

Educational Excellence Everywhere

Department for Education White Paper

Parliamentary briefing on teacher training implications

May 2016

The education white paper sets out the government's determination to press ahead with more school based in initial teacher education (ITE) and abolish the current qualified teacher status (QTS) system.

The University and College Union (UCU), which represents staff working in university teacher training departments, has serious concerns about each of these proposals and the impact they will have on higher education institutions, the teaching profession and ultimately the quality of our children's education in the future.

What is proposed?

Initial Teacher Education

- Accredite new school-led providers and support a major expansion of SCITT-led training

The white paper acknowledges the role of higher education institutions in providing ITE and yet the government is determined to press ahead with more school-led ITE.¹ It also recognises problems in teacher recruitment and supply but does not make the connection between the reforms implemented so far and their role in exacerbating the problem.

The National Audit office found in a critical report in February 2016 that the targets for teacher recruitment have been missed in each of the last four years, and that higher education ITE providers performed best at filling recruitment places, having filled 85 per cent of their allocations in the 2015-16 cycle, compared to 65% for SCITTs and 58% for School Direct.² The Education Select Committee was also sufficiently concerned to require

¹ For an explanation of School Direct reforms and their threat to teacher education see https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5864/Teacher-education-under-attack-a-UCU-campaign-briefing-May-13/pdf/ucu_teacheredunderattack_may13rev.pdf

² <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/training-new-teachers/>

the Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, to appear before them on the subject of Teacher supply.

The national teacher supply model, previously controlled through the government distribution of PGCE places to the network of university providers across the country, could take account of regional differences in supply and demand, whereas the individualised nature of School Direct cannot. Despite this the government is determined to increase the proportion of training places allocated to school led routes.

Teaching is more than a practice based craft. To deliver excellence a teacher needs a theoretical and professional knowledge of education, an understanding of how children learn including the development of critical thinking skills, problem solving and collaborative working; alongside an expert knowledge of their subject discipline. A teacher needs an understanding of all aspects of child development to recognise and analyse educational needs and adapt their teaching practice accordingly. As such the very best teacher education incorporates school based learning and higher education working together in partnership to fully integrate theory, research and practice.³ UCU is concerned that these government proposals will prise apart established successful partnerships, promoting damaging competition and leading to a withdrawal of higher education providers in ITE.

Greater use of school based training will inevitably lead to more variations in practice making it almost impossible to ensure parity of experience for trainee teachers. Furthermore the white paper presents no evidence that teachers are eager to expand their existing mentoring role in any significant way or that they have the capacity to provide more aspects of the training. Given the problems with existing teacher workload (acknowledged by government through the creation of three separate workload review groups to try and tackle it⁴) combined with poor retention to the profession⁵ it seems unwise to introduce yet more workload demands on teachers.

Qualified Teacher Status

- Replace Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) with a stronger, more challenging accreditation based on a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, as judged by great schools

This proposal effectively removes objective judgements about teacher standards. The role of higher education institutions in QTS maintains objectivity and consistency of approach to the award of QTS. An academic qualification – the internationally recognised PGCE should form an integral part of the route to QTS. Teaching is a graduate profession and as

³ Kelly and Pitfield, Forum, 55:3, 2013, p.449

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/04/half-of-teachers-consider-leaving-profession-shock-poll>

such, there needs to be clear standards of entry, nationally agreed and enforced. The government's proposal poses a grave threat to the international reputation of English teaching qualifications as they become untried, untested and externally unverifiable.

What you can do

UCU is encouraging MPs who share in our concerns to raise the issue in parliament and directly with the Secretary of State for Education. For more information about local impact, or to arrange a meeting to discuss the issue further, please contact us at publicaffairs@ucu.org.uk or on 020 7756 2596.

About UCU

The University and College Union (UCU) is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in higher and further education throughout the UK.