



Department
for Education

Initial teacher training: forming partnerships

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Summary

This publication provides guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). It has been produced to help Initial Teacher Training (ITT) providers and other organisations form partnerships to deliver quality ITT provision in compliance with the DfE's ITT Criteria from September 2024.

The content sets out a clarification of the roles and responsibilities, the key features and expectations of a partnership and broader policy context to inform the formation of partnerships.

Expiry or review date

This guidance will be reviewed in September 2024.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- Accredited providers delivering ITT that leads to QTS from 2024/25,¹ that have formed, or will be forming a partnership with other organisations
- accredited providers who want to expand their ITT provision through partnering and
- non-accredited organisations who want to partner with an accredited provider.

¹ This guidance applies to providers who have agreement to deliver the new ITT quality requirements and criteria early, from 23/24 AY.

Overview

What is a partnership?

Accredited providers have a requirement to deliver ITT in compliance with DfE's ITT Criteria from 2024/25. The draft 2024/25 ITT Criteria, which has been available to applicants in the accreditation process, will be updated in Spring 2023. The 2024/25 ITT Criteria will include the updated Quality Requirements which are available at Annex A of the [Stage 2 guidance](#).

To support delivery, and to help retain existing talent and experience in the sector, organisations involved in ITT have the flexibility to form partnerships, sharing knowledge, experience and resources. The resulting partnership can increase the capacity and capability of all organisations involved to deliver high-quality ITT provision across the country.

DfE will not prescribe the structure of partnerships or the number of organisations involved, however, the key responsibilities listed below must be covered within the partnership. All organisations involved in ITT will be classified using the three roles below depending on their role relative to the delivery of ITT courses. Whilst all partnerships must be led by a single accredited provider, other roles may overlap. For instance, an accredited provider may have lead partner responsibilities and some schools that are placement schools may also have a role as a lead partner.

Box 1 – key responsibilities in an ITT partnership

- the **accredited provider** will have been awarded accreditation during stage 1 and has full and final accountability for all aspects of training design, delivery and quality across the partnership
- **lead partner(s)** will have an operational or strategic role with responsibilities such as trainee recruitment, involvement in curriculum design, supplying lead mentors or running intensive training and practice
- **placement schools** will provide placements and general mentors

All ITT partnerships must be led by a single accredited provider responsible for ensuring that robust governance arrangements are put in place and exercised effectively. The accredited provider is accountable for the whole ITT programme including its curriculum, finance, quality of provision and compliance with ITT Criteria. By agreement, partner organisations can contribute their expertise, for example, knowledge of subjects, phases, and local networks to ensure strong delivery of ITT provision.

Partnership can take various forms, from simple collaborations between 2 or 3 organisations, to larger networks with multiple partners. Partnerships can adapt to serve specific local needs or have a multi-regional or national focus. In forming partnerships, providers may want to consider how they can retain the local expertise of quality practitioners, maintain strong sector relations and how they can work collaboratively with other local organisations to provide sufficient training capacity, for example, Teaching School Hubs.

Partnerships should be based on a formal agreement. The partnership agreement should be a clear, working document that can be used to guide and inform the contributions of each partner and help to support coherent arrangements across the various contexts in which the training takes place. The partnership agreement should be underpinned by other practices, such as well-understood procedures for communication between the partners and agreed arrangements for the co-ordination of the training.

Each partnership arrangement will be unique to the organisations involved, their local/regional circumstances and their ultimate aims and ambitions and over time, partnerships may need to be adjusted to reflect changes to local circumstances or roles. Further information to support organisations to form partnerships, including support on governance, curriculum delivery, school placements and mentoring is set out in Annex A.

Accredited provider delegation and accountability

Accredited providers have the flexibility to delegate responsibilities to their lead partners, as long as the accredited provider has sufficient oversight. All organisations in a partnership may have some involvement in the development of the ITT programme and, in some cases, the accredited provider may wish to delegate aspects of their course design to lead partners. Throughout, the accredited provider holds ultimate responsibility for all elements of the course and must ensure that their capacity to meet the ITT Criteria 2024/25 can be demonstrated across their partnership.

Given the focus on curriculum design in the new Quality Requirements, it is important that every trainee within the ITT partnership gains the benefits of the high-quality and coherent curriculum that has been designed. Regardless of where the curriculum is being delivered, the accredited provider will be held accountable for curriculum quality and for ensuring that the Quality Requirements are delivered in full. When considering partnership agreements and quality assurance processes, accredited providers should ensure that once they have worked with their partners to design their ITT curriculum for each subject or phase, it is consistently delivered to every trainee across the partnership. The accredited provider may deem it appropriate to contextualise the core curriculum to meet local need, and such tailoring of the curriculum remains the overall responsibility of the accredited provider.

Partnerships and simplifying routes into teaching

As set out in the [ITT market review report](#) and confirmed in the [government response](#) to the consultation following widespread support for the principle, from September 2024, all ITT that leads to QTS should be defined within three core routes (postgraduate fee-funded, undergraduate fee-funded and postgraduate employment based). A simplified landscape provides more clarity for applicants, schools and providers who can streamline the recruitment processes.

In recognition of the three core routes, accredited providers should cease marketing a 'School Direct' fee-funded route to candidates for courses starting from September 2024. Current School Direct lead schools forming part of an accredited provider partnership may continue to operate as lead partners, agreeing delegated responsibilities with the accredited provider and capturing this in partnership agreements. Where School Direct lead schools have had such previously established responsibilities, e.g. the recruitment of trainees, they may be in the position to carry on with their current structure, so long as this is agreed with their accredited provider. Accountability for all aspects of the operation of the partnership rests with the accredited provider, therefore where responsibilities are delegated the accredited provider should ensure appropriate quality assurance processes are in place.

The ITT market review report was clear on the importance of strong existing School Direct lead schools continuing to play a role in the reformed ITT market. As such, the Quality Requirements for Structures and Partnerships (see [Stage 2 guidance](#)) state that providers must set out how they will 'ensure that at a local level, schools and other lead partners are well placed to recruit trainees, in the way that School Direct currently achieves this; for example, given the fact that local recognition and relationships are critical for securing and maintaining the confidence of potential trainees'.

Salaried teacher training is and will remain an important part of the ITT offer. Currently, DfE is considering how best to streamline salaried routes into teaching, whilst ensuring they remain viable and attractive for both providers and trainees. As part of this, the DfE is considering how to consolidate the School Direct Salaried route and Postgraduate teacher apprenticeship into a single employment-based route under the apprenticeships banner. Further guidance will be issued to the sector in due course. Any changes regarding the future of School Direct Salaried will be announced to the sector with due regard for implementation timelines.

Getting partnerships ready for delivery from September 2024

Readiness to deliver checks (Stage 2 checks)

All accredited providers will need to be ready to deliver consistently high-quality programmes that are compliant with the ITT Criteria 2024/25 by September 2024. Between accreditation at Stage 1 and delivery in September 2024, DfE will check the progress that accredited providers have made in preparing to deliver ITT and where required, will provide improvement support to ensure that all ITT programmes are of high quality.

These checks will include reviewing a selection of providers' trainee curriculum materials and assessing readiness to deliver in 3 key areas of focus for the ITT Criteria 2024/25 (mentoring, intensive training and practice and partnerships). These checks will be undertaken by the team of ITT Market Quality Associates, who have expertise in and experience of ITT delivery and a deep understanding of the ITT reforms.

The department has published [guidance for providers to support them through the readiness checks](#). This information on partnerships should therefore be read in conjunction with the provider guidance to ensure all organisations in a partnership have a clear and robust understanding of how the department will assess readiness to deliver against the updated Quality Requirements on partnerships and structures. The timetable for the readiness to deliver checks will vary slightly across providers, but the process must conclude by Spring 2024.

Accreditation status dormancy and reactivation

We are aware that some accredited providers may prefer to collaborate to deliver ITT at greater scale under one partnership, and we recognise the benefits that a greater range of expertise brings to ITT delivery, efficiency, and trainee recruitment. For those accredited providers wishing to come together in such partnerships under the accountability of one accredited provider, we will allow a two-year accreditation dormancy period to support them in determining their future partnership plans.

ITT providers who have been accredited to deliver ITT from September 2024 may request that their accreditation status be kept dormant for up to two years (up to 2026/27 academic year), as long as they are delivering ITT as a lead partner with another accredited provider during this period. Those wishing to reactivate their accreditation status must complete Stage 2 curriculum and readiness checks ahead of delivery. It is expected that Stage 2 checks will commence in April 2024 for those wishing to reactivate their accreditation for ITT delivery in 25/26 and in April 2025 for those reactivating accreditation for ITT delivery in 26/27, with Ofsted inspection taking place within the 3-year cycle completing in July 2027. Accredited providers requesting a period of

accreditation dormancy will not be eligible to draw upon the ITT reform set-up grant funding (see ITT reform funding below) prior to accreditation dormancy or after reactivation.

If an accredited provider is considering dormancy, they should advise itt.accreditation@education.gov.uk and their ITT Associate as soon as possible. A formal request must be sent to itt.accreditation@education.gov.uk by 28 April 2023 to request accreditation dormancy. The request must provide evidence of a formal agreement to contribute to ITT delivery from September 2024 in a partner capacity. Requests with a lack of evidence or made after the deadline will not be considered.

If a dormant provider decides to reactivate their accreditation status to deliver in 25/26, a request must be made to DfE by 1st March 2024. For those wanting to deliver from 26/27, a request must be made to DfE by 1st March 2025. If accreditation status is not activated by this point, DfE will commence the formal closure process for an accredited provider.

ITT reform funding

Accredited providers are eligible to apply for funding via the ITT reform set-up grant. This funding is to support delivery of the new ITT requirements and can be used to support costs associated with partnership development. [Details on how to apply for this grant and conditions of expenditure are available.](#)

In addition to the set-up grant available to all accredited providers, certain providers will be eligible to apply for a partnership grant, where they are seeking to form a partnership with an organisation in one of the geographical regions named in the [partnership grant guidance](#).

Inspection of ITT provision

Ofsted will move to a 3-year inspection cycle from September 2024, inspecting against their framework and the ITT Criteria 2024/25 requirements. Newly accredited providers will have their first inspection in their second year of delivering ITT to trainees.

Where a new ITT partnership has formed following the 2022 accreditation process between a provider accredited to deliver from 2024/25 and providers that are not, DfE will liaise with Ofsted who will determine the appropriate timing of the first inspection. DfE will recommend to Ofsted that consideration should be given for newly formed partnerships where:

- The partnership involves an accredited provider partnering with an unaccredited HEI
- The partnership involves an accredited provider partnering with multiple unaccredited partners and there have been demonstrable changes in governance, leadership and quality assurance.

Ofsted will use this information as well as the process outlined in their [published risk assessment methodology](#) to determine the timing of an ITT inspection.

Trainee recruitment services

Accredited providers should consider how best to use expertise within their partnership, including drawing on lead partner experience with trainee recruitment. Partnerships should be configured to ensure that at a local level, schools and other lead partners are well placed to recruit and select the trainees they need.

DfE will work with accredited providers to ensure that the Apply system balances simplifying the application process for candidates with retaining providers' ability to recruit locally and allows providers to delegate posting of applications to their lead partners. During Spring 2023, DfE will be in touch with accredited providers to onboard them onto the Publish and Manage services, in readiness for the ITT 2024 recruitment cycle. These services allow providers to publish their courses and receive and respond to initial teacher training applications. We will continue to ensure that these services, as well as the candidate facing Find/Apply services, simplify the application process for candidates and retain providers' ability to recruit locally.

Next steps

Partnership formation will progress at varying speeds depending on provider and partner context. The indicative timeline below is intended to support the formation of partnerships and should be read in conjunction with the [Stage 2 provider guidance](#) on readiness to deliver checks. Firm deadlines are set out; the remainder of the timeline is intended to inform planning and finalising partnerships.

Activity	Key dates
Partnership discussions commence/continue	Autumn 2022 onwards
ITT associates make first contact with providers as part of readiness to deliver checks	November 2022 for round 1 providers January to February 2023 for round 2 providers
ITT reform funding – Set-up grant	Deadline - 9th February 2023
Partnership grants	Deadline - 28 February 2023
DfE will contact accredited providers to onboard them onto the Publish teacher training courses and Manage teacher training application services	April 2023
Request for accreditation dormancy	Deadline - 28 April 2023
Accredited providers (and partners where appropriate) create and publish their ITT course details on Publish. Apply opens for candidates to begin applying and providers / delegated lead partners to begin receiving their applications	May-September 2023 October 2023
Deadline for completion of readiness to deliver checks (including partnerships)	Spring 2024

Annex A – Forming a partnership

All organisations within a partnership should be able to articulate the proposed scale they seek to operate at, how they will deliver quality training to achieve their targets and their specific roles and responsibilities. They should be able to set, recognise and deliver the quality level set out in the ITT Criteria 24/25 and have sufficient capacity to train agreed numbers of trainees in the subjects and phases they offer.

The information provided below should be used alongside the updated Quality Requirements to prompt discussions and questions amongst organisations seeking to form a partnership but should not be considered a definitive checklist. To form a partnership, an accredited provider and potential partners will need to agree on a range of issues, including those outlined below.

Governance and Leadership

- Acknowledge and reflect throughout all arrangements that ultimate accountability for all aspects of the operation of the partnership rests with the accredited provider.
- Agree a clear vision of the strategic and delivery outcomes, including scale, range and geographical spread of ITT with corresponding plans and evidence of capacity and capability across the partnership.
- Agreed, robust governance arrangements are in place and exercised effectively, with clearly established structures, including formal arrangements between accredited providers, partners and placement schools. As appropriate, governance arrangements should also make clear how the accredited provider will report to, and be strategically steered by, their accountable body, e.g. Trust Board or Governing Body.
- Establish and articulate formal ways of working, including a clear definition of, and rationale for determining, roles and responsibilities across the partnership.
- Set out how training and delivery capacity of partners and placement schools will be established and developed to meet the overall ambition of ITT delivery.
- Reference the roles, memberships and functions of groups and committees in managing the partnership.
- Specify the different roles within the partnership including, for example, programme and course leaders, lead mentors or mentor leadership teams, mentors and internal and external moderators. This should also set out how partners contribute towards these roles.
- Establish clear protocols for conflict resolution and exit arrangements.

Curriculum materials and delivery

- Agree how quality curriculum materials will be developed and ready for delivery from September 2024, taking account of the experience, expertise and needs of all involved in a partnership. Ensure clear roles and expectations are established for partners.
- Ensure that a quality core curriculum for each subject and phase is delivered to every trainee across the partnership.
- Secure and retain school partners to enable delivery of training in line with the ITT criteria and to meet the needs of all trainees. Determine the role of each partner in addressing and managing trainee teacher workload.

Recruitment and marketing

- Agree which courses will be delivered and target recruitment numbers, including minimum and maximum numbers that will be in place and who will have responsibility for recruitment.
- Establish the course offer and marketing plans for courses and determine roles and responsibilities for selecting and interviewing applicants.

School placements

- Establish an approach to selecting, training, retaining, and supporting placement schools, including utilising existing placement arrangements, to ensure consistently high-quality training across the partnership.
- Establish how schools and partners will support recruitment of trainees building on local relationships, to secure and maintain the confidence of potential trainees.
- Ensure that effective assessment of trainees, which is aligned to the planned curriculum, is undertaken during the course and that when the course completes, accurate assessment can be made against the Teachers' Standards.

Mentors

- Establish a professional network of well-trained and expert mentors with a deep understanding of the trainee curriculum, the relevant research base which informs it, and their role in supporting its delivery and practice.
- Develop and deliver a fully resourced mentor curriculum that aligns with the trainee curriculum. Equip mentors with an understanding of the curriculum content that trainees will cover and an approach to mentoring based on the best available evidence.
- Ensure that mentors have the time, resources and the support of their school to discharge the requirements of their role.

- Ensure trainees receive clear and consistent mentoring and support from mentors and other expert colleagues.

Quality Assurance

- Ensure that robust and mutually understood processes are in place for quality assurance including self-evaluation and improvement planning and managing challenges, issues and disagreements amongst partners.
- Agree how the partnership will draw on sources of evidence and data as well as feedback to ensure continuous improvement of delivery.

Finance

- Determine overall budgets within the partnership. Establish robust financial reporting and auditing arrangements across the partnership.
- Establish budgetary arrangements that set out how funds are distributed across the partnership in a way which reflects the distribution of delegated responsibilities.
- Accredited providers must ensure that funding is used for intended purposes at all levels in the partnership, and that these arrangements contribute both to quality provision for trainees and to the retention of partners.
- Reflect and acknowledge that ultimate financial responsibility rests with the accredited provider, including for purposes of reporting, auditing or grant agreements.

In addition, organisations may need to agree on a range of other issues, incorporating professional advice as necessary, for example:

- proposed organisation structure
- HR arrangements, e.g. handling existing contracts (including TUPE as appropriate), requirements for new staff and selection processes
- IT and administrative requirements
- communications and branding, e.g. internal and external processes, agreeing key messages, websites, handling queries
- management of physical resources, e.g. property, building and resources
- data collection and management
- compliance with data protection requirements
- safeguarding, well-being, health and safety
- accountability processes, e.g. requirements and timings, preparation for and involvement in Ofsted inspections



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