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Widening participation for women in Initial Teacher Education it's not a problem, is it? - What are the widening participation issues encountered by women as they embark on a Primary PGCE Initial Teacher Training course?

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Kath Vineer – Biography

The author is working as a Lecturer in Primary Education at a university in Plymouth where they achieved a MAEd after part time study. Prior to this, they taught in primary and secondary schools, including 15 years as a primary Head Teacher.

Abstract

This research explores widening participation in one university-led Post Graduate Primary initial teacher education course (PGCE) in England. Rooted in a social constructivist paradigm and utilising a mixed-method social survey approach (questionnaires and group discussions), the widening participation (WP) issues students faced when embarking on this course were evaluated. Students worked with me as co-constructors of data by sharing stories of their journeys towards studying for this course. Specifically, the issues affecting women were investigated in order to critique the assumption that WP for women in higher education has been achieved.

I am a teacher educator with a strongly held belief that education plays a key role in helping to achieve social justice and equality. To help facilitate this process, I argue that if barriers discouraging students from becoming teachers can be broken down, these newly recruited teachers would be in a position to act as ambassadors for further WP in higher education.

Results from data analysis suggest that three factors can act as barriers to participation: geographical location of the course provider, financial constraints and family/caring responsibilities. These findings are discussed in relation to implications for future practice, including offering a flexible, part-time PGCE course.

Key words

Widening participation Post-graduate Initial Teacher Education Social justice

This article is an edited version of my original Masters in Education dissertation.

For this journal article, I have presented chapters on data analysis, research findings and implications for future practice.

Introduction

For nearly three decades, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been required by government to widen participation (WP) through increasing the number of students from under-represented groups and those of lower socio-economic status (DBIS 2011).

As a teacher, and in the context of current serious teacher recruitment and retention problems, my research set out to explore WP issues for students embarking on the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Primary course at the university where I am employed as a lecturer in the Institute of Education.

Through an exploration of policies and practice in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the literature pertaining to WP and an analysis of co-constructed data from questionnaires and group discussions, I identified some of the issues that may be regarded as barriers to WP for student teachers. I used my findings to explore implications for the future practice at [this university] in terms of WP, particularly for women students. My aim was to produce a qualitative study that had the potential to add to the limited field of research in post-graduate (PG) ITE.

The context of my research

My experience of working as an educator for four decades, in all phases from early years to adult education, has taught me the importance of building a strong, high quality body of teachers of the future, teachers that all children need in order to learn and flourish. Social and educational justice and equality have been of deep concern to me; they have shaped my personal, political and professional vision and values.

My research question demanded that I worked firmly in the social constructivist paradigm. My personal theoretical position was that the under-representation of certain groups in HE is a result of inequality in social structures which in turn results in iniquity in educational opportunities and achievement. Of importance was the concept of “choice” for students who may wish to become teachers; because of societal inequality, choice is different for different groups who do not share the same advantages. Mills (2008, cited in Duckworth, Thomas and Bland, 2016 p.264) asserts that teachers (products of social structures and their own education’s cultural expectations) unintentionally maintain inequalities for the children they teach.

Since working in teacher education, my fascination for students’ stories about their journeys to the point of embarking on a PGCE course has grown. Anecdotally, I was aware of the challenges and barriers many had encountered on the way and I shared in the pride of their achievement at graduation. With a growing realisation that if we are to have teachers that reflect, understand and celebrate the rich diversity of backgrounds that their pupils share, there is still much to achieve in WP, and this became my chosen dissertation focus.

In terms of WP in HE, there is an assumption that gender equality has been achieved, however research supports that there exists unequal participation and unfair distribution of WP strategies for women (David 2009). Whilst the expansion of HE in the UK over the last three decades and policies on WP have brought about increased access for under-represented groups, this has magnified “inequality by expanding opportunities disproportionately for those who are already privileged.” (David 2009 p. 5), a view supported by Reay (2012a p.2).

Duckworth, Thomas and Bland (2016 p.265) argue that WP in ITE promotes “the wider engagement of teachers from diverse communities to then become ambassadors of WP and effectively disrupt traditional, middle-class, White, norms.” In this way, a workforce that reflects the community it serves will play a vital role in addressing the needs of under-represented learners and help break the cycle of social and educational injustice.

Data Analysis

Of the students who completed the questionnaires, ten volunteered to participate in group discussions, all but one were women and eight of these I knew well as I was their Professional Tutor.

Questionnaire analysis

I analysed the questionnaire results before undertaking the group discussions, summarising data concerning age at the start of the course, declared gender and ethnicity, first degree details and pre-course experience. I used this to plan the discussions, grouping those similar in age and who were embarking on a PGCE straight after their UG degree or some years later. The values and ideas of co-constructors would be informed by their personal experiences and therefore these could be shared in the organised groups.

Eight out of ten respondents stated that **geographical and economic reasons** played an important part in deciding where to undertake the PGCE. This was borne out in discussion groups where all ten co-constructors explored these factors.

A third common theme, important to eight students, was by studying on a university-led course they would have access to **support** from tutors. Both students who completed a distance learning degree, all in the upper age ranges, and all those returning to study after a break, highlighted support as important.

Half of the respondents identified opportunities for **reflection and preparation away from school** as a factor, all in the 30-39+ age bracket. This was discussed in groups, particularly in relation to reasons for not undertaking a School Direct course.

Worthy of note here is the Department for Education and Skills (2005) report on a longitudinal study of student teachers' motives and perceptions of ITE. For many participants, "the nature of their life experiences, past and present, were influential in making the initial decision to investigate the possibility of training to become teachers." Themes emerging in 2005 were similar to those in my research: "geographical availability; financial viability; the length / duration of the programme; and the reputation of particular ITT providers." I would argue that this gives weight to my argument that barriers to undertaking a PGCE still exist for many students.

Group discussions analysis

The data I gathered from group discussions were qualitative, therefore my analysis was interpretative. As Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2018 p.524) state, such analysis is a “reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualized data that are already interpretations of a social encounter.” Giddens (1976, cited in Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018 p.524) refers to this as a “hermeneutic” process, whereby the researcher interprets the data from participants who have already interpreted their world, and as the researcher (who was part of the world I researched) I related this in my own words. Because of this, there was an integration of analysis and interpretation. My interpretations were subjective and the lenses through which I reflected and analysed were the result of extensive experience in education. My evaluation of interviews was arguably open to bias (Bell 2014 p.178). I was aware that my role and how I interact would have an impact on the emotions and responses of the group. In feeling strongly about widening participation in ITE I understood that this may have led to me falling into the “bias trap” (Bell 2014 p.187) whereby I let value judgements influence the way I interpreted my findings, for example overweighting data to suit my purposes. However, I was vigilant and self-critical of my interpretations. I maintain that my experience and educational vision are qualities that enriched my research and were acceptable risks of bias. I am a social researcher and was open with my co-constructors about my personal standpoint.

I was aware that analysing qualitative data, as an inductive process, was not straightforward. There was a possibility that I would fragment the data because I chose to look for the occurrence of themes or patterns, consequently losing the synergy of the whole discussion, particularly the interaction between students and between the students and me. It was a challenge to capture the sense of value in shared ideas and stimulating discussion – which is what I felt at the end of each discussion. I felt that having adopted a deliberate openness to co-constructors’ ideas, I achieved a “positive and enriching experience for all,” (Kvale 1996, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018 p.30); that is certainly how I felt and subsequent informal feedback from students supports this.

Whilst I had decided the themes before-hand and presented them on the questionnaire, I was mindful of not being unresponsive to other ideas and I had not anticipated, for example, [this university’s] interview process, living the student life and readiness to study

or teach. It is my belief that because of my relationship with the students, I was able to draw out rich data that no other researcher would have been able to.

How I used coding

I chose to use the tool of coding because it is regarded by some as an effective way of reducing the amount of data and translating ideas to specific categories in order to make the analysis practical (Miles and Huberman (1994), Kerlinger (1970)). Text data can be broken into smaller units ready for examination and comparison, followed by the identification of themes. Conversely, Brenner, Brown and Canter (1985) argue the case for content analysis of open-ended qualitative data, involving reflecting on the data and developing interpretations and meanings. St. Pierre and Jackson (2014 p.715) assert that qualitative data analysis is a humanistic and holistic activity and that coding employs a “vacuum cleaner approach” where all data is swept up and treated equally importantly. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018 pp. 657-660) suggest ten ways to analyse and present data, all of which avoid coding, and which can also be combined to better answer the research question. Of these, I found the narrative method appealing in its simplicity; just the story of each person is told, giving insight into their lives and minds. Whilst this resonated with my interest in PGCE students’ stories, I understood that such an approach would pose ethical problems; anonymity and confidentiality would be threatened, particularly because some co-constructors chose to reveal sensitive, personal information.

Having considered these ideas, I opted to employ coding as just one tool in my analysis for two reasons: one, to enable me to manage the large amount of data and secondly, to draw out the frequency of themes to compare them with those that emerged from the questionnaires. Because group discussions provided rich data, this resulted in a challenge for analysis, mainly because I recognised that my notes, thoughts and reflections “constitute data themselves,” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2018. p. 643).

In being aware that my interpretation was but one interpretation, I worked hard at looking at the data from multiple perspectives, trying not to value my own over those of my co-constructors. Consequently, I experienced a feeling of what Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018 p. 644) describe as a “messiness,” moving forwards and backwards between data,

analysis and interpretation; the reflexive process of analysing group discussions certainly was not a neat sequence. My analysis included the following actions, but not necessarily in this order: organising, describing and presenting, analysing and interpreting (often simultaneously), drawing conclusions and reporting my findings.

Analysis process

1. I recorded dates and times of the discussions and my annotations, understanding that timing could have an impact on data gathered from subsequent groups.
2. The responses of each individual within a group were summarised, to preserve coherence and their perspective. This was followed by looking at the responses within and then across each group in order to summarise similar points. The themes are clear, but I have also tried to guard against losing individual responses, fragmenting or decontextualising the data.
3. I chose not to write close transcriptions of each discussion. While doing so can provide important detail, it is time-consuming and on balance I decided it was not necessary for my research question. Instead, I summarised the data into the themes straight from the recording. However, as Denscombe (2014 p.278) points out, by summarising I was aware that I was interpreting and selecting which could have revealed my own values; selecting what I thought was important supported my own beliefs.
4. I used some verbatim quotations and short extracts as appropriate, without identifying the co-creator, because these were rich in detail, illustrated my points effectively and were much more direct than my own words.
5. I wrote the first set of summary notes from the recordings a week after the discussions had taken place. This was followed by my annotations as I reflected on and drew out initial themes.
6. Two weeks later, I listened to the recordings again and using progressive focussing, added to my annotations regarding themes. In this way, I reduced the data further into themes but conversely, I generated more data in terms of notes, reflections and reflexive insights – what Geertz (1973) refers to as “thick descriptions”. With each subsequent listening, I found myself reflecting on what had been said – often while I

was engaged on other tasks. This generated links between themes and my research question; the interpretation process continued.

7. I then analysed the co-constructors' ideas using the themes I had selected, and unexpected themes that emerged in discussions.

My findings

Geographical and economic - For younger students, proximity to family meant that students could reduce their financial outlay in a fourth year of study and its incumbent student loans. One stated "I am living at home with my family, saving money, have no rent to pay and I'm learning to drive." Another 21-year-old, who completed her first degree at [this university], had a weekend job that she needed to keep on. Living close to home also reduced travel costs which was important for women with family responsibilities. One needed access to public transport, thus "I couldn't afford to go to a different university," while another could walk her children to school in [this city] and then on to [this university]. Perceptions that [this university] was the only option were also prevalent; one rejected [another HEI in this city], could not move her family and therefore [this university] "was the only place available, I couldn't be anywhere else." Another started her UG degree four years ago at [this university], via an employment route after many years working as a teaching assistant (TA): "Without that route in, I wouldn't be sat here today." She worked for a year before embarking on a PGCE: "I could just about afford to give up my job and study for a year." Yet another described herself as "just scraping through" financially and identified that financial factors are key in WP – "to bring older people into the profession." The importance of geographical and economic factors is supported by Fuller's research (Fuller et al 2008) which found that mature women learners in HE sought recognised qualifications that offered economic and social returns, and opportunities that suited their family lives and circumstances.

Pragmatic reasons constituted a theme that arose from my analysis. Seven students (four of whom were in the older age brackets) made points about wanting to "get on with [starting the course]", for example, "For me, this was a change of career and I wanted to get on with it," another told herself that if she was going to do it, she needed to get on with it and "get

it out of the way”, recognising that, having worked between UG study and PGCE, if she left it for another year she would not start at all. This was echoed by a student who regretted not doing her UG degree much earlier: “If I didn’t do it now, it’s another missed opportunity.” The same student considered doing her PGCE at [another HEI in this city] but stated “Why do I want to be traipsing across [this city] to an unknown environment when I know this one?” One student, who studied whilst working, saw it as part of her growing confidence and readiness: “I’ve got this far, I can do another year.”

For the women I spoke to, choosing [this university] at this time, was a convenient and cost-effective means to an end i.e. gaining a PGCE and being able to start a much longed for career as a teacher. As a HEI where women are applying because frequently it is their local HEI, then these factors need to be acknowledged and built on as an important part of our ITE offer.

Closely linked to pragmatism was **readiness**, a theme referred to by six co-constructors, half in the 21-29 and half in the 30-39 age brackets and all but one were women. Most references to this were made during consideration of the idea of a two-year PGCE course as a means of WP. It was felt that such a course would give more time to visit different types of school, feel better prepared and ready to teach, with more subject knowledge. One student felt that she did not feel ready to apply for jobs so early in the course: “I wish I could take a step backwards, but the jobs are out there, and I feel as if I have to apply.” It was thought that a longer course would build confidence, particularly for students straight from their UG degree who had not had the opportunity to spend much time in school. One took a year after her degree to work as a TA in order to build up her experience before starting the course. Feeling ready to study in terms of self-confidence and self-belief was an important factor for several, either because of knock backs in earlier education where an individual need was not diagnosed: “The Head of 6th form told me I would never make anything of my life and I’d spend it flipping burgers” - or mental health issues played a part: “I needed to know that I could manage the course. I felt strong enough to juggle the demands of the course and everything else.”

These observations suggest that readiness to study and take up the teaching profession is a complex issue but one that is a significant factor in enabling women to start a PGCE course. This is compounded by feeling ready personally to embark on studying but finding barriers

in the shape of no bursaries and a timetable requiring attendance until 6p.m. Interestingly, this factor is related to the notion of a further theme I did not anticipate, that of enjoying the **student life**. Two co-constructors in the 30-39 age bracket, spoke of wanting to be a student, one because of not experiencing this as a distance learner and for the other this was partly related to not feeling ready to teach and wanting an extra year for PGCE: “I enjoyed being a student before, I wanted to carry on that lifestyle,” but “the demands of the PGCE are so great I haven’t really had that.”

The nature of the PGCE **interviews** at [this university] proved influential to six co-constructors, all women and all but one in the younger age bracket. This was a theme generated in the discussion groups and one I had not initially thought of when considering barriers to women wishing to start their PGCE. There was general agreement that interviews here made applicants feel welcome, comfortable and relaxed: “it didn’t feel like an interview.” There was appreciation of being told that a key purpose of the interview day was for applicants to decide whether the PGCE course, and studying it at [this university], was right for them. One co-constructor referred to meeting me at interview and reminded me we had discussed the secondary school that she attended and where I had taught, the inference being that she appreciated this personal connection. A further student cancelled an interview elsewhere because “I just knew this was right. As soon as I got accepted, I thought right, I’m coming here.” A younger student accepted a place here. She had experienced very few interviews and found them “nerve-racking”. Pragmatism certainly came into play here when she accepted the place, did not need to attend any more interviews, and then could concentrate on her UG assignments.

Confusion around the **application process** was explored with one co-constructor who, whilst welcoming moves to WP through more flexible routes into teaching, was concerned that this would add to the complexity of applying on UCAS. She felt there needed to be “a clear description and explanation for each route,” whilst another stated that whilst she was familiar with applying for an UG degree, the many options and codes for ITE on UCAS were “potentially confusing.” A third described these codes as “a maze” and “I don’t think it’s a welcoming process.”

Two inter-related themes of **safety/familiarity** and **access to support from university tutors** were raised. All three co-constructors in the third group, on the PGCE straight from UG

study at [this university], spoke of choosing here because they knew the campus, were able to stay with their family which was financially expedient, and knew [this city], factors that would ease the stress of having to deal with unfamiliar situations at the same time as a challenging PGCE year. This notion of familiarity is borne out by Crozier, Reay and Clayton (2008) whose qualitative research suggested students look for a place to study where they feel they will fit in and have a sense of belonging. When discussing why they had not chosen a School Direct route, several co-constructors mentioned the accessibility of support from university tutors. One did a distance learning degree and struggled with not having direct support for assignments. A second also struggled with her UG degree because of an individual need, whereas the access to additional support at [this university] was made very clear on open day: "This support was the biggest factor in terms of what [this university] could offer."

Implications for future practice

Several themes that emerged from my research findings are evidently significant factors as students embarked on their PGCE course. In this chapter I have considered those factors and the implications for future practice in the field of ITE. As WP strategies and policies have become embedded in HE over the last three decades, the issue of gender equality is implicit rather than explicit, but I argue that barriers to undertaking a PGCE course still exist for women. Discussions with my co-constructors suggested a range of strategies that could be implemented to support women (and all students), and the review of gender practices and pedagogies in HE by Fuller et al (2008) reinforces the importance of women playing a full role in producing knowledge and evidence. In the group discussions, students were able to share ideas and experiences as to how these barriers could be overcome.

The duration of the PGCE course

There was support for applicants having the option to choose a longer PGCE course. My findings suggested that this would have a positive impact on students' **readiness to teach**. A longer course would make more school placements possible and extend the provision for

deepening subject knowledge – two factors that some co-constructors raised as reasons why colleagues on the course were not (at that point) applying for jobs or were seeking supply posts to widen their experience. One suggested more frequent but shorter placements in different year groups would be possible which would enable “Primary students to go into EY and other year groups we do not see” and to have a week in “particular types of school (a Special School for example) like BEd students do.”

A longer, part-time course interested more mature women co-constructors with child-care responsibilities. However, they did highlight issues around finance; they would be faced with another year of fees and being unable to work thereby causing an unintentional financial barrier. Whilst acknowledging that part-time study can be a factor in WP, HEFCE (2013 p.vi) suggested that there are drawbacks, including a perceived lower status of part-time study which could impact on “the extent to which part-time learners see themselves as being ‘authentic’ HE students.”

Lengthening the PGCE course is supported by Samantha Twiselton, Director of Sheffield University Institute of Education. She argues that because the PGCE course is so short “too much is expected of NQTs, which is what makes so many of them leave so early in their careers,” (Twiselton 2017), suggesting that a longer course would improve retention rates.

Several HEIs do offer two-year courses and I would argue that this should be strongly considered by [my university] to WP for students with child-care responsibilities. Such courses are often described as “flexible”. In 2000, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA 2001) introduced **flexible PGCE courses** with a view to widening access to teacher training, particularly as patterns in recruitment were changing with more mature applicants, those looking for a career change or had child-care responsibilities. Morrison & Pitfield (2006), in critically evaluating the two-year PGCE course at Goldsmith’s College, London, acknowledged that the impetus to be more responsive to these circumstances arose out of a period of teacher shortage rather than an intrinsic desire to WP for students in socially disadvantaged areas or under-represented groups. Moran (2008) cites research evidence (from a UK longitudinal study carried out by the Department for Education and Science (DfES 2005)) which highlighted that 43% per cent of those taking the flexible PGCE route indicated it was the best option financially and 67% per cent highlighted that the flexibility of the programme suited their other commitments. When asked about their reasons for

choosing their particular training provider, 78% cited the geographical location. 52% of those aged 45 or over, and 49% aged 40–44, indicated that the availability of a programme in their local area had influenced their choice of ITE route, compared with just 25% of 20–24-year olds. Such findings are replicated in my data analysis, again suggesting that the same barriers are in place over ten years later.

Flexible courses are still offered by a number of HEIs including Canterbury Christchurch University (2018) where the PGCE Primary route encompasses three years of part-time study, has either a September or January start and includes online learning. St Mary's University, Twickenham (2018) offers an 18-month part-time course starting in April each year which provides flexibility to “balance the demands of career and home whilst studying to become a teacher.”

If flexible courses are offered elsewhere, this does beg the question why are they not offered at [this university]? Have they been offered in the past but insufficient interest meant they did not run? Are they seen as uneconomic in a climate of HEI cutbacks? In terms of my own practice, these are questions I would like to explore within my institution. After all, as one co-creator succinctly stated: “a two-year part-time course would open up doors for more people.”

PGCE Applicant Interviews

In my findings, I referred to co-constructors' comments on the relaxed and enjoyable interviews at [this university], a factor that influenced them to accept a place. They felt able to relax in group discussions and paired interviews and display the characteristics the interviewers were looking for such as enthusiasm, commitment, sensitivity to children's needs, and effective communication and interaction with others. Effective interview procedures were endorsed in the OECD report of 2005 which recommended that the selection processes for new teachers should be broadened (OECD 2005). I carry out PGCE interviews and yet before undertaking this research I had not considered the role they evidently play in WP. An implication for future practice will be for those involved in interviews to evaluate their impact and share this with other ITE course leaders.

Students in an ambassadorial role

When I began reading for this research, I was particularly interested in the concept of how WP on ITE courses could have a positive effect on encouraging children and young people in school to become teachers themselves, Duckworth, Thomas and Bland (2016). This “ambassadorial” role was explored by one co-creator, a woman with child-care responsibilities. She felt passionate about encouraging single mothers to access university and an ITE course and spoke of how she tried to do just that, telling them they should go to university because “they will get more money and benefits if they did start a degree and then a better job as a result.” She declared that she “would be an ambassador for encouraging single mums to go to uni.” A suggestion she made initially in jest but then realised might work, was to be an ambassador for the PGCE course– “I would come back to talk to new students about the course and the life of an NQT. The university could hire two NQTs to mentor and guide PGCE students. Serious consideration of the role recently qualified teachers from [this university] can play in WP is an important implication for future practice.

The same co-creator also felt that having a campus support group for students who are parents/carers would help to both recruit and WP, and offer support and guidance on an intense one-year course, an idea worthy of further consideration.

A further factor linked to supporting students who have child-care responsibilities is the campus **timetable** for academic studies. One comment made was that being timetabled in lectures and seminars until 6 p.m. “causes anxiety” because after school clubs at her children’s school were limited and she sometimes had to leave early “if lectures go on till 6.” Another shared the fact that she had to rely on her family for childcare outside school hours; if this was not available, she had to miss sessions which caused anxiety. One co-creator suggested that a two-year part-time course could be run like an access course, with twilight sessions: “I have a friend who wants to teach but has children and would not want to do a full-time year-long course. If she had no children, she would still want to do part-time, so she could work as well. This would reduce pressure if you have to take time off for children.”

An implication for practice at [this university] is to explore whether a more flexible timetable would support students and help to overcome barriers for specific students.

Group discussions made it clear that [this university] has a “captive audience” when recruiting for the PGCE course – more mature women with child-care responsibilities. Comments such as: “I couldn’t afford to go to a different university,” “Because of where we live, this limited where I could go,” “Proximity of [this university] to home and the fact that the course at [this university] is better made the decision for me,” indicate strongly that there are potential PGE students who will come to [this university] because they cannot go elsewhere. I maintain that it is therefore incumbent on my colleagues and I to implement strategies to WP and further enhance the student experience.

Conclusion

This research study set out to identify the factors that students encounter when embarking on a Primary PGCE course at [this university] and how these factors relate to the widening participation agenda.

Even after three decades of WP strategies and policies designed to improve access to HE, barriers for key groups remain. For women, who are well-represented in both HE and ITE, it could be assumed that WP has been “solved” but they still encounter barriers when beginning their studies on a PGCE course. My research evidence suggests that this is most prevalent for those of more mature age with family responsibilities. Government policy and HEI practice have increased the number of under-represented groups but I have argued that many of the more recent strategies are financially driven with the aim of competing for decreasing numbers of student applications. Relating this specifically to ITE, such strategies were one method of easing the teacher recruitment crisis, with WP a “happy by-product”. I am aware that in the current political and economic climate, HEIs have needed to adopt business strategies to generate income and I also fully appreciate the need to find effective strategies to raise teacher recruitment rates. However, it does concern me that this shift in focus will result in a loss of impetus to widen participation.

I conclude that offering flexible provision for the Primary PGCE course at [this university] would widen participation, opening up opportunities for more people to train to teach who are currently not able to do so. Both men and women from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with child-care and family responsibilities would have greater

choice as to where and when to study. Were this to happen, there would be opportunities for those currently unable to train to teach to do so resulting, in an important step towards social justice.

However, there are implications for both my institution's and my own future research. I would argue that an evaluation of the increased variety of routes into teaching (particularly Teaching Apprenticeships and Straight to Teaching), the extent to which they contribute to WP *and* the quality of teaching, as well as recruitment is necessary. I wish to be instrumental in exploring flexible provision and carrying out research to evaluate the impact on WP.

I would like to conclude by exploring my personal and professional development throughout the process of my research. My knowledge and understanding of widening participation, and how it can influence my practice, has developed. This is reflected in how my research question evolved and in changes in my research foci. What I am particularly aware of is how I have developed a much greater understanding of myself as a learner. I am now more confident in myself as a researcher and the role I can play in influencing future practice.

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