



# Towards a New Reality for Teacher Education for SEND

**How can we best prepare teachers for working with children with special educational needs and disabilities so that they can achieve effective inclusion?**

A summary of the findings and recommendations of the Best Practice in Teacher Education for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND in ITT) project.

## What is the project?

**Between 2013 and 2015 the UCL Institute of Education and Swiss Cottage School Development & Research Centre have been working on a project to investigate how we can best prepare the next generation of teachers for working effectively with students with special educational needs and disabilities.**

Key centres at the Institute, including SENJIT, the Centre for Research in Autism and Education, and the Primary and Secondary ITE Programmes, in close collaboration with Swiss Cottage, have worked together to formulate, pilot and evaluate a two year specialist route for preparing teachers for effective inclusion.



## What did we do?

**A cohort of 20 primary and 20 secondary initial teacher education students followed a specialist two year route.**

A curriculum was devised following a detailed review of the literature on Inclusion, SEN and teacher education, as well as consultation with leading experts from the IOE and Swiss Cottage.

This resulted, for this group of students, in their PGCE/School Direct year, in a set of enrichment inputs on working with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), in the form of additional face to face sessions on inclusive pedagogy,

child development, language and literacy, autism, alternative communication approaches in the classroom and creative approaches to achieving inclusion. The students also spent an intensive week at Swiss Cottage school, where they observed good practice in the classroom as well as receiving additional specialist input from expert staff at Swiss Cottage. The programme is supported by a range of specialist resources provided on the institution intranet.

**Accredited module on inclusion and SEND**

This group of students then, in their NQT (newly qualified teacher) year, went on to complete an **accredited**

**30 credit masters level module on inclusion and SEND.** This included input on making effective use of research evidence about diagnostic categories in SEND, as well as on beginning to develop a leadership role in disseminating best practice in achieving effective inclusion of children with SEND. In this regard, it is envisaged that graduates of the programme will go on to have an impact on the practice of other teachers in their own school or across clusters of schools, building on the idea of the **“SEND Champion”** outlined in the Lamb Inquiry report.

## What data did we collect?

### A detailed evaluation of the experience of students and of their school mentors was undertaken.

A series of pre and post questionnaires were completed both by the students on the pilot and by a matched “control” group of students undertaking the general PGCE/School Direct programme without the additional enhancement on SEND. Semi-structured interviews were also

completed by a sample of students and their school mentors.

As well, two dissemination seminars were held as part of the project in June 2014 and March 2015. These created an opportunity to share progress with stakeholders from schools, other ITT providers and government, as well as drawing on their views on how effective approaches in preparing teachers for working with children with SEND could best be developed.



## What did we find out?

### Impact on Understanding about SEND

Some of the most interesting findings focused on significant differences between the intervention and control groups in terms of mean change between baseline and follow-up

related to student perceptions of their understanding about SEND.

These results, as well as others presented in the full report, suggest that the specialist route had an effect on understanding of knowledge and skills in teaching children with SEND.

Qualitative data indicates that this is due either to the special school experience at Swiss Cottage and/or to the other direct specialist input on SEND delivered as part of the programme.

**I have the knowledge and skills to teach students with complex learning difficulties**

*Intervention group mean change in level of agreement significantly higher at  $p = 0.045$*

**I have the knowledge and skills to teach students with moderate learning difficulties**

*Intervention group mean change in level of agreement significantly higher at  $p = 0.004$*

**I understand how to work effectively with other adults in the classroom to achieve effective inclusion of children with special educational needs and disabilities**

*Intervention group mean change in level of agreement significantly higher at  $p = 0.013$*

**I have the knowledge and skills to teach students with mild learning difficulties**

*Intervention group mean change in level of agreement significantly higher at  $p = 0.077$  (borderline significance)*

### Other Key Findings, discussed in detail in the full report, include:

- The importance of professional developmental stage and the need to deliver input to students at the right time, which will extend beyond the ITT year
- The need to balance curriculum input between broad inclusive pedagogy and specific knowledge about particular diagnostic categories, and the importance of content including case studies and specific strategies for use in the classroom
- The importance of subject specific pedagogy for SEND for both primary and secondary phases.

## What do we recommend?

**This project demonstrates that the current structural arrangements for ITT do not properly allow for the development of teachers who have the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge which can allow them to be fully effective in achieving inclusion of children with SEND in the classroom.**

We believe that the review of the experience with this pilot suggests two feasible options in England for addressing the adequacy of training for SEND in the context of both ITT and continuing professional development. These recommendations also have implications for other countries within the UK:



# 1

### **An enrichment and dissemination model**

Consideration should be given to specific funding and allocation for SEND enrichment routes which provide additional input on SEND, including structured special school experience similar to that in this project, at both primary and secondary level, for limited groups of students, with the view that these students would graduate to a role in disseminating good practice in SEND. Around 5% of ITT students nationally would undertake such a route.

# 2

### **A longer or extended programme for all students**

Many of the issues relating to the one year PGCE and the proper embedding of the enrichment model in all ITT could be resolved if the length of ITT programmes was increased. It is clearly the case that fitting in the additional course content encapsulated in the pilot programme in to a 10 month PGCE course is typically unfeasible.

As such, we recommend an increased programme length which would allow for all beginning teachers to have the input entailed in the pilot, which the data indicates had a significant impact on attitude, knowledge and understanding about effective inclusion of children with SEND.

Such an increase would have potential benefits in terms of many other aspects of the crowded ITT curriculum, and would reflect the developments with lengthening ITT in other territories.

## Find out more

If you would like to find out more about the project please contact:

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If you would like to see the curriculum materials from the project and the full project report please go to  
[ioe.ac.uk/sendteachereducation](http://ioe.ac.uk/sendteachereducation)