

BERA submission to the Education Select Committee's short inquiry to follow up its 2012 report Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best.

1. The British Educational Research Association (BERA) is a member-led charity which exists to encourage educational research and its application for the improvement of practice and public benefit. We strive to ensure the best quality evidence from educational research informs policy makers, practitioners and the general public and contributes to economic prosperity, cultural understanding, social cohesion and personal flourishing.

School Direct

2. BERA has grave concerns about some of the consequences of the rapid introduction of School Direct in England. The majority of BERA members work in University Departments of Education (UDEs) that have played a major role in the provision of professional education for teachers, including initial teacher education, over many years. Since the early 1990s and, in many cases, since long before that, these UDEs have operated their teacher education provision in partnerships with schools. There has been a steady improvement in the quality of provision of initial teacher education as was recognised in the Select Committee's recent report.
3. The current Government's commitment to encouraging schools to take the lead in recruitment of trainees has some attractive features in relation to enabling schools to connect their recruitment to perceived future staffing needs. But the withdrawal of core allocations from many UDEs indubitably brings considerable instability into the system as universities try to plan their own staffing needs strategically. There is therefore a significant threat to the maintenance of a 'critical mass' of high quality research-based expertise in UDEs and there will be a growing tendency for universities to employ staff on a casual and short-term basis which is unlikely to be conducive to the continuing improvement of quality in schools.
4. In addition to the direct impact on the quality of the contribution that universities are able to make to the improvement of the teaching profession, BERA is also very concerned about the likely impact on educational research infrastructure more generally. As we see the international evidence growing for encouraging an evidence base for teacher development it seems almost perverse to be weakening the university research capacity in education.
5. Clearly UDEs are not the only resource in research expertise in England. Many other organisations, including governmental, independent and third sector bodies play an important part, but in our view the UDEs have a very distinctive contribution to make through their blending of professional and research expertise.
6. The quality of British educational research is internationally recognised as being among the best in the world and there are now many examples, including in early years provision, formative assessment, the use of new technologies in education and links between education and the economy, in which UK research has led the field worldwide. If we wish to continue to be a world-leading player in these globally competitive times, then educational research in universities needs strong support and investment.

7. Such is BERA's concern about these matters that we have recently established an enquiry into Research and Teacher Education. This is being carried out jointly with the RSA. The inquiry is an outcome from a report authored by a working party jointly established by ERA and by the UCET and chaired by former BERA President, Prof Geoff Whitty. The report, published in 2012 and entitled Prospects for Education Research in Education Departments in Higher Education Institutions *in the UK*, is available at: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/bera-ucet-report>
8. The Inquiry is commissioning a number of papers on aspects of the relationship between research and teacher education, including the development of research-informed clinical practice, the role research plays in teacher quality and school improvement, the contribution of research to teachers' professional development as well as UK and international comparisons. The Inquiry has recently issued an open call for the submission of evidence (see <http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/research-and-teacher-education-bera-rsa-inquiry>) The Inquiry's Steering Group is itself submitting a response to your call. We would urge the Select Committee to monitor the outputs from the Inquiry as they are made available over the coming months. The final report is expected to be published early in 2014.
9. Finally, as a British membership organisation, we would draw attention to the uniqueness of the approaches currently being taken in England. Elsewhere in the UK there are serious efforts being made to enhance and develop the role of UDEs (and other subject departments) in teacher education and training. These developments are partly based on evidence drawn from other systems where such approaches appear to be linked with improved pupil outcomes and raised standards.

College of Teaching

10. In principle BERA strongly supports the creation of a self-governing professional body of this kind, which would be equivalent to colleges in a number of other professions. For our part we would wish to highlight the importance of the development of teaching as a research-based and research-informed profession within such a college.
11. Such a body could best achieve this we believe through becoming an institution that sets out professional standards to be achieved at appropriate stages of development through a teaching career. The college should also play a role in the accreditation of individuals and perhaps also of programmes. The way in which such matters have been taken over by central government increasingly since the 1980s is counter to the growth of teacher professionalism, of the kind we have seen developing in many other commonwealth countries and elsewhere.
12. The creation of a College of Teaching could provide teachers in England with an opportunity to move forward in a distinctive way within the UK. The other three main jurisdictions each have their own General Teaching Council which take on some such functions, but arguably do not have the same level of self-determination for the profession that could be possible under the auspices of a College or Royal College.