

Robin Walker MP

Minister for School Standards
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Westminster
SW1P 3BT

2 February 2022

Dear Minister,

The Higher Education sector is a critical part of initial teacher education (ITE) across England and, as the major representative bodies within the sector, we are incredibly proud of the work our members do to educate and prepare the next generation of teachers. Our organisations are committed to working with the government to improve and enhance teacher education, and each has worked with your department over many years in response to a variety of innovations.

We are aware that you will have received correspondence from each of us, and from a great many of our members individually, regarding the ITT Market Review. As with all government initiatives we worked closely with your department and the ITT Market Review team to input into its development and from the outset we sought to realise any changes that would genuinely improve initial teacher education for trainees, for schools and for pupils. The sustainability and quality of the teacher workforce is of paramount importance to us all, and we share your objective of delivering the best teacher education anywhere in the world.

The government response in December 2021 did reflect some of the changes that we had called for, and were welcomed by many within the sector. Even where there may be points of disagreement, we believe that whatever comes out of this process must be robust enough to secure the long-term health of ITE, and thus the teaching profession. While we may have valued more time to build these processes or bodies, or to hear more from schools themselves and what they would have most liked to see, we understand the government's desire to move forward with this agenda. We are therefore writing as a collection of representative bodies to highlight where we believe some clarifications may be needed, and where additional focus may be necessary for the accreditation system to succeed.

Accreditation and accountability are not problems for the sector. Universities have extraordinary levels of quality assurance already built into their systems for ITE, as well as many other courses run under accreditation models. However, the system now being designed for the ITE sector does pose some questions that would benefit from greater clarity. For example, the extent of the powers of the Department for Education (DfE), and the Secretary of State in particular, of revoking accreditation from current providers are unclear, as is what happens to the trainees affected by any such decision, and the right of any provider to appeal such revocation. Executive authority such as this would benefit from clear oversight and independent checks and balances, as these are vital for a healthy system to function. Similarly, the potential role of Ofsted in this process risks calling its independence into question, be that around a conflict of interest or the ongoing validity of inspections.

We hope that the make-up of any accreditation panel takes this into careful consideration, and that clear, equitable and transparent processes are put in place to protect all necessary independence.

To that end we strongly believe that for the accreditation process to be robust, fair, accurate, and successful, it should be informed by top-level expertise in ITE. This expertise, which can guide the DfE in its decision making, would be best drawn from those with knowledge of the sector and of what schools will need both today and into the future. Head teachers, school leaders, professional associations, sector representatives, all of these, and more, would add to the strength of the process, and would add real-world experience. We would urge the government to make use of these valuable resources.

The current downturn in applications for ITE across the country, added to the incredibly high pressures already on our schools, means that these reforms could not be coming at a more difficult time for ITE. It is vital for both the teacher supply pipeline and the health and wellbeing of staff across the profession that changes made are the right ones. Any reforms that will increase the burden on schools, and potentially put schools off engaging in ITE, would be disastrous for the sector and for the profession. This is why we want this process to succeed, and why we remain committed to working with the government to ensure that it is.

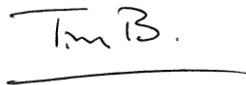
We firmly believe that this does mean ensuring that the final accreditation structure can inspire confidence from all applicants, as well as making every conceivable effort to limit additional pressures on schools, and encouraging even more to take part within ITE.

We are ready to meet you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



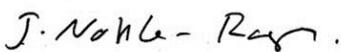
Rachel Hewitt
Chief Executive, MillionPlus



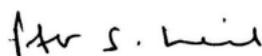
Dr Tim Bradshaw
Chief Executive, Russell Group



Vanessa Wilson
Chief Executive, University Alliance



Executive Director
UCET



Rev. Canon Professor Peter Neil
Chair, TEAG



Professor Julie Mennell
Chair, Cathedrals Group