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Reshaped teachers' careers? New patterns and the fragmentation of the teaching profession in England

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine how evolutions related to the fragmentation of labour markets, the flexibilisation of work and employment conditions, and the multiplication of teacher training models and teachers' roles in schools, are contributing to reshaping teachers' careers. Drawing on interviews with teachers and senior leaders from 8 schools in London, our analyses highlight six career patterns and their embeddedness in the changing institutional environment of labour markets for teachers. Our results help renew the dialogue between research on teachers' professional lives and on teachers' labour markets. They have wider implications for knowledge on the fragmentation of the teaching profession, beyond the London case.

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Teachers; careers; commitment; labour market; work and employment; training routes

Introduction

In this article, we examine how evolutions related to the fragmentation of labour markets (Jabbar et al. 2020) – whereby new types of schools are exempt from publicly regulated pay and working conditions – the flexibilisation of work and employment conditions (Kalleberg 2018), and the diversification of teacher training models (Boyd et al. 2006) and teachers' roles in schools (Alvehus, Eklund, and Kastberg 2019) are reshaping teachers' careers. In England, singularly in London, combined transformations of labour markets for teachers have been particularly far-reaching. Despite the centrality of these questions in a context of teacher shortages and acute retention issues (Ingersoll 2001), we know little about how teachers make sense of the changing institutional environment of labour markets, and the way it affects the logics underpinning how they build their careers. To illuminate these points, we propose an original perspective, drawing on a symbolic-interactionist approach to careers and forms of commitment (Becker 1952, 1960) that also takes into account the institutional context shaping career trajectories.

Based on extensive fieldwork carried out in 8 London schools, we analyse qualitatively teachers' professional trajectories, enriched with analyses of HR models in schools, to make sense of the connections between the transformations presented above, and the

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reconfiguration of teachers' careers. Our main argument is that the changes in the institutional environment of labour markets for teachers (Mathou, Sarazin, and Dumay 2022) have diversified the forms of commitment found among teachers, leading to contrasted career patterns across different types of schools. Our results help renew the dialogue between research on teachers' professional lives and on teachers' labour markets.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section develops more specifically the key concepts underpinning our analysis: commitment and careers. The second section provides an account of our research design and analytical process. The third and main section presents the diversity of careers found in our data, and the way they are enabled by the changing institutional environment of labour markets. Finally, we discuss our results in relation to previous typologies of teachers' careers and reflect on the implications of the diversification of careers for the teaching profession.

The London labour market for teachers: recent changes and specificities

The diversification of school types (Courtney 2015b), the rise of academies and especially of multi-academy trusts (MATs) which now represent the dominant form of school organisation (Kulz 2021) in England and in London, have profoundly transformed the labour market for teachers. Most significantly, these schools are not legally bound to employ new teachers on terms and conditions negotiated at the national level. The academies programme began under the 1997–2010 Labour government as a means for improving underperforming schools (which were supported by 'sponsors'). Well-performing schools were later encouraged to 'convert' voluntarily to academy status. All academies belong to a Single-Academy Trust (SAT) or a MAT. An academy in a SAT is fully autonomous within the confines of its funding agreement with the Department of Education (DfE). MATs, by contrast, comprise two or more academies governed by one Trust, which has a significant degree of centralised control over the operations of its schools (Martindale 2019).

A second trend is the flexibilisation of the workforce – the intensification of work, blurring of job boundaries, staff redeployment within school networks (such as MATs) and individualisation of careers in England (Mathou, Sarazin, and Dumay 2022). It affects all schools in the state-funded sector, but is particularly promoted by managerial staff in MATs, whose 'corporatised' professional identities embrace processes 'belonging to the modern, *real* world of business' (Courtney 2015a, 222). These transformations go hand in hand with the multiplication of middle-management roles and progression routes to leadership positions (Carter and Stevenson 2012), continuing a trend originating in the 1980s that has brought about an increasingly complex division of labour in schools (Ball and Goodson 1985).

A third, significant transformation is the diversification of entry routes into the profession (Tatto et al. 2017). Recent governments have encouraged market-based and employment-based approaches, which have led to an increasingly differentiated teaching workforce. In 1993, School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers were granted permission to establish their own teacher training consortia, with or without university partners. Then, in 2010, the 'School Direct' system was introduced, allocating an increasing proportion of training places directly to schools. The rise in school-based training routes means more and more teachers are expected to find their first permanent posts where they have been trained, blurring the distinction between training and workplaces. These training

routes could also provide new modes of socialisation into the profession. This is particularly true of the Teach First programme, a founding affiliate of Teach For All launched in 2003 with the aim of recruiting highly-qualified graduates, which is underpinned by a managerial discourse of 'resilience' and hard work (Bailey 2015).

London's specific characteristics exacerbate these trends. Firstly, the London labour market features relatively high rates of teacher turnover, and higher rates of non-retiring teachers leaving the profession compared to the national average (Worth, Rennie, and Lynch 2018). It also has a structurally high share of young, relatively inexperienced, and unqualified teachers—teachers who later move away due to living costs, leading to even greater rates of teacher turnover (Worth, Rennie, and Lynch 2018). Although London has more new entrants joining its workforce each year (with around half of trainees now recruited through school-led routes), this does not fill the gaps in supply created by growing demand and lower retention rates. London therefore has the highest proportion of vacancies in secondary schools of any English region.

Secondly, London varies widely in terms of levels of deprivation and governance structures. Schools with high proportions of students from deprived backgrounds are over-represented compared to the rest of the country. Academies, although historically over-represented in London, are now less common than in the rest of England, which increases the diversity in the governance of schools. Thus, the labour market is particularly fragmented in terms of teachers' choices of which schools to work in.

Theoretical framework: commitments, careers and the institutional environment of labour markets for teachers

Since the 1980s, three main strands have dominated the literature on teachers' careers. 'Life cycle' research, exemplified by Huberman's work on teachers' careers (1989) led to the identification of typical 'stages' in teachers' careers. This approach was later articulated with a school effectiveness and school improvement perspective (Day 2008). Finally, a more critical strand is well represented by Ball and Goodson's book, *Teachers' Lives and Careers* (1985). It builds on the influential 'Chicago School' and views teachers' careers as both individually experienced and socially constructed, in relation to the broader policy context. This third strand of research thus looked into the lived experiences and working conditions of teachers in schools against the background of profound changes to the financing of education and the degree of political intervention in schools. It also touched upon an emergent but growing phenomenon: the 'negatively' and non-committed teacher (Cole 1985) which appeared to contrast starkly with traditional, vocational teachers (Nias 1985). The existence of these 'weakly committed' new teachers suggested that the teaching profession was less homogenous than frequently portrayed; however, at the time, knowledge about this group was limited. Since then, there has been little recent research tracing the impact of the diversification of schools on traditional, vocational commitments – in particular on teachers working in quasi-autonomous public schools (Wilkins, Gobby, and Keddie 2020). As highlighted by Rinke (2008), the life history perspective, present in the three strands mentioned above, has so far been only loosely connected to labour market issues.

Howard Becker's concepts provide solid sociological foundations for apprehending and accounting for the diversity of teachers' career patterns and commitments. His concept of

career enables a comprehensive analysis of both the reasons for action put forward by individuals and the objective positions successively occupied by these individuals. The symbolic- interactionist perspective is therefore not only subjectivist but is also interested in how objective conditions shape careers.

Furthermore, the concept is attentive to the differentiated and time-varying commitments of individuals throughout their life cycles. 'Commitment' is a key concept in the study of occupational careers but as Becker (1960) remarked, it is rarely explicitly defined and often used as a convenient, common-sense, even tautological notion. Drawing on Becker's work, our definition of teacher commitment is thus quite different from the meaning it has in the literature on teachers' lives or school improvement and effectiveness, in which it is mostly defined as a dependent variable depending on organisational conditions (Firestone and Pennell 1993) and/or individual antecedents (Chan et al. 2008).

Becker's rigorous definition of commitment enables a more dynamic and multi-faceted approach to careers. First, commitments develop and evolve over time. At the core of commitment is a consistent line of activity, which persists over some period. Second, commitments are based on interests extraneous to the activity itself. The analogy Becker uses to understand the social mechanism of commitment – 'side bets' – allows us to specify commitments independently of the consistent line of behaviour that they account for. Side bets are extraneous to the particular line of activity one is engaged in but nevertheless later constrain that activity. The person has staked something of value, with ramifications beyond it – meaning that departing from the consistent line of behaviour one is engaged in will be costly (e.g. financial loss). Side bets constraining a line of activity can be of different kinds, for instance cultural expectations (e.g. not changing jobs too often), bureaucratic arrangements, or individual adjustments to social positions. Importantly, commitments can be plural and based on a 'complex of side bets' (Becker 1960, 38) or based on more than one side bet. Not only are side bets multiple, but there can also be conflicting side bets.

This plurality of commitments, combined in specific ways and evolving over time, translate into a diversity of career patterns. The concept of career can thus be defined as the patterned series of adjustments made by an individual to the network of institutions, organisations, and relationships in which their work is performed – resulting in movements up or down between positions differing in hierarchical rank, prestige, and income. Thus, individuals tend to move in 'patterned ways' among possible positions, 'seeking that situation which affords the most desirable setting in which to meet and grapple with the basic problems of their work' (Becker 1952, 470).

Using Becker's perspective to analyse teachers' careers in England, and in London specifically, enables us to capture the connections between the changing institutional environment of labour markets and career reconfigurations for at least three reasons. First, unlike systems regulated by bureaucratic arrangements such as the Chicago school system studied by Becker, England is characterised by market arrangements: teachers apply to positions of interest and are hired by school governing bodies. Teachers are employees (of the local authority, the school governing body or the academy trust). Moving school is in principle easier than in allocation-based systems. Secondly, the diversification of training routes and profiles (e.g. second career teachers) could entail a diversification of the side bets underpinning the traditional, 'vocational' commitment to the profession – such as the desire to work with children (Moreau 2015). Thirdly, the deregulation of employment relations, accompanied by the rise of new organisational environments

(MATs) that share some features with large corporations (e.g. internal promotion through mobility within networks), might entail different types of adjustment processes and side bets underpinning commitment.

Data, methods, and analytical strategy

The paper mainly draws on semi-structured interviews with 47 teachers carried out in 8 secondary schools in London. The data was collected between May and November 2019 as part of a broader project analysing transformations in teachers' professional regulations worldwide (Mathou, Sarazin, and Dumay 2022). A two-stage sampling procedure was used to define a sample that reflected the institutional transformations of labour markets for teachers. At the organisational level, three London boroughs were selected to provide contrasting cases, in terms of geographical position, socio-economic composition and governance structures of schools, and political leadership of the boroughs. 18 interviews were conducted with individuals working in organisations operating across schools (3 LAs, 3 Dioceses, 2 large MATs, 2 recruitment agencies, two Teaching School Alliances, one trade union). We analysed those alongside evidence from DfE documents, national collective bargaining documents, trade union publications, and other available documentation pertaining to the sampled schools and multi-school organisations.

Within these boroughs, we approached 14 secondary schools (i.e. serving the 11–16/18 age range), selected to reflect the fragmentation of labour markets in England: schools' legal status (Local Authority-maintained vs. academy) and membership of multi-school organisations (such as MATs and dioceses). Our sampling also mirrored historical categories such as religious denomination, selective status, levels of deprivation (% pupils eligible for Free School Meals), and recent inspection results by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). We managed to secure access to 8 schools (see Appendix A for a full description of the schools' characteristics). Then at the individual level (within schools), we interviewed senior leadership staff (n = 10) and secured interviews with a diversity of teaching staff (n = 47) reflecting differences in entry routes and roles, in addition to diversity in terms of years of experience, subjects taught, previous careers, and socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, race) (See Table 1 for an overview of teachers' characteristics, and Appendix B for a full description of these characteristics at the teacher individual level). In terms of work and employment conditions, all the teachers interviewed were working full-time and all but one were on permanent contracts. Our interviews suggest that part-time work is rather something that teachers want (but that is not necessarily granted) as opposed to something that is imposed on them. Two were former supply teachers who had obtained permanent contracts in their main employing schools. The unpredictable presence of supply teachers on school premises meant that we were not able to secure interviews with such teachers.

Interviews lasted on average 30 to 45 minutes, although some lasted over an hour. Three broad themes structured the interviews: becoming a teacher, finding and transitioning into the first post, and career decisions (including future career projections). Because the study did not focus on gender, class or ethnicity, but primarily on labour market (de)regulation and its impact on career diversification, we did not systematically ask questions about these dimensions. However, these issues did come up in some interviews, and we report on those when they were prominent in the interviewees' narratives. All interviews were audio-recorded

Table 1. Characteristics of the teachers included in the study.

Entry route	University-based	24
	University training abroad	5
	Employment-based	18
Responsibilities (in addition to teaching)	Just teaching	14
	With one or several middle leadership roles	29
	With senior leadership roles	4
Years of teaching experience	1–2y	11
	3–9y	18
	10–19y	10
	+20y	8
First/second career	First career	28
	Second career:	19
	– 1–2 y previous experience	*4*
	+2 y	*15*
Age	20–29	22
	30–39	10
	40–49	7
	50+	8
Gender	Female	27
	Male	20
Ethnicity	White British	32
	BAME	15

and fully transcribed. Names were changed to preserve confidentiality. School names were changed to numbers, followed by 'AC' for standalone academies, by 'MAT' for academies belonging to a MAT, by 'LA' for Local Authority-maintained schools and by 'GS' for Grammar schools (state-funded schools which select their pupils through exam results).

Consistent with the interactionist perspective, the analysis of the material aimed to give nuanced and in-depth accounts of the experiences and perspectives of the teachers. Following Demazière (2013), we used a dynamic typological approach to account for variations in career patterns, integrating the complexity of individual cases without blurring their intelligibility. We first grouped our interviewees into well-differentiated types, by aggregating, in an inductive and iterative way, cases around a small number of typical cases. The two first authors of this article were involved in this analytical work and in the comparison of teachers' portraits, showing high level of inter-rater agreement. A conceptually clustered matrix (Miles and Huberman 1994) displaying all key informants and a summary of their characteristics on key variables supported our analysis and helped us to identify six main career types, situated on a continuum between stable careers and more mobile and flexible careers, but also clustered around different forms of commitment and 'side bet(s)'. Finally, we used the interviews carried out with individuals having responsibility over employment relations to provide an understanding of the organisational context in which teachers worked.

Career patterns among london teachers, diversity and continuities

The following three sub-sections present the six career patterns we identified, grouped according to their focus of commitment.

Committing to the profession

Two career patterns are centred on a commitment to the teaching profession: the 'vocational' career and the 'subject-specialist' career.

Teachers exhibiting such career patterns express a sense of collective identity and of belonging to a professional group. The prevailing view is that of highly skilled professionals managing their own time and work, based on trust:

> So, from my own experience, it's a very, very good school. I feel as if I'm trusted as a professional to make my own choices about what I'm doing. (Alan, S2_AC)

The vocational and subject-specialist teachers of our sample have all trained at university, and most hold the standard postgraduate qualification for teachers. They emphasise the importance of solid training with a theoretical grounding, equipping teachers to work in a diversity of environments, as opposed to the 'frying pan' model, 'learning on the job', where 'you're only basically going to learn based on the school ethos' (Jade, S3_LA).

Their careers are characterised by horizontality (moving between different subjects and roles in the same school, endorsing teacher training roles), with on the whole a marked lack of interest for 'managing people' or leadership roles. Vertical mobility is experienced as a constraint or a nuisance as it drives them away from what constitutes the foundation of their commitment to the profession: the relationships they built with their pupils, and their passion for their subject.

> I think one of the reasons I haven't [become an Assistant Head] is because you relinquish a lot of the teaching of the subject and… I suppose that's what I really like doing. (Camilla, S2_AC)

Interestingly, several teachers have taken steps back after moving to middle management. Pat initially progressed fast, became Head of Department after only a couple of years, but after 9 years in the profession decided that 'as for my career aspirations, I quite like being left alone in my classroom, quite frankly' (Pat, S7_GS).

Beyond their common 'focus' of commitment, these two career patterns tend to be found in different types of schools. Vocational careers are characterised by a stable engagement in a LA-maintained school. Their early sense of vocation was often nurtured by the family environment. For instance, Brian's mother was a teacher and 'a real role model' (S3_LA), and Cara 'always wanted to be a teacher' (S4_LA). Teaching is seen as a respected profession (sometimes enabling social mobility, in the case of Brian and Casey), providing a stable career and job security combined with intrinsic fulfilment. The latter comes from the relations they build with pupils, a very strong sense of responsibility in changing pupils' lives (hence their choice of working in high-poverty boroughs and schools) and a desire to play a role in the local community. Jade for instance wanted to stay in her local area, 'in a school with 'teachers that cared' to 'do more in terms of the community'. She also expressed a broader sense of responsibility: 'If people like [me], or individuals who are willing to still carry on, go, what would happen to the education system?' (Jade, S3_LA). The intense workload (that all teachers evoke) is endured and accepted usually in reference to a public sector ethos and commitment to the pupils.

Longevity and feeling 'comfortable' in a school are viewed positively, as it allows them to develop 'caring' relationships with their pupils and colleagues – the 'family feel' or 'comradery' among peers. However, some express concerns about remaining employable and becoming 'de-skilled', or only being 'very good at teaching a naughty class' (Oliver, S4_LA). Because of the tension between his desire to teach his subject at a high level and his commitment to working in a deprived school, Oliver can be seen as on the boundary between

a vocational and subject specialist career, illustrating the porous boundaries between the two types.

Subject-specialists will instead seek to stabilise in a school with a sixth form (the equivalent of a high school, educating pupils for the end-of-school exams) and a homogeneous middle-class intake where you can 'stretch the pupils' (Geneviève, S7_GS). We found these teachers in a high performing converter academy (S2_AC) and a grammar school (S7_GS).

> It's not just like working with children because I could become a children entertainer if I really liked that… it's just simply because I love doing my subject every single day. (Edward, S2_AC)

Unlike vocational teachers who sometimes self-identify as working-class (and for whom going into teaching represented upward mobility), 'subject-specialists' include teachers who were privately educated, coming from upper (middle) class backgrounds.

Committing to an organisation

We found two variations of commitment to an organisation, translating into two types of careers: the corporate career, and the accidental career.

These teachers are primarily committed to a career in their employing organisation, often the same organisation where their training and professional socialisation took place (e.g. MAT training institute, school-direct training). This organisational socialisation leads them to accept or even welcome some degree of standardisation and not primarily seek autonomy in their daily work. They have adjusted to one organisation – one school or multi-school organisation has made side bets for them. Leaving the organisation means losing both the ease of doing one's work and the social networks that support their career progression.

The mode of commitment of the 'corporate career' pattern rests on mechanisms typical of 'corporate' professionalism: development of a sense of organisational membership, a hard work ethos underpinned by the desire to contribute to the success of the organisation, standardisation of work processes and routines, and loyalty based on rewards (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008).

Our interviewees who fit this career pattern did not talk much about their choice of profession. For some, like Gladys, the reasons for entering teaching were rather pragmatic, driven by extrinsic motivations. For Jeremy, a second career teacher, Teach First was a convenient way to enter the profession: it legitimised teaching and made it possible in financial terms. Importantly, most of them were trained through a school-based or 'on the job' form of training. Notably, their entire professional socialisation took place in an academy chain environment. Ruth for instance worked for one large chain and a sponsored academy in a small chain before joining her current school: 'the school that I came from was very similar kind of…mindset-wise in terms of how hard staff work' (Ruth, S8_MAT).

In the words of a manager in the MAT's central services, making sure that staff can cope with strenuous working conditions entails attracting the right people, generating a 'talent pool', partly found among the trainees of the MAT's own training programme, and among Teach First participants.

This socialisation influences their expectations regarding working conditions, practices, and routines. Larry praises his school's work ethos: 'everyone is working to their full capacity

in terms of… you are all there for the students' outcome' (Larry, S6_MAT). Jeremy, also a former Teach First trainee, feels that in the MAT for which he works, 'everything we do feels developmental' (Jeremy, S8_MAT). The work culture is aligned with their socialisation during their training, Teach First being underpinned by a managerial discourse of resilience (Bailey 2015) and endless search for self-improvement (Smart et al. 2009).

The 'corporate career' is characterised by an adjustment to a MAT that has developed its internal market. The standardisation of organisational routines and teaching practices and the internal sharing of information facilitate inter-school mobility within MATs. It is also enabled by consistent 'routines' and a common 'vision' and 'mindset', leading to a 'smooth transition' between schools: 'What you're teaching is different but it feels more like…moving office' (Jeremy, S8_MAT). HR managers promote this mobility across networks of schools, and it is embedded in the contracts of some senior leaders, who signed contracts with the MAT and not the individual school.

Gladys is a typical example of a 'MAT career' teacher, not feeling comfortable moving outside the MAT for fear of having to readjust to new routines and practices. She is typical also in the sense that she does not mind the lack of autonomy and sees the positive sides of having pre-set routines and ready-to-use materials, or 'being told what to do and how to do it' (Gladys, S8_MAT). The routines in place in the multi-school organisation provide a reassuring framework for this young teacher who appears insecure overall:

> That's how I've learnt everything, so, I quite like it the way everything's done, I think for me going from learning everything about teaching in a MAT and then going to another one, it would be very strange for me to go to like a local authority school when maybe everything is run differently […]. (Gladys, S8_MAT)

Consistency and standardisation also help her to cope with the flexibility that is expected of her, such as when she was asked to teach mathematics in addition to her main subject (Science). She was provided with material and instructions to support her in 'learning how to teach things in the way they want me to teach them' (Gladys, S8_MAT). She was also often asked to cover lessons for her absent colleagues. Whereas the national framework specifies that teachers should be required to provide cover only rarely and in unforeseeable circumstances, academies are not bound by these regulations. Thus, S8_MAT has an extended school day with periods when teachers are not teaching their classes, specifically so they can cover for absent colleagues.

In Larry's case, the comfort of staying within the trust helped him to progress rapidly to a middle leadership position. A key adjustment mechanism for him is his integration in a network of social relations. Moving outside the trust would mean potentially losing his 'trustworthy member' status and having to rebuild relationships:

> I did always have people around me, kind of vouch for me in a sense of… yeah, 'He knows what he's doing, he's a hard worker, he's a good member'. So, I suppose it was that, in terms of what I might lose if I did leave the trust. (Larry, S6_MAT)

However, not all welcome vertical mobility. Some teachers are de-adjusted to the organisational expectation of being seen to be progressing. Giles for instance found his first post in S6 thanks to his Teach First network and only then discovered his passion for teaching mathematics. He has made a conscious choice of not taking on extra responsibilities to focus on teaching. However, he recognises that he will have to move up sooner or later,

partly because of a diffuse, normative pressure to progress vertically: 'it's very rare that people are without any more responsibility, just stay as teachers' (Giles, S6_MAT). In contrast, such 'flat' teaching careers seemed unproblematic in our interviews with teachers in LA-maintained schools.

Accidental careers, like corporate careers, are underpinned by a commitment to an organisation, and a close adjustment to the relations, routines and positions specific to that organisation. While these processes operate in all schools, they are most clearly seen among teachers embarking in a teaching career 'accidentally', who stumbled into teaching 'a bit randomly'. They trained and socialised in the school in which they currently work, usually taking advantage of school-based training opportunities offered to them as existing staff members. If it had not been for these opportunities, they may never have become teachers.

Omar for instance was himself a pupil at S5_LA. He then took a job as a TA there because he 'needed a job', and then decided to train to become a teacher in the school through the School Direct route. Amara did 'bits and pieces' before applying for a TA role at S5_LA because she was living 'down the road'.

These teachers subsequently adjusted very well to this one particular school, described as a 'family', where most of the staff have been through the same socialisation process (i.e. school-based training). A word that encapsulates their adjustment to the school is 'comfort'. They also define themselves as 'locals' (sometimes former pupils) and express a sense of connection with pupils. Some explicitly talk about how they want to teach in the local area because of their shared minority background with students.

> I myself, you know, was born and brought up around here, and I think our students are very different. And in terms of being a role model as well, for the first couple of years of teaching, I knew I wanted to stay around here. (Zahra, S5_LA)

The choice to remain in this career is underpinned by the need and desire to have a stable and secure job. These teachers mostly come from socio-economically deprived and ethnic minority backgrounds. In England, teaching has recently become a means for social mobility for teachers with ethnic minority backgrounds (Menter 2010). For these teachers, the recruitment model of the school – getting people in early through an 'easy' mode of entry and then retaining them by offering them opportunities to progress while staying – is very suitable.

Another key, related feature is the commitment to their school – and for young teachers, the absence of desire to leave the school. There are variations in the temporal dimensions of their (projected) careers. Meera, who is about to retire and has stayed in S5 for her entire training and teaching career, illustrates how 'accidental' teachers can also develop a long-term commitment to the teaching profession. Some envisage working in the school in the medium to long term. Others seem more uncertain, drifting towards another type of career (the 'open' or 'non-committal' career, described below). Basma, who progressed fast after she completed her training, now says she might leave teaching if her workload increases further. Interestingly, none of those who progressed early seem driven to progress much further. Just as strikingly, these young teachers are more apprehensive about the risks of moving schools than leaving teaching. One aspect seems to be the suspicion that the pressure and workload will be the same or worse in other schools, without the support they have in S5. In a way, these teachers have staked the ease of doing their work and coping with their work problems on staying in this particular school.

Committing to the enterprising self

The strategic career and the open career are two career patterns underpinned by a commitment to teachers' own development. Both are characterised by high levels of mobility (inter-school and/or vertical mobility).

In the case of strategic careers, the commitment to a career in the state-funded sector is conditioned upon a quick improvement in working conditions, financial remuneration and status through inter-school mobility. 'Strategic teachers' explicitly seek vertical mobility towards senior leadership positions. This conscious commitment is often accompanied by a lucid reflection about what they will have to forego while moving up. Strategic teachers have integrated the norms of recruiters and are therefore constrained by labour market arrangements in London. In Becker's words, their commitment started when they accepted to work under these arrangements, i.e. under the market rules in force in England, where applicants compete to be hired in the most attractive places or roles. Adam (S2_AC) for instance worked in three contrasting schools: a sponsored academy in a large chain notorious for its high workload, a Grammar school, and a high-performing converter academy. That diversity helped him build a CV that is now strong enough to apply for senior leadership (SLT) post.

> I mean, most people, if you see [large academy chain] on their CV it tends to be for about a year, because people don't last long. So, if you've been there for three years, it's a sign that you've got stamina and that you can deal with difficult behaviour. (Adam, S2_AC)

Strategic teachers can be grouped into two profiles. The first concerns first-career teachers who have mapped out a career plan and pursue it by seeking vertical mobility and avoiding 'missing out' on opportunities (Ali, S3_LA). They will often accept to move to seemingly difficult schools (higher levels of deprivation, bad inspection ratings) to boost their CV, acquire valuable skills, and find their next post. Inter-school mobility is necessary (not always enjoyed per se) because it will get them closer to a position of leadership.

Cordelia, a young middle leader working in an academy rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, is a great example of a strategic teacher. With only 5 years of teaching experience, she is about to move to an Assistant Head Teacher role in a more disadvantaged school. She admits that she progressed quickly – something that is 'normalised' in London due to teacher shortages and exorbitant living costs – but she is also constrained by her desire to have a family. She wants to reach an SLT position before she has children, as such a move will be incredibly difficult afterwards. Strategic moves are based on the anticipation that an experience in a less desirable school will accelerate vertical mobility. Caroline, for instance, despite the comfortable setting provided by her school (S7_GS), is planning to move to a less affluent and non-selective school to take on a SLT role.

A second group of vertical movers is second-career teachers coming from the private sector (typically managerial positions) and seeking vertical mobility mostly to preserve their social status. Because they entered the teaching profession quite 'late', they face a number of pressures and constraints to move up and follow what they perceive to be their 'natural' trajectory. Dan, for instance, entered teaching in his late thirties, and is now Head of Year in his second school:

> I didn't see myself just only teaching, obviously I had ambition, now I'm a head of year, so my next sort of step up would be assistant head, SLT. (Dan, S1_AC)

He has a very clear career plan until retirement. An important consideration for second career teachers with a rather long career behind them is age and the demands of classroom teaching: 'with assistant head, there is more responsibility, but there is less physical workload' (Dan, S1_AC).

However, even for second-career strategic teachers, vertical mobility can be experienced as a constraint, conflicting with the desire to teach that initially drew them to teaching. For Adam, vertical mobility on the management side seems to be the only path to be 'seen' progressing – something he feels ambivalent about: 'You know I was managing in my previous job, do I want to go back to managing?' (Adam, S2_AC).

'Open careers' share a similar desire to progress and develop their career, but not necessarily in the education sector. Their commitment to teaching can be described as temporary, something they will do 'for a while', keeping an open perspective. Some have an exit plan from the start, others take this path with a sense that it will only be temporary. Rather than committing to a career in teaching, they are consistently engaged in developing their 'enterprising self' (Smart et al. 2009).

Among our interviewees, such career patterns are found among teachers working in large MATs and who have trained on-the-job. Their motivation to enter the profession is rather instrumental and pragmatic. For Dorothee and Charles for instance, the training route itself (Teach First, among other prestigious graduate schemes) legitimised teaching. Charles needed a career change, and the scheme provided a good opportunity to do something else before moving on. Similarly, Jameela chose Teach First before choosing the profession. She is an 'enthusiast' who developed identity projects around social issues (Gillis 2019) but whose discourse also echoes the managerial discourse around thriving on challenges, hard work and resilience (Bailey 2015). Teach First training is not only about investing in the self but also about acquiring skills, which can be transferred to other careers.

> I'm someone who […] I don't want to use the word "thrives", but perhaps likes to always be busy and to always have things to do […] I knew that with Teach First there are a lot of opportunities that this program opens. Even if I decide not to stay in, within teaching. (Jameela, S6_MAT)

Perhaps as a result, the (varying) degrees of standardisation of teaching practices and the provision of 'ready to use' materials in the schools where they work are not experienced as a constraint: 'it doesn't bother me like, I'll do what I'm told' (Dorothee, S6_MAT). This attitude towards standardisation is not surprising for two reasons: Firstly, training via school-based programmes often gives trainee teachers a high teaching load. This turns pre-planned lessons into a helpful form of support as trainees struggle to just cope with the experience of the classroom. Secondly, given their absence of long-term commitment, delving into didactics and pedagogy might not be their priority.

In their pursuit of self-improvement, self-actualisation, and self-development (Smart et al. 2009), they are looking for a role which is challenging enough so that they do not get bored or adjust too quickly. Feeling 'comfortable' is a sign that they must move on. They also express a confident view of their position in the labour market:

> I know that there's always going to be an opportunity, if I try this and I don't like it, I can do something else next year. (Charleen, S8_MAT)

A key leitmotiv in Charleen's discourse is the notion of not being 'tied down' or 'boxed in'. Thus, she sees an advantage in her temporary one-year contract with her current school. In a less explicit way, Shabrina, the only teacher in S3_LA having undertaken school-based training, wishes to keep her options open: 'Like, right now, I want to do this, but next year it might be different'. These narratives reject a firm commitment to one determined line of activity, at least within the remit of one profession.

Charles on the other hand has a permanent contract but has already moved a lot throughout his short, stellar career (he has worked in 3 schools in 4 years). What is striking about his discourse is how generic it is, and the little connection it bears with the intrinsic activity of teaching:

> I came to make an impact here before moving on to something else […] I guess, for me it's just been about getting the challenge and then the support right, I think I'm someone who personally, gets a bit bored easily and a bit sort of frustrated and agitated in their job I suppose, and I like to consistently change. (Charles, S8_MAT)

He is truly enjoying his time at MAT A – a feature shared by 'open' and 'organisational' careers share – and feels like a valued member of the organisation. In contrast to the 'waverers' described by Cole (1985), his plan to leave education is not related to a dissatisfaction with teaching, his employer, or with pupils. He rather exhibits the Teach First ethos to always 'excel' (Smart et al. 2009, 41):

> […] if it ever gets to the point where I feel like I've lost that passion, then I really don't want to be that teacher, so that would be the point where I kind of, cut it. And also, life is too short, there are other things out there and there is the whole wide world, do you want to just do the same thing for all of your life? (Charles, S8_MAT)

Discussion

Our analysis brings three main points to the fore.

First, the two career patterns we identified, anchored in a commitment to the profession, most closely resemble traditional types found in other typologies. The 'vocational career' resembles the vocational commitment identified by Woods (1981). In fact, this type of career is still well represented among our interviewees (about one quarter) and in different age groups (including NQTs). Among our interviewees, teachers embracing a vocational career predominantly worked in LA-maintained schools (S3_LA and S4_LA), although we found a few in other schools (for instance long-serving teachers in previously LA-maintained schools that were forced to become academies). What Woods (1981) identified as the 'professional commitment', fits quite well with the subject-specialist career identified here. Taken together, vocational and subject specialist teachers make up almost half of our sample, suggesting that 'traditional' forms of commitment centred on the profession are still strong. Among this group, older teachers are also over-represented, with teachers over 40 years old representing two thirds of those committed to the profession (against one third in our entire sample). 'Strategic' teachers, in turn, resemble those that Lyons (1981) labelled as 'map makers', teachers who have a clear career map to guide their progress over time. However, our analysis, looking closely at the side bets constraining teachers in this strategic line of action, allowed us to recognise that the pursuit of vertical progression can also be experienced as a constraint, conflicting with intrinsic interests for teaching. Men were slightly

over-represented among strategic teachers and women pursuing strategic careers faced specific constraints: reaching senior management posts before their first 'forced' career break due to maternity. Further research is therefore needed on the intersection between teachers' gender, social class and ethnic backgrounds, and how they relate to career trajectories and workplace choices (Braun 2015).

The other three patterns we identified (accidental careers, corporate careers and open careers) show a different picture. Importantly, these career patterns are typically embraced by teachers whose socialisation into the profession took place in settings and organisations that started to emerge 10–20 years ago. Our 'accidental careers' were found among teachers who entered the profession through School Direct (although not all teachers entering via this route followed this pattern). Similarly, 'open careers' were found among former Teach First and school-based trainees; teachers who embraced 'organisational careers', meanwhile, were all characterised by a professional socialisation in MATs. All the 17 teachers pursuing these 'new' career patterns were under 40. Younger teachers are particularly over-represented among accidental careers (all but one being between 20 and 30). The diachronic dimension might play a role here: we recognise that some of our interviewees shifted between career patterns over time – and that their forms of commitment were not fixed once and for all. Thus, it may be that younger teachers are, these days, more prone to embrace career patterns underpinned by a commitment to the organisation or their own development, but only upon entering the profession. Additional data and further analysis would be necessary to disentangle the weight of generational versus socialisation effects.

While former typologies of teachers' commitments in England identified those 'negatively' committed, this type of commitment based on a negative decision or non-decision was assumed to be under-reported, teachers having a 'vested interest in not betraying these kinds of reluctant commitments' (Ball and Goodson 1985, 21). Our findings show that this perspective now needs to be adjusted. Although some of our interviewees share characteristics with these 'negatively committed' teachers, new processes are also at play, creating side bets that underpin commitments toward the organisation or enterprising self. First, our interviewees openly shared their non-vocational, non-missionary motivations to enter teaching. Teachers that accidentally entered teaching because of the convenient job opportunity provided by the school 'down the road' were very candid about their pragmatic motivations and sometimes lack of interest for teaching. Some former Teach First participants were also very open about the fact that the prestigious graduate programme 'legitimised' teaching. One hypothesis is that this form of non-vocational commitment has become normalised, instead of being the sign of a failed professional endeavour. It was not necessarily experienced negatively.

Secondly, we found that these career patterns were not devoid of commitment. Teachers entering 'accidentally' for instance could develop a strong commitment to their workplace and more broadly to their local community. 'Open career' teachers could also display a high level of engagement in the school, stressing their love for teaching and eagerness to work very hard to see their pupils progress. However, teaching was a temporary vessel for their professional development. Incidentally, they seemed to adjust well to challenging conditions (e.g. high pressure environments in MATs), perhaps because of the transient nature of their experience. This seemingly paradoxical association between high levels of satisfaction and low levels of retention was also pointed out in US charter schools – in comparison to

traditional public schools – whose organisational settings are not conducive to long-term careers (Renzulli, Parrott, and Beattie 2011).

This leads us to a third point: the link between specific career patterns and types of workplaces. Almost all teachers whose careers fitted the 'open' and 'corporate' career types worked in large MATs. The deregulation of employment relations, and the rise of new organisational environments (MATs), entail different types of adjustment processes and side bets underpinning commitments to the teaching profession. In particular, corporate careers in MATs are characterised by adjustments to the flexibilisation of working conditions. Faced with particularly intense pressures and demands, these teachers have adjusted to the organisational routines and standardised practices of their MATs. These provided a familiar framework that conditioned the 'ease of performance' of their work. The lack of autonomy and standardisation of practices are not experienced as a constraint but as a resource, allowing them to adjust faster, to change roles and schools more easily. Thus, certain teachers found stability and predictability inside a MAT, while paradoxically also embracing the managerial discourse around change, flexibility, and adaptability.

What is the significance of this diversification of the school system as a whole? Large MATs seemingly tend to attract 'corporate' and 'open' teachers whilst repelling teachers whose commitment revolved around the profession. These organisations function like multi-site corporations, having developed their own brand, organisational culture, and HR practices. In that sense, they contribute to the development of a form of 'branded professionalism', their brand being a platform for a common identity and expectations (Whitty 2014). Such branded professionalism is akin to the organisational mode of professionalism that develops in large globalised firms, which become the primary locus of professionalisation (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008). As MATs continue to 'grow their own' and seek to hire teachers from 'branded' networks (including Teach First), one possible outcome could be a lack of ideological diversity in such multi-school organisations, a trend observed in the US context (Jabbar et al. 2020). Ultimately, the combined 'strands' of diversification of school types, entry routes into teaching, and employment and working conditions could accelerate the pre-existing segmentation of the state-funded sector (West and Wolfe 2019), with different segments having less and less in common, and an increasing specialisation of teachers moulded to specific organisational environments.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to uncover the variety of careers and commitments that arise within the changing institutional environment of labour markets for teachers in terms of fragmentation of labour markets, the flexibilisation of work and employment conditions, and the multiplication of teacher training models and teachers' roles in schools. To do so, we drew on Becker's heuristic concepts of 'commitment' and 'career' to analyse how teachers construct, experience and project their careers in a labour market offering an increasing diversity of workplaces.

Following the work of Ball and Goodson (1985), we looked at teachers' careers in the broader policy context, but provided a stronger articulation with the labour market perspective (Rinke 2008). Using a typological approach that could render the complexity and

variety of our empirical cases, we generated new understandings about how and why teachers commit to a career in teaching.

First, our results clearly point to a diversification in teachers' careers. Second, we bring a more nuanced perspective on what has been termed a 'negative' commitment to the profession. Third, our findings call for a reflection on the implications of such diversification for education systems.

It remains to be seen whether this diversification of careers can be observed outside of London. For instance, strategic careers could be more prevalent in London, where fast vertical mobility encouraged among young teachers (given a shortage of school leaders). Schools in London may also make greater use of the School Direct training scheme to find new recruits, due to the broader shortage of teachers. Nonetheless, our results clearly have broader, international relevance, given the spread of neoliberal reforms that are transforming the state's role in regulating employment relations, the development of short, alternative training pathways, and the establishment of privately-run, state-funded schools – trends that are eroding traditional modes of regulation of teacher labour markets (Salokangas and Chapman 2014; Jabbar et al. 2020). Our findings suggest that the flexibilisation, deregulation and standardisation of the workforce can go hand in hand.

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Appendix A

Characteristics of the schools participating in the study.

School code	Borough	Status	Age range	Ofsted rating*	Proportion of disadvantaged pupils**
S1_AC	Local Authority 3	Converter academy with religious denomination (Catholic)	11–18	Outstanding	Medium
S2_AC	Local Authority 3	Converter academy	11–18	Outstanding	Medium
S3_LA	Local Authority 2	LA-maintained school	11–18	From Requires Improvement to Good	Very high
S4_LA	Local Authority 2	LA-maintained school	11–16	Outstanding	Very high
S5_LA	Local Authority 2	LA-maintained school with religious denomination (Church of England)	11–19	From Requires Special Measures to Outstanding	High
S6_MAT	Local Authority 1	Sponsored academy in a large MAT	11–18	From Requires Improvement to Good	High
S7_GS	Local Authority 1	Grammar school (selective)	11–18	Outstanding	Low
S8_MAT	Local Authority 1	Sponsored academy in a large MAT	11–19	Not inspected yet	Not available

*Latest Ofsted inspection report (change indicated when different rating from previous inspection).
**Pupils known to be eligible for Free School Meals (% FSM) (National average = 15.4% in 2019). Source: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2019-20.

Appendix B

Individual characteristics of the 47 teachers participating in the study and career type categorization.

School	Name	Training Route	Responsibility in addition to teaching	Years in teaching	First/Second Career	Subject(s)	Sex	Age	Ethnicity*	Code Career Type
S1	**Ciara**	University abroad	None	4	First	English	F	20-30	White British	Vocational
S1	**Francis**	B-Ed	HoY	35	First	Religious Education	M	50-60	White British	Vocational
S1	**Xenia**	PGCE	KS5 coordinator	7	First	Religious Education	F	30-40	BAME	Vocational
S1	**Dan**	PGCE	HoY	8	Second	Computer Science	M	40-50	BAME	Strategic
S1	**James**	PGCE	Assistant Headteacher	15	First	Art and IT	M	30-40	White British	Strategic
S2	**Edward**	PGCE	HoD	9	First	History	M	30-40	White British	Subject specialist
S2	**Frank**	PGCE	HoD	30	Second	Design & Technology	M	50-60	White British	Vocational
S2	**Cordelia**	PGCE	HoY	5	First	Geography	F	20-30	White British	Strategic
S2	**Alan**	PGCE	None	4	First	Science	M	20-30	White British	Subject specialist
S2	**Camilla**	PGCE	HoD	10	Second	Math	F	50-60	White British	Subject specialist
S2	**Adam**	PGCE	HoD	10	Second	Business	M	50-60	White British	Strategic
S3	**Jade**	PGCE	HoY	12	Second	Design & Technology	F	30-40	BAME	Vocational
S3	**Casey**	B-Ed	Assistant Headteacher	24	First	Physical Education	F	40-50	White British	Vocational
S3	**Ali**	PGCE	KS3 coordinator	2	First	Science	M	20-30	BAME	Strategic
S3	**Katherine**	PGCE	HoD	25	First	History, Geography	F	40-50	White British	Vocational
S3	**Shabrina**	School-based	None	1	Second	English	F	20-30	BAME	Open
S3	**Brian**	University abroad	Deputy HoD	4	First	Business	M	20-30	White British	Vocational
S4	**Cara**	PGCE	HoY	14	First	Geography	F	30-40	White British	Vocational
S4	**Olivia**	University training abroad	None	4	First	Music	F	20-30	White British	Vocational
S4	**Mary**	School-based	SENCO	10	Second	English, History	F	40-50	White British	Boundary case between strategic/ vocational career
S4	**Abigail**	PGCE	None	2	Second	English	F	20-30	White British	Vocational
S4	**Oliver**	PGCE	Deputy HoD	8	First	English	M	30-40	White British	Boundary case between vocational/ subject specialist career
S4	**Jack**	University abroad	Teacher	2	First	Math, Physical Education	M	20-30	White British	Vocational
S5	**Rahima**	School-based	Programme Coordinator	1	Second	Geography	F	20-30	BAME	Accidental
S5	**Henry**	University training abroad	Head of History	10	Second	History	M	30-40	White	Boundary case between vocational/ subject specialist career
S5	**Omar**	School-based	KS5 coordinator	2	First	Science	M	20-30	BAME	Accidental

S5	**Rob**	School-based	None	6	Second	English	M	20-30	White	Accidental
S5	**Saeed**	School-based	None	3	First	English	M	20-30	BAME	Accidental
S5	**Zahra**	School-based	HoY	4	First	Geography	F	20-30	BAME	Accidental
S5	**Meera**	School-based	Deputy HoD	17	Second	Computing	F	50-60	BAME	Boundary case between accidental and vocational career
S5	**Basma**	School-based	KS3 coordinator	5	First	Chemistry, Science	F	20-30	BAME	Accidental
S5	**Arama**	School-based	KS3 coordinator	4	Second	Maths	F	20-30	BAME	Accidental
S6	**Larry**	School-based	HoD	5	First	Religious Education	M	20-30	White British	Corporate
S6	**Rupert**	PGCE	HoD	20	Second	Chemistry, Physics	M	40-50	White British	Boundary case between vocational and subject specialist career
S6	**Rosa**	PGCE	HoD	18	First	French, Spanish	F	40-50	BAME	Vocational
S6	**Giles**	PGCE	None	5	First	Math	M	20-30	White British	Corporate
S6	**Dorothee**	Teach First	None	1	First	English	F	20-30	White British	Open
S6	**Jameela**	Teach First	None	1	First	History	F	20-30	BAME	Open
S7	**Pat**	PGCE	None	20	Second	Design & technology	F	40-50	White British	Subject specialist
S7	**Laura**	PGCE	HoD	30	Second	German	F	50-60	White British	Subject specialist
S7	**Caroline**	School-based	HoD	20	First	French	F	50-60	White British	Strategic
S7	**Geneviève**	PGCE	HoD	10	Second	Math	F	50-60	White British	Subject specialist
S8	**Gladis**	Teach First	None	2	First	Science, Math	F	20-30	White British	Corporate
S8	**Jeremy**	Teach First	SLT	5	Second	History	M	30-40	White British	Corporate
S8	**Ruth**	PGCE	SENCO	7	First	Drama & Music	F	30-40	White British	Corporate
S8	**Charleen**	School-based	None	1	First	History	F	20-30	BAME	Open
S8	**Charles**	Teach First	Assistant Principal	4	Second	History	M	30-40	White British	Open

*BAME - Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

Training Route: PCGE = postgraduate certificate in education; B-Ed = Bachelor in education.

Responsibility in addition to teaching: HoY = Head of Year (grade); HoD: Head of Department; SLT: Senior Leadership Team; KS = Key Stage (a range of grades); SENCO = Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator.