

Consultation response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

• Consultation response: Initial Teacher Training (ITT) market review

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and the following is made as a public response.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG):

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK's learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline, its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace. This includes the accreditation of geographers and geography programmes through the award of Chartered Geographer to individuals and the Society's accreditation of undergraduate and Masters level geography programmes.

We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, Geography ITT Scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers. We work closely with the Department for Education, Ofqual, Ofsted, the awarding organisations, and geography teachers to support good practice in teaching and learning in geographical education.

We have 16,000 Fellows and members and our work currently reaches more than three million people per year. The Society awards the professional accreditation Chartered Geographer, which is awarded to teachers through the Chartered Geographer (Teacher) designation and accredits geography undergraduate programmes. Each year the Society works in a range of ways with teachers and pupils from about half of all English secondary schools which includes work with academies and their respective MATs, free, independent and maintained schools.

The Society provides a significant programme of activities to support teachers during their training year and entry into the profession. We work regularly with Schools Direct, Teach First and ITT providers to provide subject specialist input into their secondary programmes and since 2016 the Society has awarded Geography ITT Scholarships to over 500 geographers. Our annual programme of CPD reaches about 1,500+ teachers and the Society's online resources available via www.rgs.org/schools receive over 1.3 million views annually.

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Initial Teacher Training (ITT) market review: recommendations

The Society is responding to the ITT Market Review with reference to the following areas of interest and concern. Where relevant these have been referenced to the applicable consultation question(s).

Supporting high quality ITT subject specialism for geography (Q11, Q12, Q13)

The Society works with all types of ITT providers - whether higher education or school led, as well as with Teach First, to support high quality subject specialism for new geography teachers. The Society's online subject knowledge resources and its CPD programme are regularly drawn on by trainees to support their subject knowledge and subject specialist skills.

The following comments are made with respect to secondary geography ITT, where the Society has extensive partnerships with providers and has worked closely with geography trainees and geography teachers.

However, the Society is also concerned that primary ITT currently provides very little curriculum time to developing their trainees' geographical subject knowledge. This issue has been regularly reported on (Catling S. 2004, 2011, 2013 & 2017)¹. In addition, Ofsted (2021) has identified that geography is often diluted in the primary curriculum and further draws a correlation between the reduction in time spent on geography on primary ITT and that "most primary pupils are taught little geography".

All subjects require their trainees to develop and apply subject specialist knowledge. With respect to geography, Ofsted has identified that "given the complexity of disciplinary knowledge in geography, research suggests that subject-specialist, qualified, professional teachers are key"².

The Society notes that overall Market Review does draw attention to the importance of subject specialism. However, the Society is concerned that the specific recommendations do not provide enough consideration to this key area and could have a detrimental impact on the quality of ITT geography, including the capacity and standard of subject-specific mentoring.

The Society also believes there are other opportunities that should be considered which could further support ITT providers to develop and strengthen the subject specialist elements of their programmes. For example, the Society has previously noted how existing course accreditations for undergraduate and Masters level programmes could be reorientated to support the subject specific requirement of ITT courses. These are externally validated accreditations focused on subject requirements and they are provided by the respective learned societies and professional bodies. Such accreditations are provided for chemistry (Royal Society of Chemists), computer science (British Computing Society), geography (Royal Geographical Society with IBG), mathematics (Institute of Mathematics and its Application) and physics (Institute of Physics).

In addition, the critical role of mentors in supporting a trainee's subject specialism could be further supported through their receipt of a relevant subject-specialist Chartered accreditation. For example, the Society awards the Chartered Geographer (Teacher). Similar accreditations are also available for chemistry, English, history, mathematics and physics teachers. These would assess, and then recognise and serve to maintain and update, a mentor's subject expertise, and connect them with their wider subject community of professional practice and standards. The Society would recommend that ITT provision move towards a position where all subject specialist mentors, and

¹ E.g., Catling, S. 2017. Not nearly enough geography! University provision for England's pre-service primary teachers, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*

² Ofsted 2021. Research Review: Geography

ITT course leaders, have either received their respective subject specialist Chartered (Teacher) accreditation (if available) or are working towards one. The Society would welcome the provision of funding that would enable a mentor to develop their subject specialist knowledge and skills through their application to, and maintenance of, a subject specific Chartered programme.

Connecting ITT with the wider subject community (Q12)

There are many examples of strong and productive connections and partnerships between ITT providers, their partner schools and the wider support provided by their respective subject bodies and associations. Membership (which is often provided at preferential rates) of trainees' respective subject bodies should be encouraged, as well as further opportunities to build partnerships between schools, higher education, ITT providers, and subject bodies and associations.

There is valuable scholarship developed by research colleagues working in the ITT context that supports trainees. For geography this subject/education focused research capacity is to be found predominately within the ITT sector. Its outputs help trainees to critically evaluate their role and developing capabilities as geography teachers, drawing on subject focused research and scholarship.

The value of such subject specific scholarship was demonstrated in the findings of Ofsted's *Research Review: Geography*, which drew extensively on the research work of numerous ITT geographers. It would be a detrimental step if the wider research impact of 'research-embedded' ITT geography colleagues was diminished if their institutions were to withdrawal from, or scaled back, their ITT provision.

Ensuring that the ITT market can provide the necessary supply of geography teachers. (Q24, 25, 26)

In the 2021 summer results geography GCSE experienced the second highest rise of all subjects (4%), having risen every year since 2011. GCSE candidate numbers stand at a 20-year high of 281,741 candidates, 100,000 more than in 2010. In addition, this year's A Level geography experienced the highest rise of all subjects (16.8%) with 35,268 candidates.

This welcome, and continued, growth for geography has been creating greater demand for geography teachers. As a result, many schools have faced recruitment challenges, leading to the use of non-specialists for examination classes. Ofsted reported that ~20% of GCSE geography hours were taught by non-subject specialists in the least deprived schools, rising to ~70% in the most deprived schools.³

Geography also faces an immediate ITT recruitment challenge. The July 2021 UCAS statistical report identified that geography had 550 trainees who were 'Placed, Conditionally Placed or Holding Offers', compared to 1010 trainees in the same categories for July 2020 and 1170 for July 2019.⁴ Whilst there are many influences on ITT recruitment, it is important to note that the availability of bursaries (and scholarships where relevant) are particularly important considerations for many potential trainees. Given the current reduction in geography ITT applications, the Society would recommend the reintroduction of training bursaries and scholarships for future recruitment cycles.

³ Ofsted 2021. Research Review: Geography

⁴ UCAS Teacher Training Statistical Releases

Turning to the review's recommendations, as suggested the proposals concerning the accreditation and reaccreditation process present considerable risk to geography ITT provision. The Society notes the strong concerns raised in other institutions' consultation responses, which have been made with respect to all subjects, including geography. They have identified the disruption to ITT recruitment that the market-reform proposals could create; specifically, the proposed accreditation and re-accreditation process, and its timescale.

If high-quality providers such as Cambridge University's Geography PGCE programme were to withdraw from ITT recruitment and/or there was significant disruption to the ability of other providers to recruit successfully there would be negative impacts on the recruitment of new geography teachers. This could lead to long-lasting and negative impact on the future supply of geography teachers.

The Society does not wish to see geography's positive progress constrained by additional stress placed on the supply of new geography teachers. It is for this reason that the Society cannot support the current recommendations with respect to the proposals for the accreditation and re-accreditation of courses and the recommended timescale.

Recruitment of trainees (Q33)

Over 2016-2020 the Society's recruitment of Geography ITT Scholars represented between ~10% to ~15% of the overall geography ITT cohort.

There is much positive learning that should be drawn on from the experience of the subject specialist ITT Scholarship programmes. This is in respect to their explicit focus on trainees' subject specialist knowledge, how they have inducted trainees into their wider subject community and helped sustain them in the early career phase. The importance of connecting and embedding trainee and early career within their wider subject communities deserves greater consideration in the future development of ITT and early career support.

Impact assessment (Q34)

The Society recognises that for some trainees their travel distance to course or placement school will be a significant consideration for where or if they might train. If some ITT providers withdraw from future provision, there may be the creation of 'cold spots' in the geographical distribution of course availability.

Such gaps in provision may have disproportionately negative impacts on recruitment from certain groups. Research by the Society has identified that individuals from Black, Asian and minority ethnic or low-income backgrounds are already underrepresented within the geography, and this could be exacerbated by a narrowing and concentration of ITT provision⁵.

The Society would not welcome changes that might lead to an even more challenging context for the recruitment of geography trainees from underrepresented backgrounds.

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⁵ Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) 2020. The Geography of Geography. The evidence base