



Eurofound

Educational and training services: Anticipating the challenges

Case study: Teach First, United Kingdom

[Click for contents](#)

Contents

Introduction	1
General description of the initiative	2
The initiative in the educational landscape	5
Future challenges	9
Sources	10

Introduction

Education and training remain key policy priorities across Europe because of their importance in fostering future economic growth in the European Union. The education and training sector is addressing some of the big policy challenges in Europe and more globally through innovation, job creation, inclusion and active citizenship, to mention a few themes. This focus is a logical next step following previous policy strategies and initiatives aimed to promote lifelong learning. As Green (2002) observes, lifelong learning has been at the centre of European educational discourses for at least a decade. It is reflected in a large number of policy strategies and initiatives, first and foremost the strategic plans for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2010 and ET 2020) and the New Skills for New Jobs Initiative. Initiatives to increase mobility and the transparency of national educational systems, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the higher education framework European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as well as frameworks and networks to promote the quality assurance of education and training across Europe, are all measures that affect the education and training sector. Changing framework conditions brought about by economic, ecological, sociodemographic and technological developments will present providers of learning services with new challenges and opportunities. They will also affect the outcomes and performance of the sector, as well as employment, working conditions and skills needs.

This case report forms part of a study conducted by the Danish Technological Institute under contract to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). The purpose of the study is to provide empirical evidence about the state of the education and training sector in Europe within the overall context of lifelong learning, to identify and illustrate trends and practices that can function as a source of inspiration. The aim is to produce original scenarios for the sector in the European Union (EU27) in order to provide Eurofound and its stakeholders with a sound and pragmatic knowledge base to improve the understanding and anticipation of change in the sector up to 2020 in the EU.

The study has a particular focus on employment and the supply of labour within the sector. What sort of teaching, training and education jobs will be needed in the future? And what are the skills necessary to do them? How do we make adjustments and develop the current educational workforce in order to be prepared for future trends?

This report is one of six case study reports. The main objective of the report is to illustrate one example of an innovative approach to anticipating the challenges faced by the education and training sector.

The report is based on preliminary desk research of sources relating to the case and a one-day case visit that included face-to-face interviews with the following representatives of the case:

- Brett Wigdortz, CEO & Founder
- Amanda Timberg, Director of Leadership Development
- James Darley, Director of Graduate Recruitment
- Jason Arthur, 2008 Graduate and Current Participant President
- Matt Lloyd, 2008 Graduate and Current Primary Development Officer
- Rachel Connell, 2008 Graduate and Current Leadership Development

General description of the initiative

This case study comes from the UK and concerns an influential national charity focused on tackling educational disadvantage by ‘harnessing the energy, enthusiasm and drive of exceptional graduates to provide leadership, motivation and, above all, inspirational teaching in challenging schools across England’ (Teach First Graduate Recruitment website).

As a case study, it brings to life several themes:

- tackling educational disadvantage in deprived urban areas;
- the recruitment of high-quality university graduates into teaching;
- fostering leadership development as central to teaching and teacher training;
- social entrepreneurship approaches to addressing major social problems;
- the transfer and scaling up of educational reform approaches and initiatives.

Background

Teach First’s mission, according to its website, is ‘to address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective inspirational leaders in all fields’.

This mission is motivated by the fact that in the UK parental wealth remains the predominant factor in determining a child’s academic achievement. Teach First’s website notes that ‘Just 24% of school children receiving free school meals achieved the benchmark 5 A*– C grades at GCSEs – less than half the average rate. At the same time just 16% of young people on free school meals progress to university, compared with 96% from independent schools.’

The way forward for Teach First lies in the power of effective teaching and leadership within schools. In the words of the CEO and founder, Brett Wigdortz: ‘the positive effective of excellent teaching and leadership can compensate for the principal disadvantages children bring with them to school’ (Teach First, 2007, p. 11).

Drawing inspiration from a similar US initiative called Teach for America, Teach First was founded in London in 2002. Its formation was one of the key recommendations of a McKinsey report that looked into how businesses could help improve secondary education in London. Brett Wigdortz was one of the members of the McKinsey team and, after a six-month leave of absence to develop a business plan for Teach First, he became the organisation’s CEO and founder. Since 2002, Teach First has placed over 2,500 teachers in schools in challenging circumstances and has been voted seventh in The Times Top 100 Graduate Employers, the highest ranking ever for a charity.

Scope of the project

The Teach First vision is two-fold. In the short term the goal is to attract and support Britain’s most talented graduates to teach and lead in challenging urban secondary schools for at least two years, in ways that will raise the aspirations and achievements of their pupils. The longer-term goal is to create a movement of ambassadors working together to create systemic change, inside and outside education, to address educational disadvantage.

More specifically, Teach First seeks to achieve its mission by:

- recruiting exceptional graduates into teaching;
- targeting schools in challenging circumstances which experience high levels of poverty or underachievement amongst their pupils;
- supporting its teachers to raise pupil achievement, aspiration and access to opportunities;
- focusing on developing leaders;
- creating a movement for social change through its ambassador network.

Central to these goals are two main target groups for Teach First's work.

1. Disadvantaged students and schools in challenging circumstances – Teach First works exclusively with schools that have high levels of deprivation (more than 50% of their pupils living in the lowest 30% of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) and low levels of attainment (below the lowest 30% of the national distribution).
2. Top graduates from leading UK universities – Teach First recruits graduates with high-quality degrees (2.1 degree or above) from over 55 leading universities and places them in challenging schools for a minimum of two years to train and work as teachers, and gain a teaching qualification as part of a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE).

Activities

The work of Teach First is focused on three main activities: graduate recruitment, leadership development (or teacher training), and ambassador community.

Graduate recruitment

Recruiting exceptional graduates as 'the best young leaders and communicators of their generation' (Teach First, 2007, p. 11) is central to the Teach First approach. They look for individuals who have 'a passion for social change, coupled with a desire to build up first-class leadership skills that can be used inside or outside of the classroom'.¹ The intake for 2010 was 560 graduates, who were selected from over 5,000 applications, and recruitment is set to grow considerably over the coming years (787 projected for 2011 and over 1,100 by 2013). Applicants are subject to a rigorous selection process involving an initial online application followed by a one-day assessment process (interview, teaching trial, group activity). As explained in greater detail below, there is a strong emphasis on identifying candidates who possess not only outstanding academic credentials but ability in several key areas such as humility, respect and empathy, interaction, knowledge, resilience and self-evaluation.

Leadership development

The start of Teach First's work is its two-year Leadership Development Programme, which combines working, training and qualifying as a teacher with leadership development training, coaching and mentoring. The programme focuses on developing participants as leaders of learning as well as giving them skills and knowledge around leading organisations and leading people. The structure, content and organisation of the programme is discussed in detail the section titled 'Initial and continuing education and training of the teaching workforce' below.

¹ <http://www.teachfirst.org.uk/OurWork/recruitment.aspx>

Ambassador community

Teach First aims to be much more than a short-term training and development initiative. As its graduate recruitment site makes clear: ‘Teach First is a two-year commitment, but our aim is for you to make it a lifetime’s engagement.’ On completion of the Leadership Development Programme, participants become ambassadors and join a wider network of Teach First graduates who it is hoped will stay actively involved with tackling educational disadvantage. Currently there are 1,168 ambassadors, 67% of whom remain engaged with the charity’s mission, and 50% of whom remain in teaching.² This ongoing involvement is supported through a number of initiatives, including:

- Teach On – support network and leadership development for ambassadors continuing to teach and lead in challenging schools;
- Higher Education Access Programme for Schools (HEAPS) – mentoring and residential events for sixth-form students in Teach First schools;
- Social Entrepreneurship Programme – quality training, networking, business skills and support for ambassadors interested in launching educational social ventures.

Finance/costs

Teach First is a charitable company limited by guarantee. It gains financial and in-kind support from a range of private and public sources. In 2010 the organisation had an income of over GBP14 million (approximately €16.4 million as of 31 December 2010) and expenditure of £12.6 million.

Staff

Teach First has a staff team of 150 employees, which is likely to grow further with time. The charity’s board of trustees brings together 12 leading figures from the world of education and business, including two Teach First graduates. The Senior Leadership Team comprises seven members, and there are several regional teams that manage the charity’s work throughout England.

Stakeholders

The charity works with a range of stakeholder groups.

- Schools in challenging circumstances – at present Teach First is working with over 200 schools in deprived urban areas across the UK; thus far, this has centred on secondary schools but expansion into primary schools is imminent.
- Higher education institutions – as part of its National Initial Teacher Training Partnership, there are currently 14 universities engaged in the development and implementation of the Teach First Masters and PGCE programme.
- Funders and supporters – Teach First receives support from leading organisations spanning all sectors, including schools and teachers, universities, businesses, teaching organisations and the public sector.
- Partner organisations – the charity collaborates with a whole host of organisations from across the worlds of business, education and social entrepreneurship that are pursuing similar goals to those of Teach First.

² <http://www.teachfirst.org.uk/OurWork/ambassadorprogramme.aspx>

Evidence-based results

As an organisation, Teach First places a strong emphasis on monitoring progress, evaluating success and researching impacts. This involves rigorous internal monitoring and evaluation processes as well as independently commissioned external research and inspection. The most recent evidence of achievements and impacts are as follows:

Quality of training programme

A 2006–2007 inspection review of the Teach First Leadership Development Programme by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, the UK schools inspectorate) drew a number of conclusions. It noted that the organisation provides ‘a distinctly different employment-based route for training teachers’ (Ofsted, 2008, p. 4). On the progress made by participants, the inspectors recorded that ‘around a half achieved the Standards for Qualified Teacher Status to an outstanding level, a third to a good level and the others to a satisfactory level’ (p. 4). They also noted that ‘four of the trainees seen during visits to schools were judged by inspectors to be amongst the most exceptional trainees produced by any teacher training route’ (p. 4). It was found that ‘Teach First trainees made a positive contribution to the schools visited’ (p. 4).

Impact in participating schools

A 2010 University of Manchester study funded by the Goldman Sachs Foundation concluded that ‘there is converging evidence that Teach First teachers have a positive impact in schools’ (Muijs et al., 2010, p. 3). Based on data from 174 secondary schools (87 Teach First and 87 comparable non-Teach First schools) collected via mixed methods (surveys, interviews, lesson observation, documentary analysis, and secondary analysis of performance data), the research team’s key findings were:

1. quantitative analysis shows positive pupil outcomes in Teach First schools compared to comparator schools;
2. quantitative analysis shows that having a larger number of Teach First teachers in the school is related to more positive outcomes;
3. classroom observation data show that Teach First teachers are effective classroom practitioners;
4. survey data show that Teach First teachers believe that they can make a difference to pupils, and head teacher surveys support this;
5. survey data indicate that Teach First teachers are leaders inside and outside their classrooms;
6. interview data confirm that Teach First teachers are seen as leaders in their schools and as effective practitioners by their second year in the school (Muijs et al., 2010, p. 3).

There was ‘evidence of a correlation between participation in Teach First and pupil achievement, which appears one to two years following the first year of participation in the programme’ (Muijs et al., 2010, p. 4). Typically, where significant, ‘Teach First participation explains between 20% and 40% of the between-school variance in pupil performance at GCSE’ (p. 4). The survey authors caution that such correlation evidence does not in itself indicate a causal link, and other factors such as changes in school leadership may explain the relationship.

The initiative in the educational landscape

Teach First is focused on a very specific part of the formal education sector – low-achieving schools in deprived communities. Thus far, this has also involved working exclusively with secondary schools, although this is changing. Since 2008 the organisation has been running a three-year primary pilot with 27 primary schools in London. Following successful evaluation of this pilot, there are now plans to introduce a bespoke primary training model nationally.

As noted previously, the charity's work and especially the Leadership Development Programme involve partnerships with large numbers of organisations involved in formal education. Over 200 schools in challenging circumstances across five, and shortly six, UK regions host Teach First teachers, and staff from some 14 higher education institutions are involved in supporting participants towards becoming qualified teachers. Other partners include the Imperial College Business School, which provides input on leading organisations, Beyond Now, which supports with coaching, and various other business partners that help to develop the programme.

The programme itself begins with an intensive six-week residential summer training, which is the start of the 13-month qualification and also an induction into the organisation and mission. During the first year, support is given by the school, university and Teach First to ensure the effectiveness of the teachers. In the second year when the teacher qualification has been gained, the tutor support is replaced by more intensive support from Teach First. They are also involved in other aspects of the Leadership Development Programme delivered by the other partners referenced above for the duration of the two years on the programme.

The charity's work has benefited from high-level recognition and support amongst policymakers, business leaders and decision-makers. In the 2010 general election, for example, Teach First featured in all three national parties' election manifestos and it has received significant funding from the coalition government since it came into power. Against this backdrop, though, it is important to stress the independence of Teach First as a charity. Brett Wigdortz, the CEO and founder, emphasised that 'being an independent charity means that we don't have to worry about short-term political considerations but can instead focus on achieving our goals over a 10–20 year time-scale'.

Innovative aspects of the initiative

There are several distinctive features of Teach First as an organisation and educational initiative.

Mission

The explicit focus on a clear social mission (see Background, above) distinguishes Teach First from many other teacher training programmes. This goal is explicitly shared with participants from the start of the programme. It also drives the targeting of challenging schools, the continual concern with ensuring and evidencing impact, and the development of a wider ambassador movement.

Selection

Teach First places great emphasis on attracting, identifying and selecting the highest quality graduates for its programme. The strategic focus on changing the perceptions of top graduates (Teach First is now number 7 on *The Times* list of top graduate employers) and on competence-based assessment and selection have been central to its approach.

Leadership focus

The Teach First teacher training programme is called the Leadership Development Programme for a very good reason. There is a central focus on leadership in terms of leading learning, leading people, and leading organisations. The first of these – leading learning – is the most significant and emphasises the importance of teachers as leaders in the classroom.

Ambassador movement

Another distinctive feature of Teach First is the emphasis it places on scale and long-term change. Through its ambassador networks and initiatives, there is a concerted attempt to scale up and broaden the impact of the organisation over time.

Independence

As an independent charity, Teach First is an example of a third-sector solution to tackling social problems.

Role of teachers/trainers

The training and development processes involved in year 1 and year 2 of the programme are discussed further below. Of more relevance here in relation to the role of teachers/trainers in the initiative are the different forms of support that participants receive during the programme. As noted earlier, the programme is delivered through a national partnership involving Teach First, 14 higher education institutions, over 200 schools and a number of other business partners. There are three main support roles within the programme.

- University tutors – Participants are supported throughout their first year by tutors from one of the partner university initial teacher training (ITT) providers as they work towards a PGCE and qualified teacher status (QTS). Tutors run subject days to develop participants’ subject knowledge, and also visit participants in schools regularly to observe their lessons and support their development.
- School-based mentors – Participants are assigned mentors (members of teaching staff at their school) to support their development. Teach First supports the development of school mentors to ensure invaluable support to participants. This includes a pilot mentor development framework facilitated by the university partner to support mentors in their professional development.
- Teach First leadership development officers – All participants are assigned a Teach First leadership development officer (LDO) to support them. The LDO supports participants during their school placement in setting ambitious yet feasible visions for pupil success, as well as goals for pupil outcomes. LDOs are qualified teachers, and are often also Teach First ambassadors.

Strengths and weaknesses of the teaching workforce

A key principle underlying Teach First’s work is the idea that ‘the positive effects of excellent teaching and leadership can compensate for the principal disadvantages children bring with them to school’ (Teach First, 2007, p. 11). In other words, the quality of the workforce and the leadership in schools are absolutely critical for tackling educational disadvantage and improving achievement.

Teach First seeks to contribute to the development of high-quality teachers and leaders in schools in the most deprived areas of Britain in a number of ways. Firstly, as described previously, it invests considerable time and effort in recruiting high-quality graduates from top universities and placing them for two years in the most challenging schools nationally. Secondly, it has a rigorous assessment and selection process, which requires candidates to demonstrate their ability across eight key competencies (see box below). Thirdly, it asks a lot of its participants in terms of context (schools in challenging circumstances), responsibility (around 90% of a newly qualified teacher’s timetable) and expectations (impact in terms of social mission).

Key competences for Teach First applicants

Selection for Teach First is based on candidates’ ability to demonstrate relevant subject knowledge and the following competencies:

- humility, respect, and empathy – always respects and values others;
- interaction – adapts communication style to work well with others, a great team player;
- knowledge – has a passion for their subject and uses it to make a difference and help us achieve our mission;
- leadership – leads the way, constantly raising the bar to make success happen;
- planning and organising – works efficiently and effectively to deliver success;

- problem solving – a considered approach, works smart to come up with the best solutions;
- resilience – loves a challenge and keeps going to overcome them;
- self-evaluation – knows strengths and weaknesses and how to use them to be a better version of themselves.

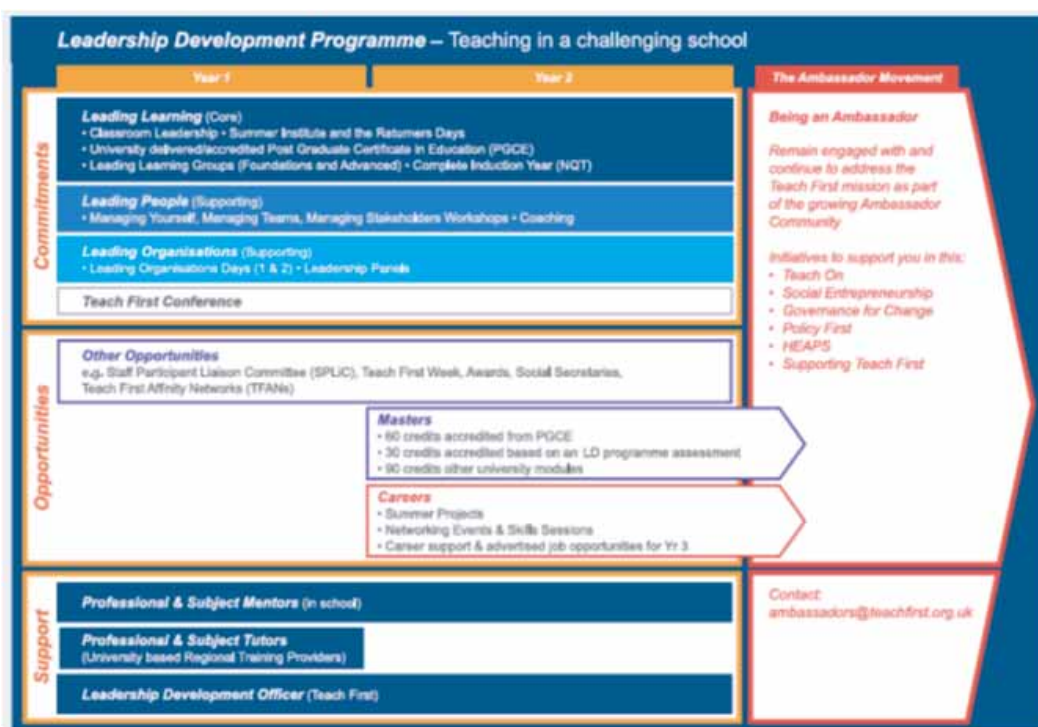
Source: Teach First website

Initial and continuing education and training of the teaching workforce

The main focus of Teach First is the initial training and development of new teachers through the Leadership Development Programme. As depicted in the diagram below, the programme is broken down into three strands and equips participants with expertise in leading learning, leading people and leading organisations. The programme comprises three main phases.

- Summer Institute (6 weeks) – Before beginning teaching, all participants are required to complete a six-week Summer Institute, which provides them with core skills and knowledge that will support their teaching from September. The content delivered is specifically tailored to the context in which they will be teaching.
- Teaching in a challenging school (year 1) – Throughout the first year, participants in secondary schools work towards a PGCE whilst undertaking around 90% of a newly qualified teacher (NQT) timetable. Participants in primary schools work towards a PGCE in their first year whilst undertaking full responsibility for a class and teaching an 80% timetable (as for a newly qualified teacher). The first half-term in schools is flexible, with a personalised partnership of support, ensuring that all participants are set up to succeed and ready to take full responsibility for a class from the start of the second half-term, if not before.
- Teaching in a challenging school (year 2) – In their second year as NQTs, they further their impact in the classroom by setting visions and goals. Support from Teach First leadership development officers plays an important role here. They help participants during their school placement to set ambitious yet feasible visions for pupil success, as well as goals for pupil outcomes.

Figure 1: Components of the Leadership Development Programme



Future challenges

Interviews with members of the Teach First leadership team and recent graduates of the programme flagged up four main areas of challenge facing the organisation:

- the scale of the problem of educational disadvantage in the UK;
- challenges during the leadership development process;
- issues relating to partnership working;
- managing rapid growth of the organisation.

Scale of the problem

Brett Wigdortz attests that educational disadvantage remains a huge problem in the UK. In his view ‘a lot still has to change for us to achieve our mission of eradicating the link between parental income and student achievement’. Furthermore, although the scale and reach of Teach First’s work has expanded rapidly, it is still small relative to the scale of the problem. As one member of the leadership team pointed out, ‘We’re still in only a quarter of all secondary schools nationally and are only just beginning to work in the primary sector’. Even reaching the ambitious growth target of 1,140 participants in 2013 (compared with 787 in 2011), will ‘still only mean covering one-third of secondary schools nationally’. There is therefore a clear need for continued organisational growth, which as noted below can bring its own difficulties.

Leadership development

Amanda Timberg, Director of Leadership Development, made clear that the Teach First training route asks a lot of its participants: ‘Learning a difficult job, meeting high expectations and working in difficult situations tests people’s resilience more than many expect’. Coupled with this is the challenge of ‘maintaining the mindset of working to tackle educational disadvantage’ in the busy world of inner city schools. These issues were strongly echoed by the Teach First ambassadors, who talked about the challenges involved in ‘taking responsibility quite quickly and needing to balance being a good teacher with training as a teacher’. Another potential challenge was ‘taking on extra responsibility within the school but not losing the focus on being a really good classroom teacher, i.e. providing classroom leadership’.

Partnership working

The involvement of a large number of partner organisations in the Teach First Leadership Development Programme is a source of strength but also an area of potential difficulty. One issue associated with partnership working is that of ensuring quality and a clear focus on mission throughout all aspects of the programme. Working with schools in challenging circumstances, for example, there can be difficulties with participants receiving support from their school-based mentors due to competing pressures. Collaborating with university teacher educators requires clarity and negotiation over respective roles and expertise, as well as efforts to ensure there is buy-in to the Teach First ethos and mission.

Organisational growth

James Darley, Director of Graduate Recruitment, highlighted growth as one of the biggest challenges facing the organisation. The skill sets required amongst staff, for example, change considerably as the organisation grows – ‘you need jacks-of-all-trades early on but then as you grow you need more specialised high-quality skill sets’. Another growth issue is increasing graduate recruitment and specifically graduates who do not traditionally consider teaching, such as science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) graduates, ethnic minority students and men.

Future plans

It is clear that Teach First has ambitious plans for the future, outlined in its strategy for beyond 2011.³

- Teach First will double in size, placing teachers in a third of all secondary schools in challenging circumstances in every region of England.
- Teach First will expand a pilot programme to place Teach First participants in primary schools.
- The Teach On network will expand. This initiative accelerates the progression of the growing community of teachers who are ready to become senior leaders and head teachers within schools in challenging circumstances.
- Teach First will target STEM graduates to increase the numbers of high-calibre science, maths and technology teachers working in schools in challenging areas.

There are also signs that the Teach First model will continue to spread internationally. A new international network organisation Teach for All was launched in 2007 ‘to assist social enterprises around the world who were inspired by the Teach for America and Teach First model’. The Teach for All network now includes organisations in 18 countries in Europe, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East, with programmes in an additional 10–20 countries expected to join within a few years.

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