



Statement from the Association for Language Learning on ITE reform

Languages may lose more than they gain in ITE reform

This September the government introduced the biggest reform in teacher education in a generation: School Direct (SD), a new route into teaching which allows students to apply for a training place direct to the school. The idea is that the school becomes the driver of the training process, selecting an accredited provider to work with and recruiting a trainee which it then employs. This turns the present system on its head. The school takes the lead, with the accredited body becoming the service provider. The Association for Language Learning is concerned that SD is being introduced too quickly without giving partnerships enough time to realign training to play to the strengths of each institution involved.

The search for teaching practice placements is a complex task in all subjects, dependent on stable staffing in schools and a commitment from departments year-on-year, so ITE providers often need to approach schools annually, searching for quality training placements for their student teachers. For languages there is an additional complexity because students' teaching languages do not automatically match the languages taught in schools' timetables. It is not unusual for a department to pull out of a placement at short notice because staffing has changed late in the summer term. Nor is it unusual for a languages department simply to decide they want a year off training with no explanation as to why. Because schools are not responsible for the training, and can just pull out, the languages ITE provider will sometimes still be searching for appropriate placements well into the autumn term. This situation is not ideal. Indeed it has been clear for some time that something needs to be done to ensure that the best languages departments and schools are, as a matter of course, involved in attracting, training and retaining the best teachers.

By September this year 900 schools had applied for SD places - all well and good where this forms part of national training provision. But where were these SD places to come from within a national quota? The allocation of core training places for providers for the year 2013-14, announced by the TA only in November, showed that, in order to accommodate the SD initiative, the allocation of places to established providers had been cut, in many cases severely. Only those providers judged Grade 1 by Ofsted have had their numbers protected or increased. Many providers judged good with outstanding features and with a long history of developing high-quality teachers, have had their allocation cut so severely that languages courses appear no longer economically viable. And this at a time when languages are about to become a statutory part of the primary curriculum.

The Association for Language Learning has grave concerns about our future capacity to train enough teachers of high quality to fulfil the country's needs and aspirations for a well trained,

world-class, teaching force for languages. We fear that, were some high quality languages ITE courses to be discontinued, school partnerships would be weakened and could be destabilised at a time of considerable curriculum change.

The Association wholly agrees with the Government's commitment to ensuring that we have the best teachers in our schools. The Association also agrees that schools should play a central role in the training of languages teachers; school experience provides unique insight into the tasks and responsibilities of the teacher, and there are talented professionals within schools with the experience and expertise essential to the development of a first-class system for initial teacher education. However, the current situation is worrying. Whilst some Teaching School Alliances are developing robust new training partnerships, the majority of teachers have not even heard of School Direct. And although schools are in the driving seat for SD, it is the ITE provider who is accountable to Ofsted.

Unless we retain a pivotal role for HEIs we will create a system which puts too much pressure on teachers, who may have excellent skills in supporting student teachers but whose first commitment must always be to their pupils. Are enough schools ready and willing to take on the leading role? Are there enough languages mentors in schools with expertise and, crucially, time to take on the full training role? How will the balance be achieved between allowing expert practitioners the time to devote to the training role whilst at the same time being accountable for their pupils' published examination results? How do we ensure the critical aspect of developing the professional thinking and research about language learning which are essential to creating teachers able to respond to pupils' emerging needs within a fast changing world?

We believe that without a solid foundation in theory and critical thinking, the quality of our training for the profession will diminish. We need universities in particular to remain a central part of the training process. But will they have the means to remain committed to Languages ITE? James Noble Rogers in his recent address to UCET said,

I really do fear that a combination of School Direct, the new allocations methodology and a tougher inspection framework could create a perfect storm under which ITT providers, faced with a situation where they cannot plan from year to year, or even guarantee the quality of their provision, will decide that the game is not worth the candle and withdraw from teacher education. From a Vice Chancellor's perspective, there are much less troublesome ways in which to attract students and fee income

The Association shares the concern that the current reforms will harm the development of the excellent new teachers for languages which our country both needs and deserves. We are risking throwing out the baby of effective HEI/school partnerships with the bathwater of education reform.

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Notes for editors

1. The **Association for Language Learning** is the major UK association for teachers of foreign languages, with over 5,000 members in all sectors of education. www.all-languages.org.uk Our Patron is Professor David Crystal and President in 2012-13 is Ann Swarbrick
2. The proposals on the reform of teacher education in England are set out by the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, in a document which can be found at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/careers/traininganddevelopment/a0078019/training-outstanding-teachers>
3. The proposals on the changes in languages education at primary and secondary level as part of the review of the national curriculum in England can be found at <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum>