

Response for online consultation from the Geographical Association

1 a) Do you think the proposals for enhancing selection will improve the quality of new teachers? These include more rigorous entry testing, a focus of inspection on how ITT providers' choose which candidates to offer training places to, and the offer for schools to select and help train the trainees that will go on to work in their school.

The strategy states that 'we have in our schools today the best generation of teachers we have ever had'. So why is reform necessary?

The GA strongly supports that good subject knowledge is important for teachers. However, the degree class does not necessarily lead to the best teachers and no evidence is cited that it does. Some people with first class degrees (even a PhD) have very specialised subject knowledge which does not match what is required in the school curriculum; those with a highly academic knowledge can find it difficult to convey subject information in a way that engages pupils. Our ITT members report that they accept relatively few students with 3rd class degrees, but do so where they have outstanding personal qualities; several have turned out to be exceptional teachers. If these candidates do not get an opportunity to train, it will be a loss to the profession. A flexible approach is called for to ensure all the "best" candidates are included.

Are there any other professions where the government interferes with recruitment by suggesting what class of degree should be accepted? The GA believes that this decision should be left to the trainers. Universities have good selection procedures already, and this has been repeatedly reported on by Ofsted. Further inspection of this aspect of provision would be a waste of money. ITT trainers are very aware of how time consuming it is if "weak" candidates are admitted. They have a vested interest in adopting rigorous selection.

1 b) Are there other approaches DfE should consider?

Much good selection practice already exists; the main focus should be for the best to be disseminated widely to avoid "reinventing wheels". For example, partner schools should give trainees the opportunity to observe a lesson (possibly acting as a classroom assistant). The candidate's interaction with pupils could be observed and their observations of the lesson discussed during interview.

Most providers would agree that the involvement of teachers in interviewing candidates and observing potential trainees working with children in a classroom context is desirable. However, such activities, like the suggestion for day-long assessment centres, are costly of staff resources and funding would need to be available for such practice to be introduced more widely.

We do not see how the suggestion for schools to recruit and select trainees and then work with an accredited provider of ITT to train them, is a new idea. At present good training partnerships welcome schools involvement in recruitment and selection and go on to train the trainees

together; this is good practice but we fail to see what your proposal adds. Indeed it could open up the opportunity for an inadequate school, or a department inappropriate for training, to “take on” a student and then look to a university to sort out the problems that result.

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?

This ‘vision’ is not based on the evidence of Ofsted inspections. Courses led by universities are rated more highly than courses in which schools take the lead. If we want to produce teachers of quality we should continue to emphasise the value of university courses, all of which work in partnership with schools. The Ofsted report on Teach First emphasises the importance of the contribution of the Canterbury Christ Church in the training and how this made a significant difference.

There is a further problem with this vision - teacher supply. Currently around 15% of new teachers are trained through SCITT, GTP and Teach First. Schools are not rushing to train geography trainees, probably because they are very content with the supply of excellent new geography teachers they can recruit from universities. If training is shifted to schools, some university courses will no longer be viable and will close. This has been happening in the last three years and the GA has repeatedly made the TDA aware of our concerns. If closures continue the supply of geography teachers will diminish. Moreover the quality of new teachers would reduce because, from current experience, it is the outstanding and good courses that close, not poor ones. Therefore an unintended consequence of schools leading most training could be fewer and poorer new geography teachers. Closure of university training and the loss of it teacher training expertise also means the loss of a subject-specific professional development for schools and fewer opportunities for teachers to participate in Masters study.

3. a) If you are a head teacher, or teacher, do you think your school would be interested in recruiting trainees through the school direct proposal described in chapter three?

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

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

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

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?

Trainees attached to only one school are disadvantaged. In university training the trainees learn from sharing their experiences with trainees in different schools. University courses give trainees the opportunities to teach in contrasting schools from which they learn an incredible

amount. Attachment to one particular school limits trainees' understanding and experience of curriculum and pedagogy. The current ITT requirement to teach in at least two schools must remain.

The expectation that schools should employ trainees that they select and train in their schools is flawed. If a school recruits a trainee with the intention of employing them after training, it indicates there is a staff vacancy. A subject department or school that is short of a member of staff is not best placed to train a new teacher. Where there is only one teacher in the school in the subject there is no subject specialist to train them. Moreover training, and subsequently teaching, in the same school is too narrow an experience. The best subject practitioners are those that have gained experience through teaching their subject in a range of different contexts.

Teach First is a unique approach that selects trainees for their leadership development potential and has a mission to provide teachers for shortage subjects in challenging schools. They train very few geography teachers. It works well for individual trainees and for schools in the tight, well managed and well funded circumstances of this scheme. It is inappropriate for widespread adoption of the approach for all schools without the resources of Teach First.

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

The GA does not agree that there should be more financial support to trainees with good degrees for three reasons. 1) there is no exact comparability between the same class of degrees from different universities. 2) As stated above, there is not necessarily a connection between the ability to achieve a very good degree and the ability to be a good teacher. 3) Since the allocation for the above reasons would be flawed, it would be unfair if trainees who were revealed as weaker teachers during training were receiving a higher bursary than very good trainees. It would be better to give golden handshakes when new teachers who had shown their capability take up their post – this also might help with retention in the early years in the profession.

Bursaries for shortage subjects have been applied in the past. Is there evidence that this has made a difference to recruitment? If it does, it should be adopted but should respond to an accurate assessment of schools' staffing shortages and take account of regional differences.

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

It would be helpful if bursaries could be continued. However, the focus on the subjects outlined is too narrow. We need to attract good quality people to the teaching profession across ALL subjects; all trainee teachers deserve a bursary of some kind given the national importance of the teaching profession.

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?

All universities have been required since 1992 to work closely with school partnerships and secondary trainees spend 24 weeks of the 36 weeks training in schools. Partnership working has improved significantly in the last 20 years, as Ofsted has repeatedly confirmed through inspection. The GA would like to see greater attention being paid by Ofsted to the quality of subject training and specific secondary training places allocated accordingly. A system that encouraged the best subject departments in schools to be engaged in training would be beneficial. Currently schools identify the departments they wish to be involved in training and universities must select from what is offered. . The 2011 Ofsted Report, *Learning to Make a World of Difference* makes it clear that the quality of school geography is very uneven, and that poor geography can be found even in high performing schools. We believe that university subject tutors should retain a key role in the training to ensure that all new teachers are exposed to high quality school geography.

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

This seems worthwhile if the resultant scheme is not too bureaucratic. It would also be an opportunity to design an application that does more than the present one to provide information on which more rigorous selection sifts could be made.

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

Ofsted has repeatedly noted that the current generation of teachers entering the profession are the best ever. They reported in 2010 that university-based ITT was of higher quality than school-based provision and consistently show in their reports of providers that subject training in school-led schemes is less effective. The GA believes that universities must continue to have the major role in training and a move to school-led training would lead to a deterioration in the quality of new teachers rather than the improvement sought.

We note that an internal department review is currently considering the role of primary subject training. The primary requirements for ITT need urgently to be revised so that all new teachers are better equipped to teach geography. In addition, specialist geography training should be reinstated to prepare some teachers to become subject leaders in schools.

The Geographical Association believes that Ofsted should inspect and report on the quality of subject training in ITT. It is important that Ofsted provides published reports on the quality of teacher training in individual subjects to ensure the best provision is made. In the past, Ofsted's subject reports on ITT have been used as benchmarks for providers to improve practice and as a source of independent information to applicants to ITT on the quality of different courses.

Questions for schools

10. How could we improve these proposals to make your school more likely to take a greater role in initial teacher training?

11. Would a reduction in salary subsidy for the Graduate Teacher Programme make it less likely that you will take part in the programme?

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

The GA is concerned about the proposed removal of the requirement for GTP trainees to be “supernumerary” because of the impact this could have on the quality of subject training. For high quality subject training, trainees must observe excellent subject practitioners, and also be observed by them with subsequent discussion between trainer and trainee. This is the crux of outstanding training and this cannot happen regularly when both trainers and trainees are fully timetabled for classes.