

General Teaching Council for Scotland submission of 23 November 2023

PE2037/D: Improve literacy attainment through research-informed reading instruction

GTC Scotland welcomes the opportunity to clarify our role in Initial Teacher Education in response to Petition PE2037.

Our role

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC Scotland) is the teaching profession's independent registration and regulation body. We work in the public interest to enhance trust in teachers by setting, upholding and promoting high standards. Our statutory role and core functions are set out in the [Public Services Reform \(Scotland\) Order 2011](#).

Setting standards

Teaching in Scotland is a profession rooted in academic study in Higher Education Institutions. Teachers who qualify in Scotland must complete a GTC Scotland accredited teaching qualification called an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme and teachers who qualify outside Scotland have their qualifications individually assessed to ensure that they meet our standards.

We set the required design, expected component parts and other features of programmes of ITE which are assessed through an agreed accreditation process. Each programme must ensure the development of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities in educational theory and practice. In doing so, as a profession underpinned by professional standards, each programme must provide the opportunity for individuals to achieve the [Standard for Provisional Registration](#). We also set the minimum entry requirements for applicants to programmes of ITE.

Teaching is complex work in a complex system. Programmes of ITE need to prepare student teachers to become competent, thoughtful, reflective and innovative practitioners, who are committed to providing high quality learning for every learner. ITE introduces student teachers to this complexity, balancing both direct content about specific teaching methodologies with developing critical awareness to develop evidence-

informed teaching, and adapt approaches in the interests of specific learners in specific circumstances.

ITE is indeed that – initial teacher education and does not aim to cover every teaching approach in detail. All teachers require access to ongoing high quality education opportunities throughout their career to continue to learn and develop as well as time and space to engage with research and literature to build their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Upholding standards

When a student teacher successfully completes their ITE programme, they will apply for Provisional Registration with GTC Scotland and begin a period of probation, either through the [Flexible Route](#) or the Scottish Government's Teacher Induction Scheme.

This is a supported induction to the profession and is about improving the knowledge, understanding and skills that teachers have already demonstrated to meet the Standard for Provisional Registration to the level required by the Standard for Full Registration.

A teacher must demonstrate that they meet the Standard for Full Registration to gain Full Registration with GTC Scotland.

The Standard for Provisional Registration and the [Standard for Full Registration](#) are mandatory or 'benchmark' professional standards.

To maintain Full Registration with us, teachers must confirm their commitment to professional learning every 5 years through the Professional Update process. Professional Update is the scheme by which GTC Scotland meets our legal obligations to ensure reaccreditation of teachers.

Promoting standards

To regulate well, we promote standards and the benefits of maintaining and enhancing them among teachers. In addition to our mandatory registration standards, we have aspirational standards which support the professional growth of teachers in Scotland.

The [Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning](#) for example, describes the advanced professional knowledge and pedagogical

expertise that registered teachers develop as they continue to progress in teaching and the education profession.

Insight from our regulatory work

We analyse the data we gather on the teaching profession to influence public policy development, providing policy makers with relevant evidence to support decision-making in the areas of teacher education and supply.

Over almost a decade of Professional Update we have gathered a consistent theme from teachers: they need time and space to reflect, think about their learning, the impact it has had, plan what to do next and fulfil their plan. They need space to ensure their pedagogy is responsive and to discuss their ethical dilemmas, to develop their professional judgement and therefore to further enhance trust in teaching.

The Petition

This Petition seeks government support to promote research-informed reading instruction, specifically systematic synthetic phonics as part of ITE as well as further professional learning for teachers.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills' response to the petition clarifies, GTC Scotland has a role in accrediting ITE programmes. This extends to ensuring that student teachers are exposed to a range of pedagogical theories and professional practice.

In addition, while we are responsible for ensuring that registered teachers complete further learning through our Professional Update scheme, we do not prescribe what form it should take. Instead, we require teachers to use the professional standards to structure their ongoing learning and development.

We believe that teachers require time and space for education and learning throughout their career. More needs to be done as a system to build career-long teacher education and learning and to provide the system structures that will better support this. We are advocating for this development, and we are actively working with partners to influence in this area. In our current context of reform, it is our view that it is timely to build a career-long teacher education framework that starts with a deep exploration of how ITE, induction and early career can be further

developed, supported and structured.

In the meantime, we are currently in the targeted stakeholder engagement stage of a review of the requirements for entry to ITE programmes, which is focusing specifically on the qualifications that prospective teachers are required to obtain prior to entry. This will be published for public consultation in 2024. Following this phase of work, we will be focusing on refreshing our accreditation process.

We would again take the opportunity to clarify that ITE focuses on ensuring student teachers meet a professional standard rather than dictating specific content that requires to be covered. There is, of course, a need for providers of ITE to balance content about specific teaching approaches with ensuring individuals develop the critical awareness skills they need to make effective choices about teaching approaches throughout their careers.

It is our view that more work is required to support an effective career-long teacher education model so teachers can continue to develop their knowledge, skills and critical awareness throughout their career across all aspects of teaching including research informed reading instruction. How the education system provides time and space for all teachers to develop, learn and grow is fundamental to successful education.

We trust that this has been helpful for the committee, and we thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments.