

# Rising to the challenge: a review of the Teach First initial teacher training programme

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This report looks at the Teach First initial teacher training programme, which offers a unique route to gaining qualified teacher status, and attracts highly qualified graduates who would not otherwise enter teaching. It is focused on the training element of the London-based programme and considers the extent to which the programme was successful in enabling the trainees to achieve the standards necessary for good quality teaching. It also describes how the trainees found their immersion into teaching exceptionally challenging and how they were increasingly encouraged and inspired to make a positive contribution to the schools in which they were placed.

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## Executive summary

Teach First is a distinctly different employment-based route for training teachers. The programme aims 'to address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields'.<sup>1</sup> To achieve this, Teach First places high-quality graduates into challenging secondary schools for two years. In the first year, the graduates are trained to meet the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) while employed as unqualified teachers.

The inspection, which took place between July 2006 and July 2007, judged the quality of the London-based programme involving 210 trainees and 70 schools.<sup>2</sup> The inspection also explored the difference that trainees made to the schools in which they were based. In the autumn, inspectors met 67 trainees in 15 schools. They visited a further 13 trainees in 13 different schools in the summer to judge their achievement of the Standards for QTS. They also attended 26 training sessions organised by schools and Canterbury Christ Church University and interviewed school-based and university trainers and staff working for Teach First.

This report outlines how the aim of Teach First and its unique challenge were very strong attractions for graduates who would not otherwise have considered teaching. The programme recruited highly motivated graduates with outstanding personal qualities and strong subject expertise. Although trainees found their immersion into teaching exceptionally challenging, around a half achieved the Standards for QTS to an outstanding level, a third to a good level and the others to a satisfactory level. Very few trainees withdrew from the programme. Four of the trainees seen during visits to schools were judged by inspectors to be amongst the most exceptional trainees produced by any teacher training route. Trainees' management of students' behaviour was the area where there was the largest scope for improvement.

All of the schools in the partnership were deemed to be in challenging circumstances. They were highly committed to the Teach First programme and willingly accepted groups of trainees with expertise in different subjects. The presence of a broad group of trainees, as well as participants in their second or subsequent years, enriched the quality of the school-based training and fostered productive networks amongst the trainees.

Teach First trainees made a positive contribution to the schools visited. Most schools were open to trainees' ideas for improvement and gave them leeway to implement changes. Participants remaining in their schools for a second year or more were starting to have a notable impact, for example, in transforming underperforming departments. At least one of the schools visited attributed a rapid improvement in its

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<sup>1</sup> Teach First's mission is outlined on its website: [www.teachfirst.org.uk](http://www.teachfirst.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> The word 'trainee' is used to denote those in the first year of the Teach First programme who are working towards QTS. The word 'participant' is used to denote all those on the second year of the Teach First programme, including those who have achieved QTS.

standards almost entirely to the contribution of Teach First participants. Around a half of those who have completed the two-year programme remain in teaching.

The six-week residential training course, which took place before the trainees began teaching, was a particularly successful and innovative feature of the training, and the central subject training was also of a high quality. However, the employment-based nature of the scheme relies heavily on the quality of training provided by schools. Teach First is well aware that schools in challenging circumstances are vulnerable to staffing changes which may affect the quality of the training they provide. The levels of funding available allowed for good arrangements to provide schools with a high level of support through regular visits by experienced tutors from the university. Tutors helped to compensate for any emerging weaknesses and, consequently, the quality of the school-based training was at least satisfactory in 27 of the 28 schools visited. It was good in 17 of the schools and outstanding in three. Most professional mentors provided good training in the general aspects of teaching and monitored trainees' progress closely. There were, however, wide variations between and within schools in the quality of subject training. Not all the subject mentors had the understanding or skills to fulfil their training role to a high standard; others lacked the time they needed to carry out their role effectively. This meant that some trainees did not reach the levels of competence of which they were capable.

At least two of the schools did not take sufficient account of trainees' initial needs during their first few weeks of teaching. Where this occurred, trainees found it difficult to overcome problems that developed at this time, particularly those related to behaviour management. The placement at a second school was not always exploited sufficiently to improve trainees' teaching skills.

University and school-based trainers took effective action to support trainees at risk of failure. As a result, all the trainees who completed the year were awarded QTS.

The central management of the programme, undertaken jointly by Teach First and Christ Church University, was exceptionally strong. This was fundamental to the effectiveness of the training. Only three of the 28 schools visited regularly evaluated the quality of their training.

## Key findings

- The teacher training component of the London-based Teach First programme is effective because it builds upon Canterbury Christ Church University's experience and success in initial teacher training and upon the expertise and commitment of staff within the Teach First office. The close and dynamic collaboration of the two organisations resulted in the very good central management of the programme. Their commitment to improving the programme and building on its success was impressive.
- The expectation that trainees should develop beyond the minimum requirements of the Standards for QTS and to strive for and achieve excellence is a significant feature of the programme. Approximately half of the 202 trainees completing the

first year of the Teach First programme achieved the Standards for QTS at the outstanding level expected; around a third met the Standards to a good level and the remaining trainees to a satisfactory level. These outcomes compare favourably with other good initial teacher training courses.

- The programme attracted applicants who would not otherwise have considered teaching. Since its inception, most participants have completed the two-year programme and, although not a requirement, around a half have continued into a third year of teaching.
- Trainees were highly committed to Teach First's aim of countering educational disadvantage and had a markedly beneficial impact on the schools involved. Their placement as groups of trainees enhanced this impact.
- In selecting schools which are suitably challenging, Teach First accepts the risk that some are vulnerable to changes in staffing which affect the training they offer. The level of funding available allows for concentrated support for schools. Regular visits to the trainees by university tutors were central to the success of the training and helped to compensate for any deficiencies in school-based provision.
- The networking amongst the trainees contributed significantly to their progress during the year and their success in meeting the Standards for QTS.
- The introductory six-week training enabled trainees to cope successfully with whole-class teaching at a surprisingly early stage in their teaching career. Nonetheless, despite their very strong personal and academic qualities and the benefit of the course, trainees found their immersion into teaching exceptionally challenging.
- Trainees who found aspects of teaching difficult, including behaviour management and the use of a range of teaching strategies, were not always identified soon enough or provided with the quality of mentoring they needed to improve their practice to a good level.
- In the schools visited, one third of the subject mentors did not set the challenging targets needed for the trainees to achieve the Standards for QTS to the high level expected by Teach First or give sufficient attention to trainees' wider subject needs.
- The placement at a second school, which is a requirement for initial teacher training, was not always exploited sufficiently as an opportunity to improve trainees' teaching skills.
- The regular subject training provided by the university developed trainees' understanding of how to teach their subject. However, the lack of any formal links between the subject trainers in the schools and the university limited their effectiveness and the coherence of the subject training.
- Very few schools evaluated the quality of their training.

- The selection procedures were rigorous in most respects, but, although they are highly committed to the programme, few schools took an active part in the recruitment and selection process.

## Recommendations

Canterbury Christ Church University and partnership schools, together with Teach First, should:

- improve the initial identification of trainees' needs and increase the flexibility in the programme so that the necessary support can be provided to enable all trainees to make rapid and sustained progress, especially in relation to their management of behaviour and use of a good range of teaching strategies
- improve the quality of subject training by strengthening the links between the school-based mentors and the university subject tutors
- ensure that the schools recognise the importance of the subject mentor role and provide subject mentors with the training and time they need to fulfil their responsibilities to a high standard
- ensure that target setting and action planning provide the challenge the trainees need to achieve the Standards for QTS to a high level
- improve the planning and organisation of the second school placement so that this is more closely aligned to trainees' individual needs and provides an opportunity to broaden their teaching expertise
- improve schools' self-evaluation of their teacher training provision.

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) should:

- consider whether the successful aspects of the Teach First programme, such as the initial six-week training course, the use of the journal to monitor progress towards the Standards for QTS and the wide-ranging evidence used to inform assessments of the trainees, could be replicated in other training programmes
- draw upon the experience of Teach First when considering how best to prepare teachers to work in schools facing challenging circumstances.

## Evaluation

### Recruitment and selection of trainees

1. Teach First recruited highly motivated graduates who were keen to help address educational disadvantage, an explicitly stated priority for the programme. From discussions with trainees, participants and Teach First's own evidence, it is clear that many of these graduates would not otherwise have considered teaching. Teach First made a significant investment in the recruitment and selection process. The programme was promoted strongly within particular universities and potential applicants were able to meet locally

with 'ambassadors' who had successfully completed the two-year programme. Applicants were attracted to the main aim of Teach First and the unique challenge of the programme.

2. The selection process was thorough as well as fair. Selection criteria, based on Teach First's personal competences and the Standards for QTS, were communicated clearly to applicants at each stage of the process. More emphasis than in many other initial teacher training courses is given to the personal and intellectual qualities successful candidates are expected to demonstrate with the result that these are particular strengths of the trainees. The online application form is exceptionally well designed, requiring applicants to analyse their experiences and qualities. Successful applicants spoke of the personal reflection and soul searching required for completing the form as well as its helpfulness in clarifying their reasons for applying. For example, one trainee said, 'I was excited by my answers on the application form. It took hours to complete but when I'd done it I was sure that the course was for me.'
3. The day-long set of activities completed at the assessment centre was well constructed to assess applicants' suitability. The inclusion of school staff strengthened the accuracy of judgements, particularly in relation to applicants' potential to work in schools with secondary-age students. However, schools were not always represented during the assessment days because very few of them took an active part in the selection process. Although Teach First took cognisance of schools' staffing needs, places on the programme were offered only to candidates fulfilling the exacting selection criteria, a decision contributing strongly to the overall success of the programme.
4. Candidates who succeeded at the assessment centre were invited to become Teach First trainees, subject, amongst other things, to their satisfactory completion of an online subject knowledge audit and the six-week residential training course, known as the summer institute. Teach First maintained regular contact with these applicants through locally organised events and regular email communication. These communications helped applicants prepare for the summer institute and forge useful links with other trainees, 'ambassadors' and members of the Teach First central team.
5. There were 1,400 applicants for training in 2006/07, of whom 220 were recruited to the London-based programme. This included a small number who had completed the sister programme, Teach for America, and a higher proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds than is the national norm on other initial teacher training programmes. For personal reasons or because they decided they were not suited to teaching, 10 of the trainees withdrew before taking up posts in schools and a further eight left later, mostly during the autumn term. This proportion is below the national average for withdrawals from programmes of initial teacher education.



## Selecting partnership schools

6. The partnership of approximately 70 urban schools was diverse and included specialist colleges, faith schools, single sex schools and academies. All were deemed to be in challenging circumstances, although the nature and extent of these challenges varied. In fulfilling its aim, Teach First accepts the risk that some schools in challenging circumstances are vulnerable to changes in staffing, which may affect the quality of the training they provide, and has well designed and successful structures and systems and funding arrangements to respond to such eventualities.
7. Twenty-six of the 28 schools visited had trained Teach First participants previously and just over a half had been involved with the Teach First programme since its inception in 2003. The careful match of trainees to schools was carried out by the Teach First team, with helpful guidance from the university. All the schools visited were suitable training venues and were highly committed to the Teach First programme. The suitability was enhanced by often placing trainees in groups where there were already participants in their second or subsequent year of the programme. This contributed strongly to the team spirit (a Teach First central value) and enriched the training.

## Identification of training needs and training plans

8. The identification of trainees' needs began during the selection process, and continued through the online subject audit and the summer institute. Trainees' responses to the demanding and detailed subject audit were insightful and highly reflective. Most university tutors provided very thorough assessments of the audits, with the best challenging the trainees to think more deeply about the application of their subject knowledge to teaching. Trainees responded assiduously to the feedback they received, for example through personal study and completion of past examination papers.
9. Trainees spent a week in their placement school during the summer institute. This visit enabled them to meet key staff, observe lessons and receive copies of schemes of work, school policies and other resources. Access to trainees' curriculum vitae and parts of their online application also enabled the schools to start to analyse individual needs. Most of the schools planned well for the week and gained a good understanding of trainees' strengths and potential weaknesses before they began teaching. However, at least two did not and, as a result, neither they nor the trainees were fully prepared for the training.
10. Information gained from selection tasks, audits and summer school activities were not always used effectively to inform the school-based training. A few school-based trainers were unaware of the outcomes of these activities or unsure about how to respond. This meant that there was a lack of coherence between aspects of the process for identifying training needs, which constrained the progress of a few trainees and the extent to which they were able to meet the Standards for QTS by the end of the year.

11. Nearly all the trainees had timetables which met Teach First's requirements in relation to the teaching load and included a good balance of teaching across the 11–16 age range. Some also had opportunities to teach in the 16–19 age range. However, the fixed nature of trainees' teaching timetable, particularly in the first term, restricted the training opportunities of some trainees who found teaching difficult.
12. The journal used by the trainees and their trainers throughout the year provided a very valuable framework for the identification of individual needs and the planning of training. It played a key role in focusing the training and in helping trainees to reflect on their practice. In most cases, it was completed to good effect. The journal also provided an agenda for discussions between the trainee and their school-based and university tutors, helping them to monitor progress towards the Standards for QTS. Journals which were completed conscientiously provided robust evidence of trainees' development and their thoughtful reflections during a period of considerable personal challenge.

### **Trainees' progress in achieving the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status**

13. The expectation that trainees should develop beyond the minimum requirements of the Standards for QTS and to strive for and achieve excellence is a significant feature of the programme.
14. Approximately half of the 202 trainees completing the first year of the Teach First programme achieved the Standards for QTS at the outstanding level expected; around a third met the Standards to a good level and the remaining trainees to a satisfactory level. These outcomes compare favourably with other good initial teacher training courses. The outstanding level of achievement of the four best trainees seen was so uniformly high across the range of Standards that they were judged by inspectors to be amongst the most exceptional trainees produced by any teacher training route.
15. All of the trainees displayed a strong sense of purpose and had marked strengths in their professional values and practice, reflecting the Teach First aims. They had very high expectations of themselves and of their students. Their professional commitment to the students in lessons and in the broader life of the school, such as clubs, was one of the major factors in the beneficial impact Teach First participants had on the schools in which they were placed. One trainee, for instance, had established a thriving science club, arranged a school trip to the Science Museum and organised a girls' football team. At the same time she never lost sight of the need for raising students' achievement in science, teaching engaging lessons that captured the interest of her students.
16. Trainees had in-depth knowledge in their specialist subjects and most made outstanding or good progress in acquiring the professional understanding and

skills required to teach the subject effectively across the secondary age and ability range.

17. All the trainees were able to employ a range of teaching strategies effectively. However, this aspect of their teaching was not as strong as others and the achievement of around a third of the trainees was only satisfactory in this respect. In some cases this was because they had been slow to recognise the value of different approaches to teaching, whereas in others it was because they had tried to act on the advice of mentors but found it difficult to manage different class activities, such as group discussions. A few trainees struggled to present their lessons in an interesting way; in some cases this was because they were still expanding the specialist subject they had studied at degree level, for example within the sciences or humanities, to meet the specific National Curriculum content. Nevertheless, some excellent examples of imaginative teaching were seen, including an English teacher who engaged a class containing a high proportion of students who spoke English as second language in a lively and searching discussion.
18. In monitoring and assessing students' progress, trainees employed the schools' systems and procedures conscientiously and effectively. They acquired a sound understanding of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment methods and knew the National Curriculum levels at which their students were working. Most were able to judge the progress students were making by asking suitable questions at different stages of the lesson. All the trainees seen knew their students well and were able to offer informed feedback to parents and other teachers about the progress they were making. The outstanding trainees supplemented the schools' systems with their own innovative approaches to monitoring progress and setting appropriate targets for students.
19. Although there were examples where trainees were outstandingly good at managing students' behaviour, around half of the trainees seen were only satisfactory in this respect. This was the area where there was the largest scope for improvement. In the best cases, the trainees were totally in command of their classes. They used praise and sanctions confidently and effectively, and were able to manage disciplinary procedures, including temporary exclusions from lessons, so that the work of the class as a whole was not unduly disrupted. However, there were examples where trainees were not fully aware of students' inattentiveness or low level disruption. In other cases, trainees had understood the school's approach to managing disruptive behaviour but had not developed the skills to apply the approach successfully. The competence of trainees deemed to be satisfactory in this aspect of their teaching could have been improved with more sustained, focused training and supervision in the school from an early stage in the year.

## Training

20. The training prepared the trainees well for their immersion into teaching and enabled all of them to achieve QTS. However, variations in the quality of training, particularly of aspects of the school-based training, contributed to the trainees' different levels of achievement of the Standards for QTS at the end of the year.
21. The summer institute was a successful, innovative feature of the training which, from the outset, emphasised the high expectations of the trainees. It included two weeks in schools, one of which was spent in the London school in which the trainee was to teach. Trainees also attended a wide range of general and subject-specific sessions at the university. Reflecting Teach First's values, great emphasis was placed on the development of team working and networks amongst the trainees. The quality of the training was at least good, and three of the 13 sessions observed were outstanding. The very best sessions were those which balanced the practicalities of teaching with theory in areas such as lesson planning, behaviour management and classroom organisation. The presentations by trainees completing their first year, and training provided by those in their second or subsequent years of teaching, were particularly successful. For example, some participants led workshops very ably on teaching students with English as an additional language and learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Others, including a number who were heads of departments, contributed very effectively to the subject training. For example, a teacher of citizenship about to enter her second year of teaching led a session for the new trainees which skilfully reflected Teach First's high expectations by covering both the teaching of citizenship and possible strategies for raising its status in schools. Her intention to prepare the trainees as future subject leaders was very clear.
22. While trainees acknowledged that nothing could quite prepare them for their first experience of teaching a full class, they recognised the success of the summer institute in introducing them to the knowledge and skills they needed and were able to begin their training year with confidence. They were made fully aware of the demands of this employment-based route and carefully prepared for their immediate immersion into teaching in challenging schools. Even so, some trainees were shocked by their early experiences. For instance, in discussion with inspectors, one trainee commented, 'My early experience was worse than I had expected. Although I had visited the school and had the summer institute, I was naïve about how challenging a school could be.' At the end of the year, her achievement of the Standards for QTS was outstanding. The way that this trainee and most others took the challenges in their stride was impressive.
23. In 28 schools visited, the professional mentors, most of whom were members of school senior leadership teams, successfully maintained an overview of the

school-based training. They met the trainees and their school-based subject mentors regularly and scrutinised the journals. They were alert to staffing difficulties within subject departments and, in such instances, tried to mitigate their impact on the trainees. Most fulfilled their responsibilities competently and provided good training that built well on trainees' early experiences during the summer institute. However, a few were slow to recognise early difficulties experienced by the trainees or weaknesses in the subject mentoring.

24. The quality of subject mentoring was at least satisfactory in nearly all the schools visited and, for about half the trainees, it was good. It was inadequate in one school. There were, however, wide variations between and within schools. The best mentors were able to help trainees to apply their subject knowledge and what they had learned from the central subject training to their teaching. They observed trainees regularly and provided perceptive and helpful feedback focusing on the teaching of the subject. Targets set during meetings were progressively demanding and related to the Standards for QTS. In the schools visited, one third of the subject mentors limited their role to preparing the trainees for their immediate set of lessons rather than considering the wider context of teaching their subject. The targets they set lacked the challenge needed for the trainees to achieve the Standards for QTS to the high level expected by Teach First. In some cases, where mentors were ill or left the school during the year, the training was affected adversely. A few mentors were unable to sustain high quality training because they lacked the time or expertise.
25. The regular visits to the trainees by skilled university tutors were central to the success of the training. Tutors monitored trainees' progress well, liaised effectively with school-based trainers and helped to compensate for any deficiencies in school-based provision, for example by providing the training themselves or arranging for other trainers, including local authority advisers, to visit the school. The funding of the programme allowed for a fortnightly school visit to each trainee. In practice, because of the numbers of trainees in each school, tutors were often present for several days each week. This enabled them to take prompt action in response to any difficulties and strengthened their impact. The breadth of tutors' responsibilities is wider than normally found elsewhere in teacher training.
26. Most trainees experienced regular feedback on their teaching by their school-based trainers, other members of the teaching staff and their university tutor. Even so, trainers did not always respond effectively to trainees' early difficulties, particularly in relation to class management. In one school, for example, a trainee struggling with students' behaviour overcame these difficulties because a temporary reduction in his teaching load allowed him to observe and learn from experienced teachers. No similar adjustments were made to the timetable of another trainee experiencing the same difficulties elsewhere. Towards the end of the academic year, this trainee spoke of her frustration that behaviour management remained an area for development.

27. Often the trainees generated their own momentum which enabled them to make progress despite weaknesses in their school-based training. Nonetheless, trainees' resilience and the university tutors' actions were not always sufficient to overcome fully all the weaknesses. Also, some trainees found it difficult to implement or did not act on the advice they were given. Consequently, around a sixth of the trainees did not achieve the Standards beyond the minimum requirements for QTS.
28. The organisation of the placement at a second school was a weakness of the programme. Schools did not always understand its rationale, and its timing and organisation were often rushed. For a minority of the trainees, the experience was not related closely enough to their specific needs and, consequently, they did not benefit from a period of sustained teaching in another school or gain a good insight into a different setting. In contrast, the experience provided a valuable opportunity for others to refine their teaching skills and, in some cases, make a fresh start with new classes. One trainee commented that the experience had been a 'huge eye opener' in many respects, deepening her understanding of how to teach students with English as an additional language.
29. During the year, trainees attended six subject development days organised by the university at a central location. Of the training sessions seen in English, mathematics and history, two were good and the third outstanding. All sessions were well planned to reflect trainees' stage of development and had a clear aim to lift the trainees' sights above the immediate demands of their timetabled teaching. The content was intellectually stimulating and engaging and trainers displayed a very good understanding of different approaches to teaching the subject. External speakers and visits to other educational settings, including the Globe Theatre and the Natural History Museum, enhanced the training. The subject days reinforced the support networks amongst the trainees and provided a valuable opportunity for them to discuss their experiences in school. Where the university subject tutors maintained good email communications with the trainees, this fostered a useful forum for the exchange of information and opinions on the teaching of the subject. Although the trainees acted as the link between the central and school-based subject training, the lack of any formal, structural links between the subject trainers limited their effectiveness and the coherence of the subject training.
30. Collaboration is one of the central Teach First values and this was evident in the numerous networks which developed during the year amongst the trainees, their trainers, other Teach First participants and staff within Teach First. These provided valuable mutual support for the trainees and added to the formal training by providing a forum for the sharing of ideas and resources.

## Assessment

31. The assessment of trainees against the Standards for QTS was based on a wide range of evidence which included audits of their subject knowledge and

information and communication technology skills, weekly progress meetings, the monitoring of teaching files, termly reviews, lesson evaluations, written assignments and the presentation of a final portfolio of evidence during the summer institute. The final assessment procedures for the award of QTS were comprehensive, rigorous and accurate.

32. All those involved in assessing the trainees were clear about the arrangements and understood their individual responsibilities. The journal was used well to track trainees' progress towards the Standards for QTS and frequent contact between the university tutors and school mentors, including joint lesson observations, added greatly to the consistency and accuracy of judgements about trainees' teaching.
33. Termly reviews of each trainee's progress were detailed and drew upon evidence from all those involved in the training. Grade criteria promoted the trainees' progress and helped trainers, particularly those who were new to their role, to make assessments of the trainees. Close scrutiny of trainees' progress resulted in the prompt identification of those who were at risk of failure. The action needed in such cases was agreed collectively by all those involved, including the trainees concerned and staff within Teach First. The very good support provided enabled all the trainees identified as a cause for concern to achieve the Standards for QTS.
34. The arrangements for the external assessment of the trainees and the moderation of the final assessments were very thorough. Trainees understood the evidence needed to demonstrate their achievement of the Standards for QTS and this was subject to robust review towards the end of the training.

## **Management and quality assurance of the Teach First programme**

35. Canterbury Christ Church University's experience and high level of success in initial teacher training, together with the expertise and enthusiasm of Teach First staff, provided a secure basis for the operational and strategic management of the programme. The close collaboration of the university and Teach First resulted in exceptionally strong central management of the programme. Their commitment to the continuous improvement of the training was impressive.
36. The high quality of the documentation, including the partnership agreement, and the effectiveness of the communication with schools helped to ensure that roles and responsibilities were clearly understood and the procedures and requirements for the training were set in place.
37. There were clearly defined lines of accountability for both the operational and strategic management of the programme. The training management group, which included staff from Teach First and the university, provided very effective coordination and management of the programme. Strong professional

relationships, responsiveness to feedback and willingness to modify the programme contributed to the effectiveness of the group. Despite their evident commitment to the training, few schools played an active part in the management of the programme. Meetings of the London Schools Advisory Group, which functioned as the main strategic partnership group, were not well attended. Similarly, few schools contributed to the recruitment and selection process. Schools which were actively involved in aspects of selection and management had welcomed the opportunity to influence decisions and felt they gained a greater understanding of their accountabilities and that this strengthened their training. New arrangements, designed to increase schools' involvement in the management of the programme, were discussed with schools during the inspection and are to be introduced for the 2007 cohort.

38. It would have been possible for Teach First to select only those schools in which there were experienced mentors and relatively stable staffing. However, its commitment to work in partnership with schools in challenging circumstances means that there is a higher prevalence of mentors lacking expertise in teacher training than found on other initial teacher training programmes. In 2006/07, as in previous years, a high proportion of the subject mentors were new to the role. The university provided central training for both professional and subject mentors and made suitable provision for in-school training for those unable to attend. Despite this, and the support they received in school from the professional mentors, not all the subject mentors had the understanding and skills to fulfil their training role to a high standard.
39. Teach First and the university worked closely together to assure the quality of the programme. The university's quality assurance coordinator and a Teach First associate director collaborated effectively in making regular checks of schools' capacity to fulfil the training programme and advising those new to the programme. They also took concerted action in response to any difficulties the schools experienced in providing the training.
40. The quality assurance systems were sufficiently robust to identify weaknesses in the training. University tutors, working with the school-based professional mentors, had a key role in monitoring the school-based training and most fulfilled their responsibilities in this respect very effectively. Tutors had a wealth of experience in school leadership and/or teacher training. They were efficiently managed by the university and, through their regular reports and meetings, had the opportunity to share effective practice and build an accurate picture of quality across the partnership. In a few cases tutors did not follow up weaknesses with sufficient rigour.
41. There were very good systems and procedures to evaluate the programme. Trainees and trainers contributed to the review of the provision and staff from Teach First and the university met for a 'national day' which served as a valuable opportunity to scrutinise the programme, identify areas for



improvement and strengthen *esprit de corps*. Although they took part in the evaluation of the overall programme only a minority of schools gave high priority to evaluating the quality of their own contribution to it. Schools did not receive any formal feedback on the quality of their training from the university to inform their improvement of this for the future.

42. Both Teach First and the university are responsive to external feedback. Over the last two years there have been two external reviews of the programmes and recommendations from these, and the external moderator, are incorporated within the university's quality monitoring and enhancement report, a summary of which is circulated to all partnership schools. Priorities included in the annual action plan are ambitious and challenging, amply demonstrating the university's drive for continuous improvement of the programme.

### **Impact of the trainees on the schools**

43. Teach First trainees made a strong positive contribution to the work and life of at least 20 of the 28 schools visited. Many Teach First participants in their second and subsequent years were starting to have a notable impact, and many had responsibility for aspects of subject or pastoral leadership. They were valued members of staff and had contributed to improvements in teaching. They were seen as lively, enthusiastic and particularly skilful in their use of information and communication technology. Most schools had been open to participants' ideas for improvement and had given them leeway to implement changes to improve provision. In some cases participants had transformed underperforming departments and, and often, because of their number within individual schools, had made a very significant contribution to raising staff's aspirations of the students.
44. During inspectors' visits, headteachers frequently spoke of trainees' and participants' positive impact on students' academic achievement, personal and social development, and their aspirations. Trainees also had a beneficial effect on the subject departments in which they were based through the links they made with other schools and the resources and new ideas they brought to the school. Many had rewritten parts of schemes of work or led professional development sessions, sometimes taking the initiative and responsibility to do so at an early stage in their teaching. They also took the initiative to form a wide range of new clubs or to contribute extensively to the extra-curricular life of the school thereby broadening the opportunities and experiences of the students.
45. It was not within the remit of this inspection to consider the longer-term impact of the Teach First programme beyond the partnership schools. However, in their discussions with inspectors, participants frequently commented on the personal impact of the programme. Many spoke passionately about how their perceptions of teaching had changed and how they relished its challenge. One participant, who had decided to remain in teaching and also be a Teach First

'ambassador', commented that, prior to gaining QTS, she had assumed that her personal and intellectual qualities would be 'enough to be a good teacher'. In reflecting on her experiences, she expressed her admiration for teachers, commenting 'I had no idea before of just how skilful and talented good teachers are. Now I see teaching as a really worthy profession.'

## Notes

### The Teach First programme

46. Teach First is a distinctly different employment-based route for training teachers. It was inspired by a scheme established in the United States of America called 'Teach for America', which has been running since 1990. The Teach First programme aims to alleviate some of the problems associated with educational disadvantage by placing high-quality graduates into challenging secondary schools for a minimum of two years. In the first year, participants are trained to meet the Standards for QTS while employed as unqualified teachers in secondary schools that Teach First recognises as being in challenging circumstances. In the second year they continue to teach in challenging schools as newly qualified teachers. Participants are contracted only for the two-year period but around a half continue to teach beyond this period. The programme combines training to teach with courses that aim to equip trainees to be leaders in their chosen careers. Prior to taking up their posts in the autumn term, the trainees attend a six-week residential training course (the summer institute) to learn the basic principles of teaching and gain experience teaching in London schools. Unlike its American counterpart, the training and professional support is provided by an accredited provider of initial teacher training. Canterbury Christ Church University is the provider for the London-based programme.
47. Once trainees have completed their two years on the Teach First scheme and moved into their chosen career, which may be in teaching, business or the non-profit sector, they become Teach First 'ambassadors'. As such they receive an annual programme of events and activities designed to support the development of their leadership skills and, importantly, to maintain their links with teaching in a way that will provide future benefits for education. Teach First expects all those participating in the programme to uphold its values of collaboration, commitment, excellence, innovation and integrity. As a manifestation of these values, trainees are expected to achieve the Standards for QTS at a very high level.
48. The funding arrangements of the programme differ from those of other teacher training schemes. Teach First is a registered charity and receives approximately one half of its annual budget from business and charitable sources. It also receives other non-financial benefits from its sponsors. Teach First funds the non-QTS elements of the programme, including the 'ambassadors' scheme and

leadership and management training in which the trainees engage alongside their initial teacher training. The initial teacher training, leading to the award of QTS, is funded by the TDA on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). This includes the cost of the summer institute, including staffing, transport and accommodation costs. The DCSF also provides £2,500 for each trainee to fund school-based mentoring. Participating schools pay Teach First a deposit, plus a termly amount for each trainee, to assist with the costs of recruitment and training. These amounts are agreed with the London Schools Advisory Group. As with other employment-based training the school pays the trainee on the unqualified teacher scale.

49. Since its inception in 2003 the programme has attracted an increasing number of applications, most of which are from final year undergraduates. The 2006 cohort of trainees in London schools is the fourth in the scheme. In 2006 the programme was extended to Greater Manchester and in 2007 to the Midlands.

## **The inspection**

50. This report focuses on the quality of the teacher training element of the London-based programme, which is provided by Canterbury Christ Church University in collaboration with Teach First.
51. Ofsted inspected the Teach First programme between July 2006 and July 2007. Two inspectors spent three days at the summer institute held at Canterbury Christ Church University in June and July 2006 and observed 13 training sessions. In the autumn term, Her Majesty's Inspectors visited 15 schools across London, responsible for training 67 trainees. The criteria used to select these schools were geographical spread, type of school, length of partnership with Teach First and number of trainees. In the summer term, inspectors visited 13 trainees in different schools. The trainees chosen were representative of the assessment grades provided by the university for all of the participants. This process enabled inspectors to estimate the overall profile of performance and gauge the accuracy of the university's assessments against the Standards for QTS. The inspection visits to schools lasted approximately one day. In the autumn visits, inspectors met with trainers, school-based trainers and headteachers and, in some instances, with the university tutor attached to the school. They observed a total of 10 school-based training sessions. In the summer term visits, in addition to meetings with trainers and headteachers, inspectors observed the teaching of a sample of trainees specialising in English, mathematics, science, citizenship, history and modern foreign languages. During all visits, inspectors evaluated the training, assessment, management and quality assurance arrangements and the impact of the trainees on the schools.
52. During the summer term, inspectors attended the university's central training sessions in English, history and mathematics. Visits were also made during the year to Teach First and the university.

53. In June 2007, the TDA provided an analysis of the returns by Teach First trainees to the national survey of newly qualified teachers. These teachers completed their initial training at the end of the summer term 2006. This information contributed evidence of the impact of the training.

## Further information

### Glossary of terms used in the inspection of initial teacher training

#### Partnership

- An arrangement where schools work together with a higher education institution (HEI) on undergraduate or postgraduate courses, or several schools work together, with or without the involvement of an HEI, to provide school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT), or schools work with another school or training body to provide employment-based training.

#### Provision

- All training and assessment offered by a provider for secondary subjects or the primary phase to which places may be allocated by the TDA, but which may comprise a number of courses or routes.

#### Training route

- Distinct ways of training for QTS, including postgraduate and undergraduate training, which may be part time, full time or flexible.

#### Training courses

- Particular cases of the above routes, providing training for a specific subject or age range, and leading usually both to QTS and a named award, for example 'PGCE secondary mathematics course' or 'four-year primary BA/QTS (5–11 age range)'.

#### General professional studies

- Training which is not subject-specific, such as special needs or inclusion, though it may be delivered by subject tutors. This is often common to all courses in a training route.

#### Centre-based training

- Training provided for groups of trainees at a central venue such as a university, college or one of the schools in a SCITT.

### **Tutor**

- A university trainer.

### **School-based mentor**

- The term used to cover all school-based trainers.

### **Subject mentor**

- A school-based trainer who is responsible for a trainee's day-to-day guidance and subject training.

### **Professional mentor**

- A school-based trainer with more general responsibilities for the professional development of one or more trainees based at the school.