

Universities play a key role in training and attracting and retaining the best teachers. This cannot be replaced by direct training in schools.

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After a period of much uncertainty in how to best educate teachers, the mists are now beginning to clear. [James Noble-Rogers](#) recently gave evidence to the Parliamentary Education Committee on the means for attracting, training and retaining the best teachers, arguing that universities provide excellent training that may not be able to be replaced by direct training in schools.



Should teachers learn their 'craft' in schools or universities?

In the period leading up to the May 2010 general election, and in the immediate aftermath, the new administration in Westminster made some controversial statements about teacher education. Michael Gove, the new Secretary of State for Education, referred to [teaching as a 'craft'](#), which is best learnt by watching experienced practitioners in the classroom. To this end, he called for a shift in teacher training away from universities and directly into schools.

The apparent criticism of what universities do in relation to teacher education understandably caused some disquiet. Not least because there is no evidence base for this view. All teacher training programmes are inspected by OFSTED, whose most recent [annual report](#) found that:

- there is more outstanding provision in partnerships led by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) than in alternative school or employment-based routes;
- the recruitment and selection of high quality trainees with the potential to become high quality teachers is a strength across the sector; and
- the ability of trainees to reflect critically on their practice is a significant factor in promoting progress, particularly in HEIs.

Universities can, and do, make an invaluable contribution to most forms of training. They provide a crucial breadth of resources including economies of scale, access to libraries and other infrastructure support, varying school placements, time out of school for student teachers to share and reflect, and access to subject knowledge expertise and research activity.

This is not to say that the *only* route to becoming a teacher should be through traditional university-led programmes. There are also some excellent employment-based and school-led routes into teaching. In fact, one of the key points made in the [select committee meeting](#) of December 7 was that the distinction between university, school-led and employment-based routes is misleading. 'School-led' should be taken to include all Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes that give schools a leading role in the recruitment, training and assessment of new teachers, and not only those attracting the 'school-led' or 'employment-based' labels for funding and accreditation purposes.

As it is, schools already play a leading role in all aspects of many HEI-managed programmes, while universities are involved (often as managing bodies) in most school and employment-based routes. There is an emerging single teacher training sector encompassing a number of overlapping forms that meet the needs of different schools and prospective teachers and that adhere to the same standards and requirements and operate according to a shared set of values.

Who will teach the teachers?

Since the election, there has been some change in the language being used by ministers, and Michael Gove has given a commitment that he would like universities to continue to have a key role in the training of teachers. Some of the proposals in the [Department for Education's June 2011 ITT strategy](#), and the subsequent implementation plan, are endorsable.

Teaching schools, and partnership formations of schools with universities and other agencies, could help to address the long-standing difficulty of getting good schools properly engaged with both initial teacher

education and Continuing Professional Development.

Provided exceptions are allowed, the broad thrust of moves through bursaries to raise the status of teaching by increasing average entry qualifications is also welcome. Here, however, care will have to be taken not to sleepwalk into supply problems in subjects and phases where bursary support will be below the level of tuition fees.

But one overarching concern is for the possible long-term fragmentation of the system. The government must not abrogate its responsibility to ensure the supply of sufficient and properly qualified teachers and to maintain a properly regulated teacher education system.

The current proposals to allocate up to five hundred teacher training places direct to schools for them to recruit their own trainee teachers and commission an accredited ITT provider are a necessary alternative approach, if the existing system can't meet a particular school's supply needs. However, the ITT strategy implementation plan refers to a 'quick' expansion of this 'School-Direct' scheme.

Allocating the bulk of training places to schools could (alongside the combined impact of various other initiatives) destabilise existing provision, undermine quality, result in duplication and the loss of economies of scale, create local supply problems, threaten the supply of teachers to schools in more challenging circumstances, and place a burden on those schools that are involved.

There is no evidence that schools have the appetite to assume responsibility for recruiting and training some 38,000 new teachers each year. HEI teacher education would not be sustainable if it was expected to rely on a fluctuating pattern of demand from local schools for fragmented packages of support.

About the author

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