

The Paradox of Alignment:

Policy Convergence, Professional Development and Learning Opportunities in Initial Teacher Training in England

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The ITTE Policy Landscape in England

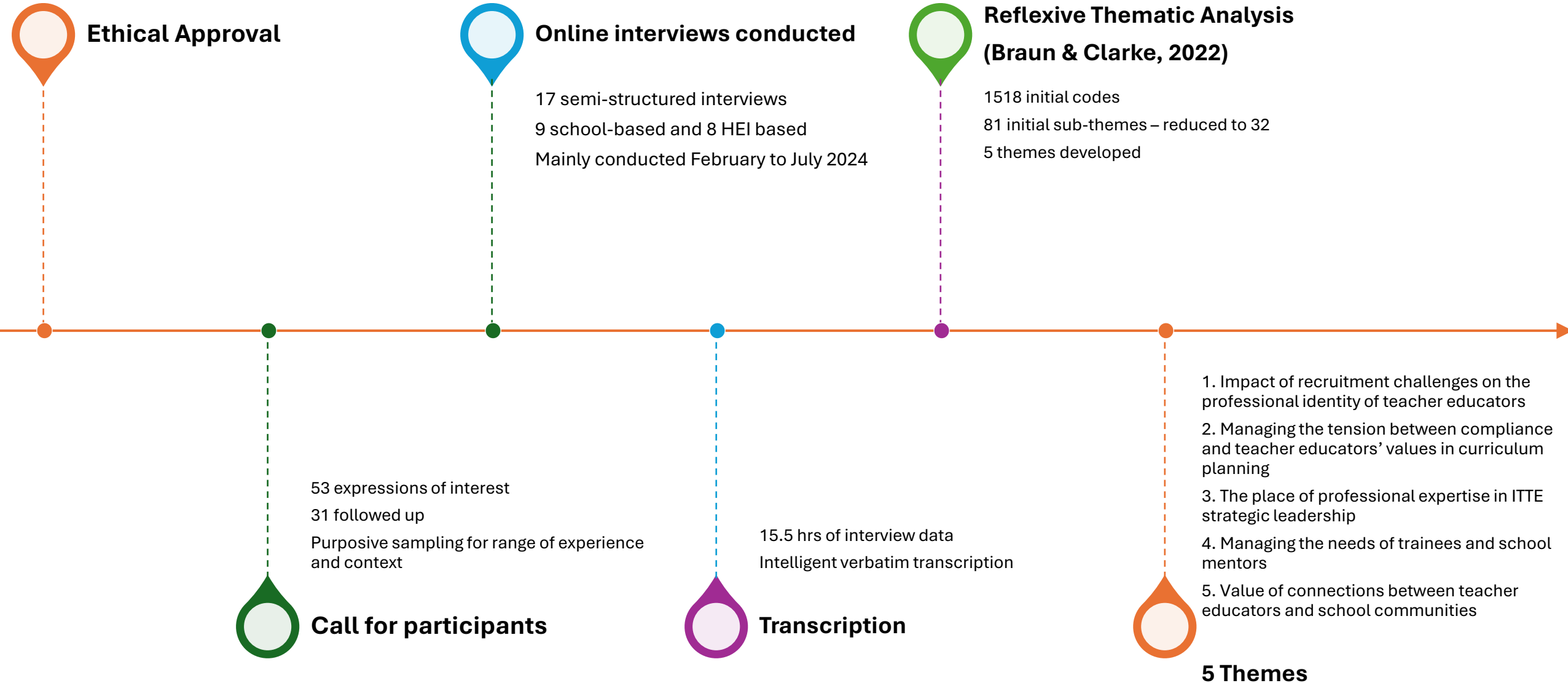
Policy in England since 2019 led to increasing alignment of all ITT providers (Ellis and Childs, 2024):

- Core Content for ITT (2016), ITT Core Content Framework (2019), ITTECF (2024)
- Reaccreditation process 2021-2022
- Quality requirements inc. ITaP, Mentoring requirements – implemented from Sept 2024
- Ofsted frameworks and toolkits (implemented in 2020, 2024, 2026)

‘Compliance’ and ‘quality’ often erroneously conflated (Brooks, 2021)

Alignment typically framed as loss – power dynamics and reduced autonomy (Fjørtoft, 2025)

Research Design



Cross-cutting thread 1: Learning to navigate and negotiate policy constraints

...now we've got to bloody do it... it's now just as much work to implement what we said we were going to implement. Francis, School-based

We've spent two years on this bloody reaccreditation... if we actually looked at all the programmes that all universities developed, they'd be so similar it'd be untrue. Evelyn, HEI-based

There are some things in there [ITTECF] that you need to do, but what they're asking is way less than we already offered. Bianca, HEI-based

You're questioning your expertise and the expertise of others within the ITT community because you don't know what somebody else thinks that's going to come and judge you. Ethan, School-based

Cross-cutting thread 2:

Learning through practice: relational, pastoral and pedagogical work

We've always had an approach to take on as many people as we think we might be able to work with, including... some calculated risks. Gareth, School-based

...there's a more diverse range of student needs...there are people with more complex needs to accommodate, which is the right thing to do but is difficult. Kevin, HEI-based

You have to be able to relate to mentors, to schools, to people who have a way of doing things, and you've got to work with them to get outcomes rather than saying "but this is what the handbook says". Phillip, School-based

Teacher educators have to really work on their listening ear. I think that we should never underestimate the potential hostility of teachers in schools thinking, "Here's somebody from outside coming in to tell us, to judge my provision in any way." Wendy, HEI-based

I'm chair of governors at a school, so I try to stay in school. I have a real knowledge of what's happening on the ground with their teachers and that helps me when I'm considering my teaching and how I share things with the trainees. Dominique, HEI-based

"I'm really privileged now to be in and out of so many different schools and seeing so many different things. In some ways I'm more current than I've ever been." Harrison, School-based

Cross-cutting thread 3: Learning through identity, values, and professional purpose

I want them to be agentic I don't want to be troublemakers, but maybe I do, actually, I want them to disrupt a little bit and have that coming from a place of evidence and knowledge and questioning and criticality. Helena, HEI-based

We need them to have that mindset when they go off into the career so that they don't end up replicating policies where their instinct is telling them this isn't right. Wendy, HEI-based

One [of the 7 curriculum areas] is about values, so that is the wider moral motivation, wanting schools to represent society, so a real drive to towards inclusion and diversity and equity and celebration of diversity as being really important. Gareth, HEI-based

EDI is really important. And the central message that's coming out from government is "get rid of it, it's all woke". It's like, no, it's not actually. It's really key and important, particularly when you look around [local area], which is predominantly white. Francis, School-based

Cross-cutting thread 4: Learning aspirations: the professional development teacher educators value and seek

I'd love for a less competitive market and a much more honest and open collegial relationship with universities... we all agree on 99% of the stuff and there's a couple of nuances, but that's never what the perception looks like in the sector... Let's work together a bit more. That's my utopia.

Phillip, School-based

In fact, I would say that the reaccreditation has made us more collegiate than ever; that's the one good thing that's come out of this. We've seen the enemy as the DfE, and as a result, we've come together... We're all stronger for it. We've also worked across region, so we've collaborated on quite a lot to get through this process.

Evelyn, HEI-based

It's always good to make sure you're part of at least one other community of people who are talking about things so that you have that corrective to getting too tunnel vision about things.

Wendy, HEI-based

But actually, that's where ITT and Teaching School Hubs can really, really enrich our profession, in that we are like the village halls.

Beth, School-based

Continuous Professional Development and Learning (CPLD): Tensions and Possibilities

High expectations, limited support

- Echoes Cochran-Smith et al. (2020): role demands is outpacing structured professional learning opportunities

Uneven access across contexts

- CPLD opportunities are valued but vary by employer and ITTE context (White et al., 2022).

Standardisation as paradox

- Recent policy changes have narrowed institutional diversity, but they have created shared vocabulary and frameworks.

Emerging collaborative practices

- Increased appetite and opportunity for cross-sector dialogue, mentoring, and curriculum design.

What the sector needs and how we get there

Conditions required	Recommendations
<p>1. Profession-led standards for teacher educators. England lacks a framework that reflects the <i>full scope</i> of teacher educator work.</p>	<p>Develop profession-led standards for teacher educators. Co-constructed by HEI, school-based, SCITT, and apprenticeship-route grassroots teacher educators (not imposed by national bodies).</p>
<p>2. Structured, role-specific CPDL. Current CPDL is uneven, goodwill-driven, and rarely aligned to the realities of the role (pastoral care, partnership work, curriculum leadership).</p>	<p>Invest in structured, sustained CPDL. Role-specific development covering: curriculum leadership; pastoral and inclusion work; mentor development; partnership and community engagement; research engagement</p>
<p>3. Regulatory stability. Policy churn keeps teacher educators in “survival mode”, preventing long-term development or innovation.</p>	<p>Stabilise the regulatory environment. Move from reactive compliance to long-term, evidence-informed development cycles.</p>
<p>4. Shared professional spaces across sectors. Alignment has created the conditions for collaboration — but the sector lacks formalised, sustainable structures to support it.</p>	<p>Formalise cross-sector professional spaces. Build on the collaborative practices that emerged during reaccreditation: subject-specific networks; joint research engagement; communities of practice focused on identity, values, and shared decision-making; inclusive representation of grassroots teacher educators</p>

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