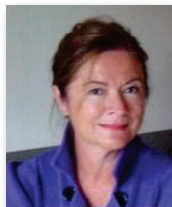


# Meeting the challenges of the classroom: the Teach First initiative

By Elisabeth Buk-Berge

How to recruit the best graduates to teaching in schools in challenging circumstances? How to recruit highly qualified and exceptional graduates who might not have considered teaching? **Teach First**, a charity organisation in Britain with funding from Government, private donations and schools, has provided a platform to address these questions, with obvious lessons to be learnt in Norway.



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Results of a full inspection of Teach First by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) published in July 2011, are very promising. Ofsted awarded the highest possible grade, "Outstanding", in all 44 areas evaluated across all regions that Teach First has operated in. Moreover, Teach First is seen as one of the most prestigious career tracks for Britain's top graduates. It is rated seventh in the 2010 Times Top 100 Graduate Employers.

It is no wonder then that many countries in Europe and beyond, including Norway, are adopting the UK model. In Norway it all started in August 2009 when Statoil and the City of Oslo education authority (UDE) established a collaboration agreement on a new Leadership Development Programme, "Teach First Norway". The agreement has formed a platform for a special type of partnership between industry and local school authorities which today includes today two additional actors: University of Oslo/Institute for Teacher Education and School Research (ILS), and the Teach First organisation in Britain.

There are big expectations for Teach First Norway on the part of involved stakeholders and, importantly, also at the political level. The Leadership Development Programme, commenced in Norway in autumn 2010, is a pilot responding to "The teacher - the role and the education", a White Paper launched in February 2009. What will happen when the pilot is completed depends on the evaluation of the programme, and the political interpretation thereof.

Certainly, the conditions for commencing Teach First Norway are very different from the ones in Britain. Difficulties with recruitment of good candidates into teaching Mathematics and natural sciences in secondary and upper secondary schools are the driving forces in Norway. In Britain there are lasting problems with recruitment of teachers

in all school subjects to schools in challenging circumstances. However, despite essential differences between Teach First in the two countries in terms of context and objectives, the positive results of Teach First in Britain provide a point of departure for developing the programme further in Norway.

Teach First in the UK is an independent education charity with a vision for a society where no child's educational success is limited by their socio-economic background. The mission of the charity is to transform the life opportunities for children from the most deprived backgrounds. In the short term, this is done by recruiting top motivated graduates to teach in challenging schools while supporting them to become effective, inspirational teachers. In the long term, Teach First is creating a movement of leaders who are expected to be committed to influencing change in education, from both inside and outside the classroom.

Trainees on Teach First become participants of a two-year Leadership Development Programme. The focus of the programme is on developing participants' leadership skills that are necessary to become effective classroom leaders, and, in a long-term perspective, leaders in all fields. The first 13 months of the programme enables participants to gain qualified teacher status. Participants teach in schools facing challenging circumstances for a minimum of two years. Before starting work in their allocated schools they attend a six-week intensive teacher training at a summer institute. In addition to work as teachers, participants attend a range of mandatory and elective components which are designed to develop their leadership skills.

Participants of Teach First Norway follow a similar scheme as their colleagues in the UK. They start by joining British participants

for six weeks of intensive teacher training at the Summer Institute at the University of Warwick. However, despite immersion in the British Teach First at the very start of the programme, Norwegian participants obtain their formal teacher certification not from Britain, but from the University of Oslo. Moreover, during the second year they attend selected courses managed by Statoil.

Since it was launched in 2002, Teach First in Britain has been supported by the government of the day. In 2010, it was identified by all three political parties in their election manifestos as an initiative they each wished to support and expand. On July 5 2010, two months after the coalition government came into office, Teach First received a £4million grant providing start-up funding to support its expansion. As Prime Minister David Cameron put it: "Teach First is a programme that recognises our shared responsibility for raising standards in schools, combining business, the voluntary sector and schools themselves. Fast tracking exceptional graduates into challenging inner city schools is a great idea and one that should be expanded nationwide."

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With the new grant from government, Teach First plans to undertake the following by 2013/14:

- Place Teach First teachers in every region of England and in almost a third of all challenging secondary schools
- Start a new programme placing Teach First participants in primary schools
- Expand the Teach On programme that accelerates the progression of its growing community of teachers who are ready to become senior leaders and head teachers within challenging schools.

The multifaceted expansion of Teach First in Britain will be elaborated further in the new Strategy 2022 which will be launched next year. As it is already announced, the strategy will include a new Statement of Intended Impact; measurable, time-limited and evidence-based statements of the progress Teach First intends to make with their partners.

Only time will show how further developments will affect Teach First Norway, as well as in what way the Norwegian programme will meet expectations in its own right. The initiative certainly reveals some of the shared features - but also some important differences - with regard to challenges in the classroom on each side of the North Sea.



**New challenges ahead.** Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg visited Southfields Community College in South West London on the first day of the new term, 5 September 2011. Crown copyright / the Cabinet Office