UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST of SCOTLAND



Moving the discourse from problems to possibilities: contributing to a national ITE strategy for Wales

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Introduction

The purpose of the research is to **'**explore the strengths, achievements and aspirations among teacher educators and student teachers in Wales' (USCET Cymru, 2024). This response takes an intentionally positive and strengths-based approach to exploring 'what might be' in the realisation of policy aspirations for initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales. It is not the intention to offer a conventional problem-oriented evaluation of programme design and implementation. In contrast, an alternative design is presented that explicitly focuses on *possibility* rather than deficit and is intended as generative rather than judgmental. The proposed design focuses on current strengths, opportunities and future possibilities. Appreciative inquiry is deployed as an appropriate framework for exploring what is working well (*Discovery* phase) and how this might inform future practice (*Envision* phase). A creative participatory approach is proposed to extend opportunities to a wide range of stakeholders: school- and university-based teacher educators and student teachers in Wales. This document sets out a plan of independent research to address the USCET Cymru research brief: background, scope, research approach, timeline, budget, and researcher skills and experience.

Context and rationale

Education policymaking in Wales in the past decade has created a progressive vision for national education. After a period of policy continuity, arrangements for teacher education in Wales have been radically reconfigured following influential reviews of the national system (Tabberer, 2013; Furlong, 2015). Ambitious reforms of the school curriculum, teacher education and professional learning are 'reshaping both the purposes of education and the nature of teacher professionalism' (Furlong et al., 2021, p.61). In contrast to education policymaking in England, the 'Welsh model' is distinctive in its efforts to shift from a performance-driven educational system towards a more 'collegiate' approach to policy development (Evans, 2022, p.380). Change processes are recalibrated from deficit-driven 'blame/shame' approaches towards strategies founded on higher levels of trust in the profession (Donaldson, 2015; OECD, 2020), alongside a reassertion of the importance of professional agency in re-design (Priestley et al., 2015). Former Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Miles (2024) asserted that 'co-design and co-construction' of solutions are 'our de facto approach'[1]. Collaboration is central to an espoused model of partnership development between universities and schools engaged in the design, enactment and evaluation of ITE conceptualised as a joint endeavour. As a result, the form, content and evaluation of initial teacher education programmes have been reconfigured to promote professional 'learning that is both rigorously practical and intellectually challenging'

[1] Jeremey Miles, (then) Minister for Education and the Welsh Language, Cabinet Statement, 31 January 2024, https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-next-stage-review-school-improvement-roles-and-responsibilities-education

(Welsh Government, 2017, p. 4). This ambition underpins the criteria for accreditation of ITE Partnerships:

- An increased role for schools
- A clearer role for Higher Education Institutions
- Joint ownership of the ITE programmes
- Structured opportunities to link school and HEI learning
- The centrality of research (Welsh Government, 2023, p.5).

Key to this integrative approach is a realisation of the critical importance of creating a 'Welsh education research ecosystem' to support all educators to engage in professional enquiry and the subsequent launch of a National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry (NSERE) (Welsh Government, 2021, p.5) and a National Professional Enquiry Project (NPEP) (Evans et al., 2022) to help build a 'thriving learning culture' (OECD 2018, p. 15). This research does not position Directors of ITE, teacher educators, and student teachers as the subjects of external evaluative research but invites contributions from primary stakeholders as participants and co-inquirers. As stated in the invitation to tender, such reframing and repositioning is more likely to enhance, than diminish, professional capacity and agency.

> *Seeing ITE as a policy problem within a 'discourse of inadequacy' (Mutton and Burn, 2020) is unlikely to build confidence and efficacy within the sector. However, reframing the narrative by identifying positive practices and promising ideas in ITE affords the opportunity to build a shared vision and national strategy among those who are key to realising the Welsh Government's ambition for a high-quality teaching profession.* (USCET Cymru, 2024, p.1)

Research approach

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is congruent with the research aims. AI evaluations are based on social constructionism and seek to identify 'the best practices that exist, positive moments, greatest learnings, successful processes, and generative partnerships' (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 277). AI has been applied across relationship-centred professions such as education, health and social care (Stulz et al, 2021; Alvarez et al., 2024; Best et al., 2020). To examine appreciatively entails shifting the focus from 'what is the problem' or 'what is going wrong' to focus on 'what is going well?' (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005; Reed, 2006). Participants are not positioned as subjects, but as knowledgeable co-enquirers engaged in generative dialogue.

> *Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them… AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005, p.3)*

Appreciative Inquiry Summits

To explore the strengths, achievements, and aspirations of teacher educators and student teachers at a time of change, Appreciative Inquiry Summits are proposed as a core approach (Roberts and Ebejer, 2023). An Appreciative Inquiry Summit is an effective means of supporting

collaboration and dialogue among a wider range of participants gathered at an in-person event. This approach focuses on identifying and amplifying strengths and successes rather than diagnosing problems and uncovering inadequacies. The summits will focus on positive experiences within current ITE provision and identify opportunities for building and sustaining transformational change.

The ITE focused AI summits will be guided by the following core principles:

- **Positive focus**: Concentrate on what is working well, leveraging past successes and strengths.
- **Inclusion**: Involve a wide range of participants across programmes (pathways to QTS) and demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity).
- **Collaboration**: Encourage participants to work together in a cooperative manner in interactive and structured workshops.
- **Co-construction**: Participants collectively produce ideas and strategies for sustained progress and positive change.

AI summits will be convened in-person at each of the five partnerships with accredited ITE programmes in Wales, 2024-25. This will entail half-day events to be held on agreed campus locations. Remote engagement will be offered for the Open University in respect of the blended mode of course delivery.

ITE Partnerships	AI Summit	Participants	Activities
• CaBan (Bangor University) • Yr Athrofa: Professional Learning Partnership (APLP) (University of Wales Trinity St David, Carmarthen and Swansea) • Cardiff Partnership • Swansea University Schools' Partnership • University of South Wales ITE Partnership • The Open University	On-site in-person/blended Open University Online	• Student teachers • University-based teacher educators • School-based teacher educators (remote option)	• Interactive activities and group discussions: mixed student teacher group, and teacher educator group (90 minutes each group). • Individual interviews with leaders of ITE (remote option) (60 mins max).

Sampling plan

In selecting a purposive **student sample** consideration will be given to the range of opportunities available to become a teacher in Wales: undergraduate primary pathways; PGCE primary and secondary; full-time, part-time and salaried routes. Given the timeline for data production in Autumn 2024, it will be important to ensure sufficient involvement of beginning teachers who commenced their ITE journey before 2024-25 e.g., undergraduate students and part-time students.

The **teacher educator sample** will include both university faculty contributing to undergraduate and postgraduate ITE programmes and teacher educators employed in partnership schools. Given potential challenges for partnership schools in releasing school staff for off-site participation, an alternative online guided group discussion will be offered where needed to increase opportunities for school-based teacher educators to contribute.

In addition, individual interviews will be conducted with the six **Directors of ITE** at each partnership, or their nominee. These interviews will not exceed 60 minutes and can be scheduled at a convenient date/time for participants and will reflect their preference – in-person or remote. AI interviews will alternate between retrospective and prospective reflection, between past and possible future trajectories. Interviewees will have an opportunity to reflect on and share their most rewarding experiences of change, ideas about what has worked well, hopeful aspirations and desired futures. The interviews will provide an opportunity to highlight past successes, achieved and future milestones, and significant changes within ITE provision at a local, supra-local and national level. Leaders will have an opportunity to describe the current state of play, including strengths, opportunities, and ambitions for ongoing initiatives. Aspirations and required support for future developments will address the short-, medium- and longer-term.

The researcher brings the benefits of externality and familiarity to the project. She is able to draw on extensive experience of working in ITE in Scotland and England to support the development of rapport based on a shared knowledge base and professional experience within the sector. Establishing rapport and a sense of equality between the researcher and the interviewee are prerequisites for a successful appreciative interview.

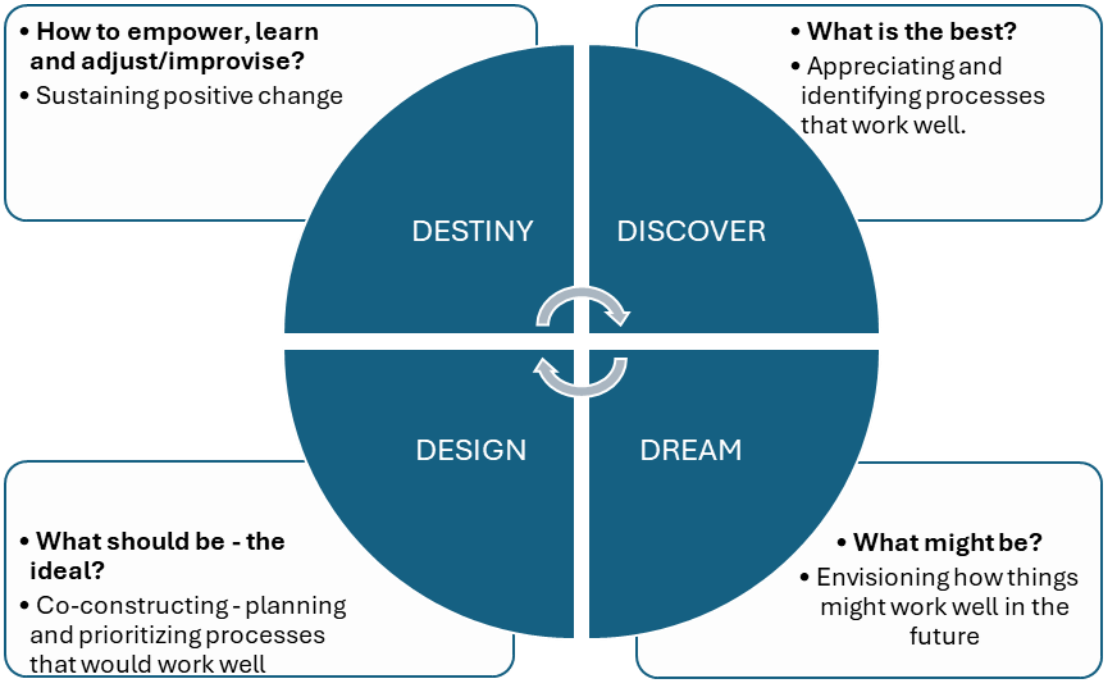
Structure of AI summits, activities and ground rules

Pre-summit preparation will involve careful planning with local leaders to identify dates/times in late September and October 2024 to enable optimal participation (cognisant of school experience periods) and rooming requirements for on-site sessions (i.e., one large and accessible meeting room/teaching space with IT capacity and reasonable acoustics for 4 hours max.). The development of workshop materials will be shared in an online meeting with a small participant panel (one for teacher educators and one of volunteer student teachers) to ensure appropriateness of design and likely generation of intended outcomes. Following a successful pilot, the support of programme leaders will be sought to identify participants who meet the inclusion criteria and to distribute email invitations and participant information on behalf of the researcher via student and staff university email addresses. Pre-summit information will include Appreciative Inquiry principles and the importance of positive dialogue.

Summit activities will include interactive sessions, group discussions, storytelling, and brainstorming activities in a comfortable setting. The workshop activities and interviews will address the four phases of appreciate inquiry (Figure 1 overleaf), adapted to each participant group.

Appreciative inquiry involves the use of creative, ethical and compassionate methods. A set of ground rules will be agreed collaboratively with participants at the beginning of the summit. These might include the use of positive and constructive language; a commitment to listen actively and respectfully; to avoid interrupting others; to share time equitably; to speak from personal experience; and maintain confidentiality. Throughout the summit, emphasis will be placed on the importance of focusing on strengths, successes, and possibilities. The researcher is an experienced facilitator who can guide discussions, manage group dynamics, and will ensure adherence to collectively agreed ground rules.

Figure 1. Four phases of Appreciative Inquiry



The opening phase will include 'emotional touchpoints' to elicit participants' experience in a structured way (Dewar et al., 2010; Dewar 2012). Visual imagery will be used as an initial stimulus to help participants express how they feel about an experience in their professional practice or student journey (Discover). Participants will be asked to reflect on why they selected images and will be encouraged to share stories to identify programme strengths. Participants will be asked to recall memorable events and to focus on experiences they felt excited and motivated by i.e., high points, 'what is best'. The workshop facilitator (proposer) will encourage participants to describe how they felt and what they valued about these experiences or their role. In subsequent activities participants will be encouraged to imagine how this meaningful experience could happen more often, how strengths might be developed across the sector, and outline steps towards making this happen. During the workshops the researcher will facilitate transitions between small group discussion to whole room discussion to identify broader themes and areas of consensus and difference, moving between personal and collective frames of reference. Whole group discussions will be audio recorded using professional boundary microphones. Artefacts produced during the structured reflection will be retained, with permission, for analysis e.g. images annotated with narratives, dream and cluster mapping, wall of opportunities and aspirational statements.

Post-summit follow-up will involve returning to participants to clarify sense-making and the authenticity of claims arising from the Summits. Follow-up will be conducted remotely by extending to workshop participants at each Summit the opportunity to reconvene online for a guided focus group discussion (not exceeding an hour). Participants will be encouraged to comment, agree, disagree, elaborate on emerging themes and/or contribute additional stories.

This is in keeping with the collaborative nature of AI where meaning and sense-making are constructed with, and authenticated by, the participants.

Transcription and analysis

A two-stage hybrid approach will be taken to transcription. Professional (subscription based) Automated Speech Recognition (ASR) software will be used to generate provisional transcripts which will then be checked by the researcher against each audio record to clarify any areas of ambiguity, word confusion (substitutions or insertions) or missing data. On transcript correction and verification, digital audio records will be permanently deleted. Employing a hybrid approach with rigorous consistency checks is efficient without loss of accuracy or compromising participant confidentiality (Pentland et al., 2022).

Textual qualitative data from focus groups and in-depth interviews will be analysed using NVivo software accessed through a secure UWS server. Anonymisation will take place before importing textual files for analysis and an anonymisation log will be kept separately (see data security and confidentiality). User authentication will prevent unauthorised access to the NVivo project, which will be backed up regularly to prevent data loss in case of hardware failure or data corruption.

Timescale

Activity	July 2024	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 2025	Feb	Mar	Apr
Project award/ inception meeting										
Prepare application & obtain ethical approval										
Prepare AI Summit workshop materials										
Convene panels to test and refine materials										
Liaise with ITE providers re. logistics: dates/times/participant pool & sample										
Raise profile of research with target groups										
Convene AI summits										
Prepare ITE leader interview topic guides and identify sample.										
Distribute project information & confirm mode of interview										
Undertake on-site or remote leader interviews.										
Convene follow-up online group discussions										
Transcription and analysis of qualitative data (NVivo).										
Preparation & submission of **Draft Report**										
Complete analysis and revise draft report										
Submit **Final Report** for funder approval										
'Sign-off' / project completion to satisfaction of funder										

Research Ethics

Before data collection, ethical clearance will be obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education and Social Sciences, the University of the West of Scotland. The proposed research will comply fully with the SERA (2005) and BERA (2018) ethical guidelines, the University's codes of practice, and with relevant current legislation, in particular GDPR. The University of the West of Scotland is committed to promoting and upholding the highest quality academic and ethical standards in research activities. The University is a signatory to the UK

Concordat to support research integrity (2019) and is committed to its five core principles: honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication, care and respect, and accountability.

This research involves individual conversations and focused group activities. All participants will be recruited via an email invitation with an accompanying Plain Language Statement (information sheet), followed by a full verbal explanation of the rationale for the study and what participation entails before commencement. Participation is entirely voluntary. Informed consent will be evidenced via a signed consent form, which includes a Privacy Notice.

All participants will be reminded of the limits of anonymity in face-to-face group sessions and will be asked to respect confidentiality including not discussing who was present or the content discussed during group sessions. Ground rules will be shared to create a safe space for positive generative dialogue to occur.

Written consent will include permission for audio recording, EU-based hybrid transcription and the use of direct (de-identified) quotations. Participants will be made aware that anonymised information gathered during the research process may be shared with USCET Cymru. Digital audio files records will be de-identified and an anonymisation log kept separately. Transcripts will be screened to search for potentially disclosive information and any such material redacted or adjusted from potentially disclosive to general text. Replacements will be indicated with [brackets].

The researcher acknowledges has a duty of care towards participants and will use protocols to recognise, minimise and manage any potential distress or discomfort arising from research engagement. The emphasis of Appreciative Inquiry on achievements and high points minimises the risks of potential adverse effects for participants. The method expressly values participant perspectives on what matters. Participants may benefit from articulating what has worked well, their values and their aspirations for future professional development and programme enhancement. During data gathering, the researcher will be vigilant to signals of distress or withdrawal of consent. On completion, each interview participant will be issued with a de-brief containing sources of support. These include details on how to access confidential counselling services provided through Student Services and Staff Wellbeing at each university.[2]. At all times, the researcher will remain mindful of the workload of participants, students and staff. She will liaise with programme leaders to schedule data collection outside pressure points in university calendars.

Deliverables

The research findings will be presented in a brief report (c. 3000 words) that includes an executive summary. Key findings will be communicated clearly and effectively. In addition, if requested, the researcher will produce a two-page bi-lingual research brief for sharing with participants. The proposer has experience of writing high-quality and accessible reports tailored towards the needs of a practitioner and policy audience. Throughout the project the researcher will maintain strong communication with nominated key contacts in USCET Cymru, including compliance with

[2] Student Services Home (cardiffmet.ac.uk); Health and wellbeing - Study - Cardiff University; Wellbeing | University of South Wales; The Wellbeing Team | Student Services & Administration | Bangor University; Student Support Services - Swansea University; Student Support & Wellbeing | The University of Wales Trinity Saint David (uwtsd.ac.uk); Student and Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (open.ac.uk)

any requested interim reporting milestones that are agreed. The project will close, subject to funder satisfaction, in April 2025.

Welsh language

The tenderer is aware of the expectation that public corporations treat Welsh no less favourably than English in accordance with the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. Accordingly, university leaders of ITE will be asked prior to the recruitment stage if potential participants need to be informed of the availability of participation through the medium of Welsh. This may require bilingual project documentation and simultaneous translation at focus group meetings. Translation is not costed in the budget and, if required, may be requested from university internal translation services. The fieldwork will be conducted with sensitivity to these issues and advice/linguistic support will be sought if required.

Costs

Researcher time (FEC), Professor Moira Hulme, 5 days	£3,914
- Pre-summit preparation of materials and ethical approval, 0.5 day	
- Fieldwork site-based & blended, 3 days	
- Analysis and reporting, 1.5 day	
Travel & workshop materials	£250
Subtotal excluding VAT	£4,164
VAT	£832.80
Total including VAT	**£4,996.80**

To reflect the commitment of the University of the West of Scotland to building research capacity in teacher education, the appropriate involvement of a supervised early career researcher is a cost neutral addition (subject to USCET approval).

Data security and confidentiality

All data gathered as part of this research will be stored in line with the requirements of data protection legislation (UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018). The Data Protection Code of Practice at UWS ensures that researchers meet the requirements set out in Article 24(2) of the GDPR, which requires the University, as a data controller, to have in place an appropriate data protection policy to ensure obligations under the legislation are met. This also applies to third parties e.g., professional transcription services that process de-identified audio data on behalf of UWS researchers. All University personnel undertake mandatory training in data protection.

Data will be stored securely and anonymously. Direct personal identifiers will be removed, and the re-identification key will be held separately. The data will be processed and used with ID

numbers and code names to ensure research participant confidentiality. All information collated as part of the research will be treated confidentially and neither individual nor institutional names (i.e., university or partnership schools) will be included in the resulting report or any publications. Access to raw identifiable research data will be strictly restricted to named researchers. All electronic data files will be kept on password protected computers backed-up to a remote secure University server (UWS). Paper files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. On conclusion of the project to the satisfaction of USCET Cymru, all personal data will be disposed of by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files.

Curriculum vitae

Professor Moira Hulme is Professor of Education at the University of the West of Scotland. She is the Research Lead for Education and leads the *Pedagogy, Policy and Place* research group. She co-directs the laboratory school network and contributes to the Sustainable Policy and Research Centre (SPARC). Professor Hulme has led large-scale, mixed methods policy evaluations in Wales, Scotland, and England. She evaluated the introduction of the teacher induction scheme, school collaboration networks, and regional wellbeing strategies for the Education Achievement Service of Southeast Wales. Her portfolio of research includes commissions for the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and, in England, the Department for Education. A distinctive feature of her policy-oriented research is a commitment to co-design and participant involvement throughout the research from problem framing, instrument design, to analysis and key messaging. She recently completed research on Teacher Workload for the Educational Institute of Scotland in a research partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University and Birmingham City University.

Current appointment

Professor of Education, School of Education and Social Sciences, University of the West of Scotland, University Avenue, Ayr, KA8 0SX. 2023-

Education/Qualifications

MLitt History (with Distinction), University of Dundee	2014
PhD (Education), Keele University	2008
Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching & Learning in Higher Education, Keele University/SEDA	2003
MA Education, Open University	1998
MA Teaching & Training Studies (with Distinction), University of Central Lancashire	1996
MA Human Rights & Equal Opportunities, Lancaster University	1994
PGCE (Secondary) Economics and Social Studies, Edge Hill University	1990
BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies, University of Central Lancashire, 2.1	1989

Posts since graduation

Professor of Teacher Education, Manchester Metropolitan University	2016-22
Senior Lecturer in Educational Research, University of Glasgow	2013-16
Lecturer in Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow	2009-13
Research Fellow, Department of Curriculum Studies, University of Glasgow	2006-09
Senior Lecturer in Post Compulsory Education, University of Wolverhampton	2004-06
Research Officer, Attention and the Knowledge Bases of Expert Practice (AHRB) Institute of Education (0.5 FTE), Warwick University	2003-04
Lecturer in Education (0.5 FTE), Keele University	2002-04
Teacher of Sociology, The Blackpool Sixth Form College	1992-02
Lecturer in Sociology, HM Prison Garth/ Runshaw College, Leyland.	1990-92

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH REPORTS

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