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Making good on the initial teacher training market review

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The Westminster government is currently consulting on a major reform of initial teacher training (ITT) in England. The main goals of this reform are to embed a core curriculum/syllabus for ITT and to introduce a new 20 day 'intensive practice' placement for all trainees. This is to be achieved by a reorganisation of the ITT market underpinned by reaccreditation of all providers. The proposals have been widely criticised by those working in ITT. In this paper, I argue that the goal of the reform is the right one – indeed the evidence is stronger than has been recognised – but that this could be better achieved by slightly different means. The paper also serves to clarify the nature and background to the policy debate for those who are less familiar with ITT in England.

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Highlights

- There is no good evidence one way or the other about the quality of existing initial teacher training (ITT) provision in England. Rather than arguing about the quality of existing provision, we should therefore focus instead on how it might be improved.
- Contrary to claims made by some ITT providers, the proposals made in the ITT Market Review do sit on a coherent theoretical foundation. There is also empirical research supporting this approach, including the proposal for a new 'intensive practice' placement.
- The government should announce additional funding in order to cover the additional costs involved in delivering the proposed reforms.
- The government should also create an independent body to review and update the ITT Core Content Framework and ITT Quality Requirements. This would neutralise concerns around academic freedom.
- A proposal is made for a two-step reaccreditation process, which would limit the risk of ITT providers pulling out of the market as a result of the reforms.

Why does this matter?

The policy proposals set out in the initial teacher training market review constitute a major overhaul of teacher training, with significant implications for the future supply and quality of teachers in England.

Policy context

Since the publication of the Carter review in 2015, teacher education/training in England has been undergoing major reform.¹ Central to this has been the introduction of the ‘Early Career Framework’, which has two components. First, it extends the induction period by providing teachers with a funded 5% reduction in timetabled teaching in the second year of employment (in addition to the existing 10% in their first year). Second, it provides access to in-school coaching for teachers across the first two years of employment. Taken together, this effectively extends the induction period for new teachers from two years (one training year and one in-school year) to three years.

Alongside this, the government has introduced new ‘core content frameworks’: minimum-entitlement, evidence-based curricula/syllabi endorsed by the Education Endowment Foundation, specifying what teachers should know and be able to do after their training year,² and after their first two years of employment as a teacher.³ Ofsted inspections of ITT providers already incorporate checks that they are covering this core content with all trainees.

These changes to initial teacher training have been accompanied by reforms to the National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) for more experienced educators, introducing new qualifications for specialist senior teachers (e.g. NPQ Leading Teacher Development), and reforming the existing qualifications for senior leaders, headteachers and executive heads. Each of these NPQs is also accompanied by a new core content framework (CCF).⁴ In sum, the whole system for teacher training in England - from qualification to retirement - has been overhauled within six years.

The ITT Market Review

In July, the government released the report from its review into how the ITT market can provide a sufficient supply of high-quality new teachers.⁵ The Review cites evidence from Ofsted research, collected during visits to 75 out of the 240 registered ITT providers during Spring 2021. This research found that less than half of the participating ITT providers could demonstrate they had incorporated the relevant CCF material into their ITT curricula, despite this having been a requirement since September 2020.⁶ In addition, Ofsted concluded that too many ITT mentors relied on trainees to let them know what they have already learned and what they wanted to work on next. In response to these criticisms, the Review recommended that “providers of ITT should develop an evidence-based training curriculum as a condition of accreditation which allows trainees to understand and apply the principles of the CCF in a controlled, cumulative and logical manner.”

The wording of this recommendation merits closer examination since it contains within it the main ideas and argument of the Review as a whole. First, the Review wants providers to develop an *evidence-based* curriculum, which includes the CCF in full, but should also include additional

evidence-based material chosen by providers. Second, the Review wants this curriculum to support trainees to *understand and apply* this material, through the integration of theory and practice. This contrasts with a situation in which theory is taught in the classroom and practice is done in placements - but the two remain largely disconnected. Third, the Review wants the curriculum to be *controlled and cumulative*, in that providers intentionally design the sequence in which knowledge and skills are learned so that foundational skills (e.g. basic behaviour management) are taught first and higher-order skills (e.g. facilitating class discussion) that depend on these lower-order skills are taught subsequently. Finally, the Review wants all of this to be a *condition of accreditation* such that nobody can provide ITT without first demonstrating they fulfil these criteria. To do so, the Review recommends a consolidation of ITT providers under a smaller number of ‘lead providers’.

Building on the aim that trainees be able to *understand and apply* evidence, the main practical innovation proposed by the Review is to introduce a new requirement for trainees to undergo 20 days of ‘intensive practice’. This differs from placements in that it involves ‘approximations of practice’ such as simulations or role plays, rather than teaching in real classrooms. This provides an opportunity to isolate specific skills, for mentors to provide immediate feedback integrated with the underlying theory, and for trainees to have the chance to rehearse the target skill based on this feedback. To ensure that ITT providers have the skills to provide intensive practice placements, each will need to have a ‘lead mentor’ who has completed the NPQ Leading Teacher Development, or a comparable qualification.

The sector’s response to the Review

The response to the Review from ITT providers has been largely negative. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have criticised it for undermining academic freedom by imposing a core curriculum/syllabus and for threatening HEI-school partnerships through the process of consolidating smaller providers into networks lead by larger ‘lead providers’.⁷ These concerns are exacerbated by a suspicion – building on the push toward school-led ITT between 2010 and 2015 – that government is trying to force many HEIs out of the market altogether.^{8 9} Meanwhile, many school-led ITT providers fear the autonomy that they gained by establishing their own provision will be undermined if they are forced to consolidate into networks lead by larger lead providers.¹⁰ Both HEI- and school-led ITT providers worry that the proposed timeline and lack of new funding for the additional 20 days of intensive practice make the proposals infeasible – thus threatening the supply of new teachers.¹¹

A weak argument against the ITT Market Review proposals

In general, providers have questioned the evidential basis for embarking on the reform in the first place. Many have cited survey data showing that 70-80% of teachers rate their training positively.¹² Others have cited data from Ofsted inspections showing that almost all ITT providers are rated ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by the inspectorate. Reviewing this and other evidence, the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Teaching Profession concluded in their report *If It Ain’t Broke, Handle with Care* that “there is no evidence that there is a substantial quality problem that justifies a significant change”.¹³

This argument is not convincing. Does 70-80% of teachers providing a positive evaluation of ITT suggest that it is good enough? Or does 20-30% of teachers not giving a positive evaluation suggest that ITT is not good enough? In any case, these surveys are conducted with serving teachers, which means that they underrepresent teachers whose training was insufficient to keep them in the profession. Similarly, Ofsted’s ITT inspection results have never been properly validated.¹⁴ By definition, that means that is unclear what resemblance Ofsted inspection grades bear to the true quality of the inspected courses.¹⁵

All this points to a more fundamental issue about evaluating the quality of existing provision. A sensible starting point for any research project is to think about the ideal data that would be required to answer the research question. In this case, we would want to collect nationwide teacher value-added data (on whatever metric) for recently qualified teachers. However, this data does not exist in England due to an agreement between government and the unions. We therefore cannot get a good measure the quality of existing ITT provision, or indeed validate the Ofsted ITT inspection process.

In sum, nobody currently knows how good or bad ITT in general is in England. Instead of asking ‘*Is ITT good enough*’ it might therefore be more productive to ask ‘*are there evidence-based ways of improving ITT?*’

Evaluating the evidence supporting the proposed reforms

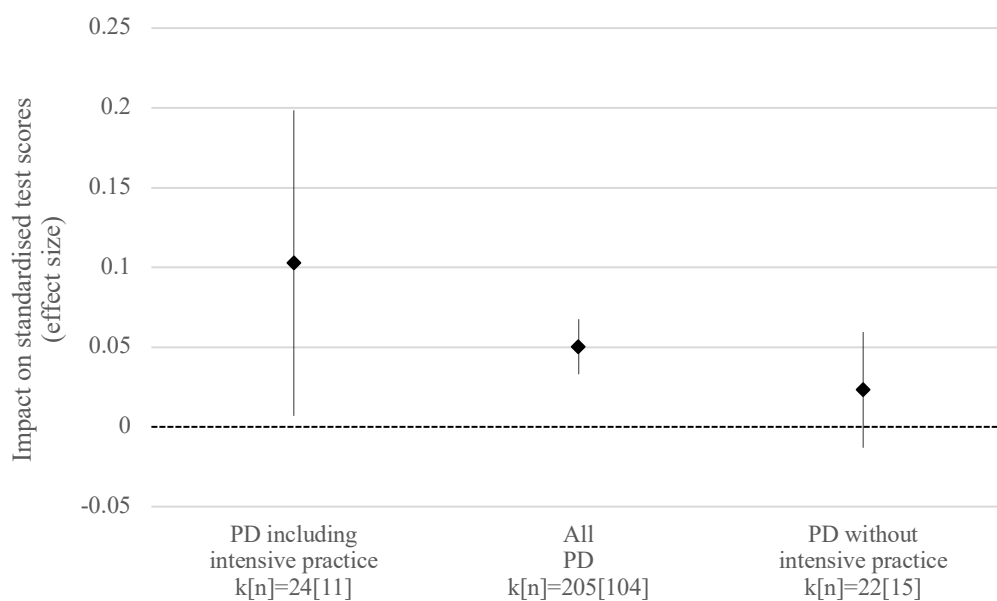
The University of Oxford’s response to the government consultation argues that the proposals made in the Review are “not based on any well-researched model of professional learning”. Likewise, the UCL Institute of Education’s response argued that the proposals represent a narrow “skills-based or technical approach to teacher education”.¹⁶ These objections are both poorly informed. The proposals in the ITT Market Review actually reflect the paradigm of *practice based teacher education (PBTE)*, on which there has been a proliferation of research over the last fifteen years.¹⁷ PBTE emphasises not just knowledge or just practice, but rather the “the use of that knowledge in practice”.¹⁸ Careful theoretical work and case study research has shown how it is possible to *integrate* theory and practice in such a way that respects the situated and sophisticated nature of teachers’ work.¹⁹ The

ITT Market Review reflects this in its recommendation that “theory and practice are integrated and interleaved at every stage” and in using concepts (e.g. decomposition, approximation) drawn from PBTE scholarship.²⁰

So the Review does sit on a coherent theoretical foundation. But what about empirical evidence? Ian Mearns, for example, has criticised the report for citing insufficient evidence in support of its proposals.²¹ I would tend to agree - indeed, the Review seems to understate the empirical evidence for its proposals. For example, there is now empirical (including experimental) evidence to support the value of PBTE approaches in helping trainee teachers use: ambitious instructional practices in English literature;²² theoretically informed classroom management practices;²³ and high-quality formative assessment.²⁴

Recent research on teacher professional development (PD) also supports the use of intensive practice sessions. Figure 1 shows the results of an original analysis of a comprehensive database of 104 randomised controlled trials testing the impact of PD. The vertical axis shows the impact on pupil standardised test scores. The leftmost plot ‘PD including intensive practice’ shows the average impact for all PD that includes the following components: isolating a specific skill to work on, mentors modelling that skill to the teacher, the teacher rehearsing the skill, and the mentor giving the teacher feedback based on observing their practice. The middle plot ‘All PD’ shows the average impact of PD. The rightmost plot ‘PD without intensive practice’ shows the average impact for the 15 studies that do not include *any* of the above-listed components of intensive practice. The average impact for ‘PD including intensive practice’ is .10 ($p=.03$); the average impact of ‘All PD’ is .05 ($p<.01$); and the average impact for ‘PD without intensive practice’ is .02 ($p=.18$). There are a number of important caveats and limitations to this analysis.²⁵ However, it strongly suggests that incorporating an intensive practice placement in early-career teacher training would result in improvements in teaching and learning.

Figure 1. Average impact of different types of PD on pupil test scores



Notes: Random effects meta-analysis using robust variance estimation. PD = professional development. k = number of effect sizes. n = number of separate experimental studies. Vertical bars are 95% confidence intervals. ‘PD without intensive practice’ comprises PD that incorporates zero of the four elements of intensive practice.

Some stronger criticisms of the ITT Market Review proposals

While the goals of the ITT Market Review are the right ones, there remain important concerns around the means of achieving them. These relate to timescales, academic freedom, and funding.

The Review proposes that all ITT providers be reaccredited during the 2021/22 academic year (AY), which would allow re-accredited providers to continue to recruit trainees during the 2022/23 AY and begin training this cohort in the 2023/24 AY.²⁶ This would require all 240 ITT providers to prepare the necessary paperwork within five months.²⁷ This timescale will be challenging for the sector, which has been working hard to maintain the trainee school placement system during the pandemic. The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) and others have suggested that the same realignment could be achieved through the existing Ofsted inspection cycle.²⁸ However, the DfE claims that the current six-year Ofsted ITT inspection cycle would be too slow – taking three times as long as their (two year) proposals.

The Review also recommends that incorporation of the CCF material becomes a condition of reaccreditation. The representative body for HEI ITT providers has expressed concerns that “The continued involvement of some universities in teacher education might be at risk if they are expected to slavishly follow and accept current and potentially time-limited DfE approved orthodoxies and deliver prescribed curricula.” The University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford have

threatened to stop providing ITT altogether.²⁹ This has already been picked up on in a *Telegraph* editorial, which provides some indication of how politically salient it would be.³⁰

The Review's proposals for a new intensive practice placement also have implications for funding. Under existing ITT provision, providers typically pay placement schools a fee to cover their costs in hosting trainees. Finding intensive practice placement schools would likely involve similar fees/costs for providers. In addition to this, the Review introduces new minimum requirements for course length, classroom teaching experience and mentor training – each of which have cost implications.³¹

These three criticisms are important. The issue around funding is particularly fundamental as no ITT provider can continue to deliver a loss-making course. For exactly this reason, it seems very likely that that government will announce additional funding for the reforms if they press ahead. In the next section of the paper, I set out a proposal designed to address the objections around timing and academic freedom. My goal is not to provide a philosophically pure argument derived from first principles, but rather to propose a pragmatic route forward that would be acceptable to all stakeholders while making good on the promise of the Review to ensure that all trainee teachers can benefit from evidence-based, practice-based teacher education.

A two-step approach to reaccreditation

During the 2021/22 academic year, the government should establish a new independent Initial Teacher Training Council (ITTC) with responsibility for accrediting all ITT in England. This would be staffed by appointees, chosen initially by civil servants, based on their record of published academic research in competitive journals. A proportion of appointees should be chosen based on their subject-specific expertise. The ITTC would inherit the existing ITT Core Content Framework and ITT Quality Requirements but would revise and update them as the evidence-base develops. Like the General Medical Council (GMC), the ITTC would accredit ITT providers against these standards. This should solve the academic freedom problem since no universities object to the GMC defining the core curriculum/syllabus for their medicine courses. The Oxford and Cambridge PGCE courses would therefore be saved.

The government should also announce in October of the 2021/22 AY that the largest 53 ITT partnership will need to submit materials for reaccreditation by 1st July 2022. This gives them nine months to submit their revised curricula and plans - twice as long as under the existing proposals and in line with what UCET say universities need to revise their courses.³² The ITTC would then inform them by September 1st whether they were allowed to recruit during the 2022/23 AY. The large providers that are reaccredited would then have one year to prepare for delivery of the realigned curriculum/syllabus starting in September 2023. These larger providers account for 70% of all

trainees, meaning the government would achieve a 70% realignment of ITT within the same timeframe (two years) as their existing proposals, but avoiding many of the risks of a potentially chaotic market consolidation in the process.

The government should also announce in October of the 2021/22 AY that the remaining 187 ITT partnerships will need to submit materials for reaccreditation by February 2023. This gives smaller providers 18 months to prepare their submissions – three times longer than under the current proposals. The ITTC would reaccredit smaller providers by September 2023 - allowing them to recruit during the 2023/24 AY and give them one year to prepare for delivery starting in September 2024/25. The smaller providers would therefore begin realigned delivery three years from now - one year later than under the government's current proposals.

Making good on the ITT Market Review

The proposals set out here will deliver on the goals of the ITT Market Review. This would be achieved within three years, which is almost as quick as the Review's proposals. However, the proposed two-step approach will give HEIs the time that UCET say they require to realign their courses, while also giving smaller providers far longer than under the Review's proposals. The two-step approach also negates the need for consolidation into provider networks, thus minimising disruption of existing partnerships and threats to supply. Likewise, by creating an independent institution to accredit against evidence-based standards, the proposed approach neutralises the risk of HEI providers pulling out of the market for reasons of academic freedom. Creating the ITTC would also put the process of updating the CCF and Quality Requirements for ITT on a sustainable footing, allowing the document to be updated as the evidence base develops. ITT providers could then be inspected against these evolving standards by Ofsted. This would be analogous to the existing setup in which ITT providers are inspected against the ECF – but with the standards set by an independent body of experts, rather than Ofsted themselves. It is doubtful that any of the stakeholders in this debate would agree with all of the proposals set out here. However, this compromise would likely be *accepted* by almost all parties, while also making good on the promise of the ITT Market Review to provide more effective, more evidence-based, more practice-based initial teacher training.

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- ¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carter-review-of-initial-teacher-training>
- ² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/974307/ITT_core_content_framework.pdf
- ³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/978358/Early-Career-Framework-April-2021.pdf
- ⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-professional-qualifications-frameworks-from-september-2021>
- ⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-report>
- ⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19/teaching-teachers-during-covid-19#fn:3>
- ⁷ <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/russell-group-response-to-the-itt-market-review/>
<https://www.cam.ac.uk/notices/news/statement-on-the-uk-government-initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-report>
<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/government-review-threatens-to-undermine-teacher-education/>
<https://www.ucet.ac.uk/13251/ucet-press-notice-the-dfe-market-review-proposals-22nd-july-2021>
- ⁸ https://schoolsweek.co.uk/itt-review-are-universities-heading-for-the-ex-itt/amp/?twitter_impression=true
- ⁹ <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/2021/08/13/this-is-no-time-for-a-mass-experiment-on-teacher-education/#more-11611>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/nasbtt-response-to-the-initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-consultation/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/nasbtt-response-to-the-initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-consultation/>
<https://www.ucet.ac.uk/13251/ucet-press-notice-the-dfe-market-review-proposals-22nd-july-2021>
- ¹² <https://www.ucet.ac.uk/13251/ucet-press-notice-the-dfe-market-review-proposals-22nd-july-2021>
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/738037/NQT_2017_survey.pdf
- ¹³ <https://appgteachingcom.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/21.06.30-report-of-the-ite-sig-to-the-appg-on-the-teaching-profession-jmc4.pdf>
- ¹⁴ The closest Ofsted have come is the research reported in this document
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-curriculum-research>
- ¹⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2515245920952393>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2021/aug/ioe-responds-itt-market-review-consultation>
- ¹⁷ This has largely been in the US.
- ¹⁸ Grossman, P. (Ed.). (2021). *Teaching core practices in teacher education*. Harvard Education Press.
- ¹⁹ Kazemi, E., Ghouseini, H., Cunard, A., & Turrou, A. C. (2016). Getting inside rehearsals: Insights from teacher educators to support work on complex practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 67(1), 18-31.
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- ²⁰ Grossman, P. (Ed.). (2021). *Teaching core practices in teacher education*. Harvard Education Press.
- ²¹ <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/itt-review-does-government-want-a-market-or-a-monopoly/>
- ²² Kavanagh, S. S., & Rainey, E. C. (2017). Learning to support adolescent literacy: Teacher educator pedagogy and novice teacher take up in secondary English language arts teacher preparation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(5), 904-937.
- ²³ Cohen, J., Wong, V., Krishnamachari, A., & Berlin, R. (2020). Teacher coaching in a simulated environment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 42(2), 208-231.
- ²⁴ Cohen, J., & Wiseman, E. (2019). *Approximating complex practice: Teacher simulation of text-based discussion*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Denver, CO.
- ²⁵ For a discussion, see: Sims, S. et al. (2021) *What are the characteristics of teacher professional development that increases pupil achievement? A systematic review and meta-analysis*. Education Endowment Foundation.
- ²⁶ Providers have to advertise the new content to students at the time of application under CMA regulations
<https://www.ucet.ac.uk/downloads/13250-UCET-Market-Review-Response-%28July-2021%29.pdf>
- ²⁷ <https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NASBTTs-Response-to-the-Initial-Teacher-Training-ITT-Market-Review-Consultation-July->

[2021.pdf?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NASBTT%E2%80%99s+Response+to+the+Initial+Teacher+Training+%28ITT%29+Market+Review+Consultation](#)

²⁸ [https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NASBTTs-Response-to-the-Initial-Teacher-Training-ITT-Market-Review-Consultation-July-](https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/NASBTTs-Response-to-the-Initial-Teacher-Training-ITT-Market-Review-Consultation-July-2021.pdf?utm_source=mailpoet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NASBTT%E2%80%99s+Response+to+the+Initial+Teacher+Training+%28ITT%29+Market+Review+Consultation)

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²⁹ https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/news/downloads/itt_review_download/2108121145-Consultation-response-announcement.pdf

<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/government-review-threatens-to-undermine-teacher-education/>

³⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2021/07/08/interfering-teacher-training-has-stirred-hornets-nest/>

³¹ See Table 1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-overview>

³² <https://www.ucet.ac.uk/downloads/13250-UCET-Market-Review-Response-%28July-2021%29.pdf>

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