

# UKLA's response to OFSTED's proposed changes to the ITE Inspection Framework

February 2020

## Proposal 1: introduction of two key judgement areas only

We propose to introduce two key judgement areas only: 'the quality of education and training', and 'leadership and management'. We propose to consolidate our inspection of the quality of the ITE training programme and ITE curriculum within a single key judgement: 'the quality of education and training' (QoET). This will replace the current 'outcomes for trainees' and 'quality of training across the partnership' judgements.

**Agree.** UKLA welcomes the shift in emphasis from trainees' outcomes to the quality of education and teaching. We note that, 'For primary and secondary phases, inspectors will also take into account the mandatory DfE ITT core content framework.' As an Association we have concerns about the breadth and depth of the literacy component of this curriculum. We expand on these in concerns raised in our additional comments. It is therefore important that judgements about literacy provision are not restricted to the requirements of the DfE ITT core curriculum.

## Proposal 2: a new methodology for gathering inspection evidence

We propose to apply a new methodology of gathering evidence during an inspection of an ITE partnership. The new focused review method of gathering evidence is relatively in line with the 'deep-dive' methodology applied in the EIF. This is an approach with which many early years settings, schools and further education colleges will now be familiar. However, the focused review approach is tailored to the ITE context in terms of the logistical arrangements required to ensure that inspectors are able to gather sufficient evidence that will help to establish the quality of the ITE curriculum.

**Disagree.** UKLA is concerned that phonics has been identified as a focus area for deep dives. This is likely to result in an unbalanced ITE literacy curriculum in which phonics receives a disproportionate amount of resource at the expense of other equally important areas of literacy education. We would welcome an approach that was more tailored to each institution and which used focused review to examine areas that had been identified as particular strengths or areas for development. We believe that this would foster partnership between educational professionals and the inspectorate and that such partnership would be more effective in promoting effective literacy education within and across ITE providers. The model being developed by Estyn in Wales offers a possible example of how this might work.

## Proposal 3: the one-stage model of inspection

We propose to carry out ITE inspections under a new one-stage model of inspection, with the intention of creating a flexible inspection model for both ITE partnerships and Ofsted. This means four days of on-site inspection within a single week, including time for inspectors to visit partnership settings, schools and/or colleges.

**Agree.** This is a welcome change which will reduce the burden on ITE partnerships enabling them to devote further time and energy to supporting trainees.

#### **Proposal 4: short and long telephone calls prior to inspection**

We propose a new approach to how our inspectors prepare for and begin inspections. The introduction of variety in the telephone conversations will allow the partnership representative to set out the partnership's context, challenges and progress since the last inspection.

**Agree.** This is a welcome change that will allow partnerships more time to prepare and ensure that inspections run smoothly.

#### **Proposal 5: spring and summer term inspections only**

We propose that inspections of ITE partnerships, under a new framework and cycle of inspections, will begin in the spring term 2021 and will only take place across the spring and summer terms of an academic year.

**Agree.** This is a welcome change given the difficulty of arranging inspections in the Autumn term.

#### **Do you have any additional comments about our proposed new framework for ITE inspections?**

Our additional comments relate to the draft ITE Inspection Framework and Handbook, 2020.

The United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA) is the leading subject association for literacy and has a diverse membership of teachers, head teachers, ITE educators, literacy researchers and other literacy experts from across the UK and overseas. UKLA is committed to working with policy makers and influential agencies to develop appropriate frameworks for curriculum, assessment and inspection. We would welcome the opportunity to work with OFSTED to develop future frameworks.

UKLA advocates a high quality, broad and balanced literacy curriculum informed by a wide range of research. Consequently UKLA is extremely concerned by the following paragraph in the Draft for Consultation of the Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework and Handbook. We note that reaching a rating of 'good' requires the following:

For primary phase, training will ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence. (Ofsted, 2020, p.39).

There are three implications of this statement which we believe will have adverse impacts on the quality of reading provision within ITE. These are linked to:

- 1. The importance of criticality and understanding of different approaches**
- 2. Limited references to research evidence on the teaching of reading**
- 3. Significant flaws in the ITT Core framework referred to in the Ofsted Framework**

We expand on each of these below.

- 1. The importance of criticality and understanding of different approaches**

Our first concern relates to the statement that ‘trainees are not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence.’

In England, many courses of Initial Teacher Education take place in universities where, in all faculties, a major concern is to develop critical thinking. As is well known, the teaching of reading is a contentious area with much conflicting research. It is the duty of university staff to foster a critical approach to such research, based on a rigorous consideration of its quality, in terms, inter alia, of the criteria used to indicate success. It is not the place of the Department of Education or Ofsted to determine what constitutes the most up-to-date research evidence. Other faculties in our university system would not tolerate this kind of proscription.

When training prospective primary teachers, whether they are following a PGCE, BA or QTS only route, it is vital that we help them develop an understanding of all that children need to learn to become effective, thoughtful and committed readers. Following from this, it is our duty to train future primary teachers to compare and contrast different approaches to the teaching of reading and writing in the light of this understanding and of relevant research - both recent findings and those that have stood the test of time. If they are to become effective professionals, teachers of the future must be able to discuss and evaluate approaches in a critical and informed way. Both postgraduate and undergraduate training courses currently in operation require student teachers to carry out their own research into particular approaches, thus enabling them to evaluate published research more effectively and to understand its bearing on classroom practice. If we are to develop teachers who are able to draw critically on research throughout their career - as the framework requires - it is essential that we foster criticality and an understanding of different approaches during their initial teacher education. Indeed we note that the framework itself states:

(36) We recognise the importance of partnerships’ autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnership’s curriculum favourably.

(91) Ofsted does NOT advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees.

**In summary, a ban on considering ‘competing’ approaches would undermine ITE’s essential work to promote criticality among trainees and would contradict aspects of the proposed framework itself.**

## **2. Limited application of research evidence on the teaching of reading**

Our second point concerns the over-emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics and the exclusion of other aspects of early reading provision, including alternative approaches to phonics teaching. There are currently eight references to systematic synthetic phonics as a required method for teaching early reading in the consultation document but no references to other methods. This is surprising as analyses of research have challenged the idea that systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective approach to teaching early reading or indeed to teaching phonics (Clark, 2014, 2017). Torgerson et al. (2016) concluded from their review of research that, ‘there is little evidence of the comparative superiority of one phonics approach over any other’ (p.234). We also question the reference to ‘competing approaches’ in the statement cited above. We do not see different approaches as competing, but rather as complementary or offering alternatives to one another. To state that there are ‘competing’

approaches is to polarise discussions about effective approaches to teaching reading in ways that are not helpful. This is at odds with studies of effective literacy teaching which have highlighted that teachers need to draw on a range of research to inform their professional decision making (Ellis and Smith, 2017; Hall, 2013). Specifically, as the Education Endowment Foundation's review of research *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1* states,

Both decoding, and comprehension are necessary but not sufficient to develop confident and competent readers, and not all children will respond equally to one approach. (EEF, 2017, p9)

Of course, phonics plays a part in reading. But, while the English writing system is alphabetic, with letters (or letter combinations) representing speech sounds (or groups of speech sounds), correspondence to the written word is not always straightforward. Encouraging children to draw on their knowledge of language patterns and subject matter aids both word identification and meaning-making.

It is also important to remember that progress in literacy requires motivation and engagement, both of which help children to develop persistence and resilience as well as enjoyment and satisfaction in their reading. As EEF argue,

If pupils are not making expected progress- it may be that they are not engaged in the process and require a different approach that motivates them to practise and improve. (EEF 2017, p9.)

UKLA maintains that whilst phonics plays an important part in early reading, successful teaching and learning of reading also includes: fostering pleasure through playing with words and enjoyment of text; developing sense; making of stories and rhymes; and respect for the experiences of language and literacy that children bring to school. This stance is supported by studies of effective classrooms on both sides of the Atlantic showing that the most successful instruction, from the earliest stages, balances phonics with attention to meaning, takes account of children's differences, including their interests and areas of expertise, and focuses on engaging them. Ellis and Smith (2017) provide a useful model for considering the range of aspects that are important in developing readers. They represent reading as involving three different domains of knowledge or understanding: cognitive knowledge or skills, cultural and social capital, and personal and social identity. If children are to become capable and enthusiastic readers, all these domains of literacy learning need attention.

Further information can be found in UKLA's recently published Viewpoint [https://ukla.org/downloads/View\\_Early\\_Reading.pdf](https://ukla.org/downloads/View_Early_Reading.pdf) on the teaching of Early Reading and phonics:

**In summary, UKLA recommends that OFSTED reworks statements to require trainees to draw on a range of research on teaching early reading to:**

- **use a balance of phonics and meaning-focused approaches;**
- **create high levels of engagement and pleasure in reading;**
- **develop children's understanding of texts;**
- **encourage play with language, stories and rhymes;**
- **give children plenty of experience of putting texts to use;**

- respect the experiences of language and literacy that children bring to school;
- help children to recognise themselves and their experiences in what they read.

### **3. Significant flaws in the ITT Core framework referred to in the Ofsted Framework**

Our third concern relates to the ITT Core Framework (DfE, 2019) to which the Ofsted framework requires partnerships to adhere. As an Association we have significant concerns about the lack of breadth and depth of the literacy component of this curriculum. In our response to the framework, we recommended how its statements on literacy could be revised to better reflect a broad research base. These were not taken up by the DfE. However, we include them here to exemplify how the Ofsted framework could be used to require a broad and balanced literacy curriculum which supports children to become fluent, thoughtful and committed readers and writers.

As it stands, the document reads:

#### **Develop pupils' literacy, by:**

- observing how expert colleagues demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics, particularly if teaching early reading and spelling, and deconstructing this approach;
- discussing and analysing with expert colleagues how to support younger pupils to become fluent readers and to write fluently and legibly;
- receiving clear, consistent and effective mentoring in how to model reading comprehension by asking questions, making predictions, and summarising when reading;
- receiving clear, consistent and effective mentoring in how to promote reading for pleasure (e.g. by using a range of whole class reading approaches and regularly reading high-quality texts to children);
- discussing and analysing with expert colleagues how to teach different forms of writing by modelling planning, drafting and editing.

And - following expert input - by taking opportunities to practise, receive feedback and improve at:

- teaching unfamiliar vocabulary explicitly and planning for pupils to be repeatedly exposed to high-utility and high-frequency vocabulary in what is taught;
- modelling and requiring high-quality oral language, recognising that spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing (e.g. requiring pupils to respond to questions in full sentences, making use of relevant technical vocabulary).

UKLA welcomes the statement's attention to:

- receiving clear, consistent and effective mentoring in how to model reading comprehension by asking questions, making predictions, and summarising when reading.
- receiving clear, consistent and effective mentoring in how to promote reading for pleasure (e.g. by using a range of whole class reading approaches and regularly reading high-quality texts to children).

However, as discussed above the following statement is likely to lead to counter-productive classroom approaches:

Systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective approach for teaching pupils to decode. (DfE Nov 2019, page 14 item 9)

We are also concerned about the lack of emphasis on critical engagement with research on early reading, and the lack of recognition of the changing nature of literacy. Much reading and writing is, and will continue to be, screen-based and this brings particular opportunities and challenges for young readers and writers. As part of their literacy teaching, teachers need therefore to support children's confident, creative, collaborative and critical uses of digital media. Many countries (including Wales and Scotland) already recognise that literacy is changing in this way, and the ITE curriculum needs to equip trainees to support learners to read and write now and in the future.

**UKLA therefore recommends the following set of statements to replace those listed above:**

Develop pupils' literacy, by:

- using a repertoire of approaches developed through reading and discussion with other student teachers and experienced colleagues;
- drawing on a critical understanding of research underpinning the teaching of reading, including comprehension, decoding, synthetic phonics and other word identification strategies, together with research on the importance of engagement and the enjoyment of reading;
- discussing and analysing with expert colleagues how to support younger pupils to become fluent, thoughtful and committed readers and writers;
- observing and discussing with expert colleagues how they model a range of reading comprehension strategies by asking questions, making predictions, deducing, inferring, determining importance, empathising, summarising and evaluating when reading;
- engaging with clear, consistent and effective mentoring to promote reading for pleasure, for example by using a range of reading approaches, which might include whole class, group and individual strategies and regularly reading high-quality texts aloud to children and providing opportunities to talk about texts and discuss preferences;
- discussing and analysing with expert colleagues how to teach different forms of writing by reading, discussing, modelling, planning, drafting and editing;
- developing their knowledge of grammar to be able to guide children on how to enhance the impact of grammatical choices on their writing;
- teaching unfamiliar and challenging vocabulary explicitly and planning for pupils to be repeatedly exposed to high-utility and high frequency vocabulary in what is taught;
- modelling and requiring high quality oral language, recognising that spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing, e.g. encouraging pupils to respond to questions at length and explain their ideas;
- engaging in two-way dialogue with children and parents in order to value and find out about the range of literacy experiences children bring with them to school (which may draw on different modes, media and languages);

- encouraging children to read and write a wide range of texts, on and offscreen.

**In summary, UKLA recommends that judgements about literacy provision are not restricted to the requirements of the DfE ITT core curriculum but rely on an expanded set of statements.**

## References

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