National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Qualitative Research with Shortage Subject Teaching Candidates: The Journey to Teacher Training

Research brief

October 2014

Ceri Matthias – BMG Research

Contents

Table of figures

Background and methodology

This research brief summarises the results of the final phase of the two-year 'Needs and Demands' research contract delivered by BMG Research on behalf of the National College for Teaching & Leadership (NCTL). This contract was largely qualitative in its methodology but was conceived to be flexible with the aim of exploring the needs, demands and motivations of NCTL's audiences and stakeholders through a time of significant change, 2012-2014.

In this final phase, from autumn 2013 to spring 2014, the audience consulted were teaching candidates, and primarily shortage-subject candidates, to explore their needs and demands in some depth. The research aimed to develop NCTL's understanding of the journey into teacher training and how this is experienced by shortage candidates, including the triggers of interest in teaching, the way candidates progress from interest to making an application for training, and the types of barriers and challenges encountered on the journey. The research also sought to deepen understanding of School Direct routes (salaried[1] and fee-paying[2]), which were introduced on a national basis for the first time in 2013/14. The sample for the study was primarily made up of applicants who began training in autumn 2013 and as such they were well-placed to offer a snapshot of how these new routes to teacher training were viewed and experienced in their first full year of operation.

Four methodologies were applied and full detailed findings are available in three separate reports:

1. *Careers Fairs Exit Survey*: Short, structured exit-interviews were conducted with 73 visitors to NCTL's stand at four careers fairs in October-November 2013.

2. *Online Survey of GTTR Applicants*: An online survey of applicants to university-led training via graduate teacher training registry (GTTR) was undertaken in January 2014, generating 418 completed returns. Of these, 132 were shortage subject candidates and 276 were successful in their application. This element was undertaken primarily to establish a sample frame of applicants for the qualitative research, supplementing NCTL's database of consenting registrants. The opportunity was taken to extend this into a short survey to offer some quantitative insights on the journey to teacher training.

3. *Qualitative Research with Shortage Subject Teaching Candidates*: In-depth qualitative interviews were undertaken with 90 teacher training candidates, including 60 on initial teacher training (ITT) and 30 not on ITT who were able to

---

[1] School Direct salaried is aimed at graduates who have been working for around 3 years and enables them to earn a salary during their training.

[2] School Direct fee-paying is

discuss challenges and barriers. Also five focus groups were conducted online, a group each with candidates in the subjects of maths, physics, and computer science, a further group of other shortage subjects (mixed) and one group of non-shortage candidates for comparison. Overall, 118 candidates were consulted through the depth interviews and online groups, undertaken by BMG Research between January and April 2014.

Summary of findings

Variability

The journey from interest to application for shortage subject candidates is highly variable. It varies in length from weeks to years, and in the points at which candidates experience motivation or challenge. Students[3] appear to begin their journey at a similar time of year, and are most likely to apply in the autumn, but career changers and finders are prompted to explore options by a wider range of circumstances, and hence begin at different times. There is also no homogenous approach taken by candidates; some of whom are highly proactive (e.g. reading around the subject and exploring all possible options) while others are passive or reactive (e.g. being prompted by a school in which they work to consider applying for a School Direct place there, and not evaluating other routes).

The word cloud below depicts shortage subject candidates' one-word descriptions of their journey to teacher training, as collected in depth-interviews and online groups. Higher numbers of mentions are represented in larger text.

As suggested by this word cloud, candidates gave interviewers a wide range of positive, neutral and negative testimonies on their journeys to training. Indeed, some contradict each other, such as easy and difficult. However, what is shown is that, typically, candidates find the journey challenging and exciting. The journey to training is therefore generally considered demanding and rigorous but in a way that many recognise to be positive.

Figure 1: **Word Cloud - the journey in one word.**

Source: Wordle. Sample: 118 respondents

---

[3] These categories were self-defined by candidates: Students responded 'I am a full-time student or graduated in the last year', career finders responded 'I finished full-time studies more than a year ago but am still in the early stages of developing a career' and career changers responded 'I followed a different career path for a number of years, now looking to pursue a career in teaching'

Nevertheless the research identifies that, while many aspects of the journey differ, candidates often share similar sources of motivation and similar fears and concerns. They also express common needs and demands of NCTL. These commonalities are summarised in this report together with any notable comparisons arising between the subgroups consulted.

Use of support

It was typical for candidates to make use of information and support along their journey to teacher training, in particular those now placed in ITT who were the majority of those consulted. Those not making it to teacher training used support to a lesser extent: In the online survey 70% of those who used support in their decision-making and application were successful in their application to university-led training, compared to 45% of those who did not. This highlights that candidates increase their likelihood of making it to teacher training by using support.

Most candidates in the survey had made use of online information and a school visit or work experience in a school (67% and 49%) while 18% mentioned using advice on applications.

The most used source of support was Get into Teaching/Department for Education (DfE)/Teaching Agency (61%) but friends and family were used to a very similar extent (58%). The next most used source of support was direct from a school (36%), while 15% sourced support on campus.

In terms of awareness of different resources, this was more than twice as high for the Get into Teaching website (86%) than any other type of resource, next most mentioned being regular emails (40%) and the teaching line (38%). Online resources were shown through all strands of the research to be crucial to supporting candidates through their journey to training. However, it was uncommon for candidates to use Get into Teaching social media platforms (approximately 7% of candidates in the online survey used the Facebook page and 2% Twitter).

Information channel requirements

Candidates seek a combination of general and specific advice. As such they make wide use of websites but also value interactive channels including phone-lines and face-to-face advice. This requirement is constant throughout the journey, although the types of information required change: At the start the candidate is looking equally at teaching as a career and the feasibility of training, while as the journey unfolds and the candidate has determined to enter teaching, information requirements become more centred on the specifics of training, including its location, accessing funding, skills tests, personal statements, the selection criteria of schools/providers, and so on. After application, candidates seek reassurance that they are still 'in the system' and that their application is

being processed; silence causes concerns and in extreme cases can lead to candidates beginning to explore alternative career options.

Events

Few candidates had attended careers fairs and other face to face events such as Train to Teach (approximately 5% in the online survey). However, where attended, these events pack a punch. In depth interviews, candidates who had attended events described these as pivotal moments in their journey, providing them with the information, motivation and often the contacts to help them take the next step to training.

As many as two-thirds of respondents in the careers fair exit interviews considered that visiting the stand had made them more likely to enter teaching.

Registration

In the online survey of applicants 45% were aware of Get into Teaching and of these 59% had registered with Get into Teaching. Key motivations to register were to get advice and support during decision-making, to get more information on routes into teaching, and to get more information on bursaries/funding.

More than seven in ten of registrants with Get into Teaching received the information, guidance and/or services they were expecting (72%).

In depth interviews (remembering that these were exclusively with shortage subject candidates), respondents were surprised at the level of support they found was available to them and welcomed the regularity of contact. While they had widely used Get into Teaching resources, and even received calls from an advisor, many were unclear on whether they had actually registered. This most likely reflects the ease of the process and the time lapse between registering and being interviewed for this research. But there was also a suggestion that a degree of confusion was caused by the number of support bodies or 'brands' involved in supporting trainees during this period *(*an example quote being *'it got a bit confusing who I signed up with'*)

Where candidates had not registered, the main reason was not knowing about it: In the online survey, 50% were not aware of the Get into Teaching campaign, nor its resources before applying for initial teacher training. Where candidates were aware of the Get into Teaching campaign but not registered, 42% were unaware you could register.

Advertising

More than a quarter of applicants to Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR) in the online survey considered Get into Teaching advertising as useful or very useful, in particular online advertising (35%). In any survey question relating to types of

communications, advertising tends to be considered less 'useful' than more practical, information-based resources, and so 35% is quite significant. Qualitative interviews likewise suggested that advertising played a role in helping candidates along their journey to teacher training in 2012-13 (candidates often recalling a direct impact or considering that adverts were likely to have encouraged them subliminally). For example a number of School Direct candidates had been triggered to move from a latent interest in teaching to a more serious exploration of options, by adverts alerting them to the salaried option and to bursaries for training, as well as the shortage of teachers in that subject. Mentions were also made of how advertising can highlight aspects of the appeal of teaching, including the opportunity to make a difference to people's lives, to make a subject fun, the challenge and variability of the role, progression opportunities and parent-friendly holidays.

However, once candidates begin considering their options more seriously they become less receptive to advertising and are keen to seek out information-rich, 'unbiased' resources. Indeed, some depth-interviewees criticised the 'ten reasons' brochure as being 'too glossy' and did not engage with it on the basis that it appeared to be 'selling' teaching as opposed to helping them ascertain if it was the right route for them.

Candidates therefore need both information that triggers their interest in teaching by highlighting aspects of its appeal and alerting them to support available, in addition to very practical, non-glossy information to reassure them that they are on the right path and ensure they understand all the relevant steps and requirements as they progress towards application.

Advisors

Support offered by NCTL advisors played a significant role in candidates' journey to teacher training.

Advisors at careers fairs were highlighted in the exit interviews as a particular plus-point, and were described as *helpful, positive, informative, friendly, enthusiastic* and *motivating*.

In the depth interviews and online groups, Premier Plus advisors were particularly highly-praised. The accessibility and level of contact from Premier Plus advisors often exceeded expectations and was often instrumental in helping candidates progress along the journey, retain their motivation, gain experience in a school where applicable and meet the necessary requirements of each stage. Decisions on application routes and funding are 'high stakes' areas of decision-making and were areas where candidates particularly valued the reassurance of conversations with someone clearly who is expert on these issues.

Webchat

Feedback suggests that there is potential to increase use of the webchat facility, whereby candidates are able to ask questions of NCTL experts online and receive prompt responses. Few had heard of this and only 6% of online survey respondents had used it, but depth interviews suggest that those who had used it found it exceeded expectations and valued the ability to receive answers quickly from an official source, saving them time trawling through resources.

Social media

As mentioned, little use had been made of government social media platforms dedicated to teaching. However, some found that social media had been useful as an informal method of gaining peer insights, i.e. through friends and connections. However, adverts for teaching had been picked up via social media and as such it can act as a portal into the wider journey or support.

Satisfaction and considerations on missing support

Candidates were generally very satisfied with the support and communications provided by NCTL. It was typical for candidates in shortage subjects to describe a sense of being welcomed and supported into the profession on account of being a shortage subject candidate and having an array of support available to them.

There was particular praise for the website (comprehensive and practical) and the recruitment advisor programme (friendly, expert and accessible). Indeed, among users of these resources in the online survey, 92% described the website as useful/very useful and 93% described recruitment advisors as useful/very useful. Other resources such as the telephone teaching line and regular emails also widely praised for providing practical advice in a timely manner and 83% and 70% of users respectively in the online survey described these as useful/very useful.

However, there is a lot involved in making an application for teacher training, and it was not unusual for candidates to be able to identify at least some information or support on their journey that they missed which would have been useful to them. In the online survey 30% considered this to have been the case.

Types of information missing were explored through the survey and other strands of the research and a wide range of types of information and advice were mentioned, again reflects the variability of the journey to teacher training and different approaches taken by candidates. However, some commonalities were identified, summarised as follows:

- **Information on financial support to train:** Candidates considered that information was available but that they had to dig around and use numerous

sources to piece together the whole picture to calculate exactly where they stood in respect of the cost of training and grants and loans available. This aspect took time. When probed about how they would like this information, they described wanting some generic information, highly summarised but comprehensive e.g. in a 'grid' format or flow diagram. They also described wanting advice tailored to their specific circumstances and preferences, by being able to talk these through with an expert familiar with the whole system (by phone or face to face). Advice should include mention of any further costs that may be applicable from different parties involved in delivering training, such that candidates can be confident there won't be any shocks in store, and that they have not missed out on some possible funding. The research suggests that candidates may not always be accessing advice of this kind despite being eligible for it, due to lack of awareness of Premier Plus.

- **Information on routes into teaching:** Some found that they did not have enough understanding of the different routes in, and what was involved/different about each one, and as such they found these complex or confusing. This included not understanding how much time was spent at a university with each training channel, the not being aware of the final qualification achieved and any differences in this respect between routes, how funding differs, and so on. A small number acknowledged that they had perhaps relied too much on the website and might have learnt more by exploring further channels of support. However, the timing of the research (in the first full year of the two School Direct routes) is likely to have played the most significant role in perceived complexity/confusion: School Direct candidates found that they could not always get answers to their questions on the basis that schools and providers were also learning about the new routes.

- **More support to get school experience:** Candidates had commonly contacted schools directly in order to request experience in a school environment (e.g. observation) and had sometimes found schools unresponsive or unable to accommodate them. Some were unaware of support available from NCTL on this, or considered themselves ineligible e.g. due to their degree classification.

- **Information on requirements to undertake teacher training:** Candidates sometimes found they had missed out on important requirements needed to join ITT, which caused bumps in the process for them, in particular those who were less proactive and had not made calls to the teaching line or attended events. These were wide-ranging but included (most commonly) requirements to undertake a skills test, and well as to provide proof of GCSEs. Other examples included the requirement to do two languages as a modern foreign language (MFL) candidate, and to do observations when applying to GTTR. Feedback suggests that candidates would like some information on requirements in a simply check-list format, displayed prominently online (and potentially via other channels e.g. emails).

- **Package of support for students born and raised abroad:** The research found that this particular group of candidates experienced particular struggles regarding

language and confidence, equivalency of qualifications, familiarity with the UK education system and peer support.

Access to experience in a school

Experience in a school can help motivate a candidate to continue on their journey to training, can allay concerns about teaching (often including behaviour management concerns) and can help candidates in their decision-making on the type of school they would like to work in.

Where used, NCTL support in gaining experience in a school (the Premier Plus school experience programme), was valued and praised.

But many had not used this service, and feedback suggests more information and advice is needed to support candidates to gain experience in a school.

The level of openness/welcome received from schools themselves is also important. Candidates looking for experience in the early stages of their interest in training may be put off by non-response, so a focus on encouraging schools to open their doors to candidates seeking experience is likely to pay dividends in helping candidates from 'interest' to 'application' stage.

Candidates vary widely in their level of prior experience in a school, and many had worked as teaching assistants or in other roles, but these too valued the opportunity to obtain experience in a different school, to increase their understanding of the sector and support their decision-making.

Where respondents encountered difficulties accessing experience in a school, this appeared to decrease motivation, to slow their progress towards teacher training and even increase the risk of not securing a place.

Demand for peer insights

Throughout the research, feedback underlined the value candidates place on case-studies, testimonies and other 'real-life' content in the resources they use. They appear to welcome input from those training on ITT courses, graduates of ITT courses, and trainers and others delivering ITT courses. In particular, newly qualified teachers who have gone through that route to training themselves are seen as being in a good position to offer expert and impartial information to candidates considering that route.

When attending Train to Teach events, candidates valued the ability to connect with a wide range of stakeholders. Similarly, when using Premier Plus advisors, candidates valued that these had been involved directly themselves in teaching or teacher training, as opposed to someone (without direct experience) briefed on how to inform candidates.

In online and hardcopy resources too, candidates value case studies that offer a balanced insight into the teaching, and teacher training experience.

As mentioned, a few depth-interviewees had used social media to connect with peers for advice e.g. using Facebook to ask questions of friends with teaching experience, but little use is being made at present of government social media platforms on teaching for the same purpose.

Funding

Bursaries and school direct salaries for shortage subject applicants are widely described as critical, without which the candidate would be unable to pursue training. In particular, hearing about the option to train through a salaried route, was often a key moment when School Direct candidates decided to explore the options of undertaking training.

Scholarships are a less common trigger of interest due to being less widely available, but those who apply and receive them again describe them as vital to enabling them to train, as well as a significant boost in confidence, given that only 50 are offered nationally for their subject.

Approximately six in ten of those polled (via the online focus groups) were aware of the 25% uplift in School Direct funding received for training in a school with more than 35% of pupils receiving free school meals (FSM). However this awareness had not impacted on candidates' choice of where to train. Instead, when choosing where to train candidates overwhelmingly prioritised the location of the school first, followed by a concern to train in 'good schools', with a positive and friendly ethos and to avoid schools with behaviour issues that they felt they may not be able to cope with as trainees (see 'choice of school' below).

Barriers and concerns

Similar feedback was given in the careers fair research and in depth interviews in terms of key concerns and barriers encountered in the journey to teacher training, as set out below. Some of these are closely interlinked with findings in other areas of the research, mentioned above (e.g. in Considerations on Missing Support):

- **Concerns about pupil behaviour and its management**: Candidates described particular concerns regarding whole class-management, and 'extreme' bad behaviour situations, including violence and accusations of sexual harassment.

- **Lack of experience/difficulties accessing experience in a school**

- **Financial considerations**: Fears around affordability and being out of pocket short and/or long-term. In relation to this, candidates seek reassurance most fundamentally a) that they have the funds to train, but also b) that they are on the

right career path and will succeed, such that the investment is less of 'a gamble' and c) that the salary and progression opportunities will be there for them on qualification.

- **Complexity of routes:** Some considered the routes into teacher training too complex and found the number of options/decisions to make a barrier. They felt that these, and funding options for teacher training, should be simplified. However, the newness of the School Direct routes at the time of the research may be part of this perceived complexity.

- **Challenge of the training, and suitability for teaching**: Concerns were also felt in terms by candidates whether would be able to cope with the difficulty and the workload of the training itself, and teaching as a whole. This was particularly the case where candidates had not worked in a school beforehand, and where they had other heavy commitments on their time, such as a young family.

As mentioned, feedback differed little across the subjects. However, in design and technology, candidates tended to have experienced more barriers in terms of funding to train, confusion in the application process, and finding places in their specialism.

As mentioned in the above section on Missing Support, the research also identified a group who experienced particular barriers and therefore required particular support in their journey, these being candidates now living in the UK but who had been educated outside the UK. Issues these candidates needed to overcome included lack of familiarity with the UK education system, concerns about their level of English where this was a second language, difficulties finding out about the equivalency of their qualifications, and lack of a social network to go to for informal advice. More support from NCTL in these areas is likely to help expedite this group through the journey to teacher training[4].

Behaviour management

Behaviour management is a significant concern held by candidates across the subjects. Some press on to training without overcoming their concerns, while others seek information and reassurance before application. They tend to seek these in the following sources:

- Conversations with family and friends with teaching experience i.e. peer testimonies.

---

[4] It may be useful to note here that BMG fed back on emerging findings this area as fieldwork progressed, and understands that a dedicated programme of support is being rolled out to support candidates of this nature.

- Information and reassurance from official government sources – online, at events and via one-to-one advice. Within this they value information on tried and tested approaches to behaviour management.
- School experience in an accommodating school.

A small number also did 'background reading' on approaches to behaviour management.

When selecting a school for a School Direct placement, location was the key factor but the likely level of 'bad behaviour' among pupils was also considered by candidates. Candidates tended to avoid selecting schools where pupil behaviour was anticipated to be a problem.

Choice of route

In depth interviews, candidates were consulted on decision-making between three options: School Direct Salaried, School Direct Fee Paying, and application to university-led training through GTTR. The four key factors driving choice of route appear to be as follows:

- Financial viability
- Location (and having control over location/knowing this in advance of application)
- Level of awareness and understanding of the different options available
- Preference between learning in the classroom or university environment.

Among those applying to School Direct, financial viability was perhaps the main factor they mentioned when describing their decision-making, in particular for those on the salaried route, due to its ability to offer a regular income. The salaried route was often considered the first-choice between the two School Direct routes, if you had the required experience.

Being able to train locally made both School Direct routes affordable and convenient. School Direct candidates also considered learning 'on the job' the most effective way to train, and this appeared to be a particular preference for career changers and finders, some of whom had already spent years in academia, or for other reasons considered themselves past the stage in life where they sought to attend university.

In contrast candidates applying for university-led training perceived that you would receive more support from a university than you would on a School Direct place. Some perceived the PGCE (post-graduate certificate in education) as a more recognised qualification or the training broader due to undertaking placements in multiple schools. Some did not feel ready to enter the classroom immediately on starting training.

Levels of awareness and understanding also played a role in which training route candidates selected in 2013. Among those applying to university-led training through

GTTR, some had little or no awareness of the new School Direct routes and what these entailed (or had not become aware until too late in the process to decide to follow a School Direct route). Student candidates may have relied on information about routes from their university, which focused on university-led training. Others may have heard or seen some information on School Direct but considered GTTR the 'safer' route on account of it being more established.

Candidates made multiple applications to different routes where they wanted to maximise their opportunity of being successful, or where they wanted to cover all bases in case they had not understood the implications of one route fully. In some cases where they applied only to one route, they understood that there were no School Direct places in their local area for their subject (at the time they came to apply).

Candidates were generally too busy to follow media coverage in detail, but reported seeing a mix of positive and negative coverage on School Direct. Those who proceeded to application generally dismissed any negatives they had seen in the media, but feedback suggests that, among those who do not proceed to teacher training, bad press on training routes, and on teaching as a whole, can contribute to their negative mindset.

Choice of School Direct school/provider

The research highlights location as the uppermost factor in School Direct candidates' decision-making on where they train to teach. This is about convenience (keeping ones commute short and not having to relocate) but also affordability (petrol/other transport costs).

Other factors considered are whether the School Direct school is a 'good school' and whether the provider has a 'good reputation'. This is judged through a mix of informal sources e.g. word-of-mouth testimonies, and by taking account of the school's Ofsted grade. Some candidates also described looking for a friendly school, with a positive ethos, which they picked up through their communications with them and visits.

Now on their training, a small number of candidates interviewed felt that they would not prioritise location to such an extent if they had their time again, recommending that future candidates take account of aspects such as the level of support given to candidates by the school and provider. Given that candidates' value real-life input (see above) and seek out the testimonies of others, information on which schools in a region offer the best support to trainees is likely to be part of decision-making on school/provider going forwards.

Comparisons by subject and life-stage

With the exception of design and technology candidates (who appeared to experience more barriers than other subject candidates in 2013), the shortage subject itself

appeared to impact little on candidates' journey to teacher training. Generally, candidates in shortage subjects were aware they were in demand and felt motivated by the support available to them, the funding, and the prospect of good job opportunities on qualification.

However, candidate life-stage at application, i.e. whether they were students, career finders and career changers, did appear to make a difference in several areas of the research. Firstly, there is a suggestion that the GTTR route was particularly well-suited to students, since it is a continuation of their university-led training. In the online survey of applicants to GTTR, 66% overall were successful in their application but this varied from 87% of students to 51% and 50% respectively of career changers and finders.

Students also appear to apply earlier. Asked when they made their application, students were more likely to apply in the autumn (64% in October-December 2012) than career finders or changers (49% and 45% respectively applying in October-December 2012).

Among career finders and career changers in particular, School Direct appeared to be a trigger for candidates to begin exploring teacher training. This is likely to be in part due to the fact that they are not at university and therefore less likely to be hearing about university- led training. But also career finders and changers are more likely to have significant commitments to time and finances, such as families and mortgages, and so the ability to train locally, with a salary or bursary to fund this, is particularly appealing.

Some career finders and changers felt that they did need a little extra support when making their application, on account of being out of the university system and not having access to mentors and tutors. They were also more likely to encounter barriers in terms of taking time off to attend tests and interviews, and valued choice/flexibility in the timing of these, where feasible.

Encouraging earlier applications

The question of why people apply when they do was added to the areas for investigation after the start of fieldwork and as such there is less evidence on this than other areas. Nevertheless, evidence gathered suggests that this is driven by a combination of a) at what point in the year candidates started exploring their options seriously and b) how long it takes them to research and clarify these and meet the requirements for training before they apply.

In terms of when people start being interested, some are triggered by advertising, underlining the importance of timely advertising and communications from NCTL. A small number also mentioned new year as a prompt (e.g. to change career). But more commonly candidates felt that they began putting time into exploring their options at a stage determined by their own personal circumstances. These included finishing a thesis or other academic qualification, the birth of a child, redundancy, moving to the UK etc.

NCTL therefore is likely to have more influence in determining the time it takes candidates to explore teaching and the training options available. Candidates commonly describe the application process itself as 'a rush' and as such they value having support on hand to clarify requirements and help overcome any obstacles arising. As mentioned, support in getting candidates experience in a school and answering finance-related queries are both likely to expedite the process to help candidates apply earlier.

In terms of student candidates, university advisors may be an important group for NCTL to engage with in terms of helping familiarise students with all available routes to teacher training, and also in getting them to application stage as early as possible. This is suggested by the fact that 15% of applicants to university-led training used support on campus. Depth interviews likewise suggest that, university tutors, mentors and careers advisers can be an influence. In some cases tutors tried to dissuade candidates from training with School Direct in 2013 on the basis of its recent introduction. Some candidates unaware of the range of support available from NCTL considered that universities could do more to promote Get into Teaching resources, and registration.

The journey in stages

Below we have divided the journey to teacher training into four stages with the aim of characterising each in terms of typical types of information and support valued by candidates, and the most common potential threats and barriers to their journey.

1) Phase 1: Latent/initial interest

Triggers: Initial interest is triggered by a range of different factors, most predominantly experience in a school or in an education/training role; and knowing other teachers and being encouraged by them. Other factors include being inspired by former teachers at school; becoming a parent and understanding the impact teachers have; being passionate about one's subject; and seeing information or advertising about teaching e.g. becoming aware of funding available to train and of the shortage of teachers in that subject.

Needs and Demands: At this stage candidates are interested in finding out about the life of a teacher, the challenges of teaching, whether they themselves are capable of and suited to teaching, financial rewards, likely job opportunities and progression opportunities.

Candidates are receptive to advertising about teaching, including information about funding to train and testimonies of other teachers about teaching and teacher training. They value support from schools and from support bodies to gain experience in a school.

The key aspects of the appeal of teaching as described by candidates in depth interviews were:

- the ability to make a difference and have a positive impact on people's lives;

- the opportunity to inspire children on a particular subject and make it fun;

- the challenge and variability of the role;

- stability/job security;

- career progression opportunities;

- the holidays/hours (suiting parents for example).

Threats: The initial interest stage is often a delicate one as the candidate has not invested time in the process and so it is easier to leave the journey to training. There is competition from other careers at this stage: 6 in 10 of those interviewed at an NCTL stand at a careers fair were considering other professions.

Fears about not being capable of teaching, including fears around behaviour management are common at this stage. There is almost a perception that some people are born to be teachers, and candidates fear that they are not one of them. Some also have concerns that teaching has a high workload or is stressful.

A minority perceive that they are not ready/mature enough to handle teaching or conversely too old to enter teaching. Advertisements that emphasise the variety of people who enter teaching, including the variety of ages, are likely to be reassuring.

Candidates are encouraged to get some experience in a school, but where schools are unresponsive or unaccommodating this can be a barrier.

2) Phase 2: Exploration of options

Triggers: A new circumstance or information motivates the candidate to begin to picture him or herself as a potential teacher trainee, and to begin exploring next steps and options to train. There is a high variability at this stage in how proactive/passive candidates are in their approach and whether they use formal channels of support or not. Use of online resources as a minimum is standard. Other sources include the Get into Teaching helpline, advisors, events, webchat and other DfE/NCTL channels; support direct from a school, university-based careers/finance services, the Jobcentre, Connexions, the Student Loans Company and (for MFL candidates) the British Council.

Needs and Demands: Candidates are interested in establishing whether training is feasible for them, including finding out subject knowledge requirements, qualifications and information on routes into teaching. Finance and location issues receive particular attention, followed by the standards of the school (with pupil behaviour a key consideration: Schools known to have good behaviour are likely to be favoured).

Candidates seek clear information on the options available to them, in particular in respect of the cost of training and funding available, and location of training (school/provider) but also support in navigating these and making the right choices to suit

their circumstances. They may need help interpreting their qualifications in relation to the requirements set out. They seek concise information on the requirements they need to fulfil and next steps e.g. skills tests. They look for bespoke information and reassurance that they understand the detail before they take the next step in applying. They also seek to understand the workload involved on the course, to ensure that they can cope with it.

Threats: The key threats at this stage are not being able to clarify or secure funding to train or find a place to train in a convenient location. Growing awareness of the workload and commitment involved in training also poses a threat in that candidates may decide that they cannot fit the likely demands of the training with other commitments e.g. family.

But complexity is also a threat, and as School Direct becomes more established candidates will be looking for greater clarity on all of the implications of which route they choose, and all the steps they need to take to follow training in that route. Depth interviews reflect that some candidates in 2013 found the routes to teacher training complex and confusing. 12% of careers fair visitors leaving the NCTL stand described themselves as not very confident and 7% not confident at all that they knew what the next steps were to enter the teaching profession.

3) Phase 3: Application

Candidates complete their application(s) online. Some apply via multiple routes, seeking to maximise the opportunity or to cover all bases. Others apply to just one, due to having a specific preference for one route or lack of awareness/understanding of what is involved in the other routes.

Needs and Demands: Candidates seek information on what are the necessary steps and requirements and what factors will contribute to a successful application. They sometimes seek help as they complete the application itself e.g. on personal statements or selection of schools on School Direct. Time is of the essence at this stage. Irrespective of the length of the journey to this stage, candidates describe this part of the journey as rushed and value prompt responses. Premier Plus support is highly valued to keep candidates informed and motivated through this very active stage of the process.

Threats: Applicants in 2013 expressed frustration at the way the portal for School Direct applications worked, but this threat may have been removed by a new system introduced in 2014. Frustrations included the inability to remove schools from the maximum three applications, after being declined, in order to apply to more schools.

Among career changers and finders in particular, time off to attend tests and interviews could be a significant challenge during the application process. Where candidates are struggling financially and making applications outside their region, interviews early in the morning can present a challenge since candidates cannot always afford hotel stays. Flexibility in the timing of interviews is therefore in demand.

4) Phase 4: Post-application

Candidates wait to hear the result of their application(s) then accept or reject offers. Offers rarely present themselves at exactly the same time and in some cases, where candidates made multiple applications to maximise their opportunity, they accept the first received (due to wanting security), even if the other route/school may have been preferable.

Needs and Demands: After application, candidates mainly seek reassurance that they are still 'in the system' and that their application is being processed. Unsuccessful candidates seek feedback on their applications and communications generally if they are to be encouraged to consider making a further application at some stage.

Threats: At this stage, it is much rarer for candidates to describe issues leading them to potentially exit the journey to training, given they have invested a lot of time and effort. However, again, the importance of finance and location comes through the feedback, with isolated issues arising relating to unforeseen costs or being placed with a school/provider they cannot commute to easily.

In the time between application and acceptance, silence is a real threat as candidates become anxious and may begin exploring other careers, or at least ways to maintain their income. Equally, where candidates are unsuccessful, silence can dissuade them from considering applying again at any stage, by contributing to a sense of failure (especially where applicants have received a high level of communications throughout the journey, since the contrast appears marked).

Conclusions and considerations

The research has identified key barriers and concerns among shortage subject applicants and also key motivations and triggers to undertake teacher training. In particular it has highlighted the appeal of being able to train locally via School Direct, the role of advertising, the importance of salaries and bursaries, and the value placed on Premier Plus and other tailored advice services where used, complementing widely-used online resources.

Some final recommendations for consideration are provided below:

Reducing complexity: Routes to teaching and the financial considerations attached to these were seen as confusing and complex by many candidates applying to train in 2013/14. While the timing of the research likely played a role, there is clear demand for information that can help simplify choices for candidates.

The research strongly supports the retention/extension of NCTL's channels of support that provide bespoke advice and guidance in these areas.

Understanding of routes among candidates had been impacted by which contact points had been used and therefore closer working among the organisations that act as contact points on the journey (NCTL, universities, Teach First, Jobcentre etc) is also likely to be beneficial in clarifying options and next steps for candidates.

Peers and predecessors: While NCTL resources already make wide use of case-studies and peer recommendations, the research emphasised the continued demand for this type of information. This includes peer insights on different stages of the journey and barriers and concerns and how these were overcome. A channel that would allow School Direct candidates to access feedback from current/past candidates about School Direct schools/providers, would be likely to be popular.

Providing experience in schools: Candidates who were successful in their application to ITT described school experience as beneficial in helping them on their journey and did not generally talk of the experience as off-putting. However, difficulty in accessing school experience was seen as off-putting; caused delays and was seen as a potential exit point from the journey to training (although more research would be needed to quantify this). Consideration should therefore be given to ways in which schools can be encouraged to welcome more candidates in for observation/experience or at least reply with an encouraging response.

Further research could usefully be undertaken in a number of areas, including:

- Research to explore both the positive impact and ant negative impact of experience in a school before application (among applicants and non applicants).

- Research on the value and impact of a range of approaches to informing and reassuring candidates on behaviour management.

- Research looking in more detail at perceptions of School Direct in terms of its qualification status compared to other routes (this was touched upon in interviews, with the suggestion the School Direct candidates were less motivated by the appeal of a qualification per se, but this area could be explored more fully).

- Research comparing attitudes towards School Direct now that it has been bedded more fully as a route to ITT.

- When designing any new guidance relating to routes and finance option, consideration should be given to including a sample of teaching candidates in the design process.

National College for
Teaching & Leadership