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

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*ABSTRACT: This article reports initial findings from a research project that focused on the impact of the reaccreditation process and its outcomes on teacher educators in four institutions in England where Qualified Teacher Status accreditation was removed, despite leading successful programmes as detailed in Ofsted inspections and National Student Survey data. Whilst the outcomes of the reaccreditation process were mentioned in the mainstream press, the impact of this policy on teacher educators had only been reported anecdotally. This research fills a research gap to document impact on teacher educator identity and provides an evidence base to inform teacher education policy debates. Data were gathered through focus groups using a triad collaborative enquiry approach, based on the lesson study model, where researchers took on different roles: clarifier, observer, and questioner. This method formed part of a constructed focus group and built on a process of semi-structured and unstructured creative tasks. Initial findings identified the shifting context university educators perceived in relation to policy constraints, including a greater top-down, centralisation that negated the opportunity for teacher educators to provide a contextualised, evidence informed approach to teacher preparation. This contributed to the impact of the reaccreditation process on teacher educators' professional identity, self-efficacy and agency.*

*Keywords: identity, reaccreditation, policy, teacher education*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ellis (2024) reported that teacher education across Europe is in crisis, with a de-professionalising of both teacher and teacher education within a climate of distrust of teachers and teacher educators. English teacher education has been the subject of changing policy for many years; most recently in the radical change agenda policy titled 'Delivering World Class Teacher Development' (DfE, 2022). This policy set out a reaccreditation process for all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers awarding

Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) whereby providers were required to apply to maintain their QTS awarding status. This process focused on the submission of evidence outlined the provider's curriculum, including some examples of teaching materials and in relation to how these addressed the government's ITE core curriculum framework; detail and evidence of the provider's partnership and their mentoring systems and processes. The application required a 2000 word submission in each of these areas. These were assessed and scored by the DfE. This article reports initial findings from a research project that focused on the impact of the reaccreditation process and its outcomes on teacher educators in four institutions where QTS accreditation was removed, having each 'failed' the process by one point in the scoring process. This was despite leading successful programmes as detailed in Ofsted inspections and National Student Survey data. Whilst the outcomes of the reaccreditation process were mentioned in the mainstream press, the impact of this policy on teacher educators had only been reported anecdotally. This research fills a gap to document impact on teacher identity and provide an evidence base for participation in teacher education policy debates. As policy language has shifted from teacher education to teacher training, in recent decades (Flores, 2023) there was a need to research the impact of changes on teacher educator identity. Identity impacts on self-esteem, professional confidence, and self-efficacy (Rushton *et al.*, 2023) and therefore this research evaluated the reaccreditation process by:

- Giving voice to ITE professionals (lecturers and senior lecturers) to reflect on their experiences of the reaccreditation process.
- Exploring the impact of the reaccreditation process on teacher educators' professional identity.
- Examining teacher educators' identity in the light of the paradigm shift in policy from 'teacher education' to 'teacher training'.

Data were gathered through focus groups using a triad collaborative enquiry approach, based on the lesson study model, where researchers took on different roles: clarifier, observer, and questioner. This method formed a part of a constructed focus group and is built on a process of semi-structured and unstructured creative tasks and methodologies. Initial findings raised questions about the ways in which universities can remain relevant to teacher preparation and development when policy constraints and shifts towards a top-down, centralised approach, excluded much of the evidence-based practice and contextual experience from teacher educators. Findings indicated the impact on teacher educators' professional identity, self-efficacy and agency was significant.

*Context: The Policy Landscape*

Commenting on the landscape in Europe, Flores (2023) reported that teacher education and the teaching profession are in turmoil with an accompanying teacher recruitment and retention crisis (Dulfer *et al.*, 2023). In England, teacher education has, over at least the past 25 years, been subjected to radical policy change which has contributed to growing instability within initial teacher education (ITE). Cochran-Smith (2008) refers to these changes as a move to a neoliberal education system and the marketisation of higher education where teacher education has been constructed as a policy problem that needs to be solved. Within dominant policy discourses, teacher educators have been critiqued for the perceived irrelevance of their teacher education programmes, the way that theory is embedded in their programmes, and being out of touch with the realities of schools (Mutton and Burn, 2024). Then, Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove's (2010), ideological belief that teaching is a craft and best learned in the classroom further cemented the idea that universities, and more specifically teacher education departments, were out of touch. A core concern of debates in English education since 2010 has been the importance of evidence-based practice, though precisely what evidence is prioritised (or, indeed, excluded) remains contentious. In the teaching of early reading, for example, priority has been given to the 'scientific' evidence of psychology and neuroscience, with preference for the use of randomised control trials, rather than evidence from the discipline of education, or studies that use classroom observation or situational, contextualised research (Goodman *et al.*, 2014). Helgetun and Mentor (2022, p. 89) suggest, for example, that 'a broader concept of evidence is now the prevailing educational discourse in England'. They further suggest that this broadening of evidence which focuses less on the knowledge of teacher educators and, indeed, teachers raises questions about the existing epistemology and ontology of the research that is being used as 'evidence' and whether the 'evidence' has been fully informed by its application in practice in differing contexts (Moss, 2016)

Successive government policies since 2010 have resulted in the deregulation of routes into teaching, the incentivisation and marketisation of favoured routes and the outsourcing of training to the private sector (Worton, 2020). Rowe (2024) argues that policy changes, particularly those implemented since 2019, have resulted in a move to increased state control of ITE in England. In January 2019, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy was published (DfE, 2019b) which led to a number of significant policy initiatives such as the Early Career Framework (ECF) and a review of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Market. This review was followed by the 'ITT Core Content Framework' (DfE, 2019a) which set out clear expectations for content that ITE providers needed to include as a minimum entitlement for all pre-service teachers. In July 2021, the ITT Market Review (DfE, 2021) was published and this policy set out a reaccreditation process for all Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers

awarding Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). The Market Review of ITT proved to be a significant policy in several ways, such as strict guidance on *what* can be taught and *how* the content can be taught. But perhaps more significantly, the Market Review of ITT heralded a rationalisation of providers. This process saw a tightening of control by central government and a loss of agency for providers. Rowe (2024) elucidates further, arguing that the results of the Market Review of ITT led to the removal of some established and experienced providers. These experienced providers have been replaced with 'often un-tried and un-tested government-favoured organisations' (Rowe, 2024, p. 108). It is important to note that providers are subject to inspections by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education), which inspects and reports on educational provision for young people in England. These Ofsted inspections for ITE focus on a providers' ability to provide high-quality provision for teacher training, however as part of the reaccreditation process these judgements were not considered in the application. The Market Review of ITT concluded that a new set of 'quality requirements' should be at the centre of reaccreditation. Providers now needed to apply to be reaccredited, which took the form of a paper-based process run by the Department for Education (DfE) with two stages of application. The first applications were introduced in May 2022, followed by a second round in September 2022. A full list of accredited providers was published later that year with some well-established providers of teacher education omitted. The reaccreditation process resulted in a rationalisation of accredited providers, with a twenty percent reduction in established providers (DfE, 2022). Some new providers were accredited, and thirteen higher education providers were not accredited despite a proven history of quality provision for teacher education as measured by high student enrolment, successful national student survey results and consistently Good or Outstanding Ofsted inspections.

### Teacher Educator Identity

In 2002 Geoff Whitty identified a shifting approach from policy makers from viewing teachers as professional, autonomous experts to viewing teachers as technicians under the control of a centralised authority. Ball (2013, p. 57) sees this shift as an outcome of a 'regime of accountability that employs judgment, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change'. Harrison (2010) describes this gradual shift as the de-professionalisation of teachers involving a removal of agency to act as independent, knowledge practitioners. Harrison's (2010) research found that teacher educators have also been subsumed into the centralised policy shift and narrative that accompanies this. In 2013, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, Michael Gove, used the term 'the blob' to characterise the teaching profession as intransient and ideologically driven The framing of policy in this way draws attention to notions of teacher and teacher educator identity. Wenger (1998, p. 263) asserts

that 'issues of education should be addressed first and foremost in terms of identities and modes of belonging and only secondarily in terms of skills and information.' However, in conflict to Wenger's assertions, within the current reforms to ITE in England, the focus is firmly on skills and information. Professional identity can be seen as fluid (Beijaard *et al*., 2003) and 'dynamically evolving' (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011, p. 308), and Vickers-Hulse and Whitehouse (2024) show how identity is formed and shaped during critical incidents. The reaccreditation process, radical policy change and resulting impacts on the landscape of teacher education is one such 'critical incident'. Steadman (2023) believes that the extensive reforms to ITE have not only undermined the development of teacher identity but have limited collective teacher agency by failing to recognise the social nature of teacher learning and development. Beijaard (2019) highlights how impossible it is to separate personal and professional forms of identity – all teachers have grown up in schools and arrive at the profession with previous experiences to draw on. Equally, teacher educators have largely all been teachers of children and young people and may still identify as 'teachers' despite working in higher education settings. Teacher educators are responsible for supporting, nurturing, and developing the future of the teacher workforce and supporting pre-service teachers to develop a robust teacher identity is central to establishing and maintaining a highly motivated and healthy teacher workforce. However, recent reforms to ITE in England have failed to acknowledge the personal and emotional nature of teaching and have instead focused on skills and knowledge. Steadman (2023) argues that limiting opportunities for teacher educators to model particular forms of professional learning impacts on identity and, in so doing, has the potential to impact on teacher retention as pre-service teachers are not given the opportunity to reflect on the development of their teacher identity and have agency over their personal and professional fulfilment. Steadman (2023) goes on to highlight that this lack of agency and time for reflection is likely to lead to more teachers leaving the profession and fewer choosing to enter it. A standardised curriculum and 'one size fits all' approach can be seen as a reductionist model that does not allow for contextualisation with regards to individual needs of pre-service teachers or the communities they serve. Warren-Lee *et al*. (2024) study found that pre-service and early career teachers viewed themselves as subject and research informed individuals who aimed to transform the lives of the children and young people they taught. The reforms to ITE have resulted in limited space for pre-service teachers to develop the skills of reflection that could enable allow them to become autonomous, thoughtful, and critical practitioners. Asking teacher educators to deliver centralised resources that may be detached from their personal and professional narratives or identities could impact their ability to help pre-service teachers to shape and construct a teacher identity that allows them to navigate the profession in the long term and develop and protect the

future workforce. The notion of teacher identity is undervalued in teacher education and educational policy (Beijaard *et al*., 2002; Rushton *et al*., 2023); however, the research outlined in this section indicates that developing a positive professional identity is fundamental in maintaining a healthy and sustained teacher workforce (Day *et al*., 2005).

## 2. Materials and Methods

The exploratory research reported here sought to give voice to a range of teacher educator professionals to examine their experiences of the reaccreditation process and so explore the impact of the process on teacher educators' professional identities. The study used an illuminative evaluation design based on a purposively sampled (i.e., institutions that had not been reaccredited), bounded multi-case study approach (Silverman, 2006; Yin, 2013). Kushner (2017, p. 20) identified this approach as one that enables the challenging of the 'single narrative' and 'one-dimensional explanation' given by policy makers. The original research design had aimed to include case studies from across four geographical regions in England, however, whilst many of the institutions expressed an interest in the study, there was a reluctance on the part of some institutions to take part. Institutional sensitivities, a desire to 'not go public', and a general undercurrent of the need to 'move on' were evident in the responses of potential case study institutions. This meant the study focused on four, self-selecting institutional case studies in the South and South West of England.

### Data Collection

Eleven participants were part of focus groups across the four institutions within the sample. The sample consisted of six women and five men of which three were senior leaders in the institutions, five were programme leaders within Initial Teacher Education and three were senior lecturers. This sample provided a range of experiences of the reaccreditation process. The study piloted a new approach designed by the research team, to focus group data collection. The triad collaborative enquiry approach was based on the Lesson Study model (Dudley, 2013) and used three researchers with different assigned roles. One researcher led the focus group, introducing questions and activities; one researcher acted as 'clarifier' listening to the responses to identify any points of interest to be clarified through either asking the participant to 'tell me more about . . . ' or checking that an interpretation of what has been said was correct. This role also included feeding back to the focus group at regular points to summarise what had been said. The third researcher focused on observation of the focus group participants, using a schedule to record non-verbal communications and supportive and non-supportive utterances. This method recognised that focus groups generate verbal and observational data (Stewart and Shamdasani,

2014) but also enabled the valuing of the 'minor details, discontinuities and recurrences, as well as the discourses and practices that make sense' of the reaccreditation process of the participants (Brooks and Perryman, 2023, p. 4). As the study involved sensitivities and potential controversial and political issues, the study used various approaches to encouraging discussion and sharing. This included timelining, emotion graphs, postcard writing, diamond nine activities and word generation activities. What we did not know when we designed the study was the extent to which these sensitivities were manifested by participants in relation to the reaccreditation process and their wellbeing.

*Ethics*

The study was approved by the researchers' institutional ethics committee and adhered to BERA (2024) guidance. Due to the small number of HEIs that were not successful in the reaccreditation process, it was necessary to protect participants' identities. To this end, no personal identifiers were included for individuals and permission was sought from each participant for this work to be published. The data collection process, as outlined above, and analysis, as outlined below, were selected to further protect individual participants and ensure that broad themes were used to present findings.

*Data Analysis*

The focus group data were transcribed and analysed along with photos from the activities and the observational data. Both an inductive and deductive approach to thematic analysis was used (Hulme *et al*., 2023), applying two pre-identified codes drawn from the contextual research literature about the policy process: 'control and agency' and 'contesting notions of quality'. In addition, an inductive process was used to identify additional themes of 'opaque processes' and 'personal impact: trauma'. These themes were then used to analyse how they contributed to and impacted on, teacher educator personal and professional identity.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Control and Agency*

Over the past decade, teacher education in England has been subject to intense scrutiny as part of the policy spotlight on teacher quality. As a result, teacher education has been framed as a policy problem needing a solution (Mayer, 2021). Participants highlighted the accountability procedures that had been implemented over the past decade and stated that they were '*used to processes*'. This said, the impact of the reaccreditation process was described as being a '*critical momen*t' in the stripping away of control from teacher educators.

Ofsted had long been held as the measure of accountability in teacher education. However, the Ofsted grading of teacher education institutions was irrelevant in the reaccreditation process which one participant described as 'farcical – how could we have been deemed "good" by Ofsted and yet failed accreditation?' Mutton and Burn (2024) highlighted that established ITE providers offered little resistance to the reaccreditation directives, and participants indicated that this was largely because 'teachers and teacher educators are compliant' and that 'due to the lack of information from the department for education, the intention was unclear'. One participant stated that he had expected 'some kind of evidence base or sense from the DfE' and that the fact that reaccreditation was reintroduced when the sector was recovering from the pandemic meant that teacher educators 'wanted to focus on Ofsted and the new inspection framework other than a piece of paperwork. We wanted to think through our curriculum properly'. Participants viewed the reaccreditation process as an expression of power from the DfE and an 'active diversion away from their main job' which was to educate high quality teachers. Mutton and Burn (2024) state that legitimate complaints about the stigma against university ITE providers have not led to meaningful dialogue with policy makers who continue to impose tighter compliance requirements with each iteration of the policy. One participant suggested that the way that the DfE exercise their power over universities is a way to exercise control and 'squeeze us out for their own needs'. What those needs are remains a contentious issue. During the pandemic, the government gave the impression that alternative voices were being listened to however, policy formation is not driven by alternative viewpoints, evidence, and discourse. Brooks and Perryman (2023) believe that the pandemic provided an opportunity to value the way in which teachers were fundamental to our society however, the government used this to push through their reaccreditation agenda. The loss of agency and control following the reaccreditation process has resulted in the participants' loss of trust in the government and their decisions. One participant stated that the reaccreditation process was a clear indication that 'the government don't want us to train critical thinkers and teach them to question and be radical'. Mutton and Burn (2024) agree that the reaccreditation was all about controlling the market and that governments see university-based education as the cause of all perceived problems and do not want academics or teachers to think. Hulme *et al*. (2023) believe that the impact of this drip feeding of a range of accountability procedures has rendered academic work calculable and implemented a metrification of quality. Warren-Lee *et al*. (2024) highlight that top-down initiatives and imposed structures on ITE, negate the scholarly process and so remove agency and autonomy from universities. They contest that this has resulted in teacher education becoming a service and a product. As well as the loss of control and agency highlighted in the literature above, participants talked frequently about 'feeling powerless' and that the 'lack of power and lack of sector support groups meant that the whole sector was too afraid to step up'

and question. This meant that participants felt they had 'no-one to blame as it was a faceless thing' with no-one in power willing to take accountability for the impact on teacher educators and the sector. Participants expressed 'disbelief that we are a group of intelligent people who have found ourselves in this situation' and felt that the reaccreditation process was a 'bad decision by the DfE that left them feeling powerless'. Warren-Lee *et al.* (2024) believe that the process of reaccreditation has resulted in ITE providers having no place to act creatively, take the initiative and respond to the needs of individual learners. The freedom to make decisions as professional educators is being stifled by accountability measures and the sector has been left with no space to develop reflective practitioners. But as one participant stated: 'the government don't want teachers who are critical thinkers and ask questions'.

*Contested Notions of Quality*

As part of the discourses about teacher education there has been a spotlight on teacher quality (Mayer, 2021) and the quality of provision by ITE providers. This discourse has continued to frame teacher education as a problem, particularly that which is delivered by universities, thereby implying that some routes into teaching are perceived as being of higher quality. Until the accreditation process, Ofsted was seen as the controller and arbiter of quality by the accountability procedures of the Ofsted inspection. The reaccreditation process has challenged this accountability process and left providers questioning who decides what quality is. One participant commented that the reaccreditation process had 'ignored all evidence including Ofsted' and stated that there had been clear 'inconsistency in the process' and a 'bypassing of all indicators of quality'. Several participants questioned the use of evidence in relation to quality and stated that 'we already can demonstrate quality' and 'we have done this for years and it is what we are known for'. Participants highlighted that their workplaces were 'an institution steeped in history who has been rejected with no clarity about why' and that 'our quality is consistent'. One participant commented on the lack of quality indicators demonstrated in the reaccreditation process and stated that 'we had fifteen people come to visit us for Ofsted for four days with the accreditation process [we just had to write] 1500 words.' Mutton and Burn (2024) suggest that part of the discourse around teacher education is that some providers are unable to provide a quality provision which is needed to prepare teachers with the required knowledge and skills needed for future learners. In contrast to this, the participants felt that the reaccreditation process was not about future teachers or learners stating that 'the development of children is not important to them' [the government]. This notion of quality was further commented in relation to participants research and experiences as a teacher

educator 'all of my research is about good quality teachers but yet here we are' and that 'It never felt about the quality of teachers'. Further comments related to decision making on quality, with participants asking 'where are the education specialists at the heart of the decision making? People creating policy have no background in education and early years ... specialists are not valued anymore'.

*Opaque Processes: Injustice*

The reaccreditation process was introduced to the sector in 2019 and over the subsequent years, the DfE set out the steps that would need to be taken to prepare for reaccreditation. Department and faculty leads were invited by the DfE to a range of seminars and along with support from the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), the universities in this study began the process of preparing their submissions. Participants expressed very clearly that throughout the process, the intended aim of the process was not made clear. 'There was a lack of intention ... what is this for.' 'There was no clarity.' 'Even now, I still don't know what it was they wanted.' This was not expressed as a lack of information: 'we had lots of information – but what were the DfE actually asking for?' Participants talked about the amount of 'speculating and guessing' that went on between institutions in the preparation for submission for reaccreditation and an overwhelming feeling of 'not knowing'. Participants reflected on the benefit of hindsight, thinking at first that this was merely 'paperwork' that needed to be completed (as they were confident about the quality of their programmes and being reaccredited). Several participants described themselves and their teams as 'naïve' for not realising the hidden intentions of the DfE, which they saw, in retrospect, as a process by which to remove providers from Initial Teacher Education. The accreditation process was viewed as a 'hidden agenda', and one described by participants as an 'ideological agenda'. One of the main policy shifts in 2014 to school-led provision provided a clear narrative that universities understood and made efforts to engage with. Universities strengthened school partnerships and worked in close collaboration with schools (Mutton and Burn, 2024). The change participants experienced in the reaccreditation process was that of a lack of a transparent narrative with various potential narratives being cited by participants including 'marketisation', 'removing criticality' and 'de-professionalising teaching'. However, one participant argued that even though universities all agreed that there was a marketisation agenda for ITE, contradictions were evident. For example, the idea was that marketisation would have, in theory, opened the market to new providers and then let 'the market decide'. The reaccreditation process, however, determined which providers could be part of the market.

With universities and academics framed as 'the problem' by the DfE, participants felt they 'should have known.' that the process would remove providers, even those with provision judged to be good or better by Ofsted. One participant stated that she 'did not realise it was an exam until it was too late'. These feelings compounded the sense of 'injustice' participants felt noting that those that were not accredited included 'some of the most research active'. Warren-Lee *et al.* (2024, p. 2) typified this policy process in ITE as 'top-down' and 'imposed from above', Participants reflected on the impact of the opaque nature of the process on their ability to meet both the demands of what was required for reaccreditation as well as the priorities each university had for their programme development and day-to-day practice. They reported that they were 'lost in the maze, speculating and guessing' about what the accreditation process involved. One participant stated that whether they were 'better' or not was 'nothing to do with the reaccreditation process' and felt that the sector could have 'invested this time in other things that would have had more impact on the real issues of recruitment and retention.' One participant stated that he was incredulous that the DfE had invested their money and time in 'the thing that wasn't broken'. In one of the activities, participants were asked to sum up their view of the reaccreditation process in a single word or phrase – one word that appeared on several occasions in each of the participant universities was 'shitty'!

## Personal Impact/Trauma

Hulme *et al.* (2023) state that the impact of policy change on teacher education is under researched. It is clear from participants' responses during interview that there is a significant personal and professional impact of changes in policy such as those instigated by the reaccreditation process. The words that participants used to describe their emotions ('shock, anger, fear, humiliation') and the impact the reaccreditation process had on them as individuals ('traumatic, overwhelming, all-consuming, powerless') were shocking and demonstrate just how traumatic the process was for ITE educators. Participants described the volume and urgency of tasks as daunting, and they were spending 'huge numbers of hours at the weekend' working on accreditation paperwork. Whilst the submission was a paper-based exercise, the lack of clarity and shifting goalposts meant that participants' workload was 'exponential' which had a subsequent impact on their personal lives. Participants described that they were 'overwhelmed in terms of the amount of work we had to do' and that the process 'dominated my whole life not just my working life.' Several participants used the words 'loss' or 'grief' to describe how they felt when they found out that their application for accreditation had not been successful. One participant described the anger that they felt at the 'lack of power' they had over the process, and it made them question their own role – 'am I too naïve to do this job? Are we the only ones? What have we done wrong?' Participants also described feeling that they 'should

have done better' and a sense that they had 'let their colleagues down'. Furlong (2013) states that teacher education departments have long occupied an uneasy place in the university ecology and a consequence of non-accreditation meant that several university teacher education providers were forced to close, despite having successful Ofsted inspection outcomes and an excellent track record of providing the communities they serve with excellent teachers. One participant stated that she was 'really angry at the ITE community' and 'wished that we had stood up to them (the DfE) -we should have fought'. One participant at a provider, who was forced to close, told us how they 'nearly cried in front of everyone when they had to tell them "That's it"' and described this as a 'rock bottom low, as if the rug had been pulled out from underneath them.' Hulme *et al.* (2023) describe the increased regulation in teacher education as being at a tipping point as the series of reforms in the past decade has opened the provision of teacher education to new actors and alliances which has created market competition. These reforms have impacted how leaders of university departments of teacher education in England are positioned and position themselves in a changing political, institutional, and professional environment – teacher education is perilously vulnerable to future policy shifts. There was a great deal of anger and incredulity amongst participants about the system and a palpable contempt for the reaccreditation process. This was not just about the professional humiliation following the impact on those who were not accredited but on the unintended consequences on the personal lives of the people involved in the profession. One participant stated that 'it was an injustice that resulted in really good teacher educators losing their jobs' with another explaining that the impact on their personal life was 'harder than they thought' and was 'difficult to put into words'. Skinner *et al.* (2021) discuss that teaching is an occupation with a higher-than-average level of common mental health disorders and that the costs of participating in the constant and complex working environment caused by shifts in education policy often outweigh the rewards. Our participants certainly feel like they paid a price. One participant described going through a 'grieving process' and expressed regret at 'how naïve' universities had been about the whole process 'no one could have predicted the outcome would be this bad, we did not see it coming!'

*Impact on Identity*

This study was framed in terms of the impact of the reaccreditation process on teacher educator identity. As summarised in Figure 1, we argue that the identity of the participants was impacted by several factors: the wider political and policy context which led to feelings of loss of control and agency along with a distrust for the proposed accountability notions of quality imposed by policy; the feelings of injustice felt from a process lacking in transparency all of which resulted in professional and personal trauma. One key factor in participants shifting identities can be located in the number that had already made the transition from classroom teacher, or school leader to university academic with one participant saying, 'I was
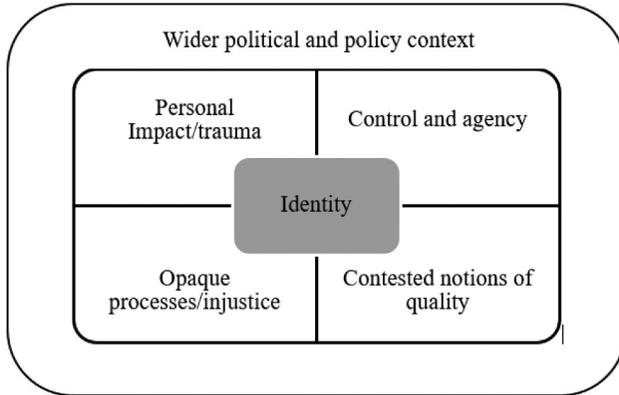
Figure 1. The reconstruction of teacher educator identity in the reaccreditation process

treated as a professional at university' after their autonomy had been squeezed by policy in relation to school agency and accountability. Where once they had seen themselves as a creative teacher, they felt constrained in the school context. It was clear that there was some sorrow that this agenda had followed them into the teacher education sector. Warren-Lee *et al*. (2024) describe this as a 'brace' being put on university educators – one that imposes rigidity. The reaccreditation process, or at least the 'failure' to be reaccredited, disturbed and disrupted teacher educators' identities: one participant said, 'Am I a teacher educator, am I a teacher? What actually am I? Where do I feel like I fit? Very unsettling.' and one described it as 'identity unrest'. The process also caused unsettling contradictions for one partici-pant who was trying to maintain their role as an empathetic colleague who was then forced into the position of being the authority figure that told people they had lost their jobs. One participant felt they were able to cope with the process only by having the 'safe haven' of their identity as 'researcher'. Rushton *et al*. (2022, p. 3) suggest that teacher identities are 'constructed and re-constructed' and go on to conclude that ignoring teacher identity (and in this instance, teacher educator identity) is shortsighted as a positive teacher identity is a factor in 'maintaining and healthy and sustainable teaching workforce' (Rushton *et al*., 2022, p. 15).

Whilst it was clear that identities had 'transferred' and 'transformed' (Menter, 2022) the reaccreditation process had 're-formed' identities and it was evident from the participants that they were now in 'resistance' mode. One participant said, 'Identity is important – I think we can still do what we need to do but we have to be subversive.' and many that reframed the resulting loss of accreditation with 'free-dom' to reclaim their identity as creative practitioners, able to re-design pro-grammes that could explore research interests, develop criticality and reclaim integrity in relation to teaching and learning, without the constraints of Ofsted or ITE policy. Many participants talked about a process that could have been divisive,

had drawn people together, with personal identities as 'professionals' being strengthened by the power of collegiate working.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The findings reported here showed that the recent reforms to teacher education through the implementation of a reaccreditation process, further diminished teacher educators' agency and control. The consequence of this process was deemed unjust by those involved and resulted in a significant impact on both the professional and personal identity of teacher educators. We suggest that the reaccreditation process was rooted in neoliberal agendas and had little to do with improving the quality of teacher education. Our data illustrates that teacher educators were used to change and reform; however, they felt that the way this change was enacted was without logic or transparency. Therefore, teacher educators have been left questioning how they found themselves in this position when they had strong track records and evidence from the prevailing account-ability regimes such as Ofsted, national student survey data, employability rates and outstanding reputations as teacher training providers within their local partnerships. Focus group discussions highlighted how the process sought to isolate those who had not been successful in achieving reaccreditation, leaving them reeling from the humiliation and feeling as though they had 'failed'. This research demonstrated that, far from being isolated, these institutions had shared experiences and are now trying to reform and regroup to consider what their future looks like post accreditation. The methodology used to gather data allowed us to revisit painful and distressing experiences with participants using creative and innovative methods that enabled the sensitivity of the issues discussed to be explored in a safe and supportive environment. The impact of the reaccreditation process and its outcomes on teacher educators are ongoing and merit further exploration. It must be recognised that this personal trauma for teacher educators is ongoing, however, whether these reforms result in improved quality in teacher education and an increase in recruitment and retention is yet to be seen.

## 5. CONCLUSION (AMENDED VERSION)

The findings reported here showed that the recent reforms to teacher educa-tion through the implementation of a reaccreditation process have impacted on teacher educator identity in several different ways. The climate of change, in relation to the wider political context was evident in the data and rooted, it can be suggested, in neoliberal agendas with little to do with improving the quality of teacher education. Teacher educators were not new to reform and change and many had experienced it in previous school-based careers as well as in higher education. However, the reaccreditation process

was a catalyst for feelings of lack of control and agency in the design of teacher education programmes that could no longer be grounded in contextualised knowledge of local partnerships and professional knowledge, experience and research. The data demonstrates how this was perceived in relation to the quality of provision teacher educators felt they were able to provide and what counted as 'quality' becoming contested in the top-down, centralised approach being imposed. This led teacher educators to express feelings of injustice about the process which was seen as without logic and lacking in transparency. Therefore, teacher educators have been left questioning how they found themselves in this position when they had strong track records and evidence from the prevailing accountability regimes such as Ofsted, national student survey data, employability rates and outstanding reputations as teacher training providers within their local partnerships. Focus group discussions also highlighted the personal and traumatic impact of the process leaving many reeling from the humiliation and feeling as though they had 'failed'. Each of these highlighted areas we suggest has impacted the identity of the teacher educator with loss of agency and control impacting both professional and personal identities. It is also recognised that this personal trauma for teacher educators is ongoing and shifting. Some are moving from feelings of isolation and vulnerability to feelings of strength and determination, as well as having new visions of future possibilities and a resistance and determination to carry on, in new partnerships and 'despite' the current government agendas.

The methodology used to gather data allowed us to revisit painful and distressing experiences with participants using creative and innovative methods that enabled the sensitivity of the issues discussed to be explored in a safe and supportive environment. The impact of the reaccreditation process and its outcomes on teacher educators' identity are ongoing and merit further exploration. However, whether these reforms result in improved quality in teacher education and an increase in recruitment and retention is yet to be seen.

## 6. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

## FUNDING

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