

Written evidence submitted by the National Institute of Teaching

1. About the National Institute of Teaching

- 1.1 The National Institute of Teaching (NlOT) improves the quality of teaching and school leadership by carrying out research, applying insights to our programmes, and sharing findings with the sector.
- 1.2 We provide teachers and school leaders with high-quality, evidence-based training and professional development throughout their careers. Our training is delivered through six regional campuses, targeting disadvantaged areas of the country. This includes all the 'golden thread' programmes – initial teacher training, Early Career Framework and National Professional Qualifications.

2. How we compiled our evidence

- 2.1 We conducted seven in-depth interviews with senior staff members and serving school leaders affiliated with NlOT. The interview questions were based on the call for evidence. Prior to the study, ethics approval was obtained from NlOT's Research Advisory Group.
- 2.2 Interviews were transcribed and analysed to identify themes. To increase trustworthiness and rigour, the analysis and writing up followed a collaborative, iterative, process. Transcripts were analysed by an experienced qualitative educational researcher, producing a coding sheet that systematically captured themes mentioned in the interviews and their frequency. A team of researchers and practitioners, including some interviewees, provided feedback on the coded information. We only included the most prominent themes in this report.
- 2.3 Our findings are in section 3, with sub-sections on initial teacher training (ITT), recruitment to schools, the early career framework (ECF) and in-service training and development. This section includes direct quotes from the interviews and pulls together emerging themes identified by interviewees.
- 2.4 Section 4 is the NlOT's interpretation of that evidence – proposing solutions to some of the challenges and themes that emerge from the findings.

3. Findings

Initial teacher training

- 3.1 Interviewees reported that the current approach to attracting and training teachers to the profession is not working as well as it could or should.
- 3.2 Interviewees reported a marked decline in the quality and quantity of teacher training applications within the last decade. A SCITT leader said: *“We’ve seen peaks and troughs in the numbers of applicants before, but this goes way beyond that. This is no longer a normal trough; it is a recession.”*

Financial support

- 3.3 Respondents noted higher application numbers for subjects which attract bursaries, with exceptions. All interviewees noted the increase in applications for secondary mathematics. Physics and modern foreign languages were frequently mentioned as subjects in which there were still shortages despite the availability of financial support. One senior leader said: *“The one that’s really come to the surface in the last couple of years is modern foreign languages. I think it’s probably to be expected. It became non-compulsory at GCSE so people stopped taking it. Therefore, you haven’t got the graduates to apply for the teaching positions.”* The SCITTs we interviewed noted significant shortages in applications for humanities subjects – including history, geography, and English. One said: *“a geography teacher is like gold dust.”*
- 3.4 While respondents were broadly supportive of bursaries as a recruitment tool, there was uncertainty as to their value in *retaining* teachers after they had qualified. Several interviewees referenced that those in receipt of tax-free bursaries sometimes saw a pay cut in their first few years of teaching. One said: *“There’s something psychological there, in that they’ve had all this financial reimbursement for the great work they’re doing in ITT. They go into their first job, which is arguably a tougher year in a school. They’re working hard and they’re getting paid less than they got in the first year.”*
- 3.5 While recruitment of primary teachers is currently on target, respondents noticed warning signs of a decline, perceived to be due to lack of affordability. One SCITTs leader noted a 75-25% secondary-primary split. Those currently in training are struggling to adequately fund their own living and travel costs. The same SCITT set **up a hardship fund** for its primary cohort. The SCITT leader explained: *“They have no salary, no income at all and they’ve got to pay their travel on top. Many of the applicants simply cannot afford to get to their placement. These are fantastic trainees who will make a great difference to the school system, but they would potentially have had to withdraw from the system.”*
- 3.6 Interviewees noted significant changes in the demographics and location of those applying. Many put this down to the cost of living. Nearly all said applicants were searching for training places close to where they live. A SCITT leader remarked: *“When we ask, ‘how did you hear about us?’ We’ve found that they are simply typing in the postcode to DfE Apply, and they are selecting whichever provider has a school close to home.”* Interviewees suggested that those who have financial support from family were more likely to apply, with fewer applications from people with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Mature entrants are often dissuaded from applying for subjects in which there are no bursaries, because of existing financial commitments.

Geography and regional variation

- 3.7 Location matters. Interviewees remarked on the smaller pool of graduates available in coastal areas, rural areas, and those areas that are not served well by universities. Interviewees felt that it was easier to recruit applicants in towns and cities with established universities.
- 3.8 In some areas, graduates are in demand, and other industries offer higher salaries that teaching cannot compete with. One interviewee told us that there is a gambling company close to a teacher-training campus that offers attractive salaries for graduates in computer science and STEM subjects.
- 3.9 Regional variation in recruitment exists, which is masked by national projections and therefore not adequately addressed by national action. This leaves regions short in certain subjects.

Changing expectations and behaviours

- 3.10 Respondents reflected on a marked change in applicants' expectations. This was attributed to Covid, the cost of living, or a combination. One interviewee said that a decade ago there was an expectation that trainees would travel to placements or training. She said: *"You just felt so lucky to have got on this training course, it was so competitive. And you just went where they sent you. Now trainees come, and it's like, well, I don't want to be more than 20 minutes away from home. They are really particular about exactly where they want to train."*
- 3.11 There are also changes in *motivations* for applying. Respondents reflected that, post-Covid, there was an increase in the number of people applying to ITT as a *'safety net'*. For example, *"they would apply for a teaching position early on but would be looking for something else to do in between the time when they found out they were accepted and when the training course would start."* Another interviewee said: *"In economically challenging areas, you find that people are graduating without a job to go to, and apply to teaching because there is nothing else to do."*

ITT market review

- 3.12 Interviewees were unsure about the impact of the ITT market review. All said that the intention was sound – that a different way of measuring quality of providers could lead to a better geographical spread of good practice. They all expressed that every new teacher coming into the profession deserves the opportunity to access high-quality training, no matter where in the country they live.
- 3.13 All referenced some unintended consequences of the market review, including the loss of local provision, and with it, local expertise.

Effectiveness of ITT

- 3.14 Respondents said that, in general, initial teacher training prepared trainees effectively. They did, however, reference inconsistencies in two areas – placement schools and mentoring.
- 3.15 Respondents reflected on how difficult it can be to achieve the right balance with placement schools. On the one hand, they need to be in strong schools with supportive environments and

good behaviour, to enable them to learn how to teach. On the other, trainees need to be exposed to the realities of school life. One interviewee remarked: *“We don't prepare students well enough to deal with the realities of schools now.”*

- 3.16 Another interviewee added: *“Say we recruit the right calibre of person. We prepare them properly and manage their expectations, and get the pre-work done before we start on programme. Let's assume all that happens as it should. We know that our model is effective. But then it all comes down then to the quality of experience the trainee gets in school, and that largely comes down to the quality of the mentor they get.”* All reflected on the demands placed on mentors and the risk that these demands become unsustainable. This was felt to be particularly acute for ECT mentors.

Recruitment to schools

- 3.17 Interviewees reported that schools have difficulty recruiting and retaining experienced teachers across geography, phase, and subject. Several interviewees explained that schools were plugging the recruitment gaps by hiring larger numbers of Early Career Teachers, putting pressure on mentor capacity. One interviewee said that in one year, **1 in 5 teachers in a secondary school in the north-east was an ECT**, and two-thirds of one department were made up of ECTs. Another interviewee remarked: *“Some schools don't have the capacity to support ECTs, but they don't have a choice, because ultimately they can't have a classroom without a teacher in it.”* Another interviewee said local schools are in 'bidding wars' on salaries to attract teachers.
- 3.18 Post Covid, there has been an increased demand for flexibility. One interviewee noted an increase in the number of new starters requesting part-time. This demand had previously been concentrated among those later in their careers. Our interviewees said some schools and trusts are managing flexibility effectively – for example, offering PPA time at home or off-site, and developing cultures and working conditions that support flexibility. But this is inconsistent by geography, phase, and type of school.

Early career framework

- 3.19 All the interviewees believed that that the ECF is a good policy which has had a significant impact on the quality of teacher induction. For example, one of our serving school leaders said: *“[The framework] is terrific, it's excellent, and although it's too soon to make this claim, I'm optimistic that it'll achieve its ambition of keeping more teachers in the classroom after five years.”*

Speed and timing of implementation

- 3.20 A theme that emerged strongly from our interviewees was the unintended consequences of the way in which the ECF was implemented – particularly its pace and the timing of the national roll-out. One interviewee remarked: *“Part of the challenge was the timing of the policy, and to be launched when schools were still facing significant challenges because of the pandemic. To have a new initiative that is so big felt like another thing to do, rather than the supportive initiative that it was supposed to be.”* Another interviewee felt more could have been done to balance the roll-out against existing challenges facing schools. They said: *“Schools are under the cosh. They've got a huge amount going on. They've got...children with significant challenges. It's*

difficult for them to find the bandwidth to take on a whole new programme, and possibly they weren't given enough time to prepare for it."

- 3.21 One interviewee referenced a perceived lack of support in implementing change. They said: *"It's not been implemented well, and in part that's because of the classic sort of change fragilities around pace of change, scale of change, and the resource available for the change. So we've got a situation where it's brilliant in design, pulling together some great evidence, but it's a pressured system and therefore it doesn't land."*

Change from what has gone before

- 3.22 Many interviewees referenced the improvement that the ECF had delivered. There were frequent references to the importance of two-year mentoring and support, and more rigorous expectations of mentoring were broadly welcomed. But there are additional financial burdens with this approach, and one interviewee said: *"In previous years, you might appoint an NQT and that would mean that that member of staff would be cheaper, which would enable you to balance your books a little bit better. Now the problem is that the amount of additional timetable and hours and things you need to be able to support an ECT means that you don't get the cost saving so actually new teachers are relatively expensive to employ."*
- 3.23 One interviewee explained that being a mentor was sometimes seen as a stepping-stone towards leadership, rather than as worthwhile in itself. Additionally, there are challenges with mentoring quality, especially with staff shortages. One interviewee explained: *"Sometimes the person who is allocated to be a mentor isn't because they're a skilled mentor. It's because it's the only person that's there...."*

Mentoring

- 3.24 Interviewees were unanimous that the workload of mentors has increased, and many raised concerns about the sustainability of this workload, and consequences for retention. One said: *"I am concerned that, where it's not being done properly, [the impact] is not neutral. It is actually detrimental to retention. This is just the straw that's broken the camel's back. It's one more thing they've been asked to do. Typically, mentors are the strongest teachers in school, the most willing, who just keep getting asked to do everything. That's partly because, in the profession, the better you are, the more you get to do, often without recompense."*
- 3.25 Quality mentoring was raised as a solution to issues around flexibility and contextualisation of the ECF programme. For example, one interviewee said: *"An ECT may really need to cover behaviour management, but that might not be available until later in term 3. A skilled mentor for the ECT would be able to support them and navigate around that. When it's just being delivered off the shelf and the mentor isn't having much input to it, then it could be seen as quite negative."* Some interviewees felt that a mentor should be empowered to navigate this complexity, but that mentors feel constrained, despite official guidance offering flexibility.

In-service training

- 3.26 Interviewees reported that teacher professional development has improved since the introduction of the new NPQ suite. The quality of the evidence base was considered robust and extensive. As one interviewee remarked: *"In our school we have more people undertaking NPQs,*

which is great, and I think the rigour with which those NPQs are taught and led is better for the system in general.”

- 3.27 The funding offered for NPQs has been welcome, but, in practice, training and support can be difficult to access in smaller schools, or in rural areas, because it is costly and difficult to find cover. Although additional funding has been made available to small schools, respondents argued that funding does not cover the actual cost of teacher release time. Providers and delivery partners have tried to resolve this by exploring different delivery models, such as outside of school hours, but this can then be perceived as causing a workload issue or devaluing the importance of professional development.
- 3.28 Respondents reflected that NPQ participants use the NPQ as a ‘stepping-stone’ or a way to secure promotion. This may be within another school or trust, and so it doesn’t always support retention *within school*. The linking of CPD with promotion opportunities can also lead to difficulties due to the tapering number of senior leadership posts within the system. As one school leader reported: *“People see professional development as something that they do to move on and change roles, but because of the nature of the pyramid in education, there are fewer and fewer leadership jobs compared to the numbers of people that teach. It can lead to disappointment, or it can lead to a churn. This is unhelpful.”*
- 3.29 Several respondents referenced that one of the unintended consequences of fully funded NPQs is that they ‘squeeze out’ other professional development. One said: *“The focus on the golden thread and NPQs has put a squeeze on that broader professional development. There’s a good suite of professional development available to schools on wellbeing, mental health training, safeguarding, Prevent. There’s been a squeeze on this type of offer.”*

4 Interpretation of the evidence

- 4.1 In this section, we reflect on what our interviewees have said, and recommend actions that could be taken to improve teacher recruitment, retention, and training.
- 4.2 **Develop a recruitment and retention strategy for the post-Covid world.** The Government’s Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy of 2019 would have had a greater impact without Covid, compounded by the rise in the cost of living. This has produced a workforce marketplace which needs a different approach, including on financial and non-monetary incentives.
- 4.3 **Adapt recruitment approaches to reflect the increased importance of locality.** The Department, ITT providers and schools should review the way targets are set, resources are allocated and processes are designed to reflect regional recruitment variations and changes in trainee expectations.
- 4.4 **Define ‘flexibility’ in the school context and trial innovative approaches.** Our evidence suggests that schools are not currently equipped to deal with requests for flexibility, or even defining what flexibility means. The sector needs to go beyond ‘part-time’ as a solution to flexible working. Evidence should be gathered on the impact of different ‘flexible’ practices, and innovative approaches should be trialled.
- 4.5 **Transform mentoring into a high-status role which teachers aspire to.** Mentoring should become an aspirational role and a career path in its own right. The funding available to schools

to support their mentors should be reviewed to ensure it can be used effectively to support their work.

- 4.6 **Elevate and prioritise professional development as a vehicle for school improvement.** All our interviewees were passionate about continuing professional development, but many reported practical challenges in implementation. Often this was because of competing school improvement priorities. We believe the sector should start a national conversation about the importance of professional development, mobilising governors, parents, and sector leaders to centre PD in the school improvement narrative.

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