



The National Association of
School-Based Teacher Trainers

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NASBTT responds to *Improving the way Ofsted inspects education* consultation, and details “area of concern” for “underdeveloped” ITE inspection toolkit

The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) has published its “considered response” to the [Improving the way Ofsted inspects education](#) consultation. The consultation, which ran for 12 weeks from February, sought views on Ofsted’s proposed reforms to inspecting early years, state-funded schools, non-association independent schools, further education and skills, and initial teacher education (ITE).

NASBTT’s submission to the online consultation, especially in relation to ITE inspections starting in January 2026, was drafted in consultation with its full membership. The charity, whose members include School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, Teaching School Hubs, Higher Education Institutions involved in schools-led teacher training and a range of other organisations engaged in the education and professional development of teachers, also provided a closely annotated version of the ITE Inspection Toolkit, the result of work undertaken by members of its Trustees Board and Member Council.

Whilst welcoming a number of commitments and proposed changes from Ofsted around ITE inspections, including: its emphasis on professional dialogue throughout all phases of the inspection process and collaborative approach; the removal of single or two-word overall judgements; the move away from a deep-dive methodology to facilitate inspection, tailored to the provider’s context and self-evaluation; the intention for inspectors to gather evidence to demonstrate that provision is ‘secure’ and then look to evidencing whether particular (or all) evaluation areas are ‘strong’, and the common evaluation areas, NASBTT raised concerns about the definition proposed for ‘Exemplary’: (highest quality provision) – *“a provider where all evaluation areas are graded as at least secure and, within an evaluation area that is consistently strong, there is a feature of practice that could be considered as exemplary”*.

In its covering letter to Sir Martyn Oliver, His Majesty's Chief Inspector, NASBTT wrote: “This indicates that being evaluated as exemplary is not expected to be possible across all or multiple areas of focus – a departure from previous frameworks where, in the ITE sector, high proportions of providers were found to be consistently ‘Outstanding’ (54% in 2024). We do argue, however, that this is not, as badged, a five-point scale. It is, actually, a four-point scale or 4+ as mentioned in the consultation (Strong, Secure, Attention Needed, Causing Concern) with Exemplary being reserved for carefully moderated ‘standout’ aspects of practice.” The letter went on to highlight **NASBTT’s principle area of concern: The ITE inspection toolkit as presented for consultation**. This is set out as follows:

- The use of language to demonstrate progression across the four evaluation grades appears to be underdeveloped and, at times, imprecise – for example, in key areas there is an over-reliance on subjective terms which unless they are clarified will lead to potentially unacceptable variations in interpretation.

- There is evidence of ‘unrefined drafting’ with aspects which are difficult to recognise for those of us ‘steeped’ in the world of primary and secondary phase ITE – for example the layout of the toolkit looks as though there was an original intention to ‘roll’ a common definition for Causing Concern as is the case for Exemplary. This looks to have been lost in the development process; it is difficult to follow the progression statements (across the toolkit) from ‘Causing Concern’ to Strong’.
- Some descriptors and the intended progression between them are likely to confuse users of the toolkit – this is particularly the case with three evaluation areas: Inclusion, Teaching and Achievement – we believe that unchecked this could lead to unintended consequences.
- The significance of the role of mentors (and programme tutors) does not appear to feature on a consistent basis throughout the toolkit; this is explained, partly, by the unhelpful reference to ‘teachers’ rather than the terminology well understood across our sector: teacher educators, mentors, co-ordinators, programme tutors.
- Taken as a cumulative whole, the descriptors for Causing Concern highlight such bad practice as to represent inadequacy rather than ‘cause for concern’. It seems unlikely that ITE (certainly those involved with primary and secondary phase provision) will fall into this category. We are aware of examples of such bad practice being reported previously in relation to aspects of the ITTFE sector. As argued earlier, this raises the question of whether the toolkit for ITE is an evaluation tool across a 4+ scale on a genuine basis.
- The reference throughout the toolkit to what we are used to calling ‘descriptors’ as ‘standards’. This is unfortunate given that in ITE we undertake final assessment of all trainee teachers against the Teachers’ Standards which has the potential to lead to unintended confusion.

Reflecting on the response to the Ofsted consultation, NASBTT CEO Emma Hollis said: “We are really pleased to have the opportunity to offer our considered response to the proposals set out in *Improving the way Ofsted inspects education*, especially in relation to ITE inspections. The concerns outlined above arise from our close analysis of the ITE inspection toolkit which we have offered in our detailed response to that. It is unfortunate that the ITE toolkit was released in such an underdeveloped state. Currently, it presents very much as a ‘Pre-Consultation’ piece of work, and more widely we need to ensure that Ofsted’s proposed five-point scale does not head unintentionally towards a driving test-style evaluation. We stand ready to work with Ofsted colleagues to help to redraft the toolkit for ITE so that it fully meets their stated aim of improving how Ofsted inspects this important sector and ‘to take any mystery out of inspection’. We look forward to discussing these issues with Ofsted in greater detail.”

NASBTT’s responses to the specific questions set out in *Improving the way Ofsted inspects education* can be viewed [here](#).

-ENDS-

The National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) represents the interests of schools-led teacher training provision in relation to the development and implementation of national policy developments. Our members include School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers, Teaching School Hubs, Higher Education Institutions involved in schools-led teacher training and a range of other organisations engaged in the education and professional development of teachers. We currently have more than 177 members, including 100% of the SCITT sector, representing over 10,000 individual trainees and their mentors. NASBTT is a

registered charity committed to promoting high quality schools-led programmes of training, education and professional development of teachers.

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