USCET EVIDENCE TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

2025



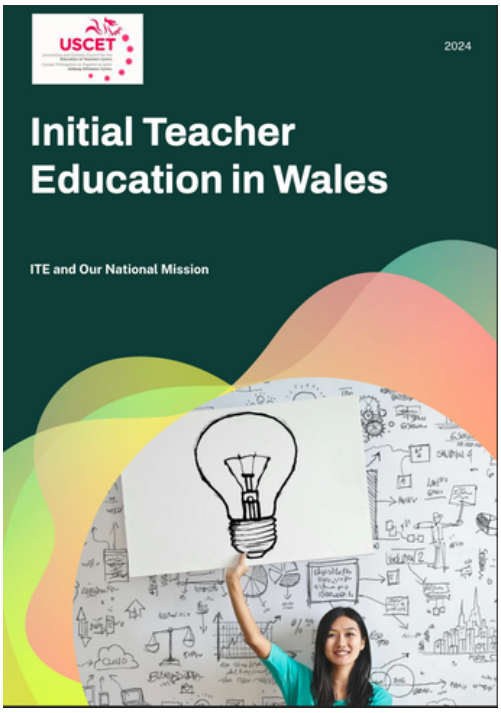
CONTACT
J.NOBLE-ROGERS@UCET.AC.UK

INTRODUCTION

The Universities and Schools Council for the Education of Teachers (USCET) is the membership body for the accredited teacher education partnerships in Wales and is part of the UK-wide Universities Council for the Education of Teachers.

USCET members are responsible for the initial teacher education (ITE) of all new domestically qualified teachers in Wales, as well as delivering high-quality CPD programmes (often at master's level), engaging in ground-breaking education research and playing a pivotal role in the work of their local communities and breaking down barriers to participation in higher education.

To supplement this evidence we recommend two recent USCET reports:





Mission USCET Cymru: Initial Teacher Education in Wales: contributing to the National Mission.

UCET; and 'Moving the discourse from problems to possibilities' News: USCET report: Moving the Discourse from Problems to Possibilities (5 March) | UCET

BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT IN WALES

The barriers to recruitment to ITE programmes in Wales are varied and multi-faceted. The ones that we would highlight are:

- competition for recent graduates from other employers
- negative portrayal of teachers and schools in sections of the media
- uncompetitive financial incentives to train as a teacher compared to those available in England
- the lack of the opportunities to study key subjects in schools and universities, thus undermining the supply chain; and
- the cost to schools of participating as full partners in ITE provision.

Further barriers might, if action is not taken, emerge in the future if the teacher education supply base, on which schools depend for their new teachers, is further undermined by:

- ongoing financial constraints
- scrutiny from within HEIs because of the expensive nature of ITE programmes and the disproportionate external scrutiny they face
- increasing difficulties of maintaining school partnerships and ensuring appropriate mentor support for student teachers
- expensive and burdensome over-regulation
- the potential to break the supply line that exists between non-ITE undergraduate programmes and PGCE courses at the same institution; and
- continued recruitment difficulties.

Entry requirements, set by the regulatory authorities, can also act as a barrier to recruitment, for example the requirement that at least 50% of the content of a first degree must match the secondary subject a student teacher is training to teach. The requirement might appear to offer reassurance in regards the subject knowledge of prospective teachers but the content of a degree in a particular subject might bear little relation to how that subject is taught in schools.

Subject Knowledge Enhancement courses might be used, as in England, to meet any gaps in subject knowledge. GCSE entry requirements can also be a barrier to some applicants, including those from diverse backgrounds and greater provider discretion about equivalences, and the scope to set equivalency tests, might be considered.

BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT IN WALES

The accreditation criteria that all ITE provision must meet, as set by the Education Workforce Council (EWC), are constraining and prevent providers from being flexible and responsive to how they deliver ITE in partnership with schools.

The 1.15 teacher-student ratio requirements and the expectation that academic staff either have doctorates or are working towards one fetter provider discretion and make expansion and the development of new programmes problematic.

The current system of applying for most ITE programmes – through UCAS – is not fit for purpose and UCAS appears to be either unwilling or unable to amend its processes to meet the needs of the ITE sector. We fear that some applicants are being lost in the system as a result.

RETENTION

The retention of new teachers would be facilitated by giving new teachers an entitlement to fully funded and timetabled early professional development (EPD) that builds on and complements their initial teacher education. We also think that giving all teachers a training entitlement, as is being developed in England, would help with the retention of teachers in the later stages of their careers. HEIs could play a key role in providing EPD for new teachers as they will already have knowledge of the strengths and development needs of the teachers they are working with. They also have the expertise and the infrastructure to deliver high quality CPD to teachers at all stages in their careers.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Recruitment to leadership positions in schools depends on the maintenance of a pipeline beginning with recruitment to ITE, through to early career teacher and subsequent stages. Measures to boost recruitment and retention generally will therefore help with recruitment to leadership positions. School leadership does however require distinctive skills for which tailored CPD, building on leadership strands that already exist in ITE, is also required.



DIVERSITY OF THE WORKFORCE

ITE providers are committed to recruiting student teachers who are representative of the communities they work with, and we support measures taken by Welsh Government to encourage under-represented groups into teaching. The sector draws on the Anti-Racism Action Plan, and the UCET Equalities Group has developed an anti-racism framework for ITE: Anti-Racism ITE/T framework | UCET.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS

The quality of teaching is recognised as the biggest in-school factor that drives the educational success of pupils. A steady and sufficient supply line of well-trained and educated teachers is therefore essential. The content and delivery of ITE programmes equip new teachers to ensure that learners achieve their full potential in terms of subject knowledge and their development as rounded citizens with the social and other skills that will allow then to thrive in their chosen careers and pathways. The maintenance of a strong research base underpinning teacher education, both ITE and CPD, is required if this is to continue.

IMPACT ON DELIVERING CURRICULUM REFORM

ITE providers have successfully adjusted their programmes to ensure that new teachers have a good understanding of Curriculum for Wales and of how to teach it. These new teachers can act as ambassadors for the curriculum in schools and play a key role in the upskilling of the existing workforce. Many teachers, however, choose to train in England because of the higher bursaries on offer, and even if they do return to teach in Wales they will not have been taught about the Welsh curriculum.

ADDRESSING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

9 RECOMMENDATIONS



ADDRESSING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

We would recommend that addressing recruitment and retention features as a strategic objective within the emerging WG's developing ITE Strategy and delivery plan,

It should include a multilayered, tri-level approach operating: nationally, regionally and locally.

1. **Develop a financially sustainable model of ITE**

Taking steps to nurture, sustain and develop the teacher education supply base on which schools in Wales depend. ITE provision needs to be financially sustainable, and yet the programmes are expensive to run. Fee income has not kept up with inflation and this threatens to make some programmes, particularly those in key subject areas and in Welsh medium delivery, unsustainable.

A significant amount of cross-subsidisation takes place within partnerships, and the continuation of programmes in shortage subjects often depends on recruitment to more popular subjects and phases. Cuts in allocations for the latter can undermine the sustainability of the former.

When allocating places WG should either take more account of the holistic needs of ITE providers or, as has happened in England, by removing recruitment controls altogether.

2. Launch and maintain a high-level marketing campaign

This should aim to counter negative stereotypes about what it is like to be a teacher and be informed by the experiences of teachers in different settings, including Welsh-medium, special, primary, secondary and all-age schools. It should also focus on priority secondary shortage subjects and specific recruitment challenges such as recruiting to rural parts of Wales, Welsh-medium schools and special schools.

3. Invest in high-quality mentoring

Schools have an essential role to play in delivering ITE and working in partnership with HEIs. The role of mentors in schools, or 'in-school teacher educators', is essential. The development of new partnerships between universities and schools has been one of the great success stories of education in Wales in recent years.

Involvement in ITE is, however, resource intensive for schools and they are often not able to give mentors either the time or the training they need. Payments by HEIs to partner schools also places pressure on the financial viability of programmes.

Consideration should be given to WG providing direct payments to support school involvement in partnership and mentor support, without reducing the income available to the HEI side of the partnerships. In partnership with HEIs and local consortia, the WG should commit to a national programme of mentoring as recommended by Estyn.

The WG should champion and support the role of mentors and school-based teacher educators in schools, providing funding as necessary.

4. Provide prospective teachers with financial incentives equitable with England

Place financial incentives for student teachers on an equitable basis to those available in England. The disparity that exists now means that we are losing teachers to ITE providers in England, and even those who do return to teach in Wales will not have been trained with reference to Curriculum for Wales or in the broader Welsh context.

5. Address over-accountability within ITE

Rationalise the overlapping, and sometimes inconsistent, regulatory burdens placed on ITE providers by the Education Workforce Council and by Estyn and give ITE providers greater flexibility about the content and structures of their programmes. These requirements add to the financial instability of ITE provision and make education departments vulnerable to internal scrutiny.

Over accountability adds unnecessary pressure on HEI providers, duplicates workload and is at odds with the principle of subsidiarity afforded to school partners within the Curriculum for Wales.

6. Invest in Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) programmes

Encourage the development of Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses, which will help with both recruitment and retention. Existing research suggests that these courses can bring a range of benefits.

7. Support teachers' continuing professional learning

Invest in master's level CPD, which will enhance the status of the profession, make teachers even more effective, attract ambitious applicants and facilitate progression into leadership roles.

8. Overhaul the UCAS application process

Streamline the application process to support more efficient admissions procedures to HEIs.

9. Explore alternative routes into teaching

The development of alternative routes into teaching should be explored in terms of cost-benefit analysis. There are suggestions around work-based routes and modifying existing undergraduate and PGCE programmes (e.g., see Egan et al., 2024). However, the evidence of what works in attracting and keeping teachers is limited. Any new programmes should supplement successful ones and be designed in collaboration with ITE providers with proven track records in high quality provision.

> There is no good evidence that alternative routes into teachers are effective for either recruitment or retention. This does not mean that this approach does not work, merely that we do not know yet. Improving conditions, and induction/mentoring both have promise but the evidence base is not yet clear enough (See et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The recruitment and retention challenges discussed in this response are complex and not confined to Wales. Recent studies from both Wales and beyond have highlighted the most impactful factors in addressing these operate at three levels:

- individual e.g., intrinsic motivation
- school e.g., workload and working conditions, induction support, effective school leadership, flexible working
- system e.g., financial incentives

Hence, we need a coordinated response led by the Welsh Government informed by the views of stakeholders including HEIs, Estyn, the Education Workforce Council, school partners, local consortia and other partners. USCET Cymru welcomes further opportunities to engage in constructive dialogue with government and others to address these challenges. Essential to this is the formation of a clear ITE national strategy and appropriately-resourced delivery plan so that we ensure that there is a shared focus on how we supply, train and sustain high-quality teachers in the education system.

