

# Schools' experiences of hosting trainees and employing newly qualified teachers

## Introduction and background

Approximately 30,000 individuals enter teacher training each year and they undertake either school-based training, or higher education institution (HEI)-led courses. All trainees must spend a minimum of 120 days in schools during their training.

Exploring the impact of training responsibilities on schools and ITT providers is an important step towards the DfE's commitment to reduce workload, improve support for early career teachers and ultimately to improve teacher recruitment and retention. CooperGibson Research (CGR) was, therefore, commissioned to conduct a qualitative study exploring the experiences of schools in the process of training and supporting trainee teachers and NQTs. Having conducted a literature review (available in Annex 1 of the full report), a total of 281 respondents were interviewed on the telephone or face-to-face: a total of 15 ITT providers from a range of routes and 68 schools were involved.

## Key findings

### Decision-making for ITT placements and NQT employment

- This section of the report includes criteria drawn upon by training providers to select placement schools, the factors that school leaders considered when selecting ITT providers, and the points most important to NQTs when applying for teaching roles.
- Trainees' awareness of and preference for different routes varied. Those undertaking school-based training were more likely to have been career changers or had previous work experience in schools. Trainees on HEI-led routes had generally progressed through traditional academic pathways.
- School choices of both training providers/routes and appropriate bodies were commonly based on historic relationships. Senior leaders felt that this consistency enabled schools to develop a good understanding of provider requirements, thereby reducing workload.
- Schools have a range of options in choosing an 'appropriate body' to manage the induction and accreditation of NQTs. Many schools were unaware that they could review and change their appropriate body.
- Providers felt that it was important to be able to visit schools promptly, where additional support was required and for observation and assessment visits. They also wished to place trainees in local areas to reduce the pressure of travel on them. Likewise, trainees and NQTs noted that location and travel were key factors in their decisions.

### Mentoring and support

- For trainees and NQTs the role of the school mentor was vital; where perceptions of support and training were not positive, this was commonly attributed to a poor relationship with a mentor or to a lack of support.
- Senior leaders were asked what qualities they looked for in a school mentor. They felt that mentors should be strong

role models who could consistently model good practice; approachable, nurturing, open to sharing ideas and able to have difficult conversations. Some senior leaders also felt that a school mentor should be full-time. Most senior leaders felt that it was important for the mentor to show that they wanted to take on the role, either by volunteering or applying through an internal recruitment process.

- Mentors were asked what advice they would give future mentors. They suggested that mentors should give the lead to trainees, and encourage them to take the initiative during meetings, when discussing feedback or planning their next targets. They should encourage trainees and NQTs to reflect on their own practice, rather than immediately telling them about strengths and weaknesses identified. They should be mindful of maintaining the 'mentor' role during all interactions with the trainee/NQT, including at lunchtimes or when sharing more general conversations with colleagues about their own class teaching/day, as this creates a model of professionalism.
- For many mentors, their role in supporting trainees and NQTs shifted from 'mentoring' through to 'coaching', whereby there was more emphasis on discussion and sharing of ideas as the trainees or NQT progressed.
- A small number of mentors stated that they had been asked to take up the role by senior leaders, even if they had not wanted to. In these cases, mentors generally attributed their reluctance in the role to workload and capacity concerns. Trainees and NQTs were able to perceive this reluctance, and they were more likely to state that they felt like a burden during school placements or even that they were clearly aware that the mentor did not wish to carry out their role.
- Several mentors suggested that it would be helpful if they could meet more regularly with other mentors, for example those undertaking the role in a different subject in the same school, so that they could share practice and develop their own skills.



## Evidencing and quality assurance: implications for workload

- Evidencing requirements were flagged by all interviewee types as being a challenging aspect of both ITT and NQT experiences, due to the variety of evidence required, the amount of evidence required, and the different approaches that individual training providers and appropriate bodies took to evidence gathering. However, in spite of the fact that it was time consuming, it was acknowledged to be a necessary aspect of training and development.
- Paper-based systems of gathering evidence were perceived to be much more onerous and time-consuming processes for both trainees/NQTs and their mentors, with reports of evidence being duplicated across several different folders.
- Attempts had been made by some schools, providers and appropriate bodies to reduce the burden of evidencing requirements on trainees, NQTs and their mentors. Electronic systems and software to support evidencing were generally perceived to save time, reduce workload and encourage more regular and consistent tracking of progress.
- Several trainees and their mentors highlighted that some of the evidence required was superfluous or out of touch with the reality of teaching (e.g. requirements to create several, detailed lesson plans per week when teachers generally did not take this approach to planning any more).
- There was mixed feedback across all routes in terms of the ease with which trainees and NQTs were able to identify the sort of material that would constitute evidence.
- Some interview participants from both school-based and HEI-led routes felt that evidence itself was open to interpretation as Teachers' Standards could appear different according to the setting in which they were applied, or individuals could interpret the evidence collated differently.
- Particular pressures were identified in the final term when trainees had also reached an 80% timetable and were completing paperwork and submitting final evidence.

## Benefits and challenges

- According to most interview participants, one of the main benefits to schools of hosting trainees and employing NQTs was having energetic and enthusiastic people coming into the school with up-to-date pedagogical knowledge. Most trainees and NQTs also felt that they brought fresh ideas and up-to-date pedagogy to their schools.
- Senior leaders felt that participating in ITT brought additional capacity or expertise into schools. Among other things, they highlighted how trainees had developed learning resources and undertaken small-group intervention work.
- Some senior leaders appreciated the fact that HEI-led training routes (and connections with HEIs as part of the school-based routes) enabled schools to remain engaged with wider research.
- Senior leaders commonly noted that trainee and NQT mentors had become more reflective of their own practice, a feeling which was echoed by the mentors themselves. Mentors felt that they remained more aware of the Teachers' Standards than they would otherwise have done. Senior leaders felt that mentoring furthered teachers' development in a number of ways such as additional CPD and the development of leadership and management skills.
- The challenge most commonly cited across all training routes and for the NQT year was a lack of capacity (mainly

in terms of time) among senior leaders and school-based mentors to provide the level of support required.

- Finding sufficient time to release mentors for weekly meetings with trainees, and to timetable protected NQT time was a challenge for senior leaders. If meetings were not protected in the timetable, they did not always take place.
- Several mentors, particularly those working with HEI-led routes, thought that the greatest challenge for many NQTs was that the longest placement experience they had often had, was approximately ten weeks. It was only when individuals transitioned to their NQT year that senior leaders and mentors felt they began to understand that they needed to keep work and energy levels consistent for an extended period of time. The amount of additional administrative tasks that NQTs might not have appreciated during training placements added to this challenge.
- Senior leaders and mentors perceived a skill gap in NQTs with regard to behaviour management. This led to a lack of resilience and, in turn, to wellbeing issues.
- School-based mentors highlighted that it could be challenging when they were required to have difficult conversations with trainees and NQTs, for example where performance was not as expected or the trainee/NQT was not integrating themselves fully into school life.
- Several NQTs said that they felt unprepared for what it meant to be a teacher. Appropriate bodies also noted their lack of experience in the range of administrative tasks that a teacher undertook on a day-to-day basis, as well as a lack of familiarity with the processes that needed to be followed for marking and assessment.

## Perspectives on training and school careers

- Overall, most trainees felt that their training had met their expectations, including with the level of challenge and workload that they encountered. Where expectations were not perceived to have been met, this was generally attributed by trainees to a perceived lack of support, the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills and lack of clarity about evidencing requirements.
- NQTs also commonly reported that their expectations had been met although some felt that they had not been fully informed about expectations were, e.g. the range of additional administrative and pastoral tasks that they would be required to undertake.
- Most NQTs hoped that they would remain in their current school following their NQT year, and most trainees believed that they would remain in teaching. Some NQTs, however, were unsure that they would remain in teaching longer-term, due to the workload.
- Interview participants of all types suggested that a range of areas could be developed further, including: increasing support and recognition for mentors, clearer information about the range of training routes, appropriate bodies and support on offer, more support for transition between ITT and NQT, and increased streamlining of provider requirements.

The full document can be downloaded from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hosting-trainees-and-employing-newly-qualified-teachers-nqts>