

## From UPTEC to NaPTEC: from exasperation to enhancement

*There is a serious and potentially damaging breakdown in understanding between the Secretary of State, HMI and CATE on the one hand and the training institutions on the other. The difficulty will not be resolved by the present procedure for accreditation. We recommend more extensive consultation and discussion on the principles behind the criteria and on the various ways in which they might be implemented.*

Report, Select Committee, Education, Science and Arts, 1986

It was in the context of this *serious and potentially damaging breakdown in understanding* that the Undergraduate Teacher Education Conference (UPTEC) was established, the precursor to the National Primary Teacher Education Council (NaPTEC). In late 1983 a group of Programme Leaders and Heads of School, mainly drawn from the Midlands and the North came together to share their unease over the direction of government policy with regard to the imposition of criteria for programme design in undergraduate degrees and what was perceived as a very significant breakdown in communication and a failure on the part of the government to take the views of the providers seriously.

Very rapidly UPTEC extended its membership to include most of the providers engaged in undergraduate degrees in primary education across the country with the first 'national' event being a day conference held at Nottingham Trent Polytechnic in 1984, where a consensus emerged about the importance of articulating a strong voice of opposition. This was to be my first encounter with the embryonic organisation and I felt a real rapport with like-minded colleagues and a sense of purpose behind the proceedings. The first two day UPTEC conference was to be held a year later on 15/16 May at Eaton Hall, Retford, attracting 80+ delegates and this was to be the conference where the organisation was formally established, the constitution agreed and where committee members were elected. At the helm was John Hallett, an experienced programme leader from Nottingham Trent, an impressive first chair of the organisation, who combined warmth with wisdom and who more than anyone else gave UPTEC a firm sense of direction and political bite from the outset. The highlight of the conference was the keynote address from Sir William Taylor, the first Chair of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), who had the difficult task of defending the government imposition of criteria which were perceived by most of the audience as at best restrictive and misguided and at worst as reactionary and disastrous. His

address was greeted with few exceptions by scorn and anger and one sensed that he was visibly shaken by the degree of hostility expressed.

At the heart of the opposition to the CATE criteria was a fundamental objection to the imposition of a model of programme design for undergraduate degrees which allocated two years of a three or four year degree to subject specialisation. This was seen as undermining the generalist direction taken by so many of the providers, especially those whose awards were validated by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) - that is, there had been a strong push, endorsed by the CNAA, for a model of programme design which did greater justice to the breadth and complexities of the primary teacher role and the range of knowledge and expertise which must underpin such a role. The traditional emphasis on a subject specialism to the exclusion of the wider curriculum and pedagogical issues had been superseded by what were regarded as more innovatory and professionally relevant patterns of programme design. The latter was perceived as being at risk as a result of the CATE criteria. In a commentary (1984) on Circular 3/84, which introduced the CATE criteria, UPTEC made its position clear:

*To achieve an adequate approach to this broad professional task, an appropriate balance of time needs to be allowed between various interrelated priorities. Such a balance is not feasible if subject studies (as interpreted in the recent HMI paper, 'Good Practice in Subject Studies') take up two full years of a 3 or 4 year programme. We regard this limiting influence of the Criteria (Annexe, Section 7) to be severely detrimental to the interest of primary teaching.*

This was also the Circular which imposed the minimum number of hours for the teaching of mathematics and language /literacy as 100 hours each, alongside a minimum allocation of 20 weeks for school experience. This left approximately one sixth of the degree for everything else, including the other areas of the curriculum, general professional studies, special educational needs, information technology, multi-cultural education etc. In 1985 I was moved to write:

*It would seem, therefore, that we are facing a situation in initial teacher education where there is a very real danger that child development, so long considered a key element in training, is squeezed out of existence, or at best allocated so little time that it becomes increasingly difficult to satisfy the course needs for rigour and coherence.*

Given the political impetus for the formation of UPTEC and the oppositional stance it took, it is no surprise that in those early years membership of UPTEC was seen as somewhat *risqué* by some and in some instances senior management actually discouraged tutors from being involved in such a *radical* organisation. This was to change as UPTEC became increasingly

mainstream, developing closer links with other professional organisations and taking on a much stronger staff development role within the sector. The fact that an HMI attended committee meetings in the late 80s as an observer was symptomatic of the determination of UPTEC to engage in dialogue with the policy-makers in the system and of the importance attached by the Inspectorate to the role of UPTEC in representing the voice of primary teacher educators.

UPTEC re-invented itself as the National Primary Teacher Education Conference (later to be Council) in 1988. The change in name was significant because the organisation did not want to restrict its agenda to undergraduate provision. This was especially significant in the context of increasing proportions of students entering the profession through the postgraduate route and the importance of viewing initial teacher education in relation to induction and continuing professional development. The inclusion of 'National' in the title reflected our aspiration that the organisation would become increasingly more representative of institutions across the United Kingdom, including those HEIs which only had postgraduate and masters provision (mainly the older universities). To a large extent this aspiration has turned into reality with conference participants normally including colleagues from Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland has been less well represented and this may well be a function of the distinctiveness of the system north of the border. With regard to the range of institutions represented, we have become much more diversified as an organisation over the past two decades and significantly this has been echoed in the composition of the Standing Committee.

Central to NaPTEC's role has been the promotion of conferences and workshops on an annual basis with a view to providing platforms for key policy makers, distinguished educationists and practitioners who can talk to initiatives being taken in ITE. This balance between national perspectives, insights from research and the voice of the tutor working at the 'coal-face' has been important to the organisation and over the years significant contributions have been made from all sectors of the profession, including chief education officers, senior figures in professional associations, college principals, heads of department, head teachers, HMIs and NQTs. The list of keynote speakers provides us with a roll-call of some of the most influential figures in education, including Andrew Pollard, Colin Richards, Henry Pluckrose, Robert Fisher, Tim Brighouse, Chris Woodhead, Mike Tomlinson, Robin Alexander, David Hargreaves, Neville Bennett, Ralph Tabberer, Carol Adams, Kevan Collins and Lesley Staggs. Collaboration with UCET and more recently with GTC(E) has been a key feature of our London based workshops. The fact that the latter organisation has been willing to support teachers in their attendance of our London workshops has been much appreciated and has enabled a wider audience to contribute to and benefit from the events.

Another key aspect of NaPTEC's role has been the continuing articulation of the perspectives of teacher educators specialising in the field of primary education. Over the years NaPTEC has responded to numerous consultation documents both in writing and in person. Most recently the Committee (2006) had the opportunity of discussing the initial drafts of the revised standards and requirements with Paul Moses from the TDA. Earlier my two predecessors as Chairs, Jack Hogbin (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Prof Colin Richards were both very active on the political front and were instrumental in surveying opinion nationally, the first survey (2000) examining the 'manageability' of the 4/98 standards and the second (2001) examining perceptions of OfSTED methodology. The former survey was particularly significant in terms of its demonstration of the impossibility of securing evidence for the multitude of standards (800+) expected of the primary graduate and the sense of frustration we all felt in having to make a system work which in essence was unworkable. Fortunately we have travelled a long distance since then with the revised model (2007) being minimalist in conception.

Indeed, it is significant that the current position taken by the government in its approach to teacher education and programme design is now much closer to the position argued by UPTEC from the outset. The principle of consultation is taken seriously by the Training and Development Agency; the balance between the contributory elements of initial teacher education is seen as a matter for professional judgement and there is no insistence on subject specialisation, although the option is there for institutions to go down this path; there is no dispute in the teacher education sector about the minimum number of weeks to be allocated to school experience and most HEIs in reality include more; and the standards for QTS are now integrated into a set of standards for the profession. When this change is seen against the backcloth of shifting ideologies in primary education, heralded in Excellence and Enjoyment (2003), with a greater emphasis on personalisation in learning, curriculum integration and creativity, one senses that the climate for teacher education has become much more enlightened and certainly more encouraging of innovation in programme design.

On the publications front NaPTEC's contribution has been limited and this may well be an area for future development. In the early years Ralph Starkie from Charlotte Mason College, a vibrant character and key figure in the establishment of UPTEC who tragically died in 1990 at the age of 54, produced a regular newsletter and this was replicated by Mike Williams from 95 to 97. Between 1990 and 1993 five Reviews were published with articles on a range of topics centred on primary education and contributors included Robin Alexander, Marion Whitehead and Patrick Costello as well as several of the committee members. In addition two sets of Occasional Papers were

produced in 95 and 96, the first based largely on contributions from colleagues at the University College of Ripon and York St John on the theme of partnership with schools and the second drawing on contributions from the University of Greenwich on the international dimension of education. In 2002 NaPTEC collaborated with Learning Matters in the production of *Primary Initial Teacher Training and Education: Revised Standards, Bright Future?* The setting up of a NaPTEC website ([www.naptec.org.uk](http://www.naptec.org.uk)) has also enabled us to share conference proceedings more widely as well as to maintain a more public profile.

But NaPTEC is also about generating social capital: new friendships are established and old friendships strengthened, especially at the annual conference in Oxford at the start of the academic year, where the ambience of the college campus provides a fitting and distinctive setting for socialising and dialogue. All of this facilitates that sense of professional identity which stems from being part of a community with a common purpose and values. I for one have benefitted enormously from being part of a social network which has extended beyond the confines of my university and which has given me access to professional enrichment. At the point of retirement I can look back with satisfaction at the way in which NaPTEC has stood the test of time, evolving through its two and a half decades and I am confident that it will continue to flourish in a climate which is much more supportive and collaborative than it was at the time of its birth.

## References

Department of Education and Science (1984) **Circular 3/84 and its associated annexe**, London, HMSO.

DFES (2003) **Excellence and Enjoyment - A Strategy for Primary Schools**, [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk)

Select Committee, Education, Science and Arts (1986) **Report: Achievement in Primary Schools**, London, DES

Simco, N & Wilson, T(ed.) (2002) **Primary Initial Teacher Training and Education: Revised Standards, Bright Future?** Learning Matters/NaPTEC

TDA (2007) **Professional Standards for Teachers**, [www.tda.gov.uk/standards](http://www.tda.gov.uk/standards)

UPTEC (1984) **Commentary on DES Circular 3/84** - available from Robert Young, [rmyoung1942@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rmyoung1942@yahoo.co.uk)

Young, R. (1985) *Child Development Under Threat: its place in initial teacher education for the years of primary schooling*. **Journal of Further and Higher Education**, Vol.9(3), Autumn.