

Ofsted ITE Framework Consultation 2020 – GA response (March 2020)

This is the Geographical Association's¹ (GA's) response to the Government consultation launched 27.1.2020, of which full details can be found at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/initial-teacher-education-inspection-framework-and-handbook-2020-inspecting-the-quality-of-teacher-education>

It is made by the Chief Executive of the Geographical Association and its Teacher Education Special Interest Group (TESIG). It draws on the expert views of TESIG members and geography teacher educators who responded to a consultation exercise run by the GA.

Proposal 1: introduction of two key judgement areas only

Agree.

The GA strongly supports:

- the emphasis on the quality of subject-specific training and the subject focus throughout the grade descriptors;
- subject training that is 'ambitious in scope' and 'rigorous' (p 39);
- training in assessment that is 'of the subject domain' rather than 'to the test' (p 41);
- the references to 'scholarship relevant to their subject' and 'research in the context of subject community debates' (p 40) and the proposal that trainers should model and foster 'informed use of relevant professional and academic literature in subjects' (p 42);
- the explicit inclusion of key education traditions, practices and debates within the specialist subjects (p 41);
- the expectation that subject leaders and trainers have appropriate subject qualifications and experience (p 46);
- the proposal that leaders and managers should create opportunities for professional development for subject trainers and mentors (p 46).

The GA believes that:

- the ITE curriculum should be collaborative and all providers should aim for this. It should not be left to individual schools to decide, independently of the ITE provider, what experiences trainees have in schools and what they teach. However, a collaborative curriculum is more easily planned and implemented in a small-scale partnership than a large, multi-faceted one – for example where ITE providers partner a large number of schools or

¹ The GA is the subject community for teachers of geography. Its charitable mission is to further geographical knowledge and understanding through education. Its journals, publications, professional events, website and local and online networks support teachers and share their ideas and practice. The GA represents the views of geography teachers and plays a leading role in public debate relating to geography and education.

where schools provide placements for more than one provider. It would be reasonable for Ofsted to have transitional arrangements for inspection to give more complex provision the time to adapt;

- the DfE ITT core content framework is a minimum entitlement but its content prioritises some views of knowledge, teaching and learning (e.g. cognitive load) and omits others. Good subject specific training should invite trainees to critically consider a *broad* view of teaching and learning and include opportunities for them to engage critically with signature pedagogies for the subject. In geography, these include fieldwork and geographical enquiry;
- the ITE curriculum for geography trainees should include the purpose of training to be a geography teacher;
- there should be more explicit reference to the role of subject associations, e.g. in bullet 4, page 38 of the framework, add the phrase '*and subject associations*' to 'professional networks'.

The GA also believes that as part of the quality of education and training judgement, it is important for inspectors to:

- assess how well the partnership evaluates whether geography mentors have the subject expertise and the capability to play their part in the agreed training;
- consider carefully whether sufficient time is provided to fully engage trainees in subject specific training;
- identify clearly those partnerships where the subject training is weak, lacking in rigour or where there is no effective leadership by a subject specialist.

Proposal 2: a new methodology for gathering inspection evidence

Neither agree or disagree.

The GA supports:

- the removal of the focus on a trainee's teaching.

The GA is concerned about:

- the ability of non-specialist inspectors to make valid judgements in specialist subject areas. We believe that it requires specialist understanding in a subject to identify from discussions/observations with subject trainers and subject mentors whether the content is appropriate in a particular context, up-to-date in terms of subject curriculum thinking and whether it draws on the most relevant professional readings in the subject. In particular, we are concerned about non-specialist inspectors:
 - judging whether the curriculum introduces secondary trainees to 'the scope and richness of the knowledge that pupils can acquire in each subject' (p 40);

- judging whether a trainee's subject mastery of knowledge and skills is evident in their planning and teaching (p 43);

We note that Ofsted's own research has called into question the accuracy of judgements by non-specialists in subject-specific contexts (see Ofsted's publications on lesson observation and workbook scrutiny in school inspection, June 2019). We doubt that non-specialist inspectors can make accurate subject judgements in contexts such as these, even if they are provided with written guidance. The GA is aware, for example, that the phrase 'knowing more and remembering more' (p 23) has been misinterpreted in the context of the 2019 school EIF, by reducing geographical learning to factual recall rather than, and/or at the expense of, deepening knowledge;

- the use of evidence from trainee visits in school to judge how trainees are 'implementing the centrally taught ITE programme' (consultation proposals). ITE providers do not determine how schools teach and trainees may not have the freedom to implement what the ITE programme has taught them. It is becoming increasingly difficult for trainees in some schools to move outside the school's curriculum so that they can learn how to plan and teach, rather than follow the approaches set within the school. If it is to become more important for a planned ITE programme to be implemented across a partnership, then the means will also need to be found to support and incentivise all the stakeholders within the partnership to deliver that programme. The proposals do not set out how this is to be achieved;
- the small sample of visits planned in each subject to enable 'Observation of mentor feedback and discussions with mentors will allow inspectors to check how well the centrally taught programme is known and embedded by mentors' (consultation proposals). In principle the GA agrees that the ITE programme should be dovetailed in terms of school and university/SCITT provision, but a specific focus observed might not reflect the central programme for very good reasons e.g. it relates to a specific need for that trainee;
- the contributions expected from subject mentors as 'expert colleagues' (page 42) in the current context. The GA believes that high-quality subject mentoring is essential for good training and supports that subject mentors have a key role as 'expert' as set out in the ITT core content framework. However, this expectation is problematic at the present time because of several constraints:
 - schools are under no obligation to work with a provider
 - the role of 'mentor' often has no formal recognition in schools
 - mentor time and training often have no clear allocation of ITE resources - ring-fenced finance is required
 - teacher workload, the current shortage of geography teachers and the high turnover of mentors make it difficult for many providers to find good school placements with expert colleagues to act as mentors. The 'geography' (the spatial distribution) of high-quality geography in schools and the availability of geography mentoring skills and capacity is highly uneven.

Inspectors should not judge ITE providers adversely in aspects of implementation that are beyond their control. Transition arrangements are required in relation to judging effective mentoring, until there is national guidance for schools about their expected role in ITE and the resources available. It would be helpful for the Ofsted school and ITE frameworks to be closely aligned in terms of expectations of mentors and ITE involvement.

Proposal 3: the one-stage model of inspection

Agree.

The GA welcomes this to reduce workload and stress. However, particularly in visits made during term two, Ofsted must be alert when judging the quality of training to the partial view that trainees will have of their training when they are midway through the process.

Proposal 4: short and long telephone calls prior to inspection

Agree.

The GA believes that more forward planning will help inspections to run smoothly and improve communications between the provider and inspection team. However, five working days' notice would be more appropriate in larger providers to gather all the information required in para 60.

The shorter time for preparation for subject survey inspections is inadequate to make appropriate and necessary arrangements for school visits and meetings with school staff. This is particularly the case since many geography ITE subject leaders do not work full time in this role.

Proposal 5: spring and summer term inspections only

Agree.

While we agree with Ofsted's rationale for this, it should be noted that most face to face subject training takes place in the autumn term and will not be seen during inspection. For the reason noted above regarding trainees' views on training, those providers inspected in the summer will be able to demonstrate different evidence to those inspected in the spring. This needs to be taken into consideration to ensure parity. For example, the online survey of current trainees is only available for summer term inspections (para 69).

Additional comments on Annex A. Instructions and guidance for focused thematic subject inspections

The GA strongly supports the return of focused thematic subject ITE inspections in geography. Subject reporting on the quality and effectiveness of subject-specialist training is essential to give ITE providers a benchmark for expectations of high quality and encourage improvement.

However, the draft handbook does not explicitly require that these are undertaken by subject specialists, but only that they 'are led by a specialist ITE lead inspector. These are inspectors who are contributing to national subject thematic studies and are experienced ITE lead inspectors.' If the inspectors involved are not subject specialists, this would be a cause for concern to the Association, for the reasons set out earlier.