

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
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8 August 2013

Dear Secretary of State

Initial Teacher Training and School Direct

I am writing as Chair of SCORE¹ to express grave concerns about the impact of changes to initial teacher training (ITT) on the recruitment of trainee teachers in the sciences.

The continued provision of a well-trained and enthusiastic teaching workforce is crucial to students' enjoyment and learning, and this is particularly true in the sciences, which have had some difficulty in encouraging students to progress to A-levels and beyond. The Government has demonstrated its commitment to that workforce through the bursaries for trainee teachers in physics and chemistry, which are already having an impact on recruitment of highly qualified graduates into teaching.

SCORE is not opposed to changes to the ITT process per se, provided the rationale for the changes is clearly made. We also support the aim of involving schools more closely in the training of teachers. However, there are a number of issues with School Direct that we would like to highlight, that could have serious implications:

- Moving to such a localised model of recruitment will make planning and managing national targets difficult. This is a particular issue for the sciences, as there is an intention not only to replace existing teachers, but to increase the numbers of subject specialists. It will be difficult to follow through this national strategy when recruitment decisions are being made by individual schools. There is a danger that the gains achieved from the additional support given to the recruitment of teachers in physics and chemistry in recent years will be halted. The PGCE in Physics with Mathematics has been a particular success, and we are very concerned that there will be insufficient schools willing to consider this new dual specialism to ensure its continued viability. We understand from statistics published by GTTR on 5 August that recruitment in physics is down 24% on last year, with biology and chemistry both down 13%, so our fears are not unfounded.
- The mechanisms in place for quality assuring the partnerships taking part in School Direct will not be effective in ensuring high quality provision. Although we understand that Ofsted will have responsibility for inspecting schools' provision of teacher training, in addition to their standard inspections, we are concerned that this will be insufficient to ensure that schools are providing high-quality training. Schools are unlikely to need to recruit new trainees in the same subject on a regular basis, so a negative inspection will have less impact on a school than on a higher education department that recruits a larger number of trainees annually, meaning there will be less incentive for schools to ensure

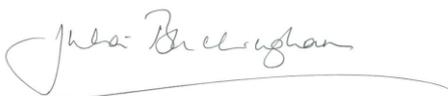
¹ SCORE is a group of science organisations working together on science education policy. Members are the Association for Science Education, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Biology.

the quality of the training they provide. SCORE would like to see a clear set of criteria for participating schools to meet before they are allowed to take part in School Direct.

- Another important route for graduates into science teaching has been the SKE courses, which have allowed those with different backgrounds (for example engineering degrees) to bring their subject knowledge up to the required level before starting their teacher training. The changes to the allocation of places for SKE courses proposed for 2014 put the provision of these courses at risk, and this is exacerbated by the emphasis on School Direct, since schools are less likely to recruit those requiring SKE courses. This is likely to have a serious impact on the numbers being recruited to teach physics and chemistry.
- Trainee teachers currently benefit from the support that comes from being part of a community of practice in a university. This is important in terms of their own practice as teachers, exposing them to different approaches, for example, and to research. If trainees are going to be based in schools, there will need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that these communities of practice can continue to be built and maintained.
- The potential for isolation is a particular issue for training teachers in the sciences, because of the need to ensure that trainees are comfortable using practical work in their lessons, which could be jeopardised by poor practice or resources in their host school. To counteract this, it is important that School Direct has in place processes to ensure that trainees are exposed to a range of teaching styles and practices, and that strong links with education departments in universities are maintained.
- There is a danger that, without the assurances of continued funding for ITT places, universities may no longer continue to regard their education departments as financially viable, leading to a loss of valuable research activity that drives innovation in teaching and learning. This has serious implications both for the provision of an evidence base for education policy and practice, which we believe to be very important, and for ensuring that teaching practice is informed by the latest research, and vice versa. The current uncertainty may lead to expertise disappearing in a haphazard way across the country, which will make it more difficult to ensure continued access to that expertise for regional school consortia, which are likely to seek partnerships with their local universities.
- We understand from the National College for Teaching and Leadership that there are currently no plans to monitor the overall costs of School Direct compared to the current system. This is a concern, as there is a strong likelihood that a localised model could incur more costs than a more centralised, university-based system.
- The lack of a centralised application system this year has made it difficult to monitor recruitment, leading to a loss of clarity on current trends and difficulty in addressing known shortfalls in recruitment in a timely way.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Professor Julia Buckingham
SCORE Chair

cc Rt Hon David Willetts MP
Charlie Taylor