# Dual identities: enhancing the in-service teacher trainee experience in further education

# A guide for teacher educators

**Kevin Orr and Robin Simmons**

**University of Huddersfield**

In contrast to the situation in schools, around ninety per cent of teachers in Further Education (FE) colleges are initially employed without a teaching qualification and complete their teacher training on a part-time in-service basis. In many ways this is beneficial — employers gain teachers with up-to-date knowledge and skills, learners benefit from their subject expertise, and many trainee teachers appreciate being able to earn an income while training. However, there are also a number of challenges that derive from this situation, above all the rapid transition to full professional role. This project, funded by ESCalate and the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, researched the dual role of employee and learner that trainee FE teachers experience. Data was gathered from trainee teachers, teacher educators and human resources managers to focus on the tension and symbiosis this situation presents. The findings are clear that teacher educators provide new staff with stability and support in what can be frenetic circumstances and they play a crucial role in enhancing teaching practice across organisations. However, that role needs to be better recognised and developed.

FE has traditionally prioritised the vocational or subject expertise of teachers over their pedagogical proficiency. Consequently, there has not been a culture of professional development of teaching in FE. Furthermore, new staff may have to quickly manage heavy workloads at the expense of expanding their approaches to teaching. If coping is given precedence over exploring practice, the professionalism and pedagogy of FE teaching cannot develop.

Though the absence of a culture of development in FE requires attention, recommendations to organisations about the initial training of teachers must be made cautiously. There is much over which employers and teacher educators have little control, not least the pertaining regulatory regime, and the sector’s diversity requires intervention that is sensitive to local influences. Moreover, any changes risk adding to the already full workload of staff in FE colleges, which may only aggravate the situation. With those caveats in mind, these recommendations are intended to contribute to a culture of pedagogical development in colleges and are offered as suggestions of good practice for teacher educators in the FE sector.

#### Recommendations

* **Prioritise pedagogic elements over administration in teacher training.**Teacher educators have limited control over many elements of initial teacher training courses and how trainees are assessed, but they can actively prioritise pedagogy over fulfilling the bureaucratic requirements of the course. Expedience should not be at the expense of developing practice. Issues of teaching and learning need to be at the centre of trainees’ experience, not completing forms.
* **Consider how trainees can be supported while maintaining challenge.**Sympathetically supporting trainees who are struggling with the pressures of teaching is important. However, it can lead teacher educators to unduly praise trainees’ existing practice. The consequence of this may be to endorse and sustain conservative pedagogical practice. Teacher educators should consider how they can support and challenge trainees at the same time by introducing new and alternative forms of practice.
* **Increase the integration and relevance of theory in teacher training.**We found little antipathy to theory, but rarely was theory used to analyse or develop trainees’ practice and often it was used to validate existing practice by giving it a technical name. Symptomatic of this are vague and entirely uncritical allusions to learning styles. Teacher educators should consider both what theory they cover and how they present it to enhance the relevance of theory to trainees. That may entail a move towards, for example, theories of situational and social learning. Trainees need to be able to analyse and critique theory as well as using theory to analyse and critique their own work.

The full report is available from ESCalate.