



## ESCalate Themed funding: Student Well-being Grant Project Interim Report

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<b>Date submitted</b>	22 December 2010
<b>Project Title</b>	Trainee teachers' physical and mental wellbeing: a study of university and school experience provision.
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<b>Project Start date</b>	1 March 2010
<b>Project End date</b>	30 June 2011

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## **Interim Report to ESCalate**

### **Research Title:**

Trainee teachers' physical and mental wellbeing: a study of university and school experience provision.

### **Research Objectives:**

The aims of the project are three-fold:

- Initiate debate within the sector about support provisions for students undertaking a Postgraduate Certificate in Education/Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGCE/PGDE), with particular reference to the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance.
- Explore the above objective in three universities including one in England, Wales and Scotland to allow comparisons between three nations.
- To disseminate the main themes arising from the project through conference presentations and Web 2.0 technologies to stimulate debate and lay foundations for the development of a sector-wide strategy.

### **Documentation Analysis:**

#### **A Cross-National Comparison of Current Teacher Training Provision:**

In terms of practical guidelines that shape the teacher training course, the process of registration and qualifying as a professional teacher are similar in England, Wales and Scotland. Across the different nations all prospective student teachers are required to register with their General Teaching Council (GTC) and complete a 'suitability to teach' declaration form that includes questions relating to criminal activities or previous instances of misconduct only. Subsequent to their yearly teacher training course, student teachers are placed on induction/probation whereby they must complete a period of teaching before receiving full registration with the GTC. The induction period in England and Wales is commonly three terms long over a year period whereas in Scotland there are two pathways to complete probation: students are either required to complete 270 days of teaching or enter the 'Teaching Induction Scheme' which fast tracks students to complete their probation in 190 days at one school. Despite the slight variations in the duration of the induction period, the universal format allows newly qualified teachers additional time within their school timetable to prepare lesson plans and ease into the profession.

An analysis of the format and quality indicators included in inspectorate reports indicates that assurance of trainee teacher wellbeing is a significant factor which contributes to the credibility of the initial teacher training (ITT) provider. This is particularly noticeable in the revised Estyn Report (September 2010) used to assess ITT providers in Wales. Support and wellbeing aspects addressed include the necessity to provide specialist services, availability of additional learning needs and provision for health and wellbeing. Similarly the OFSTED Report Framework (2008 – 2011), used to assess the quality of ITT providers in England, places emphasis on the importance of wellbeing by addressing quality factors such as effectiveness of partnership, quality of support for personal wellbeing of trainees, level of confidence disabled students feel about disclosing and satisfaction with the reasonable adjustments made for disabled students to enable them to continue with the course. The growing emphasis on wellbeing and support provisions in England and Wales' inspectorate is likely to impact upon the emphasis higher education institutions place on such issues and could improve trainee teachers' experiences, whether previously problematic or not. Unlike England and Wales, Scotland does not conduct cyclic institutional inspections on ITT providers. The latest reports including 'Student Teacher Placements within Initial Teacher Education' (HMIe 2005), 'Progress with Student Teacher Placements' (HMIe 2006), 'Mentoring in Teacher Education' (HMIe

2008), do not contain specific information relating to student teacher wellbeing and support. This is not to say that Scottish ITT providers have relatively poor support provisions compared with England and Wales, but does show a marked nation difference with prioritising the importance of support and wellbeing.

#### **Discussions of 'Fitness to Teach' across three nations:**

The completed literature review has critically reflected upon previous academic studies and relevant findings associated with wellbeing and the teacher training course. The documentation analysis has included an exploration into general policies which apply to England, Wales and Scotland and also nation or institution-specific policies relating to the teacher training course and wellbeing. A pertinent theme shaping several policy documents is the justification for monitoring suitability to teach. The underlying rationale for guidance like 'Fitness to Teach' is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing and educational progress of school pupils (Fitness to Teach 2000; Able to Teach 2007; Single Equality Scheme 2009). Whilst this rationale of encouraging student teachers to disclose any physical disability or mental health issue is understandable, it is suggested that such guidance can have a negative impact on such trainees (Disability Rights Commission (DRC) 2007; General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) 2008).

According to the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS), the Fitness to Teach (2000) guidance is no longer utilised as it is regarded as a discriminatory process which deters capable student teachers with some degree of disability, additional learning need or mental health problem from fulfilling their desired profession. The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE) and The General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) still abide by the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance but concerns over its credibility were marked by the Disability Rights Commission Report (DRC 2007) and reservations about the affect such guidance has been brought to their attention. The report stated such guidance was discriminatory and created a barrier for disabled students wanting to enter into the teaching profession. The DRC Report (2007) concluded that suitability to teach should be solely judged according to professional competencies, rather than health requirements, in order to promote equality in accordance with the Disability and Discrimination Act (1997).

Additionally, the 'Able to Teach' document (Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), 2007) offers practical guidance on how to implement 'Fitness to Teach' (2007) and illustrates a possible tension across policy objectives. The 'Able to Teach' (2007) guidance is based upon the premise that the teaching profession should be representative of the diversity of society and that many potential student teachers with health problems can be highly competent teachers. However, the DRC (2007) report highlighted that the implications of the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance prevented such student teachers from accessing the teaching profession. It seems this contradiction needs further exploration by investigating the practical impact that 'Fitness to Teach' guidance has on student teachers and whether the implication to create a representative teaching force is possible. The disclosure requirements of the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance in the future may be challenged by the arrival of the new Equality Act (2010) which states that it is unacceptable to ask a persons' health status prior to any interview and the necessity to ensure every attempt to make reasonable adjustments is made. Whilst the justification for this statement is intended to prevent discrimination against anyone with a disability or mental health issue and will impact upon the way 'Fitness to Teach' is currently applied, avoiding early disclosure could mean that students with additional requirements may not be given the required support early enough or may impact on the number of students disclosing due to the decreased opportunity to disclose.

Currently the documentation analysis highlights some important issues. The first is an apparent tension between the requirement to assess the suitability of a prospective trainee teacher with a disability or mental health issue to teach and the objective to ensure the teaching profession is representative of the diverse nature of society (Fitness to Teach 2000; Able to Teach 2007). Secondly, there seems to be a general concern with the discriminatory nature of the 'Fitness to Teach' (2007)

guidelines which has led to the General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) abandoning the perceived stringent regulations. Whilst Scotland is the only nation not to utilise the regulations, the General Teaching Council England (GTCE) and General Teaching Council Wales (GTCW) have also expressed their concern with the nature and implications of the guidance in the aftermath of the DRC Report (2007). Despite such national variations in the application of the 'Fitness to Teach' (2000) guidance, the registration process to become a qualified teacher are very similar across all three nations. Lastly, an interesting finding links to the different emphasis placed upon trainee teacher health and wellbeing within the nation-specific inspectorate quality frameworks. Whilst Wales and England's current inspectorate frameworks appear to base many overall quality indicators on the effectiveness of support provisions, Scotland appears to have no regular form of inspection and those inspection reports that do exist, do not mention the importance of wellbeing or support. Further document analysis is underway as interviews progress to provide accurate sources of current institution-specific guidance.

### **Other data collection progress:**

Aside from desk-based research, a Facebook discussion group, which is strictly a student-only space, has been created to allow students to share experiences of their teacher training course across the three universities. The discussions are not to be used as data in the project but to simply provide an insight into possible issues, alongside major themes in the literature, which could frame discussion topics for the subsequent student focus groups. The online survey aimed at student teachers has been designed, piloted and uploaded onto each university's virtual learning site and Facebook discussion page. Flyers, emails and video podcast have been used to recruit possible students, university tutors and support staff and school mentors to participate in the project. Individual interviews with university tutors and support staff have been undertaken at UWIC and are in the process of being transcribed. A visit to Edinburgh University involved individual interviews with academic tutors and the disability services. Arrangements to meet with more university staff and school mentors are underway and students have volunteered to meet during the year to participate in the focus groups at Edinburgh. Similarly, interviews with university tutors, support staff and PGCE students have been conducted at UWE alongside a meeting with school mentors.

### **Initial Findings:**

Whilst it is difficult to make any concrete statements about the research findings to date, it is possible to make some comments on initial themes which seem to have frequently arisen from interviews with selected university staff at UWIC. Overall, the university tutors and support staff recognise that the main concerns and problems that students voice about university-based learning relate to heavy workload and a non-existent work/life balance. Common specific problems linked with their school placement experiences include issues of travelling inconvenience, pressures and lack of confidence with classroom management, limited preparation time and feelings of loneliness. In terms of issues around the nature and extent of support provisions, there seems to be a consensus that support is accessible when students are in university but less available when on placement. During school placement, availability of support appears restricted for two key reasons: office hours of support services are rigid and prevent students accessing support around their demanding timetable; there are only two sources of on-site support i.e. school mentor and senior mentor that students can readily access.

Generally, university tutors and support staff argue the importance of the 'Fitness to Teach' guidance and the necessity for its implementation. However support staff, in particular, recognised the negative impact such guidance has on trainee teachers. Specifically, the procedures subsequent to

disclosure create anxiety and fear for students. Support staff recommended that the guidance should be framed more in terms of offering appropriate support and reasonable adjustment as the vast majority of students involved in the process felt vulnerable to the possibility that they would be regarded as 'unfit' for the course. From the support staff perspective, such barriers to disclosure concerned them as their intention to offer appropriate support and advice was mired. The initial findings of the university tutors and support staff perspectives will be interesting to compare with those of student teachers and school mentors and will allow a more accurate reflection of student experiences and support during the teacher training course. Themes highlighted from the interviews with staff have been incorporated into the interview prompts for other staff interviews and discussion topics for the student focus groups to allow a comparison of perspectives both between the different cohorts of the sample and across the three universities.

- **Future Stages to be undertaken:**

Nov 2010 – Jan 2011

RA interviews further key members of academic and student services staff in each institution. At this point data analysis will begin on website discussion and interviews to date. Data analysis will be undertaken by RA, JH and LS.

Electronic survey undertaken with trainee teachers and workplace mentors

Jan- Feb 2011

RA will conduct further small group interviews with students in each institution. Students invited to take part in these groups by random selection. (supervised by LS, facilitated by JH; RE; ZW).

Feb – April 2011

JH & LS draft report for review by ZW and RE prior to posting on website.

April 2011

Initial results presented at workshop at ESCalate 3rd Annual Conference (JH)

May- Jun 2011

MILESTONE 3: Final report completed on case studies, web discussion and workshop contributions. (JH & LS)