



**Geographical
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Chief Executive: Alan Kinder

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Great Teachers – follow up: School Direct

Dear Sir/ Madam,

We are writing on behalf of the Geographical Association (GA), *'the leading subject association for all teachers of geography'*, to make a number of observations about the development of School Direct as a means of training secondary school geography teachers.

The Association previously submitted its observations relating to 'the New Inquiry into Teacher Training' in 2009 commenting on concerns over:

- The need for Ofsted to report regularly on the quality of subject training.
- The development of criteria to measure the quality of subject-specific teaching.
- The improvement of subject training in employment-based ITT.
- Ways to halt the loss of subject expertise in university ITT departments and safeguard their capacity to engage in subject-specific research.
- The maintenance of subject resource networks to support those involved in the delivery of ITT.
- How best to implement sustained, subject-specific professional development for all teachers.

The development of School Direct would appear to have strengthened our concerns over the quality of subject-specific training relating to the award of QTS. As a consequence of the reduction in PGCE allocations, several universities have lost subject-specific expertise, while the linking of School Direct consortia to HEI takes no account of whether that particular HEI has subject-specific expertise.

Using the allocations data for school direct places on the School Direct DfE website in Feb 2013, it would appear that there were 198 non-salaried and 57 salaried places listed for geography. Of these 80 and 37 places respectively were allocated to accredited providers with no geography specialist tutor in post at that time. This is a proportion of 45%. This suggests that a very significant proportion of the geography trainee teachers in the School Direct scheme in September 2013 will not have the benefit of a geography education specialist contributing to their training.

In such situations, it would appear that one of the following scenarios is likely:

1. Relying solely on a mentor in school to provide all the geography specialist training, in the worst case scenarios, these mentors are not geographers.
2. Universities running School Direct schemes in geography although they have no specialist geography educators within their university provision.
3. Where School Direct subject cohorts are very small providers are planning to combine subjects and provide "humanities" training rather than specific geography training. At a time when the DfE is stressing the importance of subject knowledge in the proposals for the new curriculum this is a very backward step for geography ITE.

Strategic Partners:



Despite significant efforts, the Geographical Association has been unable to find anyone doing a School Direct pilot in geography in order to carry out a more detailed appraisal of the current situation.

Key concerns

- The closure of good (Ofsted grade 2) geography courses in universities at the same time as some schools 'requiring improvement' (Ofsted grade 3) are being allocated School Direct geography places.
- The proportion of new geography teachers who will be trained next year through School Direct schemes where no specialist geography tutor will be involved in the training.
- That school-led training risks failing to train new teachers well in geography pedagogy and provides a narrow training based mainly on the experience of one school.
- Geography teachers, as mentors, are being asked to take the major responsibility for training geography teachers without the time and resources to do so, and without having sufficient expertise in subject pedagogy. Many new schools and mentors are being expected to train for the first time, while existing highly experienced mentors with an excellent training record are not being involved.
- Geography allocations are dependent on the overall quality of the ITE provider. Those judged "good" have been allocated no core places for geography, regardless of the quality of the geography training. Courses that have been previously graded as "outstanding" for geography are facing closure. Ofsted no longer reports on individual subjects.
- If university geography ITE courses close, the loss of experienced geography educators will have a serious impact on the provision of curriculum development, professional development and research in geography education.
- The GA believes that new teachers must have a secure understanding of subject pedagogy to teach their subject well. Most school-led routes have only a few trainees studying each subject; therefore they cannot resource a dedicated geography tutor. Training that takes place mainly in one school does not provide sufficient experience of a range of teaching approaches and techniques.
- Mentors have very little time allocated to their ITE role. Most have few opportunities for subject-specific professional development to update and develop their understanding of subject pedagogy. Therefore, they rely on a university geography tutor to provide challenging and wide-ranging training in subject pedagogy – and incidentally provide them with professional development.
- Experience shows that any new geography course takes several years to achieve high quality training; some never do. Teacher training expertise takes time to develop. Yet for 2013 the allocations indicate 23% of geography trainees will be training in new providers. This risks creating a significantly high proportion of inexperienced providers.
- School Direct could work well if its introduction was managed and phased over several years. University tutors are keen to involve good geography departments in training students and the School Direct scheme requires strong commitment to ITE; such involvement by schools should establish stronger partnerships.

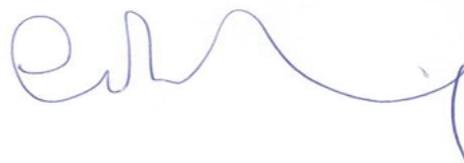
What needs to happen?

- The closure of high quality geography ITE courses in universities and the loss of geography education expertise must be prevented.
- A better way must be found to allocate secondary geography training places to reflect high quality provision and ensure the supply of high quality geography NQTs is maintained.
- Geography subject pedagogy should be improved in school-based routes into teaching.
- The introduction of School Direct should be carefully phased and managed with attention given to the quality of the geography departments that are involved; resourcing for geography mentors in time and professional development; opportunities for trainee teachers to gain broad geographical experiences during training.

Yours sincerely



Alan Kinder
(Chief Executive Geographical Association)



Dr Charles Rawding
(Chair, GA Teacher education Special Interest Group)