



The National Association of
School-Based Teacher Trainers



Centre for Teachers
and Teaching Research

Open letter

4th November 2025

The Initial Teacher Education & Training (ITET) Innovation Network

Dear Bridget Phillipson

Priorities for change in Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET)

As a network of national stakeholders in the initial education and training of teachers, we are outlining priorities for change, aimed at policy-makers and the sector itself. How new entrants experience the reality of joining the teaching profession is, quite simply, crucial. It impacts the prospects of securing a stable, fulfilled workforce that can bring positivity and expertise to their work with young people. We need the profession to move towards a reality which is more *meaningful, joyful* and *motivating*. The priorities for change are based on our real-world experiential accounts, principles and stakeholder concerns and optimism for the future of ITET. They are also supported by evidence that contemporary conditions are far from ideal for those training to teach (e.g. the DfE [Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders](#) longitudinal study 2022-27; the [Teaching Commission](#) 2024-25 on teacher retention; and the [NFER](#) 2025 report on ethnic disparities in progression from entering the profession). It is easy to say, 'we already do these things around here'. Yet, frank dialogue within the sector suggests that these priorities are not sufficiently in place, in the experience of new entrants. Our national journey has been overly focused on compliance and attendance to the mechanistic detail of ITET provision. Innovation needs the emphasis to shift towards the goals we outline here, which can build the much-needed capacity to support the new teachers our young people deserve.

For policymakers:

- Protect and promote opportunities for **agency, creativity, and responsible decision-making** during training, ensuring trainees are not confined to narrow or prescriptive approaches to teaching.
- Establish **independent mechanisms** for eliciting and acting on the lived experiences of trainees, so their voices meaningfully inform ITET policy and practice.
- Ensure **time and space** within ITET structures for reflection, co-teaching, and lesson preparation, recognising that learning to teach is a complex developmental process, not a one-year hurdle.
- Build sustainable capacity in schools to meet aspirations to provide the **high quality mentoring** that new teachers need.
- Prioritise **equity and inclusion** by embedding diversity, anti-racism, and teacher identity development within national ITET expectations.
- Align ITET policy more closely with **SEND principles**, embedding pupil needs at the heart of teacher development rather than as bolt-on provision.
- In any new policy considerations, **start from a position of trust in the sector**, acknowledging and recognising its expertise, performance and commitment.

For the sector:

- Actively **listen to and respond** to trainee voices at provider and school level, creating feedback loops that influence practice.

- Invest in **mentor training** that includes both pedagogical and pastoral/supervision dimensions, to nurture new teachers' identities and sense of efficacy.
- Provide **balanced timetables** and reduce unnecessary workload, enabling time for reflection, observation, and high-quality lesson planning.
- Promote a culture that values **creativity, risk-taking and professional growth**, supporting new teachers to experiment and develop agency.
- Collaborate more closely with schools, communities and fellow providers to sustain **innovation and long-term improvements** in ITET.

We speak as leaders of schools, national ITET organisations, School-Centred Initial Teacher Training providers, student/trainee/Early Career and experienced teachers, university providers and representatives from professional bodies. Many of us are experts closely involved in enabling the success of major initiatives like the ITTECF and increased mentoring provision and we welcome the attention being focused on new teachers. At the same time, we are far from complacent regarding the issues that need to be addressed in order to make becoming a teacher as positive and productive as possible as a foundation for a sustained career.

It is important to challenge a growing tendency to normalise perceptions of teaching as not sufficiently attractive compared with other occupations that are more flexible, less stressful and offer a better work-life balance. Such a view dangerously suggests the inevitability of teaching not being attractive to new entrants because it is incompatible with the changing life choices made by people in their twenties and thirties. We argue that life choices made by new teachers are not only informed on a comparative 'appeal' basis with other graduate professions. 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. That is why we are calling for change in how learning to teach is experienced on ITET programmes – by refocusing priorities for providers and schools.

What needs to change

Listen to teachers

First and foremost, genuinely *listening* to teachers while training is crucial to developing ITET provision in the face of persistent recruitment challenges. This means eliciting frank, independent accounts and acting on what is said. They have minimum control over their training conditions and minimal access to influential forums for reviewing ITET. They are the future of the teaching profession and more immediate, effective mechanisms are needed to tell us how they are directly affected by ITET policy and implementation decisions.

For example: establish a national consultative body for ITET to the DfE, which includes new teachers from the training year to ECT2, across the range of provision; providers and schools should provide meaningful fora for new entrants to have constructive discussion with senior leaders about their experiences, with a goal of increasing long-term retention.

Nurture teacher identities

Secondly, the identities of new teachers reflect their values, curiosity and commitment to addressing social injustices. Their developing teacher identities should be nurtured and supported in explicit ways within ITET design. Those entering teaching do so in a time of widespread debate around

social division, racism and misogyny. New teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds are less likely to progress well from the beginning of their careers. Attention to teacher identity and positive affirmation of diversity and anti-racism should be fundamental to ITET provision. A sense of efficacy and agency in the face of persistent challenge is a real need and requires explicit nurturing. It is bound up with teacher identity and the desire to make things better, whilst processing unsettling reassessments of what it takes to be effective.

For example: embed an explicit focus on addressing inequalities and countering racism within ITET programmes, making this a point of trainees' reflective tasks, 'safe' discussion spaces and of mentor training and staff development for providers; align anti-racism policies among providers and schools (and ensure that they exist); create an agreement among providers and schools about how to support trainees' experiences of all forms of discrimination; and work with the examples of development activities recommended by the Anti-Racism ITET Framework <https://www.anti-racism-framework.co.uk/>. In addition to dedicated programme focus on these issues, mentor training needs to incorporate a counselling role to support the development of professional identity and self-efficacy in new teachers.

Develop agency and responsibility

New teachers need to take supported responsibility for decisions about what and how to teach. They are exposed to very widely differing agency for teachers within different schools. Autonomy for schools is a strength; however, in some contexts new teachers themselves (and their mentors) can experience very little opportunity to experiment, be creative and take risks. Developing responsible decision-making is crucial to fostering teachers' potential to become expert professionals. Yet they have strikingly contrasting opportunities for developing creativity and agency as part of ITET. 'Novice' status can reinforce this lack of agency and does not support the positive use of previous experience, intellectual challenge and curiosity that entrants bring to ITET. This is not limited to career changers. ITET provision should actively address this.

For example: make it a requirement for all ITET contexts to include opportunities for creativity and designing lessons using the teachers' growing knowledge of their pupils and drawing on their specialist subject knowledge; provide mentor development to support this process; include focused observation opportunities for new entrants to learn about opportunities for pupil and teacher creativity; and embed teacher inquiry tasks to support the trialling of new approaches.

Put pupils' needs at the heart of learning to teach

Lessons should be learned from the SEND sector regarding putting pupils' needs at the heart of learning to teach. The principles of good teaching and attention to pupils' needs are keystones of ITET design. This goes beyond providing SEND placements during ITET or including more input about teaching pupils with specific SEND diagnoses. It is about embedding attention to differing needs, aptitudes and interests of pupils as the foundation for learning to teach. This requires having the time and strategies to get to know pupils well, observe experienced teachers and co-plan, co-teach and conduct focused review on a sustained basis. None of this is done well in a hurry. All of it is essential.

For example: review the frequency, timing and focus of lesson observations carried out by new entrants over the whole training period, so that they deepen their scrutiny of how pupils' needs are met by experienced teachers; embed trainees' development of pupil case studies within programme

design, to develop knowledge of pupils' needs, strengths and enthusiasms and how these can be met in designing lessons, focusing on increasing motivation.

Plan for appropriate support and challenge

ITET should provide a balance between schools providing supportive structures for teaching (lesson plans, schemes of work and resources) and helping new teachers to develop their own planning to meet pupils' needs, using their knowledge and enthusiasms. New teachers need to take gradual responsibility for planning stimulating lessons and experience this as an important achievement.

For example: implement mentoring strategies to enable new teachers to gradually develop their own planning, such as; co-planning lesson segments; co-teaching; planning for and teaching groups of pupils; jointly reviewing school teaching materials with specific pupils in mind; working with fellow trainees on planning tasks; agreeing the focus of mentor observation and feedback aimed at specified aspects of teaching and pupil learning.

All of this can only be achieved by recognising that new teachers need appropriately balanced timetables that ensure time to critically reflect on their teaching, observe lessons, undertake co-teaching and undertake lesson preparation based on the information they collect about their pupils. This is fundamental to acknowledging that ITET is the first stage in a complex process of learning to teach well, which takes time.

For example, review the time that new teachers are allocated to learn and ensure adequate time for: observing others; co-planning and co-assessing; reading and discussing relevant research; carrying out inquiries by talking with and observing pupils; reflecting on teaching.

These priorities for ITET are urgently needed. Entrants to teaching want to make a positive difference to the lives of young people and need more frequent experience of learning to teach as fulfilling and manageable on a day-to-day basis. Disillusionment is not inevitable. Neither is it helpful for the future if views form in the training year that teaching is so challenging that long-term career plans are not feasible.

Longer term goals for innovation can build on these renewed conditions, focusing on important issues such as the relationships between ITET providers of all types, schools and communities. We can carry ITET into the future as stronger institutions on this basis.

We will continue to advocate for ITET to be as effective as possible in meeting the needs of new teachers.

Signed by members of the **Initial Teacher Education & Training (ITET) Innovation Network**

<https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/initial-teacher-education-and-training-itet-innovation-network/>

Convened by the Centre for Teaching and Teachers Research, UCL Institute of Education and the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers.