Promoting Quality in Teacher Education

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Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers

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Submission from the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET)
Internationally Educated Teachers Special Interest Group

UCET recognises the excellent contribution international teachers make to the workforce, however increased recruitment to Initial Teacher Education programmes is not always translating into secure, long-term employment in schools in England.

UCET advocates for equitable training and early career experiences for internationally educated trainees, alongside long-term investment in domestic recruitment and retention.

This submission comprises contributions from the following Initial Teacher education providers:

- University of Portsmouth
- St Mary's University London
- University of Brighton and Hove
- University of Roehampton
- University of Worcester
- Canterbury Christchurch University
- Reading University IoE
- Edge Hill University
- Greater Manchester University
- UCL IoE
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Leeds Trinity University

1. Impact of Immigration Policy on Domestic Skills Investment and Training

Teacher education providers consistently argued that international recruitment does not displace domestic workforce development but complements it where domestic supply is insufficient. Evidence from the providers demonstrates that shortages in subjects including Physics, Mathematics, Computing, Chemistry, Design and Technology and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) persist despite bursaries, recruitment campaigns and other domestic interventions.

Providers reported that immigration restrictions, visa costs and changes to bursary eligibility have significantly reduced international recruitment into teacher training. This is particularly concerning in subjects where there is currently little or no domestic pipeline. Evidence from providers suggests that MFL and Physics are especially reliant on international trainees. One provider reported that 14 of 16 MFL trainees were international, while another reported that 90% of its MFL cohort had previously required visas. Physics recruitment across the providers was reported as almost entirely dependent on international applicants.

The UCET Special Interest Group highlighted that domestic workforce development cannot succeed without sustained access to specialist subject expertise. Participants argued that internationally trained teachers play a crucial role in inspiring future generations, particularly in languages, where declining participation at GCSE, A Level and university level is reducing the future domestic workforce.

2. Skills Policy, Workforce Planning and International Recruitment

Evidence from the data collected by Special Interest Group members suggests that workforce planning should operate over a long-term horizon and be aligned with immigration policy. Providers highlighted that increasing training places alone will not resolve shortages where insufficient numbers of graduates exist in the relevant disciplines.

Providers argued that an effective workforce strategy should include:

- Long-term forecasting of teacher supply and demand.
- Subject-specific analysis of recruitment shortages.
- Immigration pathways aligned to demonstrated workforce needs in education
- Recognition of overseas qualifications and experience.
- Support for induction, integration and retention.
- Alignment of visa durations with teacher training and induction periods. (3 years for ITTECF)

Several contributors recommended a ten-year workforce strategy, particularly for languages, reflecting the length of time required to rebuild domestic subject pipelines.

3. Incentivising Domestic Recruitment

Providers expressed limited confidence that immigration restrictions or resident labour market tests would increase domestic recruitment. Evidence submitted suggests that shortages are primarily driven by longstanding recruitment and retention challenges rather than by competition from international applicants.

Contributors argued that more effective interventions would include:

- Improved teachers' pay and conditions.
- Reduced workload.
- Recognising and responding to the impact of the White Paper on SEND on teacher workload
- Increased school funding for more staffing and reduce staff workload

- Continuation of bursaries.
- Investment in retention.
- Stronger promotion of teaching as a career.

The consensus was that restricting international recruitment without addressing these structural factors risks worsening shortages.

4. Labour Shortages and Shortage Occupation Lists

Providers argued that immigration policy should continue to prioritise genuine labour shortages, particularly where essential public services are affected. Teacher shortages directly affect educational provision and pupil outcomes.

Evidence from research with the Institute of Physics, and members of the Special Interest Group suggested that shortage occupation mechanisms are effective as workforce stabilisation tools but should not be viewed as long-term workforce solutions. Providers noted that shortages in Physics, Mathematics, Computing and Languages have persisted for many years despite domestic recruitment initiatives.

A key concern raised was the growing number of pupils being taught by non-specialists because suitably qualified teachers are unavailable. This reflects an uneven distribution of specialist qualified teachers across different regions contributing to educational inequity.

5. Rights and Conditions for Workers on Shortage Routes

Strong consensus emerged that internationally recruited professionals should receive equivalent rights, protections and opportunities to domestically recruited colleagues. Providers supported:

- Equal pay and conditions.
- Access to professional development.
- Career progression opportunities.
- Freedom to move between employers.
- Protection from exploitation.
- Access to settlement routes where shortages are persistent.

Providers argued that internationally recruited teachers often make long-term contributions to schools and communities and should therefore be offered stability rather than temporary labour status.

6. Immigration and Public Sector Workforce Planning

Providers identified immigration as critically important to education workforce planning, particularly in STEM and Languages. Evidence submitted to the Special Interest Group suggested that many schools would be unable to maintain specialist curriculum provision without access to international recruitment.

Special Interest Group members reported significant declines in recruitment following the May 2026 bursary changes:

- Science recruitment fell from 30 to 17 trainees across participating providers, a reduction of approximately 43%.
- One provider reported international science trainee numbers falling from 7 to 1.
- One provider's Mandarin programme reduced from 16-18 trainees to approximately 10 .
- Another provider's MFL recruitment fell from 33 trainees to 9.

Several providers reported visa delays and refusals from the Home Office on the premises that the applicants were not perceived as "genuine students" which prevented recruitment.

Most Visa refusals were for male applicants from West Africa, India and Pakistan.

Providers consistently highlighted that shortages in Languages and Physics cannot currently be met through domestic recruitment alone as shown by September data shared by NFER.

7. Salary Thresholds

Providers argued that salary thresholds should:

- Protect against exploitation.
- Reflect professional expectations.
- Support recruitment in shortage sectors.
- Avoid excluding essential public service professions especially where ECT starting salary falls below £32, 000 outside London.

Nationally determined teacher pay scales already provide transparent salary structures. Providers argued that immigration policy should recognise the societal importance of teaching rather than relying solely on salary as a proxy for value.

8. Impact of Changes to Visa Rules

Evidence from Special Interest Group members working in partnership with placement schools across the country indicated that frequent policy changes create uncertainty for teacher education providers, schools and prospective international recruits. Providers reported examples where trainees received employment offers which were later withdrawn because immigration regulations changed.

The Special Interest Group members additionally reported significant concerns regarding:

- Loss of international applicants following bursary eligibility changes in May 2026
- Visa processing delays.

- Inconsistent decision-making on visas by the Home Office and constant policy changes created uncertainty for schools to commit to visa sponsorship with ECTs
- Refusals based on "genuine student" assessments that were not clearly explained.

Several providers reported losing otherwise eligible candidates because visas were not granted in time for programme commencement.

Providers stressed that consistency and predictability are essential because teacher workforce planning occurs over several years.

9. **Fairness, Dignity and Respect within the Work Visa System**

Providers identified several areas for improvement:

- Faster visa processing.
- Greater transparency in decision-making.
- Clearer communication of requirements especially with schools who do not have capacity to navigate the constant changes
- Recognition of international qualifications.
- Stronger employment protections.
- Greater ability to change school without jeopardising immigration status.

Providers suggested that visa sponsorship could be held centrally by the Department for Education rather than by individual schools who cannot afford the visas. This would significantly reduce costs and administrative burdens, particularly for small schools, multi-academy trusts and schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Providers also reported particular concerns regarding visa refusals affecting applicants from West Africa, India and Pakistan, with providers expressing concern about a lack of clarity regarding "genuine student" decision-making.

10. **Cross-Government Working**

Providers consistently called for stronger collaboration between the Home Office and the Department for Education. Current policy development is often fragmented, with immigration decisions sometimes appearing disconnected from workforce planning evidence. Contributors recommended:

- Joint workforce planning.
- Shared use of teacher supply and demand data.
- Alignment between teacher recruitment targets and immigration policy.
- Early identification of shortage trends.
- Regular engagement with sector stakeholders.

Special Interest Group members expressed concern that changes to immigration and bursary policy had been implemented without sufficient consultation with providers or workforce planners.

11. The Future Role of Immigration in Workforce Planning

The overall evidence from the Special Interest Group strongly suggests that immigration should remain an integral component of workforce planning in education. Providers emphasised that international recruitment is not a substitute for domestic workforce development but a necessary complement to it while long-term domestic supply challenges persist.

This points to three key conclusions:

- **International recruitment is essential for maintaining specialist teaching provision** in shortage subjects including Physics, Mathematics, Computing and Modern Foreign Languages.
- **Immigration policy should be aligned with long-term workforce planning**, recognising that teacher supply challenges develop over years rather than months.
- **The most sustainable solution combines international recruitment with long-term investment in domestic recruitment and retention**, including improved teacher retention, subject-specific incentives and policies that encourage more young people to pursue STEM and language-related careers.

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