AMET

The Association of
Mathematics Education Teachers

Commons Education Select Committee
7 Millbank
House of Commons
London
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6th September 2013

Dear Mr. Stuart,

We understand there is a meeting of the Education Select Committee on September 11th which will include discussion on teacher recruitment. We write to express some points from the perspective of the Association of Mathematics Education Teachers (AMET), whose members are involved in training new mathematics teachers.

We are aware that there remains a significant shortage of secondary mathematics teachers and that the situation is not improving. Recruitment was 5% below target last year and we suspect that the situation this year will be no better, and possibly worse. Whilst we support intentions to attract high quality people into teaching, we express our concerns below about some aspects of current Government policy which might inadvertently add to a worsening situation for the future.

1. The reality of the increasing move to School Direct is causing a number of HEIs to consider whether it is financially worthwhile for them continuing with initial teacher training.

   We have already seen the closure of initial teacher training courses and/or whole Schools of Education within HEIs and we expect others will follow if School Direct numbers continue to increase at the expense of HEI-based PGCE places. This is causing a loss of a layer of people with significant expertise in teacher training and in educational research.

2. Those who work in initial teacher training in HEIs are experienced classroom school teachers who have also held management and training roles in schools and more widely and therefore bring considerable expertise to their work. HEI-based PGCE courses have been delivering successful initial teacher training courses using models where 2/3 of the course time is spent in schools for some years now.

   Excellent teaching comes from research informed practice and we are losing those experts who can provide such research informed training for new teachers. This is not an issue about theory versus practice as separate entities but about pragmatic teaching which is informed by what we know from research.

   HEI tutors also offer support and training for mentors. One example of this is the recent book written by members of AMET and published by Routledge (*Mentoring MathematicsTeachers: Supporting and Inspiring Pre-Service and Newly Qualified Teachers* edited by Rosalyn Hyde & Julie-Ann Edwards).

3. Many School Direct programmes draw on the expertise of HEI-based teacher educators so the loss of this expertise would impact on these programmes as well as on the other advisory, training and support work many HEI-based teacher educators carry out in schools.

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4. We are aware of cases where schools appear to be seeking 'the finished article' to accept onto their School Direct (SD) programme and rejecting some applicants who would be accepted by a local HEI who are experienced in seeing the potential in the applicant.

   However, there have also been cases where the local HEI has already filled its allocation of PGCE places and there has been no opportunity to transfer either unfilled SD numbers into PGCE numbers or for an HEI to offer a place to a candidate who, whilst not suitable for School Direct, may be suitable for a HEI-based PGCE course.

   We remain unconvinced that a sufficient number of schools have the capacity or interest to develop something which is outside their core focus of teaching children.

   The emerging picture is one where there is a great deal of diversity in programme content and delivery between SD providers and, sometimes, a narrowness of focus, leading potentially to a wide range of outcomes for new teachers. With such a large number of providers of teacher training the national recruitment picture is complex and it is difficult to say with certainty how many SD places will actually result in teachers being trained. This may lead to a situation where insufficient numbers of mathematics teachers are being trained when well established HEIs could have accepted more onto their courses if they had been allowed to do so by NCTL.

5. The uncertainty surrounding Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses has been affecting, and continues to affect, recruitment.

   For those running longer SKE courses this year, some applicants who were interviewed last November had to wait until April to know whether the course would exist since the allocation for places on these SKE courses was not released by the NCTL until then. This was extremely difficult and embarrassing for HEIs to manage and meant that some excellent applicants decided they would not risk waiting five months and decided to withdraw their application.

   We cannot afford to keep losing good applicants just because of the uncertainty caused by late notification. The late notification also creates problems regarding staffing decisions within HEIs and may result in potential courses no longer being run, with knock-on effects for recruitment to both SD and HEI-based PGCE courses.

   Currently only Grade 1 HEI providers have their allocations guaranteed for 2014-2015. This means that some good providers have not been able to accept applicants for an SKE for 2013-14 as they cannot guarantee that they will be allocated any PGCE numbers for a 2014 start. This has led to the loss of some promising potential teachers, which is something that schools can ill-afford.

   It needs to be recognised that SKE courses, particularly the longer SKE ones, bring in a number of students who go on to be excellent mathematics teachers. A brief online course on subject knowledge for applicants whose degree has little or no mathematics will not produce the quality we would expect, and that schools require, in their mathematics teachers. We await an announcement on the future of SKE courses but hope that the longer face-to-face courses will continue to exist. These not only provide the depth needed but can also offer excellent role models for how mathematics might be taught and opportunities to work together on learning mathematics, which cannot be achieved effectively on a short or online course. SKE courses have produced some of our strongest NQTs over recent years and this must not be jeopardised.

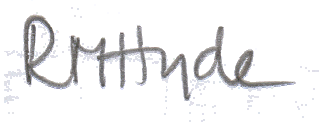
6. The way in which bursaries are allocated effectively means that someone with a third class degree is unlikely to be able to go into teaching.

   Although we understand the desire to increase the number of applicants with first and upper second class degrees, it is important to realise that many people with third class degrees have gone on to be excellent teachers. We consider it inconsistent to give a substantial bursary to someone who has no mathematics in their first class degree and trains to be a mathematics teacher through an SKE route but not offer a bursary to

someone else with a mathematics degree, albeit third class. We cannot afford to lose potentially excellent mathematics teachers just because they have a third class degree.

We hope you will consider some of the concerns expressed above. This is particularly important with a need for even more mathematics teachers in the future with a growing population and such initiatives as teaching mathematics to those post-16 students who have not obtained a grade C at GCSE and the continued support for trying to increase the number of A level Further Mathematics students.

Yours sincerely



Rosalyn Hyde

Chair, Association of Mathematics Education Teachers