What can we learn from the experiences of DMU Education Studies students who applied for postgraduate initial teacher education programmes in 2015-16?

Ross Purves and Mark Pulsford
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The education sector is a major recruiter of graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industries of HEP leavers in employment 2013/14</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Social Work</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific &amp; technical</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
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</tbody>
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SOURCE: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/stats-dlhe
There were significant systemic changes for those applying for teacher training this year

- For the 2015/16 cycle (i.e. Sept 2016 starters), the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) changed the allocations of ITE places from an institutional level to a national level.
- Meaning that ITE providers had to fill their places early or risk having their courses close.
- So when applications opened (via UCAS) there was a palpable rush to get candidates in and offers made...
There were significant systemic changes for those applying for teacher training this year. For the 2015/16 cycle, the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) changed the allocations of ITE places from an institutional level to a national level. Meaning that ITE providers had to fill their places early or risk having their courses close. So when applications opened (via UCAS) there was a palpable rush to get candidates in and offers made…

We do not yet know what system will be used for Sept 2017 starters but...

It would be sensible to assume it will be the same as this year...

It can’t really be any worse!
The 8 Key Messages

Based on:
- Our recent research with Year 3 Education Studies students
- Our experiences supporting applicants over the last few years
Key Message 1:

*It’s not an easy option!*

- ‘I was really surprised, I thought that everyone at the interview would be in the same position as us; last year at Uni, wanting to teach. There were people there with Master’s degrees, PhDs, there was a lot of people that had already got their degree and I sat there and thought ‘how naïve am I!’ ...I felt that there was so many people there with better degrees than myself...’

- ‘I had one day to make a poster on an issue in education, prepare another topic for a group discussion, then on the day I also had to read a book to a class and deal with the interview...’
Key Message 2:

It’s stressful! Students are likely to need practical and emotional support

- ‘[It was] massively intense, and I had 4 interviews in 4 days like one after the other...You come home like ‘oh my god’’
- ‘It’s been a whirlwind this year’
- ‘[Applying] was almost like a race. People were panicking’
- ‘It was extremely stressful’
Key Message 3:

Where possible, avoid overloading students with assignments in Term 1

- ‘...then the interviews kept coming round and you had to prepare for this or this. I was focusing more on that than the assignments. Everything got pushed back for these interviews’
- ‘To have to prepare last minute [for interviews] when you’ve got assignments due in...I think it helped not having any assignments due until after Christmas’
Applications need an academic reference before they’re submitted – respond ASAP to emails from UCAS

‘I think the most stressful thing was that you had to complete your [UCAS] form and then wait for your references. You can’t do anything [whilst] you wait. Some of my referees were within 2 days but some of my friends had to wait 2 weeks and that was really stressful... So it would be better if you could have them ready and then do your form instead of being blocked by them’
Key Message 5:

**University-based PGCE is not the only route these days – many opportunities lie elsewhere**

- ‘I wouldn’t have gone to any of the open days unless [Education Studies staff] weren’t sending us emails because I didn’t know where to look for it. There were so many different places. The actual provider I’m going to train with – I had no idea about the actual place’

- ‘I went to a roadshow last year and signed up, and then I completely forgot about them – but they rang me up after Christmas out of the blue and that’s the one I got in to’
Key Message 6:

Provide information and support early

- ‘Going from a joint honours perspective...I remember in February I was talking about doing my skills tests and my friends that do single honours were like ‘I haven’t even done my application yet, how do I do that?’... I think it’s really interesting that other subjects just don’t even mention teacher training ...unless you do Education [Studies] then you’re left to it, you’ve got to figure it out for yourself’

- ‘One of the people on the PGCE interview with me, that was the only thing she’d applied for because she didn’t know about anything else’
Key Message 7:

**Knowing which route to choose is tough – so students need to research and plan ahead**

- ‘I think the hardest bit is knowing what to apply for. Because it’s so hard to distinguish the differences between them, and then you go and talk to them and they obviously tell you theirs is the best but they can’t tell you why it’s different and you’re left thinking ‘well, what is the best one to go for?’

- ‘Last year when I knew where I wanted to apply I got in touch with schools that were working with [that SCITT] ready for when I was preparing for [this] year’
Key Message 8:

Having school experience is a basic requirement

‘They definitely wanted people with experience. They wanted people who had been at school. They wanted to know how many hours, days and then they were interested in you, just based on that’
“I can't stress enough how much time it takes to apply, plan numerous tasks and interviews as well as keeping up with Uni work!”

(Successful primary school teacher training applicant and former DMU Education Studies Student)

"I would suggest that the 2nd years start to think about what they want to put in their personal statement. This time last year I thought I had so much time to do it but suddenly it hits you and there are a million and one things that you need to concentrate on."

(Successful secondary school teacher training applicant and former DMU Education Studies Student)

"I had completely underestimated the amount of time it would take to complete my teacher training application and prepare for the interviews and the knock on effect this would have on my university work."

(Successful primary school teacher training applicant and former DMU Education Studies Student)
The 8 Key Messages

1. It’s not an easy option!
2. It’s stressful! Students are likely to need practical and emotional support
3. Where possible, avoid overloading students with assignments in Term 1
4. Applications need an academic reference before they’re submitted – respond ASAP to emails from UCAS
5. University-based PGCE is not the only route these days – many opportunities lie elsewhere
6. Provide information and support early
7. Knowing which route to choose is tough – so students need to research and plan ahead
8. Having school experience is a basic requirement
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June 2016

Some supporting notes and resources

Key message 1: ‘It’s not an easy option’.
To check eligibility and requirements, students should review the official info sources:
The Official DfE information site: https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/
0800 389 2500
UCAS Teacher Training: https://www.ucas.com/ucas/teacher-training
0371 468 0 469
LearnDirect Professional Skills Tests
http://sta.education.gov.uk/
0300 303 9613

They need to check back regularly for the latest information – things move very quickly in the teacher training world! This also applies to the staff supporting them.

It’s also very important that applicants have engaged with the Teacher Standards: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

A great overview of this whole area if provided by AGCAS in their regularly updated ‘Routes into Teaching’ doc. This is widely available, e.g.:

http://www.mmu.ac.uk/careers/students-and-graduates/resources/guides/Routes-into-teaching.pdf

Key message 2: ‘It’s stressful! Students are likely to need practical and emotional support’

The NCTL changes led to significant extra pressure on students – we know of situations where students, when offered a choice by the ITE provider, have opted for later interview dates only to then be told prior to that interview that places were full so the interview has been cancelled.
Providers tend to forget that they are also trying to get a decent degree at the same time, and also probably work and complete work experience. Many students will need emotional and practical support, even very strong and resilient learners (they are likely to feel the pressure more than others).

The very best ‘antidote’ to this is to get them thinking about their options and plans as early as possible. The summer between Years 2 and 3 is an ideal opportunity for this and they need to be going to open days and making links with potential providers, also working on personal statements and referee choices. If they are also in school on placement and engaging with documents like the Teachers Standards, they will be better placed to respond quickly when interview/selection invitations arrive. If asked to teacher lessons or observe teachers in the classroom, students should seek support from teachers in their placements.

**Key message 3: ‘Where possible, avoid overloading students with assignments in Term 1’**

Everything noted under Key Message 2 applies here as well. Students are also likely to face demands by providers to get their skills tests done earlier and earlier (between Jan and May is typical). They will have to prep for these around university demands.

The DMU Maths Learning Support Unit can help students with their Numeracy tests and skills audits that ITE providers often give candidates.

**Key message 4: ‘Applications need an academic reference before they’re submitted – respond ASAP to emails from UCAS’**

It is expected that the principal referee will be a member of the student’s academic tuition team. They will need to give an accurate prediction of their final grade.

We find it helpful to send students a little questionnaire to elicit all the necessary information from them, once they’ve approached an academic for a reference.

For more guidance on the referee process, including guidance on choosing a second reference, check:

http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/teacher-training/filling-in-your-application/references

**Very important:** We have known students miss out on places because (second) referees have taken too long to complete the forms and all the places have gone. Students need to choose people who they can trust will turn reference requests around early. Applications sit in ‘no man’s land’ until references are completed by both referees....
Key message 5: ‘University-based PGCE is not the only route these days – many opportunities lie elsewhere’ and Key message 7: ‘Knowing which route to choose is tough – so students need to research and plan ahead’

Again, proper research is everything and the sources of information above are a great start. As is the AGCAS document ‘Routes in to teaching’ (see above).

Students need to get out to meet as many providers as possible at open days. Every provider is different and has a different ethos and ‘feel’. Students need to feel comfortable about what works for them.

A great local starting point is to attend the University of Leicester open evenings. They run their own university based routes but also accredit SCITT and School Direct routes. Thus, their open evenings have representatives from many different organisations and routes. It’s a great ‘quick hit’, even if students are going to be applying for providers outside of Leicester – it will still give them an overview of the different routes. More info here:

http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/education/pgce/routes-into-teaching-events

For a list of all forthcoming teacher training information events, see:

https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/teaching-events

Students can search to see what events are happening in their area over the Year 2-3 summer period.

Key message 6: ‘Provide information and support early’

Start with the contents of this document, along with the key web addresses provided above.

In our experience of having run teacher training courses, applicants fall in to two categories: those that have wanted to teach all their life and those that come to it very late in the day, i.e. during Year 3. Both groups have their problems. The first group often have idealised and unrealistic views about the role and their ability to apply successfully. (You then have to pick up the pieces when it doesn’t work out as they thought it would). The second group often have to pick up the ball very quickly and run like mad in Year 3.

Key message 8: ‘Having school experience is a basic requirement’

It’s probably too late if students only start a school placement in Year 3, given that applications have to be in from the end of October. Ideally they need to be starting in Year 2 (e.g. May onwards when DMU work is largely complete).

DMU Square Mile can offer great opportunities in this area, as can DSU Volunteering. Individual Faculty Work Placement Unit teams also have strong links
with schools. These are all good contacts to help students navigate DBS processes, should placement schools be unwilling or unable to help.

School experience must be of a good quality, enabling applicants to demonstrate reflection and growing familiarity with educational practice and theory. It must be more than just doing displays or hearing children read one-to-one. They need broad, sustained and enriching experience and a variety of school contexts.

If students build up good working relationships with a school teacher or head teacher, these professionals make excellent potential second referees. Providers will appreciate that they can comment directly on classroom experience. But… teachers will be unwilling to provide references unless they've spent a good amount of time with the students – this is another reason to start school placements earlier.

It would be very helpful if students kept a reflective log of their experiences in school and it would be sensible if they used the Teacher Standards to structure their logs and prompt reflections. They need to be able to demonstrate that they can relate theory, policy and practice in their personal statements and at interview. They should be drawing on their school placement for as much of this as possible. If they can link all this to the Teacher Standards, they will be at a significant advantage.

The bottom line is… chipping away with info throughout their degree is likely to be the best way to get them to consider their options as soon as possible!

Good luck!