

EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

Education Select Committee -Teacher recruitment, training and retention Inquiry

Nicholas Wright, Head of Public Affairs

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[Call for Evidence - Committees - UK Parliament](#)

1. MillionPlus is the Association for Modern Universities in the UK, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in the UK's world-leading university system.
2. Modern universities have a long history of teacher education, and despite a diversification of routes into teaching over recent years, these institutions continue to be at the forefront of the field, both in terms of research into pedagogy and the practice of initial teacher training and education. In 2020–21, modern universities accounted for 67% of all initial teacher training students in the university sector, and 79% of those were studying the undergraduate pathway.
3. Through our dedicated Deans of Education Network, we have worked closely with the Department for Education (DfE) on a range of issues in relation to Initial Teacher Education (ITE). MillionPlus institutions educate thousands of trainees across England each year, and this experience helps build a productive working relationship, leading to many positive developments in the field of ITE that have benefitted trainees, pupils, and the wider sector more generally.

THE CURRENT SITUATION REGARDING TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

4. Forecasts for the upcoming academic year show that the Government is set to miss recruitment targets across the board, in primary, secondary and specialist subject areas – following on from DfE also missing overall secondary and primary targets last year.
5. During this time the Government has undertaken a market review of initial teacher training, adding further instability to an already turbulent recruitment and retention picture for the teaching profession.
6. MillionPlus believes there needs to be clarity about what the problem is that the Government is trying to fix as the ITT Market review slimmed down accredited providers which in turn has exacerbated the ITT recruitment and retention issues, and yet DfE is exploring new routes into teaching via degree apprenticeships.
7. MillionPlus believes there is a lack of cohesive strategy that easily demonstrates to prospective students the options into teaching that are available. The Government should give a greater focus to marketing the routes available.

What are the main factors leading to difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified teachers?

8. There are a variety of factors leading to the existing difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers which should not be taken in isolation. These include pay and benefits, cost-of-living, workload, work-life balance, policy changes and career development opportunities.

9. The levels of teacher pay and benefits in England are not seen as being an incentive to attract people into the profession. MillionPlus believes that teachers still feel that their compensation does not adequately reflect their workload and responsibilities, especially when compared to other professions that require similar levels of education, time and responsibility. While MillionPlus welcomes the increase in starting salary being introduced by the Government, there needs to be more done to improve the benefits teachers receive and incentivise recruitment.
 10. This must include longer-term planning for bursary awards as the current approach does not tackle recruitment and retention issues sufficiently. The short-term planning from the Department of Education in terms of bursaries means that strong undergraduate candidates have quite often been approached by industry and have been accepted on graduate programmes with higher starting salaries and working conditions. This leads to fewer subject specialists looking to apply to teaching.
 11. The need for increased incentives is particularly the case in the current financial climate. Students are at the sharp end of the cost-of-living crisis, with MillionPlus research showing that nearly 300,000 students are at risk due to spiralling costs, with traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education likely to be hit the hardest. While universities are providing additional support, further intervention is needed.
 12. The Government should increase maintenance funding for students, ideally through grants, and ensure students are included in any further cost-of-living measures introduced. The Government should also conduct a review of maintenance loan support to allow them to be adjusted with inflation when higher than forecast. This could go some way to alleviating the drops in applications for the upcoming year.
 13. Rural and disadvantaged areas in England often face additional challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. These areas may have fewer resources, lower pay, and limited professional development opportunities, which can make it difficult to attract and retain experienced teachers.
 14. High teacher workload is a significant challenge in England. Teachers are often asked to work long hours, including evenings and weekends, to meet the demands of lesson planning, marking, and administrative tasks. The workload can lead to burnout and reduced job satisfaction, making it challenging to recruit and retain qualified teachers.
 15. This can mean that establishing a sustainable work-life balance is a challenge for many teachers, particularly with long working hours, extracurricular activities, and additional responsibilities outside the classroom. Teachers may struggle to balance their personal and professional lives and can lead to many leaving the sector after just a few years.
 16. Workload within the job was heightened by the pandemic, significantly impacting the teaching profession, with increased workload and stress due to remote teaching, changing guidelines, and increased responsibilities related to health and safety measures. These added pressures may have contributed to difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers.
 17. Opportunities for professional development, including training and career advancement, are essential for teachers to feel supported and motivated in their careers. Unfortunately MillionPlus believes these have been highly restricted due to financial pressures placed on schools and that there is insufficient support or mentoring available to trainee teachers. This may discourage teachers from staying in the profession and hinder their career progression.
 18. Changes in government policies, such as the recent curriculum reforms and testing requirements, can affect teacher morale and job satisfaction. The increased requirements of mentoring for Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework have impacted significantly on workload and experienced teachers
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cannot fulfil all of these roles leading to a reduction of placement capacity for Initial Teacher Training. The loss of good quality providers as a result of the accreditation process in the Government's recent ITT market review could also lead to further recruitment challenges with cold spots emerging in some parts of England.

19. MillionPlus believes that there is unhelpful rhetoric surrounding the teaching profession which has entered parliamentary discourse and that is having an adverse effect on the perception of teaching as a career.

Which subjects are most affected?

20. All subject areas have been affected, with indications that primary is also facing a downturn in applicants this year.

How does the situation differ across the country and across different types of schools and colleges?

21. There is a growing gap between applications in the largest cities and towns and smaller towns and rural areas. This gap is exacerbated by the outcomes of the accreditation process with fewer high-quality providers offering ITT and the loss of existing partnerships between HEIs and schools.
22. MillionPlus believes there is a worrying trend of senior leaders retiring, middle-career leaders leaving the profession and newly trained teachers leaving before completing the ECF. This is across the country and types of institutions as increased workload has become the prevalent concern across all schools and colleges.
23. Placements are a core part of any university-led ITE programme. They provide supported time within a school environment where trainees apply the research-led, theoretical, and pedagogical training that they have received directly from their university into real-world situations.
24. This transactional process allows trainees to develop as teachers, bring innovative methods of teaching to their schools which greatly benefits the pupils they teach as well as the staff they are working alongside. Universities have developed close working relationships with schools or chains in their regions to create partnerships and pathways that link up ITE provision and time in schools, and MillionPlus institutions are incredibly proud of the work they have undertaken to build and maintain these links.
25. Despite this, and the many interventions from government over the years, there remains a severe lack of high-quality placements across the country to meet demand – particularly in a situation where England has routinely fallen below recruitment targets (with the exception of 2020-21 owing largely to the consequences of the pandemic). A major contributory factor, and one that separates the English system from the Scottish model, is that not all schools take placements or engage in the ITE process.

What impact does this have on pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND?

26. One of the biggest impacts resulting from difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in England is that schools with lower budgets in disadvantaged areas are not able to attract subject specialists. This means that children in these schools may not have a subject specialist until they enter higher education, causing the attainment gap to grow and institutions having to provide more catch-up assistance to some students.
 27. These problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic in terms of loss of learning and the impact on mental health.
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28. There is also the potential for SEND students to have their learning disrupted, with a lack of long term consistency and planning as a result of vast turnover of supply teachers in schools.

What action should the Department take to address the challenges in teacher recruitment and retention?

29. MillionPlus believes that the workload of teachers in schools needs to be reviewed urgently as current measures are not working and it is causing existing staff to seek other employment. Supply staff are not able or willing to undertake the full role of a teacher which increases the workload of full-time staff.
30. MillionPlus also believe that the mentoring requirements need to be reviewed in terms of workload and funding made available to schools. Mentors should receive additional payments in order to incentivise better teacher development and support mechanisms.

What has been the impact of the new bursaries and scholarships announced in October?

31. While there has been a bit of a bounce back this cycle, following the restoration of bursary levels, this illustrates the unhelpful impact of decisions being made on a yearly basis.

Fee Loan Forgiveness

32. To tackle issues around recruitment and retention, MillionPlus believes that for some students and graduates, the nature of the course and employment means that they should be considered for fee-loan forgiveness after a period of service in a key public service profession. This followed our joint report into key public service workforce with UUK in 2020.
33. MillionPlus suggests a forgiveness coming in after 5 years of service for teachers, but the length of time could be pegged to the optimum period where retention becomes an issue which could be assessed within government data.
34. Factoring in the cost of retention to key public services could significantly bolster any argument to make these 'free' and to have some level of maintenance grant support also. It could be the case that, owing to the repayment levels in these professions added to the cost of retention that currently is absorbed by government, that such a policy could become highly attractive and possibly even cost neutral in some areas. Such a system might need regional or institutional level capping to ensure a spread of teachers across the country.
35. MillionPlus believes that this would incentivise prospective students to become teachers, particularly with cost-of-living proving a major factor in students decision making currently. It would also help to tackle issues around recruitment in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Bursaries

36. Issues around recruitment and retention of teachers are long-standing, exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis impacting on applications for the upcoming year. The Government should apply an in-year uplift to initial teacher training bursaries to help tackle these concerns while prioritising the strategic planning of bursaries for future years.
 37. The impact of bursaries will remain minimal, if the Government continues with the short term approach to decision making. We are consistently seeing undergraduates courted by industry and the private sector. Longer term planning of bursaries in 2–3-year cycles would allow for better planning and recruitment for ITT providers.
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Market Review

38. The Government must continue to consider the impact of the accreditation process and losing previously high-quality providers from the sector. They must ensure there is enough time available for providers to establish new partnership and also consider another round of accreditation.

HOW WELL DOES THE CURRENT TEACHER TRAINING FRAMEWORK WORK TO PREPARE NEW TEACHERS AND HOW COULD IT BE IMPROVED?

What has been the impact of the Early Career Framework implemented in September 2021?

39. MillionPlus believes that the ECF was largely welcomed in its attempt to bring consistency nationally. However it has created unnecessary burden on university staff and communication with the sector should have been clearer. It has also led to a huge increase on mentor workload with schools not able to meet the requirements of mentoring trainees as well as staff undertaking ECF. This has been a factor in the retention of staff. There needs to be better communication between the Department and schools on the requirements of the ECF.
40. MillionPlus also believe that a lot more dialogue needs to take place between the sector and the Department to understand how factors such as geography, financial disparity and transport can impact delivery.

Are there ways in which teacher training could be improved to address the challenges in recruitment and retention?

41. Teachers not undertaking development opportunities such as becoming a mentor as current workload prevents them from taking part and future workload deters them from applying for opportunities. Government should look at ways to incentivise these opportunities further.
42. MillionPlus also believes that the degree of curriculum control and regulation continues to act as a disincentive to trainee teachers. There is a lack of freedom within a clear framework to develop professional capability and autonomy and this should be reviewed.

How does teacher training in England compare internationally, and what are the benefits and disadvantages of the English system?

43. MillionPlus believes that teacher training in England compares positively against international counterparts and it delivers an excellent foundation to produce high-quality teaching, despite the shorter time-frame for training compared to other European countries.
 44. The current model allows higher education institutions to partner with schools and offers a solid platform for trainee teachers to develop their skills and knowledge base. With adequate resources and support the teacher training system in England can produce an excellent workforce.
 45. However, MillionPlus believe that the ongoing crisis around the existing workforce can hinder HEIs and ITT providers as schools have to prioritise the workload and teaching of pupils rather than the development of staff. Supporting trainee teachers and teacher in the ECT years is a second priority and is not funded sufficiently.
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How do challenges in teacher recruitment, training and retention compare to those being faced in other professions/ sectors of the economy, and is there anything that can be learned from other professions/ sectors of the economy?

46. The most recent UCAS figures indicate that applications for undergraduate courses in the UK have dropped by 2.3% (596,590) compared to 2022 (610,720), although they still remain 5% higher than 2020 figures. Compared to 2022 figures, the percentage of undergraduate applicants has declined by 2.7% in England and by 8.4% in Scotland. The number of UK 18-year-old applicants has fallen slightly but remains the second highest on record.
 47. However, the most substantial falls were in nursing (-18.6%) and education teaching (-15.6%, - 3,650 in 2023 compared to 4,860 in 2022) which shows the challenges the sector is continuing to face, alongside retention issues. Meanwhile, subjects such as computing (+9.6%) and law (+2.1%) saw robust growth in applications from 2022. This shows the contrast between the challenges faced in teacher recruitment and other sectors of the economy.
 48. MillionPlus believes that is linked to workload and work-life balance, alongside the financial benefits available in other sectors compared to teaching. Teachers leaving the profession have often referenced these three as factors in their decision.
 49. The number of UK mature applicants has also decreased by 14%, this has been largely driven by fewer mature students applying for nursing courses, although with an impact on teacher recruitment also.
 50. MillionPlus believes that better incentives to stay in the profession would support recruitment and retention, particularly during the cost-of-living crisis
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