

## Final Report:

### The Impact of the Initial Teacher Education Reaccreditation Process on Teacher Educator Identity

#### 1. Introduction

The landscape of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England has been subject to significant policy reforms over the past few decades. The recent policy, Delivering World Class Teacher Development (DfE, 2022), initiated a reaccreditation process for all ITE providers awarding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This process required providers to submit applications demonstrating compliance with new standards, including curriculum alignment with the government's core content framework (CCF) for initial teacher training (ITT) and evidence of partnerships and mentoring systems. The reaccreditation process, however, resulted in the removal of accreditation for twelve Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), some of which had a proven history of quality provision for teacher training as evidenced by Ofsted inspections and national student survey data. This research project investigated the impact of this reaccreditation process on teacher educators in four institutions that lost their accreditation. The project addresses a gap in the literature regarding how such policy changes affect teacher educators' professional identities, their sense of agency, and their future within the profession. The significance of this research lies in its focus on how these changes contribute to the de-professionalisation of teacher education, a phenomenon noted across Europe (Flores, 2023). As teacher education policies shift toward increased control and centralisation, the voices of educators are increasingly marginalised, leading to feelings of disempowerment and a loss of professional autonomy.

#### 2. Objectives and Research Questions

The project set out to achieve three primary objectives:

- To document how teacher educators experienced the reaccreditation process.
- To explore how the reaccreditation process affected teacher educators' professional identities, self-efficacy, and agency.
- To examine the impact of the policy shift from 'teacher education' to 'teacher training' on the professional identity of teacher educators.

In addressing these objectives, the project focused on the following research questions:

- How have teacher educators experienced the reaccreditation process?
- In what ways has the reaccreditation process impacted their professional identities and work lives?
- How have teacher educators' identities been reshaped by the paradigm shift from 'teacher education' to 'teacher training'?

#### 3. Methodology

The study employed an illuminative evaluation design based on a bounded multi-case study approach (Yin, 2014), focusing on four HEIs in the South and South West of England that were not reaccredited in 2022. The institutions chosen had a history of successful teacher education programmes but lost their QTS awarding status after the reaccreditation process.

This approach allowed the study to capture a range of perspectives from teacher educators who were directly impacted by this policy change.

### Data Collection

Data was gathered through focus groups using a triad collaborative inquiry approach based on the Lesson Study model (Dudley, 2014). This approach involved the three researchers taking on different roles: clarifier, observer, and questioner. The focus groups were semi-structured, allowing participants to share their experiences of the reaccreditation process and engage in reflective and creative tasks such as emotion graphs, postcard writing, and timelining. The sample included eleven participants: six women and five men, with varied roles in the ITE sector (senior leaders, programme leaders, and senior lecturers). This diversity in roles allowed for a broad range of perspectives to be captured, particularly regarding how the reaccreditation process impacted participants' professional identities and their perceived sense of agency.

### Data Analysis

The focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step reflexive approach. This process allowed for both inductive and deductive coding, focusing on themes such as control and agency, contested notions of quality, and personal trauma.

## **4. Key Findings**

### 4.1. Professional Identity and Agency

One of the most significant findings of the study was the profound impact of the reaccreditation process on teacher educators' professional identities. Participants described the reaccreditation process as a "critical moment" in which their control and agency were stripped away. Despite having Ofsted ratings of 'Good' or 'Outstanding,' their institutions lost accreditation based on a paper-based process that failed to account for previous performance metrics. This loss of control was described by participants as both professional and personal, leading to feelings of powerlessness, as one participant stated: "I couldn't believe we were good enough for Ofsted, but not for this. "The loss of agency was exacerbated by the top-down nature of the policy, which required adherence to central government directives without room for local contextualisation or the inclusion of evidence-based practices specific to the institutions involved.

### 4.2. Opaque Processes and Perceived Injustice

Participants frequently commented on the lack of transparency in the reaccreditation process. Despite having attended multiple briefings and seminars led by the Department for Education, participants felt that the criteria for success were unclear. There was an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and speculation about what the reaccreditation process aimed to achieve. As one participant noted, "We had lots of information, but no one really knew what the DfE wanted." This lack of clarity contributed to feelings of injustice, particularly when long-standing institutions were rejected without clear justification. The perception that the process had a hidden agenda, one aimed at marketising teacher

education and removing critical voices from the sector, was a recurrent theme in the focus groups.

#### **4.3. Personal Impact and Trauma**

The reaccreditation process had a profound emotional impact on teacher educators. Participants described the process as “all-consuming” and “traumatic,” with the burden of paperwork and uncertainty affecting both their professional and personal lives. Many described the loss of accreditation as a form of professional humiliation, particularly as they felt they had been successful educators with a proven track record. The trauma was not limited to professional identity but also extended to personal well-being, with participants reporting feelings of grief and loss. One participant described it as a “rock bottom low” that left them questioning their future in the profession.

#### **5. Outcomes and Contributions**

The findings of this study contribute to ongoing debates about the future of teacher education in England, particularly considering increasing centralisation and control by the previous government. The study demonstrates how the reaccreditation process, rather than improving the quality of teacher education, led to significant professional and personal harm for those involved. The project also highlighted the importance of teacher educator identity in maintaining a motivated and reflective workforce. The research provides evidence that policies which prioritise compliance and centralisation over local expertise and autonomy are likely to undermine the professional identity of educators, with long-term consequences for the sector.

#### **6. Challenges and Reflections**

One of the primary challenges faced during the research was the reluctance of some institutions to participate, largely due to the sensitivity of the topic. Institutions that were not reaccredited were understandably cautious about sharing their experiences publicly, and some declined to participate in the study. This meant that the sample was limited to four institutions, all in the South and South West of England. Despite this, the findings provide valuable insights into the experiences of teacher educators during this significant policy shift.

#### **7. Conclusion**

This research highlights the far-reaching impact of the reaccreditation process on teacher educators' professional identities and their sense of agency within the education system. The study found that the process contributed to the de-professionalisation of teacher education, stripping educators of their autonomy and subjecting them to opaque, top-down policy decisions. The personal and professional trauma experienced by participants raises important questions about the future of teacher education in England. The findings suggest that without a renewed focus on educator identity and agency, the sector may struggle to attract and retain high-quality professionals. As the research concludes, further exploration is needed into the long-term effects of these reforms, both for the institutions involved and for the wider teacher education community.

#### **8. Next steps**

The results of this project have been published in the British Journal of Education Studies: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00071005.2024.2376138> The remaining funds in the budget following the first visit allowed us to pre-book accommodation and travel. The research team are conducting follow up visits in December to each of the institutions that participated in the first round to see how their institutions have navigated their way through partnerships; closures and new programme structures. The results of this will be written up in a second journal article for submission to the British Journal of Education Studies. In the meantime, the research team are preparing a further submission to a methodology journal on the creative methodology used within this research.

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