

## **'Elite' career-changers in the teaching profession**

### **Authors:**

Dr Chris Wilkins  
University of Leicester  
21 University Road  
Leicester  
LE2 3RH

Dr Chris Comber  
University of Leicester  
21 University Road  
Leicester  
LE2 3RH

### **Corresponding author**

Dr Chris Wilkins  
University of Leicester  
21 University Road  
Leicester  
LE2 3RH  
[caw11@leicester.ac.uk](mailto:caw11@leicester.ac.uk)  
0116 2525740

### **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

Evidence linking teacher quality and the 'performance' of education systems has led to a widespread emphasis on improving the quality of entrants to teaching. In the USA and UK particularly, policymakers have encouraged entrants who have been highly successful in other careers to switch to teaching, on the assumption that they bring distinctive attributes/competences that will not only enable them to become successful teachers, but to improve leadership and management cultures in schools.

This study analyses the numbers of 'elite' career-changers entering initial teacher education (ITE) in England, and compares their completion rates with those of first-career entrants. Secondly, through semi-structured interviews, it examines the experiences of career transition of 24 'elite career-changers'. Theoretically underpinned by notions of motivation, self-efficacy, and professional identity development, the findings suggest that career-changers are primarily influenced by altruistic and intrinsic motivations, and consider previously acquired attributes to be significant positive influences on their self-efficacy.

Whilst they report high levels of resilience in adapting to contrasting professional cultures and to the demands of teaching, they also report significant levels of frustration with a perceived lack of acknowledgement from colleagues and school leaders of the potential 'added value' contribution they could make at a wider institutional level. These findings are discussed in the context of the presumed system-wide benefits of attracting elite career-changers into teaching, arguing that whilst previously acquired attributes are enabling them to become successful classroom practitioners, the schools may not be capitalising on potential contributions at a leadership and management level.

### **Key words**

**Teacher education, Teacher recruitment policy, School cultures, Teacher identity development**

## Why teacher quality matters

The post-1990 era of New Public Sector Management (Ball, 2003, Apple, 2005) has been marked by an increasing focus on measuring the performance of education systems, including transnational comparisons using datasets such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA in particular has become a key influence in political and public discourse, notably in Europe, where European Union education policy has been driven by the aspiration to become a global 'knowledge-based' economic superpower (Ertl, 2006; Dale & Robertson, 2009).

Evidence suggests that a characteristic of 'PISA high performance' systems is their ability to recruit the highest quality of entrant into teaching (OECD 2005/2011; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; UNESCO, 2011); South Korean and Finnish teachers, for example, are recruited from the top 10% of graduates (Barber & Mourshed 2007 p16), something achievable with relative ease where teaching is seen as a highly prestigious profession. Unsurprisingly, other countries have attempted to emulate this recruitment record through policy initiatives aimed at raising the status of the profession and the academic quality of entrants (Furlong, 2005; Ball & Forzani, 2009; OECD, 2011). In England, efforts to raise the academic quality of entrants to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) have had a modest impact; between 2000-01 and 2010-11, the proportion of postgraduate entrants with a 'good' degree (in this context, meaning a final degree award of  $\geq 2i$ ) rose from 50% to 60% (NCTL, 2014). In the United States, the contrast with PISA high-performers is more marked; academic entry levels are below OECD average, with teachers largely recruited from "the bottom third of high-school

students going to college” (Freedman *et al*, 2008 p25).

Evidence suggests that teacher quality is also a social equity issue; in systems where teacher status (and so teacher entry quality) is low, it is schools serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities that have the greatest difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Ammermüller & Lauer, 2009; Little, 2010). Given the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and educational attainment (Lupton, 2005), attempts to close ‘the achievement gap’ (another global priority) will be undermined by a failure to improve the quality of entrants to teaching.

The desire to close this gap has seen governments across the world striving to attract quality entrants to the profession through marketing campaigns, improved pay and conditions, and the diversification of routes into teaching. The *Teach for America* initiative, established in 1990 to recruit ‘elite’ graduates to teach in socio-economically disadvantaged communities, has spread to 33 countries as *Teach for All* (*Teach First* in the UK). ITE routes designed to encourage mature career-changers are not new to the UK (e.g. Graduate Teacher Programme [GTP], Fast-Track Teaching Programme), but the 2010 Coalition government’s drive to create a ‘school-led’ ITE system (DfE, 2010/2011) has created routes into teaching explicitly intended to encourage both high quality graduates and career-changers (Taylor 2013). Some initiatives have gained more traction than others; by 2014-15 over one-third of postgraduate ITE provision will be through School Direct, a model in part designed to be more attractive to career-changers, but efforts to develop a *Teach Next* (*Teach First* for elite career-changers) have failed; this was intended to attract people with ‘high-level’ private sector backgrounds to sit on schools’ senior management teams whilst training to teach.

The presumption that such individuals will not only become strong teachers, but enhance schools' leadership capacity (Freedman *et al.*, 2008), also lies behind the *Troops to Teachers* programme for 'exceptional military service leavers' (DfE, 2014).

Further support for the case linking entry quality to system quality come from evaluations of specific initiatives focused on getting 'elite' individuals into the classroom, including *Teach for All* (primarily a graduate internship) and Fellows Programs across the US targeting career-changers (Kane *et al.*, 2008; Muijs *et al.*, 2010). However, others argue that entry quality is a less significant determinant of teacher effectiveness than the quality of ITE/induction programmes (Darling-Hammond 2009). Studies of second-career teachers of rare; although these suggest that the acquired attributes of second-career teachers provide 'added value' to the profession (Mayotte 2003; Tigchelaar *et al.*, 2010), there is no compelling evidence that career-changers are having a significant impact anywhere at a system level - not least because of the lack of data about the numbers entering teaching.

This study provides an indication of the numbers of career-changers entering teaching in England, before focusing on the experiences of 'elite' career-changers of both 'becoming' and 'being' a teacher, and the challenges they face in making the transition between often contrasting professional cultures. This leads to a discussion of their potential to capitalize on 'acquired' competences/attributes and so make a distinctive contribution to the teaching profession.

## **Conceptual background**

This study draws upon literature addressing those aspects most pertinent to its focus on career-changers, namely; motivation to choose teaching as a career, the experience of socialization into the professional culture of teaching, and the development of teacher identity (and the tensions/challenges in identity formation/maintenance in performative school systems). It also draws upon the limited amount of research that has focused specifically on second-career teachers.

Studies of teachers' career decisions are primarily driven by *altruism* and by *intrinsic rewards*. An altruistic sense of vocation, the desire to 'make a difference' and be a force for 'social good' (Lortie 1975, Kyriacou *et al* 2003), is not just important in teachers' career choice, but in their motivation to stay in teaching (Nias, 1989; Day *et al.*, 2005). Teachers' altruism is reinforced by the intrinsic fulfilment gained through 'psychic rewards'; the satisfaction of experiencing positive interactions with young people (Lortie, 1975; Smethem, 2007). With teacher retention a matter of widespread concern, this persistence of motivation is significant, as is teachers seeing themselves as 'change agents' (Manuel & Hughes, 2006).

Teacher motivation and commitment is also crucial in developing/maintaining a strong identity and sense of 'self-efficacy' (OECD, 2005; Day *et al.*, 2007). However, teacher identity is dynamic, responding to internal and external factors (Sachs, 2005; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) that interweave professional and personal identities (Wenger, 1998; Day *et al.*, 2007). The potential for conflict in 'becoming' and 'being' a teacher is apparent as individuals strive to reconcile their personal values with those of the professional community and their schools' institutional priorities (Pillen *et al.*, 2013). The 'struggle' between idealism and

reality is central to teacher identity construction (Maclure, 1993; Flores & Day, 2006); this struggle can also be seen as a 'negotiation of power' between the personal, institutional and wider policy contexts (Wilkins et al., 2012; Gu & Day, 2013).

This 'conflict' theme in teacher identity research has, in recent years, given particular attention to the challenges to the normative values of the profession presented by the deployment of ever more visible and 'intrusive' external accountability instruments (Troman *et al.*, 2007; Cherubini, 2009; Wilkins et al., 2012). These performative instruments have been widely viewed as constraining and undermining 'traditional' professionalism, with many seeing teachers as de-professionalised (Ozga, 1995), their work reshaped as a *post-professional* activity (Hargreaves, 2000; Ball, 2003; Apple, 2005). As Ball notes, "The policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space of an autonomous or collective ethical self [...] have potentially profound consequences [...] for the inner-life of the teacher" (2003, p226). Performative regimes are characterized by conflict between professional values based on critical reflection and practice determined by externally imposed, data-driven priorities, resulting in a diminution of the creative, interpretive aspects of teachers' work (Galton & MacBeath, 2008) and ultimately in 'inauthenticity' of practice (Ball, 2003). Conflicted professional identity, therefore, can be viewed as characteristic of teaching in performative systems (Burnard & White, 2008).

Some researchers have argued, however, that this 'entrepreneurial/managerialist' identity can be resisted where strong collegial values allow an inquiry-oriented approach to flourish, allowing teachers to remain as active agents pursuing a 'moral purpose' within their teaching (Sachs 2003); others note the possibility that newer entrants to teaching may be

more 'accepting' of performative instruments as normative (Wilkins, 2011) Others note that professional identities are more likely to remain stable where school leadership culture promotes a *collaborative* professionalism (Hord, 1997; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009), and that therefore effective school leaders are those that can foster a 'professional learning culture' (Stoll & Louis, 2007; Gu & Day, 2013). A crucial aspect of such learning cultures is *sustained* in-school support, avoiding the 'reality aftershock' experienced when early career teachers experience the sudden withdrawal of induction support (Hobson & Ashby, 2012).

Negotiating the complex journey of 'becoming' a teacher might seem particularly challenging for career-changers, given the transition from 'expert' identity in one field to novice in another –then to expert again. However, this remains an under-researched area; most studies on second-career teachers have focused on the US context, perhaps reflecting both the significant teacher recruitment challenges in the US, and the diversity of teacher certification routes available.

These studies found that the altruistic and intrinsic 'push' factors motivating career-changers to teaching appear similar to 'first-career' entrants (Mayotte, 2003; Anthony & Ord, 2008), and the challenges in developing a stable teacher identity also match those of other entrants (Haggard *et al.* 2006). A notable theme emerging across these studies is the extent to which ITE and early career support systems enable career-changers to build on previously acquired attributes and competencies (Mayotte 2003; Haggard *et al.*, 2006; Tigchelaar *et al.*, 2010). Chambers (2002) argues that career-changers who are able to recognise and utilise prior competencies are more effective 'change agents' in schools; however, many of these studies found that career-changers are often dissatisfied with

induction/support, with little account taken of their particular needs or of the potential 'added-value' of their previous experiences (Mayotte, 2003; Haggard *et al.*, 2006).

## **Research design**

This study aimed to explore the factors that motivate UK career-changers to enter the teaching profession, and their experience of the two-stage transition - initially from 'established expert' to 'beginning teacher' and subsequently from beginning teacher to 'established/experienced teacher'. It also aimed to explore the possible challenges faced in making the transition between often contrasting professional cultures, and the extent to which their previous career histories might imbue them with personal attributes that enable them to overcome these challenges. Thirdly, it looked at career-changers' own perception of the 'added-value' that they bring to the teaching profession as a result of the previously acquired attributes, and the extent to which they saw themselves as 'change agents'.

At the centre of this study is the concept of the 'elite' career-changer, as distinct from the wider category of 'mature' entrants; this reflects the political preoccupation with entry quality, and the emphasis given to identifying the 'right' career-changers. In the UK, successive governments have targeted 'elites', from the report into what might motivate high-level casualties of economic recession into teaching, namely '*bankers, lawyers, architects and bosses*' (Future Foundation, 2009), to *Troops to Teachers*' 'exceptional service leavers'. It was necessary, therefore, to both define and quantify this group of elite career-

changers (hereinafter referred to as ECCs), using criteria developed from the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC), based on the Goldthorpe Schema (Goldthorpe 2000), a model designed to differentiate positions within labour markets with particular regard to 'employment relations' and systems of authority and autonomy (ONS 2013); for the purposes of this study, those individuals whose career histories fit within the first 3 of 17 'operational functional' NS-SEC levels were classified as ECCs.

Teacher Workforce datasets (DfE 2013) lack sufficient detail required to disaggregate ECCs, nor does National College for Teaching and Leadership Performance Profile data identify ECCs training to teach (NCTL, 2014). However, the Performance Profile did provide the possibility of analysing the numbers of mature entrants, defined for the purposes of this study as aged  $\geq 25$  at the beginning of their training period, and their relative 'completion' rates (defined as being awarded Qualified Teacher Status [QTS]).

The only means of identifying ECCs was through scrutiny of individual students' records held by ITE providers. This labour-intensive process ruled out a comprehensive national survey; instead, 25 medium to large university ITE providers, all offering both primary and secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programmes (the most common teaching qualification in England), were invited to participate. It also provided additional challenges in gaining access to data. Variation in institutional data protection protocols caused access difficulties in some cases, and permission was eventually obtained from 9 institutions; a further 12 universities were approached, eventually leading to agreement to participate from 16 universities, hereafter referred to as the selected providers (SP) group. In 2012-13, a little over 4500 PGCE students (equally divided between Primary and

Secondary) registered for PGCEs in the SP, approximately 16% of the total number of PGCE students registered in England. Serendipitously, this SP group provided a broad geographical spread (with all nine English Government Office regions represented).

NCTL outcome data also indicated that the SP group was broadly representative of the ITE sector as a whole with respect to mature entrants. On average, just under half (49%) of SP registrations were mature students, which compares with a national figure of 54%. In terms of outcome, the proportion of mature students in the SP group achieving QTS (87%) was identical to the national picture. Given this degree of correspondence, it seems reasonable to assume that the proportion of ECCs within the SP group (that is as a sub-sample of mature students) is broadly in line with that to be found in the national population. In site visits taking place in July-September 2013, the researchers scrutinised the personal records (including application forms, personal statements and references) of all mature PGCE students (cohort 2012-13) to identify ECCs.

This approach, in addition to being labour-intensive, raised a significant ethical issue, since the time and resourcing constraints of the project meant that seeking consent for this access from all students registered at the 16 universities would have been impossible. This was the most common reason for universities declining to participate, but in the case of those who did agree to take part, the researchers provided a non-disclosure agreement, and in several cases met with University Data Protection Officers to agree a protocol for the actual collection of data. In all cases, the scrutiny of student records was carried in situ, with no records or copies of records taken off site. Once ECCs were identified PGCE administrators provided the researchers with cohort level outcomes data to enable

comparative analysis, meaning that the researchers had no access to the outcomes for individuals.

### **Sector (NCTL) data: 2011/12<sup>1</sup>**

Initial analyses were conducted using sector-level data to examine the relationship between the outcomes (indicated by QTS award) of mature students and those aged <25. Altogether 92% of the <25 group attained QTS, compared with 87% of mature students. Statistical testing revealed a highly significant difference between these two groups [ $\chi^2(1, n=36898)=168.2, p<0.001$ ] indicating that at a national level, mature students, as a group, were less likely to achieve QTS status than their younger counterparts.

While it is acknowledged that the great majority (around 87%) of mature students did attain QTS, behind this headline lies a linear, negative relationship between increasing age (represented by 5 age categories) and successful outcome (see Figure 1). Thus the success rate for those aged 35-44 drops to 84% and for those aged 45-54, to 79%. The over-55 group shows an even more dramatic 'dip', with around a third failing to qualify (although this should be treated cautiously, giving that this represents a relatively small number of trainees).

**FIGURE 1 HERE**

### **Selected Providers (SP) data: 2012/13**

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As already explained, examining the outcomes of ECCs using NCTL data was not possible as they are subsumed within the larger  $\geq 25$  cohort. The SP group data does, however, permit such an investigation, albeit on a smaller scale. Just over four and a half thousand students registered for PGCEs in the SP group in 2012/13, and using the criteria described above, approaching 1 in 10 of these (9.1%) were classified as ECCs. ECCs, therefore, represent 11.6% of secondary registrations and 6.3% of primary (see Table 1).

A comparison of outcomes - measured by the award of QTS - reveals, as with national data, a consistent difference between the SP cohort and the ECC sub-sample, both within and across programmes, such that ECCs were less likely to achieve QTS than the cohort from which they were drawn. For primary programmes, this difference was in the order of 7 percentage points (87.8%:81.0%). For secondary courses the gap was larger at around 12 percentage points, with an average difference across the two course-types of just over 9 percentage points. Chi-square analysis shows these outcome differences to be statistically significant for primary trainees [ $\chi^2(1, n=2169)=5.43, p<0.05$ ] and highly significant for secondary trainees [ $\chi^2(1, n=2399)=31.50, p<0.001$ ] and for the cohort as a whole [ $\chi^2(1, n=4568)=35.92, p<0.001$ ].

#### **TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

At a national level, then, these analyses show that mature students are, on average, significantly less likely to attain QTS than their younger peers. While the data from the SP sample show a slightly lower overall success rate than that found for the sector (88% compared with 92%), the 'gap' between younger and mature students - in the order of 3 percentage points in national data - was considerably greater in the SP sample, with a gap of some 10 percentage points between success rates of ECCs and non-career-changers (see

Table 1). Caution is required in interpreting these differences as the national and SP data is not directly comparable; SP completion rates for 2012-13 were obtained during or shortly after field visits (July-September 2013), whereas national data refers to 2011-12 completions as of November 2013 (the most up to date data available). This means that national data includes those students who completed their PGCE during the year after their 'usual' completion point whilst SP data excludes this (in most years this would generally account for around 1-3% additional completions).

## **Interviews**

Phase 2 of the study drew data from semi-structured interviews with ECCs at different stages of their teaching career, with participants sampled using a chain referral, or snowball, method. A number of school head teachers/principals were invited to identify teachers they felt matched the 'ECC' criteria, initially concentrating on relatively inexperienced teachers (between 1-4 years teaching) to allow for a sharp focus on their perceptions of the shift from expert in one domain to novice in another. However, positive responses included several from teachers who were significantly more experienced; a decision was taken to include these individuals, and the perceptions of the 'mid-career' ECCs significantly enriched the data emerging from the study. Eventually a total of 24 interviews took place, with ECCs ranging from 1 to 11 years teaching experience (see Table 2). This sampling method meant that ECCs interviewed were completely distinct from those featured in the quantitative data sample of PGCE students.

## TABLE 2 HERE

Interviews prompts were informed by well-established themes in literature, including the motivation to select teaching as a career (and in this case, the reasons for them deciding to leave their previous careers), the factors that sustained their motivation and the challenges/frustrations that act as a negative motivation (e.g. high workloads, stress and loss of autonomy). Participants were asked to reflect upon what they saw as significant 'critical incidents' in their professional development; although interviews were not in a strict sense a 'stimulated recall' approach, the underlying principle of encouraging participants to select – and reflect on - specific incidents, was adopted. The semi-structured nature allowed participants to articulate how their self-identified critical incidents were shaping their longer-term sense of professional self, so becoming '*critical influences*' on their professional persona.

### **Interview data analysis**

Interviewing was divided approximately equally between the two researchers, and transcribed in full by a third party. Because the interviews (and transcription) took place over a period of several months, coding and analysis was conducted over a similar extended period. Before the process of coding began, researchers both read the first set of transcripts (n=5) and listened to the audio files several times to develop a familiarity with the data. These 5 transcripts were data were then analysed through a 'parallel' process in which transcripts were randomly allocated between the two researchers, who independently carried out (using web-based Dedoose software) a preliminary coding using broad *a priori*

themes drawn from the key literature outlined above. These preliminary themes were clustered according to common features (again independently), after which the researchers exchanged the parallel sets of transcripts and re-coded these. Once this set of transcripts had been independently coded by each researcher, emerging themes were re-clustered and revised, then cross-checked against specific features of transcripts to provide evidence of 'grounding'.

Once this iterative process had been replicated over the first five transcripts, a set of themes emerged which were then used to code the remaining transcripts. This led to further modifications to the themes, together with a number of issues that warranted further investigation. As such, the analytical approach could be characterised as 'hybrid', incorporating elements of both deductive, theory-driven coding and inductive data-driven coding (Fereday, 2006).

During the final stages of analysis, member checking (Miles & Huberman 1984) was carried out, with four participants contacted to seek either clarification of something they had said, or confirmation that the themes accurately reflected their meaning and/or intention. In one instance it was not possible to contact the participant, but the other three all agreed to speak by telephone and provide either contextual elaboration or comments on the emerging themes. Finally, to provide additional verification of the robustness of the analysis, an independent academic colleague was invited to review two randomly selected transcripts and moderate the coding process.

In all, eight themes were identified and discussed in the section that follows: (i) Destined to

teach or serendipity?; (ii) Making a difference?; (iii) The training experience; (iv) 'added value' of the career-changer?; (v) Different worlds, different values?; (vi) Career aspirations; (vii) Maintaining the motivation?; (viii) Surviving the 'self-doubt'.

## **Findings**

### **Destined to teach or serendipity?**

The 'back story' for many of the participants (n=13) revealed a previous personal connection with schools/education, either as a parent or with a partner/family member teaching. For some this implied a sense of a 'destiny' to become teachers.

*I guess it was probably written into the DNA....mum and dad both taught and my sister is doing her PGCE now. Kelly*

In a number of cases (n=5), parents had actually cautioned *against* going into teaching, or as with Melissa, advised a period in industry first, suggesting that the decision to switch careers was not taken lightly, but was carefully considered with a realistic understanding of the challenges of the job.

The interaction with schools as parents (and/or as school governors) was also cited as an influence, whilst others found themselves being increasingly drawn towards training and education-related aspects of their previous jobs.

*I always knew it was something that I was hankering after and that I would come*

*back to sort of later on but – and you know for 15 years in the ad industry I kind of felt myself being pulled towards the educational aspects of those jobs anyway. **Rob***

Whilst Rob's experiences revealed a latent interest in or disposition towards teaching, for others the 'trigger' was unsolicited and unexpected.

*My bank sent me on a management training course. I remember thinking 'I really don't need this - it's not what I wanted to do' [but] when I really enjoyed doing inductions for new staff. I ended up running training...I enjoyed it more than any other part of the job. To be honest, I think that was the start of, thinking about teaching. **Yusuf***

### ***Making a difference?***

Virtually every participant (n=21) made reference to their commitment to the 'social purpose' of teaching, and in some cases (n=6) was key to the decision to change career. This was generally expressed as a wish (or indeed a need) to 'make a difference' or 'give something back', often accompanied by an apology for this sounding 'clichéd';

*I felt I could make a difference I sort of have to feel that I'm making a difference in the jobs that I do otherwise I can't cope with it. **David***

The decision to switch career, therefore, seems to be almost entirely a positive vocational 'pull' rather than a negative 'push' triggered either by an obvious dissatisfaction or lack of opportunity with their work (redundancy was not mentioned as a trigger by any participant). Only four participants made reference to a lack of purpose in their previous

career compared to teaching, but even these individuals still viewed this in a positive light, seeing the change as a natural progression, a desire to “give something back”. Karen, talking of her rewarding and enjoyable career in industry, said she had

*“...got there because of fantastic teachers...I wanted to do the same for kids like me”.* **Karen**

### ***The training experience***

Participants were broadly positive about their training experience, irrespective of the training routes undertaken. Their backgrounds broadly reflected the balance of ITE provision in England over the past decade; the majority (n=19) qualifying *via* a university-based postgraduate (PGCE) programme, with the rest taking either School-Centred (SCITT) PGCEs or an employment-based GTP. Although most found their training a satisfactory experience, in common with the findings of many studies of routes into teaching, a number (n=6) felt that it had been insufficiently focused on practice elements (being too ‘academic’ and theory-driven), or variable in quality of mentoring and professional support.

All found value in the practicum elements of their training, despite the variability of the level of support given during these periods. Jay described some aspects of this process as ‘sink or swim’, while David felt it ‘a complete waste of time’.

*Nothing happens until you start the job[...] let’s drop him in the deepest water we can find because that’s how we’ll know whether they can survive.* **David**

### ***Transition to teaching: the ‘added value’ of the career-changer?***

Most participants (n=20) were clear that despite schools being 'a different world', the attributes gained in their previous careers were 'professionally relevant' and 'transferable' to teaching. These attributes were not easily defined, but a tangible 'sense of professionalism' appeared particularly useful in enabling ECCs to adapt to new situations and roles, and develop the resilience necessary to succeed in a complex professional arena. For one former solicitor, this 'professionalism' included acknowledgement of the personal responsibility for pupils' wellbeing, and being a positive role model.

*I definitely think I've found the 'teacher role model' aspects of the job easier...I don't think I'd have done this at 21. Sometimes these things just come with age...but obviously I've been in the position before [...] when people judge you they are judging your whole profession. **Jennifer***

The ability to respond positively to critique was also regarded as a legacy of previous experiences.

*I've seen colleagues taking feedback badly, they let it undermine them [...] I've had the advantage of having been through the cycle, of having your work pulled apart, but learning to come through that and improve. I know I can do that again and again.*

**Kelly**

Many of the participants (n=12) felt that communication skills gained during previous careers had been a significant asset in developing their classroom practice; learning to relate to different people, and talk to them 'on different levels' and 'explaining new concepts' were all felt to be important advantages held over first-career teachers.

Some ECCs (n=7) talked of the credibility established with students through their ability to validate their subject expertise with 'real-world' experiences. This was a particular feature of those working in vocational subjects. However, Rob noted that subject credibility needed to be established before these experiences could be introduced.

*I decided the first thing I was going to do was tell them about my background...what I'd been doing in the advertising world – I was really quite surprised when they didn't want to listen [...] I've found a much better way to do it now through practice [...] I do the traditional teaching stuff first and I drip bits of myself in as the year goes on and that seems to work much better. **Rob***

Jay put this more succinctly.

*I learnt very early on that kids have a built-in bullshit detector. **Jay***

### **Different worlds, different values?**

The challenge of adapting to the cultural values and practices of schools was a recurring theme. A majority of ECCs (n=15) had experienced at least some degree of difficulty in coming to terms with their new environment; despite describing themselves as enjoying their work and being successful teachers, this was the most significant negative aspect of their work. The overwhelming perception was that the organisational practices and structures of schools were cumbersome or policy-bound, with a strong sense that such 'inefficiencies' would not be tolerated in the commercial sector. ECCs from private sector backgrounds tended to be particularly critical of mentoring/induction experiences in schools.

However, this was not accompanied by a widespread perception that schools should adopt

private sector values and practices, and a recognition that schools exist in a space that was neither public nor private. Rob argued that schools' attempts to become more 'business like' failed due to an inability to really understand business culture or how this intersected with the needs and priorities of an educational establishment - they simply became 'caricatures' of business models.

ECCs recounted numerous examples of a perceived failure of schools to capitalise on their knowledge/expertise. In some cases this appeared to be due to a simple lack of interest in - or inclination to find out about - prior experience, with many instances of colleagues and senior managers either not knowing about their previous careers, or making no obvious attempt to explore whether they might be potential relevant/beneficial to the school. Often explicit offers to make contributions drawing upon prior experiences were rebuffed.

*There seemed to be an absolute fear of – or threat of my experience or my expertise rather than people seeing it as an opportunity...there was an issue when I first arrived here about marketing this place so I volunteered and said well you know look at the CV I could probably help – 'No, no it's fine we know what we're doing [...] quite understandably staff here are not used to restructuring...but my CV's awash with it.*

**Rob**

*In my previous life if I could see a better way of doing things I could say 'well why are we doing it that way? Let's try it this way' - people listen to you and then you've got some input – whereas [in school] they have a staff training and they say 'how do you think we can improve this'? But you don't actually have any input because when you do say 'well actually that's been tried before, that didn't work. **Aisha***

In a small number of cases (n=4) participants felt that rather than seeing their prior experience as an opportunity, it was regarded as a threat.

*In an early feedback in a teaching lesson and [...] he was the guy in charge of the mentoring of all the PGCEs – he said we do not make cans of baked beans here and everybody is different and I was so shocked [...] all I remember is thinking [...] if you really think a commercial career is that cliché or indeed that's how I think teaching is then you're misunderstanding the whole process. **David***

Rob is a notable example of a teacher with a clearly articulated sense of professional identity driven by personal values, but this was a common trait amongst participants. Although 'values' were not often explicitly mentioned, they were implicit in much of what participants said not just about their reasons for entering teaching, but in their reasons for remaining in teaching and the continuing relational rewards they received as a result.

### **Career aspirations**

Whilst many ECCs (n=11) expressed a wish to progress to a position of greater managerial responsibility, this was qualified by some (n=3) in the context of the ambivalence (at best) of colleagues towards their potential for bringing 'added value' from their previous careers.

Some did make a direct connection between this added value and the potential for 'making a difference' at a departmental or institutional level in schools:

*I know why I got into teaching was to impact on youngsters and [...] whether I'm in front of them in the classroom or not I can still be providing that impact - it might just be the behind the scenes impact. **John***

*This is my third year – and so my focus at the moment is about being a great teacher...[but]...I'm not going to be happy being a classroom teacher for all of my career and I'm thinking that [...] a lot of the skills that I have from my previous life will be very useful – in a senior management team role. **Rob***

Others were less ambitious in this conventional sense, possibly indicating that previous career successes left them with 'nothing to prove', and so determined to remain focused on the things that first attracted them to teaching.

*I don't see myself climbing the greasy pole again – I've been there, done that. I love the day-to-day connection with students and [...] just can't see myself giving that all up. **Brian***

### ***Maintaining the motivation?***

The on-going satisfaction Brian derives from teaching is replicated in one form or another in every interview. Participants were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about seeing pupils progress (whether academically, socially or emotionally), frequently recounting incidents of a pupil making 'a breakthrough', and parents' expressions of gratitude.

*I just feel passionate about the children [...] in industry you hit your head against a wall a bit more often – and yes there's the management and all that here that would be as frustrating but that goes away when you see a child achieve something that they couldn't do the day before [...] it's those gems that keep you coming every day, definitely. **Kimberley***

*It's just a wonderful moment to actually sit there and see how they've grown as people. Jennifer*

Throughout difficult periods in their transition to teaching, these 'relational' rewards continued to be significant in maintaining morale and self-efficacy, and clearly at least as significant as the more formal affirmation of managers.

*I've had 'outstanding' judgements from my head...it's great, but it's what I get from the students that really...makes me feel like I'm getting somewhere. Greg*

*The pros outweigh the cons tenfold for me I'm very pleased with the decisions I made [...] and I generally go home from school with a feeling very satisfied in a way that I wasn't being satisfied by the previous job. Rob*

It is clear that the sense of civic duty and 'making a difference' that motivated ECCs to enter teaching in the first place continues to be crucial to maintaining and reinforcing motivation over time.

Almost all participants (n=20) expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with 'accountability-related' aspects of their role; "too much paperwork" being a fairly typical response. Perhaps surprisingly, this did not translate into wider perceptions of a conflict between their professional values and the 'performative culture', as reported in so many studies of teachers' work over recent decades (e.g. x, y ?). This issue was raised in interviews, but responses were overwhelmingly pragmatic and accepting, exemplified by Jennifer's comment that "...parents pay our wages...why shouldn't they hold us to account?"

## Surviving the 'self-doubt'

Almost all ECCs (n=20) had experienced at least one significant 'crisis point' as a teacher, often to the extent of giving serious consideration to leaving. Mostly these occurred early in the career transition; either during their ITE programme or as an NQT, and there seemed to be two main 'triggers'. Sometimes it was a specific situation with either a pupil/parent or a colleague that felt 'overwhelming', compounded where there was a perceived lack of support from senior managers.

In other cases a more gradual realisation of the realities of teaching (particularly workload demands) led towards a crisis point. However, there was a general sense that their maturity, combined with their previous professional experiences, helped them to 'survive' and continue.

*I saw people on my course leave as soon as they hit a pressure point. To be honest, I've been through tough times before [...] that helped me see it through. **Brian***

*I had a horrible experience with a student had been really abusive, right from the start [...] and, it felt like xxxxx didn't want to know. He basically told me to toughen up - yyyyy was brilliant and backed me up, but, it really set me back. I actually considered quitting. **Erika***

Previous successful professional experience, it seems, provides a sense of resilience in the face of challenges and complexities of teaching.

## Discussion

Broadly speaking, many of these ECC's experiences of becoming and being a teacher appear little different from what previous research tells us about those of first career teachers. This is certainly the case in respect of their motivation for choosing to teach, reflecting the findings of numerous studies in recent decades (Lortie, 1975; Nias, 1989; Kyriacou *et al.*, 2003; Flores & Day, 2006) in which having a tangible positive impact on pupils' lives, resulting in a consequential sense of 'civic duty', are prominent. As with these previous studies, this feeling of providing a 'social good' also continues to be key to the maintenance of a secure, stable teacher identity that in turn appears to contribute to a continuing commitment to teaching.

It might have been anticipated that the transition from two distinct domains, involving a trajectory from 'expert' to 'novice' before becoming an expert again would bring complexities above and beyond those challenges commonly experienced by beginning teachers (Flores & Day, 2006; Cherubini, 2009; Pillen *et al.*, 2013). However, despite reservations expressed by a number of participants about the appropriateness of ITE and induction support, these were outweighed by their perception that previous career successes, however different the context, enabled them to negotiate difficult situations. It might be presumed, therefore, that the resilience identified by these ECCs is significant, given what we know of its role in enabling teachers to 'stay the course' and establish a stable professional identity (Gu & Day, 2013).. It is important to note, of course, that the participants in this study share one thing in common; they *are* 'survivors' of the self-doubt

that appears to strike all teachers at some point in their professional development. This study did not talk to ECCs who had left the profession, but had we done so, it seems reasonable to assume that their perception of resilience as a characteristic of career-changers would be very different. We also do not have data about ECC attrition rates once they are teaching; we do, however, have data in this study that reveals a relatively low ITE completion rate for ECCs. This would suggest that a worthwhile follow-up study to this one would be to seek out those ECCs who leave the profession, either pre- or in-service to gather data on their experiences and reasons for leaving.

Many studies of beginning teachers have noted the importance of finding their place within the situated culture of their school, a process of socialisation requiring both recognition of and adaptation to specific micro-political contexts (Ball, 1987; Ketchermans & Ballet, 2002; **Author**, 2012). These ECCs have all been successful in 'finding their place', despite in many cases the significant different cultural contexts of their two careers. This might indicate that they have not 'given up' on one professional identity in order to build another from scratch, but have 'reframed' an existing one to create a stable, sustainable teacher identity. This in turn might explain why their commitment/motivation remains high, given the importance of self-efficacy and satisfaction in stabilising professional identity (Gu & Day, 2013).

This commitment remains strong, despite school leaders being perceived as lacking interest in ECCs' backgrounds - and sometimes as seeing them as a threat more than an opportunity. It is worth noting here that participants were realistic about the potential value they may bring to schools, recognising that they had much to learn on changing careers. They were

less concerned about any 'under-utilisation' of their distinctive attributes than the perceived lack of acknowledgement. The potential consequences of this are twofold. Firstly, the utilisation of ECCs' 'added value' in terms of leadership could be diminished, and secondly, an important part of ECCs' professional identity is effectively ignored, regarded as irrelevant or even harmful, as in the case of David being treated as a 'baked bean salesman'.

School culture (and specifically leadership culture) has been shown to be a key influence on teachers' continuing motivation and resilience; schools that 'professional learning communities' (Stoll & Louis 2007) with a broader view of 'achievement' than simply increasing pupils' academic attainment enhance teachers' sense of commitment (Day and Gu 2010, p141). However, although the ECCs interviewed here provide some insights into the cultures of their schools, a missing voice in this study is that of their school leaders. Whilst many of the participants felt undervalued, more research would be necessary to find out how school leaders perceive ECCs. This research would need to talk to principals about why they chose to recruit ECCs (whether they were recruited because of distinctive perceived attributes, the extent to which they felt ECCs were actually bringing 'added value' to their school, etc.). In the absence of this perspective, we are left with a sense of teachers who are successfully maintaining commitment despite being in environments apparently un conducive to this.

Clearly further research would be needed to gain an insight into how school leaders value ECCs, but the more experienced ECC teachers (those with more than 3 years teaching (n=12)) generally felt they had little impact on the wider school community and its leadership and management. Given that initiatives to attract ECCs into teaching are based on the presumption that they bring 'added-value' not just to the classroom, but to wider

institutional culture and practices (Freedman *et al* 2008), this issue is one worthy of further exploration. Previous studies of second-career teachers suggest that where they are supported in building on and utilising previously acquired competences they have the potential to become effective change agents (Chambers, 2002; Tigchelaar *et al.*, 2010). There is no doubt that these participants are secure in their self-efficacy as classroom practitioners, and most credit their previous career experiences for helping them become effective teachers, but this study does not find ECCs operating as significant change agents at an institutional level.

This may, of course, simply be a reflection of the fact that 50% of the sample (n=12) are in their first three years of teaching, meaning that the relatively small number (n=3) with a leadership role (see table 2) is perhaps not surprising. Even in the cases where doubts about the perceptions of colleagues led to ECCs feeling less inclined towards moving into leadership or management roles, it would be inappropriate to draw firm? conclusions without further corroborating evidence. It could be that the political emphasis on the value of career-changers in the profession (Freedman *et al.* 2008) causes ECCs to have different expectations of their teacher career trajectory from other entrants, contributing to a degree of frustration. Even if ECCs were shown to be less likely to move into leadership roles than other entrants, there could be many reasons for this; a lack of appreciation of their potential contribution (as with David and Rob), an overriding desire to continue in the classroom where the most directly rewarding experiences occur (exemplified by the responses of Greg and Kimberley [*cross-ref to quotes in Findings section?*]), or it could simply be that, as Brian says, they lack the desire to 'climb the greasy pole' again.

The perception of participants in this study that previous successful professional experience *increases* resilience might lead one to expect ECCs to be *more* likely to stay the course, which makes the significantly lower ITE completion rates for ECCs (along with other mature entrants) particularly striking. Studies of why people leave teaching propose a complex range of factors are involved, including workload stress (MacDonald, 1999), challenging behaviour from students (Buchanan, 2010) and a lack of opportunity for innovative or creative practice (Goddard *et al.*, 2006; Burnard & White, 2008). Evidence suggests that people fail to complete ITE programmes for similarly complex reasons (Bielby, 2007; Hobson *et al.*, 2009). However, no studies exist of whether there are distinctive factors causing ECCs who leave teaching or fail to complete ITE, reinforcing the need for further research into the career trajectories of ECCs, and into the reasons why they appear to be significantly less successful in completing their ITE programmes than other groups.

Perhaps the most surprising outcome of this study was the absence of significant dissatisfaction with the demands made on teachers in performative systems characterised by high-stakes testing and intensive accountability frameworks, contrary to many studies of teachers' work over recent decades (e.g. Ball 2003; Troman, et al. 2007, Galton & MacBeath, 2008). This is particularly noteworthy given the evidence from the US, where evaluations of the New York City Teaching Fellows Program (specifically designed to attract ECC into teaching in socio-economically disadvantaged communities) have found that many Fellows 'escape' from the schools intended to benefit from the programme and seek work either in more affluent public school districts or in the private sector, citing an authoritarian accountability culture as a primary reason (Costigan, 2005). Other studies have noted that the leadership and learning culture of a school is key to the long-term maintenance of

motivation and commitment (Day & Gu 2010, 187). Whilst the ECCs interviewed for this study are evidently still successfully drawing upon their initial desire to 'make a difference', their ambivalence to some aspects of school culture and the ways they are sometimes perceived by leaders and colleagues is perhaps a concern.

## **Implications**

The ECCs taking part in this study, in terms of their motivation for joining and remaining in the teaching profession, are not distinctly different from other people entering teaching. They do, nevertheless, feel they possess distinctive attributes that support them in the complex process of 'becoming' a teacher and which contribute positively to their classroom self-efficacy. This contrasts with their perceptions about their relative lack of impact on school leadership and management culture and practices; for most they do *not* see any wider impact directly resulting from their previous experience. However, we should be cautious about interpreting this as being solely due to the lack of recognition of ECC's potential by school leaders; a lack of desire to 'prove themselves' again (illustrated by Brian's "been there, done that" comment) might be just as significant.

Whilst the study is not intended to produce generalizable findings about the experiences of ECCs, it does provide some insights about a distinctive section of the teacher workforce widely perceived by policy makers to be a solution to perceived problems with quality of both teaching and leadership in schools (Freedman *et al* 2008). This study's revelations about ITE completion rates do indicate that at a national policy emphasis on recruiting ECCs is not risk-free. Mature entrants to teaching in general are significantly less likely to

successfully complete ITE, and this study finds that ECCs are not immune to this high level of attrition. We do not have data on the relative longer-term retention rates for those career-changers who do complete and take up teaching posts. However, given the overall lower ITE completion rates of all mature entrants (not just ECCs), increasing ECC recruitment, could have significant cost implications, simply by virtue of raising the age profile of ITE teachers. Perhaps, therefore, the question that remains to be answered is, does the 'added-value' brought by career-changers justify this added cost? If the answer is to be in the affirmative, it may be that we need to focus on a much more effectively personalised induction (both in ITE and in-service) for career-changers that recognises the challenges they experience in career transition and allows them to make full use of their previously acquired competencies and attributes.

There is a broad consensus that the quality of pre-service education/training programmes and in-service professional development is crucial in determining teacher quality – and therefore 'system quality' (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2009; Barber & Mourshed, 2007; OECD 2011). However, although current UK government reforms have explicitly addressed the issue of coherence in the transition from ITE to early career induction, the notion of personalising the experience of these highly-prized entrants has been given little attention. This means that the findings of previous studies of career-changers in teaching, that personalisation is crucial in them being able to build upon their prior competences and so become effective 'change agents' (Chambers, 2002; Mayotte 2003; Haggard *et al.*, 2006), are not reflected in policy.

Whilst this study suggests that career changers *do* have the potential to make a distinctive

contribution, there is a danger that in focusing on the intrinsic qualities of *individual* recruits to the profession, less attention is paid to the much more significant issues of ensuring ITE programmes and in-school professional development are effectively meeting the needs of - and 'bringing out the best' in - all teachers, whatever their background.

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