

From five years to a negotiable nine months: TES correspondents report on teacher training

Demonstrations by a master of the real thing

Agnes Tari and Istvan Ijgyarto, trainee teachers from the University of Budapest, sit glumly at the side of a classroom in the Sagvari Endre High School watching a class of 13-year-olds.

They occasionally make brief notes, knowing that Veronica Spira, their supervisor who is teaching the lesson, will later ask them to comment on what they have seen. They have the haunted look of those who will soon have to change places with the teacher. After several weeks of observation and discussion they will plan a sequence of at least 15 practice lessons which they will have to teach within one month. These culminate in a "final demonstration lesson" which is assessed by a master teacher and scored out of five points. They repeat the process later in the year for their second subject.

Sagvari Endre is a state school and not all of its staff are qualified to train teachers. Ms Spira, who has the coveted master teacher status, acts not just as a role model; she also takes part in the university lecture programme, making connections between theory and practice, supervising lesson planning and inducting students into the requirements of the official curriculum.

The students' teaching load is light

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by British standards – 30 lessons in their two subjects. Nor is there any expectation that Istvan and Agnes will be brilliantly original in their design of their own lesson materials, perhaps the most stressful feature of British training. In the conservative Hungarian system they are trained to carry on the academic tradition; to replicate the high standards of their own education.

But it is a harder life than a straight comparison suggests. The pressure starts in high school where four hours' homework each day is considered necessary for would-be university entrants. Although now in their fifth year, they have still not finished their first degree. During teaching practice they must also keep attending university lectures in their two subjects – as well as lectures on teaching method. The biggest academic hurdle, a 100-page dissertation, is also reserved for the fifth year. "It is difficult because we have to do well in both places, school and university," says Agnes.

This practical teaching component is compulsory for arts students in the fifth and final year of their degree. Teacher training runs through their course, with educational psychology in



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Titled teacher: Veronica Spira holds the coveted master status

the first two years, and lectures on teaching method woven into their two subjects throughout. Teaching method is taught by lecturers within the university subject departments, not by a separate department of education.

Class control is not a major problem. Maria Guoth, another master teacher, says children at practice schools are trained to respond well to students. "We tell them, make up for their deficiencies with goodwill. It is also good practice for them to learn how to listen to many people."

Sagvari Endre's deputy director says the school is popular with parents, "They know we have many of the best

teachers here, and that we have strong links with the university."

As the educational establishment also becomes increasingly aware of the need for change, particularly in science and technology, the school's status has attracted government funding for well-equipped new science laboratories. Subject groups of master teachers from the training schools have a new freedom to work with their colleagues in the university departments to generate new curriculum materials. A system set up to continue a tradition may yet be a powerful agency for change.

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