

# A New Approach to Teacher Education in England

*Teacher education institutions and Local Authorities in England traditionally had protected their own turfs. In West Yorkshire, however, they decided to work out a mutually satisfying path to teacher development.*

GRAHAM WILLIAMSON

A jealously guarded division in English education has existed for years between the universities and colleges and the Local Authorities (L.E.A.s). Universities have seen themselves as guardians of academic standards and the sole providers of intermediate and degree awards for teacher training and further professional development; the Local Authorities have been concerned with the administration of schools and inservice training as well as the continuing professional development of the teachers they employ.

This uneasy relationship, which seems to have close parallels in the United States, has been changed in West Yorkshire, England, by two colleges and two L.E.A.s that developed a jointly owned, financed, and administered scheme for managing degree awards to teachers. The scheme is likely to expand to include other colleges and L.E.A.s and is being investigated as a model for national development.

The scheme currently serves the teachers of a largely urban area with a population of one and a half million. The four partners include the Leeds and the Bradford L.E.A.s, Leeds Polytechnic, and Bradford and Ilkley Community College. The Council for National Academic Awards, a national body with international accreditation, oversees their authority to grant diplomas and degrees.

## Mutual Discontent Leads to Partnership

This partnership came about because teachers were dissatisfied with inservice training. They complained that "it's about time the colleges in this area got their act together" and recognized one another's efforts, instead of competing ruthlessly to sign teachers onto courses that were usually sold as complete packages.

L.E.A.s complained that their inservice training, much of which was designed to meet the specific needs of teachers and schools, was not recognized as a valid contribution toward an academic degree. Schools and their teachers complained that a great deal of serious curriculum development work being done in schools was not recognized by the colleges. The most they could expect for their efforts was a warm feeling. And the colleges complained that not enough teachers were taking their courses.

This mutual discontent led to more than three years of discussion, haggling, and serious horse-trading. During those years the partners came to know each other better, to understand their mutual problems and, because practicing teachers were constantly present at these discussions, to see INSET (Inservice Education of Teachers) needs through teachers' eyes.

The partners ultimately decided to

offer teachers the opportunity to work toward a series of staged awards—certificate, diploma, honors, bachelor's, and master's degrees. These would be based firmly on three principles: (1) they must be directed by the candidates for the award, (2) they must be firmly rooted in the principle of systematic professional development, and (3) they must recognize a range of means to acquire credit.

This system has been up and running for three years now and it seems to satisfy all partners. The teachers are happy because the system is flexible and much better suited to their professional needs. The L.E.A.s are happy because they can now have their own efforts recognized for academic awards, and because they are genuine partners in a cost-effective process for managing routes to qualifications. Finally, the colleges are happy because they are doing far more business than they ever did in such times of financial stringency.

The partnership has managed to avoid the accusation that it offers "Mickey Mouse" degrees. Its graduates find its qualifications not merely acceptable, but because of their obvious professional relevance, extremely useful in the pursuit of their ambitions.

How has this been achieved, and how is quality controlled in such a flexible system? Two small offices situated in the center of the two large cities, Leeds and Bradford, in which the majority of the teachers work run the scheme. The offices are jointly and equally financed by the four partners. The plan is governed by a scheme management board, a validation board, and an approvals committee. All these boards have clear executive responsibilities and all have equal representation.



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from the four partners and the organized teaching profession.

### Freedom and Self-Direction

The key to the scheme's success is that it is student-directed. A student submits for approval a plan made up of any combination of prior learning, independent study, and taught courses. At diploma and degree levels such a course will always finish with a major piece of independent study.

The one restriction is that each plan must demonstrate that the student's work is at an appropriate level and demonstrates coherence, progression, and professional relevance. Members of the validation board and examiners from other Colleges and L.E.A.s help to ensure that academic and professional standards are in line with national norms.

The teachers have complete freedom in designing their course. The scheme provides counseling and two short courses which, though not compulsory, are proving very popular. The first — a program-planning module — helps individuals with the difficult business of designing their own programs. The second — a project-development module — helps with methodology and research techniques. Both, completed successfully, count as part of the course.

The evidence shows teachers are using their freedom productively and responsibly—their independent study is almost invariably related to their own professional practice. Academic standards, as measured by degree classification, have risen.

In case all this sounds too perfect, the scheme has not been without its problems — the biggest problem has been money. Fundamentally, the scheme is very cheap to run. Its unit costs are low and the colleges have had no difficulty in recruiting students. But success has led to growth, and even cost-effective growth costs more. Success breeds demands for new areas of study and this translates into demands for staff. It is the better kind

of problem to be saddled with and so far we have coped, but imitators, beware.

### The Future Works

The scheme has passed through its infancy and is growing fast. Other authorities and L.E.A.s seem likely to imitate our experiments, to join the scheme or to pay grants fees for their teachers and become associates. The

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scheme has given us a glimpse of the future (and it works!).

Recently on study visits to the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean, we saw situations that were not much different from those we used to encounter before we developed this scheme—colleges and state education departments suspicious of one another's activities and jealously hanging on to their independence to the detriment of teachers in schools and colleges. Our experience has taught us that professional development systems can be improved to everybody's satisfaction and we welcome anyone's efforts to build upon our groundwork. □

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