

National Association for Primary Education

ITT Market Review Report

July 2021

The National Association for Primary Education is deeply alarmed by the recommendations stemming from the ITT Market Review and while we recognise the laudable intentions to enhance the quality of ITT provision, the mechanisms proposed are at best problematic and at worst highly damaging to the system. At a time of crisis, when the educational system is reeling from the impact of the pandemic, one must also question the timing of such an overhaul and the legitimacy of a consultation process which is restricted to seven weeks and located during the summer vacation, thereby precluding consultation with schools. If consultation is to be more than a token gesture, we would urge the government to abandon the current timescale envisaged and to embark on a genuine process of consultation with all the stakeholders concerned.

We question the fundamental assumption that current *structures and partnerships* are not working sufficiently well to allow for significant improvement. We note that all HEI provision (which accounts for 80% of the cohort entering the profession) is rated by OfSTED as Good or Outstanding and the document itself makes reference to the quality of some of the partnerships and the '*detailed and rigorous approach to the training of mentors*'. We are well aware of the progress made in recent decades to develop close partnerships with schools, nurturing relationships which are tailor-made for specific localities so that the benefits are mutual for schools and universities alike. **One therefore has to ask - what is the rationale for a wholesale restructuring of the system, at the centre of which is a new accreditation process which is un-costed, potentially very labour intensive and risking the departure of some of the major providers?** If the current accreditation process is perceived as insufficiently robust, then one has to ask why the government has not taken steps already to fine-tune it. The implications for teacher recruitment of this major overhaul would be seriously damaging at the best of times, but in the context of the aftermath of the pandemic and the need for *educational recovery*, they could be lethal.

We are also alarmed by the fervently centralist and restrictive messages being conveyed both in relation to the school curriculum and that of the training providers: it is argued, for example, that placement schools should be identified where trainees' experiences on placement are fully aligned with the training curriculum. Does the term, 'fully aligned' imply that the school's curriculum offer has got to be a mirror image of the HEI's training curriculum – in which case, does this constitute a major constraint on school curriculum design and what are the implications for schools' willingness to engage in ITT? The underlying assumption here is that uniformity of approach is an essential ingredient in

initial teacher education, but that ignores the critical importance of diversity of experience in professional development.

Of course, on grounds of student entitlement there needs to be some degree of consistency in the range of experiences on offer on school placement across different settings, but that is very different from what appears to be envisaged – namely a top-down model of ITT which views teaching in essentially technocratic terms, divorced from the principles behind professional autonomy and critical awareness.

The Review's orientation towards the teaching of reading (an orientation which is well rehearsed in numerous government documents) exemplifies this issue further, where rhetoric gets in the way of a stance which respects the professionalism of the teacher and the complexities of the reading process. The assertion is made that trainees should be *familiarised with the evidence for the effectiveness of SSP (systematic synthetic phonics) and that time is not used teaching them alternative approaches*. **While one can go along with the argument that phonetic awareness is a key dimension in the process of becoming a reader, it is extraordinary that the government should be precluding the possibility of induction into the range of strategies which are part and parcel of the process of becoming an effective reader: phonetic decoding may be a critical ingredient, but research demonstrates that it is by no means the sole necessary component, especially for disadvantaged children and those with special educational needs.** Moreover, this level of intervention in what is essentially a matter for professional judgement smacks of the kind of state control one associates with dictatorships rather than a liberal democracy whose values are rightly championed by the government.

In conclusion, we applaud the Review's determination to enhance further the role of the mentor in initial teacher education and we also welcome steps to encourage more schools to take seriously their responsibilities in the provision of placements and to work alongside HEIs and other providers. We appreciate the government's commitment to an *evidence-based trainee curriculum*, despite the statements in the Review which appear to contradict this principle (as highlighted in the previous paragraph) and we agree that *educational disadvantage* must be an area of priority in initial and continuing professional development. Indeed, much of the document articulates a model of good practice in ITE which would not be disputed.

However, the Review's central recommendations regarding the overhaul of the structures underpinning provision in ITE and the establishment of a new accreditation process are very problematic and counter-productive at a time when the profession needs support, not a battering-ram, as it emerges from the after-effects of the pandemic.

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