Initial response to the government’s White Paper proposals relating to initial and continuing teacher education.

As the leading provider of initial teacher education in the country, the Faculty of Education welcomes many of the proposals relating to initial and continuing education set out in the government’s White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*. It is good to see that the DfE acknowledges that there is so much to celebrate in schools in England today - many excellent teachers, many outstanding school leaders, many schools which take seriously the task of raising students’ achievements – and recognises that the quality of those joining the teaching profession is higher than ever before.

Teacher training and education is a crucial part of the Faculty’s work, and in many respects, *The Importance of Teaching* offers encouragement and reassurance:

- We welcome the commitment to continue to raise the quality of new entrants to the profession: already, 92% of our trainees have a 1st or 2:1 degree, and over 90% are in a teaching post within six months of qualification. With colleagues in similar institutions nationwide, we train far more highly qualified teachers than Teach First, and we look to continue to contribute through mainstream PGCE courses which already are at Masters level.

- We welcome the reiteration that initial teacher education must focus sharply on classroom practice, and that key teaching skills such as teaching early reading and mathematics, managing behaviour and focusing on pupils’ Special Educational Needs are to be a fundamental focus of teacher education. These are already a key part of the Faculty’s current provision, in both initial and continuing teacher education, however, and we are uneasy with the White Paper’s assertion that ‘too little teacher training takes place on the job’. Indeed, classroom practice constitutes a very substantial and integral component of our current PGCE partnership courses, and gives trainees extensive opportunities to develop their practical teaching skills, under the guidance of experienced school mentors. So we challenge the notion that these experiences are best delivered through more school-centred ITET courses.

- We acknowledge that school-centred training has an important role to play in training teachers, but we note that Ofsted recently reported that ‘there were more outstanding initial teacher education courses delivered by higher education-led partnerships than by school-centred initial teacher training partnerships and employment-based routes’ (Ofsted, November 2010). We assume that Mr Gove is anxious to sustain and support the further development of such high quality partnerships. Indeed, we hope we will have the opportunity, within the parameters for teacher training outlined in the White Paper, to develop further our existing partnership, since this has been recognised consistently as the leading teacher training course in England.
• We would welcome clarification of the concept of Teaching Schools. In our current partnerships, we work closely with outstanding local schools, passing on a substantial proportion of the University’s centrally allocated funding for teacher training to the schools, and headteachers and parents welcome the very strong links with the University of Cambridge, and the contribution which our trainees and staff make to enhancing student learning in these schools. We trust that the White Paper will enable this type of partnership to be sustained, since the University and schools are strongly committed to it.

• We look forward to the opportunity to explore in more detail with Mr Gove and his advisors the concept of University Training Schools. We are encouraged by the White Paper’s reference to Finland, where such schools “act as a link between teaching and the latest academic research and innovation” because all our current partnerships, in initial and continuing teacher education, are based on classroom-based practice and research.

• We welcome the commitment to support the professional development of all teachers, and the development of a competitive national scholarship scheme to support professional development.

• This year, we have used our own resources to run an Inspiring the Best internship scheme, introducing Cambridge Maths, Science and Engineering undergraduates to classroom teaching in comprehensive schools, so we are delighted that the White Paper wishes to produce stronger incentives for the best graduates to come into teaching, especially in the shortage subjects.

• Each year we recruit a very small number of able and well-qualified graduates from the armed services, and we welcome the possibility that this number might increase through the proposal to pay tuition fees for PGCEs for eligible graduates leaving the Armed Forces. We are not convinced, however, that a Troops to Teachers programme will significantly impact upon the volume of recruitment to the profession or on the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

The Faculty is perturbed about some of the recommendations in the White Paper as they relate to teacher education:

• It is unclear what is proposed for the future funding of initial teacher training. It is important that any changes to the current funding mechanism do not reduce the capacity or the motivation of leading universities to support and sustain current high quality ITET partnership models.

• We note that the White Paper proposes the transfer of some Training and Development Agency (TDA) functions to the DfE; the future of the TDA itself is unclear. Over the last decade, the TDA has made a valuable contribution to the improvement of the quality of teacher training in England, and we would regret its abolition.

• The White Paper is confused about the role of schools in current partnerships. Currently, the Faculty’s outstanding initial and continuing education provision is run in partnership with primary and secondary schools in the region, which are neither ‘Training’ nor ‘Teaching’ schools. They are, nonetheless, very real and effective partners, fully involved in designing the programme, helping to teach the course, offering teaching placements for students. Headteachers, governors and parents are very supportive of the current partnership model, and all wish this to continue. It is
not clear in the White Paper that this model is recognised or accepted as a future model for collaborative school-university partnerships.

- We recognise that Teach First is attracting into the profession a very small number of high quality graduates who might otherwise not choose to teach. But the numbers of such graduates will remain extremely small, even by 2014, and we would welcome much stronger recognition for the outstanding work and the very high quality teachers which are produced from mainstream PGCE routes, in HEI-school partnerships across the country.

The Cambridge Faculty of Education has a strong commitment to initial and continuing teacher education. Identifying and developing synergies between practice and research is a key aspect of our school-based partnerships, strongly supported by headteachers, and we look forward to the opportunity to develop this further within the context of the opportunities defined in the White Paper.

Indeed, we have little quarrel with many of the priorities which Michael Gove has identified in this White Paper, and have already existing links with many of the countries identified as exemplifying international good practice: academics from Cambridge are already working with the relevant governments to support curriculum reform in Singapore, to improve teacher quality in Hong Kong, to evaluate Charter Schools in the United States.