



Royal Society of Chemistry's (RSC's) policy position on Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses and their funding

Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) courses are particularly valuable in the sciences.

Department for Education (DfE) funded SKE courses should undergo subject specific quality assurance, such as the RSC's SKE Approval process. As chemistry is a practical subject, it is of vital importance that practical skills development is a mandatory part of the SKE training process. With this in mind, the Government should encourage SKE providers to include at least 10% of laboratory work in their SKE courses in chemistry. Moreover, government SKE funding should reflect the costs associated with running and attending practical sessions. In order to ensure the availability of high quality SKE courses, the DfE should commit to a long-term provision of SKE course funding for providers.

Key Messages

Royal Society of Chemistry's policy positions on SKE

1. SKE courses are particularly valuable in the sciences, for a number of reasons:
 - a. they enable students who have the right qualities to become a teacher, to refresh their subject knowledge before starting their teacher training course;
 - b. they allow graduates with closely related degrees in other subjects to teach what remain difficult subjects to recruit to;
 - c. it is implausible that subject-based chemistry graduates could provide the numbers of new teachers needed in England;
 - d. they provide a supported route for applicants making a career change, which again supports recruitment in shortage subjects.
2. There should be a level of external quality assurance involved in SKE course provision that is subject specific. The RSC currently provide such quality assurance for chemistry¹. This quality assurance does not include online only courses, as, while these can be suitable for some people who only need to 'refresh' their knowledge, we do not believe they are suitable for people learning knowledge and skills for the first time.
3. A minimum of 10% chemistry practical work of a chemistry SKE course should be spent undertaking supervised chemistry laboratory work.
4. The length of the course should be determined by the SKE provider, and be indicative of individual students' needs, based on the outcome of an initial subject knowledge audit.
5. The Department for Education should provide more funding for Chemistry SKE courses that contain practical science work than those that do not in order to support the higher running costs associated with these courses.

¹ <http://www.rsc.org/globalassets/09-careers/career-decisions/teaching/ske-approval---criteria-and-guidance-notes.pdf>

6. The bursaries that the Department for Education provide for students on SKE courses should be higher for students on face-to-face courses that contain compulsory practical work. This will support students to attend these courses over purely online courses. Funding is currently linked to the length of course, not the mode of delivery.
7. The Department for Education should support and encourage new SKE course providers to start courses that include sufficient practical work (see point 4). They should also encourage existing providers to increase their provision of practical work to meet the requirements in point 4.
8. The Department for Education should ensure a long term provision of SKE courses in order to ensure long term quality provision of SKE from providers is possible.
9. The mode of delivery of the course (e.g. face-to-face teaching, presentations, online tutorials) should be appropriate to provide students with sufficient knowledge and skills (including practical skills) on completion of the course. A variety of methods can be used (see 'SKE Approval - Criteria and guidance notes' for more details).
10. Teaching and learning methods should exemplify best practice in chemistry pedagogy.