

How do we prepare the teaching workforce that we need?

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Centre for
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This briefing paper is intended to inform priorities for a research agenda that can contribute to the advancement of initial teacher preparation in England. The paper is of relevance to: policy makers in teacher education; education researchers; research funding bodies; and stakeholders in initial teacher preparation, including school leaders, teacher education providers and teachers' professional organisations.

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Initial teacher preparation in a context of recruitment and retention challenges

The challenge of attracting and retaining teachers is well-evidenced (NFER¹, Education Committee²) and successive reports³ indicate the persistence of the problem. Cumulative evidence indicates the complex, long-term challenges for teaching being regarded as a sustainable career, despite responses initiated by the establishment of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2019⁴. The need to attract, develop and retain teachers with the appropriate professional knowledge and skills required has generated extensive policy-making, that has positioned initial teacher preparation as the foundation of a 'golden thread'⁵ of experiences and entitlements that aim to encourage teachers to develop sustained career trajectories. A core component of this has entailed re-configuring the initial preparation of teachers and their ongoing professional

¹ NFER Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report, 2024

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2024/>

² House of Commons Education Committee, Teacher recruitment, training and retention: Second Report, 2024 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44798/documents/222606/default/>

³ House of Commons research briefing, Teacher recruitment and retention in England, 2023 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7222/CBP-7222.pdf>

⁴ Department for Education Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1076587/Delivering_world_class_teacher_development_policy_paper.pdf

learning and development. A Market Review of initial teacher training (ITT)⁶ commissioned by the DfE in 2021 culminated in far-reaching reform of initial teacher preparation that builds on previous diversification of provision to extend opportunities for school-led organisations and charitable trusts to lead programmes, alongside universities. New arrangements were introduced to accredit diverse stakeholders to provide programmes leading to Qualified Teacher Status. In association with this, there has been extensive reform of the statutory components of initial teacher education programmes, via the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (ITTCCF)⁷ set out in 2019. Together with the Early Career Framework⁸ published the same year, these initiatives set out a knowledge base for the teaching profession, describing what new teachers should know and be able to do ('Learn that...' and 'Learn how to...') which is 'endorsed' by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), a charitable organisation focused on breaking links between economic disadvantage and educational attainment. A further new statutory component of re-configured provision is the requirement for initial teacher education programmes to include twenty days of identified 'Intensive Training and Practice (ITaP)' in specific areas of teaching from September 2024.

Debate within the sector

The reforms have generated extensive debate in the sector, reflecting perspectives on the nature of teachers' professional expertise, the knowledge that teachers need to enable their learners to flourish and the kinds of experiences that enable them to learn to teach. A distillation of an Intellectual Base of Teacher Education (IBTE)⁹ was prepared by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) in 2020, in response to concerns that the new requirements reflect a trajectory towards a technician concept of teaching expertise and the learning of teachers. Critique of 'policy entrepreneurship' among providers of teacher education has argued that marketised conditions create challenges for achieving a coherent teacher education system that can be bound by shared understanding of how teachers learn¹⁰.

The priority for all those involved is a concern to prepare new teachers with the professional knowledge and expertise that can help young people to develop in line with enduring, socially responsible goals, i.e. to grow the intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable them to participate as active citizens, contribute to economic development and flourish as individuals in a diverse and changing society¹¹. A commitment to high expectations of initial teacher preparation reflects a consensus that focusing on the quality of teachers is fundamental to both the experience of learners in schools and to attracting recruits to teaching with strong potential to begin careers that they find fulfilling and professionally rewarding. However, a recent evidence synthesis of research, policy and

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60e45ae4e90e0764ce826628/ITT_market_review_report.pdf

⁷ Initial teacher training (ITT): core content framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

⁸ Early Career Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁹ UCET, 2020 <https://www.ucet.ac.uk/11675/ibte-position-statement-updated-february-2020>

¹⁰ Ellis, V., 2023 *Teacher Education in Crisis: The State, The Market and the Universities in England*, Viv Ellis: Bloomsbury Academic

¹¹ Pollard, A. & Daly, C., 2023 *Reflective Teaching in Secondary Schools*, Reflective Teaching - home <https://www.reflectiveteaching.co.uk>

theory identifying ‘quality teachers’¹² led by the Centre for Teachers and Teaching Research indicated extremely diverse proxies that are most commonly used to identify ‘quality’ teachers and found very limited research related to quality teachers ‘in the making’ in initial teacher preparation contexts. In the United States (US), in a context of extensive deregulation of initial teacher preparation, a meta-evaluation conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation of strategies to evaluate initial teacher preparation¹³ identified sustained challenges in correlating the components of teacher education programmes with pupil outcomes, due to the complexity of teaching and teaching contexts. New research by the National Institute of Teaching¹⁴ is currently focused on this complex area within the English system.

Initial teacher education and socially responsible goals

There is ample evidence of the need to prepare teachers for contexts of uncertainty and complexity, characterised by multiple, intersectional inequalities, political populism, prejudice, the climate crisis, conflict and migration (e.g. Menter & Tatto, 2019¹⁵; Lander, 2022¹⁶). The implications are that research is needed to identify how initial teacher preparation can best prepare new teachers, support teacher retention and role satisfaction and enable teachers to support socially responsible goals for education.

Most importantly, the un/attractiveness of teaching as a fulfilling career requires serious attention that goes beyond issues of remuneration and workload, important as these considerations are. In addition, annual labour market analysis provided by NFER demonstrates that the respite from recruitment problems during covid needs to be understood as temporary. It is now critical that the forthcoming relief offered by projected decreases in pupil rolls¹⁷ does not deflect from the fundamental questions that need to be asked to secure the teaching profession that we need.

The design of teacher education programmes has a long history of navigating the integration of practical experience, theoretical perspectives and research evidence. Successive models have reflected widely varying conceptualisations of learning to teach, along with designing for the integration of forms of knowledge and experience¹⁸. It is not the purpose of this

¹² Taylor et al., 2023 [Teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention-lit-review-Final.pdf](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/~/media/EEF/Reports/Teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention-lit-review-Final.pdf) ([d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net](https://www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/~/media/EEF/Reports/Teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention-lit-review-Final.pdf)), Education Endowment Foundation.

¹³ Cochran-Smith, M. & Reagan, E.M., 2021 “Best Practices” for Evaluating Teacher Education Programmes. National Academy of Education.

¹⁴ [Teaching improvement through data and evaluation \(TIDE\) - Nuffield Foundation](https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/teaching-improvement-through-data-and-evaluation-tide)

¹⁵ Menter, I. & Tatto, M., 2019 What Future for Teacher Education? Knowledge, Policy and Practice in Teacher Education. In M. Tatto & I. Menter (eds) *A Cross-National Study: Work carried out by an International Research Network of the World Education Research Association*, 280-292.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334701844 Knowledge Policy and Practice in Teacher Education A Cross-National Study Work carried out by an International Research Network of the World Education Research Association](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334701844_Knowledge_Policy_and_Practice_in_Teacher_Education_A_Cross-National_Study_Work_carried_out_by_an_International_Research_Network_of_the_World_Education_Research_Association)

¹⁶ [Launching an anti-racism framework for initial teacher education and training](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334701844_Launching_an_anti-racism_framework_for_initial_teacher_education_and_training)

¹⁷ <https://www.ascl.org.uk/Help-and-Advice/Primary-education/Primary-Accountability/A-numbers-game>

¹⁸ E.g. Menter, I., Mutton, T. & Burn, K., 2019 Learning to Teach in England. Reviewing Policy and Research Trends, in *Knowledge, Policy and Practice in Teacher Education: A Cross-National Study: Work carried out by an International Research Network of the World Education Research Association*. By Maria Teresa Tatto and Ian Menter. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 60–80.

paper to summarise these conceptualisations and models. What is singularly lacking is wide-scale, longitudinal, independent research into initial teacher preparation in the English system and its relationship with professional knowledge, including growing the capacity of teachers to address the needs of pupils in a diverse society. Growing this kind of expertise is a major challenge in the face of acknowledged pressures on teachers to respond to the numerous demands they face from the start of their careers. The DfE-funded longitudinal study of the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders¹⁹ is confirming that multiple factors contribute to the sustainability of teaching as a career choice²⁰ and that potential solutions need to take account of other forms of role satisfaction in addition to remuneration and workload, such as increasing teacher agency.

The expectations made of teachers entering the profession are therefore numerous, complex and inter-related. Learning to teach takes place in a context of serious issues such as the concerning rates of pupil unhappiness in school²¹ and the numbers of young people absent from school²², including 26% of secondary school pupils persistently absent in 2022-23 (using the DfE definition of 'persistent'). Impacts on socially disadvantaged pupils of non-engagement with school are most acute: in 2022/23 36.5% of free school meal-eligible pupils were persistently absent, compared with 15.6% of pupils who were not eligible. Related issues around the mental health of young people reinforce the need for new teachers to understand the complex impacts of school experience on pupils²³. Further related challenges for pupils of navigating social media, misogyny and racism are well documented. In summary, the teacher preparation that is needed requires research into what it means for a teacher to optimise educational opportunities and experiences for all pupils and how this relates to learning how to teach a subject or set of skills.

The need for system-level research

In the UK, the last major, longitudinal and wide-scale independent study of initial teacher education was over 20 years ago (Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) 1990–2000²⁴), in England and Wales. The study identified the components of initial teacher education and conceptualisation of theory-practice relations following the innovation of school-partnership/school-led programmes. Elsewhere, research has taken place at this scale more recently. In 2017 the Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE) project²⁵ in Australia tracked 5,000 new teachers and 1,000 school leaders to investigate the characteristics of teacher education programmes that are most effective in preparing teachers to work in diverse school settings. It further examined the impact of the teacher education programmes on employment patterns and retention. International comparative

¹⁹ [Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders](#)

²⁰ DfE Working lives of teachers and leaders - wave 1: core report
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1148571/Working_lives_of_teachers_and_leaders_-_wave_1_-_core_report.pdf

²¹ [Why are Children Unhappy with School? | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)

²² [Pupil absence in schools in England, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²³ [News: 'School is too much pressure'- young people identify school as a contributing factor to poor mental health - edpsy.org.uk](#)

²⁴ Furlong J, Barton L, Miles S, Whiting C, and Whitty G., 2000 *Teacher education in transition: re-forming professionalism?* Buckingham, Open University Press.

²⁵ [\(PDF\) Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education | Diane Mayer - Academia.edu](#)

research by Darling-Hammond and colleagues examined teacher preparation in 'well developed systems' that serve diverse student populations, in Australia (Victoria and New South Wales), Canada (Ontario and Alberta), Finland, China (Shanghai) and Singapore²⁶. Findings from these wide-scale studies suggest the importance of unifying values and a focus on addressing inequalities, together with supporting the recruitment of highly qualified entrants to intellectually challenging programmes that foster critical research literacy as part of teachers' education. The conclusions suggest these are enabling of coherent and stable systems that can maintain high-attaining pupil outcomes and teacher retention rates. There have been numerous much smaller studies in England, together with extensive research into the mentoring of new teachers and the production of 'typology'-type research identifying forms of provision. However, there is a pressing need for a research agenda to be developed that can respond at system level to the complex responsibilities of initial teacher preparation in a hugely diverse and transformed sector, at a time when the attractiveness and sustainability of teaching as a rewarding profession is not secure.

Four key questions arise to underpin the future research that is needed in initial teacher preparation, to secure the education that young people deserve:

- What teachers do young people need and deserve to prepare them to participate as socially and economically responsible citizens?
- With this in mind, how do we prepare the teaching workforce that they deserve?
- What knowledge base is needed for a teaching profession that can prepare teachers to meet these expectations?
- How do the features of initial teacher education help new entrants to grow informed anticipation of teaching as a role that is constructively challenging, satisfying and sustainable as a rewarding career choice?

These questions also relate to the early career development of new teachers. The initial preparation of teachers however is an under-researched priority for securing the teaching workforce that is needed.

²⁶ 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.