

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 the Blind (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

Three ways to make teacher education in England even better

James Noble-Rogers, Executive Director of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET)

INTRODUCTION

As I hope will be clear from the title, this article does not assume a deficit model of teacher education. As even the government now acknowledge, the quality of initial teacher education in this country is high, whether it be delivered through HEI or SCITT partnerships. The results of OfSTED inspections and surveys of newly qualified teachers confirm this, with the vast majority of ITE provision rated by OFSTED as being either 'good' or 'outstanding'. Given the turbulence that it has faced in recent years, ITE providers (especially HEIs, which bore the brunt of the ideological assaults on the mythical 'blob' during Michael Gove's tenure as Education Secretary), the sector deserves to be congratulated on what it has maintained and achieved.

But that is no reason to be complacent. There is always scope to improve. The suggestions below are some of the ways this could be done.

SUGGESTION ONE: REVIEW WHAT IS COVERED IN ITE

The way that ITE is structured and organised is to an extent outside the control of ITE providers. All programmes must equip teachers to demonstrate that they meet the teacher standards, and must comply with the Secretary of State's criteria for ITE, which controls things such as programme length, amount of time spent in school, entry requirements and age-phase coverage. ITE providers

also have to have regard to the ITE content criteria developed by a group led by Stephen Munday in 2016, as well as what OFSTED inspectors will expect to see when they carry out inspections of ITE in accordance with their ITE inspection framework, which is currently under review.

Some agreed national frameworks and expectations are appropriate as they help to ensure equity of entitlement for student teachers and for the schools that will employ them. There must at the same time be sufficient flexibility to allow programmes to be adjusted to



meet the contextual, intellectual and personal needs of individual student teachers. Getting the right balance between consistency and flexibility will never be an exact science, and the emphasis might shift over time. But, with dialogue, a consensus should be achievable.

What is covered during ITE, on both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, is important. But prescribing detailed content along the lines of a national ITE curriculum (which we came close to having in the 1990s) would be counterproductive,

lead to a tick-box audit culture and shallowness of delivery while preventing flexibility, innovation or responsiveness to local and individual contexts. Content should instead be underpinned by a set of values and principles of the kind currently being developed by UCET's Intellectual Base of Teacher Education (IBTE) group chaired by Trevor Mutton from The University of Oxford. The intention is that these principles should inform both the content and delivery of ITE and CPD, as well as helping to set UCET policy and practice and acting as a touchstone for UCET responses to public consultations. It is at a certain level reasonable for a national agency to identify priority areas that ITE and early career development linked to statutory induction should cover as well as the standards which all qualified teachers should meet and develop. Beyond that, it should be for accredited ITE providers, teacher educators and their partner schools to decide what is covered and how programmes are delivered. How well this is done in the context of national frameworks and the teacher standards could, as now, be regularly looked at by a national regulatory body such as OFSTED, or through a peer review process. The role of the regulatory body or peer review group should not however stray into setting content or structure, as that would imply a confusion of boundaries and a regulatory body commenting on the quality of things that it itself has prescribed. This point should be borne in mind as a new OFSTED framework for ITE programmes is developed.

Equity and entitlement for student teachers – and for the schools that employ them – would be further enhanced if all students were able to undertake a teacher education programme linked to an academic award such as a first degree or, in the case of postgraduate students, a PGCE or PGDip, all of which adhere to additional regulatory requirements from bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA). Such programmes, rather than being a distraction from training, ensure that

programmes have an extra layer of internal and external quality assurance and draw on a range of evidence beyond the immediate work setting. They help students to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to use, interpret and carry our research, something which is increasingly recognised, including in the new UCET paper on building research informed teacher education communities.

SUGGESTION TWO: TEACHERS TO HAVE AN ENTITLEMENT TO, AND EXPECTATION TO ACCESS, STRUCTURED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREERS

UCET has said on many occasions that, however good ITE is, only so much ground can be covered in sufficient depth in what in most cases are programmes lasting for just nine-months (undergraduate programmes, which fulfil an important role, are different as they do allow more time). That is why the government's proposals for an Early Career Framework for all NQTs have, at least in principle, been generally welcomed. To meet its potential, the ECF should build on and complement ITE, which implies a key role for accredited ITE providers who are best placed to ensure a smooth transition between ITE and early professional development. Like ITE, the ECF should also be free from over-prescription and over-regulation. Teachers should also have access to robust, meaningful and properly funded CPD beyond their NQT years. The government's original consultation proposals set out in the Strengthening QTS and improving career progression for teachers white paper which led to the development of the ECF did make reference to career long CPD pathways as well as to the ring-fencing of funding for CPD and the signposting of effective CPD programmes that will help teachers and schools avoid the plethora of CPD provision that has become

available in recent years and which is, at best, of limited value. Unfortunately, these aspects of the White paper appear to have fallen off the radar. We hope that they will re-emerge.

The Government's original proposals were also explicit about the benefits of teachers undertaking CPD at master's degree level. Most postgraduate ITE programmes, some 90% according to the results of a 2015 UCET survey, carry with them 60 level 7 master's credits, equivalent to one third of a full master's degree. The benefits to teachers of undertaking CPD at master's degree level are well documented, and have been shown to have a positive impact on things such as: teacher confidence; depth of subject and pedagogical knowledge; classroom management skills; and retention. An increase in the number of teachers undertaking master's level CPD would in all likelihood lead to an improvement in pupil and school performance, and to the recruitment of new teachers and their retention in the profession.

While it might be premature to expect that all teachers achieve a relevant Master's degree, some progress could nonetheless be made towards teaching becoming an all Master's qualified profession, something which would make great teachers even better and attract ambitious and talented people into the profession. This could be done by government facilitating and championing links between the ECF and Master's credits, and between Master's and the new professional qualifications that the government intend to develop. It would also help if sources of funding could be secured, by for example relaxing some of the totally unnecessary rules concerning access of teachers to postgraduate loans (which forces teachers to borrow more than they need to by not allowing them to use the Master's credits from PGCE programmes) and by allowing schools to use their own apprenticeship levy to support meaningful professional development for teachers moving into leadership positions.

SUGGESTION THREE: LET THE PROFESSION REGULATE ITSELF

As already mentioned, the ability of ITE providers to decide for themselves the content and structure of ITE programmes in the context of local and individual needs has to be balanced against the need for a degree of national consistency and equity. Move too far in one direction and new teachers might not be able to work effectively in the range of schools they will be qualified to teach in, and yet too far the other way could lead to the imposition of a one size fits all approach that stifles flexibility, creativity and a contextualised approach.

But where should regulatory responsibility rest? England is an outlier in the UK because it is the government that accredits ITE, determines structures and a large proportion of content and holds the register of qualified teachers. In other parts of the UK it is the professional bodies such as GTCS in Scotland, the Education Workforce Council in Wales and GTCNI in Northern Ireland that

perform these functions. These bodies are part of the profession without being beholden to any particular aspect of it. It can, in fact, be argued that the existence of such professional bodies is one of the defining characteristics of a profession. The English government should be bold enough to relinquish part of its control and allow teacher education to be regulated by education professionals. That would be consistent with much of its rhetoric surrounding empowerment and schools-led systems. The government would retain a role, and would be consulted and kept informed. It might have ultimate responsibility for teacher supply, national qualification requirements (which I hope will be introduced for all publicly funded schools) and for funding. OFSTED or another body or group might have a regulatory function, as does OFSTED's sister organisations in the other three countries.

Some responsibilities in England currently held by government could, once it has reached sufficient size, be held by the Chartered College of Teaching, the

establishment of which has been one of the most exciting developments in the education sector in recent years. The Chartered College could accredit ITE providers, set the teacher standards and maintain the register of qualified teachers. It could also have a role in signposting teachers towards effective CPD and relevant research, and through its Chartered Teacher programme facilitate progress towards an all Master's qualified profession.

CONCLUSION

All of the above suggestions would require further work before being agreed, let alone implemented. And I should make it clear that I am writing in a persona capacity rather than as Executive Director of UCET. But I do think that principled and values driven teacher education, a teaching force with ready access to high quality Master's level CPD and a profession trusted to regulate itself are things we should at least think about, and without leaving it too late. ■

FOOTNOTES

1. Justin Greening, foreword to 'Strengthening QTS and improving carer progression for teachers, December 2017).
2. OFSTED, December 2018.
3. DFE, July 2011.
4. DFE, January 2019.
5. DFE July 2016.
6. Chartered College of Teaching, Impact, March 2019.
7. UCET, July 2015.
8. A summary can be found in the longitudinal study of the impact of postgraduate professional development published by former HMI, Peter Seaborne, for the Training & Development Agency for Schools in England in September 2009.
9. DFE recruitment & retention strategy, January 2019.

May 2021 Postscript

The issues identified in the article, which was published two years ago, are still relevant today, possibly more so. Since the article was written the UK government has stepped up its review of what it calls the 'ITE market'. Although such a review was announced in the January 2019 Recruitment and Retention Strategy, since its reinvention in late 2020 it appears to have a much broader remit, potentially impacting on the content of ITE as well as how the market is structured. Care will have to be taken to make sure that this does not lead to the imposition of a detailed ITE curriculum of the kind the original article warned against.

The importance of structured early professional development for new teachers, which builds on and complements their ITE, is as clear now

as it has ever been. While those teachers undergoing ITE during the pandemic will have developed unique knowledge and skills that will be of huge benefit to schools, it is likely that some at least will need tailored CPD programmes that address any issues resulting to any Covid related disruption to their ITE. This might require funding over and above that being made available through the ECF, and a more flexible and contextualised approach to delivering the ECF itself. It remains our view that accredited ITE providers are best placed to deliver this. ■