

The Context of Colleges of Teacher Education

I want my historical role to be plain, and I am sure
you will do justice to it.

Professor Asa Briggs
(letter to the author, 7 November 2012)

This book examines an academically neglected sector of higher education, the colleges of education, which provided training for the country's teachers and which were abruptly merged or closed in the 1970s. The issues raised have significance for teacher education this decade. Hence the importance of world recognised historian Professor Briggs' comment; he believed college restructuring to be an area which should have had national debate but which it was not granted. Nearly fifty years on this book explores the issues on which Asa Briggs actively campaigned as Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sussex. New evidence is presented from archive material and personal testimony. Furthermore, one of the main aims of this book is to act as a stimulus for further research.

Although initially termed training colleges from their foundation in the time of Queen Victoria, on 12 December 1964 they adopted the new title of colleges of education on the recommendation of the Robbins Committee set up by then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. This terminology reflected a change in their philosophy. At their peak in 1968 there were 113 local

authority colleges of education and 53 run by voluntary bodies, and these were located throughout England, Scotland and Wales.¹ Indeed, college principal J.B. Parry calculated that 40,000 men and women entered colleges of education compared to 50,000 who entered the first year of traditional universities. In some local authority areas more sixth formers went to colleges of education than to universities.² They were thus in this period a vital element of higher education.

From 1974 onwards the colleges of education were abolished as separate institutions. Some were completely shut, other merged with local polytechnics and only a few survived to develop and diversify into universities in their own right. Their very existence, though important in the memories of former staff and students, has been largely ignored by academics. Cyril Bibby, the internationally renowned geneticist and Principal of Kingston upon Hull Training College wrote in 1964 that ‘very little has been written about local authority training colleges’ and, apart from individual college histories, the situation has not changed.³ I wholeheartedly agree with Professor Robin Simmons, one of the few academics to recognise the significance of the colleges of education, who in 2017 reflected how ‘it is often forgotten a whole set of Higher Education institutions was once abolished by the State: the colleges of education’.⁴

I wish, as author, to declare a personal, as well as an academic interest, in the findings of this research.⁵ In 1961 I selected a three-year Certificate of Education course in King Alfred’s College in Winchester which was then a Church of England college of education. I believed that the school experience of the three-year course better qualified me to teach in a primary school and I liked

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1. David Hencke, *Colleges in Crisis: The Reorganization of Teacher Training, 1971-77* (London: Penguin Education, 1978).
 2. J.P. Parry, *The Lord James Tricycle: Some Notes on Teacher Education and Training* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972) p. 15.
 3. Cyril Bibby, *The First Fifty Years: A Brief History of Kingston upon Hull Training College* (Kingston upon Hull: Cyril Bibby, 1964).
 4. Robin Simmons, ‘Mrs Thatcher’s First Flourish: Organic Change, Policy Chaos and the Fate of the Colleges of Education’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 65, no. 3 (2017), pp. 1-16.
 5. Andy Pickard, *Teacher Education at Didsbury, 1946-2014: A Celebratory History* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2016). Andy, a former Didsbury lecturer and college historian, explains the challenges of personal involvement, p. iii.

the wider range of subjects than a conventional degree course. The photo shows me (sitting, fifth from the left) in 1963 with fellow KAC students.



After working as a primary school teacher, I went on to lecture in Sociology at three colleges of education: first, Brighton College, then, Mather College, Manchester, and its successor, City of Manchester College. I moved to what was Manchester Polytechnic because in 1970 these colleges of education were closed as free-standing institutions. This personal experience of studying and working in the former colleges has obviously influenced my value judgements and interpretation in my research methodology. I am following in the footsteps of, amongst others, Brian Jackson and Denis Marsden, whose innovative book *Education and the Working Class*, drew on their own school experiences in Huddersfield.⁶ Obviously generalisations cannot be drawn from just one person's experiences but I feel my involvement lends an important dimension to this research. More recently, Freathy and Doney wrote: 'Historians of education should examine their own positionality considering the role of self in interpreting the subject matter.'⁷

6. Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, *Education and the Working Class* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).
7. R. Freathy and J. Doney, 'History of Education Teacher?' *History of*

Concerns about the institutions providing teacher training are now highly topical because there is currently a critical shortage of teachers. The impartial National Audit Office (NAO) in its commissioned report for the Department for Education, *Training New Teachers*, published in 2016, was critical of the present arrangements for training teachers:

Training a sufficient number of new teachers of the right quality is the key to success of all the money spent on England's schools. The Department, however, has missed its recruitment targets for the last four years and there are signs that teacher shortages are growing. Until the Department meets its targets and can show that its approach is improving teacher recruitment, quality and retention, we cannot conclude that the arrangements for training new teachers are value for money.⁸

The report raised serious questions about the structure of the teacher training system.

The National Audit Office highlighted that, in response to the teacher shortage, new routes were created by which trainees can obtain qualified teacher status. There are currently six routes to reach qualified teacher status with an emphasis on training led by schools. The report is critical of the effects of this diversity: 'Potential applicants, however, do not yet have good enough information to help them decide where to train. Providers and schools told the NAO the plethora of training routes was confusing.'⁹

The report examines the routes of 33,209 students involved in teacher training. The routes include university-led training at undergraduate and postgraduate level, which does have an input from schools. Other paths focus on school-led training, which has a limited input from colleges. In some cases, in these schemes the students are counted as employees and so receive payment. The comparatively new scheme, Teach First, making up five per cent of trainee teachers, employs graduates in shortage subjects and provides them with a generous salary while training.

Education Researcher, no. 102 (November 2018), p. 53.

8. National Audit Office for the Department for Education, *Training New Teachers*, HC 798, 10 February 2016.

9. *Ibid.*

Main routes to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS)

Route	Number started training 2015/16 ¹	Who leads recruitment and training design?	Who delivers training?	Are trainees students or salaried employees?	Qualification gained
University-led (undergraduate)	5,440 (16%)	University	University	Student	BA, BSc or B.Ed. with QTS
University-led (postgraduate)	13,561 (41%)	University	University	Student	QTS and PGCE ²
School Direct - Fee (postgraduate)	7,086 (21%)	School	Mix of school-centred providers and universities	Student	QTS, usually with PGCE
School Direct - Salaried (postgraduate) Applicants must have around 3 years' experience	3,166 (10%)	School	Mix of school-centred providers and universities	Employee	QTS, usually with PGCE
School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (postgraduate)	2,372 (7%)	School-centred provider	School-centred provider	Student	QTS, usually with PGCE
Teach First (postgraduate)	1,584 (5%)	Teach First	Teach First and University	Employee	QTS and PGCE, optional masters
Total	33,209				

Notes

- 1 Provisional figures from the Initial Teacher Training Census, November 2015.
- 2 Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE).

The lessons of the past should inform current and future decisions about the structure of teacher education. There are a number of themes running through this book which are applicable to all debate about teacher education:

To what extent should there be uniformity or diversity in teacher education?

What is the role of the State and voluntary bodies in determining the structure of teacher education?

Should teacher education be mainly school-based in partnership with colleges or carried out in separate colleges with collaboration from the school sector?

What is the balance between practical classroom subjects and those which enhance the intellectual development of the student?

Should teacher education take place concurrently with the student's own academic education or after its completion?

How far should training for teachers enhance social mobility?

How far should colleges be monotechnic and student teachers educated apart from other students?

How is teacher education to be funded? Should the students' training be free or subsidised by the state?

It is important that the personal experiences of those attending the former teacher education colleges should be recorded before they are lost forever. I therefore welcome the initiative of the Alumni Voices Project, carried out between 2004 and 2009 at the University of Winchester, based on ninety-one questionnaire responses and twenty audio interviews with former students of King Alfred's College.¹⁰ The participants ranged from alumni who had attended the college in the 1930s to larger groups from the 1950s and 1960s. I hope other institutions will be inspired by this to carry out their own similar projects.

I value oral history as a method of exploring experiences in colleges. Certainly I recognise the problems of reliability and representativeness, as discussed by Cunningham and Gardner in their use of oral testimony in their study of student teachers, but I believe it yields valuable insights when combined with documentary evidence.¹¹ I have also drawn on their research into student experience.

A range of college staff and students have provided interviews and questionnaires for this book and some have contributed written testimonies. In addition to my correspondence with Professor Briggs, former college principals shared their perspective on college life with me. These include Eileen Alexander (a 100 years old when I interviewed her), who was Principal of Bedford College between 1951 and 1971, and Edward Burton, Vice-Principal of Mather College in the 1970s.¹² Twenty-five former

10. Stephanie Spencer, Andrea Jacobs and Camilla Leach, *Alumni Voices: The Changing Experiences of Higher Education* (Winchester: Winchester University Press, 2015).

11. Peter Cunningham and Philip Gardner, *Becoming Teachers: Texts and Testimonies, 1907-1950* (London: Woburn Press, 2004), p. 5.

12. Interviews with Eileen Alexander, 2 November 2012, and Edward Burton,

students who attended nineteen different colleges of education completed questionnaires in which they reflected on their experiences. Respondents included Estelle Morris, the former Education Secretary, who qualified as a teacher at a physical education college and later pursued a political career. A further fifteen college of education students were personally interviewed.

A number of my respondents, such as John Shannon who attended King Alfred's between 1935 and 1937 were also personally interviewed.¹³ They provide compelling alternative histories from the perspective of students. John, 101 years old in 2018, vividly described how life in a 1930s college was one long round of controls and petty restrictions which the students attempted to subvert. John has written a memoir about his life but it is significant how much supplementary information about his college life emerged in interviews.¹⁴

The insight of campaigning journalist David Hencke is particularly relevant because, at the time of the college closures, he was a journalist for *The Times Higher Education Supplement* and *The Guardian*. His article in the education section of *The Guardian* on 24 May 1977 raised a number of important issues which he developed in his book, *Colleges in Crisis*, and opponents termed him a conspiracy theorist. He generously gave his time to discuss his controversial views with me.¹⁵ I also approached Shirley Williams, the minister involved in finalising the college of education closures, for an interview, when she was a member of the House of Lords, but was not successful.

Archival research has also been central to this book and my Appendix shows the range and geographical diversity of the archives. Since the demise of the colleges of education their archives have become fragmented and divided between different institutions. In some cases, the current institution holds the college archives, as in the case of Edge Hill University, but, in other instances, such as King Alfred's, Winchester, the archives have been passed to the county record office. The National Archives in Kew is a major depository. In the Appendix I have traced where

9 December 2012.

13. Interviews with the author, 10 July 2012 and 30 March 2018.

14. J.W.S. Shannon, *John William Shannon: A Memoir* (Winchester: Winchester University Press, 2017).

15. Interview with the author in Manchester, October 2012. David Hencke, *Colleges in Crisis*. Penguin Education, London, 1977.

the archives of the 1976 former colleges of education are currently located and hope this will be of use to future researchers. I would also encourage former staff and students to donate material to local archives before it is lost irretrievably. I explain their importance in the Appendix 'Archives of Colleges of Education'.

I have been able to visit and research many national and local college archives with generous assistance of a BA Leverhulme Small Research Grant. These archives were drawn from both the south and north of England, voluntary- and state-maintained colleges, general and specialist colleges. Archives in which I have researched include Avery Hill, Bedford College of Physical Education, Bingley, Brighton, Darlington, Edge Hill, Homerton, King Alfred's College, Winchester, the Liverpool Colleges, the Manchester Colleges (Didsbury, Elizabeth Gaskell, Manchester Day, Mather College), as well as the archive of the International Froebel Institute. Some of these archives are exceptionally well-presented as they display college memorabilia.

College histories, often by senior academic members of staff, have proved to be invaluable sources of information. Renowned educationists, who were also past principals, have written thoughtful histories yielding interesting insights, for example, that of Olive Stanton of Darlington Training College of Education and Alfred Body of Didsbury College of Education.¹⁶ There are also perceptive accounts of their former colleges by historians such as Richard Smart, Head of History at De Montfort University, and Martial Rose, historian and former Principal of King Alfred's College, Winchester.¹⁷ The internationally renowned academic Cyril Bibby, Principal of Kingston upon Hull College of Education wrote a spirited defence of the colleges of education as well as editing his college history.¹⁸

Celebratory histories of the former colleges can be purely descriptive but there are authors who provide critical assessments

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16. Olive Stanton, *Our Present Opportunities: The History of Darlington College of Education* (Darlington Training College) (Darlington: Privately published by O.M. Stanton, 1966); Alfred H. Body and N.J. Frangopulo, *Silver Jubilee: The Story of Didsbury College of Education, 1946-71* (Manchester: E.J. Morten, 1970).
 17. Richard Smart and Martial Rose, *King Alfred's College, Winchester, 1980-1990: A Decade of Change* (Salisbury: Salisbury Printing, 1990); Martial Rose, *A History of King Alfred's College, Winchester 1840-1980* (Bognor Regis: Phillimore and Co. Ltd, 1981).
 18. Cyril Bibby, 'In Defence of Colleges of Education', *British Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (1975), pp. 19-28.

and relate their college to the wider higher educational system. The account of *Teacher Education at Didsbury 1946-2014* by former lecturer Andy Pickard offers far more than 'the celebration' of its subtitle. As well as the social history of staff and students on campus, it analyses how this important Manchester college of education engaged with the national teacher education system. Jennifer Bone locates her Westminster teacher training college in the wider picture of teacher education reform.¹⁹

In order to understand the rise and demise of the colleges in the higher education system, it is necessary to examine their origins. This is not an abbreviated education history but rather a focus on the key themes outlined at the start of the chapter. I have consulted standard works that concentrate on the history of teacher education, including books by Jones, Dent and Gosden,²⁰ but the emphasis of my research is on the political and social debates surrounding its origin. I contend that heritage research helps an understanding of how the past influences present political discourse. It shapes the approach to contemporary issues and problems.

After this introductory chapter the book is structured as follows: the political context of the training colleges (Chapter Two); the struggle between schools and colleges in providing teacher education (Chapter Three); the academic experience in colleges by staff and students (Chapter Four); the experience of female students and staff (Chapter Five); issues of social mobility, such as working-class entrants (Chapter Six); issues of college control and rebellion (Chapter Seven). The treatment of mature students and ethnic minorities is discussed throughout the book. In the book's longest chapter (Chapter Eight) the reasons for expanding and then closing the colleges, stated and unstated, are explored. The final chapter traces the achievements of some of the remaining colleges in the twenty-first century and analyses the direction of teacher education.

19. Andy Pickard, *Teacher Education at Didsbury, 1946-2014*; Jennifer Bone, *Our Calling to Fulfil: Westminster College and the Changing Face of Teacher Education, 1951-2001* (Bristol: Tockington Press, 2003).

20. Lance Jones, *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales: A Critical Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924); H.C. Dent, *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales, 1800-1975* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977); Peter Gosden, *The Education System since 1944* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983).