



The National Association of
School-Based Teacher Trainers

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NASBTT statement: Scrapping skills tests

The Department for Education (DfE) has today confirmed that it will withdraw the professional skills test at the end of the current recruitment style.

These tests are undertaken to assess the core skills that teachers need to fulfil their professional role in schools, rather than the subject knowledge needed for teaching, to ensure that all teachers are competent in numeracy and literacy, regardless of their specialism. Currently, all trainee teachers have to pass skills tests in numeracy and literacy before they can be accepted onto a teacher training programme. Initial teacher training (ITT) providers are responsible for checking that all trainees meet the ITT entry requirements for the skills tests before they start the course.

NASBTT Executive Director Emma Hollis said: “We are thrilled that the DfE has removed the outdated skills test system which is no longer fit for purpose. It is a known barrier to the profession and does not reflect the way we teach and assess children and therefore is not representative of how we want the profession to behave.

There may be fears from some quarters that this may be seen as ‘dumbing down’ the profession, but we think those fears would be misplaced. The majority of providers are already working with trainees to ensure that if there are any gaps, they are filled. We certainly believe that you want prospective teachers to be able to evidence functional literacy and numeracy, but we think there are far more nuanced, sophisticated ways to do that.

We have had too many cases of either ‘false positives’ or candidates missing out by just a few marks, often as a result of technical issues or difficulties with the false test situation, which does not accurately reflect their understanding. The decision also removes the practical barriers that have been an issue – location of test centres and difficulty booking appointments – and is more inclusive as accessing the test centres (including the need to fund travel to get to them) were more of a barrier to some candidates than others.

ITT providers will now be able to take a developmental approach to a candidate’s functional literacy and numeracy which will allow gaps to be identified and filled. Going forward, this will ensure quality and consistency as providers will have a more rounded understanding of the functional literacy and numeracy requirements of a cohort.

Our members, SCITTs and School Direct Lead Schools, will ultimately benefit from greater understanding of the needs of their candidates and fewer frustrations with the delays and barriers caused by skills test centres. Scrapping skills tests removes one of the known barriers to recruitment, recognises the more nuanced way in which assessment should take place, and will bring huge money saving to the sector – approximately £15 million per year is currently spent on funding skills test contracts.

For NASBTT, this is something we have been calling for – in response to member feedback – for a number of years, and therefore represents a huge ‘win’ for us. We have written letters to the Secretary of State, lobbied the Schools Minister and his team, supported and advised the DfE team investigating possible alternatives, and arranged member focus groups with the DfE to explore the issue. This is the perfect outcome.”

-ENDS-

NASBTT is a registered charity committed to promoting high-quality schools-led programmes of training, education and professional development of teachers.

NASBTT represents the interests of schools-led teacher training provision in relation to the development and implementation of national policy developments. Our members include SCITT providers, School Direct Lead Schools, Teaching Schools, HEIs as well as a range of other organisations involved in the education and professional development of teachers. We have 195 members representing almost 7,000 individual trainees.

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