

 A Registered Charity (No 275082)

**Disjointed, un-costed and undeliverable: the DfE’s proposals for the reform of the ITE Market**

After months of waiting the DfE has finally published its proposals for the reform of the ITE Market, although they focus as much on the content and delivery of ITE programmes as on Market structures, with the link between the two not being immediately apparent.

Let me begin by saying, before I am accused of being protectionist and resistant to change, that there are some of the review proposals that many people in the ITE sector would be willing to support. Student teachers should have an entitlement to a minimum amount of mentor support, and mentors should be properly trained. That will of course cost money, but is a good idea if the funds are available and it is properly done. ITE curricula should, as far as possible, be aligned to what student teachers experience while on school placement, although this should not of course mean (which the review proposals do sometimes imply) that ITE providers should be able to dictate to schools how and when their pupils are taught. We also agree that schools should be encouraged to have significant involvement in ITE. We have in fact been arguing this for years, long before ‘school-led’ was even a twinkle in Michael Gove’s eye. That is why UCET supported the establishment of teaching schools, and why universities as well as SCITTs have worked to make many School Direct programmes a success. But the review proposals, as they stand, pose significant risks for teacher supply and the availability of school placements.

The consultation paper says that the government’s objectives for the content and organisation of ITE programmes can only be delivered if they are accompanied by wholesale market reform. And yet, in a paper that constantly references the importance of evidence, no evidence or justification for this is given. None whatsoever. In fact, the changes they want to secure could more easily and quickly be introduced through a straightforward amendment to the Secretary of State’s own ITE requirements, to which all ITE programmes have to conform, compliance against which is regularly checked by OfSTED. There is in short no reason to require ITE providers, or for that matter DfE, to go through a costly and time consuming accreditation process which would make the government’s preferred implementation date of September 2023 totally unfeasible. Delivery mechanisms are, surely, a second order thing. They are a means to an end, not an end in themselves. Suggestions to the effect that the Review Group should agree on what it wants ITE to deliver, then map the extent to which that can be done through existing structures, and then address any gaps fell on deaf ears. An example of ideology and prejudice trumping actuality. That is not to say that we agree with the recommendations on ITE content. We do not and will be commenting on them. It is just that they could be achieved without taking a wrecking ball to existing structures.

It is the implications for teacher supply, and the continued involvement of schools in ITE, that give us most cause for concern. ITE providers have been extremely successful in recruiting some 30,000 new student teachers every year. If they are either forced to, or choose to, withdraw from ITE this will reduce the choice prospective teachers have about where to study and will therefore probably impact on recruitment. The loss of local provision will keep out of the profession those who choose, or need, to train close to where they live. The withdrawal of university providers will break the pipeline that exists between non-ITE undergraduate courses and postgraduate ITE programmes at the same institution. Some applicants choose ITE providers because of their particular characteristics, for example the subject and pedagogical expertise of some of our research intensive HEI providers. If these go, so do those student teachers.

DfE may say that threats in the past of mass withdrawals from ITE have been overstated. There was a real risk in 2011 that HEIs would pull out because of the expansion of SCITT and School Direct provision. In fact, HEIs engaged with the new structures, making School Direct the success it is in some cases, and working in partnership with SCITTs. The same opportunities do not seem to be present under the current proposals.

Why would ITE providers choose to withdraw from the market? The intention, not always unstated, is that DfE would like some of them to do just that. Others will withdraw because of the loss of autonomy or control they would face, because of the likelihood of being forcibly subsumed within larger partnerships, because of the increased costs that would be associated with ITE and because of the complexities, costs and uncertainties associated with accreditation and reaccreditation processes.

And what of the schools that are involved in ITE partnerships, those bedrocks of the current system? Partnerships between accredited ITE providers and schools have been at the heart of ITE provision in England since the early 1990s. The DfE blithely assumes that schools will be content to break away from existing partnerships that have evolved on the basis of mutual trust and shared ownership and enter into quasi-contractual relationships with other, potentially distant, providers. Add to this the extra burdens schools will face because of the extra time student teachers will spend in school and the need for mentors to take time out of school to train, they may well be tempted to withdraw from ITE altogether. Do not forget that schools are already under significant pressure, even before the ECF comes fully on stream, and may well choose to focus on their core work of educating children. The fewer schools there are involved in ITE, the fewer placement opportunities there will be. There fewer placement opportunities there are, the fewer student teachers that will be recruited. The fewer student teachers there are, the fewer teachers there will be in school in the future. It is as simple as that.

This Market Review has had the potential for disruption written all over it since its inception. Words of caution have been ignored. We are standing at a cliff edge. DfE must see sense and turn away now.

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