

GUEST AUTHOR

In every edition of *Research in Teacher Education* we publish a contribution from a guest writer who has links with the School of Childhood and Social Care at the University of East London. James Noble-Rogers is Executive Director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), a membership organisation

for universities involved in teacher education and education research. Prior to taking up this position in 2004, he was Head of Governance at the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) for four years. Before that he was, from 1987 to 2000, a civil servant in the Education Department (in its various guises) and the Teacher Training Agency. He was born in 1961 and has an Honours degree in Humanities from Hatfield Polytechnic,

a Master's degree in Philosophy from the University of Nottingham and a Postgraduate Diploma with distinction from City University, London. He is an Honorary Fellow of Wolverhampton University, and in 2015 was awarded an honorary master's degree in Education from the University of Hertfordshire. In 2022, James was also awarded an honorary doctorate from Birmingham City University.

The unique role of universities in supplying schools with a high quality, research-informed and professional teacher workforce

James Noble-Rogers

INTRODUCTION

This article identifies ways in which the intellectual robustness and integrity of teacher education might be secured and enhanced, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) partnerships protected and the teacher supply crisis addressed. The article draws upon the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET)'s 2-24 Manifesto, 'The contribution made by universities to teacher education, teacher supply and to local communities'.

ITE providers across the UK, both universities and School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT)s, make a huge and positive contribution to the quality of education in this country. For the purposes of this article, I am focussing

on ITE delivered by ITE partnerships between universities and schools in England. Many of the conclusions and recommendations could, however, apply to provision across the UK and to that delivered by school-based providers (often in partnership with universities) and to that relating to teacher education for the FE and Skills sector.

ITE is one of this country's great education success stories and should be celebrated. Despite its clear strengths, for too long teacher education has been seen by previous Governments as a problem that needs to be fixed, rather than as something that should be nurtured, cherished and supported. The sector has proved, with support from

their representative organisations, resilient and adaptable, for example in response to the challenges presented by the Conservative Government's policies in 2011 and 2021. The 2011 reforms were explicitly intended to reduce the proportion of teachers educated through university routes to below 50%, while the latter was, in all likelihood, intended, in part, to reduce the number of accredited providers. Despite these attacks, universities continue to be involved in the education of some 80% of new teachers and most ITE providers were able to retain their accreditation following the Market Review reforms. The contribution that the sector made to ensuring that schools continued to have access to well-trained teachers

during the COVID-19 pandemic was nothing short of heroic. The effective way in which the sector has responded to its various challenges reflects the adaptive, flexible, collegiate and professional approach it has adopted.

THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF UNIVERSITIES TO TEACHER EDUCATION AND TEACHER SUPPLY

As well as providing high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate ITE programmes, universities also work in partnership to support programmes delivered by school-based providers and by schools themselves. University education departments provide high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) for serving teachers (often at master's degree and doctorate level) and are active in outreach work to encourage under-represented groups to engage in higher education and to support school and college improvement. Universities are at the heart of local communities and act as hubs that support cooperation between schools, colleges, local businesses, voluntary sector bodies, teaching school hubs, local authorities, academy chains and others. Universities carry out ground-breaking education research that has proven impact, as demonstrated by impact reports submitted through the regular Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercises.

Universities make particular and invaluable contributions that include:

- Educating new teachers in a research-rich environment informed by expertise from higher education institute (HEI) subject departments and with access to pastoral, library, information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources that universities offer.
- Delivering ITE at scale and maintaining a supply line of recruits from non-ITE undergraduate programmes at the same institution.
- Providing student teachers with

opportunities to undertake centre-based training away from school and to share and reflect on their experiences with those working in contrasting schools.

- The awarding of master's level credits that can form the basis for further progression to full master's status.
- Engaging in outreach work to encourage more people into higher education and the teaching profession.
- Supporting school and college improvement.
- Acting as a hub to support cooperation across communities and between different groups and organisations.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF TEACHER EDUCATION

In what soon became an infamous speech, the incoming Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove said, in 2011, that:

'...we will reform teacher training to shift trainee teachers out of college and into the classroom. We will end the arbitrary bureaucratic rule which limits how many teachers can be trained in schools, shift resources so that more heads can train teachers in their own schools. Teaching is a craft, and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. Watching others, and being rigorously observed yourself as you develop, is the best route to acquiring mastery in the classroom'.

The debate over whether teaching is a craft or a profession is, of course, misleading. Surely it can be both. As UCET's former Academic Secretary Gordon Kirk once said:

150 cardinal are these craft skills and techniques of teaching that anyone whose grasp of them was tenuous, no matter how intellectually distinguished or otherwise talented, would be a walking disaster in a classroom. Nor is it surprising that those who qualify as teachers should be required to

demonstrate the capacity to deploy these skills with confidence in the classroom.'

But he went on to say that:

'... the personal knowledge that is associated with the performance of a craft has to be complemented by the public knowledge that resides in the well-grounded evidence about the conduct of teaching. One of the claims of teaching to professional recognition is that it draws on just such a public knowledge base. It is presumptuous in the extreme to set to one side the extensive evidence base on teaching and learning and to proceed only on the basis of one's personal experience.'

So, while Michael Gove might not have been wrong to describe teaching as a 'craft', the tone and the context of his statement implied that it was only a craft, with no need for the intellectual, academic or values-base that would make it also a profession. That is where he was clearly wrong, or at least, only half right.

A key feature of all professions is that they, within nationally agreed frameworks, regulate themselves, and this regulation includes the identification and monitoring of entry standards for the profession. And yet in England, it is the Government rather than the profession that sets the standards that new and serving teachers are expected to meet, the way that ITE programmes are structured and, to an extent, the research base that is used to inform the content of ITE programmes.

Instead of prescribing a top-down approach to teacher education, I would suggest that, because teaching is a profession, a range of professionals from across the education sector be brought together to identify flexible approaches for ITE and CPD that will equip teachers to be competent and confident professionals, epistemic agents, and responsible professionals who are able to engage in inquiry-rich practice. ITE providers should be given the freedom to deliver programmes that meet the differing needs of their communities,

reflect the particular circumstances of the schools they work in partnership with and draw upon and contextualise a broad research-base. This could be informed by the work of UCET's Intellectual Base of Teacher Education (IBTE) group. These professionals should come from a representative example of ITE providers, researchers with a proven track-record in conducting and evaluating high-quality education research, subject-associations and the professional associations (including the representatives of teachers and schools' leaders and the Chartered College of Teachers). Representatives of Government could attend meetings as observers.

Such a process will, if it is to work and consensus be achieved, take some time. But more immediate action needs to be taken before then. The new ITE Quality Requirements, which came into effect in September 2024, are overly restrictive in terms of, for example, the precise level of mentoring support that each student teacher should receive, the ratio of mentors to student teachers and the amount of Intensive Training and Practice (ITAP) that each ITE programme contains. Although possibly well-intentioned, such requirements are not flexible enough to allow programmes to be tailored to the particular needs of partner schools or, for that matter, individual student teachers. Some schools might decide that they are too much of an 'ask' and decide to reduce the number of placements they offer or withdraw from ITE altogether, which would make an already challenging teacher supply position even worse. We, therefore, call on the new Government to immediately relax, following discussions with UCET and the The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT), some of the more inflexible rules as a precursor to bringing the sector together to identify, within the next couple of years, a more robust and collegiate set of expectations about what ITE should cover and how it should be structured. Such a move would signal the new Government's commitment to

enhancing the status and professionalism of the entire education sector.

TEACHER SUPPLY

Schools are faced with a teacher supply crisis. They are not able to recruit the teachers they need. This will inevitably have a negative impact on pupil performance and well-being. Although the country has experienced periods of teacher supply problems in the past, the current situation is without precedent. ITE recruitment targets have been missed for the last decade, and in 2023/24 we only managed to recruit about half the number of secondary ITE students the country needs. Prospects for 2024/25 are little better. The last Government's decision to withdraw accreditation from many universities and SCITTs will make matters worse, because people will have to travel greater distances in order to train and because the supply line that exists between undergraduate courses and PGCEs within some of the universities affected has been broken.

There are many interlinked reasons for the teacher supply crisis: median pay for teachers is 12% lower in real terms than it was in 2010/11, the workload of teachers remains greater than that for comparable professions, teachers spend too much time on non-teaching activities and teachers have less autonomy than those working in other professions. Significant numbers of teachers are also leaving the profession once qualified, with workload and lack of professional autonomy often cited as key reasons.

Financial pressures are making it difficult to recruit people to ITE and to retain those who are recruited. Postgraduate ITE students will be faced with an additional year of student debt and will, in most cases, be required to pay £9,250 tuition fees. Bursaries are inconsistently available for a limited range of subjects, despite recruitment being problematic in most subjects and phases. Funding for Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses was inexplicably cut just before this year's General Election. Student teachers are

faced with significant on-programme costs, including travel to and from their school placements. It is difficult for student teachers to alleviate these costs through part-time working because of the demands of ITE programmes.

To help address these issues, we would recommend to new ministers (in line with some of their manifesto commitments) that ITE bursaries are restructured so that all student teachers receive a level of financial support in addition to maintenance and other loans, which would help to forestall future shortages in some subjects and phases rather than simply react to them after the event. Bursaries should be set for three-year periods to allow ITE providers to plan their recruitment. Accreditation taken away from ITE providers through the Market Review exercise should be restored to improve the teacher supply line. Funding for SKE programmes should cover all secondary shortage subjects. Teachers should be enabled to access the full range of CPD opportunities available to them, including National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) and master's and doctorate level study.

There will also need to be a more fundamental review of how ITE in England is funded. ITE programmes are expensive to run and the basic unit of resource of £9,250 per student teacher has been frozen for the best part of a decade. Universities often have to subsidise ITE programmes from other sources of income, including overseas student teachers. The current funding model is not sustainable, and programmes will, inevitably, close if something is not done. But increasing fees is not an option as it would deter even more people from entering the profession. An element of core Government subsidy, applied to all ITE programmes regardless of subject or phase, would seem to be the most appropriate long-term solution.

CONCLUSION

The issues the country faces in terms of the content and structure of teacher

education and the supply of teachers can be addressed if we all work together, as a profession, to agree a way forward. Teaching is a profession – the profession on which all others depend – and a key priority for the new Government should be to promote and enhance that professionalism for the benefit of us all. Immediate actions should include the relaxation of the more prescriptive parts of the new ITE Quality Requirements and the provision of more comprehensive and equitable support for all student teachers. In the longer term, the basic unit of resource for ITE needs to be increased, and the education sector collectively be tasked with identifying how ITE should be structured, the principles on which it should be based and the outcomes that it should seek to achieve. Not only is teaching a profession, but teacher education is as well and this should be reflected in the way that it is regulated and viewed by Government and other statutory agencies. ■

FOOTNOTES

- i. News: UCET manifesto briefing paper (July 2024) | UCET
- ii. More than 90% of ITE provision is graded by Ofsted as being 'outstanding' or 'good' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofsted-annual-report-202122-education-childrens-services-and-skills/the-annual-report-of-his-majestys-chief-inspector-of-education-childrens-services-and-skills-202122>
- iii. Initial teacher education providers: unsung heroes of the pandemic | UCET
- iv. Speech to National College: 17 June 2010
- v. Partnership & the Knowledge Base of Teacher Education: A reinterpretation. Gordon Kirk, UCET, 2011
- vi. <https://www.ucet.ac.uk/11675/intellectual-base-of-teacher-education-report-updated-february-2020>
- vii. Initial Teacher Training Census, Academic year 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK
- viii. Working lives of teachers and leaders - wave 1: core report (publishing.service.gov.uk)
- ix. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-initial-teacher-training-itt/funding-initial-teacher-training-itt-academic-year-2023-to-2024>