

# MillionPlus

The Association for  
Modern Universities



**BUILDING A MODERN BRITAIN**

Teacher education,  
recruitment and retention

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## Teacher education, recruitment and retention

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, including being directly responsible for training thousands of the backbone public service staff that keep Britain working.

Modern universities have a long history of teacher education, and despite a diversification of routes into teaching in 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.

MillionPlus utilises this world-class expertise and experience through its dedicated Deans of Education Network, working 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, working with thousands of schools in respect of training student teachers, not only placing their own trainees but also supporting and providing academic accreditation for school-based initial teacher training (SCITT) providers. This experience helps build a productive working relationship, leading to positive development of ITE, to the benefit of trainees, pupils and the wider sector.

In 2021–22, modern universities accounted for **63%** of all initial teacher training (ITT) students in the university sector, which is one vital aspect of ITE. **Seventy-five per cent** of those were studying the undergraduate pathway, while **55%** of all those studying education at university were at modern universities.

The same period also saw **87%** of HEI-led trainee teachers awarded Qualified Teacher Status, with **73%** of teacher training university students from the 2020–21 cycle teaching at a state school within 15 months of completing their course.

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### The current climate

However, there are significant, longstanding difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers across England which must be addressed. While none of these should be taken in isolation, these factors include: pay and benefits; the high cost of living; workload; work-life balance; policy changes; and career development opportunities. Research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) identifies three key issues that impact on retention as they compare to equivalent graduate professions: (a) salary levels; (b) working hours; (c) flexible ways of working, particularly post-covid.

Challenges in recruitment have been exacerbated by the Government's Market Review of initial teacher training, with 68 existing providers initially de-accredited, adding further uncertainty and instability to an already turbulent and unprecedented recruitment and retention picture, while leaving areas of the country with teacher training cold spots.

Rural and less advantaged areas in England often face additional challenges. These areas may have fewer resources and limited professional development opportunities, which can make it difficult to attract and retain experienced teachers.

The total new entrants to ITT courses in 2023–24 is **26,955**, down **5%** from **28,463** in 2022–23. The percentage of the Department for Education's Postgraduate Initial Teacher Training (PGITT) target achieved for all subjects (secondary and primary) was **62%**. This is a decrease of **8%** from **70%** in 2022–23. Specifically, shortage subjects such as mathematics and languages were below target, with mathematics at **63%** and languages at **33%** of the required intake. Computing was at **36%**, design and technology reached **27%** and physics just **17%** which emphasise the scale of the challenge faced.

The NFER's 2024 annual labour market report concluded the recruitment and retention crisis showed "no signs of abating", with teacher supply in a "critical state". It predicted that secondary recruitment will improve, but still be **40%** short of target, with 11 out of 17 secondary subjects likely to have shortfalls. Last year, the target was missed by **50%**. Primary recruitment is forecast to be about **15%** below target, far worse than the **4%** seen last year. It comes after the DfE reduced its secondary school teacher recruitment targets by almost a tenth.

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) highlights a worrying trend in retention, with a recent report indicating that **40%** of teachers in England leave the profession within 10 years of starting, a figure that has been rising over the past decade.

There is further concern about recruitment after the Government scrapped the Now Teach programme in April 2024, which helped older workers start a new career in the classroom, despite the scheme overdelivering on its recruitment targets.



### Where next?

Addressing these challenges in ITE should be the priority of any incoming Government. The reforms outlined in this document would go some way to meeting that aim, to the benefit of teachers, students and schools.

The ultimate goal of ITE should be to get high-quality, well-supported new teachers into classrooms and to keep them in the profession long term. DfE should focus on reducing micromanagement of ITE and trusting providers' judgments; proper support for the mentoring workforce and trainee placements; and the strategic, careful development of new ITE routes which maximise opportunity but minimise risk.

To support teacher education and enable modern universities to continue to deliver the highly skilled teaching workforce needed for a modern Britain, an incoming Government should implement the policies outlined in these pages.



### Funding

To tackle the longstanding recruitment and retention crisis across our vital public services, an incoming Government should explore and implement the MillionPlus model for fee loan forgiveness, which would write off **50%** of the tuition fee loan after five years and **100%** after 10 years that a teacher stayed in the profession at a state school.

- **The Government should implement a Fee Loan Forgiveness scheme for teaching** that would increase the number of teachers entering and staying in the profession.

The current approach for bursary awards does not sufficiently tackle recruitment and retention issues. The short-term planning from the DfE means that strong undergraduate candidates are quite often approached by industry and accepted on graduate programmes with higher starting salaries and better working conditions. This leads to fewer subject specialists looking to apply to teaching and quite often unequitable support for trainee teachers from all backgrounds.

There is also little acknowledgment of the issue of costs for undergraduate students and for postgraduate students who do not get a bursary, such as placement and travel, that are not faced by students on standard and non-professional courses.

Bursaries are currently determined solely by their relation to subject recruitment. Yet for students it costs the same to live and train, irrespective of subject or phase.

- **The Government should therefore conduct a thorough review of funding structures for bursaries across the teacher training landscape**, including travel bursaries, and prioritise areas where applicant numbers are down significantly.
- **The Government should set bursaries on a longer-term basis**, increasing to three-year cycles, to improve planning and certainty for decision-makers and students.
- **The Government should explore national priority grants to universities** for delivering teacher education, equivalent to existing grants for STEM.

Subject knowledge enhancement (SKE), which are courses that run before or alongside initial teacher training courses to assist with trainees' subject knowledge, are potentially critical for boosting the supply of people with appropriate subject knowledge to train to be a teacher. However, during 2024 funding for a number of subjects has been removed mid-cycle, leading to coverage of just five subjects from April 2024, which could lead to further trainee dropouts.

- **The Government should restore funding for SKE programmes to cover all secondary shortage subjects.**

### Placements, mentoring and workload

Placements are a core part of any ITE programme, university-led and school-led, with partnership working integral to successful delivery. They provide supported time within a school environment for trainees to apply the research-led, theoretical and pedagogical training that they have received directly from their university into real-world situations. 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 undertaken to build and maintain these links.

Despite this, and the many interventions from the Government over the years, there remains a severe lack of high-quality placements across the country to meet demand – even in a situation where England has routinely fallen below recruitment targets and hitting targets would see the problem further exacerbated. 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.

- **To address placement shortages across schools the Government should mandate all schools to provide teacher training placements or provide evidence of their involvement in ITE.** This is essential to ensure equitable training experiences and address placement shortages.
- **An incoming Government must also ensure schools have adequate incentives and resources to deliver these high-quality placement opportunities.**

Opportunities for professional development, including training and career advancement, are essential for teachers to feel supported and motivated in their careers. Unfortunately, these have been highly restricted due to financial pressures placed on schools, resulting in insufficient support or mentoring available to trainee teachers. It is also the case that the demands of the Early Career Framework rely on the same mentors and therefore there is a real issue of capacity in schools. This may discourage teachers from staying in the profession and hinder their career progression.

There is a worrying trend of loss of senior leaders through retirement, middle-career leaders leaving the profession and newly trained teachers leaving before completing the Early Career Framework. Supply staff are also not able or willing to undertake the full role of a teacher which increases the workload of full-time staff.

The reputation of the teaching career and view of staff in the staff room can also act as a barrier to trainees where they are experiencing issues such as a lack of professional autonomy, centralised control, micro-management and views of the prescribed curriculum.

This issue cuts across the entire country and different types of institutions as increased workload has become the prevalent concern across all schools and colleges.

- **The mentoring requirements should be reviewed in terms of workload and funding made available to schools.** Mentors should receive additional payments to incentivise better teacher development and support mechanisms.
- **The workload and conditions of teachers in schools should be reviewed urgently.** Current measures are not working, causing existing staff to seek other employment.
- **A long-term strategic framework for teacher recruitment and retention should be developed,** offering comprehensive support systems for teachers' career progression.

### Reputation

Unhelpful rhetoric surrounding the teaching profession has entered parliamentary discourse and has an adverse effect on the perception of teaching as a career. This combines with the lack of a cohesive strategy that easily demonstrates to prospective students the available options into the teaching profession.

- The Government should set up a taskforce including existing university and school providers, the DfE and the Chartered College of Teaching to explore ways to improve the reputation of the teaching profession and encourage more young people to train.
- The Government should give a greater focus to positive language around the teaching profession and increase the marketing of the routes available.
- The Government should conduct a review of the purpose and focus of Ofsted in inspecting initial teacher education, including the additional burden currently placed on universities and schools.





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