



Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity

CREID BRIEFING 37

Choosing the PGDE: Motivations and influences for students with and without widening participation backgrounds

Susan Whittaker

Centre for Research in Education Inclusion & Diversity
Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Careers Service

May 2017

Introduction and aims

This project was undertaken by the Centre for Research in Education Inclusion and Diversity (CREID), Moray House School of Education, on behalf of University of Edinburgh Careers Service. The University of Edinburgh recognises the need to improve access of widening participation (WP) students from less advantaged social backgrounds. For all universities, the Commission for Widening Access (2016) has set demanding targets for the sector to increase the percentage of students who have widening participation indicators¹. In the School of Education 23% of undergraduate entrants are from areas in the forty per cent most deprived communities as measured by the Scottish Index for Multiple Deprivation (known as SIMD40) (and 22% of students on undergraduate initial teacher education programmes including the Professional Graduate Diploma in Education). This compares to College-wide measures between 13% and 19%. Teacher education courses are also amongst the few courses at the University of Edinburgh which cater predominantly for those from the local community and hinterland.

The starting point for the research was provided by the findings of the analysis by Edinburgh University Careers Service (2011, 2015) of data on the early post-graduation outcomes and paths of graduates from the University of Edinburgh who had widening participation (WP) backgrounds compared with those who did not. Indicators of WP background include coming from a school with below average academic attainment or progression to HE; entering the university through a widening access programme; coming from a family where neither parent attended university; or coming from a neighbourhood of high multiple deprivation. It was found in the analyses by the Careers Service, which identified WP-indicated students mainly on the basis of attending a below average progression secondary school or entering through an access programme, that:

- Comparing graduates from different university Schools, graduates from under-represented groups were almost twice as likely as other graduates to have studied in the School of Education. This indicates that the School of Education has been more successful than other schools in attracting those from less advantaged backgrounds to undergraduate programmes, including undergraduate initial teacher education degrees.
- A higher percentage of WP graduates, compared to those from non-WP backgrounds, were studying for a teaching qualification six months after graduation.
- The majority of the WP group graduates from the University of Edinburgh who entered a Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) did so at the University of Edinburgh.

These findings, and those on the SIMD background of PGDE students, raise the question as to why a relatively high representation of students with WP indicators at the University are on teacher education courses, and whether WP and non-WP students have different reasons for choosing Education.

There is relatively little research on postgraduate students with widening participation backgrounds. This research focuses on PGDE students at the University of Edinburgh and

¹ For example, the Commission on Widening Access (2016) recommended that by 2021 students from the 20% most deprived backgrounds should represent at least 16% of full-time first degree entrants to Scottish HEIs as a whole.

seeks to identify the factors which motivated graduates both with and without widening participation backgrounds to enter the PGDE Primary and Secondary programmes at the University of Edinburgh. Specifically the project aims to provide evidence with regard to:

- The attributes, social background and first degree background of PGDE students;
- When PGDE students decided to train as a teacher;
- Their reasons for deciding to train as a teacher;
- Who influenced their decision to train as a teacher;
- Whether these factors differ in relation to student characteristics that indicate that they were widening participation students when they entered their first degree.

A literature review and a student survey were carried out.

Literature review

The literature review (available in full in the project report) identified that in wider UK data, those from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely than those from more advantaged backgrounds at undergraduate level to study Education than most other subjects. At postgraduate level they are more likely to undertake teacher education, than other types of taught and research postgraduate study. Education at undergraduate and postgraduate level therefore appears relatively socially accessible. For women in particular it has traditionally acted as a facilitator of social mobility, helping those from less socio-economically advantaged backgrounds into professional jobs.

Three types of motivation among those wanting to be teachers have been identified: altruistic motivation (awareness of the social value of teaching); intrinsic motivations (what benefits the role can provide in terms of enjoyment and satisfaction, including the wish to work with children and young people, enjoyment of the subject and the variety, challenge and responsibility of the role); and extrinsic motivations (what benefits the role can provide in terms of factors such as salary, working hours, job security, fit with family life, and holiday entitlement). Altruistic and intrinsic motivations tend to be stronger motivations for those wishing to become teachers than are extrinsic motivations. However a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is common. Some student teachers perceive negative aspects of the job in relation to status, workload and pay for example, but may not rate these factors as important in their career decisions as those not wishing to be teachers.

Motivations can also vary overall in relation to those wanting to be Primary or Secondary teachers (for example higher importance give to working with children for the former and enjoyment of subject for the latter); gender (intrinsic motivations and the extrinsic factor of family friendly conditions may be stronger amongst females); age (love of working with children may be more important to younger students and career options more important to older students). Career changers may be motivated by a wish for a more varied or secure career, or to make a social contribution.

Student survey

This research used a survey of University of Edinburgh PGDE students on the 2016/17 programme to identify their attributes, social background and first degree background, and the motivating factors and the main influences for graduates both with and without widening participation indicators to enter the PGDE Primary and Secondary programmes.

Identifying 'WP' students is challenging based on available measures (Weedon, 2014), and on a postgraduate course is more challenging than on an undergraduate course, because the experience of having completed a degree can change the relevance of some of the WP measures commonly used. This is particularly the case for the PGDE programme which attracts entrants of all ages and who may have graduated some time ago. Three WP measures were used in this survey: home postcode before entry to first degree, which was used to identify the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD²) (or English or Northern Irish equivalent) quintile area the student was from at that time; whether either of their parents has an HE qualification or experience; whether they entered their first degree through a widening access route.

There were 109 useable responses to the survey. 66% of respondents were on the Primary PGDE and 34% on the Secondary PGDE. There was a 38% response rate (a 58% response rate for Primary and 22% for Secondary PGDE). The higher response rate for the Primary PGDE was because students were given hard copies of the questionnaire survey to complete, in addition to the on-line version. All of the Secondary respondents filled in on-line questionnaires.

Survey findings

Characteristics and undergraduate education

- Thirty eight per cent of respondents did not have a parent with HE experience, and 11% entered HE through an access route. Only 15% had a home postcode in the 40% most deprived areas (SIMD40) compared to 21% for the whole PGDE cohort. Students from deprived neighbourhoods were therefore under-represented in our sample.
- Only around a quarter of respondents were aged under 25, while around 40% were aged 30 or over. Three quarters of respondents were female. The representation of males and females overall and within the two PGDE courses aligned with wider data. The respondents on the Primary PGDE were more likely to be female and older than those on the Secondary PGDE, although the findings by course were based on different numbers and response rates.
- In terms of WP indicators, there was little difference in relation to PGDE course, sex or age groups, apart from the 30 and over group being least likely to have a parent with HE experience; and within the small number of respondents whose home address at the time of undergraduate entry was in an SIMD40 area, there was a lower percentage of males than females, and of those aged 25-29 compared to other age groups.
- Thirty eight per cent of the respondents had graduated from an ancient or Russell Group university, and only 18% from a Post-92 university. This is not in itself a WP indicator, but reflects the relatively low percentage of SIMD40 respondents. WP students were more likely than non-WP students to have studied STEM subjects, mainly biological sciences.

² SIMD is a relative measure of deprivation across small areas in Scotland, based on 38 indicators such as pupil performance, unemployment, crime, travel time to GP (Scottish Government, 2016).

Motivations and influences

- Respondents in the WP group were significantly more likely than the non-WP group to have made the decision to enter teacher education during their undergraduate study.
- The WP group (but not the SIMD40 group) was slightly less strongly motivated by altruistic and intrinsic factors than the non-WP group, and this was the case even after accounting for sex and age group. However, the nature of teaching as a social and public service role means that the vast majority of WP respondents were also motivated by the altruistic and enjoyment factors, and to a greater extent than by extrinsic factors.
- The potential for career development was more often a strong motivation for WP than non-WP respondents. The WP group was more often strongly motivated than the non-WP group by the responsibility of the teaching role. The findings may suggest greater long-term commitment to teaching among the WP group, while the non-WP group overall may be more confident about or may value more the expectation of challenge of the role.
- The expectation of a reasonable salary was more often a strong motivation for the WP group than non-WP group. This was the only job condition by which the WP group were more strongly motivated than were the non-WP group.
- The expectations of security of employment, holiday entitlement, family-friendly conditions, the PGDE as a funded route to a professional career, and the short length of the course, were more often motivations for the non-WP group than the WP group. These findings in relation to job security, and course funding and length were not expected.
- Analysis by sex showed that for males the security of employment and funded route were more often a motivating factor for the WP than non-WP group. For male WP respondents getting into employment quickly and security of employment when they get there appear particularly important, however this is noted with the caveat of a low number of male respondents, albeit they were equally distributed in the WP and non-WP groups.
- Males overall were more motivated than females by enjoyment of the subject(s) they will teach, the potential for career development, and the security of employment – females more frequently cited every other factor as a strong motivation, suggesting a greater complexity of motivations amongst females or a more positive outlook on the range of potential benefits of teaching.
- Amongst all respondents, the potential for career development was more often a strong motivation for those aged under 30. Younger entrants may therefore either be more ambitious, or expecting to have a longer teaching career, than older entrants. Those aged over 30 were the least motivated by security of employment and salary.
- Those in the 25-29 age group were more likely than other groups to be strongly motivated by the course condition factors. The few years between graduating and entering the PGDE potentially creates financial and time pressures. Therefore for

some in their mid to late twenties, a short, funded qualification route and guaranteed post is important.

- Primary PGDE respondents were more likely than Secondary PGDE respondents to be strongly motivated by wanting to work with children and variety of the role, and Secondary respondents by enjoyment of the subject(s) they would teach, and responsibility of the role, the potential for career development and extrinsic job conditions.
- WP respondents were less likely than non-WP respondents to have been influenced to enter teacher education by personal contacts. These differences appear due in part to differences between those with and without a parent with HE experience.
- Among the WP group, school teachers were more likely to be an influence on becoming a teacher than were parents or family members, and they differed to the non-WP group in this.
- Males overall were also more likely to draw on personal contacts in deciding to enter teacher education, which may reflect teaching as a less normalised professional route for men.

Conclusions

The respondents in the sample were more socially advantaged than amongst the PGDE and ITE cohorts, in relation to the SIMD40 measure. Within the sample there was little difference in relation to WP indicators amongst the Primary and Secondary respondents. However, within the cohort, Primary PGDE students are a little less likely to be from a SIMD40 area. The skew of the sample towards Primary PDGE students may therefore explain the lower percentage of SIMD40 respondents in the sample compared to the cohort. Entry to the Primary PGDE is also more competitive than entry to the Secondary PGDE.

However in the context of the University of Edinburgh the percentage of respondents originally from a SIMD40 neighbourhood was nonetheless high, reflecting the relatively accessible nature of teacher education programmes at the university. Furthermore, a relatively high percentage did not have an HE-experienced parent, allowing comparison to be made between a group with at least one WP indicator and a group with no WP indicators.

It was found that people enter the PDGE at Edinburgh University from a wide range of previous institutions and fields of study, often some time after they first graduated and having had other life experience first. Wider research shows the relatively high participation of mature students (those over 21) in undergraduate teacher education, and applying a higher age threshold for identifying mature students in this survey shows them to be strongly represented at postgraduate level.

The findings suggest that teaching can either be a career idea that people mature into, or be more valued as an option after other experiences, or for some be a fall-back choice after trying other options. Whether or not they are from backgrounds under-represented in HE as a whole may become less of a factor given the delayed entry to the PGDE in most cases, and the fact they have completed an undergraduate degree.

One of the potentially important ways the WP and non-WP groups differed was in relation to when they graduated and when they decided to enter teacher education. The findings suggest the non-WP group were willing or able to delay their entry into teacher education until their mid to late 20s, while WP students were more likely than non-WP students to enter soon after graduation. In relation to the wider literature on the perceptions of employability and of accessibility of teaching as a career, the findings suggest that those classified as WP in this study are less likely to have financial and social resources to either delay entry to the workplace or to have social networks that open up a wide range of options.

In terms of motivations, the findings show firstly that while teacher education is most strongly being pursued because it is seen as a worthwhile, varied and enjoyable role, the reasons can be more complex. There was variation in motivations by WP group - notably the WP group were more likely than the non-WP group to be motivated by expectations of a reasonable salary - but the differences between WP and non-WP students were not in all cases in the direction nor as strong as expected. The limitations of using WP indicators in relation to postgraduate students may be a factor. Other factors such as sex and age group were more important in relation to some of the motivation measures. Knowing more about financial circumstances of PGDE students, expectations about how long they plan to be a teacher and their hopes for their teaching career, may help further explain the findings.

The full research report is available on the CREID website.

References

- Commission for Widening Access (2016) *A blueprint for fairness: the final report of the Commission for Widening Access*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government
- Edinburgh University Careers Service (2011) *First destinations of graduates from under-represented groups: An analysis of University of Edinburgh graduates 2007/08 to 2008/09*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Careers Service
http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/SRA/WP/Widening_Participation_First%20Destinations_Report_2007-2009.pdf
- Edinburgh University Careers Service (2015) *First destinations of graduates from under-represented groups: A 3-year analysis of University of Edinburgh graduates 2010/11 to 2012/13*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Careers Service
- Hunter Blackburn, L, Kadar-Satat, G, Riddell, S and Weedon, E (2016) *Access in Scotland: access to higher education for people from less advantaged backgrounds in Scotland*, Edinburgh: CREID and Sutton Trust
- Scottish Government (2016) *An introduction to SIMD 2016*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00504809.pdf>
- Weedon, E (2014) *Widening participation to higher education of under-represented groups in Scotland: the challenges of using performance indicators*, Edinburgh: CREID/CES, University of Edinburgh

Further information

Further information about the project is available from Dr Susan Whittaker, CREID, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ, Susan.Whittaker@ed.ac.uk. All publications and information about this project are available at http://bit.ly/CREID-project_Choosing-PGDE

All briefings are available in hard copies, or as an email, or to download on www.creid.ed.ac.uk.

If you would like to receive briefing, or to be added to or removed from the distribution list, please contact Grace Kong (creid-education@ed.ac.uk).