

Collaborative Action for Change

National Conversations on International Teachers

UCET (The Universities Council for the Education of Teachers) has a Special Interest Group (SIG) for the Support of International Teachers which has rapidly become an active and influential collaborative network in the teacher education sector. It brings together 83 members from universities, school partners, subject associations and others (ALL, the Institute of Physics, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Languages (APPG)).

The SIG has created a powerful collective voice advocating for equity, clarity, and sustainability in the support, recruitment and retention of internationally trained teachers and trainees. Co-chaired and co-founded by Juliette Claro, Lecturer in Education on the PGCE MFL and iQTS programmes at St Mary's University, Twickenham, and Philipa Barker, Subject Lead for PGCE Science at Nottingham Trent University, the group has grown into a dynamic professional community committed to addressing the systemic integration and inclusion barriers faced by international trainees seeking to enter the teaching workforce in England.

At the heart of the SIG's work is a shared recognition that international teachers bring invaluable linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical expertise to the profession not only in MFL but also in Physics and other shortage subjects such as Maths and Computing

Despite their strengths, many face significant obstacles when transitioning into the English education system, particularly around curriculum changes, but also with financial adjustments, visa sponsorship, employment pathways, and inconsistent school-level understanding of culturally responsive mentoring skills and immigration legislation. Through regular meetings, collaborative research, and the pooling of lived experiences from across the sector, the SIG has developed a nuanced, evidence-informed understanding of these challenges. Members have contributed to case studies, institutional data, and policy analyses, enabling the group to articulate the complexity of the issue with clarity and authority.

This collective expertise has led to two debates in the House of Lords in collaboration with APPG for Languages, and colleagues from the University of Portsmouth (Tanya Riordan Subject Lead for PGCE MFL) and Philip Harding-Esch and Baroness Coussins, and another with the Institute of Physics. The two debates have also led to discussions with MPs on the potential support for schools to navigate the costs and administrative burden of the visa sponsorship for the recruitment of international ECTs. These debates draw explicitly on the SIG's findings, amplifying the voices of international trainee teacher, ECTs and providers who have long struggled with complex processes and inconsistent guidance. The visibility

generated by these discussions marked a significant step forward in raising parliamentary awareness of the issue.

The impact of the UCET SIG demonstrates the power of collective action in shaping national discourse. Through the commitment of its diverse membership, the group has transformed individual concerns into a coordinated movement for change for culturally responsive mentor training in schools but also for coherence in policies. The work of the SIG aims to influence policy conversations, strengthen sector understanding, and advocate for a more equitable system in which international teachers can thrive and contribute fully to the profession in languages and other shortage subjects.