TEACHING IN ENGLAND POST-1988

Accounts of change in education tend to focus on capturing how policy is developed at a system level. *Teaching in England Post-1988* is important because it examines a 30-year period of unprecedented change in English schools through in-depth interviews which capture the lived experiences of some of the teachers who survived it. This enables it to offer a detailed, longitudinal perspective that remains all too rare, and new insights into how and why teachers maintain their commitment to teaching and schools in the face of increasing pressures and demands. As a result, it should be read carefully by everyone interested in the future of schools and of education more widely.

—Michael Jopling, Professor of Education, University of Brighton

Joan Woodhouse has applied her considerable experience as both a teacher and a teacher educator to bring to our attention the previously under-researched phenomenon of teacher retention. While other researchers and the mass media have focussed on the issue of early leavers, Woodhouse details the creativity and tenacity of those who have responded to ever-shifting policies which have increased prescription and proscription, heralded the erosion of teachers' autonomy and creativity, imposed longer working hours and increased workload, and facilitated changes in the culture of schooling and the nature of teaching. The essential question – Why have these career-long teachers remained in the profession, when so many of their peers quit? – is addressed through enlightening and original accounts which offer deeper understanding of how this generation of teachers navigated the changes and sustained their commitment to teaching. 'Vocation', 'wisdom' and 'agency' are shown to be their essential characteristics, which provides a much-needed antidote to the doom and gloom image of teachers as burnt-out automatons often promulgated in public discourse.

Career teachers should enjoy reading this well-researched and well-written text in the knowledge that they are not alone in their dedication. Anyone considering teaching as a profession will find much to comfort them, and to arm them for the challenges they will face. Policy-makers, who rarely seem informed by research which doesn't fit their preconceptions, would particularly benefit from understanding the damage they have wrought and identifying potential remedial strategies by reading about the real experiences of dedicated professionals.

—Ralph Leighton, Former Principal Lecturer and Secondary PGCE Programme Director, Canterbury Christ Church University

This book could not be more timely: with teachers leaving the profession in droves, and teacher recruitment at an all-time low, it is vital that we learn more about the experiences of those who have remained in the profession for some time. Dr Woodhouse is ideally placed to give this account, based on her long experience working with teachers, and as a former teacher herself. It will be useful to post grad and PGCE students and, from both theoretical and practical perspectives, represents a valuable contribution to the literature.

—Professor Jacqueline Baxter, Professor of Public Leadership and Management, The Open University

Joan Woodhouse has created a fascinating and innovative history of education from 1988 through the eyes of long-serving teachers whose vision and wisdom has enabled them to have marathon careers in times when many teachers have left the profession. Her own wisdom and vision – which I've known for years since we taught together in the 1980s – make this a provocative and vital read for all who care about teaching and teacher supply.

—Lat Blaylock, Editor, RE Today magazine, National RE adviser, NATRE

This book is exactly what is needed currently. The teacher recruitment and retention crisis, the meltdown in the initial teacher education 'space' wrought by the ideologically motivated 'market review', and the well-documented impact of the pandemic on teachers' well-being, welfare and willingness to remain in the profession, all contribute to its necessity. Insufficient qualitative research has been undertaken on why teachers leave. What exists are statistics and trends which show the outcomes, not the reasons. Even less qualitative research has been undertaken on why teachers stay, up to this point. Politicians tend not to ask; system leaders are more concerned about performance and outcomes, and armchair analysts assume they have an authentic answer to everything. Joan's approach here builds on her years as a successful classroom teacher, teacher trainer and educational researcher. She builds positive and mutually respectful relationships with peers and those she's teaching. Few others could successfully administer a research tool such as this because of its dependence on professional, collaborative relationships. Consequently, the findings are genuinely authentic, giving this book a degree of validity and reliability, in a sector dominated by external perceptions of truth.

—Dr Simon Hughes FRSA, Freelance Educational Adviser, former Her Majesty's Inspector and former diocesan Director of Education

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TEACHING IN ENGLAND POST-1988: REFLECTIONS AND CAREER HISTORIES

BY

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In memory of my father, Francis Joseph Smith (1927–2022)

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

'A' level	Advanced level
Cert. Ed.	Certificate of Education
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CTCs	City Technology Colleges
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DfE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ERA	Education Reform Act
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
GM	Grant Maintained
HMI	Her/His Majesty's Inspectors or Inspectorate
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LMS	Local Management of Schools
MAT	Multi Academy Trust
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
'O' level	Ordinary Level
PGCE	Postgraduate/Professional Certificate of Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment

RI	Registered Inspector
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPAG	Spelling and Grammar
TA	Teaching Assistant
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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Chapter 1

TEACHING IN AN ERA OF REFORM: POLICY SHIFT SINCE 1988 IN ENGLISH STATE EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

This book offers important new insights into career-long teachers' experiences of teaching in England since the Education Reform Act (ERA) (1988). In particular, it offers new understandings of what sustains their longevity in the profession. I draw in the book on data from in-depth, career-history interviews with teachers who had been teaching in the English state sector since the 1970s or 1980s. I discuss (i) the teachers' perceptions of the impact of policy shift on their daily work over a 30-year period (1988–2018), and (ii) the factors the teachers identified as pivotal in enabling them to stay in the profession career-long, when so many of their peers had left before retirement age.[1] (See Table 1 for attrition rates of successive cohorts of teachers.)

These career-long teachers were uniquely placed to offer authentic perspectives on how the succession of changes since 1988 had impacted their work, and on how and why they had been able to remain committed to teaching long term, despite the changing policy landscape. As the participants in the study were nearing the end of their working lives, the timing of the interviews, which took place 30 years after the ERA, was critical. It was a key point at which to harness the perceptions of a group whose seasoned and longitudinal perspective might otherwise have been lost forever. Capturing participants' reflections on 30 years of policy shift, this book also offers a nuanced understanding of the factors that have sustained these teachers career-long in the teaching profession. The teachers' perceptions might usefully inform policymakers and educational leaders concerned with issues of teacher recruitment, retention and attrition. Their reflections also offer valuable insights to individuals considering a career in teaching.

Table 1. Attrition Rate After Number of Years of Service.

Years' Service	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Year Qualified																				
1996	31.9	33.5	36.0	37.6	40.4	41.8	42.6	44.3	42.3	43.2	44.1	45.2	46.3	48.2	50.0	52.2	54.2	55.7	56.7	58.4
1997	31.3	33.4	35.3	38.2	39.6	40.8	42.4	41.0	41.9	42.7	43.7	45.2	47.1	49.0	50.9	52.8	54.5	55.7	57.4	
1998	30.6	32.5	35.6	37.0	38.2	39.8	38.2	39.3	40.3	41.8	43.5	45.3	47.3	49.6	51.4	52.9	54.0	55.9		
1999	30.1	33.4	35.0	36.3	38.3	36.7	38.2	39.4	40.6	42.1	43.8	45.8	47.7	49.5	51.1	52.4	54.2			
2000	31.3	33.3	34.4	36.4	35.1	36.6	37.5	39.2	40.8	42.9	44.8	46.6	48.2	49.9	51.2	52.7				
2001	31.6	32.7	34.5	33.3	34.8	35.9	37.8	39.4	41.3	43.5	45.4	47.3	48.8	49.9	51.3					
2002	30.3	32.4	31.5	33.2	34.6	36.2	38.1	40.1	42.0	44.4	46.2	47.9	49.3	50.9						
2003	30.5	29.9	31.6	33.6	35.3	37.4	39.8	41.9	44.4	46.3	48.2	49.4	51.0							
2004	28.1	30.3	32.3	34.3	36.3	38.5	40.9	43.0	45.2	46.8	47.9	49.7								
2005	28.3	30.4	32.5	34.8	37.4	39.5	42.0	43.9	45.8	47.0	48.6									
2006	28.0	30.6	32.9	35.4	37.9	40.1	42.0	44.0	45.2	47.0										
2007	28.0	30.5	33.5	36.0	38.4	40.7	42.7	43.8	45.3											
2008	27.9	30.8	33.4	35.9	37.9	39.8	41.2	43.1												
2009	29.3	31.8	34.7	36.7	38.8	40.0	41.7													
2010	32.4	34.9	37.3	39.5	40.8	42.6														
2011	33.3	35.3	37.5	38.5	40.3															
2012	33.8	36.0	37.2	38.7																
2013	34.6	35.5	37.4																	
2014	34.1	35.7																		
2015	33.2																			

Data derived from DfE Teaching Workforce Statistics, retrieved from https://www.education.gov.uk.

The aim of the study was to consider the career-long teacher in relation to the changing situation in English state education post-1988. The participants in the study were interviewed during the academic year 2017–2018. They had spent their careers teaching in an era in which there has been an unprecedented pace and rate of policy shift. (See Table 2 for a brief timeline of some key policy shifts referred to by interviewees during our discussions. For a more detailed, chronological list of reports, acts and papers from 1988 to 2018, see Gillard, 2018.) The career-long teachers' insights are critical to understanding this era of reform from the perspective of an under-researched group of educators – those who have experienced and implemented the changes. Their stories reflect how the imposed changes from 1988 onwards were received by already serving teachers, who saw their work as an important, professional role in educating young people. This perception of their role, as I discuss later in the book, was an important factor in their ability to remain committed to teaching.

During the era on which the book focusses, English education witnessed 'a paradigm shift' (Fisher, 2008, p. 255), towards much greater political control and centralisation of education. This paradigm shift was rooted in a significant change in the philosophy underpinning educational provision. This change became apparent in the move from a social to a market-led model, consistent with the free-market ideology that characterised the United States of America (USA) at the time. Successive United Kingdom (UK) governments[2] intensified central, political control of state education. Over time, state education was taken 'further and further away from liberal values, local control of administration and professional input into curricula, teaching methods and examinations' (Fisher, 2008, p. 255).

As a succession of reforms impacted on English state schooling from 1988 onwards, the teachers in this study recalled that they initially experienced anxiety and a sense of loss of control over their own work. Disoriented by the new discourses of performativity, marketisation and competition, they had, arguably, little option but to adapt, or quit. Whilst many of their peers chose to quit (see Hallahan, 2023; see also Table 1), as teachers who had remained in the profession, participants spoke of the ways in which they adapted, shedding light on how the 1988 ERA and subsequent legislation framed their daily work choices. Their stories are testament to the teachers' capacity to reassert control over their work and to use their knowledge, expertise and experience to ensure policy was translated into practice in ways that suited their schools, their contexts and their pupils.

The original insights offered by the study build on a body of research over the last 30 years in which consideration has been given, for example, to

Table 2. Brief Timeline of Key Policy Shifts in English Education.

Dates	Policy	Notes
July 1988	ERA	The basis for a number of subsequent changes, including: *Basic curriculum* to be taught in all maintained schools, comprising National Curriculum and Religious Education (RE): (i) National Curriculum Attainment targets (ATs) set out in National Curriculum, identifying knowledge, skills and understanding pupils are expected to have by the end of each key stage. Pupils assessed against ATs to ascertain progress. National Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) introduced at the end of key stages 1–3 to measure student progress and school performance. Key stages are defined as: • key stage 1: ages 5–7 years (year groups 1–2) • key stage 2: ages 8–11 years (year groups 3–6) • key stage 3: ages 12–14 years (year groups 7–9) • key stage 4: ages 15–16 years (year groups 10–11) (ii) New rules on RE • Schools required to provide a daily act of broadly Christian collective worship. • Local Education Authorities (LEAs) required to set up a standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE), comprising representatives of religious groups, Church of England teachers and LEA. • RE syllabuses to reflect Christian traditions and take into account other main religions. *Local management of schools (LMS)* Pre-1988, schools had control of 'capitation', for expenditure on books and resources. Other financial matters, including staffing and buildings, were the responsibility of the LEA. The 1988 ERA gave school governors control of the majority of the budget, under LMS. School budgets were allocated based on the number and ages of the pupils in the school, plus the number of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Hiring and dismissal of staff transferred from LEA to school governing bodies. *Grant maintained (GM) schools* GM schools were to be independent of LEAs, with funding from central government, deducted from the LEA budget. Decisions about which schools should seek GM status were based on parental ballots. *Open enrolment* Introducing parental choice in selection of school. Schools' SATs and GCSE results published in 'league tables' to enable parents to choose a suitable school
September 1989	National Curriculum	Roll out starts in maintained schools in England and Wales

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (*Continued*)

Dates	Policy	Notes
1991	SATs start	The first key stage 1 tests conducted in summer term. Rolled out to subsequent cohorts in following years
March 1992	Education (Schools) Act	Provided for the creation of a new system of school inspection in England and Wales: Ofsted introduced
April 1992	Department for Education established	The Department for Education and Science renamed Department for Education (DfE)
September 1992	HMI ceases to exist	Replaced by Ofsted
1996	National Numeracy Strategy	Strategy outlined expected teaching in primary school Mathematics, covering all years from reception to year 6
1997	National Literacy Strategy	Intended to raise standards in English primary schools, prescriptive guidance on teaching literacy
1997	The Education Act	Reinforcing the 1988 ERA, schools were required to ensure state schools provided children with a curriculum that: • was broad and balanced • promoted spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development • prepared children for adult life • included RE and sex education
September 2002	First, sponsored academies open in England	Academies are state-funded, independent, non-selective schools that run outside of the control of LEAs. The sponsoring body of each academy was required to set up a charitable trust and sign a contract with the DfE. At this stage, most academies were pre-existing schools that converted to academy status having failed Ofsted inspections. Governors appoint staff, set pay and conditions and decide policies
2004	The Children Act	The 'Every Child Matters' policy came into being. Multi-agency approach to supporting children up to age 19. Functions of education and children's social services combined. The term 'LEA' becomes obsolete (although it continued to appear in legislation)
2008	Key Stage 3 SATs abolished	Key stages 1 and 2 SATs retained
2010	The Academies Act	Made it possible for all maintained schools to convert, or be forced, to become academies. Schools graded 'outstanding' by Ofsted are pre-approved. Academies continue to be state funded but enjoy increased autonomy in decisions about curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions
September 2014	National Curriculum levels of attainment removed	

Source: Adapted from Gillard (2018) and Watson (2001).

teacher resilience (Day & Gu, 2014; Day & Hong, 2016), teacher professionalism as enacted, and as defined in the government's professional standards (see Evans, 2011), and teacher professionalism in relation to accountability and trust (including, e.g., Evans, 2011; Ozga, 1995; Ozga, Baxter, Clarke, & Lawn, 2013; Six, 2021). The study on which this book reports adds a new dimension to our understanding of teachers' experiences in the context of English state education post-1988. It presents a picture of a group of teachers who adapted to change in ways that were neither actively resistant nor passively compliant. It provides accounts of the ways in which, over time, the teachers took control of their work to suit the context in which they worked and the children and communities they served.

I begin by discussing, in this introductory chapter, how the ERA (1988), and the policy shifts that ensued thereafter, affected the school sector in England in the 30 years that followed. (See Table 2 for a brief timeline of the policy shifts to which the teachers in this study refer.) I consider how the change of inspection regime from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) to the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) altered the culture and practices of inspection. Finally, I provide a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

THE ERA (1988) AND AFTER

The ERA (1988) marks the start of a period of over 30 years during which there has been an 'epidemic of reform' (Ball, 2003, p. 215) in English education. Prior to this period, the legacy of the Education Act of 1944 had been a more liberal system, in which LEAs were empowered to effect change, and government did not intervene (Fisher, 2008).

The ERA (1988) was to some extent the outcome of a growing, cross-party concern that, compared with other countries, state schools were underperforming, and young people were not being properly prepared for work and society. Teachers and educational administrators were suspected of 'running the system in their own interests and obscuring the results from public accountability' (Fisher, 2008, p. 257). This suspicion is apparent, for example, in some of the comments made by Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan in his Ruskin College speech (1976):

> *[S]ome people would wish that the subject matter and purpose of education should not have public attention focused on it […] We all know those who claim to defend standards but who in reality are simply seeking to defend old privileges and inequalities […]*

> *To the teachers I would say that you must satisfy the parents and industry that what you are doing meets their requirements and the needs of our children […] [S]ome of the fields that […] need study because they cause concern […] are the methods and aims of informal instruction [and] the strong case for the so-called 'core curriculum' […]; next, what is the proper way of monitoring the use of resources in order to maintain a proper national standard of performance […]; [and] the role of the inspectorate in relation to national standards. (Callaghan, 1976)*

Callaghan's concerns were to an extent echoed in Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party manifesto of 1987 (cited by Gillard, 2018), which promised four major reforms in education:

- a national core curriculum;
- governing bodies and head teachers of all secondary schools and many primary schools to be given control over their own budgets;
- increased parental choice; and
- state schools to be allowed to opt out of LEA control.

Based squarely on the conservative manifesto, the ERA (1988) introduced a number of significant changes. The salient features of the ERA (1988) included:

(i) *A National Curriculum*, defining curriculum content to be taught. The National Curriculum was introduced in 1989 and rolled out over a number of years across primary and secondary schools. National Curriculum focussed primarily on core subjects such as mathematics, science and English, deemed by policymakers to provide better value for money and to equip young people more suitably for employment (McGuire, 2022). Curriculum and assessment were to be organised around key stages, that is, blocks of years at the end of which children would be formally assessed, using national assessments (McGuire, 2022). The key stages were:

  - key stage 1: ages 5–7 years,
  - key stage 2: ages 8–11 years,
  - key stage 3: ages 12–14 years, and
  - key stage 4: ages 15–16 years.

(ii) *Levels of attainment*, launched alongside the National Curriculum, specifying standardised, national, age-related expectations of children's

achievement. Levels of attainment were devised with the intention of allowing pupils' 'progress' to be measured and school performance evaluated. Levels of attainment were eventually removed, in 2014.

(iii) *Age-related tests* (*known as SATS*), gradually introduced between 1991 and 1995. SATs were to be carried out at ages 7 years, 11 years and 14 years, that is, at the end of key stages 1, 2 and 3. Introduced initially at the end of key stage 1, SATs progressed to key stages 2 and 3 as the first cohort of children moved on.

(iv) *The new General Certificate of Secondary Education* (*GCSE*) *examination*, introduced for 16-year-olds. The teaching to prepare students for GCSE began in 1986, and the first examinations took place in 1988. The GCSE offered one examination for all children, replacing the former 'O' levels (aimed at more able students) and the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) (intended for lower attaining pupils). Results of GCSE examinations and SATs were published, so that parents could look at league tables of school performance and compare results to expected national standards. The idea was that parents could assess the effectiveness of schools, and make their choice accordingly (West & Bailey, 2013).

(v) *New rules on RE and collective worship*, introduced with the 1988 ERA. Maintained schools were required to provide RE and carry out a daily act of collective worship, promoting pupils' moral, spiritual and cultural development (Gillard, 2018).

(vi) *LMS,* allowing schools to opt out of LEA control, and run themselves as autonomous, GM schools. With funding direct from central government, LMS ostensibly offered schools the flexibility to make their own financial decisions in order to 'respond to the market' (Whitty, 2008, p. 168). GM schools controlled their own budget and resources, took ownership of school buildings and land, and made decisions about pupil admissions and staffing (Fan & Liang, 2020). More than 1,100 primary and secondary schools opted to become GM between 1988 and 1997 (Fan & Liang, 2020), and the majority of the LEAs' schooling budget was devolved to schools. LEAs' spending power was considerably eroded, and the support they had previously been able to offer schools diminished.

The amount devolved to each school was largely determined by the number and ages of pupils on the school roll, placing schools in a position of having to compete with each other to attract pupils and stay afloat.