

The response of the Special Educational Consortium to the call for evidence on: ITT Core Content and Early Career Frameworks

The Special Educational Consortium (SEC)

SEC is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership includes the voluntary and community sector, education providers and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, workforce training, the SEN legal framework, exclusions, and alternative provision. This response therefore focuses on the SEN and disabilities aspects in particular.

Evidence Submission

SEC submitted evidence via the online survey from a 2015 study carried out by UCL & the Swiss Cottage School Development and Research Centre named [‘Towards a New Reality for Teacher Education for SEND’](#). The source is a pilot project involving a cohort of 20 primary and 20 secondary initial teacher education students following a specialist two-year route. The route proposed and piloted within the project was that of an “enhancement and dissemination” model, whereby a group of teachers followed a modified two-year programme, with an emphasis, following to some extent to recommendations of the Lamb Report in 2009, on becoming “Champions” for SEN and disabilities and disseminating their knowledge to other teachers. It was conducted as a randomised controlled trial, with a series of pre- and post-questionnaires being completed both by the students on the pilot and by a matched “control” group of students undertaking the general PGCE/School Direct programme without the additional enhancement on SEN and disabilities.

The evaluation from the research clearly indicated that enriched input on SEN and disabilities in initial teacher training (ITT) courses can have a significant effect on increasing the understanding of beginning teachers about how to achieve effective inclusion. The study recommends development of a longer universal ITT curriculum to incorporate understanding of inclusive pedagogy to extend the capacity to address SEN and disabilities-related issues. It also recommends a SEN and disabilities enrichment and dissemination programme such as that modelled in this project should

be in place in every partnership so that a proportion of students become teachers who will be resources for schools, families, and clusters. A target figure of 5% of ITT students is proposed in the study.

SEC provided examples of which 'learn that' statements the evidence helped to inform, predominantly from standards 1, 5 and 7 of the core frameworks. Our key message was that with a stronger focus on inclusive teaching and better knowledge of SEN and disabilities, teachers will be able to meet children's learning needs and the high expectations set out in the frameworks.

SEC Asks of the DfE

SEC believes that the recommendations in the study provided do not go far enough. 1.5 million pupils are now identified as having SEN and disabilities, an increase of almost 77,000 from the year before, and only 46% of Early Career Teachers (ECTs) feel well prepared to teach pupils with SEN and disabilities (DfE, 2022; UCL & IFF Research, 2023). This indicates a significant overhaul of the ITT content and Early Careers Frameworks (ECF) is needed to effectively equip teachers entering the profession.

In recognition of the statistics quoted above and a strong need for redesign of the ECF, **SEC advocates for improvement on both SEND-related knowledge and training to promote inclusive practice in general terms for all ECTs**. SEC urges that SEN and disabilities are not treated as an add-on, but as an essential part of the knowledge and skills all teachers should have, so that they feel more confident about teaching the full range of pupils they may engage with in their classes. As such, we present the following six asks:

- In support of Speech and Language's recent letter to Gillian Keegan, Education Secretary, the DfE addresses the issue of the current teacher training working group and reference group not including a single organisation directly representing children and young people. Ensuring that children and young people with SEN and disabilities have their voices heard is one of SEC's core values and we urge that there is increased representation of children and young people in the working group.
- All ITT providers equip teachers with a thorough understanding of the legislative requirements and of their professional responsibilities to pupils with SEN and disabilities.
- The core values of inclusive teaching and education form the basis of the ITT core content and ECF.
- All ITT providers equip teachers with the skills, knowledge and understanding to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children, including those with SEN and disabilities.
- Practice placements include a focus on SEN and disabilities and equip trainee teachers with knowledge of identifying and supporting learning needs, and experience of delivering high-quality teaching to all pupils, regardless of ability.

- ITT providers offer substantive guidance to teachers on working collaboratively with specialists and targeted support for children with SEN and disabilities to ensuring they have their needs met.

Context

Understanding specific responsibilities to learners with SEN and disabilities

ITT should include in-depth and specific training on the statutory framework for identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN and disabilities, specifically Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Regulations 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice. Similarly, training should include the law on disability discrimination (both direct and indirect discrimination) and the legal duties to make reasonable and anticipatory adjustments as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

A thorough understanding of the legislative and policy requirements for inclusive education is critical. Whilst many of the statutory responsibilities lie with schools and local authorities, teachers have individual professional responsibilities under the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2021). They:

...must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

These explicitly include duties under the Children and Families Act and the Equality Act. From the very first steps in their career, teachers are expected to be aware of the impact of high-quality teaching on pupils' life chances, to adapt their teaching in a responsive way without lowering their expectations and to ensure all pupils can experience meaningful success (DfE, 2019).

Inclusive Teaching

Teachers need to be recognised as professionals who make independent professional judgements that are fundamental to inclusive practice. Educators need to be supported to provide quality learning experiences for pupils of all abilities to enable them to reach their full potential. ITT should make a commitment to 'inclusive teaching', which is much broader in scope and values-based in comparison to 'Adapt Teaching'. Research shows that teachers' attitudes and values are crucial to the success of inclusion in mainstream schools (NASUWT, 2008). According to the European Agency Teacher Education for Inclusion, four core values have been identified as the basis for the work of all teachers in inclusive education. These four core values are:

1. Valuing learner diversity – learner difference is considered as a resource and an asset to education;
2. Supporting all learners – teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements;
3. Working with others – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;

4. Continuing personal professional development – teaching is a learning activity and teachers take responsibility for their own lifelong learning.

In some countries, such as Finland, training is not organised in disability-oriented streams but rather aimed at providing teachers with a wide variety of knowledge and skills that they can apply in various settings and situations (Savolainen, 2009). Cardona (2009) suggests that student teachers in new ITT programmes must be prompted to (a) raise their level of awareness regarding issues of SEN and disabilities, and (b) begin to see learners with SEN and disabilities as resources providing opportunities to learn and understand student characteristics more deeply to develop skills and empathy with the learners' abilities. SEC believes that applying the lens of inclusive teaching to ITT frameworks would enable teachers to use a more holistic approach to working with children with diverse needs and learning styles.

Knowledge of SEN and Disabilities

Whilst inclusive teaching core values and perspectives should underpin the ITT core content and ECF, SEC believes that knowledge of SEN and disabilities should also be a key element of training frameworks. The ITT core content has a significant focus on a more consistent approach to high quality preparation of teachers. SEC welcomes the focus on quality but is concerned that in seeking to establish a more consistent approach there is a risk that standardisation leads to a more mechanistic approach. This means that there will not be adequate focus on the professional skills that teachers need to include all children, including those with SEN and disabilities, in high quality teaching.

ITT should include training on the different areas of need (SEND Code of Practice), how different types of SEN and disabilities can affect children's learning, and how to adapt teaching strategies and the classroom environment to children's individual needs. This approach needs to ensure that providers equip trainee teachers with the professional skills, discussed in more detail, above, that are essential to adapting teaching to meet a range of individual needs, including:

- Educating and informing trainee teachers so that they can assess, identify, and adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children in their class;
- A sound understanding of the breadth, depth and detail of the curriculum, of sequences of learning, of stages of learning and development so that children learning outside age-related expectations are included in curriculum design;
- skills in analysing where children are in their learning, underlying causes of difficulties that children encounter, and being able to tailor their approach in light of that analysis;
- ITT providers offer substantive guidance to teachers on working collaboratively with specialists and targeted support for children with SEN and disabilities to ensuring they have their needs met both inside and outside of the classroom.

Central to the review of the provision of ITT must be the rights of every child to have their needs identified and met. In tailoring learning to meet individual needs, there is no 'one size fits all approach'. ITT education courses must include the development of understanding and critical evaluation of a range of methods that can be used to teach any subject, and an understanding of how children with a wide range of different needs respond to different methods. ITT requires a much broader focus on understanding difficulties in learning development so that student teachers understand clearly how they can adapt their teaching methods to help them acquire these skills. This is essential for achieving the goal of inclusive quality first teaching.

Ensuring children with SEN and disabilities have their needs met in school sometimes requires input from specialist support such as school SENCOs, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, interpreters etc. As well as having an in-depth understanding of the different areas of need, ECTs should be given adequate guidance on how they can work effectively with any specialist and targeted support both inside and outside of the classroom. Close collaboration between a class teacher and professionals supporting these children will increase confidence in newly qualified teachers and improve pupil's educational experiences (Tutt, 2010).

Christina Welsh & Dr Daniel Stavrou
Special Educational Consortium
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