TACTYC’s response to OFSTED’s proposed changes to the Initial

Teacher Education (ITE) Inspection Framework and Handbook

Consultation Response

(March 2020)

The full consultation document is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/initial-teacher-education-inspection-framework-and-handbook-2020-inspecting-the-quality-of-teacher-education>

This should also be read alongside the following documents:

ITT Core Content Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-core-content-framework>

Early Career Framework <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-early-career-teachers>

Building great teachers: Initial teacher education curriculum research: Phase 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-education-curriculum-research/building-great-teachers>

Firstly, Ofsted are requesting consultation on the following:

* To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to introduce two key judgement areas only? TACTYC Agree
* To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to change the evidence-gathering approach for inspection evidence? TACTYC Disagree – please refer to text below
* To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed new inspection model of a one-stage inspection process for ITE inspections? TACTYC Agree
* Timings and stages of inspection? TACTYC Agree.

This response from TACTYC questions Ofsted’s focus on the approach to early reading exclusively through phonics within their proposed Inspection Framework for ITE. There is evidence that such a limited and limiting emphasis within Early Years Initial Teacher Education (EYITT), and Initial Teacher Education (Primary/Early Years Phase) is not sufficient or effective preparation for teaching young children to read; the subsequent impact of this narrow approach can be shown to undermine children’s confidence and motivation to read (Boardman 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Hall 2013; Levy 2008, 2009). This emphasis on teaching reading exclusively through Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) within the Framework is simplistic and does not take into account the complexity of what is involved in becoming literate. As Ofsted has identified ‘reading’ as a specific focus area for the proposed ‘deep dive’ methodology, the current ITE literacy curriculum, which is already significantly focused on the use of SSP as the prime method of teaching reading, will no doubt continue, despite robust research evidence which challenges this standpoint (Clark 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Torgerson, Brooks, Gascoine, Higgins 2016).

Many researchers agree that reading encompasses a broad construct which depends on the wider literacy knowledge that young children need in order to become successful and motivated readers (Boardman and Levy, 2019; EEF, 2018; Flewitt, 2013; Hulme and Snowling, 2013; Turbill, 2001). The importance and enduring benefits of encouraging early literacy experiences for very young children has already been widely recognised by many researchers and has been sustained across many decades (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1967; Dombey, 1999; Goodman 1970; Hatcher, Hulme and Ellis 1994; Howard et al. 2016; Levy 2009, 2016; Liberman, 1974; Melhuish, 2014). The evidence to support SSP as the single uniquely effective approach to the teaching of reading is not widely accepted; indeed, there are questions about the research in Clackmannanshire that has driven current policy in England (Ellis and Moss, 2014; Torgeson, Brooks and Hall, 2006; Torgeson et al., 2016). The current focus on teaching SSP is not compatible with the wide range of studies of effective literacy teaching, which highlight the fact that teachers choose to rely on the wide range of research available to support them in teaching early reading (Cain, 2015b, 2016a; EEF, 2017: EEF, 2018; Ellis and Smith, 2017; Hall, 2013). Indeed, the Education Endowment Foundation’s (EEF) review of research on improving literacy in Key Stage 1 suggests that “decoding and comprehension are necessary but not sufficient to develop confident and competent readers, and not all children will respond equally to one approach (EEF 2017, p.9).

TACTYC are deeply concerned that Ofsted’s exclusive emphasis on teaching reading through phonics is at the detriment of very young children’s learning (Clark, 2017a, 2017b; Boardman, 2019b, 2019c) and undermines very young children’s’ motivation to read (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). The hierarchically powerful position of Ofsted is already causing more schools and early years settings to engage in formally teaching SSP, in order not to fail their Ofsted inspection. The proposed Inspection Framework is clear about the intention that a judgement of ‘inadequate’ will be based upon the fact that “primary training **does not ensure that trainees only learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics**” (Ofsted 2020, p.44).

We particularly highlight the following statement, which does not reflect evidence from research, including that reported by the EEF, which Ofsted claims to have taken into account:

“For primary phase, training will **ensure that trainees learn to teach early reading using systematic synthetic phonics** as outlined in the ITT core content framework and that trainees are **not taught to use competing approaches to early reading that are not supported by the most up-to-date evidence”** (Ofsted 2020, p.39).

In addition, we emphasise that Ofsted states that “The ITE curriculum is designed to equip trainees with up-to-date research findings, for example as outlined for primary and secondary phase trainees in the ITT core content framework.” (Ofsted 2020, p. 40).

Ofsted states that “we will judge fairly partnerships that take radically different approaches to the ITE curriculum. We recognise the importance of partnerships’ autonomy to choose their own curriculum approaches. If leaders are able to show that they have built a curriculum with appropriate coverage, content, structure and sequencing, then inspectors will assess the partnership’s curriculum favourably.” (Ofsted 2020, p. 9) This is reinforced later in Paragraph 91: “Ofsted does not advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees...” (Ofsted 2020, p. 22).

Primary phase training in England includes training provision for trainee teachers specialising in Early Years Education who intend to work with children aged 3 – 8 years. Supporting trainees to teach early reading to under-fives is an important part of a broad and dynamic literacy curriculum, which does not solely advocate teaching SSP (Boardman 2019b, 2019c), but does require a more sophisticated approach than just looking at the content of the taught curriculum. Consequently, given that many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) deliver ITE and are focused on supporting students studying on a University undergraduate or post-graduate degree, HEIs are united in their core intention to develop students as critical thinkers, which is recognised and assessed as a key graduate attribute by the Office for Students (OfS), the Department for Education (DfE) and the Chartered College of Teaching.

Evidence-based research suggests that supporting both trainee teachers and experienced teachers is most effectively done by engaging students and teachers in critical thinking, thoughtful debate and independent research, as this enables the development of informed and evaluative approaches. Toom et al. (2010) suggest that the ideal situation is when teaching and research are integrated and cohesive to produce “pedagogically-thinking, reflective and inquiry-oriented teachers” (p 339), through a curriculum which links teaching and research. Ofsted’s proposal for a single specific teaching approach to reading within Primary and Early Years ITE courses undermines any possibility for the development of professional judgment.

TACTYC suggests that OFSTED should provide clarity for the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce, alongside more accurate and useful criteria within the proposed Inspection Framework to support trainee teachers, which does not contradict the research informed evidence-base for the teaching of reading and their own explicit criteria (Clark 2020).

We are concerned that some statements in the consultation document are contradictory,

for example:

“The ITE framework focuses on factors that both research and inspection evidence indicate contribute most strongly to high-quality education and training” (OFSTED 2020, p.22). Particularly, Ofsted quotes the Education Endowment Foundation, yet its proposals are not compatible with EEF recommendations, and many other reputable research studies are ignored.

“Ofsted does NOT advocate that any particular teaching approach should be used exclusively with trainees” (Ofsted 2020, p.22). In which case, TACTYC would like to know how the statement about failing providers that do not rely solely on SSP as the approach to teaching reading can be justified?

Clearly both these statements contradict the single approach to teaching reading that is defined in the consultation. We therefore suggest that Ofsted should

* Acknowledge that SSP is not appropriate for some children and that teachers do need to apply their professional judgment, and use a variety of strategies to support, engage and motivate children.
* Provide clarity for the ECEC workforce relating to the teaching of reading, given that SSP is not appropriate for under-fives. TACTYC would like this to be stated clearly within all documentation, so that Private, Voluntary, Independent and State Nursery settings are not forced to deliver SSP to support children with their school readiness. This perception of reading and literacy practice must not influence the ECEC workforce in their work with under-fives, given that there is already research evidence that the primary school curriculum is impacting upon early years pedagogy and provision (Boardman 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Boardman and Levy 2019; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury 2016a; Levy 2009; Miller and Paige Smith 2004; Roberts-Holmes 2015).
* TACTYC also considers that there should be a much stronger acknowledgment of the importance of the prime areas of learning and child development in EYITT and ITE Primary Phase Training, as necessary foundations for later more formal learning.

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