

***Diverse talents, teamwork and quality:
Preparing students for the transition from
employment to teacher training***

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Addressing the conference theme and objectives

A novel pre initial teacher training course – Maths Enhancement Course **MEC** that enhances/provides:

- The student experience of preparation for training and employment
- The role universities can play in addressing the employment needs of students and society
- Flexible access to higher education and employment training

Background Kingston University

- “[Kingston University] is seeking to address the issue of declining mathematical ability amongst students and the knock-on effects this has to wider society through a range of initiatives stemming from its mission as a civic university” (Atkins et al 2007)
- “To strengthen the University’s civic and community contribution to the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the wider South West London region” (Kingston University 2005)

Background – Government Strategy

UK Government strategy for children and learners focuses on:

- “every primary school offering high standards in the basics..” (DFES 2004)
- “every secondary school offering excellent teaching...” (DFES 2004)
- “Closing the gap in educational attainment between those from low income and disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers” (DFES 2006)

The training and development agency for schools (see TDA 2007) was set up with a critical role in achieving these priorities

Background – Training Development Agency (TDA)

Aims include:

- “that the diversity of the teaching workforce should reflect the diversity of the pupil population”

The TDA pledge to:

- “continue with [their] successful approach to attracting candidates from **under-represented groups** to teaching” through
- “contribution to the development of an **effective school** workforce”

Subject Enhancement Courses Available for the teacher shortage subjects:

- Maths, Chemistry, Physics, French & German

Maths enhancement courses

Only 20 Maths Enhancement Course (MECs) in the UK

- Aimed at graduates in the workplace who wish to teach maths but who need to develop their subject knowledge
- Offer an alternative route into maths teaching (secondary level)
- Target group for Lifelong Learning Networks
- Large catchment area – considerable commuting for some students
- Bursary of £225 per week (2007)
- Successful students automatically go on to teacher training

Setting up the SW London MEC

- Collaboration between institutions:
Kingston University; Brunel University; St. Mary's University
- Collaboration between departments:
Education and Maths and Academic Development Centre
- Collaboration between University and Schools
Placement of students

The MEC at Kingston University

- **Recruitment**
- **Curriculum Design**
- **Delivery**
- **Progression**

Evaluating the MEC

Discussions with faculty staff yielded the following Course Success Criteria:

1. Students will gain insights into mathematics teaching (e.g. through working in groups)
2. Students will gain the subject knowledge needed to commence a PGCE programme and teach mathematics.
3. Students will improve skills important to teaching such as confidence and communication.
4. Students expectations of the course will be realised.

Findings

Themes are drawn from interviews with students and staff and from student focus groups

Maths related skills and knowledge

“Its good to be able to demonstrate you understand concepts/methods” (All MEC focus group)

“The MEC students have significantly better maths knowledge. None of those on the MEC have been picked up for lack of subject knowledge” (Course director)

“As a result of the MEC it is easier to manage the knowledge part of the PGCE” (PGCE focus group)

Recurring Themes

Potential as teachers

“Their quality as potential teachers is high...I think our proportion of good teachers has risen because some of the people who would get onto a PGCE would discover perhaps that teaching isn't right for them...They wouldn't appreciate that the issue is not about delivery, its about learning. I think the MECs really have that clarity – that's where the MECs are above average”
(Course director)

Deeper Learning

“The real strength [of the MEC] is the deeper understanding that [another course director] has encouraged. Good PGCE students can do it but MECs do have this deeper grasp” (Course director)

Recurring Themes

Confidence

“I have felt more confident talking to people on the course and talking in front of people on the course compared to when I started off at the beginning of... with the MEC” (Interviewed student)

“I think I was naively confident (before MEC) but the course taught me more...Backed up my confidence, not just in maths “ (PGCE focus group)

“MEC students are confident with their familiarity with school maths” (course director)

Recurring Themes

Peer support

“we make them have a buddy system so that seems to work quite well and MECs adjust very well to that . That they support each other and you know they share their successes” (Course director)

“Bonding has been good. We will have to do that in work situations”
(All MEC focus group)

“It is quite nice because we’re able to compare what we’ve done on the MEC and how it’s... how our PGCE’s are different and stuff and we get ideas off of each other and we feel like if we ever needed to speak to other tutors” (interviewed PGCE student)”

Recurring Themes

Group work and networking

“A lot of the tasks that we had to do were group tasks and we were always working with different people and I don’t know how much you know about the cohort but we all got on so well and we just mixed and matched groups all the time, it was never working with the same people so... mixing with other people, team working, everything, it was really good” (interview with PGCE student)

“The MEC student are willing and ready to engage in group work and this has enabled them to bond with the PGCE group” (PGCE focus group)

they’re [The MEC students] ahead of the game in terms of networking ...not just with each other but networking in schools. (course director)

Tentative conclusions

- A highly effective method to prepare students for maths teacher training
- Gives transferable life skills
- Expected to produce better teachers
- Benefits of collaboration at all levels

Discussion points

- Transferability → employment skills
- Recruitment process → high quality, diverse teaching workforce
- Curriculum model → flexible access / focus on content and process
- Collaboration → between course members, across depts/sectors

References

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