Promoting Quality in Teacher Education

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Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers

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Paul Givan, MP
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Dear Minister,

iQTS issues

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of UCETNI, to express our concern about the implications of English ITE providers delivering iQTS programmes in Northern Ireland schools.

The iQTS policy was established by the DfE in England as part of the UK government's strategy to promote the global expansion of UK higher education. iQTS programmes involve the training of new teachers in international settings by one of 14 iQTS providing universities in England. Although training takes place in schools outside England, the content and structure of the programmes must meet requirements in regards to curriculum design and course structure that apply to ITE provision in England. The programmes are subject to inspection by Ofsted and not by the regulatory authorities in the country in which the training takes place. Anyone successfully completing an iQTS programme will be eligible for the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England, which will automatically entitle them to teach anywhere in the UK. iQTS providers have identified Northern Ireland as a key market for iQTS. One English University has already established a foothold and others are looking to do the same. The number of student teachers recruited onto iQTS programmes could soon become significant, not least because of the caps on numbers that are applied to ITE courses in Northern Ireland.

This concerns us for a number of reasons. It will destabilise the teacher education infrastructure that already exists within Northern Ireland, drawing potential teachers away from domestic programmes. It will make it more difficult for the universities in Northern Ireland to find placements for their student teachers because capacity in schools will be taken up with iQTS trainees. It will also mean that an increasing number of teachers will be trained with reference to English ITE criteria and not to those which apply in Northern Ireland, for example in respect of the teacher competencies. This will have implications for the readiness of iQTS teachers to teach in NI schools and for their subsequent professional development needs.

We are grateful to colleagues from DE for raising this issue with DfE in England. The most straightforward solution would, we think, be for DfE to change the iQTS criteria to say that training must take place in schools outside the UK rather than just outside England. Any pressure you can bring to bear on your ministerial colleagues in England to this end would be much appreciated. Faling that, a statement from DE and others to schools and prospective teachers about the inappropriateness of the iQTS route for people aspiring to teach in NI would be helpful.

We would be happy to meet with you to discuss these points with you in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Eaton

Tricia Eaton, UCETNI Chair