



3 December 2025

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities
Department for Education
By Email

Dear Bridget,

I am writing on behalf of my constituents at the University of Brighton, regarding the decision to set off-the-job training hours for Teacher Degree Apprenticeships to 2,200 hours.

I have provided extracts from their letter, which has been anonymised, below.

Background

I am writing as a member of the team who have developed the new teacher degree apprenticeship route at the University of Brighton where we have committed to developing a robust, professionally and academically credible and successful new route for qualified status, a degree and an apprenticeship. Our commitment to this has been seen in our successful bids to be part of both the DfE Secondary Maths Funding Pilot and also the Office for Students Degree Apprenticeship Funding Competition where we have focused on supporting recruitment for applicants from under-represented groups (Black, Asian, LGBTQ+ and those from areas under-represented in HE). We have worked closely with employers from across our region of the South of England and beyond through our monthly employers' strategic oversight committee with 30 members to develop a model of the teacher degree apprenticeship that has been well received by employers and applicants and currently we have 23 secondary maths and 55 primary apprentices due to start this September.

Why we moved to a three year apprenticeship model

The critical issue is that we have taken the flexibility in the apprenticeship rules to make our route three years long rather than the recommended four years that the trailblazer group initially made. We made this decision based on feedback from employers and potential applicants and our successful experience in running similar undergraduate programmes (Troops to Teachers and BA Secondary Maths) that had the same proportions of off-the-job on on-the-job training. These routes were quality assured at different points by Ofsted in 2010, 2018 and 2024 and each time they were part of provision at primary and secondary that was assessed to be 'outstanding'. We share this point to emphasise that this decision has not been made lightly. We made sure to keep our DfE contacts informed of this decision to move to a three year model in February when this option became apparent after a meeting with them. At this point they shared their concerns about the model but said that we were entitled to do so. Based on this we have continued recruitment, validated the two routes through university processes and are due to start the courses in September.

Recent decision to move to 2200 hours off-the-job training

On 19 May we were told that the off-the-job training hours have been set as 2,200. Based on this model, which we have had explained by our DfE contacts (those listed below) as six hours per day, that is 367 days of off-the-job training. We have been told that this is to ensure that the course last four years and has two days a week of off-the-job training. The various (and changing) rationale for this decision that we have been presented with are listed well by the two emails below that we have received (in the first email its is justified based on feedback from unions and other providers, evidence of what quality is, the original aims of the trailblazer group, apprentice wellbeing concerns and the need to have sufficient time to complete degree elements. In the second email the justification has been narrowed to the preference to keep the initial plan of the trailblazer group and this being their preference).

Why we are concerned

We have serious concerns about this that we believe warrant review of this decision that are set out below:

- ***Parity between undergraduate initial teacher education courses and the teacher degree apprenticeship***

In the email below (Appendix A) there is reference to ensuring the degree is equivalent to the amount of learning on a 360 credit degree. The model in the teacher degree apprenticeship based on the 2,200 hours of off-the-job training on two days a week leads to a total of 5,500 hours of total training over the five days a week of the apprenticeship. There is a serious issue of parity here as the total hours to gain a degree and QTS for teacher education undergraduate courses of 360 credits is 3,600 hours (based on the standard of 10 hours per credit of learning that is used across the sector). This means that teacher degree apprentices are disadvantaged by having to complete an additional 50 per cent of time to gain the same qualification. This raises the question of whether the policy is based on a lack of faith in the candidates or a lack of faith in learning on the job on the part of the DfE. Either way this is a massive and unfair discrepancy for these apprentices.

- ***The lateness of this decision***

This decision was communicated to us on 19th May. In February when we spoke to the DfE of our plans to reduce the length of the apprenticeship to three years there was no indication this decision was coming. This means that the employers and schools we have recruited and the course we have validated does not now fit. We are left with a course that we are confident can be successful and make a success of this new route is now not able to run in the way advertised. We feel that the lateness of this decision is reason enough for the review as this is an unreasonable timeline to expect providers, employers and apprentices to respond to.

- The opaque nature of this decision***
We have been told that this decision is based on evidence and the feedback of various stakeholders. At no point have we been asked to comment or provide an alternative point of view. We have tangible evidence of success on equivalent routes to QTS and degree but have not been asked to give a view on this. This raises the question of policy making on the hoof based on listening to favoured or the loudest voices.
- Setting much higher off-the-job hours for teacher degree apprenticeships than other degree apprenticeships***
The off-the-job training hours for equivalent courses is much lower (e.g. Early Years Teacher – 1,531, Building services engineer – 1,392, Geoscientist – 1,392). This raises the question of fairness – why are teaching apprenticeships felt to so less able to learn on the job than apprentices on other degree apprentices?
- Undermining of the potential of the teacher degree apprenticeship***
Our belief that this setting of very high off-the-job training undermines the chance to create a successful teacher degree apprenticeship model. We believe passionately this can be a vehicle to find talented people who would not otherwise get into teaching and start to address the target of 6,500 new teachers. The inflexibility this number of hours is in danger of preventing the success of this route as it would be substantially cheaper and quicker for schools to pay tuition fees on an undergraduate course. This proposed model makes apprentices study for an additional 50 per cent longer to get the same qualification as equivalent students on undergraduate routes making this route less attractive for them. It also means if schools want to address teacher shortages and get teachers into the classroom it is cheaper and quicker for schools to recommend undergraduate courses. We do not believe this will support the goal of additional teachers due to the inflexibility it introduces into the degree apprenticeship model.”

I hope you will read this testimony and request for action with interest, and thank you for your attention to this matter.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Siân Berry MP
 Green Party, Brighton Pavilion

Appendix A

Thank you all for your time on Wednesday.

The decision to move away from typical duration to minimum hours was made to provide consistency and clarity across all apprenticeships following recent reforms around duration, announced in February.

On the back of this, we agreed with the apprenticeships policy team and IfATE that a minimum of 2200 OTJ training hours for the TDA was appropriate. This was based on a number of factors including the course being initially designed, in conjunction with trailblazers and IfATE, to be 45 months with 40% OTJ training. This length of course has been our strong and publicly stated preference as we think it balances such things as candidate experience, the amount of learning required to complete a full 360 credit degree and the pedagogy to qualify for QTS, and the viability to employers of the TDA. We believe the OTJ percentage fairly reflects that balance and equates to 2200 hours for a 45-month course.