

**Department for Education consultation on
'Training our next generation of outstanding teachers'**

University Alliance response

1a. Do you think the proposals for enhancing selection will improve the quality of new teachers?

University Alliance is a group of 23 major, business-engaged universities committed to delivering world-class research and a quality student experience around the UK. At University Alliance, just like our universities, our approach is about putting solutions, innovation and enterprise at the core of everything we do. We deliver evidence-based policy and research and foster close links with Government and business in order to improve higher education policy; to the benefit of the economy and society.

We support the aims of increasing the status of the teaching profession, attracting candidates with excellent potential and of training the next generation of outstanding teachers. The proposals are likely to have a positive impact on the status of the profession.

The new proposals will not necessarily improve the quality of new teachers. Degree achievement is an indicator of a particular type of subject knowledge. However, there is no evidence to support the assumption that higher degree achievement on entry to teacher training is an indicator of future teaching excellence.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), in partnership with schools, have great experience in selecting and recruiting candidates with excellent potential for initial teacher education (ITE). The proposed threshold of a 2.2 degree classification provides a useful marker of quality. However, sufficient flexibility must be maintained to ensure that institutions can make a judgment on candidates with excellent potential to become teachers who do not meet the proposed threshold.

We welcome the recognition that personality and aptitude testing are important in selection in combination with effective institutional admissions processes. It is essential that the timing and scale of the tests do not increase the burden on HEIs and schools and do not lead to increased uncertainty or delays for candidates or ITE providers.

1b. Are there other approaches DfE should consider?

Considering undergraduate and non-traditional entrants to postgraduate ITE, it is important to ensure that a degree of flexibility is maintained in admissions to enable programmes to recruit all outstanding candidates.

2. What are your views of the vision of schools leading teacher recruitment and training, working in partnership with universities and other ITT providers as they require?

Schools already have a significant role in teacher training. This is recognised by HEIs and demonstrated in the extent of strong HEI-school partnerships. The annual HMI report (2009/10) found that there was ‘more outstanding initial teacher education delivered by higher education-led partnerships’ and that they demonstrated a ‘better capacity to improve’. Based on this research we would underline the importance of HEIs, in partnership with schools, in providing a broad and deep environment for educating our next generation of outstanding teachers.

The government is committed to ensuring that applicants are able to make informed decisions when entering into education/training. In line with this, applicants will need to know in advance what institution and which schools will be supporting their training. Ad-hoc arrangements where partnerships are on an ‘as required’ basis would lead to great instability for the partners involved, uncertainty for applicants and are to be discouraged.

4a. If you work in a university or other ITT provider, would you be interested in working with schools that recruit trainees in this way (School Direct)?

HEIs have demonstrated commitment and considerable flexibility to working with schools in a variety of different ways and will continue to do so.

4b. What opportunities and difficulties do you think this approach would present?

We welcome schools, in partnerships with HEIs, taking an increased role in recruitment and training. HEIs necessarily have robust admissions processes, experience of managing applicant queries and infrastructure in place to manage large scale recruitment. However, significant cost and careful pilot schemes would be required to ensure that schools were equipped to take on this process. We would not want this to increase burden on schools to the extent that their primary focus, of educating young people, suffers. The cost and potential delays of implementing a school based recruitment system could also increase uncertainty for applicants.

Again, in line with government priorities, applicants would need to know what HEI would be supporting their training so that they can make informed choices. This will enable applicants to be confident in the nature and quality of the programme they are entering.

5. Would it be more attractive for a trainee to be able to apply to a particular school for teacher training, rather than a university, with the expectation that the school will offer employment after training?

Having a probable offer of employment following training would likely be attractive to many applicants. The implementation and details of this proposal could raise many difficulties. Schools will not be able to say with any degree of certainty what their staffing needs will be 18 months in advance (or 3 years for undergraduates). The nature of any employment agreement would have to be extremely clearly defined and communicated. Additionally this proposal does not take into account the importance of the training year. Offering employment at the point of application renders learning to teach a formality rather than recognising it as a valuable and transformative process.

We do have concerns that this proposal could lead to teachers qualifying with a very narrow experience of teaching, trained for working in a particular school environment but lacking the necessary broad and deep education equipping them for the demanding and varied profession of teaching. It is extremely valuable for trainees to gain experience in more than one school, a requirement from the current structure that should be maintained. Teachers that can draw on experiences from a range of different schools are likely be a greater asset to the schools they teach in in future.

HEIs are well placed to manage a wide range of partnerships with schools and institutions have an excellent track record in effectively managing a number of school placements, integrating this experience into the development of the trainee. Considering their research activities, involvement in CPD and network of partnerships HEIs are in a unique position to add value to the ITT programmes they support.

6a. Do you agree that we should offer more financial support to trainees with good degrees and maths and science specialists?

We support the provision of bursaries and financial incentives to train to be a teacher. However, due to the lack of evidence supporting the assumption that those with higher degree classifications make more valuable teachers, we would query the value of using this as a measure for awarding differential bursaries.

We recognise the need for boosting recruitment of good candidates and to STEM subjects in particular. However, we are concerned about financial support potentially not going to students who need it the most, and the consequential disincentive this would have in terms of widening participation. Bursaries directed towards excellent candidates who would otherwise not be able to train should be prioritised.

6b. Do the proposals for funding in chapter three strike the right balance in the different levels of funding individuals?

We welcome the expectation that potential income per trainee should remain stable. In order to minimise disruption to recruitment and confusion for applicants, the proposed changes to student funding and how they relate to ITT providers and applicants needs to be clarified, agreed and publicised in good time.

Differential bursaries could be very divisive and, due to their very short term impact, the proposals are unlikely to incentivise retention after qualifying. It may have more impact on retention if the incentives were staggered to encourage outstanding new teachers in high priority specialisms to stay in teaching. In the longer term, a more effective way of raising the status and quality of the teaching profession would be to address fundamental issues such as career salary, professional development opportunities and conditions of employment.

7. Do you think that it is right to give more initial teacher training places to providers that are working in close university/school partnerships?

Effective university-school partnerships provide the trainee with essential depth and breadth of education alongside the practical training needed to become an outstanding teacher. As the HMI Annual Report (2009/10) stated, higher education-led partnerships delivered the most outstanding initial teacher education and demonstrated better capacity to improve. Alliance universities, in close partnerships with schools, are committed to delivering high quality provision.

These strong and effective partnerships come in a variety of forms so there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' measure of 'closeness'. Close university-school partnerships would need to be very clearly defined in order to be used as a measure for allocating ITT places. In addition, institutions must be given clear and advance information regarding their student number allocations so that there is minimal disruption to the application and admissions process for institutions and applicants.

8. Do you think that a single gateway for PGCE and Graduate Teacher Programme applications is a good idea?

We agree that a single gateway for applications to teaching is a good idea. Very careful design, piloting and implementation would be needed to ensure that it improves on the current position and increases efficiency. It would need to be communicated and operated very efficiently and be in place well in advance of its intended use.

9. What more would you change to improve initial teacher training?

As recognised by Ofsted, there is clear evidence that HE, in partnership with schools, is very effective in educating and training teachers. We should continue to learn from best practice at home and internationally to ensure that the strengths of institutions and schools are maximised and teaching is seen as a high status profession.

Effective partnerships are recognised as extremely valuable in delivering high quality teacher education. To ensure that schools are effectively engaged in initial teacher education partnerships, this should be integrated into the criteria for any school to be awarded outstanding status as monitored by Ofsted. This would give a clear signal that involvement in ITE is a professional responsibility.

12. Does the removal of the supernumerary requirement for the Graduate Teacher Programme make it more likely that you will take part in the programme?

While learning how to teach, trainee teachers require time out of the classroom. Schools partnering with our institutions have raised concerns that removal of the supernumerary requirement would mean that trainees would most likely have a full workload and not have time to plan, to reflect, to consider and observe others. This could result in reduced quality of training, pupils receiving lower quality teaching and it could unintentionally reduce the status of the profession.