

The beginnings of school-led teacher training: New challenges for university teacher education

The *School Direct Research Project* undertaken by a team of academics from Manchester Metropolitan University concludes five years of research into the effects of school-led training on the rationale and composition of university teacher education in England and considers the impacts of recent changes on the teaching profession.

Teacher education in England now comprises a vocational employment-based model of training located primarily in schools. This approach is in sharp contrast to models followed in the European Teacher Education Area where student teachers typically spend five years in university, followed by up to two years on school placement. Almost all countries introduced reforms in initial primary teacher education after the initiation of the Bologna Process (1999), similarly for secondary subject teachers, and half of pre-primary sectors of education. These two approaches reveal radically different conceptions of how teacher quality might be improved in the name of international competitiveness.

In the English model, teacher education has been wrested from its traditional home within the academy where universities play a support role to what has become school-led training where government funds for teacher education have been diverted to schools. Student teachers often spend as little as thirty days in university during a one-year postgraduate training course. Teacher professional identity has been referenced to skill development within this frame and the wider assessment culture. The wider European model, meanwhile,

similarly claims to be concerned with raising teacher quality in a way which responds to the challenges of lifelong learning in a knowledge based society. The model is characterised by reinvigorated faith in academic study and promotion of individual teachers, where a pedagogical dimension is included from the outset of undergraduate studies, but with relatively brief periods spent in school.

The report, written by Tony Brown, Harriet Rowley and Kim Smith, shows how the reconfiguration of how training in the English model is distributed between university and school sites consequential to School Direct altering how the content and composition of that training is decided. Most notably, local market conditions rather than educational principles can determine the design of training models and how the composition of teacher preparation is shared across sites. This contingency means that the content and structure of School Direct courses varies greatly between different partnership arrangements across the country, leading to greater fragmentation within the system as a whole. Thus, there is not only increased diversification in terms of type of training route but also diversification of experience within each route.

School Direct has also altered the balance of power between universities and schools, and in turn, their relationship with one another. The ascendance of school-led training has changed how the responsibilities of each party are decided and impacted on how the categories teacher educator, teacher and trainee are defined. In particular, the function of teacher educator has been split across the university and school sites, displacing traditional notions of what it means to be a 'teacher' and 'teacher educator'. The flux is leading to uncertainty across role boundaries and, in turn, changes in practice. Furthermore, as those in different locations negotiate territorial boundaries, this can activate anxiety and tension within the workforce. The particular impact on

different school subjects as a result of these contrasting approaches relates to the way in which conceptions of the subjects derive from where understandings of them are developed, whether in schools or in universities.

For those training in schools little more may be done than enable teachers to work through commercial schemes as implementers of curriculum, as opposed our European neighbours following university intensive courses where relatively low attention is given to the practical school aspects during the university element. Lower cost school-based teacher education may yet appeal to other countries in building and influencing the practice of their teaching forces. But four questions immediately present themselves:

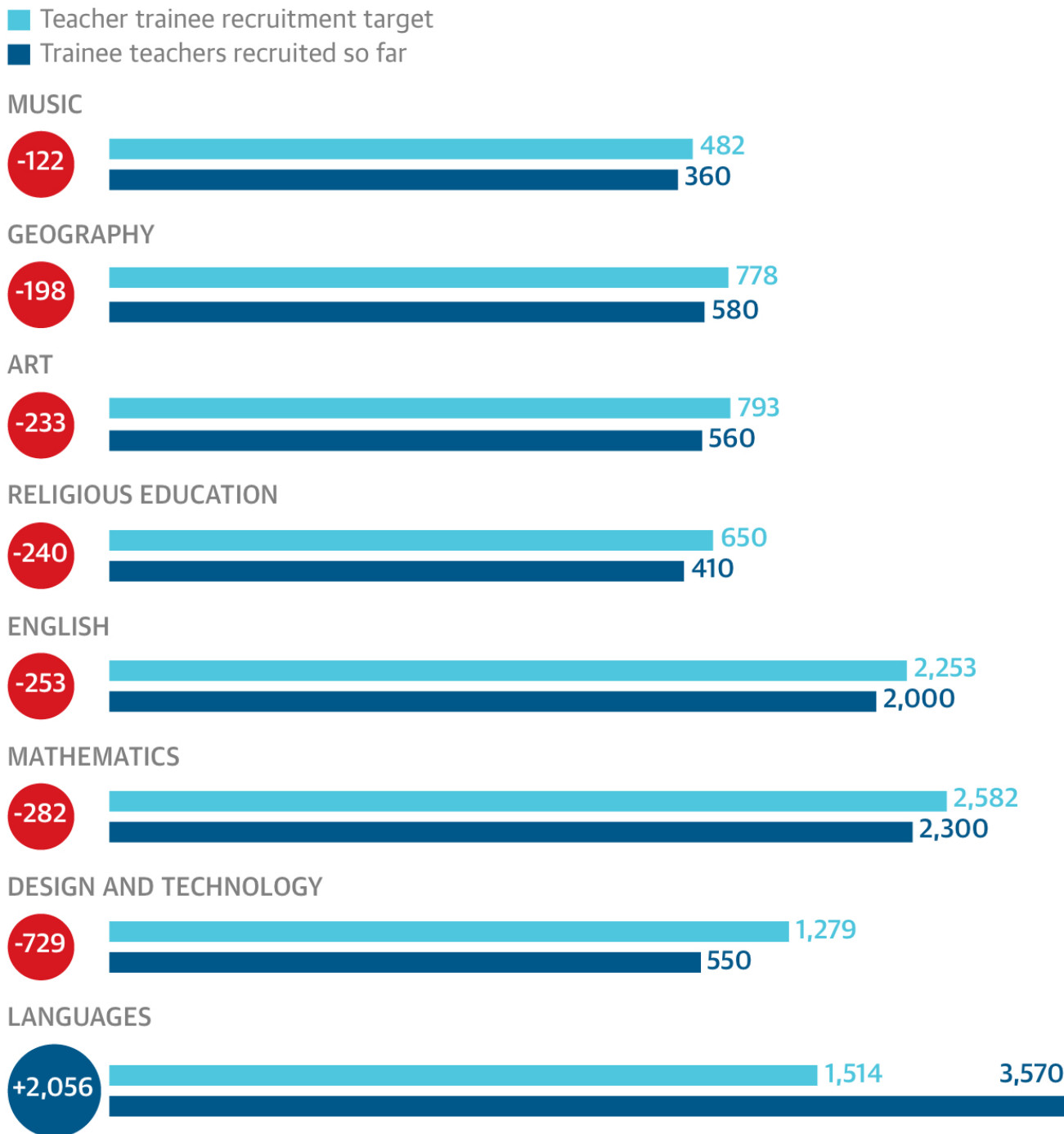
- Does School Direct provide a viable alternative to university based teacher education?
- Does it alter the composition of the pedagogical subject knowledge it seeks to support?
- Is it low cost, or at least good value for money (National Audit Office, 2016)?
- How will it eventually impact on England's reputation in international comparative testing?

The full research report can be downloaded [here](#).

This Government is failing in its duty to manage teacher supply

[Back in December 2014](#), I wrote about a looming crisis in teacher recruitment for September 2015. Here we are a couple

of days away from September and that crisis has well and truly emerged. [Figures published by the Government](#), quietly and secretively on a busy news day, reveal significant shortages across the board:



Considered in total, there is a 10% shortage in total applicants, and this is the third year in a row that the Government has failed to secure enough new entrants to the profession.

John Howson, whose blog has chartered these things in detail over the years, has written about the reasons for and consequences of this Government's failing to look after teacher supply in today's [Observer](#).

This crisis has come about because of:

- Depressed wages in the public sector, making teaching look unattractive compared to other career paths;
- The perception [in 2011] that we had enough teachers due to falling pupil rolls;
- The imposition of a complex and constantly changing bursary scheme that has muddied the waters around who pays what for a teacher training course, and has resulted in the vast majority of students having to pay £9k for their studies;
- The introduction of School Direct, a shoddy and ill-conceived attempt to impose a free-market training systems run by schools. This has resulted in the closure of some university teacher education courses .

The immediate results of this are that courses, like those we run at MMU, will open in a week or so with unfilled places. In most subjects, this is unheard of in my experience.

Moving ahead to September 2016, headteachers will find it difficult, or impossible, to recruit enough teachers in subjects such as physics, design and technology, geography, business studies and even English. Headteachers will be forced to ask existing teachers to teach subjects where they do not have specialist subject knowledge. Or, perhaps more worryingly, they will be forced to remove certain subjects from the curriculum. We have seen this happening in Music in many primary and secondary schools in recent years.

What will parents make of all this? As some readers know, I have five children. Three are currently attending three different schools in our local town – one academy, one free

school and one LA -maintained primary school. Sadly, I have to specify which types of schools these are as I can't rely anymore on them being taught by qualified teachers with appropriate qualifications. As this crisis in teacher recruitment begins to hit the public consciousness, parents should be holding headteachers to account for the decisions they make about who is teaching their children. If answers are not forthcoming, then Freedom of Information requests should follow. Our children deserve to be taught by qualified teachers.

As for the Government, they are in denial. Nick Gibb is quoted in yesterday's Guardian as saying that:

"These figures show that teacher recruitment is improving, with 3% more people due to start postgraduate teacher training than this time last year. We have already exceeded our target for primary school trainees and are making sustained progress for the secondary sector – including in key subjects like English, maths, physics and chemistry, where we are ahead of last year's performance".

None of these things are true. I'm with [John Howson on this one, when he writes that](#) 'unless it [the Government] recognises the scale of the problem and acts soon, it will become the worst teacher-supply situation since the dark days of the early 2000s. That is no way to create a world-class education system'.

Is the crisis in initial

teacher education and teacher recruitment beginning to hit the public consciousness?

It's taken a while, but I was pleased to see at least one MP begin to question some of this Government's policy in respect of initial teacher education and teacher recruitment this week. Louise Haigh, Labour MP for Sheffield Heeley, has written [this article in the Yorkshire Post](#) that explores some of the key issues that I've been raising in this blog for a number of years.

Chief amongst these are, of course, the inadequacy of the Schools Direct model in terms of contributing the numbers of teachers that is required for the country as a whole, their geographical spread and subject specialism. She also questions the efficacy of Teach First as a model (and, I would add, the immense cost of sustaining a so-called charity with public funding). She also mentions the huge costs involved in paying for supply staff to cover the gaps left in schools who are unable to recruit full time members of staff.

It seems to me that as headteachers in many schools face up to this crisis that, eventually, the public consciousness of these matters will begin to hit home. Sadly, by then, it will be too late for many schools and parents, who will find that their children are being taught by non-specialists, supply staff or, even worse, unqualified teachers with minimal, if any, teaching experience and little professional support.

The system of initial teacher education in this country is in a perilous state. The recently announced policy of [unrestricting allocations to HEI](#) will not help. It will only fragment further the issues of geographical spread and subject specialism. Year on year, there is a decreasing number of

students opting for teacher education courses, with Schools Direct the worst culprit by far in failing to fill allocated places. These trends have been analysed superbly by Professor John Howson over many years with his most recent observations on the current state of play published [last week](#). Whilst organisations like Teach First play around the edge of the sector, contributing little sustained benefits and with [the majority of their student teachers leaving after two years](#), the organisations that can and should be empowered to drive forwards quality in initial teacher education are being marginalised at every turn.

Almost every headteacher I speak to tells me that universities should be leading initial teacher education across the country. They know, better than anyone probably, that schools (with a few exceptions perhaps) are not wanting or willing to lead programmes of initial teacher education. The system implemented by this Government is falling apart. The NCTL has been shown as incompetent in managing the sector as a whole. Schools Direct is a complete farce. Teach First is propped up by public funding and making minimal impact in a national context. As pressure mounts, one can only hope that headteachers and parents will put pressure on the Government to rethink their approach before permanent damage is done to the infrastructure of the current and future teaching workforce.

Labour will abolish School Direct



In one of the most welcome announcements in respect of educational policy, I was delighted to hear from Tristram Hunt yesterday that [Labour will abolish School Direct](#), the (in name) school-led system of initial teacher education. The reality is, as anyone who has worked in the initial teacher education sector will know, that universities have propped up this ideological experiment ensuring that individual students feel a modicum of success by partaking in the programme.

Hunt's view is that School Direct has been haphazard in its implementation, resulted in a crisis of teacher recruitment and a looming national shortage of teachers in key areas (both by subject and geographically). I would agree with all these points. Those who doubt the veracity of these statements should spend a few minutes reading [Professor John Howson's blog](#). He has, more than anyone else I know, charted the lows of this Government's policy on teacher recruitment with unfailing energy and a criticality often missing in debates in this area.

At a national level, School Direct has been a complete failure. Last year, it only filled 61% of its total places (down from 68% last year). These statistics may themselves be over-optimistic and inflated. Interested readers should read [this recent post](#) by Professor Howson. Figures for this year's School Direct recruitment look even worse on a month by month analysis.

This failed experiment is in stark contrast to the work done by MMU and other HEI in bolstering their initial teacher education provision, in partnership with schools of course, resulting in an over 90% recruitment success of students to PGCE courses in primary and secondary initial teacher education across the entire UK (the figure at MMU is much higher). Additionally, huge capital investments such as the new Brooks building for the Faculty of Education (at a cost of around £150m; see picture above and below) have ensured the students have access to the very latest and most impressive space and facilities to learn within.



Perhaps the most damaging aspect of this whole sorry episode is the fallacy that university led ITE provision is done in isolation from schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the 15 years that I have worked for MMU, the partnership of schools across the north west of England has been central to our work, every day. Later today, I'll be visiting one of these to support a student in Macclesfield who has benefited immensely from his experiences there on a teaching placement. He has benefited immensely from the structured university led programme of education and the support of dedicated colleagues who have helped him navigate the complex process of becoming a teacher.

Incidentally, the school where he is currently working has also benefited immensely in the process too. Despite being at the forefront of the training school programme themselves, they have employed more students from our PGCE in Music course

than any other school in the north west of England, with the current Head of Department and two other staff having completed their training with us over the last ten years.

What does the future of ITE look like under a Labour Government? Hunt had this to say:

What we need to do is to take the best of the School Direct system, which is school-based training and practical training, but re-introduce some order into it. [We must] continue a role for higher education providers, which would be obliterated under a future Tory government, and have a regional model, rather like a medical deanery model, [made up] of excellent higher education institutions at the regional core of teacher training programmes.

This seems like a much more sensible route forwards. HEI have the expertise, experience and capacity to manage programmes of ITE. Schools don't. Generally, they are overwhelmed by the responsibility and student experience suffers. Partnership working has always been, and will remain, the way forward with HEIs leading and schools working alongside as vital partners.

[Is there a looming teacher shortage for September 2015?](#)

I've enjoyed reading [John Howson's blog](#). His analytical take around the number of teachers that we, as a country, need is incisive and informative.

The release of the ITT census a week or so ago was given the 'Howson treatment' in [this post](#). I'd strongly encourage anyone with an interest in teacher education to read it. If you are a

parent concerned about your child's education perhaps you should read it too. We are heading for a major shortage of qualified teachers in many subject areas. We are at least 1,300 secondary school teachers short across the country. There is also a 7% shortfall in primary school teachers this year.

As someone with an interest in music education, one key fact stood out for me from the post. Across the country only 81% of planned training places were filled. Regular readers of this blog will remember that the MMU Music courses for a September 2014 start were filled well in advance; in July we received a panic email from the DfE asking us to fill an additional 7 places. We were able to do this. Through discussions with other colleagues across the country I've found out that many universities received a similar request. Many of them were not willing to reopen courses.

This chaotic, piecemeal approach to the training of our teachers is pretty shoddy. It is certainly not helped by this government's preoccupation with Schools Direct. [Howson's analysis](#) shows us that Schools Direct only manages to recruit 61% of total places. SCITTS only managed 79%. HEI led courses recruited 90% of their allocation. I am constantly amazed that the DfE seems determined to pursue a policy of school-based training provision like this when the evidence shows clearly that it is poorer quality, patchy in terms of its provision, and pedagogical and intellectually weaker in many aspects compared with HEI-led programmes.

The (still) continuing farce of School Direct

For anyone who has been following this Government's flagship policy of School Direct over recent years, [this article](#) in yesterday's TES will be no surprise at all.

The key result of this policy to try to move initial teacher education away from HEI and relocate it in schools is that schools themselves are now facing the most severe teacher shortage in a decade. Congratulations to all those schools and head teachers who thought it would be a good idea to try and train their own teachers! You are complicit in causing severe damage to our national ITE infrastructure. The TES report shows that the number of vacancies going unfilled is increasing and that while some subjects are meeting recruitment targets, others are falling far short.

The study was done by Professor John Howson, [whose blog](#) has charted the continuing challenges and chaos around teacher supply over the last few years. Howson is particularly scathing about the inability of School Direct to address shortages in key subject areas such as Music, Design & Technology, RE, Biology and Physics.

Anyone who has read my blog over the years will know that [I'm no fan of School Direct](#). It has created chaos in the ITE system as a whole and has no significant advantages over an HEI led system which, as anyone who knows even a small amount about ITE, is delivered in partnership with schools already (every student has to spend 2/3 of their time in school anyway, and this is legislated for).

This is not to say that individual students on School Direct do not have a good experience. Our current cohort of Music PGCE students contains seven School Direct students and I

would like to think that they get a great experience during their time with us at MMU. But the blunt reality is that the School Direct system as a whole is failing and should be abolished immediately after the next General Election. It has been a terrible policy, poorly and hastily implemented, and now we can see clearly that it is failing to deliver in key areas.

Tristram Hunt – will you commit to dismantling School Direct if Labour come to power next year?

DfE announce an 'independent' review into initial teacher training

The DfE has launched what it [laughably] calls an independent review of initial teacher training courses within the UK. You can find full details [here](#). I say laughably, as the review is being led by an Andrew Carter (and don't forget his OBE), who is chair of the review. Carter's qualifications for undertaking this role are that he is a primary school head teacher (at South Farnham School, a very good primary school by all accounts), leader of a school-centred ITT provider and ITT lead on the Teaching Schools Council. He's also a DfE favourite, having acted in an [advisory role for schools wishing to become academies](#) (following his own lead in re-designating his own school as one of the first primary academies). Given this experience, I'm struggling to see how he could be an independent chair in any traditional understanding of the word 'independent'.

The other funny thing about this is that we already have an

apparently independent organisation that undertakes an annual review of initial teacher education, following detailed inspections of various providers of all shapes and sizes – Ofsted. Clearly, Gove does not like what Ofsted report, namely that HEI-led partnerships have consistently outperformed school centred, School Direct, Teach First and other school-led programmes over many years. They will continue to do so whatever Carter and his team may report back to Gove.

The review will begin its business shortly and report back to the DfE by the end of the year. When the review team is appointed I'll let you all know its constituency alongside any further news about the way in which it is going to conduct its work.

[The continuing farce of School Direct](#)

One of Gove's flagship policies – School Direct – continues to lurch from one crisis to another. It does seem to be terminally ill. Following sustained pressure from various groups, [the Government have released figures today](#) of the number of graduates that have applied to undertake initial teacher education as part of the initiative. However, as usual, this only tells half the story at best.

Firstly, the figures only report applications to the programme. Headteachers, who are ultimately the ones who have to agree to training a student on the Schools Direct programme, are being highly selective (and rightly so) about taking on those graduates who have applied. A number of sources have told me that less than 5000 potential students

have been accepted by their schools. This is figure being quoted by the [BBC](#) and other media today. In reality, the figure may be closer to 40% nationally. In some parts of the country, the ACSL are reporting that [66% of places have remained unfilled](#). Whatever way you look at it, it is a very long way short of the 10,000 places that the Government want to have secured by September.

The consequences of this for the number of teachers that our country needs are disastrous. But, amazingly, no one is collecting information nationally about how many teachers are being recruited, in which subject areas, or phases. The [ACSL comment](#) that:

*Although the previous system wasn't perfect, one advantage it did have was an overall plan to ensure there were enough teachers coming through in every subject. The problem now is that **no one is collecting data nationally, so there is no big picture of teacher recruitment, retention, advertisement of vacancies, and how many go unfilled.** The last thing schools want more bureaucracy, but there is a need for national data. By failing to collect that data and use it to inform what happens, **we will not know where the shortages are until it is too late.** (my emphasis)*

Staggering, isn't it?

Professor John Howson from Oxford Brookes University has documented the potential impact of the failure of School Direct in great detail over on [his blog](#). Over the last few months he has documented the availability/unavailability of places via the School Direct website. From this, he has analysed the consequences for the provision of teachers in various subjects, identifying significant or serious risks of shortfalls from the end of next year. It makes sober reading.

If there is a shortfall of 50% across the board as a result of the chaotic, rushed and un-evaluated approach taken by School

Direct, can other routes that provide teachers with QTS pick up the pieces? At the moment, HEI are hamstrung. They are penalised if they recruit more than their allocated numbers (in my university, we can't even make a reserve list as students are required to have completed their initial skills tests prior to the commencement of studying on our courses); Teach First have closed their recruitment and have just started their summer institute so won't be taking on more students either.

In addition to this, Gove is desperately seeking to cover his tracks quickly having presented [a series of half-truths to the House of Commons last week](#). In relation to this question by Bill Esterson:

In 2011-12, there was a 10% fall in the number of graduates applying to teacher training programmes; there has also been a 17% rise in the number of schools using supply teachers, and we see reliance on unqualified teachers. How will those approaches raise standards and improve the outcome for children?

... he said this:

Michael Gove: *I am pleased to be able to say that the statistics the hon. Gentleman quotes come from a period before the introduction of our school direct programme, which has achieved a dramatic increase in the number of highly qualified graduates entering the profession.*

This is clearly untrue. In this academic year, there are only around 500 graduates undertaking Schools Direct placements. There is no way of knowing whether from September 2013 there will be a 'dramatic increase' in 'high quality graduates'. In comparison to what? This year's intake (which is smaller than the secondary PGCE course in my university and clearly tiny in relation to the number of teachers the country needs). Anyway, all the evidence is pointing in the opposite direction.

The sadness in all this is that we did have a high quality, perhaps world-leading, system of initial teacher education in this country. My best guess is that Gove is wanted to deliberately wreck this in order to privatise it at some point later down the road. Does that sound familiar? As [Howson points out](#), the only short term winners in all this will be recruitment agencies. Pupils will loose out; HEI will continue to suffer despite offering our country the best and most rigorous training programmes for initial teacher education; schools will suffer and will be forced to employ unqualified staff or make teachers teach outside their subject specialisms. This is not a recipe for a world class education system in any way, shape or form.

And what about the other person charged with responsibility for this shambles – the head of the NCTL – Charlie Taylor. I've been told he's off on sick leave.

Desperate tactics as Schools Direct continues to flounder

Here's a copy of an email that the DfE has sent to anyone registered on the School Direct (SD) applications portal. It is encouraging those who might already have applied for a mainstream PGCE to switch towards SD in an desperate bid to fill the many outstanding places on this untried, untested programme.

Dear xxx

You may have already applied for a PGCE by now, but have you thought about applying for School Direct?

Competition for training places is very high. So applying for a second training programme is a great way to ensure you can start your teaching career this year.

Why you should apply for School Direct.

School Direct is different. That's because you're part of a school team from day one, where you can train as a teacher with the expectation of a job once you qualify. And you could receive a bursary of up to £20,000* or even be paid a salary.

It's free to apply. Simple too.

There is still time to get a place starting this year if you act quickly. [Search and apply for a School Direct place](#) by location and subject, or check out some schools which are still keen to recruit in your area on our [new vacancies](#) page. Applying is free and you can even start your application and finish it off at a later date. And if you've already applied for your PGCE, you'll be able to use a lot of the same information again.

This email has caused quite a stir in the ITT community. It seems like a deliberate attempt to poach students from PGCE routes for Gove's favoured SD route. It also contains many inaccuracies:

'Competition for training places is high'. No! Not for a Schools Direct place. In fact, when asked a parliamentary question on the 24th April 2013 about how many students had been recruited, Mr Laws' best answer was, "The National College for Teaching and Learning will be publishing data on how many applicants there have been for Schools Direct places starting in September 2013 shortly". In private meetings, DfE officials have been pushed to provide this information and but have refused on countless occasions. It seems clear that they have massively under-recruited but do not want this news getting out at this point; it would clearly be detrimental to those students considering this route. But the key question is, of course, why is the programme under-recruiting?

'You can train as a teacher with an expectation of a job once you qualify'. No! You can expect whatever you want, but all the schools I have been in touch with are not offering any SD student a job following their training. Many schools have been put off from partaking in this programme because of this DfE-inspired myth.

'You could receive a bursary of up to £20,000!' No! Only if you teach one of a very few shortage subjects.

'Or even be paid a salary'. No! I've yet to hear of one school offering a training salary of the type that the old style GTP offered.

All this is very sad. The UK had a very high quality programme of HEI-led of initial teacher education delivered in partnership with schools. This has slowly been dismantled by Gove for ideological, not educational, reasons. Anyone who has been following this blog will have read the views of other significant people in the educational community who are warning of a crisis in teacher training if this continues. Recently, Professor Sir Robert Burgess, Vice Chancellor of the University of Leicester, has [written directly to Michael Gove about his concerns](#).

Schools Direct is the latest ill-thought through, hastily implemented, and pretty much unworkable idea that Gove and his new crony, Charlie Taylor, have come up with. Anyone with an ounce of common sense and knowledge in this area will know that it is bound to fail. Yet in another parliamentary question asked to Mr Laws on the 24th April 2013 he couldn't even confirm that a formal external evaluation of Schools Direct would be commissioned.

Interestingly, of course, the email didn't encourage students who had applied for Teach First to also apply and transfer for the Schools Direct programme. Funny that.

What should the leaders of our Faculties of Education do in response to this? Well, UCET did issue a response to this email (although today this seems to have been withdrawn from their website). My view is that **all** universities that are involved in Schools Direct should withdraw their staff and other resources from it immediately. We are only shooting ourselves in the foot by engaging with this scheming and manipulative approach to teacher training.

Whilst they are at it, **all** universities should refuse to

cooperate with Ofsted until the obvious political bias of and influence on their work has been examined and removed. They are not an independent watchdog anymore and their judgements cannot be trusted.

Gove, Wilshaw and Taylor. What a damning testament to the state of initial teacher education in this country.

[Professor Sir Tim Brighouse speaks out the 'Government'-induced crisis' in Initial Teacher Education](#)

[Professor Sir Tim Brighouse](#) is a teacher, professor and educator to whom everyone should listen. His experience of education across the UK is second to none, and he has done a range of jobs that most of us could only dream about. He is also prepared to call a spade a spade, which is a refreshing change for an academic in my experience. On the view occasions that I have heard him speak live, I have been impressed by his vast knowledge and wisdom, his ability to bring humour into different discussions and also his compassionate humanity.

For all these reasons, the publication of [this statement](#) by Sir Tim is an important marker in the current political debate surrounding initial teacher education. I would urge you all to read it carefully. For those of you that feel that I'm sometimes provocative, intemperate (just too grumpy) and perhaps prone to exaggeration, I'd encourage you to listen to this highly informed and well respected voice. These are some of the key points that Sir Tim makes:

1. There is a Government-induced crisis in Initial Teacher Education. It is not the fault of the sector itself. It has been caused directly by ill-informed and careless handling of educational policy by Gove and his new puppet Charlie Taylor;
2. There is no one person or central agency that can ensure a sufficient supply of of trained teachers nationally, or an efficient local distribution of training places covering all subject areas. The distribution of places is now 'startlingly haphazard';
3. QTS is no longer seen as a necessary requirement for becoming a teacher in the English state education system (unless you work for a LA-maintained school);
4. Charlie Taylor, the new Chief Executive of the Teaching Agency, is overseeing a new system (Schools Direct) that Ofsted believes produces significantly fewer outstanding courses in teacher education;
5. Many universities have now lost all their PGCE provision and are wholly reliant on schools choosing them to partner with for School Direct places (and what happens when they don't);
6. Many universities have, or will, withdraw from the provision of ITE and PGCE type provision because it is both financially and politically too unstable and too risky to carry on their involvement;
7. Partnership approaches between universities and schools have been the bedrock of the UK's provision in this area for years, but this is no under threat. HEIs bring much of value to this partnership that, once undone, will not be easily replaced.

I expect that Gove will dismiss Sir Tim's paper as more 'yada yada' from a leftist academic. However, I would encourage you to read Sir Tim's paper carefully. It comes from a responsible and respected pillar of the UK education system whose opinion we should take very seriously.

