

Written evidence submitted by Education and Training Foundation (ETF) (ITN0007)

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important and timely inquiry into teacher numbers. As the national workforce development body for the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector in England, ETF plays a central role in supporting the recruitment, development, and retention of high-quality teaching professionals. Our remit encompasses initial teacher education, professional standards, continuous professional development, leadership, governance, and sector insight.
- 1.2. ETF's evidence indicates growing and persistent challenges in teacher recruitment and retention across the FE and Skills sector, particularly in priority subject areas such as English, maths, digital, and technical and vocational specialisms. These disciplines, which are essential for supporting national productivity and social mobility, rely on a workforce of dual professionals—educators who bring both deep industry expertise and strong pedagogical capability. However, the sector continues to lose these valued professionals to better pay and conditions in industry or other parts of the education system. Existing workforce shortages and pressures are compounded by regional disparities and rising demand for lifelong learning and reskilling. Research shows that teacher shortages, unqualified staff, and unfilled posts can seriously affect learner outcomes, particularly in foundational subjects such as English, maths and science (De Witte et al., 2023). Without sustained investment in the recruitment, retention and professional development of dual professionals, there is a real risk that learners will face disengagement, missed qualifications, and reduced opportunities—undermining the very purpose of FE and Skills.
- 1.3. Whilst schools benefit from systematic workforce planning, for example through DfE's 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, there is currently no overarching strategy to track and tackle workforce shortages in Further Education and Skills, despite the sector suffering the same recruitment and retention crisis. We call for a national FE and Skills workforce strategy to sit alongside school workforce planning, supported by robust data, a renewed focus on professional status and progression, and sustainable investment in recruitment and retention. ETF is equipped and ready to collaborate with government and sector partners to co-develop such a strategy.
- 1.4. Our response broadly focuses on three key recommendations which we believe will help to increase teacher numbers in the Further Education (FE) and Skills sector:
 - A national workforce strategy for the sector—underpinned by high-quality data—to help recruit, retain and improve the skills of the FE and Skills workforce
 - Government to devolve further funding to regional bodies to invest in tailored solutions to local workforce development priorities, teacher shortages and skills needs

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- A kitemarking system for providers of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to raise the quality of teacher training, support the recruitment and retention of good teachers, and improve student outcomes.

2. About us

- 2.1. Founded in 2013, with an official purpose to drive professionalism and improve teaching and learning, the ETF is the professional body and membership organisation for the whole Further Education (FE) and Skills sector. We set the quality standards for teaching and leadership, deliver Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and manage the Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Status (QTLS) and Advanced Teacher Status (ATS). ETF has more than twelve years of experience as a trusted strategic partner of the Department for Education, which has included assessing workforce needs and designing national development programmes that raise the quality of teaching, build leadership and governance capacity in the FE and Skills system and improve learning outcomes.

3. Introduction and context

- 3.1. The Further Education (FE) and Skills sector is at the heart of the UK's economic growth agenda and its main function is to provide technical and vocational skills to the nation's workforce to improve business capability. There are over 3 million FE learners in the UK (DfE, 2024a) and the sector is a major driver of social mobility, community cohesion and increased productivity (Lisauskaite et al., 2021; Learning and Skills Council, 2007; BIS, 2015).
- 3.2. There is, however, a well-documented shortage of qualified teachers and trainers that will adversely impact on the Nation's ability to secure the desired growth. For example, the FE and Skills sector has teacher/trainer shortages in:
- English and maths (essential for progression and employability)
 - Digital skills (critical to national productivity)
 - Technical subjects (e.g., construction, engineering, green skills, health and social care)
 - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- 3.3. These roles, and the wider teaching body across the sector, require industry-experienced teachers and trainers (dual professionals) who are often lost to the sector due to more competitive pay and conditions in industry or other parts of the education system. Yet, further education, like the rest of the education system, is experiencing serious challenges in recruitment and retention. Teacher shortages have doubled between 2017 and 2022, putting strain on existing resourcing, and there is a shortage of dual professionals delivering teaching in areas such as construction, which is impeding the delivery of technical education (Edge Foundation, 2024). Additionally, low staff morale, heavy workloads and a lack of training opportunities are putting off talented professionals from joining the sector (Augur, 2019; DfE, 2020).

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- 3.4. The challenge of increasing teacher numbers in FE and Skills requires an organised and sustained strategy which recognises and invests in the dual professionalism of the workforce, develops pedagogical skills, and supports educators to stay current through industry placements, professional development, and structured collaboration with employers and industry.

4. The workforce required in further education

4.1. *A systematic plan for workforce development*

- 4.1.1. ETF's insight and programme evaluations highlight key barriers to the recruitment and retention of teachers in the FE and Skills sector:
- Lack of career pathways and status parity compared to school and higher education teaching careers
 - Workload and accountability pressures, especially for those with teaching responsibilities across multiple levels
 - Regional disparities, with cold spots in teacher supply
 - Salary disparities, particularly when recruiting from industry.
- 4.1.2. In addition, the sector is under increasing pressure to deliver T levels and other technical qualifications, reskilling and upskilling opportunities for adults, and the lifelong learning entitlement. The sector also plays an important role in supporting place-based economic renewal and social mobility. A disproportionate number of learners in the FE and Skills sector have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and/or are from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a third of students coming from the 20% most deprived areas in England (Social Mobility Commission, 2020). This requires not only more teachers, but also a more diverse and flexible teaching workforce equipped with up-to-date knowledge, pedagogical skills and expertise in SEND.
- 4.1.3. Whilst schools benefit from systematic workforce planning, for example through the Teacher Workforce Model, bursaries and DfE recruitment campaigns (DfE 2024b), there is currently no overarching structure for tracking, forecasting and driving teaching capacity within the FE and Skills sector. DfE's 2019 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy focused on schools without mention of Further Education and Skills, despite the sector suffering the same recruitment and retention crisis. There is a need to tackle the fragmented approach in FE and Skills to ensure greater parity between secondary and FE workforce planning. Although a Further Education Workforce Strategy was developed in 2014 (BIS, 2014), this is over a decade old, and we need a revised strategy that better supports the current needs and workforce requirements of the FE and Skills sector. This cannot be part of a wider schools strategy; given the unique nature of FE and Skills, this blueprint would not fit and the sector requires its own workforce strategy which recognises and invests in the dual professionalism of the workforce, training dual professionals as skilled educators and supporting them to retain deep and up-to-date

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technical knowledge through industry placements, collaboration with employers, and professional development that is informed by the latest industry trends and technological advancements.

- 4.1.4. A systematic plan for workforce development will help the sector to address teacher recruitment and retention challenges, including:
- Persistent high levels of staff attrition (Edge Foundation, 2024)
 - High teacher vacancy rates in the subjects of environmental science, (22.5%), construction (9.6%), agriculture (9.4%) and engineering (8.9%) (DfE, 2024c; Smith and Husband, 2024)
 - Shortages of dual professionals delivering teaching in areas such as construction, which are hampering technical education (Edge Foundation, 2024).
- 4.1.5. Without such a strategy, FE and Skills workforce challenges will have a knock-on effect on learners, leading to inconsistencies in teaching quality and variations in learner attendance, attainment and progression (Ofsted, 2023). Additionally, gaps in specialist subject areas critical to economic growth, such as digital, maths and green skills, will continue to grow (Edge Foundation, 2024).
- 4.1.6. **ETF recommends that a national workforce strategy for the sector is needed to help recruit and retain teachers, improve the skills of the FE and Skills workforce, and drive up teaching quality and learner outcomes.**
- 4.1.7. A comprehensive sector workforce strategy needs to be aligned with the school workforce plan but tailored to the sector's unique context. Such a strategy could:
- **Make accurate forecasts about evolving skills needs and workforce gaps across different regions**, so that teacher recruitment and training strategies can be aligned with local and national priorities
 - **Expand routes into teaching**, introducing more flexible and funded pathways for career changers and industry professionals, including bursaries and placement support
 - **Strengthen professional standards** (QTLS/ ATS) to support parity of status with school and university educators
 - **Provide relevant and high quality CPD and structured mentoring** to support teacher retention, build a sustainable workforce, and drive up the quality of teaching and leadership
 - **Train dual professionals** as skilled educators whilst also helping them to retain deep and current technical knowledge so that their pedagogy is informed by evolving industry demands and technological advancements
 - **Recognise and support technical and vocational pedagogy** as a national priority for workforce development

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- **Address the shortages of teachers in SEND**, and support practitioners to address the needs of learners with SEND, who make up 1 in 5 learners in FE and Skills institutions (Natspec, 2022)
 - **Prioritise equity, diversity and inclusion** in recruitment so that the workforce better reflects the student base, as when students feel known, respected and included, they are more likely to persist and succeed (EEF, 2024).
- 4.1.8. In doing so, the strategy would help to attract and retain good teachers, support parity of status with professionals in schools and universities, and strengthen the perception of FE and Skills as a career of choice for talented professionals and graduates.
- 4.1.9. ETF is an independent charity with a remit covering the whole of the FE and Skills sector, including convening stakeholders to work on system-wide issues such as the recruitment and retention crisis, which impede high-quality teaching—see our [Changing Systems of Change Report](#) (Maylor et al., 2024). ETF has significant experience in analysing workforce development needs, developing workforce plans and delivering national professional development programmes on behalf of government, and so is ideally placed to lead this work. For example:
- Between 2014 and 2020, ETF was the government’s official body for reporting on workforce demographics and development needs using Staff Individualised Records
 - In 2023/24, over 6,800 FE teachers completed ETF’s Professional Standards self-assessment tool, helping them to understand which aspects of their practice they need to develop, and then supporting them on their professional development journey
 - ETF has a track record of developing national CPD programmes that improve professional practice and learner outcomes—see our [Impact Report](#) (ETF, 2025a):
 - 100% of those who achieved ATS said that it has had a positive impact on their practice, learners and colleagues
 - 99% of professionals who achieved QTLS said it has had a positive impact on their teaching practice
 - 95% of leaders said they are more knowledgeable and better equipped to meet the responsibilities of their role after taking part in a leadership programme
 - 92% of FE professionals said taking part in ETF’s maths, English and ESOL CPD will have a positive impact on their professional practice
 - 96% of those who attended ETF’s SEND professional development activity said it will have a positive impact on their professional practice.
- 4.1.10. Ofsted produces reports and intelligence on provider strengths and weaknesses, which enables the sharing of good practice across geographical boundaries. However, our sector-facing teams consistently advise us that more could be done to support providers. We recognise that Ofsted itself cannot assume a greater development focus without compromising its independence of judgement - in other words, it cannot be seen to be

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‘marking its own homework’. ETF could support Ofsted by using provider performance data to create workforce development plans and training that address the findings of inspection.

4.2. *Using data and insights to understand the workforce required in FE*

4.2.1. A significant barrier to developing a sector workforce strategy and increasing teacher numbers in Further Education and Skills is the lack of a robust and consistent data infrastructure. Unlike the schools sector, which benefits from the Teacher Workforce Model and detailed national datasets to inform planning, FE does not currently have a comprehensive, centralised system for tracking teacher supply, demand, attrition, or pipeline development. The fragmentation of provision across colleges, independent training providers, and adult community learning contributes to this challenge.

4.2.2. ETF recommends that the Department for Education commission a review and enhancement of FE workforce data collection and analytics. Improving and strengthening the consistency and quality of FE workforce data will better enable effective local and national planning.

4.2.3. Specifically, there is a need to:

- Strengthen the Staff Individualised Record (SIR) system by making submission mandatory across all provider types, not just grant-funded institutions, to ensure a complete picture of the workforce
- Establish a national FE Workforce Observatory—potentially led by ETF in partnership with DfE and sector bodies—to provide real-time intelligence on workforce demographics, recruitment hotspots, and subject-specific shortages
- Develop a common data framework for measuring workforce diversity, qualifications, teaching hours, attrition, and professional status attainment, aligned to sector priorities and national skills needs
- Link workforce data to learner outcomes, so that workforce planning is directly informed by pedagogical impact and course viability.

4.2.4. ETF is committed and ready to support government in strengthening data collection, analysis and transparency to underpin a workforce strategy for the sector. High-quality, consistent data will enable the effective design and evaluation of strategic workforce interventions, supporting a pipeline of high-quality teachers in FE and Skills.

5. Government decision-making on where to invest or intervene to address need

5.1. *ETF’s recommendation on where to invest to address need: meeting regional skills gaps*

5.1.1. Within and alongside national workforce planning, it is important to consider FE and Skills workforce needs at a regional and local level. The UK has a wealth of industry specialisms across its regions, such as manufacturing in the Midlands, aerospace in the South West, and the gaming sector in Liverpool (House of Commons, 2024; Houghton, 2024). It also has larger gaps in skills between different parts of the country than most other nations

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(Learning and Work Institute, 2025). Sector leaders engaged by ETF agree that solutions to regional skills disparities should be at the forefront of economic development, increasing teacher numbers, and building a stronger FE and Skills system (Smith and Rowland, 2024).

5.1.2. ETF recommends that government devolves further funding to combined authorities and regional partnerships to invest in tailored solutions to local workforce development priorities, teacher shortages and skills needs.

5.1.3. Local intelligence and evidence can be used to develop regional workforce development programmes for the FE and Skills sector, tailored to address local recruitment and retention challenges. Local providers and employers are often best placed to pilot innovative workforce development models, act with agility, and respond to evolving local recruitment and retention challenges.

5.1.4. With a team of expert regional development leads (RDLs), who co-ordinate engagement with local stakeholders and decision-makers, ETF is well placed to provide such intelligence about local workforce pressures and regional skills needs; as well as supporting providers and employers to address local challenges by drawing on our portfolio offer. ETF uses intelligence to drive its local CPD solutions, for example, we recently conducted a regional analysis of the changing skills needs across the Solent and EM3 (Surrey) Learning and Skills Improve Plan (LSIP) areas on behalf of the ALPS Partnership Ltd. We compared the changing technical skills profiles over five years for both areas against wider regional and national forecasts. Our work revealed that Solent has a strong need for 'blue' skills in marine and coastal industries. ETF's role in supplying region-based intelligence in this way can be scaled up and produced for stakeholders and government departments who are developing skills plans, recruitment and retention initiatives to meet local workforce priorities. ETF can further use the intelligence to support stakeholders to address local and national challenges (such as a shortage of English and maths teachers, digital skills, SEND) by developing tailored professional development solutions and through the delivery of professional statuses, QTLS and ATS, to improve teaching practices.

5.2. *ETF's recommendation on where to intervene to address need*

5.2.1. As part of a drive to increase teacher numbers in the FE and Skills sector, a priority is to ensure high standards of teacher training. Government has raised concerns that increases in the number of private training providers entering the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) market has impacted negatively on the quality of government-funded ITE programmes (DfE, 2023). This lack of consistency has implications for the workforce's future capability. Not only can it lead to pedagogical approaches that are inconsistent or lack impact, leading to ineffective teaching and poor student outcomes (Ofsted, 2023), it can also

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result in teachers feeling unsupported, out of their depth, and leaving the profession prematurely, causing disruption to the student experience (Edge Foundation, 2024).

5.2.2. Focusing on improving the quality of teacher training will help to address the issue of retaining FE teachers.

5.2.3. ETF recommends that a kitemarking system is developed for ITE providers to ensure that teacher training programmes adhere to rigorous standards, support the recruitment and retention of good teachers, and improve outcomes for students.

5.2.4. The kitemark would be a beacon of excellence, recognising providers who are investing in the development of their infrastructure and faculty. An ITE kitemark would:

- Provide a register of high-quality providers who are authorised to offer government-funded teacher training courses
- Ensure rigour in curriculum design and a focus on evidence-based pedagogy that relates to different FE and Skills contexts
- Ensure ITE educators follow a programme of continuing professional development that is mapped to the sector's professional standards
- Be a strong value proposition to ITE trainees and those considering a career in teaching
- Provide high-quality support to ITE trainees so they are less likely to leave the profession prematurely
- Provide value-for-money for government-funded ITE provision
- Include a robust process and infrastructure check to ensure providers have the systems, governance, and learning environments needed to deliver high-quality training.

5.2.5. While Ofsted already inspects ITE provision, it only inspects a small proportion of providers each year, with some providers waiting several years to be inspected. In contrast, an ITE kitemark could be secured from the outset, and ahead of a provider's first Ofsted inspection, to endorse and ensure that ITE provision meets professional standards and has in place high quality teaching, resources, and appropriate curriculum design. It would function similarly to Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation that other industries (including higher education) adopt to ensure the quality of training and programmes (HESA, 2012).

5.2.6. We believe this approach would support increasing teacher numbers in FE, and ETF are well-placed and willing to take the first steps to introduce a kitemarking system:

- ETF as the sector's professional body is the leading FE and Skills stakeholder in teacher education working across the sector and is the primary author of the new ITE curriculum, working with its awarding body partners as the Chair of the ITE Forum
- ETF is the custodian of the professional standards for teachers and leaders which drive effective practice in the FE and Skills sector
- ETF owns and oversees Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) and Advanced Teacher Status (ATS), the main professional status programmes for the sector that focus

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on improving outcomes for practitioners, the latter leading to Chartered Teacher status (offered in collaboration with the Chartered College of Teachers). 27,500 FE and Skills practitioners have been awarded QTLS and 250 have achieved ATS. In 2023/24, 100% of professionals who achieved ATS said that it has had a positive impact on their practice, learners and colleagues. 99% of professionals who achieved QTLS said that it has had a positive impact on their teaching practice

- Since it was handed over by ETF's predecessor organisation, the Institute for Learning, ETF has maintained a register of over 22,000 practitioners, including those who have achieved QTLS.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. High-quality skills are instrumental to the UK's economic growth and social mobility, and the FE and Skills sector plays a pivotal role in delivering them. However, this potential is increasingly constrained by persistent recruitment and retention challenges, particularly in essential and technical subject areas. Without a stable and well-supported teaching workforce, the sector will struggle to meet current and future skills demands, exacerbating shortages and limiting national and regional productivity.
- 6.2. ETF's response focuses on workforce development to help secure the sector's future. Central to this is the concept of dual professionalism—the combination of industry-grade technical expertise and strong pedagogical practice. It is this blend that enables educators to translate real-world knowledge into transformational learning, inspire confidence in learners, and drive sustained learner outcomes. The sector must be empowered to recruit, develop and retain such professionals at scale if it is to fulfil its mission.
- 6.3. ETF has identified three key recommendations to address this national challenge. First, a comprehensive FE and Skills Workforce strategy, informed by robust data, is needed to align sector capacity with skills needs and to underpin sustained investment in professional development and dual professionalism. Second, greater devolution of funding to combined authorities and local consortia will unlock more responsive, place-based strategies to address regional teacher shortages and skills needs. Third, the introduction of a national kitemarking system for initial teacher education will ensure that teacher training programmes are high-quality, support the recruitment and retention of good teachers, and ultimately drive up outcomes for students. By embedding dual professionalism at the heart of workforce policy, we can ensure that every learner benefits from world-class teaching, every region is equipped to meet local employer demand, and every investment in skills delivers real economic and social returns. ETF welcomes the opportunity to support this transformation, ensuring that the FE and Skills sector has the high-quality dual professionals it needs to fulfil its critical role in the UK economy.

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