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Vignettes on Education Reforms: England and Poland

This chapter provides brief vignettes describing some specific education reforms in three countries – England and Poland:

- In England the government responded to a teacher shortage with a successful campaign to attract more potential teachers. The success of the English strategy rests on its two-pronged approach which combines a clever advertising campaign with a substantial package of financial relief. The government has now met its recruitment targets.
- Since 2000, reforms in Poland have made impressive gains in the quality of its secondary education. There were three elements to the reforms: *i)* increasing secondary and higher education qualifications in the population; *ii)* ensuring equal educational opportunities; and *iii)* improving the quality of education. Poland's PISA scores now show that the variance between schools in student performance in reading, mathematics, and science has been significantly reduced.

This chapter provides brief case studies of specific reforms in two different countries – tackling teacher shortages in England and reforming secondary education in Poland.

ENGLAND: TACKLING TEACHER SHORTAGES

At the beginning of the decade, England's universities were finding it difficult to attract trainee teachers, and schools were consequently short-staffed. This case study describes how the government has responded with a successful campaign to attract more potential teachers.

Some background

The Training and Development Agency (TDA) – formerly known as the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) – falls under the English Department for Education. It is charged with improving the quality of teacher training and recruiting new teachers. The TDA had always been concerned with teacher recruitment, but in the early years the majority of its energy (and resources) was spent in driving up the quality of provision. In response to the teacher shortage crisis, the government gave the TDA greater responsibility for running national recruitment campaigns for new teachers to encourage university applications. The TDA took a very clear strategic approach to teacher recruitment, driven by its new Chief Executive appointed in 2000.

Working with the new CEO, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, David Blunkett, persuaded the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, to announce an extra GBP 150 million of spending in his 2000 budget to support the TDA's new recruitment strategy.

The extra money was used in two key areas:

- 1) **A new national advertising campaign.** Leading international advertising and recruitment agencies were employed to undertake extensive market research on the motivations and barriers to becoming a teacher, and to develop award winning marketing strategies.
- 2) **Financial support for teacher trainees,** a new GBP 6 000 training bursary was offered to all trainees, as a one-off, tax-free payment to support them through their training. A “golden hello” was also introduced, of up to GBP 4 000. This amount was to be paid on employment, depending on which subject trainees were teaching. Teachers of subjects which were especially short of teachers, such as mathematics and physics, received the full amount.

The new support package of bursaries and golden hellos became a central pillar of the new advertising campaign. By focusing on the idea of teaching “making a difference”, the new campaign aimed to improve the status of teaching as a profession. The campaign also encouraged people to pick up the telephone – for the first time the national information line number was included in the adverts. The message was easy to understand: “Don't just think about it – call us”. This also allowed the TDA to collect data on people who were considering teaching, monitor the number of inquiries, and analyse the questions being asked, as well as sending out further information to targeted groups (for example, mathematics and physics students, where the supply shortage was most pronounced).

The final element of the new approach was to change the way the TDA talked about teaching, emphasising the flexibility and diversity of the skills teachers acquire and the variety of routes into teaching. The TDA also started to actively advocate teaching as “a first career” – something you could do for a few years before doing something else (Box 10.1). Some of these elements are outlined below in more detail.

A sophisticated recruitment campaign

One of the TDA's central aims was to understand its “customers” better. It divided the student population into three broad categories: 1) those planning on teaching; 2) those considering teaching; and 3) those not considering teaching.

Originally, the majority of the TDA's efforts went into recruiting teachers from the “might teach” category (2). They wanted to encourage people who were seriously considering teaching as an option, but were put off by various barriers – such as the financial burden of the training.

In order to refine its campaign further, the TDA then undertook more in-depth market research on potential teaching recruits. It divided the market into three main categories:

- **Undergraduates and recent graduates** – students looking for their first job on leaving university.
- **Career finders** – young people aged around 25-30 who had left university and not settled into a graduate career, but who were now looking for a career.
- **Career changers** – people who had embarked on a career, but were looking for a career which would bring them more job satisfaction.



During the last decade the proportion of career finders and changers amongst teacher training recruits has grown – today about 50% of teacher training recruits are over 25. This was reflected in the new advertising slogans – such as “Use your head: teach” – to appeal to people not making full use of their graduate skills in their current jobs. The latest campaign, “Turn your talent to teaching”, is designed to appeal to all three categories of potential recruits.

After extensive profiling of potential recruits, the advertising agency also developed the profile of “self-interested idealists” to define potential teachers, and to shape the marketing campaigns. This acknowledged that potential teachers were motivated by making a difference and putting something back, but that they also wanted to enter a profession which would give them financial and personal satisfaction rewards.

Box 10.1 **Teach First**

TDA worked closely with Teach First, an independent educational charity set up in 2002 to address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields. Teach First targets graduates who would not normally consider a career in teaching and places them in what it considers challenging schools across England. Based on America First’s “Teach for America” model, these graduates are only required to teach for two years, but in poor performing schools. The attraction for graduates is that they are given a special form of teacher training and are also provided with a competitive graduate salary, mentoring by a blue-chip company or business, and a masters’ degree.

Creating new ways of entering teaching

To broaden the potential pool of teaching applicants, the TDA developed a wide range of routes to becoming a qualified teacher. From 2006, there were as many as 32 ways of acquiring Qualified Teacher Status. The two most important include:

- An undergraduate or postgraduate course in Initial Teacher Training provided by a university or college. This is still the main source of teacher entry.
- The Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP). This programme was first established by the government in 1998, but remained small scale until it was developed substantially from 2005. It now recruits around 10% of new teachers. GTP is a programme of on-the-job training allowing graduates to qualify as a teacher while they are working. It is a particularly good choice for mature people who want to change to a teaching career but need to continue earning while they train. Under the scheme, new teachers are employed and paid as unqualified teachers during their year of training. The introduction of a training grant salary subsidy of GBP 13 000 in 2000 was a crucial element in ensuring the success of this programme. Despite the significant pay-cuts which many entrants had to accept, the new salary allowed those who had resisted a teaching career due to financial restraints to re-consider.

Encouraging more science and mathematics teachers

The lack of graduates with mathematics and physics degrees has proved one of the hardest nuts to crack. By offering up to six months’ additional training to engineers, accountants, biologists etc., the TDA has added several hundred extra recruits to mathematics, physics and chemistry courses.

The TDA has moved rapidly to respond to the financial crisis – mounting special “bankers to teachers” campaigns, seeking to attract former financial market specialists to the teaching profession. The TDA also monitors carefully the value for money of the financial incentives it offers through frequent market research, and adjusts the levels of bursary offered accordingly.

The impact

Within three months of the launch of the advertising campaign, the number of people calling the national teaching recruitment helpline tripled. The teacher supply shortfall began to be reduced in 2000/2001. By 2003/2004 the vacancy-to-employment rate halved to less than 1% for all subjects. Mathematics and physics are the two subjects which had the greatest shortage of teachers. However, by 2003/2004 the TDA had made major gains in these subjects. The number of new recruits in mathematics almost doubled between 1999 and 2005. Recruitment to science subjects reached its target a year earlier, in 2002/2003. “Science” includes biology, popular among new teachers, as well as the priority shortage subjects of physics and chemistry.

Conclusion

The success of the TDA's strategy rests on its two-pronged approach. Combining a clever advertising campaign with a substantial package of financial relief proved to be very effective. Having now met the recruitment targets, the TDA can do more research into the barriers to recruiting the most able graduates. It has recently adjusted the focus of its advertising and marketing to appeal more to higher quality graduates.

Financial incentives tend to be a much greater incentive for teachers recruited as career changers, and in shortage areas, than among the general teaching population. The TDA's 2005 Review of Financial Incentives to enter teacher training and teaching makes this point strongly:

The evidence – from focus groups and desk research – was overwhelming that the decision to consider teaching as a career was largely emotional rather than financial. For instance, the TTA McCann marketing survey revealed that the top factors were social value of the profession, working with children, long-term career, and love of subject. The PGCE bursary ranked only 13th out of 17.

Financial incentives were, however, of greater importance to the key recruitment challenge groups – shortage subject trainees, men [for primary education] and career changers with shortage subject backgrounds [...] This particularly applied to potential teachers of mathematics and science who were aware from media coverage of their shortage value – a finding confirmed particularly strongly by focus groups.

■ POLAND: SECONDARY EDUCATION REFORM

Since 2000, Poland has made significant gains in the quality of its secondary education. This case study tells the story, outlining the reforms the country has made that have improved its secondary education performance so impressively.

A highly tracked education system pre-1989

From the post-war period until 1989, education in Poland focused on preparing young people for jobs. In this communist state, vocational education was seen as the path to full, guaranteed, life-long employment, especially for the poor, less capable and disadvantaged. Students entered primary school at seven and stayed there until it was time to make career decisions at the age of 15. Options for secondary education were based on performance in stringent placement exams (*kuratoria*), with no retakes:

- The bottom half of the students were streamed into two-year basic vocational schools run by individual sector industries.
- About one-third of the students were sent to two-year technical secondary schools to prepare as technicians.
- The top 20% of students went into the three-year general secondary *lyceum*. Students at the *lyceum* took academic courses to prepare for the *Matura*, the university entrance exam.

By the early 1990s, Poland had one of the lowest participation rates in full secondary education and in higher education in the OECD (OECD, 2010).

Education reforms since 1989: The birth of the technical *lyceum*

With the demise of the communist government, the economy moved towards free market practices, and the industries that had run the secondary basic vocational schools backed away both from funding those schools and guaranteeing employment to their graduates. The ministry of Education stepped in to run basic vocational schools, but could not accommodate the large numbers of students who had previously attended such schools. In addition, parents, seeing more opportunities in the new society, wanted better options for their children. As a result, general secondary schools as well as technical secondary schools increased their enrolments. Some basic vocational schools became general secondary schools, but with lower entrance standards than the other *lyceums*. This gave more students an opportunity to prepare for university, but not at a level that would enable them to gain admission to the national universities. Additional universities sprung up in smaller cities to accommodate these students.

In 1993, a new type of secondary vocational school, a four-year technical *lyceum*, was introduced. The technical *lyceum* provided students with a general secondary education, as well as training in electrical engineering, business and administration, various industries such as textiles, and communications and transport. Students also had the option of taking the *Matura* exam, as they would in the general secondary school.



Structural reforms of the late 1990s

In 1997, the latest government introduced a package of reforms, including to the education system. By January 1998, the minister of Education had set three major objectives for education reform:

- Increasing secondary and higher education qualifications in the population.
- Ensuring equal educational opportunities.
- Improving the quality of education.

To accomplish those objectives, the ministry implemented a number of structural reforms. Chief among them was a major change in the structure of the school system. Rather than an 8-3 or 8-2 structure, the country moved to a 6-3-3 structure. This meant that students would attend primary school from ages 7 to 12; lower secondary school – the *gymnasium* – between ages 13 and 15; and then one of the three upper secondary options: *lyceum*, technical *lyceum* or basic vocational school. Thus all students would study a common curriculum – including courses in reading, mathematics, and science – until they turned 15. This provided an extra year of academic studies for those students who otherwise would have spent that year in vocational training.

This new school structure provided an opportunity to make several other significant changes to the system, including:

- A new core curriculum for the *gymnasium*. This set high expectations to prevent teachers from teaching the same way they always had. This was especially important given the low expectations for students who were assumed to be going on to the basic vocational school.
- Curricular standards at the national level, but curriculum development decentralised to the local level. This would engage teachers in focusing on three dimensions of education: acquiring knowledge, developing skills and shaping attitudes. The hope was to change the teaching philosophy and culture of the schools.
- An accountability system to monitor results. The ministry created a system of external examinations to be implemented at the end of primary, the end of lower secondary, and the end of upper secondary schools, to ensure schools were moving in the right direction. The Matura exam was now taken by all secondary school students.

The results: A remarkable turnaround

PISA 2000 and PISA 2003 mark the divide between the old and new systems of Polish education.

In the 2000 PISA examination, Poland's students' average score was 479, well below the OECD average of 500 points (OECD, 2000). More troubling was the fact that over 21% of Poland's students only reached Level 1 or below. The PISA results also showed a real disparity between the educational competencies of students in the general education system and the basic vocational schools. Nearly 70% of the basic vocational school students tested at the lowest literacy level.

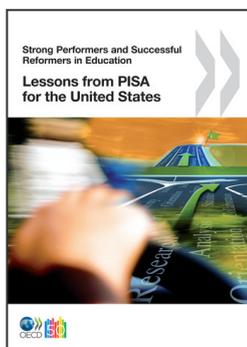
By 2003, Poland's students had made significant gains on PISA (OECD, 2003), with their average score increasing to 497. By 2003, the percentage of students who scored 400 points or less decreased to about 15% from 21.4% in 2000; 13.7% of students scored 600 or more points, as opposed to only 10.6% in 2000. A comparison of PISA 2000 and 2003 shows that the variance between schools in student performance in reading, mathematics, and science was significantly reduced. In fact, this was the most significant decrease for all European Union and OECD countries. The trend continued, and by 2006, the average scores of all students had risen another 37 points to 534. Furthermore, research done by the Polish Center for Social and Economic Research showed a remarkable 115 point improvement for students who previously would have been assigned to basic vocational schools but instead received an extra year of general secondary school curriculum under the new system (Wiśniewski, 2007).

The 15-year-olds tested in 2000 had already been streamed into their three distinct levels of schools. In 2003 and 2006, the 15 year olds tested on PISA were studying in the *gymnasia*. Not only did these students have a stronger foundation in academic areas, but the 2006 students had also participated in the revised primary curriculum as well as the new *gymnasium*. The reduced variance between schools may also be attributed to the fact that the 2003 and 2006 students attended *gymnasia* that were not streamed by academic ability, unlike the schools they would have attended under the old system.



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From:
Lessons from PISA for the United States

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264096660-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2011), "Vignettes on Education Reforms: England and Poland", in *Lessons from PISA for the United States*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264096660-11-en>

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