

PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

Government's policy on Initial Teacher Training, including the recruitment of new teachers, and the role of universities and other bodies, in ensuring the supply and education of new teachers

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MillionPlus is the Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in the UK's world-leading university system. Modern universities make up 52% of all UK undergraduates and 37% of all postgraduates, with over one million students studying at modern institutions across the UK.

Modern universities are a critical component in the supply of teachers across England, and many have a long history of provision in this area. In 2019/20 modern universities accounted for 61% of all initial teacher training (ITT) students in the university sector¹, and many universities offer both undergraduate and postgraduate routes into the profession.

Through the MillionPlus Deans of Education Network, comprising of twenty major ITT providers across England², we work with both government and the wider sector to improve both the access to and the provision of teacher education. Our members are committed to working in partnership with the Department for Education to ensure ITT courses are truly world-leading, and that the needs of trainees and pupils remain at the forefront of the minds of policy makers.

University-Led Teacher Training

Universities play a key role in the delivery of ITT, and collectively they train over 40% of all those entering teacher education each year. Although there are many routes into teaching today, universities remain a central pillar of ITT and have been fundamental in ensuring the profession can recruit and train the next generation of high-quality teachers.

This has been particularly striking during the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic where university capacity and ability to co-ordinate regionally was of significant benefit, and helped place trainees within structures that other types of providers struggled to do in those extraordinary times. Innovations that universities made, such as virtual placements, also enabled them to get teachers trained and qualified under challenging circumstances, and provided a blueprint for blended learning approaches for the sector moving forward.

Universities work with partner schools across their regions to ensure research-informed and cutting edge practice is married to appropriate placement opportunities and time in schools to blend theory and practice to prepare their trainees. The relationships developed between universities and their partner schools are the

¹ https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Jul21_ThinkModern_StatsBooklet_LR.pdf

² https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Membership_and_contact_information_-_DoE_Network_v2_1.pdf

bedrock of high quality ITT courses, and they also have the additional benefits to schools with universities providing training for school-based mentors and for staff.

University-led ITT is also of incredibly high-quality, a fact that has been developed into a newly designed qualification and export opportunity for the UK – International Qualified Teacher Status (iQTS). This initiative, which has been supported by MillionPlus and on which we have worked with government, seeks to export the ‘quality and rigour’ of English ITT³, building on the work universities are already doing with international partners.

Government Policy and the ITT Market Review

Universities are key components of ITT from recruitment to training and then on to retention. As such, as a group we work closely with government to help support reforms to improve teacher education and meet the workforce needs of schools across the country. Over the past few years we have supported government programmes such as the Core Content Framework (CCF) and the Early career Framework (ECF), indeed we have worked directly on the development of these proposals.

These new initiatives are still very fresh, and these reforms have come at the same time as a once-in-a-generation pandemic that has disrupted schools in a way not seen since the Second World War. They are ambitious and rightly so, but they need support and time to both embed themselves fully, and then also to be fully assessed. Before this could be done, however, further changes were proposed within teacher education through the ITT Market Review. In its original formation it was designed to look at the routes into teaching and see if greater efficiency and clarity could be developed for trainees and applicants. The review changed in tone and purpose when relaunched in 2020 however, focusing more on quality and with an explicitly stated remit to shake up the market.

We believe that continuous improvement is essential for any profession, yet the evidence base for both the motivations behind the review, and much of what was subsequently in the report, were spurious and lacking in any great depth. As a group we engaged with the review process, to highlight the excellence within the sector but also to point out where greater support could be given to help in this work. However, we were disappointed to see that many of the recommendations lacked any serious evidence base, and if followed through by government could put the teacher supply model at serious, and unnecessary, risk. The report simply did not make an adequate case for such a dramatic overhaul of a system that the DfE themselves are lauding as an international exemplar across the world, and with added bureaucracy that takes time and resource away from the job at hand it has the potential to damage both provision and also the amount of providers across the country who can engage with it.

Perhaps the key recommendation within the report is the proposed new accreditation system for providers, to enable them to continue to lead on the provision of ITT. With as yet no firm detail on the structure or make-up of this new framework, or how it interacts with the various other quality assurance mechanisms that universities, in particular, operate under, the end result has been confusion, which leads to uncertainty and instability within the market. Universities work on long-term planning structures and stability of provision, and the introduction of an as yet unspecified accreditation model, allied to a review that has been clear that changing the nature of who operates in the market was an objective of it, will undoubtedly lead to some revising the scale of their participation in ITT.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1012646/IQTS_consultation_response_August_2021.pdf

The risks to the teacher supply model are therefore clear and present, at a time when it has never been more important to have clear and stable policy for both universities and schools. MillionPlus members report that schools are increasingly confused about the nature and direction of government policy, and some are re-evaluating their engagement with ITT as it is placing an increasingly large burden on them through the scale and weight of reforms from government. Stability is key, particularly as the whole education sector recovers from the pandemic, and government and sector need to work together to appreciate the significance of what everyone has been through over the past two years, and then to develop policy with schools and trainees firmly in mind.

Future Reforms

There are areas of potential improvement that could be addressed, and that would make a practical difference on the ground for trainees, schools and ultimately pupils. One of which is a greater focus on increasing the number of schools taking part in ITT, through placement partnerships. The lack of adequate support, both financial and otherwise, is a limiting factor for many schools in either engaging with ITT or increasing their engagement⁴. The fear of further Ofsted inspections is also a factor in school decision making, and this relationship should also perhaps be addressed. These might be better as an immediate focus for government ahead of a top-down reorganisation of the structure of ITT.

A stronger focus on the retention of teachers would be welcome. MillionPlus and Universities UK published a joint report in 2020 focusing on greater support that could be given to those in key public service workforce roles⁵, including loan forgiveness after a period of service, and creative solutions such as this should be further explored.

Reform also needs to take account for the need for stability and long-term planning. Both schools and universities can better adapt to reform if it is less frenetic, and a stable environment is a better place from which improvements can be made across the entirety of the sector. An environment of instability, constant change, and fear of possible loss of provision, is not one in which providers will be looking to invest and expand, which runs counter to the need to expand and solidify the pipeline into teaching.

Conclusions

MillionPlus members support genuine and thought through reform that will make an improvement to the experiences of trainees. The current policy towards ITT from government remains slightly confused and lacking in the stability that is required. Universities are key to the continuation of the profession, from undergraduate to PGCE to innovative teaching apprenticeships. All elements of the ITT sector have a role to play in the future and none should be arbitrarily cut out of delivering high quality provision in order to satisfy a need for change for changes sake.

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⁴ <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/initial-teacher-training-placement-capacity-in-english-schools-analysis-for-millionplus/>

⁵ [https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Strengthening_and_enhancing_UK_public_services_in_response_to_Covid-19_-_April_2020_\(1\).pdf](https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Strengthening_and_enhancing_UK_public_services_in_response_to_Covid-19_-_April_2020_(1).pdf)