

Government consultation on Further Education (FE) Initial Teacher Training (ITT) reform

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction and key points

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 25,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.
2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation, which sets out proposals to improve the quality of initial teacher training (ITT) for the FE sector. Publicly funded ITT must help to create a strong supply of new teachers to the FE sector, particularly where vacancies are hard to fill.
3. ASCL also welcomes the fact that, over the longer term, the DfE is considering the use of legislative powers to support a sustainable, quality-focused teacher training system for FE by making proposals for a system of accreditation for FE ITT providers, to improve the quality and breadth of data and evidence on the FE ITT system, leading to statutory guidance for publicly funded FE ITT providers.
4. Our members tell us that pre-service students who have come to them from private training providers have sometimes been unprepared to teach effectively in the sector and have required significant re-training. Colleges as employers must have confidence that the quality of FE initial teacher training is high and assists the FE sector to contribute towards its improvement.
5. FE workforce information published by the DfE this year showed that 5.4% of teaching posts were vacant. Vacancy rates are, however, as high as 12.9% in some subjects, including construction, planning and the built environment. Over 10% of vacancies are in subjects such as electronics, agriculture and horticulture, design, engineering and manufacturing, and accounting and finance.
6. It is important to establish how the provision of ITT might impact on students intending to enter FE teaching and how pre-service ITT students are successfully progressing into teaching roles.
7. Legislation to force FE teacher training organisations to be accredited by the DfE may establish a clearly defined quality bar that providers must meet before accessing public funding, but it is unlikely that it will improve the vacancy rate in FE.

B. Answers to specific questions

Question 1: “From AY24/25, access to student support for pre-service FE ITT courses should be limited to higher education providers with degree awarding powers and their validated partners” Please choose from the following options: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree.

8. Neither agree nor disagree. The proposal to only allow student loan funding where courses are delivered by, or in partnership with, universities and providers with degree awarding powers is, in general, helpful. We know there are concerns about the quality and value for money of some providers. However, having degree awarding powers and validated partners may be restrictive in some areas, and does not necessarily mean that the quality of the ITT provision is high. We would prefer a system where grading of providers with these awarding powers is used to ensure consistently high quality of provision, as is typical of most inspection regimes.

Question 2: “From AY24/25, the Diploma in Teaching (FE and Skills) should have access to public funding when delivered via in-service training programmes such as Taking Teaching Further” Please choose from the following options: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree.

9. Neither agree nor disagree. Whilst having access to public funding via in-service training programmes such as Taking Teaching Further is a good idea in principle, it is not clear whether this will lead to fewer employers paying other necessary costs for in-service training and more employers expecting the teacher to cover any additional costs themselves.

Question 3: For those FE ITT trainees best suited to a pre-service course of study, what further steps could government take to support their progression into teaching employment in the statutory FE sector?

10. ITT trainees with specific skills in shortage areas, such as engineering, construction, IT and graphics, would be suitable for pre-service training. However, the pre-service training would need to carry with it a mandatory award, such as those available to certain ITT teachers in schools. Without this, the salaries alone in FE would not be sufficient to attract those with the skills sets needed in FE.

Question 4: Do you wish to submit any additional evidence to show how the proposals outlined here would impact on the provision of FE ITE courses, and how that could affect potential students seeking employment as FE teachers?

11. No.

Question 5: “Providers of publicly-funded FE ITT should require an accreditation from the Secretary of State” Please choose from the following options: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree

12. We agree that providers of publicly funded FE ITT should be accredited. If public funding is granted to provision, it should only be granted to those who have gone through a process of accreditation to ensure the quality of the provision and safeguard those undertaking the programme.

Question 6: “Providers delivering publicly-funded FE ITT courses should be required to provide specified data relating to their programmes and students to the Department

for Education” Please choose from the following options: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree

13. Agree. However, the specific data required of providers should be proportionate to the need for that data, and not lead to an unnecessary extra administrative burden on the provider.

Question 7: “Providers of publicly-funded FE ITT should be required to have regard to statutory guidance pertaining to quality standards” Please choose from the following options: Strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree; strongly disagree

14. Agree. However, the statutory guidance must be relevant to teaching in FE and not merely borrowed from another sector.

Question 8: Do you have any comments about the potential impact, both positive and negative, of our proposals on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics?

15. Yes. There are likely to be negative impacts on students with some special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). These individuals are more likely to be negatively impacted by a more formal system of pre-service and in-service ITT. These individuals are represented amongst the teaching profession in the FE sector. It is imperative that they are not disadvantaged because of these changes.

Question 9: Where any negative impacts have been identified, do you know how these might be mitigated?

16. Yes – by ensuring that the proposed changes provide special arrangements for students with protected characteristics so that they can contribute to teaching in the FE sector.

C. Conclusion

17. We agree with most of the proposals for change in the FE ITT system, but it is important that the proposed changes do not make it any more difficult to recruit to posts in Further Education where there are considerable shortages of skills.

18. We hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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