

NASBTT response to Public Accounts Committee inquiry on Increasing teacher numbers: Secondary and further education

About NASBTT

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.

Context for response

NASBTT is seeking to provide an informed, and present day, contribution to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry on *Increasing teacher numbers: Secondary and further education*. As the voice for school-based ITT we have decided to focus our response on secondary education only. To inform this submission, we issued a survey to our members (inviting contributions from secondary SCITTs, 34 responses received) in April/May 2025. The following sections present our summary findings in three areas.

Key findings/ideas

Q1. What are your views, generally, on the workforce required in secondary education and ensuring there are sufficient teachers in the classroom?

1. Inequitable and Unstable Bursary System

- Unequal bursaries across subjects encourage applicants to pursue teaching in areas they are not qualified for, simply to receive financial support.
- Fluctuating bursary values (e.g. English bursaries dropping from £10k to £5k) create uncertainty and delay applications.
- STEM trainees often receive tax-free bursaries, making their take-home pay better than Early Career Teachers (ECTs), creating resentment among mentors and disparities in pay.

2. Loss of Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE)

- Loss of funded SKEs has negatively impacted the recruitment of subject-specialist teachers, especially in English and STEM.
- Many applicants now apply outside their subject expertise, driven by financial incentive rather than passion or qualification.

3. Recruitment and Retention Crisis

- Recruitment efforts have stagnated, and retention is poor: many trainees do not stay in the profession long-term.
- High workload, lack of flexibility, and low morale are major deterrents to teacher retention.
- There is regional and subject-specific variation in shortages, especially acute in secondary STEM and English.

4. Funding and Budget Constraints

- Schools are underfunded and often cannot afford to hire new ECTs, instead opting for more experienced teachers, which limits opportunities for trainees.
- Mentorship capacity is declining due to staff shortages, sickness, and increased workload.
- Chronic underfunding has led to redundancies and restricted training placement opportunities.

5. Profession's Image and Public Perception

- Teaching lacks prestige and is not viewed as a "true profession" like law or banking.
- Negative media portrayal, simplistic government advertising, and emphasis on accountability (e.g. Ofsted, GCSE results) harm the profession's image.
- There is a need for more positive public narratives around teaching and to treat it with greater professional respect.

6. Structural and Systemic Issues

- Recruitment and policy decisions are seen as top-down, often made by those with no real classroom experience.
- Government's short-term reactive policies ("bandwagon effects") undermine long-term planning and consistency.
- Decision-making should include teachers, TAs, and school leaders who understand the reality on the ground.

7. Generation Z Expectations

- New entrants to the profession want greater flexibility, competitive pay, and better work-life balance.
- The profession's traditional reliance on "moral purpose" is insufficient to attract Gen Z.
- Need to adapt to changing workforce attitudes, including addressing mental health and burnout.

8. Solutions and Suggestions

- Reinstate fully funded SKEs for all subjects.
- Offer basic bursaries and free training for all teacher trainees, regardless of subject or phase.
- Provide salaried training routes with lighter teaching timetables to ease trainees into the profession.
- Redirect some bursary funding to support mentor training and retention.
- Treat teaching as a strategic national priority, ensuring sustained and realistic funding for schools and teacher development.

Q2. What has been the impact of Government decision-making on where to invest or intervene to address need in increasing teacher numbers in secondary? How should this evolve going forward? What are the main ideas you have?

1. Bursary Consistency and Equity:

- Bursary payments need to be consistent across years, but variations in payment amounts between subjects feel inequitable, implying that certain subjects are more valued than others. For instance, the lower bursary for biology compared to chemistry and physics is seen as nonsensical, as many science teachers teach all three subjects.
- The removal of SKE courses in certain subjects, particularly mid-year, has made it difficult for candidates to progress with ITT, especially for small ITT providers who cannot offer internal support for subject knowledge enhancement.

2. Challenges for Small ITT Providers

- Smaller ITT providers struggle with limited resources, especially in providing support for trainees with complex needs or disabilities. Larger providers have more capacity due to dedicated departments and funding, such as Disability and Student Support.
- There is also frustration with the current placement system, where schools are expected to offer placements at no cost to the government. This can limit recruitment for smaller providers when all available placements are filled.

3. Bursary Effectiveness and Concerns

- While high bursaries attract more applicants to certain shortage subjects, some applicants view the bursary as a temporary salary and may leave teaching after a year or work abroad. This undermines the goal of creating long-term retention in the profession.
- The bursary system sometimes attracts candidates who are more interested in the financial incentive than in teaching, which may lead to lower-quality applicants, particularly in terms of subject knowledge. There is also concern about a mismatch between bursary amounts and starting salaries for new teachers, with some reporting that their post-training salary (M1) is lower than the bursary they received.
- Suggestions include rewarding teachers who stay in education with additional bursary payments in later years (e.g., years 3 and 5) and ensuring the maximum bursary never exceeds a new teacher's annual take-home pay.

4. Alternative Funding Models

- A more equitable approach to bursaries is suggested, with all trainees receiving a standard amount, and specific financial support for STEM subjects due to teacher shortages.
- Some propose that bursaries should be used to attract qualified candidates with the right subject knowledge, such as requiring at least an A-level in the subject as a minimum qualification.
- Instead of relying on bursaries, some advocate for removing tuition fees entirely for teacher training and having the government cover the cost. This would alleviate financial barriers for those wanting to train as teachers, especially for candidates from less privileged backgrounds.

5. Retention and Support for Teachers

- More focus is needed on teacher retention, not just recruitment. Suggestions include offering "golden handshakes" after five years or student loan forgiveness to encourage teachers to stay in the profession.
- The importance of mentorship in schools is highlighted, with mentors needing time and capacity to properly support trainees. Mentorship quality could significantly improve trainee outcomes.
- Flexible working conditions and better working conditions overall are suggested as ways to improve teacher retention.

6. Government Policy and Decision Making

- Criticism is directed at the government's decision-making in the past 10-15 years, with policies often lacking clarity and consistency. There is also concern that the recent changes in government have not significantly improved recruitment figures, and the focus seems to be on short-term financial incentives rather than long-term strategic solutions.
- Calls for clear, actionable steps from the government are evident, particularly in addressing teacher shortages, rebranding the profession, and restoring trust in teaching as a respected career.

7. Alternative Teacher Training Models

- Some ITT providers suggest restructuring the application process so that trainees only have three choices, with the first offer being mandatory. This would reduce time wasted on multiple interviews and indecision, which frustrates schools and providers.
- There is also mention of exploring apprenticeship models, where candidates earn a salary while training, as a viable option to increase the pool of potential teachers.

8. The Role of Financial Support in Teacher Training

- While bursaries have helped attract more trainees in shortage subjects, the system is viewed as unfair, with some subjects receiving significantly higher bursaries than others. Some advocate for a fairer, more equal financial support system that ensures access to teacher training for everyone, regardless of their subject choice or financial background.

Q3. How do you assess progress in addressing recruitment and retention issues in secondary? What else can be done to meet teacher workforce needs?

1. Recruitment and Retention Issues

- There remains a significant gap in recruitment. The difficulty in attracting and retaining teachers is compounded by a lack of commitment from applicants, poor funding, and the mismatch between teachers' expectations and the reality of the profession.

2. Flexibility and Work Conditions

- There is a strong call for increased flexibility in the profession, such as more flexible working hours or remote work, though the practicality of this in schools is debated. Better work-life balance is seen as essential for addressing workload and wellbeing.

3. Training and Professional Development

- More personalised professional development and better training programs for teachers, particularly in supporting underperforming applicants. The importance of alumni networks and mentoring in providing ongoing support is also highlighted.

4. Bursaries and Funding

- There is uncertainty around the effectiveness of current bursary systems, with suggestions for alternative funding models, such as reduced tuition fees topped up by the government. There is also a concern that funding for ITT and career development, like National Professional Qualifications, is insufficient.

5. Support for Schools

- Schools are underfunded, in general, making it difficult to support teacher recruitment and retention. The need for more funding to provide better pay, better training, and more flexibility is emphasised.

6. Perception of Teaching

- The image of teaching is again criticised for being undervalued compared to other graduate professions. There is a need for a cultural shift, better promotion of the teaching profession, and better recognition of teachers' roles and responsibilities.

Suggestions for improvement include more targeted recruitment campaigns, focusing on subject-specific CPD, spreading bursary rewards over time, providing sabbaticals for travel or volunteering, and ensuring the quality of applicants.

In addition to this new evidence from ITT providers, we also offer an updated, secondary education-focused, version of our manifesto [The Future of Initial Teacher Training: How can](#)

[we attract more people to the teaching profession and support school-based ITT providers to deliver high-quality training?](#), published in July 2024.

Introduction

Teacher supply is in crisis with the government missing its own ITT recruitment targets for the last decade, and now all eyes are on what actions the Labour government will take to address the worsening picture. **A manifesto for change is definitely needed.**

Looking at the latest figures, NFER's [Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2025](#) reports:

- Recruitment to ITT has been persistently below target in most secondary subjects since the pandemic and the latest data shows no change.
- Secondary ITT recruitment in 2024/25 reached 62% of what DfE estimated it needed to meet the demand from schools. This was slightly higher than the previous year, however the increases were mainly due to bursary changes in some shortage subjects, rather than a widespread increase in interest in teaching.
- 12/17 subjects recruited below target last year, continuing the post-pandemic trend of severe under-recruitment for secondary. Trainee recruitment for all except five secondary subjects was below the respective target in 2024/25 and NFER's latest forecast for 2025/26 shows only five subjects have a reasonable chance of recruiting at or above target. Slight improvements to recruitment last year were limited to a few shortage subjects – such as biology and chemistry – driven mostly by higher bursaries.

[School workforce in England](#) data published in June 2024 (the next round of data is due to June 2025) also showed the teaching workforce grew by less than 300 teachers in 2023 as record low numbers of newly-qualified staff entered the profession and numbers quitting continued to rise. The number of FTE teachers leaving for reasons other than retirement or death remains at a record high of 39,971 – a rate of 8.8%.

Debate and discussion on 'why' this is happening has ranged from teacher pay, with private sector wages outstripping public sector wages, to the lack of flexibility compared to other graduate jobs, with solutions posed including offering a salary to all trainees and bursaries for all subjects not reaching their recruitment targets.

This goes beyond ECTs, but we see a need to **revisit the Recruitment and Retention Strategy and co-design with the sector a new “Retention Strategy”** (with a deliberate focus on retention and not recruitment here) to provide a clear strategic direction which all future policy should then fall out of in terms of what schools then do. Everything feels so disparate that without an overarching strategic steer on the direction of travel for the sector, there is a serious danger that policy continues to focus on individual problems in isolation from one another.

It has also been **an extremely challenging and difficult time for school-based teacher training providers**, with the ITT market review and reaccreditation process being all-consuming. The consequence is that we have lost a significant number of high-quality providers. Incredibly, these included many who have been judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, the government's own measure of quality provision. However, **school-based ITT providers remain stoic in their commitment to recruiting more teachers** – supporting their trainees, and the children they teach – and whilst this does not immediately help schools needing teachers today, the question is exactly 'how' the government will approach this to meet the needs of the education system in the longer term.

Our [Autumn 2024 ITT insights survey](#) captured mixed emotions among providers about the new government – hope for greater stability and positive change alongside ongoing concerns about teacher shortages, funding pressures, and the pace of reform. Common themes include scepticism about whether ambitious recruitment targets can be met, as well as challenges surrounding workload and clarity on key policy areas. Nevertheless, complex issues require nuanced, solutions-focused approaches.

So, drawing on our own consultation with NASBTT members on what is missing from current ITT recruitment policy, we outline **five (updated) solution-focused asks that this government should consider as their focus**.

Our asks

1. Make teacher training affordable to everyone

Teacher pay, which often gets the most attention in discussion around teacher supply, is not the only problem. **All candidates must be able to afford to train as a teacher in the first place.** This is critical for the talent pipeline, and also increasing the diversity of applicants.

In our [Autumn 2023 ITT insights survey](#), NASBTT members were invited to suggest what was missing from current ITT recruitment proposals and what would make the biggest difference. **Bursaries upon application was the main suggestion.** Others included government subsidies to reduce tuition fees for all trainees, exploring fee grants during the training year, and responding to cost-of-living increases facing trainees through their programme.

Prior to the election, the Conservative government believed that bursaries exert the strongest influence on teacher recruitment. Bursaries are a key policy tool used to attract more people to enter teacher training, particularly for high-priority subjects that might otherwise struggle to recruit enough teachers. New bursaries targeting a wider range of subjects will always be welcomed but we would argue that these are not always targeted correctly and advocate for a **more nuanced approach by subject and region**.

With partners, we have also modelled teacher student loan reimbursement (TSLR), policy whereby the government pays back the amount of money paid by teachers in the previous financial year for their student loan repayments. The publication of NFER's analysis considering the cost effectiveness of a new TSLR scheme as one policy option that could be a beneficial tool for encouraging more teachers to remain in the profession is therefore a huge step forward in making the case for a serious policy discussion around that. The full findings can be read in NFER's report, *Policy analysis of student loan reimbursements for improving teacher retention*, which can be viewed [here](#).

In addition, we propose that DfE may wish to consider hardship funding for all trainees to apply for help with costs. This could be managed through providers under existing grant funding agreements.

In summary, we ask for:

- Bursaries for all upon application.
- Consideration of student loan reimbursement for new teachers working in state schools.
- Hardship funding for those in need.

2. Tackle public perceptions about teaching

Targets to recruit new teachers to fill vacancies and skills gaps across the profession are, of course, to be expected – but this must be part of a longer-term vision for increasing the

competitiveness of the teaching profession via pay and other financial incentives, and tackling public perceptions about teaching and the work of a teacher. There is also the bigger issue: the funding of the profession for schools and the teaching profession, **that teachers are having to 'do more with 'less'**, and schools being required, increasingly, to run at a deficit model.

From our perspective, however, we need to think beyond today – and make the case for **what education (and ITT within that) should look like in 10 years' time**. The sector needs to look at the future of education in a more strategic, long-term way and counter the current political football approach to education. Reacting to the policy landscape, and constant chopping and changing of political leaders, is a significant contributor to workload in the teaching profession.

We therefore advocate for a **long-term cross-party vision** for the sector, and a process for getting there, and we would argue this should be established and remain regardless of who is leading the country. Having something that reduces, significantly, the amount of politicking from education could be the way forward to both tackling public perceptions about teaching and make education a highly attractive profession.

In addition, although we know why people want to become teachers, we need to understand **why young people are not considering or choosing a career in teaching** – and use the evidence from that to inform action. This would be a major step forward. **DfE should commission research into why undergraduates are not choosing teaching as a career option**, rather than relying on research which focuses on those that do.

Proposals for additional classroom hours for pupils, for example, are unlikely to be feasible given existing workload pressure; schools need to be funded and staffed adequately before any policy change is introduced. Recruitment and retention issues are going to need to be resolved and the workforce stabilised before we can reasonably expect schools to be able to provide the resource for pupils to study more subjects, requiring more teachers.

In summary, we ask for:

- An inspirational 10-year vision for education (and the role of ITT within that).
- Research to understand why young people are not considering/choosing teaching, with evidence to inform vision and practical action.
- A commitment to ensuring appropriate funding is provided to schools and the teaching profession.

3. Incentivise schools to engage in ITT

Overall, we call for greater support from the government to incentivise schools to engage in ITT. Specific suggestions in our [Autumn 2023 ITT insights survey](#) **included dedicated funding to support schools with ITT**, but this could also potentially work as a reward scheme.

In the short to medium term, schools and multi-academy trusts must be required to open their doors to trainee teachers, not just when they are recruiting new teachers but in **supporting their training right from the start**, including **mandating all schools to provide placements** (another specific prominent challenge). Currently this relies purely on the willingness of individual schools to engage in ITT and **if every school took the option not to engage in ITT there would be no teachers**. If they do not engage, we will be faced in the future with a teacher recruitment crisis of even greater proportions.

Our [Spring 2024 ITT insights survey](#) highlights concerns over implementation of the ITTECF and the new apprenticeship route into teaching for non-graduates, which also require engagement from schools, and potentially mean extra strain on already-stretched provision.

We could consider offering teacher retention bonuses to all those who complete the ITTECF. However, awarding a lump sum at the point of completion may come too early in a teacher's career to have a meaningful impact. A more effective approach might be to spread the bonus across years three, four, and five of the pay progression scale, aligning it with annual salary increases. This would encourage early-career teachers to remain in the profession through the most challenging initial years, allowing them to benefit fully from the framework. By the time they complete the Early Career Framework, the promise of continued financial incentives would help motivate them to stay in teaching and continue to grow in their third year and beyond.

A focus on retention, even prioritising this over recruitment at least in the short term, would definitely lessen the need to recruit so many teachers going forward, but overall there are not currently enough teachers in the system.

In summary, we ask for:

- A reward scheme to incentivise schools to fully engage in ITT.
- Early career retention bonuses for teachers over years three, four and five.
- Mandatory teacher training placements.

4. Mentoring capacity: introduce a Teacher Professional Development Lead

With in-school **mentoring capacity one of the greatest barriers to effective ITT provision**, we call for the introduction of a fully-funded Teacher Professional Development Lead, such as we see in every school in the role of SENDCO. Mentoring has always been a vitally important part of training teachers (both those new to the profession and those progressing through their careers) but recent policy changes have brought the centrality of this role into sharper focus.

For example, schools need to have a highly skilled mentoring team to meet the demands of the ITT quality requirements for 2024 and the new ITTECF – and, in doing so, develop skilled teachers to boost pupil outcomes. To help schools do this, a lead mentor role has been introduced with up to £25 million funding available to schools and providers in the 2024-25 academic year to allow mentors time off timetable to access high-quality training.

To achieve these ambitions, we advocate for the introduction of a Teacher Professional Development Lead (or similar title) to ensure that mentoring becomes an integral part of every school. They would take **responsibility for upskilling the whole workforce on mentorship**, just as a safeguarding lead upskills staff on their responsibilities under safeguarding regulations.

The Teacher Professional Development Lead **should be a funded role**, which includes time away from the classroom. The senior leaders occupying this role would be **highly skilled practitioners, with a deep understanding of teacher CPD, mentoring and coaching**, and would be responsible for managing the ring-fenced time and funding that every teacher in their school should (under our asks) be entitled to.

By **introducing the skills of mentorship across whole staff bodies**, the capacity issues which have been playing out for individual mentors – who are often shouldering full responsibility for being trained and delivering high-quality mentoring – can be shared across the school, with **every member of the team in turn playing an important role in supporting teachers** (particularly those new to the profession) to flourish.

In summary, we ask for:

- A funded Teacher Professional Development Lead in every school.
- Ringfenced time away from the classroom to make a genuine difference to mentoring and support the ITT quality requirements and ITTECF.
- Through this role, the development of a clear pathway to upskill the teacher workforce in the essential skills for effective mentoring.

5. Flexible working: less talk, more action

We need to **close the gap between current approaches to flexible working** and the demand for more innovative approaches that **we know the next generation has come to expect**. The whole issue of flexible working in schools, including discussion around a four-day working week, has risen to the fore given the ongoing teacher recruitment crisis. In a sector struggling to recruit enough teachers at present, more **flexible approaches to working may help make the profession more attractive to potential teachers**.

As organisations start to embrace the opportunity to work more flexibly, there are **clear and obvious barriers to schools** being able to replicate this practice within our working environment. But with the proven benefits to productivity, wellbeing and retention, it is vital that the education sector feels empowered and confident to **pursue bold and ambitious plans** to create a flex-working environment for current and future staff.

In our [Summer 2023 ITT insights survey](#), 89% of ITT providers told us they think that **greater opportunities for flexible working would attract more applicants to the sector** – it is also an acknowledged factor in retention.

With the DfE-funded [Flexible Working in Multi-Academy Trusts and Schools](#) (FWAMS) project team, NASBTT is seeking to inform, empower and **support providers in implementing flexi-working approaches in ITT**. We are working alongside DfE to raise awareness, support ITT providers in making changes, and highlight research. We want to design realistic and supportive guidance to providers who are interested in developing a flexi-approach, and create an accessible report with advice and guidance that is tailored towards ITT and not just schools in general. **Over time, we will work with existing FWAMS institutions to gain the very latest insight and best practice models** to support ITT providers in the implementation of projects.

Whilst direct policy change is not the purpose of the FWAMS project, a clear step forward is to outline the key principles of a flexi-working approach to providers to try to support teacher recruitment and retention.

In summary, we ask for:

- Flexible working expectations to be met.
- ITT providers and schools to be supported in implementing flexi-working approaches.
- The impact on recruitment, retention and wellbeing to be monitored/reported.

Conclusion

Today, as we know, the English state school system faces significant challenges, including teacher shortages, high attrition rates, and low morale. Addressing these issues requires innovative, collaborative, and long-term solutions. We recognise the challenging financial situation the government faces, but we also strongly believe that the previous government's approach to the recruitment (and retention) crisis has exhausted the majority of 'obvious' policy levers, yet made no progress in solving the issues.

Teacher training needs to be affordable and free to everyone – this should be our mandate. It is scarcely believable that we are asking people to work in state schools in this country, teaching our children, to take on debt to do that. **Training should be paid for as long as teachers remain in state education.** If they choose to leave to go into the private sector or somewhere else, the cost of training should be repayable.

This government's commitment to recruit 6,500 new expert teachers, and where these are coming from, is viewed with scepticism. However, **we are clear we must work to a position to fully fund all teacher training programmes directly through government support.** If teaching is important to society (as surely it must be), then why should we ask trainees to take on debt in order to be able to do it? Whilst we cannot perfectly model the cost of that, as it is a bold move and one that has never been done before, it would signal to the world that the government believes teaching to be so important that they will 'put their money where their mouth is' and fund it. In return, we might raise the bar for entry to the profession to ensure world-class quality.

The five proposals outlined in our original and updated manifesto should be our focus for inspiring a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce. However, there is a **bigger discussion needed on the purpose of education.** Secondary school teachers are generally excited by the opportunity to deliver the subject they are passionate about – yet they end up number crunching and dealing with a host of other issues.

At the present time, due to **the closure of wraparound services, schools are taking on ever wider roles**, meaning that we are asking teachers to be social workers and mental health professionals alongside a whole other host of roles outside of teaching. This state of affairs is not going to attract people to, and keep people in, the profession. If, as a society, we expect schools to take on a broader role then a **fundamental re-evaluation of the system needs to take place** and schools will need to be funded and staffed differently. So **the bigger question we need to be asking in partnership with government is: What is school for? Is it solely for education or something wider? In either case, training, funding and staffing needs to reflect what we really want from schools and our teachers.**

Related articles

- Emma Hollis, Tes, [25 years of ITT: what's better, what's not, and where we go next](#), February 2025.
- Emma Hollis, Schools Week, [‘Trainers still bang the teaching drum, no matter how broken they are’](#), March 2025.
- Emma Hollis, Education Business, [Attracting and retaining talent in the workforce](#) (see pages 15-21), April 2025
- Derek Boyle, Bromley Schools Collegiate, [Invest in teacher training, an invitation to the Government](#), March 2025
- Polly Butterfield-Tracey, KMT, Training [Rewarding the heart of Initial Teacher Training – how can we incentivise schools to engage in ITT?](#), March 2025
- Alison Fletcher, [Tackling public perceptions about teaching, and some reasons for “cautious optimism”](#), April 2025.