Ensuring sufficiency of supply in trainee teachers in England

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Summary

1. The excellence of initial teacher training (ITT) provision in England is underpinned by strong university-school partnerships, which recent reforms have further encouraged. However, with a rising pupil population and future demand for entry to the teaching profession uncertain, the challenge for government now is to build sufficient teaching capacity wherever it is required, and to ensure that policy initiatives promote stability, and work to maintain and build on the robust quality of existing provision around training and continuing professional development.

Key points

- Universities across the UK are important hubs for their local area, training the people that every community relies on, including 63,000 nurses, 62,000 doctors and dentists, and 75,000 teachers. A university’s commitment to teacher education is part of the institution’s core mission and, in many cases, the history of the institution too.

- 96% of university-led partnerships for teacher training in England are rated as ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted, with many serving localities that have low levels of provision from the more recent school-led partnerships.

- Changes to the initial teacher training (ITT) system in England in recent years have further encouraged close working partnerships between schools and universities.

- However, the changes in training place allocations between the different routes into teaching have also created a level of instability for the university sector, as well as a system of supply that has failed to take into account differences in regional demand.

- These changes have coincided with government missing its overall teacher training recruitment targets for the past five years, and to some regions having high teacher vacancy rates at a time when pupil numbers are forecasted to increase by as much as 450,000 by 2020.

- As government drives to build capacity in the school system and create more good school places, the system will require as many as 30,000 additional teachers in the years ahead. Therefore, with closer working partnerships between schools and universities secure, and in the interests of securing sufficiency of teacher supply, government should now move to:

  ➢ Introduce a period of stability into the ITT system by providing multi-year allocations for all good and outstanding ITT providers;
  ➢ Build ITT capacity in areas with an insufficient supply of teachers by encouraging existing outstanding and good providers to grow;
  ➢ Work with universities to enhance opportunities for continuing professional development in the interests of improving teachers’ job satisfaction and retention rates, and strengthen universities’ role within the future award of qualified teacher status (QTS), and
  ➢ Provide firm reassurances about the continued role of universities in the ITT system, and their value.
• The government has acknowledged that it needs to attract more teachers to the most challenging schools, which can play a key part in driving social mobility. However, there is also a need to ensure that the teaching workforce is itself representative of wider society, and the allocation of ITT places can play a key role here – universities already have a strong record of widening participation into teacher training, with 19% of entrants to university ITT programmes coming from a minority ethnic background, compared to 8% of entrants to school-centred ITT (SCITT) programmes.

Context

2. The quality of an education system depends on the quality of its teachers, and a high quality teaching profession is underpinned by effective initial teacher training and continued professional development.

3. In England, the challenge now is to ensure that teachers are of sufficient quality and of adequate number to meet government’s policy objectives. Coinciding with the rapid shifts in allocated training places in recent years, the latter challenge is not being met and, for the past five years, the number of prospective teachers enrolled onto training programmes has not been sufficient to meet future demand for teachers in England. This has coincided with a number of structural changes made to the ITT landscape, including a substantial reduction in the number of training place allocations awarded to some university providers.

4. The number of school-age children is set to increase. In particular, there are forecasted to be 9% more secondary school-age children in 2019-20 than there were in 2014-15. If the system is going to train enough teachers, the government will have to encourage initiatives which build capacity in the teacher training system, while maintaining the quality of existing provision.

5. Universities have a critical role to play in any teacher training system. In England, universities are not only the largest providers of provision, they are also highly likely to achieve a good or outstanding rating from Ofsted – 96% of partnerships coordinated by universities were judged as good or outstanding at their most recent Ofsted inspection.

6. Universities have always worked closely with partner schools in delivering teacher training, and trainees on PGCE courses will spend around half of their time on school placements. Universities have also engaged constructively in the development of new models of teacher training partnerships, at the same time as building on the successes of existing pathways. However, the proportion of places allocated to courses led by higher education institutions has decreased in recent years, and this has created a period of instability for some providers.

7. This instability has impact beyond the 44% of all teacher trainees that universities directly recruit. Most other trainees are recruited into placements such as School Direct (40%) or Teach First (5%) – both of which are largely delivered in collaboration with a higher education institution.

8. Despite this prolonged period of uncertainty, universities have remained committed to teacher education. The sector has a strong record of recruiting students to fill large proportions of their allocations of places, including in the ‘hard to recruit’ STEM subjects.

9. Well-supported School Direct or SCITT providers naturally have a key role to play in the ITT landscape, recruiting to meet teacher demand in individual schools or chains of schools. However, schools with the greatest need for well-trained teachers do not always have the capacity to lead this sort of provision.

10. There is no need to choose between teacher training from high quality providers, and teacher training places in locations with regional shortages. University providers of teacher training are based in every region of the country, and the vast majority of universities are rated as outstanding or good by Ofsted.
How can government work with universities to address current concerns around teacher supply?

Introduce greater stability into the system by moving to multi-year allocations

11. One of the key issues faced by university ITT providers in recent years has been the inability to plan for the long-term because of the government’s drive to reduce levels of university ITT provision in certain areas, and because allocations of training places are made on an annual basis, sometimes just nine months ahead of the date of student enrolment. This level of uncertainty can limit an institution’s willingness to invest in their own ITT infrastructure. In the interests of securing sufficient trainee teacher recruitment in the years ahead, UUK therefore urges government to instead provide greater stability by moving to a system of allocations over a number of years, in order to provide universities with the certainty they need that there is a place in the ITT system for them in the long-term, and to provide them with greater confidence when it comes to institutional investment in ITT.

12. The 2016 Education White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, suggested that the best ITT providers may be granted a multi-year allocation in order to assist their planning and recruitment, and UUK welcomes the introduction of multi-year allocations to certain providers for the 2017/18 cycle.

13. However, the government should go further, and ensure that all allocations operate on a multi-year basis. While some flexibility will most likely be required from year to year, more advanced planning is possible.

14. This issue has been picked up by two parliamentary committees. As part of its inquiry into *Training New Teachers* in 2016, the Public Accounts Committee supported this proposal, in acknowledgement of the problems generated by year-on-year changes, recommending that a ‘clear plan’ for teacher supply covering at least three years should be developed. Further, in 2017, the Education Committee recommended that government develops a long-term plan to improve supply and retention.

15. Multi-year allocations would form a vital component of this longer-term vision, and allow providers to invest with confidence in the development of their teacher training staff and infrastructure, to allow for expansion and improvement. This is to the advantage of not just the trainees of the provider, but also partner schools.

Encourage outstanding and good university providers in areas with high vacancy rates to grow

16. Until recently, the Department has taken a wholly national approach to recruitment. This approach carried with it substantial risks: provision has grown at different rates across the regions, without full understanding of important local and regional issues. This is in part because new providers, most of them delivering school-led programmes, have been approved without reference to existing provision or local demand for trainees. Policies should now work to build lost capacity where it is required, and encourage the development of new capacity where provision is not sufficient to meet demand.

17. The current Teacher Supply Model does not sufficiently take account of the regional differences in the levels of vacancies at schools. In its 2016 report, the National Audit Office observed that the National College of Teaching and Leadership (the government agency with responsibility for trainee recruitment) has ‘not assessed the risk of under- or over-provision in particular geographic areas when deciding how to grow the market’. Changing approach to take into account regional need will be an important step in addressing the current imbalance of teacher vacancy rates across different parts of England outlined in the following image.
Heat map of teacher vacancies by region, year ending October 2016

![Heat map of teacher vacancies by region, year ending October 2016](image)

Source: Burning Glass Technologies, as cited by Migration Advisory Committee

18. Higher education providers have a record of recruiting well when they are allocated places. Allowing for some expansion at institutions in areas which have not experienced growth through school-led routes, or in areas where research finds that there are higher levels of vacancies in schools, could help to address the under-supply of teachers on a regional basis.

**Provide reassurances about the continued role of universities in the ITT system**

19. Universities have adapted well in a period of instability to the government’s ITT allocations model, recruiting strongly against their targets, even without clarity about the pace of future policy change. The government’s 2016 Education White Paper confirms that there will indeed be an “important place” for universities in the ITT landscape in the future, but it also reiterated its intention to continue to move towards school-led ITT provision.

20. At a time when pockets of the country are experiencing substantial shortages of teachers, Universities UK is asking government to now introduce a greater level of stability to the teacher training system, and reconsider any plans to alter the balance of the allocations model even further in order to provide universities and schools with the confidence that the future of their programmes and partnerships is secure. Government should also ensure that evidence plays a key role in the development of ITT policy in the future.

**Work with universities to enhance opportunities for continuing professional development, in the interests of improving teachers’ job satisfaction and retention rates**

21. Universities play a significant role beyond ITT, including through the delivery of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Universities already play a key role in the delivery of these flexible courses, which build on learning in the workplace to improve practice in the classroom.

22. The Secretary of State for Education has indicated that Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) as an award for ITT graduates is to be reviewed with a focus on strengthening the qualification, as part of a wider review of the early stages of a teacher’s career. As part of this review, government should work with universities to evaluate the current CPD landscape with a view to providing opportunities for the expansion of provision where suitable. Such an initiative will be important in driving up teacher retention rates and promoting greater job satisfaction among the teacher workforce.

23. It is also vital that policymakers draw on the expertise of universities as government considers how to ‘strengthen’ QTS as an award. We welcome the Department for Education’s indication that any changes to QTS will be co-designed with the sector, and that providers will be given sufficient time to
adapt to any changes, but there is a risk that, through this process, the role for universities in accrediting future teachers with QTS will be reduced, a move which would overlook the robust mechanisms already in place across the higher education sector to guarantee that those accredited with the award are of the level of quality the profession demands.

Maintain and enhance the quality of initial teacher training

24. The system cannot deliver the volume of quality trainees required by the wider education sector without relying in part on existing good providers. The government should take steps that ensure these good providers develop and improve.

25. The Higher Education and Research Bill sets out plans to significantly relax requirements before providers are able to award their own degrees. This could open the door to a significant expansion in the number of small teacher-training institutions, who will be able to operate without the oversight of an existing, established provider. It is important that new providers are assessed on the same basis as existing providers, so the quality of provision is maintained.

26. The creation of another route into teaching, through the introduction of teaching apprenticeships may help the government meet its recruitment targets. Further, the introduction of an undergraduate degree apprenticeship may, if designed and delivered effectively, help widen access to the profession. However, it is important that the government ensures that this new route is subject to the same standards as other routes into the profession.

Adopt a fair and proportionate approach to assessing the quality of providers

27. The quality assurance system and policies for deciding on allocations of places should reward the quality of provision and student outcomes, rather than input measures such as degree classifications or A-level grades of the student intake. The government’s policy that the ‘best’ providers receive multi-year allocations of places should be extended to as many providers of ITT as possible. This will give providers the stability they need to build capacity that the system needs.

28. The government is also considering methods for assessing the quality of teaching at higher education institutions through the Teaching Excellence Framework. To avoid duplication, this new Teaching Excellence Framework and the existing Ofsted framework should be used to inform any developing policies of the Department for Education as to how to assess the quality of teacher training.