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Was 2021–2022 an Annus Horribilis for teacher educators? Reflections on a survey of teacher educators

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Abstract

The COVID pandemic temporarily altered the functioning of all sections of society. In England, it led to major disruption in the teacher education sector leading to curtailed training in schools and a rapid shift to alternative approaches to teaching and learning. By the 2021–2022 academic year, it was hoped that activity would return to a level of normalcy. However, the continued hangover of the pandemic together with the return of high-stakes inspections by Ofsted, and a decision by the UK Government to instigate an accreditation process for all English initial teacher education (pre-service teacher education) programmes, required to allow institutions to continue offering initial teacher education beyond 2024, all combined to create the potential for a very difficult year. We surveyed 159 teacher educators to capture reflections of their experiences form the 2021–2022 academic year, understanding their perceptions through the lens of the Job Demands-Resources Model (Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **86**(3), 499–512, 10.1037//0021-9010.86.3.499) which identifies those factors which may lead to stress and burnout in the work environment (demands) and those which balance against this and offer emotional well-being (resources). The results show a number of high demands over the course of the year, especially related to accreditation and Ofsted pressures, and the extra demands made by the overhang of the pandemic, all factors leading to increased workload. Counteracting

these demands are the resources present, particularly the support between colleagues and a strong commitment and enjoyment gained form working with student teachers. However, the long-term sustainability of the role of teacher educator is in question.

KEYWORDS

accreditation, initial teacher education, job demands and resources theory, workload

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Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

• This paper addresses issues experienced by teacher educators in the university sector in the academic year 2021–2022, including the outcomes of the Market Review and Ofsted inspection, and the impact on wellbeing and workload.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

• The paper provides insights into the experiences of those working in the sector, using a job demand-resources model to analyse high demands on this group.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact globally (Singh & Singh, 2020). Societies had to make major sacrifices in an attempt to stem the impact of the virus, in many cases including the use of lockdowns and other social restrictions. The summer term of the 2019–2020 academic year thus saw major disruption in the UK, with schools closed to all save for the children of essential workers, with much of the teaching load moving to online platforms. This disruption also extended to the work of teacher educators who were responsible for thousands of student teachers (pre-service teachers), the vast majority of whom were unable to complete the major elements of their practical work in schools during the summer term of 2020 (la Velle et al., 2020). Please note that in this paper, we refer to 'ITE (initial teacher education)' and 'ITT (Initial teacher training)', as these are used widely in the sector – at the time of writing, the Department for Education (DfE) uses 'ITT', Ofsted uses 'ITE' and the providers themselves use one or both interchangeably. Many in the sector prefer the use of ITE as they argue that an emphasis on education over training denotes the complexity and extended duration of the project of becoming a teacher (Chitty, 2009). We use 'student teacher' for the same reason, although in much of the literature, student teachers are referred to as 'trainee teachers'.

Initial teacher education in England

In normal times, initial teacher education in England has a number of routes, all of which involve significant periods of time spent in schools (usually known as placements). The first is as an undergraduate on a 3 or 4 year university-based programme, leading to a degree and

QTS (Qualified Teacher Status, which cannot be awarded to someone without an undergraduate degree at time of writing), and the second is on a postgraduate training route, of which there is a wide spectrum of choices. The majority of student teachers are on postgraduate routes, which are funded either through student finance in the same way as a university degree, or through a salaried position in a school while training. Postgraduate student-financed routes are accessed through an HEI (higher education institution) or SCITT (school-centred initial teacher training) provider. Some salaried postgraduate routes are available, currently the HPITT (High Potential Initial Teacher Training, for example, Teach First, who select candidates believed to have a high potential for teaching, usually based on the quality of undergraduate degree level) and the PGTA (Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeship). In addition, the vast majority of postgraduate ITE programmes include an academic qualification, normally a PGCE (postgraduate certificate in education), PGDE (postgraduate diploma in education) or a pGCE (professional graduate certificate in education); many SCITT providers partner with universities to offer these qualifications. In this study, we have focused on university-based ITE because of the unique position of this part of the ITE sector, following years of government favouring SCITT provision (Spendlove, 2024).

There are parallels with teacher education in other countries, where there are often undergraduate and postgraduate routes offered. England is not alone in facing issues in teacher education. Recruitment of student teachers, and therefore the financial viability of ITE providers, is a widespread issue, with countries affected including Germany, Australia and the USA. Significant drivers include a decline in the relative attractiveness of teaching as a career and falling enrolments in teacher training (Van den Borre et al., 2021). While teacher supply issues globally pre-date COVID-19, Eric Charbonnier of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that the pandemic 'gave "visibility" to the teaching profession and highlighted issues around its appeal' (quoted in Euronews, 2022, para. 4).

While the initial disruption to education in the 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 academic years is well documented (Kim et al., 2021; Moss et al., 2021), the UK government was keen to label the 2021–2022 academic year as a 'back to normal' year (Brooks & Perryman, 2023). Schools were encouraged to return as close to normal practice as they could with many COVID-19 restrictions being dropped as a sign of this normalcy and Ofsted inspections resuming (Ofsted, 2021). Likewise, in teacher education there was an assumption by those external to the sector that the disruption was over and normal service should be resumed (Brooks & Perryman, 2023), despite the wholesale changes to provision and assessment of student teachers that were implemented rapidly during the pandemic (e.g. Department for Education, 2020). All ITE providers are also subject to Ofsted inspection, and like school inspections, ITE provider Ofsted reports are currently graded and based on an inspection framework (Ofsted, 2020). Ofsted returned to fully graded ITE inspections from 4 May 2021. Ofsted has historically been considered a high-stakes risk to ITE providers, with previous powers to restrict student teacher numbers if inspections were not deemed 'outstanding' (the highest grade awarded by Ofsted) (Spendlove, 2024) and an unfavourable outcome on inspection is still a potentially critical blow to provider reputation.

However, the 2021–2022 academic year was not business as usual for those in England's initial teacher education sector as it experienced a confluence of major disruptive issues all of which identify this academic year as anything but 'normal'. Firstly, the impact of the pandemic was still being felt. Some school leaders were reluctant to allow student teachers to complete teaching placements as schools were still feeling the disruption of the pandemic and needed to ensure their staff well-being as a priority. More generally, infections within the early part of the 2021–2022 academic year were still disrupting the work of both teacher educators and student teachers. Ofsted had returned to completing inspections within the sector in 2021. With short notice inspections in place

together with the continued impact of COVID-19 this put a continued strain on those leading ITE in universities, and their school partnerships as they attempted to nurture partnership relationships stretched as a result of the pandemic with little guidance from the DfE (Murtagh & Dawes, 2023).

Secondly, the Core Content Framework (CCF) (Department for Education, 2019) had been introduced just a few months before the start of the pandemic, with ITE providers required to map their curricula to the CCF and go beyond this framework in order to be compliant with DfE regulations. For context, ITE courses in England must meet the minimum requirements of the CCF. The CCF sets out the core learning that all programmes must cover, the content being organised into five core areas – behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours (Department for Education, 2019). Non-compliance with the CCF could result in failure during inspection or even the closure of programmes (Ellis & Childs, 2024). Criticism of the CCF has been widespread. The evidence base of the CCF has been questioned, particularly the focus of the evidence on narrowly defined ways of understanding the learning process. Notions of teaching are equally narrow—'there is no encouragement to perceive teaching as something that encompasses consideration of values, socialisation or the development of citizenry participating in a democratic society' (Hordern & Brooks, 2023, p. 812). It has also been pointed out that the literature cited in the evidence bundle is heavily skewed towards randomised controlled trials as the gold standard of research (Hordern & Brooks, 2023), which may not take into account the particular context and nuances of real-life teaching and learning.

Finally, the 2021–2022 academic year saw the relaunch of an accreditation 'market review' process, which had been postponed from 2020 owing to the pandemic (Department for Education, 2022). The English government had decided that all those providing teacher education programmes, both higher education (HE) and non-HE based, should be required to apply for the opportunity to continue to provide programmes from Autumn 2024 (Department for Education, 2022). This entailed a two-stage process, including submitting a detailed application and examples of curriculum and delivery teaching and learning resources for scrutiny, all based on a government-directed set of principles and approaches, to enable them to be accredited and continue training new teachers. For providers in university and SCITT partnerships, some of whom had been providing ITE for over a century, the suggestion that their 'market readiness' needed to be judged and signed off has been a source of frustration. Brand new providers with no experience of delivering ITE programmes were already advertising themselves as outstanding or 'flagship' providers (Walker, 2022). All appeals launched following stage 1 of the process were rejected, despite some providers with good or better Ofsted outcomes and historic records of ITE success missing the pass mark by one or two marks (Walker, 2022). The number of accredited providers has been reduced by the reaccreditation process, from 240 to 179 (Worth, 2023), with potentially a loss of 4000 training places (Zuccollo, 2022), and despite some brand new providers entering the market, it is unclear what the full impact of this process will be on recruitment from 2024–2025 (Maisuria et al., 2023).

Therefore, the 2021–2022 academic year presented a large number of issues and challenges for university ITE providers as while they dealt with these major changes to their work and structures, they were also required to continue providing high-quality training to the student teachers for whom they were immediately responsible. There has been some focus on the impact of the pandemic on the teacher education sector in England, but this has tended to focus on the impact for student teachers (Murtagh, 2022; Rushton et al., 2023), while the teacher educators themselves have tended to be ignored. We therefore decided that it was important to try to understand the experiences of those involved in ITE in England during the course of this significant year.

JOB DEMAND – RESOURCE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated above those working in university-based ITE faced a number of acute demands during the 2021–2022 academic year owing to the continued impact of the pandemic together with significant policy and practice changes in English teacher education. All jobs have demands and in some cases these demands can be easily met; when the demands are intense, both in terms of workload and in terms of pressures which are both internal and external to organisations, there might be a significant impact on well-being. However, while all jobs have demands they also have resources. Resources are those aspects of a job individuals experience which can have a positive impact on them and their work, they are aspects of the job which support and hence counteract some of the stress which is caused by the demands. The balance between these two aspects of work, demands and resources, acts as the basis for the JD-R model (Job Demand – Resource model) (Demerouti et al., 2001).

The JD-R model began as a model focusing on the determinants of burnout. Early research in the area (Demerouti et al., 2001) focused on understanding how emotional exhaustion and job-related stress occurred in workers. They argue that where exhaustion and stress occur, certain behaviours can begin to emerge, such as a sense of alienation and emotional distancing, both processes of protection of the self as well as a lowering of work engagement (Hakanen et al., 2008). In addition, this process leads to stress, and potentially burnout, leading to cynicism and a lack of feeling of accomplishment. Demerouti et al. (2001) further argue that stress is related to external factors, the disruption of a cognitive–emotional–environmental system by external job factors. Han et al. (2020) identifies a number of these factors contextualised to the higher education sector. They identify job pressures, job stress, emotional demands, job overload, role ambiguity/conflicts and job security. Where these are present, job demands are high, and are the foundation for subsequent burnout. As an illustration of job demands in the HE sector, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) identify the impact of increased accountability systems which can impact on many of the demand processes listed above as they add pressure on individuals to be seen to be constantly performing at maximum capacity in their jobs.

In opposition to job demands, job resources are processes that lead to positive perceptions of work and which help individuals meet work goals and stimulate growth. In addition, resources can also counteract the negative impacts of excessive demands as they can protect well-being even under high levels of job demand (Demerouti et al., 2001). Bakker & Demerouti (2007) identify four levels at which resources operate. Firstly, the organisation itself can act as a resource by offering good pay levels, job security and career opportunities as these can impact positively on feelings of worth and agency. At a second level, the interpersonal/social level acts as a resource where co-worker support and a positive team climate can lead to feelings of belonging and support. In addition, the organisation of work such as role clarity and opportunities to be involved in decision-making can likewise give a feeling of having a voice and of encouraging agency. Finally, a fourth level is that based on tasks; having task variety, clear task identity and work autonomy and performance feedback all help to foster a feeling of control and worth. Bakker et al. (2005) showed that amongst teachers the opportunity to impact on their teaching and its outcomes saw organisational change more positively as they had agency in the process.

Bakker and Demerouti (2017) developed the initial model further, characterising it eventually as a theory. They advance a number of propositions concerning how the demands and resources interact to impact on overall well-being. All aspects of a job are characterised as either a demand or a resource and lead to one of two general reactions, either health impairment or motivation. Because they interact, they act in opposition to each other, hence where

demands are high and resources limited, there is a greater chance of impairment and eventually burnout. Where resources compensate or even outstrip demands, individuals will feel motivated and will work effectively. In this developed theory, Bakker and Demerouti (2017) embellish the original model by explaining that personal resources are also important, such as drive and optimism. This also opens up another dimension to the theory as it emphasises that the work environment is not only determined by the organisation, as assumed in the original model, but is also affected by the employee in how they shape their own work. Hence, individuals are argued to have a role in how they shape their task environment and how they develop relationships within the workplace. Hence, there is a complex interplay of demand and resources which impact on the well-being of individuals and their abilities to operate effectively in the workplace.

Han et al. (2020) reinforce the argument in their work on the Chinese HE sector, that while the JDR model was originally developed to understand work related burnout, the characteristics and processes involved suggest it is a framework to be used to consider 'the relationship between job characteristics and employee well-being' (Han et al., 2020: 320). In their research focusing on the application the JD-R model to higher education, they found that the combined impact of teaching, the conflict between the demands for teaching and research, and the constant presence of new challenges all reduced job satisfaction as a result of emotional exhaustion. Impacts of high job demand included 'chronic stress, over-fatigue and emotional exhaustion' (328). Conversely, teaching resources and social and administrative support all led to greater job satisfaction, and show the ameliorating impact of having positive resources.

Given the context of ITE in England during the 2012–22 academic year, as teacher educators emerged from the immediate impacts of COVID together with the need to meet the demands of the reaccreditation process created by the DfE, the JD-R model offers a lens through which we can understand the experience of teacher educators in what was a very challenging year.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To understand the experiences of teacher educators during the 2021–2022 academic year, we used a descriptive research design in order to 'portray the characteristics of persons, situations or groups', to 'observe, describe and document aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs' and to 'discover associations or relationships between or among selected variables to answer questions based on the ongoing events of the present' (Dulock, 1993, p. 154). We developed a questionnaire, designed to capture the views and reflections of teacher educators based in higher education institutions. We chose a questionnaire to enable respondents to feed back on a wide range of topics that would give insights into their experience of the year, and also because of the opportunity for reaching a wide sample at low financial cost. From personal experience we knew that academics working in ITE might find time to respond to this method, whereas more time-consuming tools would be unattractive to very busy participants (Marzi & Tarr, 2023). The questionnaire (see Appendix A) focused on a number of issues relevant to teacher educator work and which would also reflect aspects of both demands and resources, specifically;

- the ITE environment (amount of work, role of leaders, relationships);
- workload;
- accreditation and Ofsted; and
- future of work in ITE.

In each case, there was a mix of Likert scale and open questions to capture patterns of views explored further by qualitative insights and explanations. In total there were 19 Likert response questions and eight text response questions, inviting participants to give additional detail to the four sections of the questionnaire. Participants did not have to enter a response in the text-based answers and 70–90 responses were logged for each text based response.

The questionnaire was made available online, being advertised through the use of Twitter, and through ITE professional networks including the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers and National Primary Teacher Education Council. The link to the questionnaire was left open for 3 months over the latter part of the 2022 summer term and the summer holiday (June–September 2022), and regular adverts were published on Twitter. We have to accept that a limitation of the study may relate to the way in which we gained our sample. Because social media played a major role in gaining respondents this may have led to a skewed sample.

A total of 159 responses were given. Using the Higher Education Classification of Subjects (HECoS) codes 100,511 (primary teaching – The training of others to impart, explain and disseminate knowledge, skills and learning to children between the ages of 3 and 11) and 100,512 (secondary teaching – The training of others to impart, explain and disseminate knowledge, skills and learning to children between the ages of 11 and 18) we estimate a total of 1281 teacher educators in HEIs. Hence, the sample constitutes a 12.4% return from the HE teacher educator population, although given that some teacher educators might be returned elsewhere, this might be a slight over-estimation.

The quantitative data was analysed for descriptive statistics to show patterns in respondents' views, cross referencing demographic data with Likert scale responses and also analysing patterns between Likert scale responses to different questions. The qualitative responses were thematically coded, initially by looking for key words in the collated text responses, then by a deeper reading of meaning in these comments. Codes were derived *a posteriori*, after data collection. Codes did not emerge from the data; they were mined in a deliberate and reflexive act of looking for, finding and examining themes. While the text comments of participants generally seemed unambiguous in meaning, it is important to acknowledge that a different researcher would probably identify different codes and focus on other intersections in the data; therefore a process of 'uncomfortable reflexivity' (Pillow, 2003) was followed. Throughout the process of coding, we questioned ourselves on why we picked out particular themes. Thematic codes allowed us to understand the main views being expressed by respondents, and how these views were being communicated in text.

Sample characteristics

The sample gained from the questionnaire showed a return that included responses from across the HE sector, and broadly reflects the main types of institution involved in ITE. There was a spread of experience from the sector. Table 1 shows the respondents, ranging from those who have recently joined the sector to those who have over 20 years of experience.

Finally, responses were gained from all ages phases (Table 2). Here, the number of responses overall does not equal 159 as in some cases more than one phase was identified.

In England, Early Years refers to 0–5 age range, Primary covers 5–11 years, Secondary is 11–16 years and Further education is 16+ years. The demographic breakdown of the respondents to the questionnaire suggests that views were captured from across the sector and hence that they are generally representative of the ITE sector overall.

TABLE 1 Breakdown of respondents by length of time working in initial teacher education (ITE).

Less than 5 years	40
5–10 years	70
10–20 years	38
20+ years	11
Total	159

TABLE 2 Breakdown of respondents by phases they teach in.

Early years (0–5 years)	52
Primary (5–11 years)	104
Secondary (11–16 years)	71
Further education (16+)	13

RESULTS

The teacher educator questionnaire has helped us to build a picture of current perceptions of work in teacher education in universities during the 2021–22 academic year. The themes which were explored by the questionnaire are presented below.

The ITE environment

We wanted to understand aspects of the ITE environment within which teacher educators work and how they view their work. As summarised in Table 3, and visualised in Figure 1, there are aspects of the work of teacher educators which are very positive. The majority (136/159) enjoy working in the ITE role at a strongly agree and agree level, and feel supported by colleagues (143/159). One respondent reflects this sentiment,

> Direct colleagues and line manager are brilliant.

In addition, there are no teacher educators who do not enjoy working with students, showing that the majority of teacher educators find the core element of their work, i.e. the interaction with and development of student teachers as a positive aspect of their role. However, perhaps underpinned by a strong ethical motivation embedded in personal, social and cultural contexts (Steadman, 2024), and the desire to help students succeed, as well as some of the negative aspects of the role discussed further into this section, a majority of respondents do find it difficult to detach from their work outside of their working hours.

These patterns are obvious in Figure 1, showing very positive relationships within teams and with students, but with clear problems switching off from work.

Most respondents also perceive that they have the opportunity to be creative in their role (115/159 either strongly agree or agree), but there are criticisms of recent changes to ITE created by government working groups which are seen as developments that curtail professional creativity, for example two respondents state that,

> The current DfE Core Curriculum and Ofsted requirements are restricting how
> I can teach early reading, particularly phonics. It is limiting how we can both

TABLE 3   Aspects of how teacher educators perceive their working environment.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q8 I enjoy working in a university ITE role	65	71	16	6	1	2	1
Q11 I can easily 'switch off' from work, outside of my working hours	5	24	14	79	37	4	1
Q12 I have supportive colleagues to work with	85	58	10	4	2	1	1
Q13 I enjoy working with ITE students	106	48	5	0	0	1	1
Q14 I have freedom to be creative in my work	32	83	24	18	2	2	1

Note: Median values are 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree.
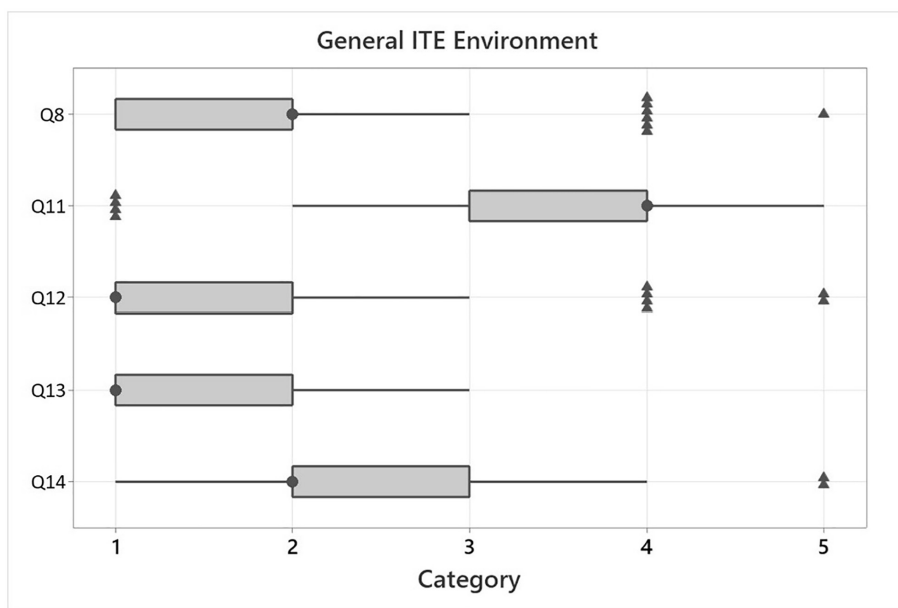
FIGURE 1   Boxplots of responses to questions 8 and 11–14 as set out in Table 4. (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

> academically critique these areas and also how we can encourage the students to teach creatively.

> It is difficult to be creative in ITE now with the prescriptive CCF and requirement to be promoting (uncritically) particular learning theories and schemes of work.

With the current instability in both ITE and the wider HE sector, we also asked about the role of leaders in supporting the work of teacher educators (Table 4, Figure 2). There are a range of views concerning how well ITE is understood by leaders with a wide spread of views, although the median is located in the 'agree' category. Views are somewhat more

TABLE 4 Teacher educator perceptions of the role and support of leaders.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q9 The leaders of my institution understand ITE	27	57	23	35	13	2	2
Q10 The leaders of my institution are supportive of ITE	38	66	27	19	8	2	1

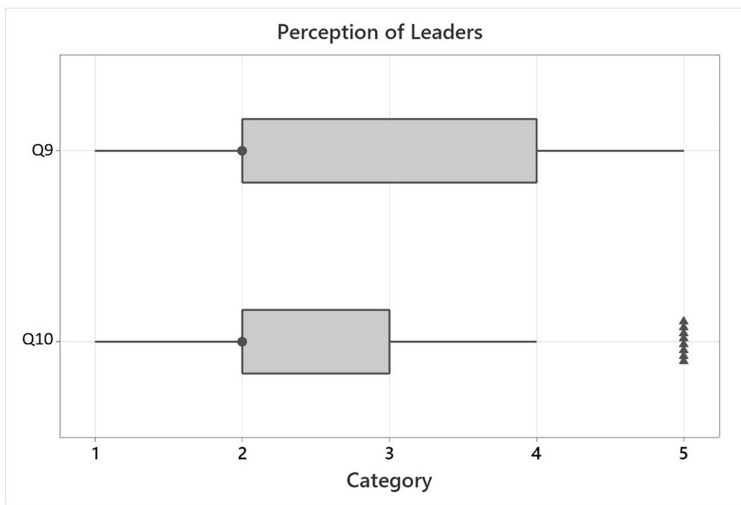*Note*: Median values are 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree.

FIGURE 2 Boxplots of responses to questions 9 and 10 as set out in Table 5 (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree).

positive about how supportive leaders are (104/158 strongly agreeing or agreeing), with a lower number feeling that leaders actually understand ITE (84/155).

This is reflected in the comments made by respondents.

> The leaders of the programme and school of education understand and are supportive of ITE, but the leaders of the whole university prioritise other programmes and ITE is not considered in its uniqueness.

Here, a clear distinction is made between university-level leaders and those within schools of education, a view reiterated by another respondent who identifies what they believe to be the different viewpoints and priorities held by leaders at different levels within their university.

> The department of education are so supportive but the VC group are only worried about money and ITT is expensive!

Analysing the free text responses concerning the ITE environment, magnitude coding (Table 6) shows a more negative than positive set of views. Here, there is a clear focus on

TABLE 5 Views concerning aspects of the 2021–2022 academic year.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q16 2021–2022 is a 'normal' year for me in my ITE role	4	28	26	70	31	4	1
Q18 COVID-19 does not impact on my work life in 2021–2022	5	21	14	82	36	4	1

Note: Median values are 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree.

TABLE 6 Aspects of how teacher educators perceive their workload.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q20 I feel secure in my ITE post in 2022 (there is a question about the future in the next section)	24	54	17	43	21	3	2
Q22 My workload in 2021–2022 has been manageable	3	43	21	60	32	4	2
Q 23 I have enough time to get my work done in 2021–2022, to a standard that is acceptable to me/my team	2	37	30	67	23	4	2
Q 24 My workload in 2021–2022 is comparable with pre-COVID levels	2	32	24	75	23	4	1

Note: Median values are 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree.

the role the Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2019) is playing in creating a less conducive environment for teacher educators as well as the impact of the pressure Ofsted create within the system. Illustrative comments include:

> The introduction of ITT CCF has significantly reduced academic and creativity due to its highly prescriptive nature.

As shown above, leadership demonstrates both positive and negative reactions with both positive and negative comments being made. Likewise, the CCF is seen as a major negative impact, but at the same time, a small number of respondents comment on their ability to be creative, and in one case, the CCF is seen as the main threat to that creativity:

> I feel I have the freedom to be creative in my work broadly, but I am concerned the CCF and associated accreditation process place unnecessary and unhelpful constraints on my teaching. In particular I find aspects of the CCF to connect less with primary and early years practice than with secondary and this contributes to my feeling of those constraints being unhelpful.

What the results here suggest is a dedicated group of teacher educators who enjoy their work and who value the role teacher education plays, but feel at the same time that external forces such as the CCF and Ofsted are making their role more difficult. However, there is still room for many to be creative in the work they do. The other aspect of teacher educator work is that they appear not to be able to 'switch off' from their roles, perhaps linked to the emotional labour involved in their roles (Steadman, 2024), but on the whole they are supported well by colleagues which makes their job more sustainable.

The 2021–2022 year

The environment is therefore one with mixed views concerning those areas which still make the job a positive experience and those which lead to increasing worries and stress. In this context, we also asked views concerning the 2021–2022 academic year in particular. In Table 5 and Figure 3, the majority of respondents disagree or strongly disagree (101/159) that it has been a normal year, and even more (118/158) believe that COVID is still having an impact, even though the main government narrative is based on a return to normality.

As one respondent reflected:

> Whilst the media representation was that the pandemic was over and the country can return to 'normal', this was certainly not the case in education. Educational settings (including universities) are still facing the challenges of staffing as a direct result of COVID. This poses further challenges to our student teachers on placement who are managing their own mental health alongside the effects the pandemic has had on children's wellbeing.

In terms of the comments made by respondents, once again, there is a heavy skew towards negative reflections, with very few positive remarks. Only a few people have
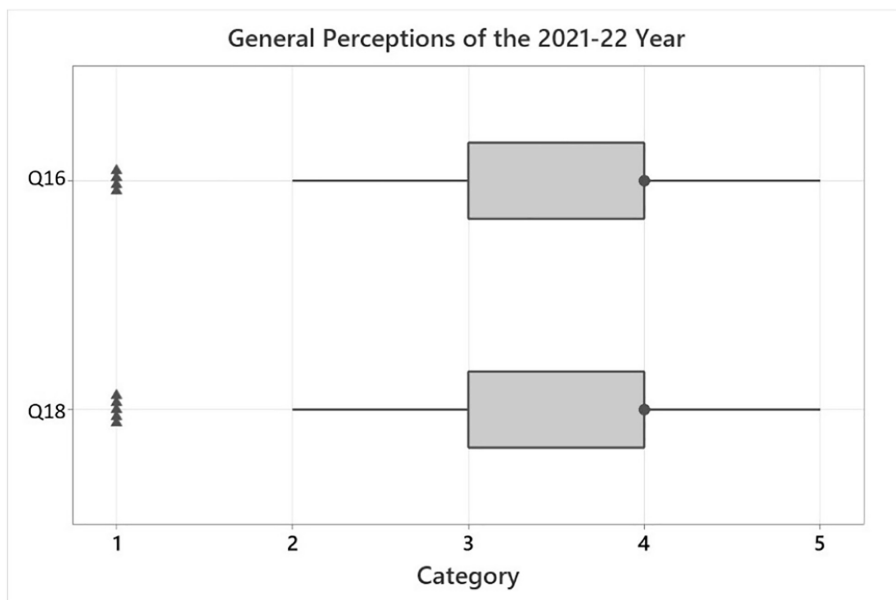
FIGURE 3 Boxplots of responses to questions 16 and 18 as set out in Table 6 (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

experienced a return to a work pattern that they feel is approaching normality, with just two comments highlighting new ways of working which they find positive.

> This year has been nearly back to normal. Trainees are still finding school more challenging than previous years, but 90% of practice is back to normal. With some bonuses from the pandemic era. For example, the ability to set up rapid Teams meetings with school based mentors.

In contrast, several issues are still prevalent in making the 2021–2022 academic year difficult. Firstly, there is the extra workload that was incurred through the introduction of the reaccreditation process the government instigated during the pandemic. For many, this is seen as allied to the possible arrival of Ofsted to carry out an inspection of the quality of provision, both obviously putting a great deal of stress on a sector already attempting to handle the impacts of the pandemic.

> Accreditation and preparation for Ofsted has taken up a lot of time this year. It is difficult to keep preparing to jump through these hoops and the day job.

> The accreditation and changes to the Ofsted framework have caused huge workload issues in trying to manage both of these simultaneously. There has been no account for the lingering issues of Covid, such as a boost in student numbers, placement issues, etc. which have all just added to stress and workload.

At the same time, a series of issues relating to the pandemic are evident, including high levels of staff and student absences, mental health issues and the resultant higher workloads.

> Absence has been higher and workload seems significantly increased.

> There are still absences due to students and staff isolating. There is still a lot of anxiety from many students about COVID-19. Much of the independent research carried out by final year students has focussed on the impact of COVID-19 and so my tutorial time and marking time have been saturated with discussing this.

Thus, it is the case that the 2021–2022 academic year, in contrast to the wider political desire to be seen to be back to normal, was one of anxiety, continued impact from the pandemic, joined by increasing workloads and stress relating to both programme reaccreditation and Ofsted pressures. One comment sums up the multiple demands very succinctly,

> Covid, Ofsted, reaccreditation, severe & impactful ITE issues.

WORKLOAD

As alluded to above, workload was a major issue during the 2021–2022 academic year. Table 6 and Figure 4 show the pattern of respondent perceptions. Respondents do not feel that their workload is manageable (92/159 either disagree or strongly disagree) nor that they have time to do their job justice in terms of their own/their team standards (100/159). Finally, they also feel that they are having to work harder than they did pre-pandemic (107/156). However, as shown in Figure 4 there is a wider spread of perceptions here than when answering questions about the ITE environment except in the case of comparability with pre-pandemic workloads.
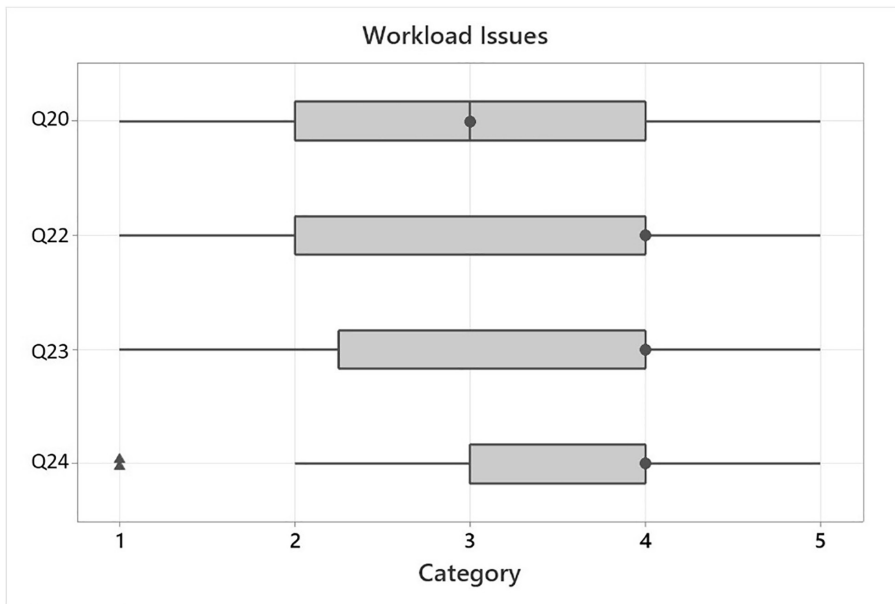
FIGURE 4 Boxplots of responses to questions 20 and 22–24 as set out in Table 7 (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

Once again the open comments about workload were almost ubiquitously negative, with some commenting on the long-term problems in ITE workload:

> Workload has been too great for a long time. I'm paid part-time but only keep my head above water by working on my 'days off' and on weekends. It is incredibly rare for me to have an unpaid day when I do no work at all.

Here, showing that the only way to keep up with the workload is to work part-time officially while actually working full-time, thereby giving labour for free in an attempt to make the job sustainable. There are also a number of comments which demonstrate the multifaceted attack on peoples' time owing to both the pandemic and government policy shifts;

> Perfect storm—COVID, ECT, Ofsted, MReview [market review] and reaccreditation have taken time and energy away from my core role and my academic development. I feel like I have been running to stand still.

And the changes in work patterns since the onset of the pandemic are captured in the quote below, where there is a suggestion that work and non-work contexts now have permeable boundaries and this also relates to the question above which highlighted a lack of ability to switch off from work for many in the sector:

> So Many Emails The 12–14h working day seems to be normalised since the shift online. Way harder to switch off.

Finally, the increased workload relating to programme work has left many unable to engage with other important aspects of their roles such as research, which are then again displaced into time outside of the working week:

> Workload has always been crazy. The ITE work is manageable, however having very little research time means that it is this that is done in my spare time.

The results on workload show a sector under severe strain, having to deal with the hangover of the pandemic, ensuring that students have the support they need, while covering for absent colleagues, in some cases having to provide both online and face to face versions of seminars to ensure inclusion, all the while feeling anxious about Ofsted visits and reaccreditation. As such, elements of the job which should be core, such as research and scholarship, appear to have been all but pushed out unless individuals are willing to develop this work in their own time.

ACCREDITATION AND OFSTED

Given the major government policy interventions of the past few years we decided to gain an insight into the perceptions of teacher educators in relation to the accreditation process as well as the ongoing presence of Ofsted. Table 7 shows the overall perceptions of respondents which is summarised graphically in Figure 5. The accreditation experience has not been positive (108/155 disagree or strongly disagree), with only seven respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it has been positive. Likewise, Oftsed has also been seen as a negative experience, be that in terms of the inspection itself or the preparation for inspection (109/158 disagree or strongly disagree). These overall patterns are clearly reflected in the distribution of responses shown in Figure 5.

Comments in response to open questions are generally very negative when discussing the accreditation process. This includes a focus on the amount of time spent on the process, as well as seeing the process as unfairly calling into question the quality of existing provision. For example,

> Although 'successful' with accreditation, the whole process has been very time-consuming and disrespectful to the ITE sector, including supporting colleagues who are re-submitting in round 2. Such a waste of everyone's time!

Indeed, the process is seen by some as actually leading to a loss of quality owing to its focus on standardisation and micromanagement of teacher education:

> This should have been such a great opportunity to review the programme, and update it in line with national standards and guidelines. Instead, it has felt as if we have had to sacrifice a lot of the strength of our provision to conform with a 'one size fits all' approach. The programme is currently designed to meet the needs of teachers in the local area, and has been shaped over many years by

TABLE 7 Aspects of how teacher educators perceive the impact of accreditation and Ofsted on their work.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q 26 ITE accreditation has been a positive experience for me	3	4	40	56	52	4	2
Q 28 Ofsted inspection/ inspection preparation has been a positive experience for me	0	7	42	65	44	4	2

Note: Median values are 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree.
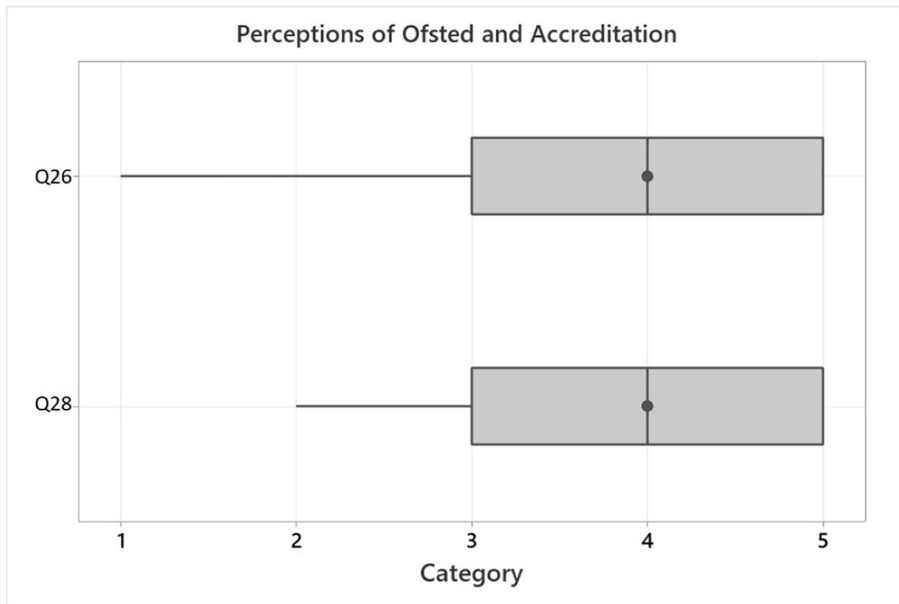
FIGURE 5 Boxplots of responses to questions 26 and 28 as set out in Table 8 (1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree).

the schools that are in partnership with us. We are struggling to maintain this within the framework set out for ITE programmes.

The accreditation process has been a complete waste of time and resource. I feel insulted by the process. DfE have not been constructive and all I can see is that they are making the system worse, not better. Currently, we are working on resubmissions because we were not successful in the first round. As a result, I do not feel that current students are getting the normal quality of experience because they are not getting my attention.

Indeed, much of the comment is succinctly summed up by a short comment:

Utter bollocks.

What these comments appear to demonstrate is that while the process is seen as superfluous to need, if it had led to a positive opportunity for reflection and development it might have gained some support. However, generally, the process is perceived as an attempt to dictate and to take control of teacher education from the sector, and giving it to the Department of Education to redistribute to favoured multi-academy trusts (MATs):

I was flabbergasted when we did not get through. We have a strong course and we have done our best to comply with the CCF restrictions, while maintaining integrity. Apparently this was not enough. It increases the suspicion that the whole process has been aimed at getting rid of HEI ITE in favour of MAT led cloning.

The impact of the Ofsted process appears to be seen as equally as destructive. There were a small number of positive comments, relating to the focus on the curriculum;

> I think there are some positives in the new inspection framework especially the focus on all subjects and a broad and balanced curriculum.

However, the vast majority of the comments focus on the belief that the process is unfair, and that it detracts from the main focus of providing quality training;

> It's never-ending and repetitive. It's tiresome and tedious to have to justify what we do for non-specialist/non-experienced Ofsted inspectors who themselves are working to tick off a list.

> I think there are particular agendas being promoted around the CCF etc. rather than looking holistically (and with an open mind) at quality and impact. I think those who have undergone inspections have found it a negative experience, undermining the work that many institutions have undertaken for decades. I feel that Ofsted are adding to the agendas promoted by the Market Review and DfE, similar to situations witnessed around schools and academisation. It is a really sad position for education at the moment.

> The Ofsted team were very fair but it was another job preparing for the Ofsted framework. It took time away from what our job actually involves.

In a number of cases, comments were also made that the Ofsted framework is highly selective and partial when it comes to using research informed practice, instead requiring strict adherence to the Core Content Framework,

> Time consuming focus on current superficial, performative, compliance goals. These are always artificial and ever changing in emphasis. This prevents us from focussing on true value and research led improvement and development of our programme.

Thus, both the accreditation process and the presence of Ofsted are both seen as negative processes which are unfair, do not treat the sector in a professional manner and which take valuable time and resources away from the core activities of helping the development of well qualified new teachers.

FUTURE WORK IN ITE

The final section of the questionnaire focused on respondents' views concerning the future of ITE (Table 8 and Figure 6). Here, there was a clear desire for those in the sector to continue to offer education for student teachers (102/159 agreed or strongly agreed); indeed for some of those who disagreed with this it was due to their imminent retirement. However, far fewer believe they will be still be in the sector in 5 years (41/159), and in many cases this is as a result of pessimism over the direction of government policy,

> I aim to be still working within the ITE sector at university, however my concerns are more about how the current policy makers are focussing on more private providers of ITE outside the university sector and also how the expectations for ITE have become more prescriptive.

TABLE 8 Teacher educators' views concerning the future of ITE in England.

	S. Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	S. Disagree	Median	IQR
Q 30 I am sure I will still be working in the university ITE sector in 5 years	4	37	53	42	23	3	2
Q 31 I want to still be working in the university ITE sector in 5 years	50	52	20	21	16	2	2
Q 32 I will actively seek promotion within the university ITE sector in the next 5 years	14	32	36	46	31	3	2
Q 33 I do not have any worries or concerns about the future of the university ITE sector	1	7	4	62	85	5	1

Note: Median values are 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree.

FIGURE 6 Boxplots of responses to questions 30–33 as set out in Table 8 (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

> 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.

There was less of a clear pattern when it came to asking about intentions to seek promotion, with some individuals quite open to the prospect while others were less interested. In some cases, there was a perceived need for promotion perhaps owing to lower pay levels than in the school sector:

> Although I would like to remain within university ITE, I will need to increase my hours or salary, for example through promotion, for this to be financially sustainable.

However, in some cases while respondents like working with student teachers, and would like promotion they see movement into programmes led by universities and not the Department for Education or inspected by Ofsted as being the only sustainable option;

> I am unlikely to seek a linear promotion in the next 5 years, however, I am actively seeking other academic roles within other universities that include teaching opportunities over a range of programmes and that are not predominantly ITE programmes.

Finally, there is a high level of concern about the future of the university ITE sector, predominantly owing to the direction of government policy making it unsustainable. For example;

> Feels like the DfE is very hostile to university ITE and is forcing us out either through not accrediting us despite track record of success or through introducing compliance to limited and reductive understandings of ITE which are on direct conflict with HEI purposes and values.

There are also concerns about personal health and levels of stress the job produces, again making the role unsustainable:

> I am so disillusioned with the direction of travel of ITE due to the DfE/Ofsted etc. I have given 100% to my job because I care about the students I work with and outcomes for children in school. However it is increasingly obvious that this is having a negative impact on me.

> I am not sure how long I will be able to continue at this level of stress. Despite being a passionate educator and caring deeply about education being the best for every child, I feel increasingly like I may eventually need to walk away for the sake of my own health. It shouldn't have to be like this. It feels very unfair that I may need to give up a career in education that I love because the stress and workload is becoming unmanageable.

Therefore, while many in the ITE sector wish to continue working with student teachers, they are struggling to identify how they can make their work sustainable, and believe that currently there is a great deal of instability and uncertainty within the sector.

DISCUSSION

The results gained from the teacher educator questionnaire suggest a far from quiet or even normal year. There is much comment, as shown above, about the excessive workload, the stress imposed by the imposition of a reaccreditation process at the same point as teacher educators were attempting to construct a successful exit from the impacts of the pandemic on their colleagues and students. And all of this was being navigated under the expectation of Ofsted inspections, often seen as opaque and unfair, further adding to the burden. Hence, there is evidence of a number of demands (Demerouti et al., 2001) which together have led some to feel emotional exhaustion brought on by concern for colleagues and students, and

the constant attempt to ensure everyone is catered for as evidenced by the lack of an ability to 'switch off' outside of work hours. There is obvious evidence also of stress with respondents highlighting feelings of disillusionment and an undermining of their professionalism. Much of this reflects Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2007) evidence that increasing the level of accountability also increases demand as the belief that teacher educators are consistently and publicly held within a performative culture with little agency leads to greater pressure and stress. In addition, the wider set of demand pressures outlined by Han et al. (2020) including job pressure, job stress, emotional demands, task overload and a questioning of job security are all clearly present in the data captured. And crucially, much of this acute demand relates to external factors, the disruption of what Demerouti et al. (2001) call the cognitive–emotional–environmental system by factors beyond the control of teacher educators and their leaders; it is the still acute impacts of the pandemic, the reimposition of Ofsted inspections at a critical point when people are attempting to regain a level of normality, all added to by the imposition of an accreditation process that many see as both unfair, poorly conceived and in some cases, as a process deliberately developed to oust universities form teacher education altogether. Given this acute, high-demand environment in higher education initial teacher education, we might expect a rising level of burnout amongst teacher educators. Yet there is little evidence of this here. It might be that the sample is skewed and that those who are suffering from burnout might have decided not to engage. We can never be sure of this. There is some evidence in comments that health is already suffering (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) or is recognised as a problem which is on the verge of erupting for some individuals. However, what is more likely at a population level is that burnout levels might be low and mitigated by a number of resources which are counteracting the worst excesses of the job demands currently rife in ITE.

As discussed earlier, resources offer a counteracting balance to demands, and as argued above, can protect well-being even under high levels of job demand (Demerouti et al., 2001). The results from this project show that resources ameliorate the demands made of teacher educators at three of the four levels identified by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). According to the results here, there is a strong resource at the interpersonal/social level, the consequence of strong colleague support and a resultant positive team climate. The resultant feelings of belonging and collegiality act as a resource for emotional health. At a second level, the organisation of work can offer elements of resource owing to the opportunity to decision-make in relation to teaching and curriculum, although this is being progressively curtailed with the introduction of the Core Content Framework (2019) dictating curriculum content. Nevertheless, at least internally, there is agency in how work is carried out. Finally, task variety and autonomy both add to resource, by giving opportunity for professional judgement and further opportunities for decision-making.

Bakker and Demerouti (2017) add the potential for personal resource through drive and optimism. Here, there is evidence of drive, in that teacher educators draw emotional well-being from the positive relationships they enjoy with the student teachers they work with, leading to a desire to give them the best possible experience to help them reach their potential. Looking to the future, there is a positive desire to continue to work within ITE and if possible to develop their careers in this direction. Hence, there is a personal aspect to the generation of resources.

CONCLUSIONS

In understanding the shifts currently taking place in university-based teacher education, the JD-R model can act as a very useful lens though which we can explore the state and sustainability of the teacher educator role. The data from this project suggest that there are

many demands in the current ITE system, demands that are acute, and which appear to be increasingly structural in nature. At the same time, there are positive aspects to the roles in teacher education creating resources owing to strong colleague support, opportunities to influence the content and approaches to curriculum and teaching, and also owing to professional autonomy. However, as Bakker and Demerouti (2017) stress, there is a complex interplay of demand and resources which impact on the well-being of individuals and their abilities to operate effectively in the workplace.

Currently in HE-based teacher education, it appears that the resources available to teacher educators are shrinking while the demands are ever more intense. The positive impact of collegial working, feelings of professionalism and autonomy are being counteracted by the raft of changes, enforced from outside universities, but which have led to excessive workloads, a curtailing of professional autonomy and systems creating consistently high levels of stress. From a JD-R model perspective, for many in ITE, stress and even mental health problems are becoming a reality. This shift has led some to consider leaving, others to take early retirement and yet others to contemplate sideway moves into other non-ITE university jobs.

Taking a descriptive research approach, we feel that the insights we have gained from teacher educators for the 2021–2022 have helped us to describe the current situation. Participant responses strongly suggest a sector unhappy with the current direction of government policy, and evidence that this might begin to have impacts on the sustainability of the ITE sector. If the future of the sector is to be secured, there needs to be serious consideration as to how the demands to which teacher educators are exposed can be lessened, through reform of inspection processes, as well as a reconsideration of the accreditation process. Internally, university leaders also need to understand the stress overly large workloads bring, combined with a longer academic year owing to compliance criteria on training in England. This is particularly acute when they relate to external pressures from beyond the institution, such as Ofsted inspection and the ITT accreditation process. Teacher educators are a critical asset to the education sector; we need to make sure that their jobs are sustainable if we are to retain a fully functioning and high-quality teacher education system.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest associated with this study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The BERA ethics guidelines (2018) have been followed throughout the research project and ethical approval was sought and granted by the following institutions, before data was collected: Nottingham Trent University and Leeds Trinity University.

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APPENDIX A

1.   Gender

Male   Female   Prefer not to say   Other

2.   I work in

A post-92 university   Pre-92 university   A Russell Group university

A 'new' university   Rather not say   Other

3.   How long have you worked in university based ITE?

Less than 5 years   5-10 years   10-20 years   20+ years

4.   Which age phases do you work in?

Early Years   Primary (5-11)   Secondary (11-18)   FE   Prefer not to say   Other

5.   My contract is best described as:

Permanent, full-time equivalent   Permanent, part-time equivalent   Fixed-term, full time

Fixed-term, part time   Hourly paid   Prefer not to say   Other

6.   If you have a management responsibility, which of these best describes it? Please feel free to add if none of these fit.

Programme/Academic Leader   Partnership/Placement Leader   Cohort/Group Leader

Subject Leader   Research Leader   Pastoral Leader   Other

7.   Have you taken a lead role in any of the following events/activities, in the last 2 years?

Ofsted inspection   QTS Accreditation process   Revalidation/validation of programmes   Other

8.   I enjoy working in a university ITE role.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

9.   The leaders of my institution understand ITE.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

10.   The leaders of my institution are supportive of ITE.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

11.   I can easily 'switch off' from work outside of my working hours.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

12.   I have supportive colleagues to work with

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

13.   I enjoy working with ITE students

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

14.   I have freedom to be creative in my work

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

15.   If you'd like to add any comments about the responses above please feel free to do so here

16.   2021/22 is a 'normal' year for me in my ITE role

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

17.   Please fell free to expand on your answer here

18.   COVID-19 does not impact on my work life in 2021/22

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

19.   Please feel free to expand on your COVID-19 answer here

20.   I feel secure in my ITE post in 2022 (there is a question about the future in the next section)

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

21.   Please fell free to expand on your answer here

22.   My workload in 2021/22 has been manageable

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

23.   I have enough time to get my work done in 2021/22 to a standard that is acceptable to me/my team

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

24.   My workload in 2021/22 is comparable with pre-COVID levels

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

25.   If you would like to add to your responses on workload, please do so here

26. ITE accreditation has been a positive experience for me

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

27. Please fell free to expand on your answer here

28. Ofsted inspection/inspection preparation has been a positive experience for me

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

29. Please feel free to add to your Ofsted response here

30. I am sure I will still be working in the university ITE sector in 5 years

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

31. I want to still be working in the university ITE sector in 5 years

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

32. I will actively seek promotion within the university ITE sector in the next 5 years

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

33. I do not have any worries or concerns about the future of the university ITE sector

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

34. If you would like to add any comments to your responses in 'The Future' section please do so here