

## **Why schools should continue to provide placements for trainee teachers?**

A think piece working paper by Margaret Mulholland, Julie Greer and Caroline Daly

This discussion paper was written following concerns from members of the UCET Executive Committee, that offers of school placements for trainees in 20/21 have been significantly reduced. With increased applications for post graduate and graduate ITE, the demand for school placements is likely to be far higher than supply, without more schools being able to offer their time, skills and expertise.

### **New NQTS; thinking about the emerging professional**

Do you remember your teaching practices? We'd be surprised if you don't. They are a vital experience that helped shape our teacher identity; our skills and characteristics. It's like learning to ride a bike, drive a car, or play an instrument. These are all things you could experience in a virtual world, but you can only learn competence, flair and an emotional engagement with these skills, if they are practised in person. It is on a teaching placement that increasing proficiency will develop motivation, resilience and determination, without which a new teacher would find it hard to keep going. As we enter the new school year there is a fear that so many of our recently qualified teachers will be going into their first teaching post with less experience drawn from real classrooms and less familiarity with the culture of schools than in former years. This autumn term we will need the increased involvement from a range of staff to ensure our NQTs have access to an upgraded package of mentoring, support, team teaching, coaching, observations and professional conversations with colleagues, to develop the skills that have not yet been honed by extensive development time in classrooms.

### **New trainees and student teachers; thinking about risk**

In response to Covid-19 the DfE reminded providers to use the flexibility to reduce the 120 day requirement for school based training, in order to obtain qualified teacher status. Whilst programmes need to continue to have 120 days in their design, there may be a need to reduce this again next academic year. This flexible approach is welcomed by many, but we need to be sure that this is not a short cut to slashing the requirement for teachers to learn to teach in the classroom in the longer term. Schools need their NQTs to arrive with a standard and competency they can rely on; so it follows that schools have a responsibility to provide the training that they need their teachers to acquire.

A trainee should be welcomed into school, as an integral part of our learning community, not as a stranger or a visitor. Whilst it would be important to assess the risk of someone entering into our schools at any time, in these times of Coronavirus we need to undergo the process of weighing the risk against the likelihood of an event and balance those risks with the gains.

The risk of a well person bringing Covid-19 into the school environment is relatively low and no greater than the risk that any school staff present each day. A trainee would be responsible for maintaining the measures that a school has put in place. To not do so would be managed in the same way as any other breach of professional standards. These procedures are already in place in schools. The DfE guidance states that, within the current pandemic, we maintain 'bubbles' of children and staff where we can. It would be reasonable if the teaching placement is within a second or third wave, to assign the trainee to a 'bubble'. If the local risk of contagion is low, then schools may be able to relax some of their regulations around staff moving between bubbles, to enable a trainee to observe others and have contact with mentor and colleagues, maintaining an appropriate distance with ease.

Significant steps are being made in all schools to address Covid-19 related risks and these can also be applied to trainee teachers. We advise schools to work closely with the ITE provider lead body to reduce the risk from

working across settings in close proximity with others without a reasonable time gap between. This might mean considering one teaching placement as the 'norm' where the trainee teacher remains attached to the school in case of closures. In this case the second placement for enrichment can be provided late in the year, which is flexible and determined by circumstances (including school closures). If schools are closed for part of the year, the main focus is on consolidating development within the main placement school, not moving to another. As for other adults in the setting we would advise completing a confidential risk assessment with the trainee where the trainee may present with underlying medical vulnerabilities including anxiety. See below for example. This can help to ensure that the trainee has agency in the process and the solutions. 18 Schools need their NQTs to arrive with a standard and competency they can rely on; so it follows that schools have a responsibility to provide the training that they need their teachers to acquire.

### **New professional practice; thinking about the gains**

The advantages of having a trainee are numerous for a school community and for the trainee. To name a few:

- Demonstrating that we are all here to learn. Recognising that a trainee is learning to teach can be very powerful for pupils and supports their own ambitions and understanding of a life-long commitment to learning.
- Maintaining important links with Higher Education and educational research, which informs developments in pedagogy and our metacognition.
- Reinforcing our own practice. Let us not forget Piaget and his understanding that we assimilate new knowledge and then accommodate it by applying our skills in different contexts. We usually choose teacher mentors because we recognise their own strengths in the classroom, but mentoring others can extensively develop the mentor's thinking about teaching and learning and further embed their own good practice, which can then be shared with more colleagues.
- Enabling flexible teaching. A trainee teacher is able to develop their interest in a subject area, such as phonics or fractions, by taking a small group over a period of time, which can make a real difference to that group and benefit the rest of the class too. Done well, teaching alongside the teacher practitioner can double the teacher input for a class and enhance the learning, providing pre learning to groups or individuals, reinforcing a teaching point in the lesson, or supporting pupils to review and apply their learning at the close of a lesson.
- A school should be able to provide a good enough experience for a trainee, so that school staff miss that trainee when they have gone. There will always be trainees who need more support and who take longer to develop their teaching abilities. An inclusive school will have a supportive infrastructure to help the mentor to support the trainee, using the experience to problem solve and resolve – these are important skills for the senior management roles to which good teacher mentors can aspire. Sharing the practice and culture of our schools, of which we are right to be proud, is important for the future of education and the professional quality of our teachers. Why would we not want to share what we do with 19 our colleagues who will teach the next generation?

### **New solutions; would more trainees create better experiences for pupils and teachers?**

Pre and post Covid-19 the argument for saturating schools with trainee teachers is compelling. A new normal for ITE could be to encourage schools to host additional placements. This might develop from a model of professional learning that will directly benefit pupils who have experienced learning loss.

### Take paired or multiple placements in each department

Once you have experienced paired placements as a Head of Department or as a mentor you understand how rather than adding to mentoring responsibilities, a paired placement reduces the burden on mentors.

Even within a small school or department it is possible to place and benefit from multiple trainees.

Co-planning, co-teaching and co-assessing can improve teaching and learning for trainees and the schools they work in.

### Who benefits?

Pupil	Mentor	School/Department
<b>Adult support for groups and individuals is increased</b>	Having a team to work with  Mentor gains skills in directing focused support and delegating	A departmental focus on strengthening teaching and learning
<b>Addressing individual needs – supporting a range of reasonable adjustments</b>	Learning from different approaches – questioning and challenging own practice	A greater sense of team and collaboration – even more so for small departments who miss this.
<b>Improving on task/engagement</b>	Being able to observe own class – strengthening forensic teaching	Opportunities to innovate and plan curriculum developments as a team
<b>Additional expertise – e.g. subject specialist in class</b>	Having two helpers to support mentors' teaching while being able to have shared mentoring sessions	Inclusivity is promoted through a co-teaching model
<b>More agile response to pupil questions</b>	Trainees talk through, problematise, reflect and refine together. Not everything is focused solely on the mentor to support	High degree of on-going professional learning for the wider departmental team and school
<b>Inclusivity is strengthened</b>	Collaborative learning	Tutor group also gains support from trainees
<b>Opportunities for enhanced reflection</b>	Skills developed to encourage trainees to reflect and respond	Strong reflective practice is developed
<b>Beneficial adult to pupil ratio</b>	Shared workload - marking and assessment is shared out and overseen by mentor	Developing a community of practice

In addition to the potential benefits to the existing school community, being in a paired placement provides student teachers with a rich learning experience because of tensions, dialogue and reflections that arise from being placed with a peer. This typically leads to more creative thinking and problem solving around the dilemmas that are natural experiences on placement. At a time of uncertainty in schools these qualities are even more important in the development of new professionals.