devised by one LEA were often required to be implemented by another. Either way, what soon became clear was that individual colleges would have to adapt and change, or perish.

Ultimately, just twenty colleges of education survived as independent teacher-training institutions, and eventually these would either be taken over by universities or ultimately close. North Riding College was, for example, annexed by Hull University in the 1990s; St Martin's College, Lancaster was incorporated into the University of Cumbria in the

early 2000s; and Bretton Hall College, for instance, shut in 2007 after being run by a series of other organisations from the 1980s onwards. Most colleges were, however, taken over by neighbouring institutions soon after Mrs Thatcher's White Paper. A few were absorbed by universities – for example, St Luke's, Coventry and Keswick Hall Colleges of Education merged into Exeter, Warwick and the University of East Anglia respectively. Far more joined the new polytechnics though, with some 37 colleges of education amalgamating with polys. About twenty teacher-training institutions were taken over by FE colleges, effectively creating 'mixed-economy' FE/HE institutions, some of which, for example Bradford College and New Durham College, still exist. Meanwhile, a few former colleges of education were used by LEAs as in-service teacher-training centres, although such arrangements were usually short-lived as the comprehensive programme of professional development suggested by the James Report faltered. Still, a few colleges found alternative futures – Wentworth Castle College of Education, for example, was recreated as Northern College – a residential college operating along similar lines to Ruskin College. Others were less fortunate: some 25 colleges of education shut altogether in the years after the somewhat ironically titled Framework for Expansion.

### Debris

Meanwhile, a notable by-product of the abolition of the colleges of education was the emergence of some 59 colleges or institutes of higher education (CIHEs), a new type of provider usually formed from two or more teacher-training colleges. Although government had legislated for such arrangements, it would be safe to say that nowhere near as many CIHEs were envisaged, as effectively a whole new sub-sector of HE arose from the debris of the colleges of education. In a few cases, a single college managed to become a CIHE, usually by expanding to offer a broader range of social science or humanities courses, but most were created via merger, normally between colleges with similar traditions – the Anglican teacher-training colleges at Ripon and York, for example, becoming the College of Ripon and York St. John. Sometimes, though, it was necessary to bring together institutions of varying origins. Roehampton Institute was, for instance, created by the amalgamation of four colleges with voluntary sector origins – Whitelands (Anglican), Southlands (Methodist), Digby Stuart (Catholic) and Froebel (non-denominational). Either way, there is no getting away from the fact that the

CIHEs soon became something of a pis-aller for those unable to access a degree elsewhere, as had sometimes been the case with the colleges of education. Effectively the CIHEs became a new 'third division' of higher education institutions – arguably akin to secondary moderns in a new tripartite of HE underneath the universities and polytechnics.

Eventually the CIHEs would themselves disappear. Two of the largest, Derbyshire and Luton Colleges of HE, became universities after the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act allowed polytechnics and certain other institutions to use the title of university. Others were eventually taken over by neighbouring universities; Bulmershe College, for example, became part of Reading University in the late 1980s, and Crewe & Alsager College was consumed by Manchester Metropolitan University in the early 1990s. Others 'fell back' into FE – Doncaster Metropolitan Institute of Higher Education, for example, being annexed by Doncaster College. Some CIHEs, on the other hand, eventually became universities in their own right, generally after being a university college for some time beforehand. Bishop Grosseteste University, Newman University and the Universities of Chester and Worcester, for example, all began as either Anglican or Catholic teacher-training colleges and eventually became universities after various incarnations, including spending a period of time as a CIHE. Religious bodies were somewhat more effective in defending their colleges than were the LEAs, basically by demanding that their historic stake in the nation's education be protected. Notably, Liverpool Hope, Roehampton and various other CIHEs with religious roots also, in time, became universities.

### Uneven

Either way, the fate of the colleges of education was, as we have seen, varied and uneven. Whilst some were able to find alternative futures others sunk – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly – after Mrs Thatcher's *Framework for Expansion*. Perhaps the salutary lesson to be learnt is that the state will, where it sees fit, reorganise, reform or otherwise abolish not only individual institutions but a whole sector if it is deemed to be surplus to requirements.