

News story: Measures announced to ensure talented trainees get into teaching

Aspiring teachers across the country are set to benefit from a number of changes designed to allow them to begin training, and make a difference in the classroom, more quickly.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb has today (12 February) announced that thousands of would-be teachers are now eligible for three attempts at the professional skills tests they must pass to begin Initial Teacher Training (ITT) before they incur any cost, rather than one.

On top of this change – worth up to £77 per candidate – the government has removed the lock-out period that previously prevented candidates from re-taking tests for two years if they had been unsuccessful in two re-sits.

The changes follow feedback from the teaching profession and remove financial and administrative barriers – ensuring capable trainees do not give up on their hopes of becoming a teacher while they wait to re-take the tests.

Since the government introduced the more rigorous skills tests in 2012, the entry requirements to teacher training have remained unchanged so that only the very best and brightest enter the profession. Today's announcement builds on a number of measures to recruit and retain high-calibre teachers, including a £75million investment in teachers' professional development and follows the recruitment of 32,000 new trainees in 2017.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

Standards are rising, with 1.9million more children in good or outstanding schools since 2010 and a record number of teachers in our schools – 15,500 more than in 2010.

In 2012, the government introduced more rigorous skills tests for teachers to ensure they have the highest standards of English and maths. The bar for entrance to the teaching profession remains as high as ever, as parents and pupils would expect, and this is evidenced by the fact that the quality of new entrants into the profession is at an all-time high, with 19% of this year's cohort holding a first-class degree.

It is absolutely right that aspiring teachers can begin training as soon as they prove they are ready and these changes – backed by the profession – will help ambitious graduates to join the profession.

Professional bodies such as the National Association of School-Based Teacher

Trainers (NASBTT) and the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), have welcomed the changes.

Emma Hollis, Executive Director of NASBTT, said:

NASBTT welcomes these changes to the administration of the skills tests. We have seen all too many examples of candidates with excellent potential being locked out of the profession for the sake of one or two marks on a test. This move will keep the profession open to those who deserve the opportunity to train to teach.

James Noble-Rogers, Executive Director of UCET, said:

This is a sensible and pragmatic move. It will allow potentially good teachers who would otherwise have been kept out of the profession to begin their training.

In the past good candidates have been prevented from re-taking the skills tests because they failed by just one or two marks, often because of the pressure they experience having reached their final attempt.

The measures announced today will be effective from 15 February, but are relevant to all applicants who applied on or after 24 October 2017 – with refunds offered automatically. Candidates still need a degree for graduate training and all assessment criteria for Qualified Teacher Status remain unchanged.

The recently published 2017 Initial Teacher Training census showed that more than 32,000 new trainee teachers were recruited in a competitive labour market, with historic low unemployment rates and a growing economy, showing that the teaching profession continues to be an attractive career.

In full today's changes are:

- The removal of a lock-out period that previously prevented aspiring teachers from re-taking tests for two years;
- No limit on the number of tests, and the first three tests are free of charge to all candidates; and
- Refunds for anyone who has already paid for tests in this year's recruitment cycle – on or since 24 October 2017.

Today's news adds to a growing number of initiatives to attract the brightest and best into the teaching profession, including:

- Increasing bursaries to £26,000 for all trainees with a 2:2 or higher in the highest priority subjects; physics, languages, chemistry, biology, computing, geography and classics.

- Offering a £20,000 bursary for maths trainees followed by two additional early-career payments of £5k each (£7,500 if teaching in local authority areas where teachers are most needed) in their third and fifth year of teaching, if they have taught in a state school in England since completing their teacher training course.
- Offering scholarship schemes in six subjects for 2018/19; physics, maths, languages, chemistry, computing, and geography. Successful scholars will receive £28,000 tax-free in all subjects except maths, where scholars will receive £22,000 tax-free.
- Offering bursaries for English trainees have been increased to £15,000 for all trainees with a 2:2 or higher, and bursaries in all other subjects are unchanged for 2018 to 2019.