

Wednesday, 18 August, 2021

Initial teacher training (ITT) market review: full consultation response

The University of Cambridge has submitted its response to the public consultation on the Government's market review of Initial Teacher Training. This follows a [general statement of concern](#) about the proposals published on 6 July.

[Read and download the full consultation response.](#)

Our overall position remains that, while we support the objective of promoting *consistently high-quality* teacher training, we are deeply concerned that the proposals themselves would require us to adopt a model within which we could no longer guarantee the high standards we have achieved to date. The market review proposals appear to confuse quality with uniformity and conformity. We cannot, in all conscience, envisage our continuing involvement with ITT should the proposals be implemented in their current format.

We have called on the Government to halt the review, particularly given the fact that the consultation period itself has been much-reduced and occurred during the school holidays, limiting engagement. Instead of pushing ahead with these flawed proposals, representatives including university and school-based colleagues from a range of ITT programmes should be consulted in an open and transparent way, so that genuine challenges can be identified and addressed, drawing on national and international understanding and a wider range of research evidence of high-quality teacher education. We would welcome opportunities to work with the Government, alongside representatives of other providers, to help develop an alternative way forward.

Some of the key points raised in our response are as follows:

- **Perceived 'challenges' to effective teacher education in England:** The narrow scope of representation on the Expert Advisory Group, and the very limited engagement with long-standing, high-quality successful providers, in school-based and university-based provision, has failed to allow for a true portrayal of the current state of teacher education across the whole sector. There is a distinct lack of evidence presented for the 'challenges' identified in the Government's proposals. Genuine challenges could be identified if the review was halted and representatives from across the sector consulted in an open and transparent way.

- **Curriculum requirements:** The recommendations set out the equivalent of a national curriculum for teacher education. The report's authors have recently claimed that this is a 'myth' because it simply demands adherence to the Core Content Framework, which is already a statutory requirement. This is incorrect. The recommendations make prescriptions regarding how the curriculum should be sequenced, what and how trainees should be taught, how trainees should undertake placements, how mentors should be trained and do their jobs, how trainees should be assessed, and a range of quality assurance requirements and arrangements. Taken together, these comprise a curriculum which would undermine the innovative and ambitious teacher education curriculum that we already have in place, lowering standards in the process. This will restrict continued improvement in teacher education and pupil experience and lead to universities, all currently deemed 'outstanding' or 'good' by Ofsted, withdrawing from teacher education altogether. While the review champions an evidence-based approach, much of the evidence behind these proposed measures is either untested or not sufficiently robust. Our view, as a leading centre of education research, is that the review's specifications are not based on the best evidence available about what works in teaching, or teacher education. At best the underlying evidence is restricted and partial, and overlooks the need to guard against fads in teacher training that may turn out to be unhelpful to future teachers.
- **School placements:** There is no evidence provided in the proposals that intensive placements, which are envisaged in the report, will lead to high quality teacher education. The proposals reflect a very limited notion of how trainee teachers grow and develop, and provide no foreseeable benefits for high-quality partnerships: in fact, they will lower the standard of provision, not least by wasting time on activity which does not lead to sustained professional learning; but also interfering with our existing carefully-planned, sequenced and individualised provision for each trainee. The underlying assumption that teaching is merely a set of skills, and that every trainee should concentrate on the same skills, regardless of their past experience, subject, or phase, is completely flawed. It will result in a mechanistic 'one-size-fits-all' programme which is not adequate to develop longer-term professional learning.
- **Timings:** The cost and time burden which these proposals will entail will detract from providers' and schools' attempts to ensure a continued supply of excellent trainee teachers and to support the post-pandemic effort to support students' learning. In particular, the proposal to increase the length of the course while at the same time reducing University-based sessions will increase costs to schools, while obstructing opportunities to offer the ambitious curriculum we currently provide.
- **Mentorships:** Imposing the requirement for mentors to be educated against the restricted, partial evidence base that underpins this review will

compromise standards. Mentors should be entitled to education which draws on a full and comprehensive understanding of evidence. We – and many other Russell Group providers – already provide this through bespoke mentor education programmes. We do not want mentors in our Partnerships to be forced to complete poorer mentor training than we already provide.

- **Reaccreditation:** We do not see the need for providers who are already acknowledged as delivering high-quality teacher education to go through a reaccreditation process when their energies should be focused on supporting schools, pupils and trainee teachers to deal with the impact of the pandemic. Any reaccreditation would lead to a renewed risk assessment of the course by the University, which would take into account the inherent risk to quality imposed by the market review proposals.
- **Timetable for implementation:** The proposed timescale set out in the review is unrealistic and unworkable. Alongside our partner schools, we would need to evaluate the current programme in relation to any new requirements, and then undergo an extensive and lengthy revalidation process. Even if the proposals were acceptable, ironically, the short time-frame alone would therefore preclude our involvement in Initial Teacher Education. Again, we therefore suggest that the consultation is halted to enable more meaningful engagement between the Government and the sector.
- **Recruitment and selection of future teachers:** The proposals would have a detrimental effect on recruitment and teacher supply. Currently, prospective teachers have the opportunity to choose their preferred route of training. These proposals impose a single model of ITT which would make teaching a less attractive profession for trainees with a strong academic profile. Compromising opportunity and choice in this way is contrary to what happens in the best-performing education systems internationally, which recognise that professional academic study raises the status of the profession.
- **Impact on equality and schools:** Many universities have a social mission to support their local communities and have long-established partnerships with schools, including those in rural or disadvantaged communities, covering a wide geographical area. The University of Cambridge currently works with around 250 such partner schools. As well as providing high quality professional placements for trainees, these schools are involved in all elements of the course including teaching, recruitment and assessment. If universities withdraw from ITE, the teacher supply which these partnerships provide will be lost. In addition, this will mean trainees are no longer able to encourage and guide talented, bright young people in under-represented areas towards further study at a leading university.