

Enablers and restrictors in navigating careers in education in England and the role of policy in supporting aspirations to become a teacher

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This research paper draws on empirical data that examines how some mature students are able to recognise, access and navigate educational opportunities in University continuing education, despite the instability and transience of educational policy. Specifically, it focuses on part-time pathways for teaching assistants to become fully-qualified teachers and it extrapolates findings from individual life stories that identify influences in the navigation of these career routes. Bourdieuan-based Careership theory (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) is used to analyse the multi-dimensional influences on a sample of eight teaching assistants and their educational 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997) over the lifecourse.

Common to many European countries, England has high current and predicted teacher shortages because of low recruitment and retention of teachers (OECD, 2019; EACEA, 2018). Whilst there are some alternative pathways to teacher training for mature entrants, this study has found that these precarious routes to reach teacher status are disproportionately experienced by those who have not accessed higher education as a young person. In addition, the effect of short-lived educational policies is found to create instability for mature students embarking on non-traditional routes to reach teacher status. Enablers and restrictors to success for the participants in the study were found to be centred around the balance between cost and risk, guidance and access to educational career structures and acknowledgement that life events effect people at different times in their learning lives. Common to all is evidence of a strong desire to be active contributors to society.

Through better understanding the social and affective impact of non-traditional career routes, this paper offers recommendations to support Universities to create more accessible part-time routes in higher education for students throughout the lifecourse. The findings from this study contribute to an argument that supports organisation of flexible, alternative routes accessible across the lifecourse. The research suggests that lowering the risk threshold for entry to teaching and raising the reward between investment and work/life balance will require policy makers and universities to recognise diverse lifelong rights of entry to the teaching profession.

Topic: Diversity and inclusion in Higher Education: what we have and what we need