Department of Politics

# DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

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**MSc or MRes programme:** MSc Social Research

# Full-time or part-time? Part time

**Title of proposed dissertation** It’s the thought that counts. Prospective teachers’ *intentions* – should we care, or have we not cared enough?

**Description of subject area** Teacher intentions, behaviours, and self-efficacy.

This research will explore how new teachers’ intentions relate to their actions, personal development, and resilience to the ‘reality shock’ of entering teaching.

Improving the retention of early career teachers and the overall quality of the UK teaching workforce are key policy objectives for the UK government. Cumulatively, more than a quarter of teachers (27 per cent) leave teaching within three years ([Nfer, 2020](https://www.nfer.ac.uk/news-events/nfer-blogs/what-impact-did-covid-19-have-on-teacher-retention/)), and it is now widely acknowledged teaching performance is the most important factor affecting student learning (e.g. Hattie, 2009). Entering teaching presents cognitive, motivational, and emotional challenges (Caires, Almeida, & Vieira, 2012 in Klassen et al, 2020). Teaching can be psychologically demanding job and many trainee teachers experience a ‘reality shock’ early in their careers and find themselves unprepared to adequately deal with the demands of the profession (e.g., Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Veenman, 1984). Consequently, there has been increased interest over the past decade in teachers’ self-efficacy and resilience to the reality shock of entering teaching, and how this can be improved. Simultaneously, there has been increasing interest in teachers’ motivation to teach and to remain teaching (e.g. OECD, 2005; Watt & Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2012), and an increasing acceptance that – given the changing nature of work and careers – not everyone will come into teaching with the intention of remaining in the profession and progressing incrementally over the duration of their career. However, research has not yet explored general patterns between intentionsand personal development pathways, particularly the development of self-efficacy (i.e. trainee teachers’ own beliefs in their capacity to develop into great teachers).

To address teacher shortages, the UK government has steadily increased the sizes of bursaries it has offered to graduates and career changers to train as teachers (with the exception of 2020/21 when the pandemic led to a surge in applications to teacher training courses and reductions in bursaries). Arguably, there is an implicit assumption that new teachers are a ‘blank slate’ whose actions, personal development, and resilience to ‘reality shock’ are shaped by their experience in the profession, their context, and the support they receive, and that by contrast their initial intentions - neither well-formed nor well-informed – quickly become an irrelevance. However, an alternative perspective is that large bursaries attract people into teaching who don’t put sufficient endeavour into their own personal development, and consequently don’t develop their own belief in their capacity to become great teachers and are ultimately more likely to leave the profession. Further research is needed to explore the extent to which new teachers’ intentions affect their actions, personal development, and resilience to the ‘reality shock’ of entering teaching. This should inform policies intended to address teacher shortages. If people are coming into teaching with different intentions, and this trend is accelerated by the level of bursaries on offer, then this might help account for declining retention and concerns about teacher quality. In short, the people coming into teaching might be changing more than the profession itself.

This project will explore how new teachers’ intentions before they enter teaching are related to changes in their self-efficacy, wellbeing, and satisfaction after they start, and how this is mediated by their engagement with professional development opportunities. In so doing, this research will help develop government and the sector’s understanding of the importance of attracting and selecting people with the ‘right’ intentions. This study will build on prior research that has demonstrated prospective teachers’ motivations are associated with their intentions one year after entering the profession. It will build on this prior research by exploring how prospective teachers’ *initial* intentions (before they start teaching in the classroom) affect what they think, feel, and do in their first term in teaching, and how their own beliefs in their competence as a teacher change over time. Specifically it will explore how intentions relate to their (a) engagement in professional development opportunities, (b) their wellbeing, (c) their satisfaction with teaching, (c) changes in their beliefs about their own competence (self-efficacy), and (d) their ability to respond appropriately to teaching scenarios.

The central hypothesis of this paper is that trainees’ intentions will be predictive of their engagement in professional development opportunities, and consequently also their ability to respond appropriately in realistic teaching scenarios and changes in their self-efficacy, wellbeing, and satisfaction. In short, the central hypothesis of this paper is that new teachers’ *intentions* matter, and that new teachers that are more committed to becoming a great teacher put more effort into their own development, make faster progress, and are consequently more resilient to the ‘reality shock’ of entering teaching. To test this central hypothesis, secondary data on the intentions and professional development of new teachers’ will be analysed. The sample will consist of new teachers that started training through Teach First in 2021. This is principally for practical reasons; Teach First is the largest teacher training provider in the UK (thus providing a sufficient sample to explore and identify general patterns), and has this year begun collecting significantly more data on trainees’ professional development.

‘Intentions’ is used as shorthand for ‘professional engagement and career development aspirations’ (PECDA), which will be defined and measured using Watt and Richardson’s typological approach to the study of beginning teachers’ professional engagement and career development aspirations (Watt & Richardson, 2008). The PECDA scale comprises 4 latent variables; ‘planned effort’, ‘planned persistence in teaching’, ‘professional development aspirations’ and ‘leadership aspirations’ (Watt and Richardson, 2007). Watt and Richardson have found there are empirically identifiable ‘types’ among qualifying teachers at the outset of their career and have developed profiles based on professional engagement and career development aspirations. The first stage of this research project will identify ‘types’ of new teachers starting the Teach First Training Programme, using data collected using Watt and Richardson’s PECDA scale, and replicating the analytical approach they have used (hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward’s method). The research study will then explore how intentions are related to new teachers’ engagement with professional development opportunities and their ability to respond appropriately in realistic teaching scenarios using multiple linear regression. *Changes* in their wellbeing, satisfaction, self-efficacy within their first term in teaching will then be analysed using multi-level linear regression.

**What scholarly literature will you be examining?**

I will be examining the literature on:

1. **New teachers’ intentions** – What does the existing literature say about the intentions of trainee teachers, and how they change over time? What is known about the validity and reliability of the PECDA scale as an instrument for measuring trainee’s intentions?
2. **New teachers’ professional development** – What does the existing literature say about how teachers’ develop, and how their belief in their own abilities changes over time? How are new teachers’ professional development pathways best understood and measured?
3. **Teacher retention** – What does the existing literature conclude about factors associated with teacher retention? Is there existing evidence that trainees’ intentions (and the clash of reality vs. intentions) are associated with their likelihood of remaining in teaching?

**What primary research material might you use?**

The research involves the analysis of secondary data collected by Teach First on trainees’ intentions. This has now been collected from trainee teachers that started the Teach First Training Programme in summer 2021, using the Professional Expectations and Career Development Aspirations (PECDA) scale developed by Watt and Richardson. This scale was embedded into a survey administered to trainees at the end of their initial five-week ‘Summer Institute’. Over 70% of the ~1500 incoming trainees completed the survey.

This data will be linked with other Teach First secondary data on:

* Trainees’ engagement in professional development opportunities offered by Teach First over the course of their first term in teaching
* Trainees’ ability to respond appropriately to teaching scenarios at the end of their initial five-week Summer Institute
* Trainees’ perceptions of their competencies in different domains of teaching. This is a repeated measure, enabling analysis of change in beliefs over time
* Trainees’ retention at the end of their first term in teaching

**Have you identified or spoken with a potential supervisor? If so, who?**

Yes. Dr Jean Marc Dewaele has agreed to be my supervisor.