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FEATURE

# Teaching School Hubs: are they working?

With the new Teaching School Hubs now halfway through their initial funding phase, Tes investigates their impact on schools – and asks whether they are here to stay

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Dan Worth



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teachers,” says Teaching School Hubs Council president Richard Gill.

But then he adds: “I would say that, wouldn’t I?”

This acknowledgement of bias is important because an objective assessment of the impact of Teaching School Hubs (TSHs) is not easy. There has been high uptake and progress in some areas, there is work to do in others and plenty of questions remain - not least: does the model deserve funding beyond its first three-year lifespan?

That’s a pressing question as TSHs are now in the middle of that three-year period: they were announced in February 2021 as schools were in another lockdown.

## Are Teaching School Hubs a success story?

In total, 87 centres were chosen to provide several defined aspects of teacher training and CPD that the Department for Education believed would be best delivered through a select group of frontline providers. These areas are:

- School-based initial teacher training (ITT)
- The Early Career Framework (ECF)
- Specialist national professional qualifications (NPQs), including leadership NPQs
- Appropriate body (AB) services for early career teachers
- Professional development for school leaders and teachers

The TSHs are responsible for delivering these services to an average of around 250 schools each and in most instances they work with seven government-approved lead providers, such as Ambition Institute, Teach First and UCL Institute of Education.

This works well for both sides, as the providers get access to the thousands of schools and teachers that want training courses and leadership qualifications, and the TSHs can deliver on their remit by facilitating this training for the schools in their area.



This, in turn, helps to bring standardisation to the training being received, in line with the government's desire for greater centralisation.

This doesn't mean schools have to use a TSH; they can go direct to a provider for services, but any provider with a connection to a TSH would likely link them together anyway. Even if the provider is not connected to the school's local TSH, the TSH should still welcome those trainees to any wider networking opportunities it facilitates, such as training or conferences.

For TSHs, this has the benefit of bringing in extra cash, as they receive money per participant from a lead provider to cover the cost of facilitating access to these programmes.

This is on top of the funding of between £170,000 and £220,000 a year that each hub is given, depending on the number of schools it services, for day-to-day operations such as staffing, admin, legal and travel.

It's a complicated model and a far cry from the old system of 700-plus Teaching Schools that operated on a much more low-key, localised basis. Yet, for Gill, uptake of ECF training through TSHs proves the model has been a success.

"In total, 93 per cent of the early career teachers who started their induction period last September [in 2021] received their training from a Teaching School Hub," he says. "That's around 23,000 teachers - that's pretty significant."

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because using a TSH and a lead provider also means schools know that the training complies with AB requirements.

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Where Gill does acknowledge that things have been less straightforward is uptake for NPQs, with around 40 per cent of NPQs delivered via TSHs. But he says this is “to be expected”.

“If you look at the number of providers that are already in the system with the legacy NPQs and the partnerships that already existed with the lead providers, it would be expected there would be greater competition,” he says.

Other NPQ providers include private firms, universities and multi-academy trusts that deliver NPQs themselves. Some MATs have their own relationships with lead providers and so can bypass the TSHs.

Considering this, Gill thinks that the NPQ figures for TSHs “suggest pretty good uptake” in this area.

But what does this all look like at a local level? What works, where?

Kent Teaching School Hub (KTSH) is led by Tenax Schools Trust and its CEO, Ian Bauckham. KTSH uses Ambition Institute for its ECF and NPQ framework and, to date, 197 schools across the region and more than 1,100 teachers have been through its various programmes, including 271 as early career teachers, 325 for NPQs and 212 accessing seminar workshops for CPD.

“It’s been a really good experience and we’re delighted with the uptake,” Bauckham tells *Tes*.



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do that and develop relationships with schools in East Kent,” he says.

## Getting schools engaged

Some 64 per cent of secondary schools in the area have engaged with KTSH, but only 34 per cent of primary schools.

“It’s harder to get into primaries,” Bauckham admits. “They’re smaller, they’ve got lower horizons, they’re less aware of what’s playing out on the biggest stage.”

One primary leader in London sees the lack of primary school take-up slightly differently. He says that his school had a strong relationship with its local Teaching School but it has not engaged with its TSH because the offer is too “confusing and not personalised” and delivered out of a secondary school.



The primary-secondary divide is not consistent across the country, though. Lynne Birch, hub lead at the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Teaching School Hub, reports “good engagement across primary and secondary schools”.

Regional variation in uptake and engagement is perhaps not surprising given that the geographical context of each TSH is different, and Gill says the reality is that while

“We need those national priorities - absolutely - but there needs to be localisation,” he says.

An example of this comes from Kat Howard, director of DRET Teaching School Hub, which covers north and north-east Lincolnshire. She explains that it developed its professional development offering based directly on feedback from schools in the area.

“We want to ensure we provide a PD offer that really meets the needs of the people that are going to access it, and school leaders that are going to signpost it to their staff,” she tells *Tes*.

The TSH worked with KYRA, part of the Education Endowment Foundation research school network, to achieve this. “We carried out a training needs analysis with the research school to make sure we had impartial data from schools and trusts and local authorities in the region in terms of what [provision they needed],” says Howard.

Based on this, she explains, a SEND (special educational needs and disability) and inclusion programme and a literacy project for primary schools were put in place.

Gill says the delivery of courses is another example of how TSHs can adapt to the needs of their local schools.

“In the pandemic, a lot of [training] was online but since then it has evolved so some hubs are doing a lot more face to face and others are doing more online, or a hybrid mix of both,” he says.

**‘We need those national priorities - absolutely - but there needs to be localisation’**

However, while these local adaptations have worked well, Gill acknowledges that provision for special schools and alternative provision settings has not developed quite as hoped.

cover this by bringing in relevant schools to help with mentoring and training.

“All hubs are expected, through strong networks, to deliver training and development to schools of all phases and settings...including special schools and alternative provision,” he said at the time.

However, Gill now admits that this has not worked quite as well as hoped. “If we look at September 2021...the nuances of special school needs, for example, were less addressed than they needed to be,” he says.

He adds that while some TSHs did “hit the ground running” and establish strong partnerships, others have been slower to do so.

One TSH that represents those further ahead on this is DRET. Howard says focusing on building partnerships has been a key element of her role from day one.

“In that first year I visited every special school in the region to understand what their specific needs were and make sure we were meeting that,” she says.

This fed into the creation of the aforementioned SEND and inclusion programme, which was so popular it was then offered to mainstream early career teachers, too.

Gill hopes other TSHs will develop similar strategies. “There’s more work to be done to ensure these programmes meet the needs of every single teacher, regardless of phase or school,” he says.

## Connections with universities

However, one area where he is more confident that partnerships have been formed as intended is between TSHs and universities. Specifically, he says, the research that universities do is often integral to the CPD work.

Howard says maintaining and strengthening connections with both Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) and the University of Hull has been key.

“We have a really representative partnership board - BGU and Hull are both represented on that partnership board and both local authorities have representation,



Furthermore, Howard says that, as part of her TSH's work supporting early career teachers, its ECF lead also works as a module leader for teaching and learning at a local university. "[That means we can] really think carefully about that transition from ITT [to early career teacher]," she says.



However, some are less upbeat about the role of universities in TSHs. Rachel Lofthouse, professor of teacher education in the Carnegie School of Education at Leeds Beckett University, says that if there is good engagement between TSHs and universities, she is "not really aware of it".

She acknowledges that some universities are acting as delivery partners for NPQs within the TSH set-up, but says she's not convinced this makes "the best use of potential collaborations between the university sector and schools sector".

What's more, she feels that it "reinforces the role of universities in enabling a relatively homogenised training model" - and helps the DfE extend its control over the market.

"As TSHs are themselves largely centred around multi-academy trusts, I see them as part of 'educational conglomerations'," she says. "This may help to manufacture joined-up education policy, but I am concerned these conglomerations are effectively becoming powerful outposts of the DfE."



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remit to provide ITT would undermine higher education providers in this area. Has this happened?

Gill does not have data to share on how ITT from TSHs has grown. He says such data does not exist because TSHs engage in ITT in different ways.

However, he believes that TSHs unquestionably have a role to play in ITT due to their knowledge of the school system and where placements are available, or where more are needed.

“As we move towards 2024, there is a need to gain a system-wide picture as to where and what school placements are available, and to provide further support to schools so as to ensure enough placements are available where they are needed,” Gill says.

Birch says this is something her TSH is already doing by acting as a “convenor of ITT”, linking prospective new teachers with four local ITT providers and helping them to understand “what a career in teaching involves, routes into teaching, the application process, funding options and other aspects of teacher training”.

TSHs doing more of this sort of ITT work certainly seems likely, given that the ITT market review strongly suggested, in its recommendation 10, that hubs needed to move into teacher training.

“We think it is right that Teaching School Hubs have a core responsibility for the delivery of ITT,” the government said in its response to the ITT market review.

Considering that not all TSHs are accredited for ITT delivery, it’s not clear exactly how this will be delivered, but Gill says he hopes the DfE will provide an update soon.

“I know the ITT policy team now are working through, and hopefully we’ll come up with something sooner rather than later,” he says.

**‘There’s more work to be done to ensure these programmes meet the needs of every single teacher’**

school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) members may wish to work with TSHs to provide partner accreditation.

“It says TSHs should ensure that they have some sort of strategic engagement with ITT providers or role in providing ITT training - but there isn’t a reciprocal expectation on ITT providers that they must engage with hubs,” she says.

“I think that’s right, because there are many instances I can think of where it wouldn’t be easy or appropriate. So, think of a national provider, for example: which hub would they choose to partner with?”

However, Hollis says that without this requirement, it could be challenging for TSHs to create the sort of set-up the DfE seems to expect.

“If [TSHs] happen to be in an area where there is one very independent, very large provider who doesn’t feel the need to engage with them, what do they do? How do they bridge that gap?” Hollis asks.

She says this needs careful consideration because there could be real benefits to TSHs and SCITTs working more closely to identify schools that should be involved in ITT - mainly in the provision of placements.

She says bringing this “local intelligence about local schools” into the wider ITT market could be beneficial.

*Tes* asked the DfE for comment on the recommendation 10 issues raised above but had received no reply at the time of publication.

The DfE also did not reply to a request for comment on the wider implementation of TSHs since they were formed.

## The future for TSHs

Presumably, though, the DfE is looking at TSHs closely, given that the model is just over halfway through its first iteration and funding allocation. Work should be under

Of course, a change in government at the next general election could alter the course of TSHs entirely.

Gill is confident that TSHs will show their worth. He says the data and experiences of TSH uptake and the benefits the model offers should convince anyone of its merits. “I think the Teaching School Hubs Council has got a very strong argument to sell to any government,” he says.

It’s an argument he won’t have to wait long to make, whoever hears it.

*Dan Worth is senior editor at Tes*

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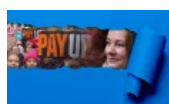


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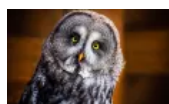
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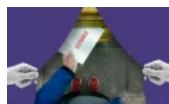
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