**Teacher Education in Higher Education Institutions: Contribution and Challenges**

**Introduction**

This report reflects upon the initial stage of a research project which aims to develop a stronger understanding of the contribution made and challenges faced by teacher education in Higher Education Institutions. The study is located in the intersection between the domains of teacher education and higher education scholarship, which in England represents a contested and ambiguous professional space.

**Research Group**

Our research group evolved following a presentation at the UCET Continuing Professional Development (CPD) forum, drawing in other interested colleagues involved in university-based teacher education. The research design was shaped through online meetings where discussions drew on the diverse experience, knowledge and professional and political awareness of members of the group.

**Aim of Project**

The aim of the research was to develop a stronger understanding of Teacher Education as a discipline in UK HE and how it can survive, thrive and contribute within the Higher Education policy framework, our key research question being:

*‘What are the challenges faced and contributions made by Teacher Education in Universities’*

### The online survey

An online questionnaire was issued to members of UCET via its forums structure. The questionnaire comprised the following open questions:

# What benefits does teacher education bring to your university?

# What do you feel are the most significant challenges for university teacher education?

# How do you negotiate and resolve the challenges identified in the previous question?

# How can university metrics (i.e. published measures of accountability) capture the value of teacher education?

# Are there benefits of teacher education that are currently not captured by these metrics, but are captured elsewhere? If so, how else can these benefits be demonstrated?

# How does teacher education contribute to your university's regional, national and global agendas?

# Can you identify examples of excellence in which teacher education contributes strongly towards the achievement of your university's strategic aims?

43 participants finished the survey, providing the data the findings are based upon. Of these, nearly all were from England, therefore this analysis focuses on the English context, incorporating single responses from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**Findings**

#### Benefits teacher education brings to universities

The survey identified ways in which teacher education benefits universities beyond its own programmes, offering local and regional community links and status, research opportunities and impact and HE pedagogical expertise.

***1.1 Anchoring the university within the region*** *-* teacher education establishes and brokers the university’s status in the wider community through partnerships with local schools and settings to supply the teaching workforce. However, it is not necessarily perceived as recognised or valued within the university.

##### *1.2 Pedagogic and leadership expertise -* bring critical perspectives to professional HE practice, linking theory, research and policy development, e.g. in inclusion, technological enhancement and evaluating education reform*.*

##### *1.3 Purpose, reputation and reciprocal research-*Teacher education brings a *‘sense of purpose, mission and socio-economic responsibility*’ to the university. Institutional reputation and status are enhanced creating opportunities for recruitment and ‘*research reciprocity*.’

#### *2.* Significant challenges for teacher education

Challenges of role and identity arise, where teacher education is perceived as lacking in support for both internal and external recognition.

***2.1 Political interference and uncertainty -*** the market review (DfE, 2021), was felt to ‘*marginalise and devalue’* university teacher education. Policy was described as ‘*reckless’,* with unprecedented government ‘interference’ undermining planning, funding, investment and partnership work.

***2.2 Unsupportive university culture and insufficient resourcing****- Teacher* educators’ uneasy positioning in HE was expressed disturbingly: they are ‘*bumped and bruised’;* they *occupy a ‘unique and powerful space but do not 'own' it…’;* they are told they are *‘not good enough …. when in fact they have a very specific domain knowledge and skill set*’. Partnerships, placements, professional qualifications and school visits create additional pressure, significantly heavier workloads and different academic timelines.

***2.3 Surveillance culture*** *-* Over a third of respondents mentioned Ofsted as a significant challenge. Inspection preparation absorbs an inordinate amount of time and energy which is believed to detract from curriculum development, student support and research.

#### Meeting the challenges

Teacher educators identified a variety of ways to *‘own our own space and change the narrative’,* although some felt they were *‘fighting a losing battle’* without power or authority*.*

***3.1 Maintaining excellence -***Teacher educators’ prime focus is on academic development of ‘*excellent,* *critically engaged reflective teachers*’, with autonomy, knowledge and understanding that they are able to apply in context and a commitment to their own lifelong learning.

***3.2 Dialogue and negotiation with key stakeholders*** *-* Nationally, teacher educators raise their profile through UCET and other professional organisations, engaging with policy debates and developing strategy. It was felt that authentic representation of university teacher education in the media is needed to counteract unfavourable voices with powerful influence.

***3.3 Advocacy in institutional and political dialogue -***Teacher educators feel responsible for ensuring university senior leaders are fully informed about sector developments and opportunities, needing creative strategies to secure senior support and call attention to positive outcomes and impact in the university’s terms.

***3.4 Identity development -*** *T*eacher educators want their complex academic-professional identity to be understood, ‘… *recognising their specific knowledge and skills, but also [their] unique place in school and university wide growth’.*

#### Capturing value: metrics and beyond

The question of how university metrics can capture the value of teacher education provoked a wide range of responses, indicating contributions made to generic metrics while recognising what is missed or under-represented.

***4.1 Demonstrating value through data -***For some, demonstrating value is unproblematic, with confident assertion that ‘*TEF, REF and KEF … capture Teacher Education with ease, as it not only impacts on student experience, and staff share their expertise with the wider university, we also provide CPD support across partnerships, as well as then research the impact widely’.* Teacher education should also be able to contribute well towards HE retention, graduate outcomes, employment and student satisfaction in national surveys.

***4.2 Challenges of internal and external accountability*** *-* Some respondents answered that they did not know how the value of teacher education is represented in university metrics, lack of time may result in incomplete or inaccurate representation, needing more ‘*expert flagging’*.

#### 4.3 *Making better use of existing metrics -* Multiple metrics that apply specifically to teacher education (QTS, QA of mentoring) are considered to be poorly understood internally. Alumni qualifications and career and employability statistics could be considered alongside course recruitment, retention and completion figures. CPD evaluation and impact can contribute to the KEF but it may go unrecorded through lack of time or limited awareness. Research publication and presentation within the teacher education community is perhaps more diffuse and practice-orientated than in other domains, requiring additional effort to capture impact.

#### 4.4 *Qualitative complexity -* The longitudinal, interconnected and reciprocal impact of HE teacher education on schools, cultures and systems, described as ‘*obvious*’ by survey respondents, is not habitually or systematically tracked. It needs qualitative representation incorporating narratives, testimonials and case studies, demonstrating ‘*growth of pedagogic learning, critical thinking and teacher identity*’ and tracking teachers’ professional trajectories longitudinally. Many outcomes are felt to be ‘*immeasurable’, ‘soft’ and ‘for the future’*.

#### 5. Contribution to regional, national and international university agendas

Notwithstanding benefits and challenges already discussed, teacher educators often expressed their contribution on their own terms, arguing for the university as a centre of education excellence with teacher education at the heart.

##### *5.1 A regional hub for education advancement -* Teacher education graduates with knowledge of local socio-economic and education contexts ‘…*seek to use their knowledge to develop world-leading education by first ensuring that every child has the opportunity to the very best education’*. Universities situated in areas of deprivation are particularly attuned to this systemic imperative for widening participation, improving aspiration and employability, embracing diversity and challenging inequity to improve life chances.

##### *5.2 Critical and political engagement -* Teacher education sustains ‘*an atmosphere of inquiry and inquiry-led practice*’, through collaboration, networking and partnership with trainee teachers and practitioners. Engagement with critical and political discourse in teacher education embodies the critical role of HE at the intersection of research, policy and practice.

##### *5.3 Examples of excellence -* Beyond reiteration of generic contributions, there were specific examples of distinctive recognition, for example an award and international nomination for sustainability and a transferable model of Portfolio Based Learning adopted across disciplines. Teacher Education makes a regional mark through community and partnership projects to improve employability and develop global citizenship.

**Summary of survey findings**

Evidence from this preliminary survey demonstrates powerful contributions to HE agendas and strategic priorities, emphasising the breadth, depth, complexity and longitudinal reach of education through well-established relationships, partnerships and career paths. There is a strong regional focus with additional national and international influence. Contributions are understood from a resolutely strong subject perspective, acknowledging education’s transformative power, but conviction and commitment are offset by a significant counter-current of reticence and lack of recognition, in relation to wider HE purposes and priorities.

**Future Research**

The group are now seeking funding to expand this project, with a view to advocacy and influence. The intention is to develop phase 2 and 3 of the project to build upon this first phase. Phase 2 will involve interviews with Teacher Educators to add depth to the current data through their experiences of the challenges faced and contributions made by Teacher Education. These findings coupled with the original survey will then be used to interview senior leaders (Deans/Pro Vice Chancellors and above) in universities to get their perspectives on Teacher Education and the findings from our project to date. Phase 3 will then feature reimagined futures for Teacher Education in Higher Education, focusing on a wider field of contribution to the sector and society as a whole.

**Dissemination**

Given the advocacy nature of this project it is critical to disseminate and involve as many Teacher Educators as possible. To date dissemination has taken place through UCET, BERA and IPDA. An academic paper has also been submitted framing the findings within theory.

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**Reference**

DfE. (2021). *Initial teacher training (ITT) market review report*, available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-report> (accessed February 2022)