

The University of Cambridge is one of a number of university-based initial teacher education providers committed to producing outstanding teachers who think critically and systematically about their classroom practice, respond creatively and effectively to new challenges, and contribute to the development of their profession at both a theoretical and practical level. This makes a lasting, positive impact on the lives and learning of the pupils they teach.

The following statement, produced by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in 2025, summarises our core values in this regard.

Overview

Universities have an essential role in teacher education. Teaching is a distinctive profession, defined by intellectual challenge, social impact and the privilege of shaping future generations. As such, it should be understood as an intellectual endeavour, in which teachers build and deploy criticality to make informed professional decisions every day, across a wide variety of educational settings and circumstances. To support this level of intellectual engagement, the PGCE has long been established as a Master's-level qualification.

The PGCE's Master's level status is recognised both independently and by the University of Cambridge itself. Section 6.11 of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies* identifies the PGCE as a Level 7 qualification. Level 7 is the equivalent level to a Master's degree:

https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/the-frameworks-for-higher-education-qualifications-of-uk-degree-awarding-bodies-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=3562b281_11

Likewise, within the *Statutes and Ordinances* of the University of Cambridge, the completed PGCE is equivalent to the first half of a Master's degree; PGCE students are qualified to go on to complete their MEd degree in one additional academic year, rather than the usual two.

The aim of the PGCE

We aim to develop outstanding and resilient teachers who are intellectually curious, able to think for themselves, and able to make independent contributions to the generation of knowledge within their professional communities, while also making a meaningful and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people. We expect them to continue developing and adapting their practice throughout their careers in diverse school settings, through collaborative thinking with colleagues, reflection on their practice, and critical engagement with research.

The PGCE is therefore designed to nurture lifelong learners, with high standards of professional ethics, who remain proactively committed to providing the best education possible, both in the classroom and as future leaders in education.

The ultimate goal is to improve outcomes for all young people, by supporting the development of teaching professionals who can respond to the diverse needs of students and the unpredictable realities of working in different communities and schools. The work of our PGCE programme is therefore founded on a deep, strong and long-standing partnership between our institutions and numerous local schools.

Why is a University-based teacher education important

To achieve the aims above, we believe that:

- **Teachers should learn from research**, there being strong evidence that ‘research-rich’ schools and colleges underpin the world’s best education systems. Universities like ours undertake such research, meaning that university-based teacher education provides a valuable basis for this integration.
- **Teaching requires specialist knowledge**. Teachers need subject knowledge, disciplinary knowledge (the ways of thinking and procedural knowledge that characterise a subject) and pedagogical knowledge about how to build and assess students’ learning. Universities like ours play a fundamental role in developing and continually refining the knowledge bases upon which teaching depends.
- **Teaching is inherently a moral and socially responsible vocation**, grounded in a commitment to promoting educational opportunities for all.
- **Teachers should be inducted into the tools and traditions which enable them to undertake research into their own practice**, reflect critically on that practice and build professional autonomy, thereby making their own contributions to codified professional and academic knowledge. Universities like ours build new teachers who can engage in such enquiry-rich practice.

We agree with the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET 2020), who explain that teacher education should produce teachers who are:

- **Competent, thoughtful and confident professionals**, ‘who act as independent thinkers, recognising that knowledge, policy and practice are contestable, provisional and contingent’.
- **Able to engage in enquiry-rich practice**, ‘and have a predisposition to be continually intellectually curious about their work, with the capacity to be innovative, creative and receptive to new ideas emerging from their individual or collaborative practitioner enquiries’.

Finally

Without universities, teaching and teacher education are diminished. Without research, they are impoverished. And without professional autonomy, they risk being reduced to ‘one-size-fits all’ approaches which diminish the potential for high-quality teaching and learning that meets the needs of all learners.

We share a strong commitment with colleagues across the sector to university-based teacher education at the level and standard described above. We know that such an education plays an

essential role in developing outstanding teachers who enjoy long and successful careers in the profession, often in leadership roles.