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Chapter 5
The Complex Policy Landscape of Initial Teacher Education in England: What's the Problem Represented to Be?

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Abstract Teacher education policy and practice in England differs from that of many other countries, even compared to other jurisdictions within the United Kingdom and, it has been suggested, is something of an outlier. Increasing government intervention in teacher education has led to a somewhat complex and, many might argue, confused policy landscape. Current teacher education policy and practice in England is framed by major policy reforms begun in 2010 and informed by the government's White Paper *The Importance of Teaching*. These reforms were ostensibly about improving the quality of teacher education in England but the emphasis was on market-driven approaches. The government has introduced the Early Career Framework—a prescribed curriculum for all recently qualified teachers in their first two years of teaching, with full implementation from September 2021—and a revised Core Content Framework, with implementation from September 2020. This chapter presents a critical examination of the recent policy trajectory within initial teacher education in England, interrogating policies designed to bring more recruits into the profession by following a market ideology: increasing the choice of available pathways while treating teacher preparation as on-the-job training for work in a specific setting. We investigate the espoused dual imperatives of quality and quantity in teacher education and the resulting policies and practices as postulated 'solutions' in order to tease out their implicit problem representations and the implications that they entail.

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Introduction

This chapter considers recent and ongoing policy developments in initial teacher education (ITE) in England and offers a critical analysis of the underpinning rationales for change that have acted as policy drivers for the substantial reforms undertaken within the past decade. We critically examine the current complex policy landscape, interrogating policies framed within a market-led model (George and Maguire 2019), designed to ensure that more teachers come into the profession through the diversification of routes and underpinned by the philosophy that schools should 'take more control over training the next generation of teachers' (Department for Education (DfE) 2013a). While teacher education reform is not something unique to England but is, rather, a characteristic of many countries globally (see Darling-Hammond and Lieberman 2012; Kosnik et al. 2016; Mayer et al. 2017; Tatto and Menter 2019) the specific nature of the reforms in England has made it, to some extent, an outlier in international comparisons and even within the four jurisdictions of the United Kingdom (Beauchamp et al. 2015; Loughran and Menter 2019; Teacher Education Group 2016). Having set out the way in which ITE policy reform in England has attempted to address the 'policy problem' of teacher education (Cochran-Smith 2005), we go on to examine both the way in which the problem has been represented and the way in which 'solutions' to the problem have been identified in light of such representations (Bacchi 2012). For Bacchi the 'What's the Problem Represented to be' (WPR) approach:

> 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') (2012: 21).

The task of determining 'what's the problem represented to be?' is then carried out by applying six key questions:

1. *What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?*
2. *What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?*
3. *How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?*
4. *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?*
5. *What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?*
6. *How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?* (adapted from Bacchi 2012: 21–22)

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The Context of Initial Education or Training In England

Even before we can begin to describe the policy context in England, we need to determine how to refer to the process of preparing teachers, since the choice of terms, in itself, indicates how that process is understood and so shapes the ways in which it can be deemed to have gone wrong. As university-based tutors and education researchers we regard our own work with beginning teachers as one of initial teacher education (ITE) and will therefore use that term when referring in general terms to the processes of teacher preparation. Since the Department of Education refers exclusively to initial teacher training, we will therefore adopt their favoured abbreviation—ITT when referring specifically to government policies.

In England, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is the normal requirement for a teacher in a maintained school. There is no obligation for teachers to have achieved QTS in order to teach in independent (private) schools, nor in Free Schools or Academies, but the majority of teachers in the latter would have QTS and such schools appear not to have exploited the freedom to employ more unqualified teachers (Mathou, Sarazin and Dumay 2020). In order to be recommended for the award of QTS teachers must demonstrate that they have met the requirements of the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011c).

ITE is offered as either a three or four-year undergraduate programme (usually for primary teaching but some undergraduate secondary courses do exist) or as a one-year postgraduate programme. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is a one-year course for those with an undergraduate degree, and is offered by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) leading to the award of an academic qualification as well as QTS. The PGCE can also carry credits towards a Masters level qualification. Both primary and secondary PGCE programmes require student teachers to spend at least 120 days within their course in at least two different practicum settings.

Launched by the Coalition Government in 2012, School Direct is a route into teaching that enables schools to select the teachers that they want to train. A 'lead school' offers training places in conjunction with a university or a School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) provider, with the aim being that the school should have more involvement in the leadership and content design, as well as the delivery, of the training programme. SCITTs are usually run by a school, or consortia of schools, and SCITT providers are accredited to award QTS. They offer programmes for both primary and secondary teachers and many also offer a PGCE if the SCITT in question works in conjunction with an HEI.

Standards and quality are monitored by the government inspection service, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). ITE providers are inspected regularly using a rigorous framework, which has recently been revised (DfE 2020).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the extent to which the teaching profession in England is representative of the population as a whole. In 2019, where ethnicity was known, 85.7% of all teachers in state-funded schools in England identified as White British (UK Government, 2021). By contrast, in January 2020 33.9% of pupils in

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primary schools and 32.3% of pupils in secondary schools were of minority ethnic backgrounds (up from 33.5% and 31.3% in January 2019, respectively).

Overview of Recent ITE Policy Development in England

ITE policy reform in England is well documented (see, for example,MacBeath 2011; Childs and Menter 2013; Murray and Mutton 2016; Tatto et al. 2018) and recent analysis (Menter et al. 2019) has identified distinct 'periodisations' within a broad historical overview, each characterised by a particular approach. Most recently, the period between 1984 and 2010 is seen as being one of '*diversification and standardisation'* and the period since 2010 as one of '*marketization*', the latter characterised by '*complexity and competition in training routes*' (2019: 67–68) emanating directly from the reforms of the Coalition Government which came to power in 2010. The major reforms following the 2010 White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and the subsequent policy documents addressing initial teacher training (ITT)[1] specifically '*Training our next generation of outstanding teachers – An improvement strategy for discussion*' and '*Training our next generation of outstanding teachers – Implementation plan*' (DfE 2011and DfE 2011b respectively) could be seen as the latest attempts by various governments in England to address the long-standing dual imperatives of quality and quantity in teacher education. These measures, however, represented a very different approach to previous reforms (see Furlong et al. 2008 and Furlong 2013, for an analysis of policy reform under the 1997–2010 New Labour government). While the 2010 reforms certainly continued the '*the pendulum swing of ITE in England … away from the dominance of HEIs and towards schools and teachers'* (Murray and Mutton 2016: 72) the aim to make more than half of ITE provision 'school-led' by 2015, primarily through the introduction of School Direct and the expansion of SCITT provision, was far more radical than anything that had preceded it. The rationale was set out in the above documents and was regularly reiterated as the policies started to be enacted:

> (T)he School Direct model … is designed to meet the following main aims:
>
> To give schools the ability to influence the way in which ITT is delivered, improving the system by creating more school-led training programmes that better meet the needs of schools and trainees
>
> To enable schools to recruit and select the trainees that best meet their and their partnership's needs, with the expectation that those teachers will go on to work in the group of schools where they trained
>
> To introduce choice into the ITT system by enabling schools to negotiate with their chosen provider how they wish to use their School Direct place (or places). The School Direct Training Programme also enables a school to negotiate their choice of accredited ITT provider, the funding they receive from the provider and the way in which the training is delivered. (DfE 2013b)

[1] In all government policy documents since 2010 the term initial teacher training (ITT) has been used.

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The mechanism by which the move from 'university-led' to 'school-led' provision was to be achieved was the imposition of allocation 'controls' which determined the number of teacher training places that could be allocated to any one provider, thus ensuring sufficient capacity within the sector for 'school-led' provision.[2] Whereas the number of postgraduate student teachers training with university providers declined from 28,669 in 2011–12 to 22,224 in 2015–16, the number of postgraduate trainees within School Direct during the same period grew from none to over 17,000 (Roberts and Foster 2015). The overall policy, however, was predicated on the need, within a market-led model, to diversify the routes by which it would be possible for applicants to train to teach (see Whiting et al. 2016). Thus, the majority of the changes implemented in the years immediately following the publication of the 2010 White Paper were focussed on structural reform—establishing the necessary infrastructure through which new routes could be established, and it was only subsequently that the government turned its attention to the quality and content of ITE provision.

In 2014, consistent with its previously identified perception that quality was a matter of concern, the government commissioned an independent review of the content of ITT. The final report of the review (Carter 2015) can be seen to grapple with a complex range of issues which it seeks to resolve, including maintaining a sufficient number of highly qualified new entrants to the teaching profession; the professional knowledge base of teaching and how this is acquired; equity in terms of the trainee teachers' access to high-quality teacher education; and parity of esteem between different types of provision (Mutton et al. 2017). The final report made a number of recommendations, some of which focus on the subject content of ITT programmes, while others focus on the knowledge that trainee teachers require and how they gain access to it; the need for effective mentoring; and the nature of effective ITT partnerships. The first and most significant recommendation, however, was that:

> DfE should commission a sector body … to develop a framework of core content for ITT (Carter 2015: 67).

As a response to this recommendation, the government set up a number of 'expert groups' which it said would '*lead vital work to improve the quality of initial teacher training (ITT) courses in England*' (DfE 2015). The remit of one of the groups was to establish a framework of core content for ITT (with the other two focusing on detailed content related to behaviour management content and on developing national standards for school-based ITT mentors, respectively). The findings of these expert groups were published in July 2016 (DfE 2016b), with the government making clear that all ITT providers should align their programmes with the newly established core content framework for ITT. The rationale for the development of this first iteration of an ITT core content framework was set out by Stephen Munday, the chair of the expert group, who said in his introduction to the document:

[2] These allocation controls were subsequently removed in 2017–18 in light of a growing recruitment 'crisis'.

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> Our aim has been to improve the consistency and quality of ITT courses by supporting teacher trainers and trainees themselves to have a better understanding of the essential elements of good ITT content. This, in turn, will help to ensure that gaps identified by the Carter Review are closed. (DfE 2016b).

The arrival of Nicky Morgan as the new of Secretary of State for Education in 2014 coincided with the period of the Carter Review (which had been set up by her immediate predecessor Michael Gove) and there was little by way of teacher education policy proposals until the publication of the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* in 2016 (DfE 2016). This outlined the government's commitment to 'strengthening' ITT, arguing that:

> It is crucial that teachers receive high quality initial teacher training (ITT) that prepares them for a successful and fulfilling career in the classroom. (DfE 2016a: 28, para 2.19).

The White Paper also contained further commitments to pursue the goals of the 2010 reforms, stating for example: '*We will therefore continue to increase the proportion of ITT delivered and led by Schools'* (para 2.26) and '*We will accredit new school-led providers and support a major expansion of SCITT-led training'* (para 2.27). The document did, however, appear to acknowledge a role for the university providers and confirmed:

> There will continue to be an important place for high quality universities in ITT with a strong track record in attracting well-qualified graduates. We want the best universities to establish 'centres of excellence' in ITT, drawing on their world-leading subject knowledge and research. We will seek to recognise both the best university and school-led ITT through guaranteed, longer-term allocation of training places, allowing providers to plan their provision into the future. (2016a: 31, para 2.28).

Perhaps the most striking feature of the White Paper, however, was the quite radical proposal to:

> replace Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) with a stronger, more challenging accreditation based on a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom, as judged by great schools. (2016a: 32, para 2.33).

Although this particular proposal was never implemented, due in large part to the subsequent departure of Nicky Morgan from office, and the 'churn' within the post—which saw the arrival of three further Secretaries of State for Education in rapid succession—some of the thinking that underpinned it was to resurface in subsequent initiatives. Effectively some aspects of Morgan's White Paper (in particular those linked to previous policy initiatives) were pursued, but others were not.

While there had long been concerns about teacher *recruitment*, attention at this point also became increasingly focused on the issue of retention of new teachers. The idea for a more rigorous qualification awarded by schools after a more extensive period of experience came to be transformed into plans for a much more tightly structured induction phase. The publication of the government's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE 2019a) saw the establishment of the Early Career Framework (ECF) (DfE 2019b)—a programme for all newly qualified teachers in their first two years of teaching which:

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> … underpins an entitlement to a fully-funded, two-year package of structured training and support for early career teachers linked to the best available research evidence (2019b: 4).

The ECF was introduced through an initial 'roll-out' in 2020 with full implementation planned for September 202. It is clear in the introduction to the ECF that is intended to:

> … build on and complement ITT. … As is the case for other professions, areas covered in initial training will be covered in greater depth as part of induction as teachers continue on their journey to becoming experts. (2019b: 5).

Having stipulated the content of the ECF for newly qualified teachers, it was now a much easier step to re-introduce the idea of a Core Content Framework (CCF), to be implemented from September 2020 (DfE 2019c), within *initial* teacher education. The latter has been presented as complementing the ECF in order to '*establish an entitlement to a 3 or more year structured package of support for future generations of teachers'* (2019c: 1) and it follows the ECF closely both in terms of its structure and in its designation of exactly what new teachers must learn. Furthermore, both frameworks include specific research citations to underpin each of the elements specified. The CCF document indicates that:

> … key evidence statements ('Learn that…') have been drawn from current high-quality evidence from the UK and overseas. (2019c: 4).

There is little indication as to what makes the evidence 'high quality', or the way in which the references may have been selected unless to reflect a particular perspective. The references themselves are not annotated so it is not possible to discern the warrant for their inclusion, other than that the evidence has been deemed to be of 'high quality'. While a long list of references to provide evidence in support of both the EAF and the CCF could be interpreted as placing research and theory at the heart of ITE programme content, it is worth noting Helegtun and Menter's (2020) analysis of the role of evidence in recent policy making in England and their conclusion that:

> … the role of 'evidence' in policymaking has moved the environment from an age of measurement to an 'evidence era'. Furthermore, we have shown how 'evidence' has become a tool of government to justify policy, but also to grant speaking rights to selected actors whom ministers deem to have the right ideological leanings. This takes place under a tight central control with 'evidence' translated through an emphasis on how it will be received by politicians and the general public, not through any academic notions of rigour, robustness or reliability. (2020: 11).

In summary, England has, as can be seen, undergone significant policy reform in ITE over the past decade; reform, one could argue, that demonstrates a high degree of policy coherence in that the original direction set by the 2010 White Paper has continued to inform subsequent policy developments. Much of this reform has been premised on the idea of teacher education as a 'policy problem' which can only be addressed by an interventionist approach and increasing moves towards standardisation. In going beyond this initial analysis of the policy context, we now seek to examine this policy trajectory in light of the questions that Carol Bacchi raises.

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What's the Problem (of ITE in England) Represented to Be?

While policy reform has ostensibly been driven by the need to attract more high-quality teachers to the profession, driven by an economic imperative around the influences of globalisation and aligned with similar policy trends elsewhere in the world (Paine et al. 2017; Tatto and Menter 2019), one distinct representation, and recurrent theme over recent decades, has been the identification of university teacher education as the central problem. Linked with this theme is a related view of the disputed relevance of educational theory. This narrative emerged strongly in the 1980s among those labelled the 'New Right' (Furlong 2005), for whom universities were seen as introducing teachers to progressive educational ideas and not focussing sufficiently on the teaching of substantive subject knowledge. The related critique is that university teacher education focuses too much on irrelevant theory and not enough on the practical skills of teaching which, it is argued, can only come from extensive classroom practice. This argument is central to the Policy Exchange Report '*More Good Teachers'* (2008):

> Over the past 30 years there has been a reluctant acceptance that practical, competence-based training is more valuable than theory. At the beginning of their careers, new teachers need to acquire the craft of managing classrooms so that their pupils learn effectively. This is not achieved through the acquisition of abstract knowledge in a seminar room; it is gained through apprentice-style training in classrooms. (2008: 28).

Likewise, the report uses economic arguments to support the case for reducing the role of the university and moving responsibility for teacher education into schools. Interestingly, it is this report that acts as the blueprint for many aspects of teacher education policy that took shape in the first two years of the Coalition Government and is echoed in the rhetoric of Michael Gove and Nick Gibb, writing during a brief period when he was not Schools Minister:

> Teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman. (Gove 2010).

> In the past, the education debate has been dominated by education academics—which is why so much of the research and evidence on how children actually learn has been so poor. (Gove 2013).

> Who is to blame for our education system slipping down the international rankings? The answer is the academics in the education faculties of universities. (Gibb 2014).

In the Carter Review, the issue of the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education is once again evident, and the arguments around the apparent university-led/school-led division come again to the fore, but here the problem is represented more as one of equity for trainee teachers, whatever route they have chosen. Content is identified as being too variable, and one of the report's recommendations is for the government to establish:

> A central portal of synthesised executive summaries, providing practical advice on research findings about effective teaching in different subjects and phases (Carter 2015: 54).

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Evidence submitted to the review by headteachers indicated another underlying representation of the policy problem in teacher education, namely that recently qualified teachers are not sufficiently prepared to enter the teaching profession, particularly in their competence in relation to behaviour management. This links back to a critique of the lack of relevance of traditional models of training and supports the argument that the most valuable aspects of any teacher education programme are those related to direct classroom experience.

What Presuppositions or Assumptions Underpin This Representation of the 'Problem'?

The underlying assumptions here, as noted above, are that little can be learned about teaching other than through direct experience of the classroom through the practicum experience. There are, however, varying levels of acknowledgement in the policy documentation in England that it is the quality of the practicum experience that is important, not just the number of days or hours spent observing other teachers or actually teaching. Likewise, the prevailing assumption is that theory in teacher education programmes is largely irrelevant, rather than acknowledgement of the potential contribution that it might make to beginning teachers' learning as an integrated part of an effective clinical practice model. As Burn and Mutton (2015) point out:

> … the school-based elements of ITE programmes cannot be construed merely as providing scope to learn from experience or by imitating experts. … For beginning teachers working within an established community of practice, with access to the practical wisdom of experts, 'clinical practice' allows them to engage in a process of enquiry: seeking to interpret and make sense of the specific needs of particular students, to formulate and implement particular pedagogical actions and to evaluate the outcomes. (2015: 219).

How Has This Representation of the 'Problem' Come About?

It is, at one level, easy to understand the representation of ITE as being inherently a problem of the perceived irrelevancy and inadequacy of university provision, stemming from a period in the 1970s in England when this argument may have had some justification (Whitty 2014). Yet by any objective standards, this is not the case currently in England where 100% of age-phase partnerships have been judged by Ofsted to be at least good and 37% of these outstanding (Ofsted 2020). Instead of celebrating the success of the system, at least as judged by the government inspectorate, the Department for Education has announced in the middle of the current Covid-19 pandemic a fundamental review into the shape and structure of the ITE market.

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So why is ITE represented as the 'problem' rather than the solution? Part of the answer lies in the international discourse around the improvement of both teacher quality and the professional education of teachers that has been underpinned almost universally by neoliberal political agendas (Cochran-Smith 2005; Furlong 2013). The question of what type of teacher is needed has been combined with debates around their preparation through 'school-led' or 'university-led' systems. In England, in particular, this has been accompanied by government attempts to encourage a market economy of alternative providers and routes into teaching that either bypass or reduce the role of universities. Ironically, of course, this is the very market that the DfE now wishes to rationalise. Education has historically been highly politicised in England. The current government's political stance is seen by many to be hostile to both university involvement in ITE and what is viewed as 'progressive' forms of education. Government initiatives such as teaching apprenticeships or the Troops to Teachers non-graduate programme may have had limited impact on recruiting teachers but their existence reflects the political view of ministers, both past and present, who believe that teaching should be seen as a trade that can be learnt through apprenticeship or by those who have a particular form of resilience.

What Is Left Unproblematic in This Problem Representation? Can the 'Problem' Be Thought About Differently?

What is left unproblematic or unproblematised in the simplistic and short-sighted view of university involvement in ITE as the problem, is a focus on what makes a teacher fully professional and able to navigate different challenges and contexts in their career. Government reforms aimed at improving teacher quality have relied on a focus on the structures and content of courses rather than the pedagogical assumptions around the sort of curriculum that can help to produce effective teachers. At the same time, ITE has become a growing and highly competitive industry. This has led to perverse incentives for ITE providers to both maximise numbers as an economic necessity and produce standardised and conformist beginning teachers. In 'training' the 'craft' of teaching complexities and contradictions are either ignored or not recognised, reflected in the use of the term initial teacher training, or ITT (rather than the established term ITE) where the focus is rarely on the processes of professional learning across multiple sites and cultures of practice or on conceptualisations of what makes a teacher fully professional.

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What Effects Are Produced by This Representation of the 'Problem'?

Perhaps the major effect of this representation has been an increasing polarisation of views that affords little room for exploring developments in teacher education pedagogy. This has been the result of a sector that is reliant on effective partnership becoming increasingly competitive and market-driven. Instead of collaboration across the sector in concerted research focussed on beginning teachers' learning, the discourse can descend into unhelpful binaries between educational theory and academic research on the one hand and practical or craft knowledge on the other. Teacher education development has long been hampered by problems associated with this theory/practice divide. Seeing the university as the problem has led to some ITE providers rejecting theory altogether, insisting that if teaching is really a practical craft then the only learning can be from the practicum. There are also polarised debates about what sort of evidence can inform the profession. Concepts associated with research-informed clinical practice (Burn and Mutton 2015) such as practical theorising (testing theory in practice and evaluating them in relation to academic criteria) and adaptive expertise are seen as the property of a few established partnerships rather than a potential tool for all. In contrast, learning in many SCITTs is limited to the specific context in which the student–teacher is situated.

How/Where Has This Representation of the 'Problem' Been Produced, Disseminated and Defended?

The representation of the 'problem' of ITE has been through both policy documentation and through the guidance around the ways in which information about a career in teaching is disseminated. Problems of retention and recruitment in teaching have been used as both a smokescreen for the real issue and a way of representing previous conceptions of ITE as failing. Concerns about a shortfall in the numbers of teachers needed for schools in England, and figures suggesting that around a quarter of newly qualified teachers who join state-funded schools leave within four years, have resulted in intense government focus on recruitment and incentives to become a teacher. Yet the incentives have been market-driven with generous bursaries available to candidates in shortage secondary school subjects such as physics and mathematics, but nothing at all offered to trainees in early years or primary. The economic crisis caused by the pandemic and the subsequent rise in applications for ITE places has resulted in major cuts in most subjects other than physics, chemistry and mathematics. Marketing of teacher training opportunities has focussed on the teacher being an inspiration or role model, rather than on the learning involved in becoming a teacher.

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Conclusions

We have argued in this chapter that increasing government intervention in teacher education in England has led both to a somewhat complex and confused policy landscape and the creation of a politically driven characterisation of the policy problem in ITE. Government reforms have led to a teacher education sector that is dependent on partnership working that is in practice characterised by competition and market-driven approaches. Current teacher education policy and practice in England has been framed by major policy reforms begun in 2010 and informed by the government's White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) with an emphasis on market-driven approaches resulting in wide diversity of ITE provision. The subsequent Carter-led independent review of teacher education and the new Core Content Framework for ITE reflect the government unease at autonomy in the sector, reflected in an anti-intellectual and anti-university discourse. This has increased polarisation, limited collaboration and obscured a real need to focus on the complexities of learning to teach. This will require a focus on the pedagogy of learning to teach by interrogating the lessons from both practice and research.

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