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*Promoting Quality in Teacher Education*

**ITE Market Review: Bullet points for 18 November House of Lords debate**

Background

The decision to review the ITT market was originally announced in the January 2019 DfE Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, although work did not begin in earnest until the autumn of 2020 with the establishment of an Expert Advisory Group.[[1]](#footnote-1) The work of the Group covered: the content and structure of ITE programmes; which organisations are accredited to deliver ITE; and the relationship between accredited ITE providers and partner organisations.

The DfE’s proposals were published on 5 July 2021 and the deadline for responses is 22 August 2021. Details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review>

Key facts and points

*Quality of ITE*

* According to data released by OfSTED in response to an FOI request October 2021, of 8,503 student teachers who responded to the relevant question, 96% are confident that their ITE will make them good or better teachers.
* A separate Teacher Tap survey showed that 81% of teachers trained in the last two years thought that their ITE had prepared them well for their first role, and 78% would recommend their ITE provision to others.
* DfE’s own survey of newly qualified teachers, before it was curtailed in 2017, found that more than 90% rated the ITE they had received as being good or outstanding.
* Prior to the Market Review, OfSTED rated all ITE provision as being ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’.
* ITE inspections carried out under the new OfSTED framework since May 2021 have been much less positive, with approaching 50% of provision identified as ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’. Concern has however been expressed by former inspectors and others about the way in which these inspections have been carried out, with a belligerent and antagonistic approach by inspectors being reported, a failure to take account of the pressures experienced by providers and schools because of Covid, and a lack of understanding about the regulatory requirements that ITE is subject to. Details of these concerns can be found in the following blog written by two former ITE inspectors: <https://www.teachbest.education/a-look-at-recent-itt-inspections-by-terry-russell-and-julie-price-grimshaw/>.
* OfSTED have admitted to being unable to substantiate negative claims made about ITE in its May 2021 ‘research’ report into ITE and Covid, as can be seen from the response to another UCET FOI request (*‘it is very difficult to make a precise read across between the raw evidence gathered during the visits and the high level findings’*.)

*Accreditation process*

DfE have sought to reassure the sector that it does not intend to impose a prescriptive curricula on ITE providers or massively reduce the number of existing providers. There are however concerns that he proposed reaccreditation process will be used as a backdoor way of achieving these unspoken objectives. Reassurances should therefore be sought that:

* The accreditation process will be open, transparent and equitable.
* All accreditation applications that can be seen to ‘meet the bar’ in terms of the new quality requirements will be approved, with no artificial rationing taking place.
* The process, and any subsequent activities, will not be used to ensure that ITE providers only deliver ‘DfE approved’ curricula over and above what is already required through the CCF.

Summary of recommendations

The consultation includes a number of recommendations. These cover:

* The content and structure of ITE programmes, including:
	+ The development of carefully sequenced ITE curricula by accredited ITE providers that build on content requirements already set out in the Core Content Framework for ITE introduced in September 2020[[2]](#footnote-2).
	+ ITE curricula should be seamlessly translated into the structure and sequencing of what student teachers experience in school placement settings.
	+ The introduction of intensive initial school placements over the course of the programme for groups of student teachers, during which they will get support and feedback from subject and phase-specific experts and will have intensive coverage of the provider’s ITE curriculum.
	+ The identification by accredited ITE providers of lead mentors to work with student teachers and other mentors. Lead mentors should either have, or be working towards, the new NPQLTD qualification or one of the other new specialist NPQ qualifications or equivalents
	+ All student teachers should have access to have a minimum level of support each week from mentors with expertise in the phase and subject concerned. All schools involved in ITE should have at least one member of staff with the NPQLTD qualification.
	+ ITE providers should develop detailed training curricula for mentors at all levels, including subject and phase specific elements, and with minimum time allocations.
	+ An increase in the length of postgraduate ITE programmes to a minimum of 38 weeks, and an increase in the amount of time student teachers spend in school to 28 weeks on postgraduate programmes.
	+ The structure of ITE partnerships, with accredited ITE providers working with lead partners and individual schools. Teaching School Hubs will be required to participate in ITE. MATs will, as a condition of growth, be required to participate in ITE. Prospective ITE students will apply to accredited ITE providers, and funding will be routed through accredited providers. In some cases the role of accredited providers and lead partners might be carried out by the same organisation.
	+ ITE Market structures: Current and potential new providers will have to apply for accreditation from DfE, demonstrating how they meet (or are likely to meet) requirements relating to the content, structure and the configuration of partnerships. Applications for accreditation will have to set out how roles, responsibilities and resources will be shared across different components of the partnership. OfSTED and DfE will hold accredited providers to account for the quality of ITE and for complying with the new requirements. Accredited providers might have to be able to operate at a minimum scale.

It is claimed that reforms to ITE Market structures will be needed to deliver the programme content and structure proposals. No evidence is provided for this. New requirements in respect of content and structure could be delivered by amending the Secretary of State’s requirements for ITE. This would avoid the need for a costly, drawn-out and complicated re-accreditation process and the risks that this would entail. It might also make the DfE’s preferred implementation date of September 2023 more achievable.

There are aspects of the proposals, for example in relation to mentor training and support, which would (subject to resourcing) be worthy support. We stand ready to work with DfE to deliver these in a way that avoids de-stabilising the sector. But there are also significant risks that could impact on teacher supply, the continued involvement of schools in teacher education, and the ability of existing providers, both SCITT and HEI, to continue to deliver high-quality ITE in partnership with schools.

Teacher supply

It has been suggested at various times that the number of accredited ITE providers should be reduced. Any significant reduction would damage teacher supply.

Reducing the number of accredited ITE providers will reduce the choice prospective teachers have about where to train. Many prospective teachers choose, for family or financial reasons, providers that are close to where they live. Increasing the distance to be travelled will result in fewer applicants. Many student teachers choose to train at specific universities. For example, some apply to postgraduate ITE programmes at the same universities where they studied for their undergraduate degrees, a supply line that could be lost if those HEIs withdraw from ITE. Postgraduate ITE programmes also draw on the subject expertise of their non-ITE undergraduate colleagues. Some student teachers choose an ITE provider because of its reputation and its pedagogical, subject and research expertise. Others might prefer a SCITT provider focussed on providing teachers for a particular local community. Effective markets depend on choice. Market reforms that artificially constrain choice are perverse.

The proposed accreditation process might lead, and might be intended to lead, to some existing providers losing their accreditation. But some might withdraw from ITE regardless of this. This is because:

* The Market Review report implies that it expects some providers will have to consider whether they will need to partner with other organisations if they are continue in teacher education, with the implication that they will form part of larger accredited providers, or act as subsidiary partners without holding accredited status. There is no guarantee that they will be interested in doing this, particularly if they have a mission to provide bespoke provision to meet the needs of local schools and communities.
* The uncertainty of having to go through an accreditation process might lead some to conclude that ITE is not a secure enough activity to be involved in. HEI providers might, in particular, conclude that their resources might be better directed towards more stable, predictable and cost-effective areas of activity.
* Some providers, for example research intensive universities, might not be willing to deliver programmes that have to include content which they are not allowed to critique or question, particularly if they do not hold accredited status themselves and are obliged to deliver curricula designed entirely by other organisations. The loss of such providers would do significant damage to the intellectual standing and status of the teaching profession.
* ITE programmes are funded through fees at the rate of £9,250 per year per-student[[3]](#footnote-3). This is significantly less than other professional programmes, for example nursing and social work, where placement activities receive additional funding over and above tuition fees.

The current DfE proposals will add to provider costs, potentially making programmes financially unviable. For example:

* The minimum length of postgraduate ITE programmes will increase to 38 weeks a year. Longer programmes will be more expensive to run.
* Accredited ITE providers will be responsible for identifying lead mentors to work across partnerships, for ensuring they have access to new entitlements in respect of training and that student teachers receive 2 hours minimum mentor support each week. Intensive initial school placements, with the additional mentor support that will require, will also add to costs.
* If schools are to have student teachers on placement for a greater proportion of the year, they will expect an increase in funding. Such increases would also require the re-configuration of postgraduate and undergraduate programmes.

A significant number of accredited ITE providers might withdraw from ITE because of either: failing to get through the accreditation process; voluntarily withdrawing because of loss of autonomy and control; or financial unviability and unpredictability. This will in return reduce the choice prospective teachers have about where to train and disrupt teacher supply pipelines. It would also impact on the training and supply of teachers for the FE and early years sectors, as the withdrawal of HEs from QTS programmes would also likely lead to the closure of whole education departments.

Implications for schools

The strong partnerships that have developed between accredited HEI and SCITT ITE providers has been one of the education sector’s great success stories in recent years. These partnerships take a number of forms, with the extent of school engagement varying according to the circumstances and priorities of the schools concerned. Schools should have a choice about how they participate in ITE. It is, as the report itself acknowledges, already difficult for providers to secure a sufficient number of placements, particularly in some key subjects such physics and MFL. This in turn has led to an artificial cap being placed on recruitment. The reforms should not do anything to make these challenges even more acute.

In many cases partnerships work because of the close and often personal relationships that have developed over a number of years. These are generally flexible, with schools increasing or decreasing their involvement because of changing priorities. It seems unlikely that all existing partner schools would be content to negotiate new partnership arrangements with new, potentially distant, providers, especially if this would mean them having less ownership and control about the content and delivery of ITE than they currently have (it is perhaps worth noting that references to ‘school-led’ provision are being overtaken by the new ‘school-based’ descriptor) and having to enter into more formalised, quasi-contractual, relationships[[4]](#footnote-4).

The Market Review proposals will add to burdens on schools. Increasing the amount of time that student teachers spend in school will obviously impact on their placement capacity (it will also, it should be noted, make it more difficult for accredited providers to ensure consistency in programme delivery). Increased expectations, such as releasing mentors for training and taking additional numbers of student teachers to provide intensive placement experiences, will also add to the burdens faced by schools, who will at the same time, be focussing on more immediate priorities, including the continued fallout from the pandemic and for the additional mentoring responsibilities they will have under the Early Career Framework.

Teaching Schools Hubs, and MATs if they want to expand, will also face additional responsibilities, as described above. Higher Education institutions will be able to support Teaching Schools Hubs and MATs in the delivery of ITE under the new Market Structure and in the light of the additional expectations that TSHs and MATs will face. Further information on this can be found in the UCET briefing paper which is available at: <https://www.ucet.ac.uk/13143/initial-teacher-education-in-england-a-briefing-note-for-mats-teaching-school-hubs-and-individual-schools>.

The DfE consultation document asks questions about how more schools might be encouraged to take part in ITE. That is an appropriate question. UCET has been calling for greater school involvement in ITE for many years, long before ’school-led’ policies were ever developed. We do not however believe that schools should be coerced, through OfSTED requirements or otherwise, to participate. Reluctant partners seldom make good partners. Involvement in ITE should be encouraged by pointing out the benefits that it has for schools. The more onerous or inflexible the expectations on partner schools, the more difficult this will be.

1. Chaired by Ian Baukham, CEO of Tenax schools and the Chair of the Oak National Academy. Other group members are: Samantha Twiselton (Sheffield Hallam University); Reuben Moore (Teach First); Richard Gill (Chair of the Teaching Schools Council); and John Blake (Now Teach). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DfE October 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This covers all costs, including for HEI programmes access to central support services such as library and ICT facilities, pastoral support etc. It also covers the cost of any academic awards such as a PGCE, although fees are not generally higher when academic awards are offered. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Which would also sit oddly with references in the OfSTED ITE inspection framework about partnerships being co-constructed and based on shared leadership. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)