Teachers and Teaching
theory and practice

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctat20

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**To cite this article:** Clare Brooks, Joanna McIntyre & Trevor Mutton (2021): Teacher education policy making during the pandemic: shifting values underpinning change in England?, Teachers and Teaching, DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2021.1997984

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1997984



Published online: 17 Nov 2021.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING
https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1997984

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group



# Teacher education policy making during the pandemic: shifting values underpinning change in England?

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines how the policy process around initial teacher education (ITE) during the pandemic of 2020 was experienced by the leaders of ITE programmes across England.Education policies,it is argued, are solutions to perceived problems, revealing latent values that drive action. Group interviews with leaders of ITE programmes across the education sector, focused on the lived experience of ITE policy developments during the first wave of the COVID-19 period (March to July 2020). The analysis drew upon three policy drivers derived from an examination of teacher education policy (prior to the pandemic) in four 'high performing' English-speaking countries (according to PISA). The three policy drivers: the economy and global competitiveness (the rationale for change); accountability and regulatory framework (the technologies for change); and the core purpose of schooling and teacher professionalism (the values underpinning change); show how the temporary policy shift soon reverted back to previous priorities. Agency and autonomy were experienced by teacher educators which enabled them to exercise expert judgment, but there were also the significant 'gaps' in the expertise of policymakers. The research reveals how values influences policy formation, creating divisions within England's ITE community, and isolating it from international policy trends.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 9 October 2021
Accepted 15 October 2021

**KEYWORDS**
Teacher education policy; COVID-19; pandemic; policy drivers

## Introduction

This paper is an empirical examination of policy process around initial teacher education (ITE) during the pandemic of 2020, critically exploring how policy drivers were experienced by the leaders of preservice teacher education programmes across England. Prior to the pandemic, teacher education policy internationally was increasingly shaped as a response to global education performance measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the prevalent assumption that teacher quality is linked to pupil outcomes, which in turn determine the economic health of the state (OECD, 2005). Policy is thus inextricably linked to international competitive performance and subject to influences of globalisation (Paine et al., 2017). Although the drivers and the evidence base are similar (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), policy responses are shaped by individual governments.

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Cochran-Smith has recognised that the "policy turn" (Cochran-Smith, 2016, p.xi) of teacher education has been particularly influential. Driven by a strong narrative about the economic importance of 'quality teachers' and by extension quality teacher education, the range of policy initiatives introduced across the globe have been remarkably similar (Mayer, 2017). Not only does this pervasiveness affect the field of initial teacher education, it also influences ITE practice through the widespread use of similar policy technologies and discourses(Ball, 2003). Understanding the way that policy influences practice is key to understanding change. This view is grounded in a perspective of policy as discourse (Ball, 1993). Ball's (2015) distinction between policy as discourse (where actors are formed and reformed by policy) and policy as text (where policy enactment occurs through interpretation and translation of policy by social actors) can reveal potential theoretical tensions between differing perspectives of policy: tensions that become problematic as policy is put into practice. Here, we focus on how ITE programme leaders, as social actors, were engaging, interpreting and enacting in a highly dynamic 'messy' policy environment (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). Policies which create"regimes of truth" affect individuals' actions and costs that come with the possibilities of action (Ball, 2015). The messiness of policymaking and enactment is analysed through the'policy is argument' approach (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013). This calls for policy analysts to move beyond simply presenting policy as a problem towards active problematising of policies,, enabling us to view policies as solutions to perceived problems (Bacchi, 2012) and understand how governments interpret these problems and solutions: education reforms are inherently political (Cochran-Smith, 2005).

Our interest is motivated by our context: ITE policy in England *is* deeply problematic as successive evolutions of policy design have failed to halt what in a pre-pandemic context was widely accepted to be a teacher recruitment crisis (Busby, 2018).It has been the focus of much analysis, as England is often seen as an outlier in the ITE policy context (Beauchamp et al., 2015), where the policy landscape has been described as diverse and complex (Whiting et al., 2018), through its diversification of "routes" into teaching and forms of qualification. Furthermore, the introduction of the government's Core Content Framework (CCF) for ITT (Initial Teacher Training[1]), outlines a series of "know that" and "know how to" statements, defining a minimum content entitlement for preservice teachers, of which the implementation within individual ITE programmes is monitored through the Ofsted Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2020). This complex landscape of policy initiatives and legislative requirements makes teacher education in England highly centralised.

Our study aimed to deepen understanding of how the English ITE policy context was situated within, and compared to, international discourse of high performing policy contexts and how this was experienced and interpreted by ITE leaders across the country. Our plans were affected by the rapid change in policy experienced as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when both ITE policy, and the way in which policymakers engaged with the teacher education community, changed dramatically. Our research sought to understand the drivers affecting policy change during this first wave of the pandemic. We wanted to explore if the unique context had enabled a different approach to ITE policy which could provide an alternatively imagined solution. This critical moment of policymaking and enactment could reveal latent assumptions, prejudices and drivers pertinent to policy creation, distribution and implementation. Our aim became to understand the experience of policymaking during this period and to situate that understanding within the international context of teacher education policy construction.

## Methodology

The research was conducted in two stages: analysis of empirical data within our own context and analysis of international teacher education policy.

First, in order to understand the rapid changes and potentially new policy directions in England, we analysed these changes through the lens of the experience of ITE programme leaders, who were simultaneously both responding to change and anticipating further change. Empirical data were generated through focus group discussions with 13 leaders of ITE programmes[2] across the education sector, capturing their experience of policy milestones during the period March 2020 to July 2020. The sample was generated through responses to a request for participants on social media (Twitter) and the UCET (Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers) and NASBTT (National Association of School Based Teacher Trainers) newsletters. All who responded were invited to take part in a focus group discussion. The twenty leads of ITE who said they would be interested in taking part in the study comprised 14 representatives from higher education institutions (HEIs) and 6 School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITTs). In the end 13 participants (8 HEIs and 5 SCITTs) were able to attend one of the four focus groups which were conducted on Microsoft Teams. To ensure consistency of approach, the same researcher conducted each focus group. The questions for the focus group discussions are in Appendix 1.Our analysis of the focus group data was conducted using an inductive approach, with each of the authors individually identifying themes within the data, followed by synthesis of our findings to ensure rigour; through this process we identified a number of emerging and high-level themes and commonalities (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Second, these high-level themes were further analysed in relation to a synthesis of policy drivers, developed from an analysis of international teacher education policies in four high-performing jurisdictions. We selected four English speaking jurisdictions (so as to be able to read and analyse texts in our own native language) from the top 15 ranking of the 2015 PISA results, acknowledging that PISA is a contested indicator of education quality, but also recognising the status and cultural capital that comes with high rankings, and the influence of these 'high performing' education systems on international policy discourse. The selected countries were Canada (Ontario), Ireland, New Zealand and Singapore. We identified key policy texts through a review of published literature relating specifically to ITE policy within that context and through a review of official documentation relating to ITE policy publicly available on official government websites. We proceeded to review the policy texts individually, adopting a framework based on Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach which:

> *starts from the premise that what one proposes to do about something reveals what one thinks is problematic (needs to change). Following this thinking, policies and policy proposals contain implicit representations of what is considered to be the 'problem' ('problem representations')* (Bacchi, 2012, p. 21)

This facilitated an understanding of what is positioned as 'the problem' whilst also exposing dimensions which have been overlooked and excluded within this configuration of policy solution. The framework highlighted aspects of policy text that directly responded to specific questions which Bacchi poses, alongside an overall narrative with

commentary against each. We then brought together our analyses, identifying commonalities and similarities in our individual readings and then looked for cross-case commonalities and discourses.

Our aim was to determine how, in these apparent high performing jurisdictions, teacher education was problematised through policy. In our analysis of this data, see Table 1, we identified seven common themes:

- Impact of the economy
- Deregulation and diversification of education providers
- Levels of accountability and regulation
- Influence of OECD international ranking tables
- Public debates about the core purpose of schooling, and how theseevolve in the light of changing economic and political circumstances
- A rationale that teacher education needs to change
- Concerns about the professional status of teachers

Our analysis shows, that whilst there are common characteristics in the way policy issues are framed, there are some important differences. Notions of teacher professionalism and teacher quality, for example, differ across international contexts, as do ways of defining how such quality might best be achieved. In order to recognise both these similarities and contextually related variations, the seven themes were synthesised further into three macro-themes which we conceptualised as policy drivers for change, each evident in the policies of the four countries studied. To that end we argue that across the jurisdictions, the economic imperative to perform well globally is the key rationale for a need to change policy, these changes are tracked through imposed accountability and regularity frameworks which act as technologies for change whilst the values underpinning the change are linked to the state's identification of the core purposes of schooling and of the teacher's professional role within that. Whilst the details in the policy texts might be different according to the rational and values justifying the need for the policy change the three policy drivers were consistent and can be summarised as follows:

Common Drivers for Policy Change:

- The economy and global competitiveness: Rationale for Change.
- Accountability and regulatory frameworks: Technologies for Change.
- The core purpose of schooling and teacher professionalism: Values underpinning Change.

These policy drivers framed the analysis of the data from interviews with ITE programme leaders, in order to highlight key features of policy enactment: in particular how the teacher educators were interpreting and translating policy during this period. The three policy drivers offered a holistic framework through which to explore policy developments, including both the intention and execution infrastructure.

Table 1. Summary of analysis of policy texts.

| | Canada (Ontario) | Ireland | New Zealand | Singapore |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Drivers from the economy** | Teaching is considered a high-status profession. There is an oversupply of teachers, and an increased interest in internationalisation and supporting Canada's diversity | Ireland's changing societal context means more diversity, changing family structures and new societal problems all of which were exacerbated by a fragmented education system (O'Doherty & Harford, 2018).<br>Many teachers are moving elsewhere in Europe as a response to the impact of the 2008 economic crisis. | New Zealand has experienced a period of growth, fuelled in some part by increased immigration. There has been a growth in a range of employment opportunities and the rise of the gig economy has made teaching a more challenging profession to recruit to. | Singapore is a small Island nation with no natural resources, so future economic success is understood as reliant on investment in the population, which need to be of the highest possible quality. A well-prepared teaching profession is central to this (National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), 2016). |
| **Deregulation anddiversification** | The Canadian system could be described as devolved rather than deregulated. Recent policy shift (TIMMS, 2015) reduced the number of ITE providers and introduced regulations about the duration and funding of ITE programmes | This led to the introduction of a market for ITE with the launch of Hibernia as an ITE provider to challenge the dominance of the existing HEI providers (O'Doherty, 2016).<br>Subsequent policy changes have been focussed on restructuring, reaccreditation and rationalisation. | New programme accreditation requirements open up an opportunity for new sectors to become involved in teacher education (Teaching Council NZ, 2018). Teach First New Zealand prepares a small number of teachers (https://teachfirstnz.org/) | Singapore has a highly unified system with only one teacher education provider, with a close alignment between teacher education and government departments (Xia, 2020) |
| **Accountability and regulation** | Accountability is devolved to Province professional bodies which regulate entry to the profession along with accreditation of ITE programmes. | Ireland has moved from having a relatively low accountability system to an increased emphasis on regulatory compliance and external accountability (Conway & Murphy, 2013) in respect of teacher professional conduct (The Teaching Council, 2012), programme outcomes (The Teaching Council, 2017) and programme accreditation (The Teaching Council, 2011) | New accountability and accreditation requirements have shifted from a focus on inputs to outputs, and on the identification of key tasks. Assessment is moving towards performance tests in addition to practical experience (Teaching Council New Zealand, 2018) | Singapore is a high accountability system with close alignment with MOE ensures that the national teacher education provider adhere to national policy priorities, annual performance appraisals and emphasis on student results. |
| **Influence of international rankings** | Ontario has been a high performer in the international rankings. | Ireland has performed well in international rankings (OECD, 2018) | OECD has characterised New Zealand as being high performing but low equity (OECD, 2005). Performance overall is high, but the concern to improve equity dominates education policy. | Singapore is a competitive and high performing nation, and performs well in international rankings.<br>The policy emphasis is on enabling schools to provide good proud Singaporeans and to reflect the multicultural diverse society (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2018a). |

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

| | Canada (Ontario) | Ireland | New Zealand | Singapore |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Changing debates on purpose of schooling** | The Canadian system has been described as a treasure hunt rather than with hunt, where the emphasis is placed on recognising what works well for dissemination and wider adoption. | Role of education is seen as public good with the responsibility of the state being that of ensuring high quality teacher education to serve an increasingly diverse population in response to changing economic circumstances in Ireland (The Teaching Council, 2010). | The emphasis on equity reflects the bi-cultural status of the nation with high level of concerns around the needs of the Maori and People of Pacifica. Parents value their children's happiness and wellbeing over achievement. | There is a common purpose for education with high levels of central oversight. As a highly competitive country, achievement is considered important but there is an increasing emphasis on holistic educational outcomes (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2018b). |
| **Need for ITE to change** | Canada embraces coherence over wholescale change and looks towards integration across the education sector. | ITE policy development was part of a wider unifying approach to education policy to ensure that there was a sense of a continuum of teacher education from the initial preparation to career long professional development (Conway et al., 2009). Structural reform followed the report of the international review panel (Sahlberg, 2012) | The need for increased equity has dominated discussions about changes in ITE (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). | The prescribed focus in ITE is on pedagogy rather than the philosophy or sociology of education. Teacher education is seen as part of a coherent system, with education policy integrated into economic and social policies.(Aras, 2018, Cambridge Assessments 2017).) |
| **Professional status and attractiveness of teaching** | There is a high regard for teachers, and teacher autonomy. There are more teachers than available positions. | There has been a decline in the prestige and status of the profession, due to some deregulation to private providers (O'Doherty & Harford, 2018). | Education has a good reputation in New Zealand, teaching remains a relatively high status profession (Teaching Council 2021), but does not attract the highest quality graduates. | Teaching is a desirable profession with only the top 3rd of applicants selected for ITE (TIMMS, 2015). |

## Findings

During the first wave of COVID-19 (March-July 2020), the ITE landscape in England shifted dramatically. This reflects accounts of changes made during this period in other countries[3] leading Mutton to conclude that the pandemic has in many contexts been an 'opportunity to consider new ways of working, to adopt innovative approaches to pedagogy and to re-conceptualise the nature of their teacher education programmes' (Mutton, 2020, p. 439).

In England, the rapid pace of policy changes affected teacher educators' capacity to respond. Our group interviews explored the experiences of leading teacher education provision during this time, highlighting both opportunities and constraints. Analysis of the interview transcripts indicated several key themes, discussed in turn below.

### *Shifting the locus for decision making*

The number of days spent in practicum placements had hitherto been mandated by government. In March 2020, when school closures In England were announced, providers were faced with significant decisions regarding immediate course provision, with many assuming that the government would step in with guidance to cover the contingencies. When this did not happen immediately, individual providers had little choice other than to make key local level decisions.

> *So I suspect some of our schools were a bit frustrated because it was an email saying 'Hello. Today's the last day you'll see our students and that's the end of it'. But I think they were frustrated that day, and then about three days later they probably thought 'Oh, thank goodness they made a decision actually'.* (Carol, HEI Lead)

Furthermore, in the context of a rapidly changing situation, both HEI and SCITT providers considered it necessary to take decisions on behalf of their wider ITE partnership rather than going through the processes usually associated with collaborative partnership working.

> *And at that point we took ownership and we let our partnership know what we were doing. We felt that we wanted not to burden partnership because they were too busy dealing with their own staff and their classes and their communities at that point and that's generally been appreciated.* (Jane, SCITT Lead)

On the other hand, schools were also making decisions which affected the way in which ITE provision might be maintained:

> *We made a decision, as a Multi Academy Trust, that actually we didn't have the capacity to support ITT trainees moving forward and actually that we felt the fairest thing to do for them . . . was that we asked our providers if we could draw those placements to an end.* (Amanda, ITT Lead in Multi Academy Trust (MAT))

There was also a recognition that schools were also having to make decisions regarding their own emerging priorities, and this inevitably meant that the focus was often not on school-based ITE provision. One HEI ITE Lead indicated that the flexibility to operate at a local level, while welcome, did not indicate any significant change of relationship with policymakers:

> *it was great that we had a degree of flexibility, but they never said 'we trust you to have that flexibility' . . . having that local direction is good but you need to feel that if it doesn't quite work out, you're not going to be pilloried.* (Patrick, HEI Lead)

This period was recalled as being one of growing frustration at the perceived lack of policy guidance from central government, focussing on a number of distinct but interrelated areas: the processes by which current trainee teachers would gain qualification; the implications of school closures in relation to both gaining sufficient school experience and compliance with the national ITT criteria; funding for those who might need to extend their period of training; the expectations of those entering the profession as newly qualified teachers in September 2020 .The decision taken by the government to allow providers to recommend trainee teachers for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at the end of the training period, based on an assessment of their trajectory towards successful completion at the time of the school closures, was welcomed by all providers and further guidance was anticipated. The delay in such guidance emerging was unhelpful and interpreted as representing a lack of policy itself.

> *It seemed to be a long time, to hear things about funding for the trainees who weren't going to make it this year . . . It just felt like they told us what to do with the bulk of this year's cohort and thought that we'd be happy with that and left it and there were too many other questions.* (Brian, HEI Lead)

In light of this lack of government guidance and the need to make decisions at local level, many interviewees noted the opportunity that this provided for more autonomy in their decision making and the flexibility to do things differently.

> *It was a bit scary because I felt like I was on my own sorting things out but at the same time nobody was telling me how to go about it. There's a bit of freedom really.* (Carol, HEI Lead)

The necessity of looking afresh at provision also led to programme changes that are likely continue in the future.

> *So it was challenging, but it worked, and I think a lot of good things have come out of it in terms of the way we structured the courses for next year based on the feedback that we've got from this year's trainees.* (Sue, SCITT Lead)

### *Varying degrees of influence with policy decision making*

Participants reported differing level of access to policymakers. Some were directly involved with organisations such as UCET, NASBTT, and other academic and professional networks such as the Russell Group of ITE providers. Kirstie, for example, talked about feeling that her voice was being heard, even though she did not have direct access to DfE officials.

> *UCET and NASBTT have been in a lot of contact with them, and I certainly feel my voice and my questions are raised to the DFE and I get responses back via those organisations.* (Kirstie, HEI Lead)

For those who did have a closer connection with policymakers they were not always able to influence policy decisions, but at least felt that their view had been acknowledged.

*I think it took quite a lot of time and effort from the Russell Group to get them to listen and I think in some areas they were successful in getting them to listen to understand and in other areas, they were less successful.* (Wendy, HEI Lead)

Initially, for many, there was a sense that Covid-related ITE policy decisions during this period involved greater communication between the DfE and the ITE sector and established what seemed at the time like an important dialogue. What emerged as time went on, however, was a feeling that this dialogue was not extended to other existing areas of ITE policy. Sarah commented:

*I think the end agenda is pretty much the same. I think that's been demonstrated by the fact that the Ofsted framework is coming in in January - I think that was the one thing that everybody was saying, please don't do this to us, Covid really knocked us with this, please, please, please I know that that was your agenda, but please don't, please just, just let it go.Every single provider, every single hub, and what do we get? It's going ahead in January.*[4] *So yes. I don't think the bottom-line agenda has changed.* (Sarah, SCITT Lead)

The three policy areas that many saw as representing 'business as usual' were: the implementation of the new Ofsted Framework for ITE; the initial roll-out of the Early Career Framework (ECF); and the introduction of the ITT CCF. Brian, leading an HEI ITE programme, thought it illogical to introduce the CCF at a time when dialogue and collaboration with school partners was so difficult to manage. Amanda, the ITT lead in a MAT, said that early indications were that the implementation of the ECF in her area would reduce the capacity for ITE mentoring in schools, and that schools were prioritising the need to deliver the ECF over the need to provide training placements. The focus for many was not on criticism of these policy initiatives *per se* but rather on the pace of implementation regardless of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools and ITE providers. Brian felt that the reluctance of policymakers to engage in discussion around the postponement of these initiatives was due predominantly to an ideological stance:

*The only answer I've got is that they don't want to be seen to be backing down. They don't want to be seen to be taking the foot off the accelerator that they've got to keep this image up of 'we're pursuing excellence', even within these different circumstances.* (Brian, HEI Lead)

## A lack of knowledge of ITE expertise by policymakers

For many the lack of influence with policymakers, both before and during the pandemic, was seen as stemming from their unwillingness to acknowledge the specific expertise within the sector, while at the same time lacking sufficient expertise themselves.

*I think also what they [the DfE] were being asked to do, was perhaps more complex than they wanted it to be, it was easier not to listen and just to do what they really wanted to do anyway, which would be a quick easy fix but perhaps not thinking about the longer term.* (Wendy, HEI Lead)

This perspective was shared by others. Carol's comments drew on experiences of discussions with policymakers during the pandemic but indicated that this lack of specialist knowledge had been a common feature of previous interactions.

> *The people in the DfE who are doing the consultations don't know the topic area. So they come up with something simplistic. So you have to tell them what teacher education is about first, and they probably do then listen . . . So, I don't know whether it's not listening or you have to go through that process of understanding it before you can listen properly.* (Carol, HEI Lead)

Michael thought that the perceived willingness of policymakers to listen more during the earlier months of the pandemic was because of a lack of knowledge rather than any real desire to engage with providers.

> *it seemed that in a way it was quite encouraging, it seemed like we had a bit of leverage in the situation, but I think that's more because they didn't know what they were doing, rather than they were actually willing to listen to us.* (Michael, HEI Lead)

### *The perception that ITE policy isdriven by economic considerations*

Many of those interviewed highlighted a tension between the policy drive to recruit trainee teachers in sufficient quantity and the need to recruit good quality trainees. In such a context, both SCITT and HEI providers perceived policy dialogue as more difficult since the predominant driver is one of quantity over quality. Previous lack of trust in providers' ability to judge the appropriateness of applicants to ITE programmes also emerged as an issue. Brian particularly resented the interference of policymakers whom he saw as being driven only by the need to secure sufficient trainees in annual application rounds. Interestingly, he contrasts the tone of previous conversations around recruitment as different from the approaches made during the early stages of the pandemic:

> *The recent phone calls, the last couple I've had have been more open in the sense that they've been less about them coming with an agenda and more about them seeming genuinely wanting to know how things are going. I think the tone is different. I'm not sure the outcomes are any different but I think it's more information gathering than it is a kind of telling off.* (Brian, HEI Lead)

## Policy drivers pertinent to teacher education policy

Whilst the thematic analysis of our data illuminates the lived experiences of leaders in the ITE sector it also became clear that our three drivers for policy change could further our understanding of the policy response to the pandemic in England. Policy, as a form of text, is an attempt at persuasion (Ball, 2015), and we contend that these drivers are used as rhetorical devices within policy documents to persuade and defend the particular policy choices outlined. We explore each of these below.

### *The economy and global competitiveness: the Rationale for Change*

In our review of teacher education policies in high performing jurisdictions, each referred to economic developments which directly or indirectly affect the demand and supply of teachers. In some cases there is an explicit recognition that policies around teacher education need to be amended to adjust to recent economic shifts, whereas elsewhere trends towards more casualised employment influence teacher supply as they

appeal to people who require flexible working. Similarly, policies refer to concerns about the quality of entrants to the profession and the need to attract the highest quality graduates into teaching. In all contexts, there is a recognition of the increasing diversification of populations due to migration, and a need to reflect that diversity in the teaching workforce. Underpinning these concerns, is an underlying drive for global competitiveness, fuelled by the OCED international ranking tables, and a rationale that a high-performing education system is essential to economic success and competitiveness.

In England the demand for high quality teachers has been the driver for ITE policy change since the White Paper in 2010, where recruitment targets have been missed by some margin for successive years (Worth & Van Den Brande, 2019). Within the current policy narrative, 'high quality' is indicated by academic success—schools and teachers need to produce good examinations results; entrants to the profession should have high degree classifications. A central tenet of the recruitment policy since 2012 has been to award financial incentives in the form of bursary payments to applicants in shortage subjects where the value of the bursary is dependent upon on market need. In this way new entrants to the profession have higher or lower market value. Whilst the bursary programme is costly, there is scepticism about its relative success in terms of the quality of teachers it attracts and the retention of those who secured the highest value bursaries (Noyes et al., 2019). Concerns about early career attrition were partly the driver for the latest (pre-Covid) teacher education policy in England,including the development of the ITT CCF and the ECF (Department for Education, 2019). Our data show that ITE partnerships' planned programme developments in readiness for the roll-out of these initiatives were put on hold when all ITE provision moved online during the early stages of the pandemic.

During the period of our data collection, the rationale for change appeared to shift as the need became more focussed on the operational and the short-term. The emphasis seemed to be on shorter-term policy priorities than the previous focus on quality teachers and a school led system with highly centralised accountability and control. Trainees currently on ITE programmes needed to be awarded qualified teacher status despite cessation of school placements. Prior to the pandemic, a key tenet of teacher education policy was that teacher training should be primarily based in schools, sites where trainees would collect evidence of meeting the Teacher Standards. The new and immediate policy problem was how to ensure adequate numbers be successfully awarded QTS to fulfil the demand for teachers in the short-term.

The data show that the policymakers appeared to lack specific and sufficient teacher education expertise to formulate solutions to this problem, and that they needed to consult with teacher educators and their representative bodies in order to come up with a strategy that could address the issue of qualification for those who had had their school placements curtailed so abruptly. This was interpreted by some teacher educators initially as a sign of confidence in their expertise, especially with regard to judging the progression of their trainees no longer underpinned by evidence from practicum. However, as the national priorities shifted (from teacher quality to teacher quantity) during the pandemic, policymakers lacked the requisite teacher education expertise to know how to ensure that sufficient teachers were qualified in time for the recruitment cycle.

### *Accountability and regulatory frameworks: Technologies for Change*

In our analysis of international teacher education policies, the establishment of the drivers for change fed into the approach for achieving that change. Each policy sought to introduce, amend or develop accountability or regulatory frameworks which govern or control teacher education. The policy technologies developed here are remarkably similar: a regulatory framework for programme accreditation; an inspection or review system; standards which drive the assessment and qualification of teachers; or a prescribed curriculum. Those responsible for oversight of these policy technologies may include governments, their agencies, or teacher-led professional associations, but each of the technologies deployed are designed to control the process, content and assessment of ITE. The rationale for the use of such technologies is often unexplored, but reference is frequently made to benchmarking with other international systems. There is little evaluation of the drawbacks of the use of such technologies.

In England, regulatory and accountability frameworks are dominated by Ofsted's inspection framework for ITE. Within Ofsted's new inspection framework, ITE providers in England need to demonstrate full implementation of the CCF. The Ofsted framework therefore became a policy technology that would ensure that the non-statutory CCF would be delivered by all ITE providers. ITE leaders in England view inspection gradings as particularly high stakes, largely because of the way they were previously linked within another policy technology, the allocation of teacher training places, where some allocations were only awarded to providers who had been judged 'outstanding' following an Ofsted inspection.

Prior to the pandemic, technologies for change, such as Ofsted and the introduction of the CCF, were mobilised to ensure control of ITE provision; the CCF, for example, provides a mechanism by which programme content is regulated more visibly. However, during the period of the pandemic, our research shows that there was a sense of a shared understanding that priorities needed to shift to accommodate changes to programme structure (such as the move to more online provision and questions about the viability of long school placements in light of Covid-safety measures being implemented in schools). ITE partnerships worked to devise a 'best fit' modification of their programmes and there was a growing consensus amongst the sector that the CCF and Ofsted inspection cycle should be temporarily paused. Participants in our sample appeared to feel that the apparent renewed trust in teacher educators in the early stages of the pandemic meant that such levels of control, through the policy technologies of change, were no longer necessary.

In England the renewed trust, as experienced by the teacher educators, seemed to signal the potential to think differently about teacher education. This was demonstrated by the early stages of consultation with policy advisors where the emphasis seemed to be on *'tell us what to do'* and *'what support do you need from us?'*. Ultimately this was short lived, and our data reveal that before the end of the academic year, teacher educators perceived there to be a move back to the previous policy agendas with their associated technologies for change. Towards the beginning of July, as ITE programmes were coming to an end, announcements were made about the implementation of the new inspection framework in January as originally planned. The rationale for the rapid implementation of this technology, despite all the upheaval in the sector, was that there was now a greater

need to quality assure ITE provision. Whereas before, interactions appeared to be about the response to the pandemic, the discussions about the Ofsted inspection framework appeared to revert to a 'business as usual' model, focusing on the rhetoric of quality and the importance of accountability. The technologies of change are thus closely aligned with the rationale of the policy and what it is seeking to achieve.

### *The core purpose of schooling and teacher professionalism: Values Underpinning Change*

Within international policy documents we found frequent references to the quality of teaching and the importance of the quality of teachers. However, the policies of high-performing systems, also emphasised the core purpose of education, and by extension schooling, and the implications for teacher education. This was seen variously as an opportunity to restate important national values such as equity, autonomy and inclusivity, and valued traditions of educational excellence. In these examples, strong cases are made for the values which underpin change, and in particular how such values reflect aspects of teacher professionalism.

Following the 2010 White Paper the situation was less clear in England, where educational policy rhetoric was premised on the value of establishing a school-led system (George & Maguire, 2019). More recently there has been an increased policy emphasis on the need for evidenced-based curricula, most usually manifest in a knowledge-rich curriculum and a focus on memorisation techniques, both of which are embedded in the content of the CCF. Our data suggest a perception that the pandemic had initially brought about a shift in the values underpinning change: that the priorities had shifted to being about schools' contribution to society, care for key workers (teachers and those that worked in schools), and a recognition of expertise.

However, whilst there is evidence of such a shift, this was only a minor one reflecting the shift in the rationale for change: the emergent and immediate concern about teacher supply. By the summer, announcements that were more in line with pre-pandemic policy directives came from the same policy advisors that had consulted with ITE leaders in the early stages. As well as the early rollout of the ECF there was the announcement of new influential Teaching School Hubs (with oversight of the delivery of ITT) both of which reflect previous policies prioritising a school-led teacher education system.

## Concluding comments

Analysis of teacher education policies in high performing systems revealed how the values of change are central drivers in how policies are formulated, articulated, and experienced. The rationale for change represents an argument about what is (or perceived to be) necessary: what the policy seeks to achieve. The technologies for change offer the mechanisms by which that change can be achieved. But both are underpinned by the values that drive the policy-making process. What our research illustrates is that nationally there appeared to be a values shift: the pandemic offered an opportunity for pause and reflection and a more self-conscious societal perspective that valued the ways in which certain workers (like teachers) were fundamental to how societies worked, both through their labour and through their relationships with the community. However, our

research also illustrates that this values shift was short-lived and once the immediate concern about teacher supply was resolved, the policy perspective reverted to the pre-pandemic position which sought centralised control and influence over ITE provision.

Our analysis does not only illustrate this shift in values during a time of national emergency. It exposes fundamental 'gaps' that render the policy making process dysfunctional. It reveals the importance of local knowledge in decision-making, particularly when dealing with a devolved school system with a range of organisations who operate in various ways. It also reveals policymakers' lack of expertise in understanding how teacher education works, and the lack of influence of those with that teacher education expertise in the policymaking process. These 'gaps' have been laid bare at a time when decision making needed to happen quickly and effectively, but are systemic and persist in the post-COVID period of policymaking.

We write this as university teacher educators and are aware that our own positionality inevitably impacts our analysis of the policy context, both before and during the early months of the pandemic. The issue of 'silenced voices' within teacher education policy making is not new, particularly in the English system (McIntyre et al., 2017). We also recognise that policymaking is not necessarily a process derived from consensus. However, we have sought to develop a deeper understanding of the motivation behind teacher education policy and how it is experienced. Adopting the three drivers for change emerging from our review of international teacher education policies has revealed the inter-related nature of these drivers: how they work together both in policy formation and the experience of that policy by those required to implement it. Our research has also revealed that the process of policy-making during the pandemic, within England, has shown some serious 'gaps' in expertise and influence which, we contend, are likely to cause concerns for the efficacy of policy formation and interpretation, and which reflect a fundamental weakness in policy formation.

Despite numerous initiatives, the policy narrative for teacher education has remained the same since 2010, situating England's ITE policy differently from policy drivers in higher performing countries. Whereas there are clear articulations of the professional status of teachers and the role of preservice Master's level teacher education elsewhere in the world, teacher education policy in England diminishes the role of postgraduate-level education in what can be termed an anti-intellectual policy stance, repositioning teaching as the craft of a skilled technicist. This de-professionalising view of teachers and teacher education is exacerbated by the gaps we have outlined above: policy-makers' lack of expertise and knowledge about teacher education (and the needs of local education communities), and the lack of involvement of the teacher education community in policy formation. Such an omission prevents teacher educators from acting as adaptive and agentive professionals which, as we have seen during the Covid-19 period, they are both capable of doing and willing to do. Such gaps also mean that teacher education, like many other aspects of the education landscape, is open to what we term the 'discourse wars'—the tension between competing discourses of progressive or neo-traditional educational approaches, and the influence of ideological positions on policy formation, guided by those who lack appropriate expertise. Regardless of where a teacher educator sits in relation to the continuum of ideas within the 'discourse wars', the impact of those competing discourses is that it is changing practices—in schools and across ITE providers, and as such is redefining teacher professionalism. The focus on dominant narratives

about the 'best way' to teach can sometimes draw on a narrow and partial evidence base, and a technicist view of teachers; we would argue that the lack of expertise of policy-makers in the complex process of teacher education exacerbates the chance of solutions based on a 'simple' view of teacher education (Jones & Ellis, 2019). The policy shifts during the pandemic, whist offering an opportunity for teacher educators to plug the gaps within teacher education policy, ultimately reveal the weaknesses of such a perspective, and how it de-professionalises teacher educators through policy formation. Not only is this approach likely to be to the detriment of teacher education in England, but it also acts as a warning to policy makers and teacher educators in other contexts. It signals, above all, a widening gap between the values underpinning change which influence ITE policy in our own national context and those which influence policy in other higher performing systems.

## Notes

1. In the English context the terms Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) are used to describe preservice programmes of teacher preparation. ITT is the preferred term in government policy texts. We use the term ITE (as preferred by some providers) unless referring specifically to government publications.
2. The providers included representation from providers of School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) and providers from universities also referred to as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
3. See Journal of Education for Teaching Special Issue Vol 46 (4).
4. The reintroduction of ITE Ofsted inspections was planned for January 2021, but it was announced on 4 December 2020, that they would take place from April 2021.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Appendix 1 Focus group interview questions

- What was your experience of leading ITE provision during this period? With the prompt: do you have to deal with different layers of stakeholders, networks and organisations?
- Using a timeline of DfE and related announcements as circulated by UCET—what are your reactions to this, do you have any comments?
- Have you been involved in any DFE Consultations since 2020? With the prompt: How does this compare to what you have experienced before?
- How effective did you feel the communication and consultation process was? (Technologies for change). With the prompt: compared to what had happened before?
- What do you think the DfE were prioritising during this period, and did that change?
- What do you think the government policy is and has been for ITE? And what has been your experience of this as a leader of ITE? With the prompt: Do you think that policy making during this period has signalled a change of policy direction or has it been a continuation of policy?