

MillionPlus

The Association for
Modern Universities



POLICY BRIEFING

Supply and demand –
why high quality placements
are critical to the future of ITE

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Introduction

MillionPlus is the Association for Modern Universities, and the voice of 21st century higher education. We champion, promote and raise awareness of the essential role played by modern universities in our world-leading higher education sector.

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,¹ 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.

A recurring theme in much of the work that the network has engaged in over the past few years has been on the issue of placements, and how to ensure there are enough high-quality placements across the whole of England to deliver the very best ITE, in close partnership with schools.

Placements are an integral part of university-led ITE, and MillionPlus universities build strong partnerships with schools in their regions that enable high quality placement opportunities, as well as a range of other benefits that come from such relationships.

The Initial Teacher Training (ITT) market review, announced by the DfE in January 2021, was tasked with developing policy recommendations that will improve the teacher education system across England.² The Deans of Education network engaged with the review team and officials to offer insight and evidence to help them in this endeavor. While we continue to have some reservations over some of the recommendations, we were pleased to see the ITT market review expert group report³ reference the need to increase both the quality and supply of placements across England, and there is a degree of alignment between some of their suggested ideas and those outlined in this report. MillionPlus believes, however, that placements are a core component within the ITE ecosystem.

As such they should have received much closer scrutiny and attention by the review team and should feature more centrally to the entire process if the goal is to make real improvements to the system. Placements could make the largest material difference, particularly as we enter a post-pandemic world, and in the context of a more joined up system of support for trainees and early career teachers.

This report highlights the importance of placements, including the wider benefits they bring to schools. It also demonstrates where current issues are within the system, and what possible avenues there are to make improvements. Even some relatively minor changes, or changes without huge funding implications, can have significant impacts in this regard.

Furthermore, acknowledging the discourse that occurred on the future and stability of ITE following the publication of the ITT market review report and subsequent consultation; it is our intention that this report reiterates the critical importance of placements within the ITE ecosystem and reorientate the narrative away from theoretical or ideological arguments on sector architecture, grounding our collective thinking more on what will make the biggest and most positive real-world impacts for those who need it the most.

For this report MillionPlus commissioned research⁴ from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) as well as surveying members and sector stakeholders. The NFER research analyses school ITE engagement by a number of different school characteristics and other variables. It also explores the views of school leaders with regards to ITE and how responses to survey questions relate to the level of involvement with ITE.

1 <https://www.millionplus.ac.uk/deans-of-education>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-overview>

3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-report>

4 <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/initial-teacher-training-placement-capacity-in-english-schools-analysis-for-millionplus/>

The issues around placements

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. 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.

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).⁵

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.

Schools and school chains build up partnerships with providers of all types more organically across England, or sometimes in direct response to certain levels of need. The question as to the benefits and drawbacks of all schools having to engage in ITE are discussed further on, however for now the question

is centred on what does the way the system is structured currently across England mean for placements, in terms of both quantity and quality?

DATA AND COLD SPOTS

Perhaps the place to start is in the lack of high-quality data as to exactly how many schools offer training placements, their reasons for doing so, and the reasons why others do not. This lack of evidence is in and of itself part of the problem of having a system that is not joined-up, or indeed not of sufficiently high priority to merit such analysis. The NFER analysis commissioned by MillionPlus highlights some of the issues and trends within the sector.

One clear finding we are able to ascertain from the NFER survey work on the state of placements in England, however, is that there are “significant geographical differences in placement capacity” across the country.⁶ Higher placement capacity means higher levels of placement choice for providers, but in other areas far fewer schools engage in the ITE process. The end result is that placement capacity is not uniform across England and is open to fluctuations and changes that can have significant impacts on capacity and high quality placement provision. It is unsurprising that the size of a particular school is associated with placement capacity. However, it is important to note that the data also shows that the geographical location of the school seems to have an influence too, particularly for secondary schools. Irrespective of school size, there are clear differences between rural and urban schools in terms of the percentage that are engaged with ITE, and the average number of trainees.⁷

In 2020, Ofsted published its updated inspection framework and handbook, which altered the nature of placements inspection to assess them more holistically against notions of consistency of approach, particularly around mentoring.⁸ MillionPlus welcomed many of the changes made, but in our response to the consultation we flagged to Ofsted that:

“We believe that it will be important for the success of these proposals that systems are put in place to ensure that all holistic judgements of quality and leadership are judged on their own merits and reasonable adjustments are made to ensure that neither size of provider, nor location in the country, gives rise to advantages or disadvantages that would undermine the fairness in the system... we strongly believe that any assessment must be viewed in the wider context of placement availability otherwise the holistic nature of the judgement will be critically undermined.”

MillionPlus supported Ofsted in their approach, while cautioning them as to their application based on the reality of the situation. Ideally there would be ample capacity in every part of England, with providers able to work closely with a range of schools to assess the best pathways for each trainee in each possible placement, with mentoring across each school. The fact that this is not always possible does not mean we have a quality problem, it means instead that we have a quantity issue that, if addressed, can improve on quality and choice within the entire ITE system.

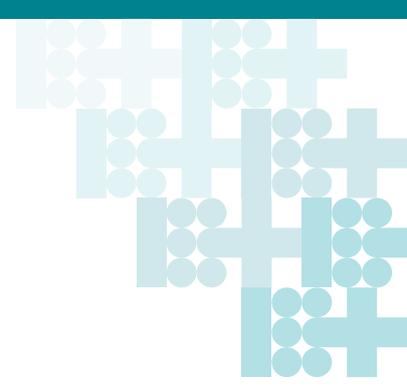
5 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7222/> p9

6 https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4603/initial_teacher_training_placement_capacity_in_english_schools_analysis_for_millionplus.pdf

7 *ibid*, tables 3.7 and 3.8

8 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-ite-inspection-framework-and-handbook>

9 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/early-career-framework-reforms>



TIME AND WORKLOAD PRESSURES

Through the continued engagement between MillionPlus institutions and their partner schools, as well as the findings from the NFER research, clear reasons as to why schools choose not to engage in the process, or only take limited numbers of trainees, are apparent. The time pressures on schools even outside of ITE are intense, so some feel this additional workload will eat into staff time and school resource. It is a similar picture for training and supporting mentors, with the time and resource this takes acting as a potential disincentive. These pressures do not look like going away anytime soon, in fact with the introduction of the Early Career Framework (ECF), and the greater entitlements around mentoring that this brings, they may increase.⁹ MillionPlus is a strong believer in the importance of the ECF and what it represents, but it is impossible to escape the reality of the pressures facing schools and ITE partnerships, and that burdening them further without addressing some fundamental questions could be a risk in the near future. This risk is heightened with some of the recommendations within the ITT market review report, which increases workload in this area but does not increase the resource for schools that would be an absolute prerequisite for any successful implementation of such a change. Once again, MillionPlus supports the principles behind higher levels of minimum entitlements, however without associated funding and close collaboration with the whole ITE sector it could serve to have the exact opposite effect than intended.

ASSESSMENT

Additional pressures also exist in the current assessment framework, and MillionPlus universities have reported that some schools are less likely to engage with ITE owing to worries around how much time and effort it will take when they could otherwise be preparing for their next Ofsted inspection. The gravity and importance of inspections is such that they can, in some instances, contribute to a culture that disincentivises schools from offering placements. MillionPlus supports robust quality assurance and assessments, and the need to maintain high quality throughout all provision, but this situation will not be improved without a holistic view of ITE which takes all issues and pressures into account.

So much of the current placement system is built on the extraordinary work providers do with partner schools. The benefits that are felt across the ITE system through the delivery of placements are broad and difficult to quantify, and go way beyond the immediate, practical value for the trainee. This report aims to start a conversation which articulates the wider value of placements, not just for trainees, but providers, schools and the teaching profession. Being mindful of current and future pressures on the system enables us to better prepare and to get ahead of potential problems rather than simply react to them. The importance of this partnership work, but also its fragility and the need for reform, has been highlighted since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Covid-19 complications

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools, and by extension the ITE system, has been unprecedented. With schools closed, or reduced to incredibly limited capacity, as well as a pivot to online delivery, the challenges for all in the education sector have been profound.

Analysis by NFER clearly demonstrated that throughout 2020 and into 2021, while applications actually rose for ITE courses, placement capacity had reduced across England.¹⁰ Schools withdrew placements or scaled down how many they could offer, for a variety of reasons, and as the National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT) highlighted in June 2020 this was an issue across all routes into ITE, with huge numbers of providers worried about capacity issues.¹¹ Many of these capacity issues already existed, but the pandemic made them critical.

During the pandemic the MillionPlus Deans of Education Network worked with the government to highlight the major issues they were experiencing, and how they could seek to overcome these obstacles. Concessions and alterations to the rules on placements helped in this regard, and many member institutions believe the greater flexibility these offered helped boost innovation, suggesting that perhaps they ought to be maintained. The impact of this pandemic will be long felt across the education sector, with many of the challenges faced over the past 18 months either remaining or leaving a clear shadow. Some schools cited having greater

flexibility to meet these challenges as a potential determining factor in expanding future placement provision.¹² It would be sensible to learn lessons from the innovations made over the pandemic to build in greater resilience throughout ITE.

Across the MillionPlus membership during the height of the pandemic, there were examples of trainees bringing the skills they had gained while learning online to support schools in their own online delivery, providing additional support within curriculum recovery, utilising their fresh knowledge and pedagogic skills. The move to virtual placements came with challenges but also offered a way to provide genuine experience and also add additional skills to trainees that may one day soon become core to the job in a way not considered pre-pandemic.

Many schools were worried about taking trainees however, owing to a need to potentially limit numbers on those coming into schools,¹³ as well as a desire to perhaps scale back to focusing on 'essential' work at a time of unprecedented crisis. While guidance from DfE was helpful, it was the work done by providers as part of their partnerships that enabled placements of

all descriptions to actually take place, and for trainees and schools to be supported every step of the way.

Although challenging, the end result was a true success story for the sector across England in the face of dire circumstances. However, once again, the fact that provision was so starkly hit and capacity reduced, speaks to a need to really examine what more can be done to shore the system up and protect it against future difficulties.

The desire of some schools to scale back capacity and focus on what they may consider 'core' areas of their work also speaks to wider questions around why ITE is perhaps not seen as the core part of a school's work, and the essential link between the teachers of today and the pipeline into the profession for the teachers of tomorrow. As mentioned previously, the actual partnership work undertaken between providers and schools goes far beyond finding places and offering support. There is so much more that providers, and in particular universities, can add, and highlighting these additional supporting factors should help schools to view the work done in and around ITE as truly essential no matter the context.

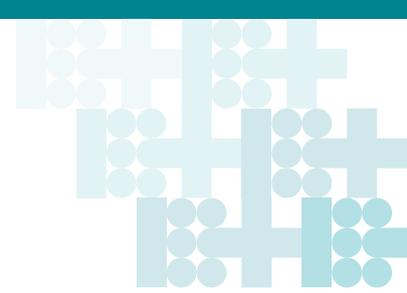
10 https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4143/the_impact_of_covid_19_on_initial_teacher_training.pdf

11 <https://www.nasbtt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Placements-survey-05062020.pdf>

12 https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4603/initial_teacher_training_placement_capacity_in_english_schools_analysis_for_millionplus.pdf, table 3.11

13 *Ibid*, table 3.9





The value of placements

Placements are a critical part of ITE for all providers, but there is more to the partnerships established than just the core work of placing and supporting trainees. As demonstrated throughout the pandemic, these partnerships are more than just basic transactional relationships, with the support offered by university partners proving pivotal in the face of overcoming significant challenges. Such work plays an unsung role in the strength of the ITE system and requires greater recognition and celebration, which would likely result in improved quantity and quality going forward.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD)

MENTORSHIP

One clear element of support comes in the form of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) that schools can access from their university partners. MillionPlus member institutions, and modern universities in general, endeavor to form close working relationships with their schools and the CPD support they can offer to staff is incredibly valuable, but this comes as a ‘free’ additional benefit from partnership working. This is perhaps most acute in the area of mentor support, which is of absolutely critical importance to placements – and has been recognised as a core component by government through the introduction of the ECF. Mentoring takes time, both for the mentor to train and deliver their support, and for the school as it takes staff away from teaching. This work is not glamorous, or always rewarded, but without it the challenge of having high quality placements and all necessary support for trainees and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) is next to impossible.

Universities are well versed in working with school partners in mentoring, and many do so in some of the most challenging areas of the country. At the University of Sunderland, for example, many of their school partnerships are situated in parts of England with the highest levels of deprivation. To address the particular challenges teachers will face in these areas they have developed an enhanced mentoring programme, where their Partnership and Placements Teams work closely with schools to identify improvements made since their last Ofsted inspection and on areas of subject strength, as well as any areas where additional support to enable them to develop mentoring is needed.

CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Big Mentor

At the University of East London, they offer subject-based CPD alongside an annual ‘Big Mentor’ event. These events are themed around an issue each year, with one recent event leading on research and how schools’ colleagues can engage in research informed practice. Other themes have been on wellbeing and mindfulness for teachers, to help with issues of retention, and they are planning an event on curriculum subject excellence across all subjects.



CASE STUDY: UNIVERSITY OF SUNDERLAND Enhanced Mentoring at Farringdon Academy

Enhanced Mentoring has been put into place at Farringdon as the school have taken 15 trainees from several secondary subject programmes. These include PGCEs in: Business Education, Computer Science, English, Geography, History, Mathematics, Religious Education and Science with Biology.

They are keen to support the university in developing new teachers but feel that the current circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic have placed enough stress on their own staff and they do not wish to add to this by asking them to take the additional role of mentor for the trainees.

The school have asked for communication to take place between their lead mentor and one member of university staff. For this reason, the university has provided an experienced member of the tutor team to work with the school. The university tutor will:

- Complete the weekly review with each trainee. This will be an individual meeting to check the trainees evidence against the teachers' standards.
- Complete observations of the trainee's teaching and will provide them with feedback relating to these.
- Organise drop-in sessions with the trainees to discuss various aspects of the placements and the collection of evidence.
- Complete the final weekly reviews with the trainees.
- Discuss with the school's lead mentor regularly to ensure any questions or concerns the school has are answered. This focused relationship between the university and school ensures that the trainees are well supported, and the school get the support they need to enable them to offer the placements.

MillionPlus has established a positive and engaged relationship with the Department for Education on matters relating to the ITE ecosystem. As such, the MillionPlus Deans of Education Network is regularly called upon to inform developments such as the ECF, and the wider Recruitment and Retention Strategy, and mentoring has always been a central theme of these discussions. At many MillionPlus institutions additional work is undertaken to value mentorship and help mentors understand how appreciated they are within the system. From relatively simple ideas such as partnership dinners or award recognition, to more formalised ways of creating dedicated pathways for mentors to train on courses with Master's level credits, universities are able to work behind the scenes to help train and retain the mentors that are critical for the system, and for the teacher pipeline. [The University of Bolton](#), for example, offers a fully funded Masters for a school mentor, in partnership with schools that host trainees for the full academic year. This has proven to be successful with growing take up in the area and adds even greater value to the partnerships between the key stakeholders in teacher education.

More broadly universities are also able to bring research-informed practice and knowledge transfer into schools, with the most up-to-date and relevant ideas in teaching helping to directly influence current staff or help with curriculum design.

This opens up schools to new and interesting ideas and gives them access to a wider pool of resources that can only be to the benefit of the school and its pupils. The levels of support that this can bring, and the access to larger providers like universities to build on their own, often-stretched, capacity can be hugely important for schools. As the NFER data shows, 39% of primary schools who do not engage in ITT would be encouraged to do so with more provider support – so the critical, yet unheralded, work that is going on behind the scenes cannot be ignored. Instead, as this data suggests, it needs to be made much more explicit and communicated clearly as a benefit.¹⁴

Universities, as central regional hubs, also work with partner schools to address regional challenges, and act as vital pipelines of recruitment and retention for their local areas. One major concern that has been expressed during the ITT market review consultation has been the potential move away from the organic and regional approach to teacher education, that builds on the core programmes with additional initiatives to address particular features of working in certain environments.

14 Ibid, table 3.12



At Liverpool Hope University, for example, they run an evidence-based series of action research projects based in disadvantaged areas across Merseyside. Projects such as this are happening at providers across England, and this work is critical in keeping regional recruitment and retention high.

CASE STUDY: LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY Hope Challenge

At Liverpool Hope University (LHU) the Hope Challenge (HC) aims to work with the wider partnership involving local authorities, regional inspectors, head teachers and university tutors.

HC aims to support beginning teachers to become stronger in terms of their knowledge, pedagogy and understanding of the challenges faced by teachers and learners who work in schools facing disadvantaged communities. This is part of the mission of the university and a recognition of the immediate context that many of the trainees will face entering the profession.

HC strives to support LHU exiting cohorts staying in the Liverpool region with data suggesting around 30% stay in Liverpool and around 75% remain within the North West region. This requires the university ITE programmes to prepare their trainees for the context of disadvantage which is greater in many parts of the NW than in other regions.

It has also determined an area of priority for research within the School of Education which has extended the portfolio of taught and researched postgraduate qualifications which have a focus on the impact of disadvantage and poverty on educational outcomes.



POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

A perhaps less clear, but no less important, additional benefit comes from the communication channels that partnership working brings, in both directions. For schools, universities can and do offer the research-informed knowledge transfer, but they can also give updates on government policy and new initiatives that are developing or about to be rolled out. This is not just a communication exercise; it is also about helping schools prepare and adapt to policy reform. The MillionPlus Deans of Education Network have reported incidences of school leaders learning about large projects, such as ECF or the CCF, through joint work with universities, rather than through official channels, owing to the sheer volume of information schools receive and have to digest. Indeed, the ITT market review itself had its consultation phase predominantly during the school holidays, meaning not only were universities key in explaining that a review was even taking place, but they were also able to feed back into the consultation the comments from schools that they found impossible to do themselves, partly owing to the challenging timeline.

Universities have organised policy update sessions explaining new initiatives and how schools can interact with them, which helps schools prepare and helps in the delivery of government policy. Conversely, the trusted relationships also mean that schools can be open and honest with providers about challenges they face which then, through networks such as MillionPlus, can be translated into policy work and fed directly into DfE in a way that single schools would find much more difficult or time-consuming. Taking the pressure from schools is a key element of the work being done, and, once again, this needs to be valued and highlighted if we want to expand provision and build a stronger and more secure sector.



What can be done?

There are a number of large-scale ideas often suggested as a means of dealing with the issues outlined in this report while improving the placement ecosystem. Three of them are explained in this section.

MANDATING

Perhaps the most dramatic of the options on the table is to follow the Scottish model and work towards a system in which all schools in England are mandated to take trainees and play an active part in the ITE system. The benefits of this option are clear at first glance: the quantity and capacity within the system would be significantly increased and the ITE system would become firmly embedded within the wider school landscape as a core function of their work. However, this idea has significant drawbacks, such that outweigh its utility at this time.

Forcing schools into such a system risks increasing quantity but doing little to improve quality. Without significant investment in both time and resources schools would be faced with additional work while already over-stretched, particularly as we enter a post-Covid world focused on catching up and closing the gap for those who have lost the most learning over the past 18 months. Also, for some schools there may be reasons why taking trainees would not be the right course of action at one time, and this needs to be respected. Ideally, mandating would not be necessary as almost every school would want to be part of this system; this is the goal we should build towards. Therefore, while potentially appealing at first glance from a provider point of view, mandating is not currently practicable, or even desirable, so MillionPlus would not advocate taking forward such a proposal at this stage.

OFSTED RECOGNITION

Another option is the possibility of Ofsted having some recognition of ITE within its inspection framework for schools. For example, should any school be rated as truly outstanding if it is not in some way engaging with the future of the profession by taking trainees? Work commissioned by MillionPlus suggests that secondary schools that are rated good or outstanding are more likely to be engaged in ITE. Moreover, there is a significant difference between the average number of placements for secondary schools when broken down by Ofsted rating. On average, it appears secondary schools that are rated as good or outstanding take more placements. This could serve to provide a

case for Ofsted recognition of ITE. Based on the data analysis, it would seem that such a move would be more likely to celebrate existing high-quality provision than disrupt practice, as long as it is introduced sensibly and in close consultation with the sector.¹⁵ It would have the benefit of incentivising schools to see the value of ITE and would attach a prestige to working in this space. In fact, the ITT market review recommended an exploration into this very point as Recommendation 13 of their report.¹⁶

MillionPlus supports the move by DfE to do exploratory work on this idea, working closely with schools and providers as they do so. There are naturally hurdles to overcome however, and we need to appreciate that moving to such a model would change the relationship within ITE to a more transactional one which may have negative unintended consequences. For schools it may also add another layer of pressure and complication to inspection processes, which can already have impacts on the way schools run, so the process would need to be careful and highly attentive to the responses from across the sector.

FUNDING INCREASES

The final, and perhaps most obvious, policy would be to increase funding within ITE for schools who engage, to give them additional resource to more effectively work and plan for all the elements needed for a high-quality placement and mentoring environment.

The feedback received through our Deans of Education Network was clear that increased investment would positively benefit schools. It would allow schools to consolidate and then grow capacity. The NFER research commissioned by MillionPlus demonstrates that of all the factors that would encourage greater engagement and placement capacity, greater government funding support was top of the list. For those schools not currently engaged in ITE, 63% of primary school leaders and 43% of secondary highlighted increased financial support from government as a means to encourage engagement with teacher education.¹⁷

This appears to be a relatively simple and effective solution that has the backing of all parts of the ITE ecosystem and that would have the biggest material impact on capacity, and therefore quality. The government should seriously consider this and the impact it would bring and weigh up this funding increase against any other expenditure it was considering committing

¹⁵ Ibid, table 3.4

¹⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/999621/ITT_market_review_report.pdf

¹⁷ https://www.nfer.ac.uk/media/4603/initial_teacher_training_placement_capacity_in_english_schools_analysis_for_millionplus.pdf, table 3.12



following the ITT market review and assess which is likely to elicit the biggest real-world benefit. It was disappointing that the ITT market review report stopped short of explicitly recommending that the government at least explore how to increase funding for much of what it recommends, particularly around placements. Universities work closely with schools and support them financially to take placements and to support trainees, but with more being asked of schools today and without the extra resource, it is easy to see why this will remain a barrier to growth, irrespective of any other incentives introduced.

Furthermore, as highlighted previously, there are clear geographical differences in engagement with ITE across England. It may therefore be worth considering how more targeted financial incentives could be used, and how this might be aligned with other government agendas. Targeted financial incentives for schools to engage with placements could clearly contribute to the government's ambition to "level up" the country by bolstering the educational infrastructure and supporting the pipeline of teachers in more disadvantaged areas. A clear rationale based on these principles could open up the possibility of drawing on other funding streams to support this initiative.



What should be done?

It is acknowledged that funding increases would be of most benefit, with conversations around what could be done in coordination with Ofsted also well worth pursuing. However, it remains vital to continue to look for other possible, and relatively short-term, changes that could have long-lasting impacts on placement provision and quality and that could be initiated by the government in partnership with the sector.

MillionPlus has worked with its member institutions to consider possible solutions that would enact positive change. What we propose does not constitute an effective alternative to extra financial resource but we firmly believe they are a step in the right direction to boost and improve capacity while maintaining high quality within the ITE ecosystem.

We believe the government should:

- Seek to ensure that engaging with ITE, and its many benefits, is viewed as a core part of what schools do.
- Promote ways to better recognise the value of mentoring.
- Generate more and better data on placements across England.
- Focus more on practical work to boost placements and less on unnecessary and unhelpful structural reform.
- Increase funding to help more schools engage with ITE and build successful partnerships.

CULTURE, CO-ORDINATION AND OPTING-OUT

In many cases ITE is seen as an add-on to the school system, part of the supply model and pipeline as opposed to an integral part of the way that sector operates. The government has rightly acknowledged that more needs to be done in this area, and recent initiatives, like the ECF, are hoping to bridge the gap and better integrate how stakeholders think about training and supporting trainees and NQTs, and beyond. However, even with these efforts, more can and must be done to put ITE more centrally into the minds of school leaders and the wider sector. This will boost the quantity and quality of placements, driven by a desire to be part of a successful ITE ecosystem as opposed to external incentives only.

A cultural shift is required in the way the sector views ITE, with the default position for schools to engage with the process with the option to 'opt-out' if needed, instead of seeing ITE as an

additional extra to be 'opted into'. In practical terms this could be initiated by the government communicating more effectively about the value and merit schools gain from their engagement in ITE, and the importance of the whole sector buying into the need to invest in the next generation of teachers. The recommendation within the ITT market review report on multi-academy trusts needing to actively meet ITE requirements in order to grow is a good step in the right direction, but more should be done across the wider schools ecosystem to position ITE as central to the profession.

Importantly, this should not be a transactional approach where we simply incentivise schools to train their recruits only, instead the whole sector should feel part of the pipeline and have training the next generation as a central focus, and not seen as something that can be picked up or put down depending on circumstance. Clearly schools have many competing priorities, but the government communicating this critical importance will have an impact and start to foster some cultural changes.

The government can also work with the sector to facilitate what works best and how we can seek to replicate it across the country, particularly in cold spots where provision is lacking. It is clear from the work of the MillionPlus Deans of Education network that initiatives could be put in place to work with schools to provide them the time and space needed to engage with ITE, and then see the immense benefit it brings. Some schools who do not engage currently may be entirely unaware of some of the work being done, work that could help them and bring benefits to how they operate. This needs to change, and the government can coordinate with the sector to lead a concerted effort to reach out to those who do not engage currently, better understand why, and then highlight the best practice that can be pulled together by the sector to underscore the importance of ITE and in offering placements.

One initiative, though, however well intentioned, is not enough. To make a real difference in cultural mindset, and without additional funding to provide a stronger incentive, then a truly cross-DfE approach is needed to ensure all relevant communications with schools, and all dialogue with school leaders, incorporates ITE into its fundamental messaging.

CREDIT

Appreciating the work of mentors must be a key component of the ECF if it is to live up to its potential. Recruiting, training and supporting mentors is critical, and this requires schools to have buy-in to ITE, to allow staff time away from teaching to provide the mentoring support, or receive support themselves. Acknowledging the importance of mentors is therefore critical,



so we must ask what more can be done in this regard to retain and train more mentors to support the next generation of NQTs and boost recruitment and retention.

Formal structures that support mentoring already exist in many universities, but a much larger co-ordinated approach that sees mentoring training and CPD aligned with master's level credit would increase the prestige of mentoring and offer a strong incentive to potential mentors. Creating pathways that enable career progression or formalised credit for mentorship works not only to recruit but it also places a real value on the role of the mentor. Working with universities to develop and promote these pathways would enable the government to better promote mentoring and show how valuable they believe them to be. Universities are very capable of upscaling the work they are already doing in this space, and the benefit to schools in terms of CPD would be attractive in promoting working within ITE to those who may otherwise not do so. Examples of this can be found across the sector, such as at Leeds Trinity University where teachers at partner schools are offered discounted postgraduate courses, as well as free CPD for school staff via the university. These incentives and offers form part of the wider work providers do to support partners, and this can sometimes be missed if partnership work is reduced to something simply transactional.

Alongside this, there are also wider, less formal, ways the government can work with the sector to better recognise staff or indeed whole schools that are involved in ITE. Many Deans of Education Network members have noted that a good way to acknowledge and appreciate staff or schools that they work with is to set up awards or certifications that highlight the work that they are doing. The University of East London has developed 'Unsung Mentor' awards each year, alongside platinum, gold and silver awards for partner schools with framed certificates and feedback of excellence from the university and students. Even small gestures can have real impacts in a profession that is too often taken for granted.

The government and the sector should be encouraged to work collectively towards a system of recognition that can be awarded to schools that engage in ITE, that can then become a valuable award of which schools or staff can be rightly proud. Raising the status of ITE in this way, in conjunction with a wider cultural shift (or indeed as a key part of it), can make a material difference, and can help providers offer greater means of appreciation to the school partners they work with – with the added cache of having a university backed award that will mean greater local recognition.



DATA

The dearth of readily accessible data on placements, even for the government, is a major roadblock in terms of addressing any issues around placements and speaks to the fact that ITE is an additional function for schools and not part of any core mission. To change cultures, and address specific policy concerns, it is necessary to have far greater data collection on ITE in terms of placements. If published, this information can help providers in their efforts to better understand how to retain and expand provision, and it can help all parties better analyse the issues, assess potential cold spots and provide targeted support.

The NFER analysis commissioned by MillionPlus highlights that provision is by no means uniform across England, but we need more information in order to give any additional support and ensure all schools, trainees, NQTs and pupils have access to high quality ITE. Doing so will also help Ofsted in its role as assessing ITE, and placement quality and consistency, as it may be able to take into account external factors or work with the government and the wider sector in addressing them.

GOVERNMENT FOCUS

As with creating and fostering a culture around ITE that makes it more central, part of the current discourse on ITE through the ITT market review places far too little an emphasis on the issue of placements, particularly in its overall consideration of quality within ITT. In fact, with such a focus on the architecture of the sector within the ITT market review, the lack of government attention may actually drive the issue of placements further down the agenda. For high quality and effective partnerships, the very best environment is one of stability, with all elements of the sector, and the government, pulling in the same direction. Sadly, this appears not to be the case currently and there is a fear that much of the content of the ITT market review report will actually disincentivise schools and providers from the ITE system entirely, potentially damaging the placement environment further, with knock-on consequences for quantity and overall quality of placement provision.



Conclusion

High quality and plentiful placement opportunities across the entire country is the ambition of the entire sector. Unlocking this capacity will do more to make a material difference to ITE than any review or marketing campaign.

Alongside strengthening England's ability to recruit and retain teachers, the work that can be accomplished through effective partnerships across every region of the country can unlock the many additional benefits highlighted in this report.

There is so much good practice already evident across the country, and the examples from MillionPlus universities alone paint a picture of a highly engaged and creative sector taking on challenges, both regional and national, and working as partners with their schools in the truest sense of that word. This model of partnership work that has developed over the years leaves the sector with a solid base to work from.

We believe the government should:

- Seek to ensure that engaging with ITE, and its many benefits, is viewed as a core part of what schools do.
- Promote ways to better recognise the value of mentoring.
- Generate more and better data on placements across England.
- Focus more on practical work to boost placements and less on unnecessary and unhelpful structural reform.
- Increase funding to help more schools engage with ITE and build successful partnerships.

The core issue, as demonstrated through the NFER research, and through the clear feedback from providers themselves, is that placement capacity needs to grow; schools must have the support and

incentives in place to want to engage fully in ITE; take trainees; and develop the pipeline that is so crucial to the future of the profession.

Steps in the right direction have been taken, with the ECF a good idea rolled out in challenging times. However, despite the best of intentions from the Department for Education in countering the challenging environment due to the unprecedented pandemic, pressures on schools continue to mount. Instability has been introduced as a knock-on effective of the ITT market review, and there remains a lack of focus on how best to practically address the critical issue that is the lack of high quality placements.

This report highlights both the immense benefits of engaging in ITE and the ways in which this work can be expanded and grow if the sector and the government work together. The key issue will, naturally, remain around funding and levels of support. However alongside that there are steps that can be taken to put ITE into a more central position within the wider teaching ecosystem, kick starting a culture change whereby it becomes the norm for schools to engage.

This cultural shift, and the immense opportunities associated with it, is only possible through schools, universities, and the government working in harmony towards realising this ambition. It cannot be left to one part alone to do the work, or else provision will remain patchy and uncoordinated. Examples of how this could be implemented have been examined in this report. Schools need to see the benefits of engaging, universities must continue to innovate, and the government should acknowledge the immense value of partnership work and place ITE as centrally as it can in its strategy for the future.





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