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BERA Blogpost

## **2021/22 Experiences of Academics in Teacher Education: ‘I should not be afraid in my job, but I am’**

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This blog briefly explores some initial findings from a study on the experiences of academics working partly or fully in initial teacher education (ITE) in the UK, and particularly their responses to the current ITE accreditation. At the time of writing, our questionnaire has been running for two weeks and has attracted 120 responses to Likert scale statements covering topics including workload, impact of COVID-19, Ofsted, ITE accreditation, and future career plans, plus free text responses on these topics. Whilst this questionnaire is open until September 2022 (see below for a link to the questionnaire), we felt that it was important to share what we have discovered so far, whilst accreditation is still very much a ‘live issue’ for the sector.

In January 2021, the Department for Education announced that to ensure consistency and quality across the sector, a Market Review group had been assembled that would make recommendations for the future of ITE (DfE, 2021a). Following the recommendations of the review, providers currently authorised to recommend Qualified Teacher Status, who wish to continue beyond 2024, must apply for accreditation; a first-round deadline was in February 2022 (DfE, 2021b). 80 out of the reported 216 submitted accreditation applications from ITE providers (Whittaker, 2022) met the required minimum standard, and have now gone through to a second stage of curriculum interrogation where detailed documents have to be submitted to demonstrate that providers will include content determined by the government in their ITE programmes (DfE, 2022). For the 60%+ of applicants who failed to meet the requirements in the first round, and those who decided to wait and submit their applications in a second

accreditation round in June 2022, accreditation has become a source of stress and disruption within the sector (Whittaker, 2022).

Our questionnaire covers a broad range of topics and accreditation is just one, but the data so far presents a worrying picture. It is worth pointing out that responses are from a range of academics, working in a range of universities and with a variety of contracts (e.g, part-time, full-time etc), experience, roles and phases in ITE.

First, the good news: when asked to rate the statement 'I enjoy working in ITE', 88.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. When rating 'I enjoy working with ITE students', 98.3% agreed or strongly agreed, with just 1.7% disagreeing. 96% report that they have supportive colleagues to work with.

In terms of ITE accreditation, in response to 'accreditation has been a positive experience for me', 6.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Comments included:

*I think accreditation has been detrimental to staff energy and morale - who now- having passed the first hurdle, dread curricular accreditation (and its creative curtailment).*

*It was good to spend time working with colleagues on an ideal approach to our training, but we felt constrained by the demands made, and also unsure of exactly what was being asked for.*

*It was upsetting to feel we had to prove we know what we are doing, when we pride ourselves on supporting trainee teachers in becoming confident and outstanding teachers.*

Providing evidence and a formal submission in such a high stakes process is almost certain to be a stressful process. In addition, there is a worrying trend in the data collected so far in the section of the questionnaire focused on 'the future'. Just 28% of respondents said they agree or strongly agree that they will still be working in the ITE sector in 5 years, despite 65% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they still **want to be** working in the sector in 5 years' time. 93% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they 'have no worries or concerns about the future of university-based ITE'. Participant comments help to explain these reports:

*I am an experienced and respected teacher educator. I should not be afraid in my job but I am.*

*I love working in ITE and certainly intend to remain. However, the restructuring on the government's agenda, coupled with such low recruitment, leaves me wondering if my job is secure in the long term.*

Whilst the ITE sector continues to offer collegiate support, both formally and informally (UCET, 2022; Murtagh and Rushton, 2021), it is of great concern that current government policy could result in a recruitment and retention crisis in ITE academia, beside the one already seen with trainees and teachers (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022).

Our questionnaire continues to collect responses on a wide range of ITE topics and takes 5-10 minutes to complete: <https://forms.gle/tknkgB4RsdCLPUKa7>.

## References

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