



The National Association of
School-Based Teacher Trainers



What next for Initial Teacher Education and Training?

This briefing paper is intended as a provocation to inform discussions among stakeholders in Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET), hosted by the UCL IOE Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research and the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers.

The question ‘What next for Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET)?’ may seem unsympathetic to the need for stability in a sector that has experienced extensive change in recent years and is still managing ongoing transformation arising from the [Market Review](#) (DfE 2021) and evolving [Frameworks](#) for the development of new teachers. Yet the question could not be more timely.

It is not the purpose of this paper to rehearse the comprehensive evidence related to teacher attrition and the difficulties of attracting new teachers to the profession (e.g. [DfE 2024](#)). There is ample evidence that the trends are persistent ([NFER, 2024](#)). This does not however mean that they are inevitable. It is important to challenge a growing tendency to normalise perceptions of teaching as a career that is not sufficiently attractive for ‘Gen Z’¹ compared with other occupations that are more flexible and well-paid, while being less stressful and offering a better work-life balance. Such a view dangerously suggests the inevitability of teaching not being attractive to new entrants because of an incompatibility with contemporary social and demographic reality - the changing life choices of people in their twenties and thirties.

There is much to be gained by looking closely at the realities of what it is like to learn to teach in contemporary conditions in our system and take a bold view of what might be done differently. Life choices made by new teachers are not only informed on a comparative ‘appeal’ basis with other graduate professions. That simplifies the state of things. Their choices are informed by the nature of everyday life in schools, as they come to understand and evaluate what it is to do the job itself. Productive change needs to be based on a deepened understanding of the relationship new teachers have with the work they are learning to undertake. If what they learn does not confirm

¹ Members of the generation of people commonly characterised as born between the mid-1990s and mid-2010s.

the intrinsic worthwhileness of teaching itself, compensatory measures are unlikely to be effective. Changes to pay and contracts remain a political challenge, but are not the entirety of the solution.

So, what makes being a teacher worthwhile? How can that be made a reality in the early stages of a career? How is the worthwhileness and pleasure of teaching experienced by those who are learning to teach?

Remedies at policy level to address recruitment and retention in ITET have involved widely varied forms of strategic support for those learning to teach, including: financial incentives such as training bursaries; extended mentoring entitlements; pathways for career changers; and systematic frameworks for core programme provision. Future strategies impacting on new entrants and aimed at wider support for teachers include more [flexible working](#) and using [AI](#) to relieve some forms of workload. While all of these can play a role in making teaching more attractive, the fundamental issues are not being addressed. That is because, too often, support is geared towards shorter-term incentives to increase enrolment for ITET, or prioritises compensatory approaches to supporting new teachers to cope.

The problems through a different lens

A focus on innovation looks at the process of becoming a teacher through a different lens, one which identifies what might be the most productive priorities for change. This may necessitate pursuing ideas that have been under-explored or under-estimated and which offer alternative kinds of solutions. Change needs to be based on optimism (e.g. that more people can find teaching an intrinsically fulfilling career rather than being convinced by ‘sweeteners’ to stay) and a conviction that it is absolutely necessary to ask different questions of a problem, if complex challenges are to be addressed. We need first to assert that it is completely possible (and demonstrated by some high-performing systems around the world²) for teaching to be a fulfilling and sustainable long-term career for sufficient numbers to achieve a stable workforce and attract high quality entrants. An OECD [international study](#) of initial teacher preparation reminds us that we can seek change premised on the human (and humane) and ethical dimensions of problems, as well as rationalist drivers to supply more teachers. At the same time, we propose that the questions we pursue need to be informed (i.e. based on evidence and on experience) and ethical – concerned with the purposes of education and the responsibilities to pupils who are our (future) citizens and of course, our future teachers.

² Darling-Hammond, L., D. Burns, C. Campbell, A. Goodwin, K. Hammerness, E. Low, A. McIntyre, M. Sato, & Zeichner, K., 2017 *Empowered Educators: How Leading Nations Design Systems for Teaching Quality*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

The imperative for change

The imperative for change in how teachers relate to their work is growing and this is important for how entrants experience learning to teach. The goal of innovation in ITET is ultimately of course for *both* pupils and new teachers to thrive in schools. Increasing rates of [pupil unhappiness](#), concerns about [SEND](#), [non-attendance](#), young people [not in education, employment or training \(NEET\)](#) and [elective home education](#) tell us about a growing pattern of disengagement from education affecting too many young people. It is very likely that such pupil disengagement reflects the struggles of teachers to pursue in practice the pro-social motivation that attracts so many into the teaching profession. In particular, impacts on socially disadvantaged pupils of disconnection from education are most acute³. Yet it is schools serving the most disadvantaged communities that find it hardest to recruit teachers and where it is vital for ITET to enable new entrants to flourish. For these reasons, questions need to inform change in ITET that aims to increase self-esteem, optimism and worthwhileness for all:

What teachers do young people need and deserve to prepare them to participate as socially and economically responsible citizens?

How can ITET help new entrants to grow informed anticipation of teaching as a role that is constructively challenging, satisfying and sustainable as a rewarding career choice?

Ultimately, ITET stakeholders share core values towards increasing the positive engagement with education that is essential to improving the life chances of young people. How we prepare teachers needs to draw on new perspectives on how, in the current climate, the sector can further support:

- the needs of young people
- the needs of teachers
- the needs of schools and communities.

Exchanging perspectives on priorities for the future development of ITET invokes both optimism and realism. It is possible for teacher satisfaction and career longevity to be normalised. Looking at systems around the world, there are many indications that it is possible to maintain good outcomes for pupils and have a teaching profession that is stable, well-qualified and offers teacher preparation as a foundation on which to build long-term role satisfaction. At the same time, policy-borrowing solutions are subject to pitfalls(!) and the English system provides a unique context for innovating teacher preparation. The breadth of expertise and perspective within the system can be more fully utilised to think of what can happen next in ITET.

³ [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)