



The National Association of  
School-Based Teacher Trainers

## **NASBTT Opinion Piece**

**Emma Hollis**

**13th November 2018**

### **‘Unlimited resits for pre-entry tests for teacher training are a step forward – but are the tests even needed at all?’**

We need a serious discussion about the need for pre-entry tests, write two sector leaders. It makes more sense to have one exam post-training, they [James Noble Rogers and Emma Hollis] argue

The government’s decision to relax some of the rules surrounding pre-entry skills tests for applicants to initial teacher training (ITT) programmes is sensible, pragmatic and expedient.

Until now, prospective student teachers have had three attempts to pass the literacy and numeracy tests before being locked out of the system – ie, prevented from having any more attempts and denied training for at least two years.

This applied even when applicants failed by just one or two points, something that appeared to happen in a disproportionate number of cases.

In many cases, the reasons for failure were clear. People felt under so much pressure by the time they had their final attempt they experienced “brain freeze”, panicked and failed for that reason alone.

There have been examples of people with PhDs in maths-related subjects failing the numeracy test, despite the fact that their number skills are beyond doubt. Such people will, in most cases, have been lost to the teaching profession forever.

It was a huge waste in current circumstances. The ending of the “three strikes and out” rule will reduce the pressure on applicants and make it more likely that they will be able to demonstrate their true ability and pass.

Those who narrowly fail will have another chance and, crucially, none of this will be to the detriment of the literacy and numeracy skills of those entering the profession as everyone will still have demonstrated that they meet the required standard.

The teacher supply crisis

The welcome decision to fund three tests, rather than just one, will also help. These reforms will make a contribution to meeting the teacher supply crisis.

One area that could be further improved is the experience of applicants in the skills tests centres.

Once someone has got an appointment to take the test, there are sometimes reports of noisy environments, a failure to make reasonable adjustment to reflect special requirements and unreliable equipment. The next stage of these reforms to help talented would-be teachers must address these problems.

On top of that, in the longer term, thought needs to be given to the need for pre-entry tests at all.

No one wants people without the required literacy and numeracy skills going into schools, but many providers run their own tests once people have been recruited to programmes, such is their confidence in the relevance of the skills tests. It would be a simple measure to develop robust standardised assessment processes that would have to be successfully undertaken by all student teachers before they qualify.

These would almost certainly be a reliable indicator of ability, and quality could be ensured as part of Ofsted inspection – allowing the government to spend its £15 million skills test budget in other areas, such as CPD to help to retain teachers in the profession.

That said, today's news provides a positive step in the right direction and the teaching profession will undoubtedly benefit from these changes.

James Noble-Rogers is executive director of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET)) and Emma Hollis is the executive director of the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers (NASBTT)

First published in the [TES](#) 12th February 2018.

**-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.

**Website:** [www.nasbtt.org.uk](http://www.nasbtt.org.uk)

**Social:** <https://twitter.com/nasbtt> (@NASBTT)

**Media Resources:** [nasbtt.org.uk/media-hub](http://nasbtt.org.uk/media-hub)

**Media Contact:**

Phil Smith

NASBTT PR consultant

Office: 01778 218180

Mobile: 07866 436159

Email: [phil@philsmithcommunications.co.uk](mailto:phil@philsmithcommunications.co.uk)