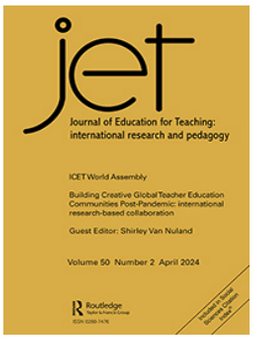

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Does initial teacher education (in England) have a future?

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Introduction

The question in the title may be provocative but is one that needs to be addressed. The time has passed when we can assume that established initial teacher education (ITE)[1] practices in England will continue in anything like the same way as they have previously, and it appears that we are at something of a watershed. Recent commentators have gone so far as to identify ITE in England as being in a state of crisis (Ellis and Childs 2023), predominantly as a result of almost continuous policy reform over the past 40 years but specifically as a result of policies implemented since 2019. Ellis and Childs (2023) have concluded that '(A)s a result of this unique combination of policies, England now has the most tightly regulated and centrally controlled system of ITE anywhere in the world' (2023, 2). The desire for policy makers to exercise ever-increasing levels of control stems, perhaps, from the identification of teacher education as a 'public policy problem' (Cochran-Smith 2005, 1) the goal of which is

> to determine which of its broad parameters that can be controlled by policymakers is most likely to enhance teacher quality and thus have a positive impact on desired school outcomes. (2005, 4)

The way in which this perceived policy problem has been addressed internationally, through regular reviews of teacher education provision and ongoing policy reform initiatives, is well documented within the literature (see, for example, Darling-Hammond and Lieberman 2013; Kosnik, Beck and Goodwin 2016; Mayer et al. 2017; Childs and Menter, 2013). Virtually continuous reform, particularly in Anglophone countries, has led to what Hulme describes as '(t)he ideological and discursive construction of permanent crisis in teacher education' (Hulme 2016, 46). While the drivers for such reform are often similar, and closely linked to any government's wish to improve national student outcomes in relation to specific global performance measures, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), individual governments may respond differently in terms of subsequent teacher education policy (Brookes, McIntyre and Mutton 2021). In England, the policy response has been distinctive and has led to the country being identified as something of 'an outlier' in comparison with reforms in other nations, even

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within the four devolved jurisdictions of the United Kingdom (Loughran and Menter 2019, 220). In Wales, for example, where there are only a small number of ITE providers, all of which are universities, and recent reforms have been driven more by a particular conceptualisation of teacher education pedagogy (see Mutton and Burn 2020) than by a market-driven approach. In Scotland, policy-making is considered within a more collaborative framework, with greater levels of consultation between key stakeholders and more responsibility devolved to local public bodies (Cairney, Russell and St Denny 2016). The aim of this paper is to explore why England may have become such an outlier and to examine what the broader implications of these policy reforms might be.

The recent policy context in England

While education had been a key policy focus of the 1997–2010 Labour government (see Furlong et al. 2008; Furlong 2013, for an analysis of reforms during this period), the Coalition Government, which came to power in 2010, signalled a new direction for education policy with the publication in 2010 of the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010). In terms of teacher education, the government emphasis on more 'school-led' provision led to a significant increase in the number of accredited 'school-based initial teacher training' (SCITT) providers, as well as more direct involvement of schools in the initial recruitment of trainee teachers. Furthermore, schools were to have a greater responsibility for the planning and delivery of ITE programmes, through the introduction of the model known as 'School Direct' (Department for Education 2011b). The government's aim was for at least 50% of TE provision to be 'school-led' by 2015.

Despite the boldness of this vision and the sweeping changes that followed from its ambition, the perception of ITE as a public policy problem persisted. The publication of the government's ITT Implementation Strategy was followed by a plethora of policy interventions, focussing on both the structure and content of ITE programmes (see Mutton, et al. 2021 for further details). Once such policy change saw, for the first time, the introduction of a defined 'ITT Core Content', a key recommendation of the Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (Carter 2015) commissioned by the government in 2014. The Carter Review focused on a number of related issues, including recruitment to ITE programmes; the knowledge base of teaching and the way in which pre-service teachers gain access to this knowledge; and the perceived need for parity across different forms of provision (Mutton, Burn and Menter 2017). Subsequent reforms, some of which can be traced back to the Carter Review and others which appeared as a result of the government's Recruitment and Retention Strategy (Department for Education 2019c), such as the establishment of the Early Career Framework (ECF) (Department for Education 2019a), continued to address perceived issues around both programme structure and course content.

The current set of reforms in England, namely the 'ITT Market Review' (DfE 2021b; 2021b 2021a), is the strongest indication yet of the way in which the government sees the ITE sector operating, although the review itself, somewhat ironically, has little to say about the workings of the market. Instead, it focuses on the requirement for all providers to apply for re-accreditation, in line with a set of criteria that require strict adherence to the government's ITT Core Content Framework (CCF) (Department for Education 2019b). The latter is accompanied by a list of references, offered as 'suggested reading, which can be

shared with trainee teachers to support their critical engagement with research' (2019c, 4), although the specific research studies cited within that list appear to represent a very partial representation of the available research, focusing predominantly on studies carried out within one particular paradigm (Hordern and Brooks 2023a).

The most recent example, to date, of the constraints imposed on providers as part of the process of policy implementation appears in the Market Review Stage 2 Guidance (Department for Education 2022), to which all providers must adhere as part of the re-accreditation process, and which requires the submission of curriculum materials to the government for further scrutiny. The guidance makes it clear that the materials submitted by providers will need to 'meet the bar in terms of CCF incorporation and presentation of evidence' (2022, 9). The 'school-led' narrative of the government's earlier reforms, implemented in 2014 and which, it could be argued, may have led to enhanced school–university partnership working (Jackson and Burch 2016), appears now to have been replaced by a centrally mandated model that takes little account of the school or local community context in which beginning teachers are learning. ITT providers and their school partners are expected to work within the parameters of the CCF both in delivering the content, embodied in the 64 'Learn that . . . ' statements, and in assuring the processes through which the trainee teacher will learn, which are encapsulated in complementary 'Learn how . . . ' statements. These 'Learn how . . . ' statements 'define an entitlement to practise key skills as well as an opportunity to work with and learn from expert colleagues as they apply their knowledge and understanding of the evidence in the classroom' DfE (2019b, 5).

The future of teacher education in England: an analytical framework

In considering whether the most recent policy reforms now call into question the very future of teacher *education*, we are drawing on the six questions that underpin Carol Bacchi's 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) framing of policy-making.

For Bacchi, the WPR approach develops from the premise that proposals for policy reform reveal a great deal about the way in which the problem has been conceptualised. Policy making thus contains implicit representations of what is considered to be the 'problem' ('problem representations') (2012, 21) and Bacchi suggests six questions that can be used to tease out some of these implicit representations:

(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)

In order to carry out this analysis, we examined a range of teacher education policy documents produced in England between 2010 and 2022 (see Appendix 1 for a full list).

While these policy documents have different levels of status (from the 2010 government White Paper to review reports and consultation documents), all have been integral to the reform process. We selected key policy documents which relate directly to initial teacher education, enabling us to examine the policy trajectory over time. Using Bacchi's six questions, we focus on the way in which teacher education in England, as elsewhere, has been constructed as a 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith 2005) but also on the very particular way in which the 'problem' has been both framed and addressed during more than a decade of reform.

What's the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policy proposal?

In England, as in many other countries, policy has focussed for many years on securing a sufficient number of new entrants to the teaching profession (and then preparing them to teach effectively through high-quality pre-service teacher education programmes). It has been based largely on an economic imperative and influenced by global factors (Paine, Aydarova and Syahril 2017; Tatto and Menter 2019). In the early 2000's the then Labour government identified partnership as being central to the way in which the issue might be addressed. It launched a National Partnership Project (NPP) through the Training and Development Agency for Schools, in order to build capacity within the school system, as well as improving the quality of teacher education in schools. While the initiative was seen to be successful in leading to an increase in the 'commitment of large numbers of schools and teachers to contribute to the training process', it also resulted in partnership being redefined 'as a concept of governance rather than as a concept of professional education', with the 'essential contributions of higher education to professional formation – the consideration of research, of theory and of critique – all [being] expunged as important components of professional education' (Furlong et al. 2008, 317). The NPP, in many ways, offered further evidence that the underlying conception of the problem was rooted in the 'conceptual binary around "theory/practice" and a related "universities/schools" divide' (Murray and Mutton 2015, 70) and the perception that 'university models of teacher education overly emphasise theory, values and beliefs at the expense of actual teaching practice . . . ' (Cochran-Smith et al. 2020, 47).

Certainly, the need for greater involvement of schools in ITE programmes and the potential of effective school-based teacher education (Hagger and McIntyre 2006) has been acknowledged and promoted. What has been described variously as the 'practicum turn in teacher education' (Mattsson, Eilertson and Rorrison 2011, 17), a '(re)turn to the practical' (Beauchamp et al. 2015, 154) and 'the turn toward practice' (Zeichner and Bier 2014, 103) has become a feature of provision in a large number of international contexts. In England, the move towards school-based teacher education has also gone beyond consideration of the amount of time spent in schools, with a further emphasis on the need for schools to have a greater responsibility in programme design and candidate selection, characterised as 'school-led' provision (DfE 2011b, 9). This policy direction has, however, also had another dimension, driven by an ideological position that identifies the problem as being rooted specifically in the involvement of universities in teacher education. The blueprint for the 'school-led' model was clearly set out in an influential think-tank report published by Policy Exchange (Freedman, Lipman and Hargreaves 2008), but

the report linked the necessity for greater involvement of schools in ITE to what it saw as a related imperative to reduce both the influence of universities and the financial costs associated with their programmes. The report concluded that 'on-the-job training, supported by the funds currently diverted to higher education, would be far more valuable' (2008, 66–67). It also made clear the distinction between what it saw as overly theoretical university-based provision and practically relevant classroom teaching experience:

> 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)

The attitude of policy-makers towards university teacher education in England in the decade following the 2010 reforms appears to have been somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, the government sought ostensibly to 'encourage more universities to follow the example of the integrated working of the best university-school partnerships' (Department for Education (DfE 2011b, 11), seeming to recognise that integration lay at the heart of effective partnerships. Likewise, the Carter Review (2015) picks up the theme of integration, arguing that:

> (p)rogrammes should be structured so that there is effective integration between the different types of knowledge and skills trainees need to draw on in order to develop their own teaching. Programmes that privilege either 'theory' or 'practice' fail to take account of the necessity of such integration. (2015, 21)

On the other hand, the rhetoric of those most closely involved in ITE policy reform seemed to reveal a very different perspective. As Secretary of State for Education at the time, Michael Gove was clear in his belief that '(t)eaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman' (Gove 2010).

Similar (although perhaps less forceful) critiques can be found elsewhere, such as in the Australian Government's response to the 'Action now: Classroom ready teachers' review which identified, as a problem 'the gap between the knowledge and skills universities are preparing their teaching graduates with and those that are needed for new teachers to thrive in the classroom' (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015, 8).

This is echoed in the document setting out the new requirements for ITE in Aotearoa New Zealand (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand 2022) lists, as one of the issues to be addressed, a perception that ITE has 'become increasingly academic and newly graduated teachers lack practical skills' (2022, 13).

Established models of teacher education have, over time, been subject to various (often hostile) critiques which have focused on: the perceived irrelevancy of teacher education programmes, particularly the way in which they engage with educational theory; the extent to which university-based teacher educators are seen to be out of touch with the day-to-day realities of schools and schooling; and the extent to which new entrants to the teaching profession are judged, often by school leaders, as being insufficiently well prepared for those realities, particularly in terms of the management of pupil

behaviour. Such critiques are not necessarily new, but have come to form the underpinning rationale of policy reform in recent years.

What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?

A number of inter-related assumptions appear to lead to this representation of the problem. The first such assumption is that teacher education is not of sufficiently high quality to produce teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for preparing their future pupils to achieve the sort of outcomes on which a successful national economy depends, with teacher education policy clearly linked to wider global issues (Furlong 2013). In England, the newly elected Coalition government set out its 'Case for Change' (DfE 2010a) to accompany the publication of the 2010 White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010b). From the first paragraph, the document makes clear that the driver for reform is the necessity for the country to perform better in international league tables, which are seen to demonstrate that 'there is scope for improvement in the training of teachers' (2010b, 10). The Secretary of State for Education, commenting in a newspaper article in 2011 on the most recent PISA results, is explicit that these results have to drive reform since they show that:

> . . . we are falling further and further behind other nations. In the last 10 years we have plummeted in the world rankings from 4th to 16th for science, 7th to 25th for literacy and 8th to 28th for maths. (Gove 2011)

The second assumption is that teacher education therefore needs to be placed increasingly under the control of the state, an assumption which Tatto (2006) attributes to perceived global imperatives, arguing that:

> formal and informal accountability mechanisms are continuously created to secure compliance with globally determined standards of quality in teacher learning and practice. The '"new accountability",' promoted and legitimized in the globalization era by international agencies such as OECD, has become in many cases the essential tool of the state to initiate change and regulate systems that may already have in place other (more culturally based) regulatory mechanisms. (Tatto 2006, 232)

In England, a wide range of measures consistent with the assumption that the government needed to assume increased control of teacher education have been enacted in the last decade, many of them set out in the initial 2010 White Paper. These include: reform of the qualification standards for teachers; reform of the routes into teaching; control of the allocation of training places) and others which have been implemented since, particularly in relation to ITE course content (see above). Adherence to ITE requirements is monitored by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), through its inspection of ITE providers.

The government's 'Case for Change' made it clear that those who trained to teach on employment-based routes were likely to be better prepared for the profession than those who trained within university partnerships, arguing that 'there is evidence that university-based trainees see their training as too theoretical' (DFE 2010a, 9). Such conclusions provide a rationale for reform, based on an assumption that employment-based routes provide better professional preparation for teachers than traditional university programmes and that preservice teachers can learn little about teaching, other than through

direct classroom experience, with theory being seen as unnecessary or even damaging. Nick Gibb, a former Schools' Minister (who was subsequently re-appointed and held the post until his resignation in November 2023) was clear about what he saw as being the nature of such assumed damage: '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).

How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

Gibb's identification of the perceived problem (and, in his view, the cause) is a clear example of the way in which the representation of the problem has been determined, and takes us back to the international context and the seemingly ever-present call for reform of teacher education in so many countries (Ellis, Steadman and Trippestad 2019). The impetus for such reform has focussed on national performance in international comparative assessments (what Gibb refers to as the 'international rankings') and the need for individual countries to do better in order to achieve national results that are comparable to those which are the highest performing. As noted, this imperative leads to a policy discourse around the need to improve both teacher quality and, by extension, the quality of teachers' professional education so that teachers are prepared effectively to meet the challenge of improving the performance of the nation's children as measured by these international assessments. Cochran-Smith (2005) and Furlong (2013) discuss the way in which such a discourse has been driven by neoliberal policy agendas, which, in England, has resulted in increasing levels of marketisation (Whitty 2017), through the proliferation of alternative providers and the diversification of routes into teaching. Certainly, such policies have been premised on the belief that any increase in the number of different routes into teaching will result in greater choice and flexibility for the 'consumer', and is therefore likely to lead to increased levels of recruitment; but these policies have also been developed in order to challenge the traditional dominance of university-led teacher education.

In summary, the representation of the policy problem has therefore come about because of the perceived imperative to improve England's performance in terms of PISA results, interpreted as a need to produce better-qualified teachers, which in turn required improvement in the quality of preservice teacher education programmes. Yet Ofsted, the body responsible for national inspection of teacher education provision reported in 2019 (Office for Standards in Education, 2019) that there was no problem with the *quality* of that provision, and that 'one-hundred per cent of age-phase partnerships are now good or outstanding, a slight increase from 99% at the end of both June 2017 and June 2018'. The justification for reform was therefore presented in terms of a demand for *consistency*, that is to say consistency for all trainee teachers in terms of curriculum content. The proliferation of alternative routes and multiple teacher education providers – previously driven entirely deliberately as part of the process of marketisation – was now, itself, represented as a problem in terms of the variety and inconsistency to which it gave rise. The solution advanced was tighter regulation of the teacher education curriculum to a point at which the government in England now frames its own 'quality criteria' around the principle of 'fidelity' to a narrowly defined core content framework (DfE 2022).

The roots of the drive towards consistency as a proxy for quality can be seen in the report of the Carter Review (2015). While the report acknowledges the need for the effective integration of theory and practice within programmes (see above) and makes clear that preservice teachers require 'an appropriate combination of access to the expertise of teachers and pupil learning contexts, as well as engagement with and experience of relevant educational research' (2015, 21), much of the report's analysis focusses on the need for greater consistency of provision and more equitable learning experiences, regardless of the particular training route that new entrants decide to pursue. The report is, therefore, clear that standardisation is the answer to the perceived problems and, in its first recommendation, calls for further work 'to develop a framework of core content for ITT' (2015, 6). Interestingly, the next sentence in the recommendation makes its own stipulation about how this framework should be constructed: 'We feel it is critical that a framework is developed by the sector, rather than by central government' (2015, 6).

It is important to note, however, that as positive as many of the early sections of the Carter Report were in relation to the role and value of educational research, the actual *recommendations* of the review to the government did not reflect these premises and instead focussed on the need to ensure consistency (and by implication, uniformity) across all initial teacher education providers through further standardisation. The government did, in fact, take up the recommendation and asked Stephen Munday, Chair of the Teaching School's Council at the time, to lead an expert group in producing an ITT core content framework, which was eventually published in 2106. In the introduction to the framework to which all ITT providers were required to adhere, Munday says:

> 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 2016, 3)

This first iteration of the Core Content Framework itself was closely aligned to the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011a) and did not go much further in defining what it saw as 'the essential elements of good ITT content' but clearly articulated the view that 'gaps' needed to be filled. Subsequent policy has continued to highlight the need to address these apparent gaps and the discourse around the need for consistency has continued, resulting in the most recent iteration of the Core Content Framework (DfE 2019b) which requires 'fidelity' to what is now a much more prescriptive framework.

What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?

Representing the problem as one of quality, while at the same time seeking to address it through the implementation of 'quality criteria' (predominantly focussed on standardising all provisions within a narrowly conceived model) is itself problematic. Predicated on a particular view of what teachers should know and be able to do in order for them to be 'classroom ready' at the end of their teacher preparation programme, the CCF is made up of a series of 'know that' and 'know how to' statements which providers must teach and which preservice teachers must apply to their practice.

What is left unproblematic or unproblematised in this reductive model is any consideration either of the nature of teachers' professional learning, or of the way in which ITE programmes might lay the foundation for *ongoing* professional learning, as teachers are inevitably required to navigate different challenges over the course of their career, especially in adapting to new curricula and new contexts. In one way this is hardly surprising since ITE reform, aimed ostensibly at improving teacher quality has, in recent years, relied increasingly on control of the structures and content of courses, rather than examining the pedagogical approaches underpinning the sort of curriculum that can help to produce effective teachers. There appears to be little acknowledgement that teaching is complex, not only because of the nature of the extensive professional knowledge base on which teachers have to draw (Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2007; Shulman 1987; Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer 2001) but also because it is a relational practice which involves teachers having to deal with multiple variables in complex situations (Doyle 1977), requiring moral judgements about how to arbitrate between competing (and often incompatible) priorities (Kennedy 2005). While 'rules of thumb' might be appropriate as a response in some situations, preservice teachers need also to understand why an approach to teaching might be effective (or otherwise) in any given context, and how practice might need to be adapted. Rules of thumb or prescriptions for practice, when applied consistently, may certainly lead to efficiency, but do not necessarily equip the preservice teacher with the capacity to 'move beyond existing routines… to rethink key ideas, practices, and even values in order to respond to novel situations' (Hammerness et al. 2005, 358–59), a capacity which has also been referred to as 'adaptive expertise' (Berliner 2004; Hatano and Inagaki 1984).

What is, therefore, left unproblematic is any recognition either that teachers have to be prepared in ways that make them able to adapt to new contexts, or that they require sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge on which to draw in order to make informed decisions about possible competing courses of action. The 'silences' within the policy suggest that little attention has been paid to what *professional* learning for teachers would look like if teaching was to be seen as a genuinely 'professional endeavour' that

> … demands of teachers practical knowhow, conceptual understandings of education, teaching and learning, and the ability to interpret and form critical judgements on existing knowledge and its relevance to their particular situation. (Winch *et al*., 2015, 202)

We have argued elsewhere (Burn and Mutton 2015) that, for preservice teachers, the learning process needs to be one of 'research-informed clinical practice', which recognises the 'necessity of bringing research-based understandings of teaching and learning into dialogue with the professional understandings of experienced teachers' (2015, 219). At the heart of this approach is the notion of 'practical theorising' (McIntyre 1990a, 1990b; 1995; Hagger and McIntyre, 2006; Burn, Mutton and Thompson 2022), based on the belief that, in order to develop adaptive expertise, pre-service teachers need to be able to evaluate critically all ideas for practice that are offered to them and, in doing so, to draw on diverse sources of evidence to inform the judgements they make. Kriewaldt and Turnidge (2013) refer to such a process as 'clinical reasoning', which they describe as the 'analytical and intuitive cognitive processes that professionals use to arrive at a best judged ethical response in a specific practice-based

context' (2013, 106). It is interesting to note that the concept of 'research-informed clinical practice' has been at the heart of recent ITE policy reform in Wales (Furlong 2019, 2020), yet has remained almost totally excluded from policy reform in England. In Wales, the approach has been driven by the need for teachers to be agentic in the delivery of a new school curriculum, along with a vision for teacher education based on the clear principles and recommendations of the Furlong Review (Furlong, 2015), which argued that ITE programmes must provide beginning teachers with 'the opportunity to develop the "extended professionality" that they need' (Furlong 2020, 53).

What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

Perhaps one of the major effects of this representation of the problem has been an increasing polarisation of views, and one that affords little space in which developments in teacher education pedagogy might be explored in a constructive way. Underpinning this polarisation is a series of seemingly ever-present unhelpful binaries: between educational theory and academic research on the one hand and practical knowledge and its application on the other; between university-led and school-led models of teacher education; between conceptualisations of teaching as a craft and/or of the teacher as a technician, and the conceptualisation of teaching as a 'professional endeavour' (Winch *et al*., 2015, 202). Furthermore, ITE partnerships, acknowledged as being essential to effective programme integration, have become marketised and required to perform competitively. This has resulted in an absurd scenario in which many ITE providers, deemed not to meet new and restrictive quality criteria have been de-accredited, in spite of them continuing to achieve grades of 'good' or 'outstanding' in government Ofsted inspections (highlighted in press reports, for example https://schoolsweek.co.uk/snubbed-uni-slams-inconsistent-and-unfair-itt-review-after-good-ofsted/). Somewhat ironically, this has led to the break-up of successful school-led partnerships, particularly those established within the 'School Direct' model that were a key feature of the 2011 government reforms.

Furthermore, when the perceived policy problem is presented in terms of teacher education as being overly complex, overly theoretical and failing to ensure that new teachers are 'classroom ready', the almost inevitable policy response is to privilege particular course content, and to place the focus on specific technical skills which beginning teachers can, it is argued, acquire through training and intensive practice. The effect is then to limit the scope of the curriculum, both in terms of what new teachers are expected to know and be able to do, with an emphasis on generic skills and behaviours. This reductive approach is characteristic of the ITT Core Content Framework which, Hordern and Brooks (2023b) argue, lacks 'either conceptual or contextual coherence' and is:

> concomitant with an imaginary context of teaching, generating an official pedagogy that is technicist, instrumentalist but also unrealistic, as it does not fully take account of the dynamics and contexts of educational practice. (2003b, 10)

Finally, when academics (and the institutions in which they work) are identified as being the cause of the problem, the effect of seeking to reduce their influence inevitably leads to marginalisation and exclusion within the policy domain. In England, the voices of university ITE providers have been noticeably absent from any of the 'expert groups' constituted by the government to offer guidance on ITE

policy reform. As Baird (2023) has observed, when talking about engagement with policy makers during the initial stages of the ITT Market Review:

> Having a critical or dissenting voice is not something that is going to be valued in those processes even though most would agree that engaging with critical views is likely to make policies stronger. (2023, 71)

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?*

Given the challenges of the ITT Market Review, ITE providers in England might feel that there are few ways in which these market-driven approaches might be challenged in order to re-assert the important place of intellectual enquiry within programmes of teacher education. When faced with a similar set of challenges in Australia, following publication of the government's response to the 'Action now: Classroom ready teachers' review of initial teacher education (Australian Government 2015), Nicole Mockler, asks 'What's to be done?' Her response makes clear what the implications of going down the path of least resistance might be:

> In many ways, the path of least resistance would be easiest: to deny the complexity ourselves and recreate our teacher education programs to serve the ends of instrumentalism and demonstrable impact on student learning. The required emphasis on content knowledge, pedagogical strategies, literacy and numeracy provide more than enough for teacher education to 'go on with', without clinging to what are seeming like increasingly outdated ideas about the theoretical foundations of education, an understanding of which might be less immediately demonstrable but no less important for sustaining and developing practice over the course of a career. (Mockler 2017, 336)

In the final sentence here, Mockler asserts the importance of equipping pre-service teachers with the knowledge, skills and understanding that will sustain them throughout their professional careers. But this raises important questions as to the sort of teacher that we want to produce. Winch et al. (2015) address this question in philosophical terms, examining the different conceptualisations of what it is to be a teacher and presenting the two characterisations of the teacher as either craft worker or as technician. They argue that, while both 'craft knowledge' and the technical aspects of teaching are important, neither sufficiently encapsulates what it means to be fully professional as a teacher. They set out the way in which teachers, acting as full professionals, need also to develop powers of judgement, including the capacity both to ask critical questions in order to analyse and evaluate their teaching, and to draw appropriately on new ideas. In other words, developing the adaptive expertise referred to above.

Much of this thinking also underpins the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET's) policy statement, entitled the Intellectual Basis of Teacher Education (UCET 2020), in its own way a potential response to Carol Bacchi's final question in that it challenges the current policy orthodoxy through its insistence on seeing teachers as full professionals. The document sets out UCET's vision for high-quality teacher education that values 'teachers as intellectuals who take an enquiring stance to their work and make

meaningful contributions to the professional knowledge base' (2020, 1), and, more specifically, those who are

- **competent and confident professionals** who recognise and understand that educating is a professional, thoughtful and intellectual endeavour. They learn from research, direct experience, their peers and other sources of knowledge.
- **epistemic agents**, who act as independent thinkers, recognising that knowledge, policy and practice are contestable, provisional and contingent. As such, teachers search for theories and research that can underpin, challenge or illuminate their practice. They are able to analyse and interrogate evidence and arguments, drawing critically and self-critically from a wide range of evidence to make informed decisions in the course of their practice.
- **able to engage in enquiry-rich practice** and have a predisposition to be continually intellectually curious about their work with the capacity to be innovative, creative and receptive to new ideas emerging from their individual or collaborative practitioner enquiries.
- **responsible professionals** who embody high standards of professional ethics. They act with integrity and recognise the social responsibilities of education, working towards a socially just and sustainable world (2020, 2).

But this does not just happen. It is not easy to achieve, and it certainly does not follow the path of least resistance. It requires ITE providers to design programmes in such a way that they 'facilitate and deepen the interplay between the different kinds of knowledge generated and validated within the different contexts of school and university' and so provide opportunities and support for the beginning teachers to 'interrogate each in light of the other, bring[ing] them both to bear in interpreting and responding to their classroom experience' (see Burn and Mutton 2015, 219). Despite the challenges inherent in orchestrating such opportunities, equipping new teachers with the capacity to frame critical questions in relation to both theory and practice is, we would argue, a viable alternative to the reductive technicist models that are currently being forward within the Quality Criteria of the ITT Market Review. Approaches such as practical theorising (see above) which attempt to hold theory and practice together within integrated and coherent ITE programmes are important not only in terms of providing beginning teachers with the wherewithal to make informed, ethical decisions about their practice, but also in equipping those teachers with 'adaptive expertise' and the foundations for career-long professional learning (see, for example, Burn and Harries 2022).

Conclusion

In summary, teaching is a hugely complex activity, as is learning to teach, and we can respond to this complexity in different ways. Policy makers, as well as teacher educators, must resist the temptation to try, at best, to reduce this complexity wherever possible and, at worst, to ignore it altogether. The temptation is all the stronger, we would argue, if one sees teaching as being merely dependent on the accumulation of a set of practical skills that can be learned by replicating the practice of others, or through implementing what might be called 'technical know-how'. In such

circumstances, the reduction of the core ITE curriculum in England to a series of 'know that' and ''know how to' statements, with quality measured in terms of the extent to which programmes demonstrate 'the quality and fidelity of all aspects of curriculum delivery to trainees 'DfE (2022), 36) has not been a good sign.

Established ITE providers have, to date, offered little resistance to the latest ITE policy directives. This is understandable, perhaps, given the requirement for all providers to have their programmes re-accredited (even those consistently rated by Ofsted in the past as either good or outstanding) and the significant consequences of not securing re-accreditation, or failing to engage in the process, which could have led to de-accreditation, loss of programmes and the consequent loss of jobs etc. Legitimate complaints about the marginalisation of academic freedoms for university ITE providers have not, however, led to any meaningful dialogue with policy makers who offer only reassurance, while imposing further compliance requirements with each iteration of the policy guidance. At the time of writing it looks, however, as if a significant number of providers, who have been successful in gaining re-accreditation, will continue to offer programmes within the new model. For some, this may be a question of delivering a teacher *training* programme that adheres to, but does not extend significantly beyond the government's 'Quality Requirements' for ITT providers (DfE 2022). For others, it may be finding a way in which they can both comply with the statutory requirements yet go beyond what they see as a reductive approach, in order to provide programmes that align more with the vision of professional learning encapsulated within UCET's (2020) Intellectual Basis of Teacher Education.

It should be noted that, although England may be something of an outlier when compared to other policy contexts, that is not to say that similar reform agendas might not be adopted elsewhere. Mayer and Mills (2021) argue that reforms in both Australia and England reflect a type of professionalism that is defined by a 'managerial approach dominated by performance cultures, increased accountability, and teacher standards' (2022, 58). The recommendations of the most recent teacher education review in Australia (Clare 2023) reflect this trajectory, including as they do a reform of accreditation standards and procedures, a commitment to embed an ITE core content by the end of 2025, and the establishment of a new body which will have the power to remove universities' accreditation if they fail to deliver evidence-based approaches. Here, as in England and the United States, accountability criteria for teacher education are determined predominantly by outputs, rather than by inputs and processes (Cochran-Smith et al. 2020). Cochran-Smith goes on to give examples of where the latter have had more of a focus, for example, in Norway, Austria, Portugal and New Zealand, yet that does not mean that such contexts are necessarily resistant to the standards-based approach. A recent think-tank report from New Zealand, entitled 'Who Teaches the Teachers?' (Johnston and Martin 2023) follows the same line of argument as seen in England, identifying university-based teacher education as the cause of the perceived problems and locating potential solutions in the creation of new professional bodies for teaching; reform of professional accreditation; more rigorous standards and assessment processes; discouraging university teacher educators from engaging in educational research). Yet even this report does not go so far as to seek to prescribe the content of individual ITE programmes, regarding such an approach as unwise. The extent to which the model of teacher education reform that has been rolled out in England becomes adopted more

widely is thus yet to be determined, although teacher educators elsewhere might want to pay heed to the way in which the policy problem here has been represented and how this representation has been used to justify subsequent reform.

In spite of the challenges, we would conclude that initial teacher education in England may yet have a future, but only if policy makers come to recognise that a narrow training model can only achieve so much. Teacher education (as opposed to teacher training) recognises teaching as a 'professional endeavour', with teachers prepared in a way that will enable them to become competent and confident professionals who can take their rightful place as 'public intellectuals' (Cochran-Smith 2006), equipped to serve the needs not just of the pupils in their classrooms but also of the schools and communities in which they work and live. Cochran-Smith (2004) had previously discussed the 'problem' of teacher education, and shown that, at various stages, it has been conceptualised, in turn, as a 'training problem' a 'learning problem' and, finally a 'policy problem' (2004, 295). We would suggest that, with the recruitment of new teachers falling steadily year-on-year and a government-mandated model of teacher 'training' that imposes a narrowly conceived core content framework within a strict compliance model, teacher education, in England now risks becoming a 'professional' problem. The future of initial teacher education in England may therefore depend on those who advocate strongly for teaching as a 'professional endeavour' (Winch et al., 2015, 202), and devise ITE programmes which meet the stipulated minimum requirements but are not constrained by otherwise reductive conceptualisations of teacher professional learning.

Note

1. The term *teacher education* itself is not unproblematic – while many universities continue to designate the courses they offer as programmes of initial teacher *education* (ITE), the reality is that initial teacher *training* (ITT), the term used in all government documentation, is the one that is widely accepted. Here we are very explicitly using the terms initial teacher education and ITE, other than when specifically referring to policy documentation.

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Appendix 1

Policy documents examined for the analysis:
The importance of teaching: the schools' White Paper 2010 (DfE, 2010)
The importance of teaching: the case for change (DfE, 2010)
Training our next generation of outstanding teachers: implementation plan (DfE, 2011)
Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2011)
Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) (Carter/DfE 2015)
Initial Teacher Training: government response to Carter review (DfE 2016)
Teacher recruitment and retention strategy (DfE, 2019)
Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019)
ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019)
Initial teacher training (ITT) market review report (DfE, 2021)
Government response to the initial teacher training (ITT) market review report (DfE, 2021)
Initial teacher training (ITT): provider guidance on stage 2 (DfE 2022)