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Mapping the landscape of teacher education for inclusive education in Scotland

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study that maps how teacher educators in Scotland are engaging with the ongoing global challenge of preparing classroom teachers to support diverse learner groups. Scotland's National Framework for Inclusion, a principled approach to inclusion supported by the General Teaching Council to ensure a consistent approach based on common values and national standards for teacher education and professional development, was interrogated using a tool developed by the Council of Europe to map teacher education practices. A collaborative seven-step process of data analysis led to the use of a metaphorical landscape to reveal how different providers are able to develop distinctive programmes while adhering to common values and national standards of inclusive education. The emergent landscape addresses a gap in the literature on teacher education that shows how a theoretical perspective on inclusion is embedded in teacher education and surfaces important insights for teacher education and professional learning.

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Inclusion; initial teacher education; activity theory; teacher educators; National Framework for Inclusion

Introduction

Since the 48th International Conference on Education (ICE), *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future* (UNESCO, 2008), concluded with six recommendations specific to teacher education and development, there has been growing international recognition of the importance of preparing classroom teachers for inclusive education. Notably, the second of the ICE recommendations called for teachers to be equipped with

the appropriate skills and materials to teach diverse student populations and meet the diverse learning needs of different categories of learners through methods such as professional development at the school level, pre-service training about inclusion, and instruction attentive to the development and strengths of the individual learner. (UNESCO, 2008, p. 5)

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This has stimulated a growing interest in how teachers are prepared for inclusive education at a time when the concept itself has evolved from a specific focus on learners with disabilities to a wider concern for the additional needs of learners in vulnerable groups (UNESCO, 2018). Today, improving the ‘quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education’ is a key priority of the European Union’s Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training 2021–2030 (Council of the European Union, 2021).

While there is a great deal of consensus that high-quality teachers make a difference to student outcomes, and that all teachers should be ‘prepared to teach all students’ (UNESCO, 2020, p. 1), there is far less agreement about how they should be prepared. Substantive reviews of teacher education research (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005) have pointed out that many important questions remain unanswered or are only partially answered because of the incremental nature of research on teacher education and the need for synthesis across many research topics. Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015) took a step towards synthesis by organising teacher education research into three overarching areas: (1) research on teacher preparation accountability, effectiveness and policies; (2) research on teacher preparation for the knowledge society; and (3) research on teacher preparation for diversity and equity.

Preparing teachers for inclusive education aligns with the literature on teacher preparation for diversity and equity. This work often occurs within award or degree programmes that prepare teachers of learners with special educational needs. Courses that prepare primary and secondary class teachers may include a specialist focus on special needs, social justice, diversity or inclusion, or the content of these may be infused within the wider course to ensure that mainstream teachers are aware of these issues, but this content is too often additional rather than foundational (Pugach, 2005).

In both cases, teacher educators work on courses that draw on a range of theoretical ideas, practice-based research and professional experience, to develop activities and content that aim to develop the teaching competences associated with inclusive practice or teaching inclusively (see for example, Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012; Blanton et al., 2011; Deppeler et al., 2015; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011; Florian, 2022; Naraian, 2017; Oyler, 2006; Walton & Ruszzynek, 2020). These approaches have been widely adopted in many jurisdictions, yet teachers continue to report feeling unprepared to teach diverse classes, and research specifically focused on teacher education for inclusion struggles to document how inclusive principles are enacted in teacher education practice.

Two recent literature reviews (Li & Ruppert, 2021; Massouti, 2019) acknowledge the historical focus on distinct content associated with meeting special educational needs and call for a wider conceptualisation of inclusion to encompass a broader understanding of diversity and barriers to learning. Li and Ruppert’s (2021) review combined the concepts of teacher agency and inclusive education on the grounds that teachers are important actors in creating equitable environments for learners from marginalised groups. They identified nine studies that explored the relationship between these two concepts and derived four implications for teacher education and professional development: (1) the development of an ‘inclusive teacher identity’ facilitated placement experience in quality school settings; (2) preparing teachers ‘to respond to dilemmas, problems and conflicts in their everyday worksites’; (3) recruit prospective teachers from diverse backgrounds

including other professional fields; and (4) develop teachers' imagination and ability to visualise alternative futures for themselves and their students'.

Massouti's (2019) literature review examined the Canadian and international context. His starting point was the observation that within Canada, many studies associated with teacher education for inclusion focused on instructional practices for learners identified as having special educational needs and teacher attitudes about inclusion, an important topic given widely reported concerns that teachers did not feel confident about the practice of inclusion. Like Li and Ruppap (2021), he found the role of practical placement experiences to be important for the development of inclusive practitioners. Inclusive skills and pedagogies were found to include collaborative practices such as co-teaching and collaboration between specialist and mainstream colleagues. Whether these practices were taught in preservice courses within stand-alone courses or integrated models of preservice content did not seem to matter as both models were considered supportive. However, the need for inclusive oriented curricula that was responsive to the demands of teaching in diverse classrooms was deemed crucial. But a gap remains in this literature as research on such curricula remains scant.

This paper reports on innovative research that was designed to address a gap in the literature on teacher education for inclusion. Using an activity model tool developed by the Council of Europe (Hollenweger et al., 2015) to map current provision on preparing teachers to meet the demands of inclusive education, the study reported here adds to knowledge about how university-based teacher educators, in one national jurisdiction, engage with the principles of inclusive pedagogical practice in preparing classroom teachers by examining the enactment of a principled approach to teacher education for inclusion. To our knowledge, it is the first study to do so, both in terms of mapping inclusive practices across initial teacher education (ITE) courses, and in making use of the activity model to do so. The research, therefore, contributes to the knowledge base of teacher education for inclusive education by providing methodological and conceptual insights with applicability for researchers and teacher educators in other jurisdictions.

Scotland's inclusive practice project

In recognition of the important role that teachers play in ensuring inclusion and equity in education, the Scottish Government funded a four-year (2006–2010) initial teacher education (ITE) project to 'develop an approach to ITE that would ensure that all teachers had greater awareness, understanding and skill in responding to the many problems that can affect children's learning' (Florian & Rouse, 2009, p. 597; Rouse & Florian, 2012). Known as the Inclusive Practice Project (IPP), this research and development project created an example of inclusive oriented curricula based on the concept of inclusive pedagogy, an approach to teaching that emerged from theorising the practices of expert teachers with reputations of excellence in teaching diverse school populations (Black-Hawkins & Florian, 2012). The approach is based on the idea that differences between learners can be accommodated without perpetuating the marginalisation that can occur when some learners are treated differently to others (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It is constructed on three principles:

- (1) that difference between learners is ordinary and should be expected;
- (2) that teachers are capable of teaching all learners; and
- (3) collaboration with others may be needed.

The IPP systematically embedded these principles as content in teacher education courses and specified what would count as evidence of early career teachers' inclusive practices at one Scottish university. (For full details of this project, including data collection tools and criteria for documenting practice, see Rouse & Florian, 2012).

Scottish Universities Inclusion Group (SUIG)

The investment in the IPP was intended to benefit all Scottish ITE providers and to disseminate its work with the wider teacher education community. To this end, one of the outcomes of the IPP was the establishment of an ongoing working group of teacher educators, which has been sustained over the intervening years with the support of the Scottish Universities Council of Deans of Education. Known as the Scottish Universities Inclusion Group (SUIG), this group includes course leaders and inclusion specialists from 11 Scottish Universities offering ITE. SUIG's aim is to represent the interests, activities and expertise of its members to collectively inform education policy and practice. The remit of the group is to:

- Ensure that teacher education providers across Scotland embed inclusion in their ITE courses and support new teachers to understand their professional responsibilities to support the learning of all learners.
- Support teachers at all stages in their careers to recognise, value and respond positively to the diversity of school populations.
- Support teachers in all stages in their careers to draw from contemporary research-informed understandings of inclusion as they reflect on and develop their practice.
- Challenge, where appropriate, practices or attitudes that act as barriers to inclusion.
- Undertake research to inform and develop ongoing work relating to inclusion in schools.

To achieve these aims, SUIG developed a framework aligning the inclusive pedagogical approach adopted by the IPP with General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards, Scottish policy and broader international rights-based policies of education for all. The resulting *Framework for Inclusion* was published online in 2009 and revised in 2014, and a third edition published in 2022, as the GTCS Professional Standards for Teachers have been updated (Scottish Teacher Education Committee [STEC], 2009, 2014; Scottish Universities Inclusion Group [SUIG], 2022).

Scotland's National Framework for Inclusion

As with each of its editions, the *National Framework for Inclusion* (STEC, 2009, 2014; SUIG, 2022) identifies the values and beliefs, professional knowledge and understanding, as well as the skills and abilities, expected of prospective teachers and qualified teachers throughout their careers based on the underpinning principles of inclusive pedagogy and

a broad definition of inclusion which embraces all learners with additional support needs, those living in poverty and others vulnerable to exclusion in education. It is aligned with relevant aspects of wider UK and Scottish policies such as the Equality Act (United Kingdom Government, 2010) and the national curriculum for Scotland, A Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004). This has enabled a coherent national approach to dealing with inclusion that has been highly influential in supporting ITE courses to ensure that all teachers have the knowledge, skill, values and beliefs to respond effectively to all children and young people from age three to 18.

The distinctive approaches to ITE developed by each university provider are designed to align with their individual context. Within these approaches, the *Framework for Inclusion* offers guidance that supports teachers at all stages of their careers to enhance and extend their inclusive practices. This is facilitated by a series of questions that are embedded in the framework about how relevant GTCS Professional Standards might be met (GTCS, 2021). In this way, the *Framework for Inclusion* is conceptually coherent in terms of outcomes but leaves providers free to determine how best to turn the underlying principles into practice. Today, SUIG continues to align its work with the evolving policy landscape to promote inclusion in Scotland's schools, but the need to develop a shared understanding about the challenges and opportunities of inclusion is ongoing as courses, programmes and staff are not static but change over time.

For these reasons SUIG set out to investigate how, and to what extent, a principled approach to inclusion is enacted across Scotland's ITE programmes. This involved examining practices within our respective courses and evaluating them against the principles of inclusive pedagogy embedded in the *Framework for Inclusion*.

Mapping the landscape of university-based teacher education for inclusion

Scotland has 11 schools of education, which range from those with small intakes, for example around 60 students per year, to those with large cohorts of 200 students or more in a year group. In addition, there has been an increasing number of new and alternative routes into teaching e.g. part-time and distance learning programmes of study. At the time of the study, eight schools of education were members of SUIG. Here teaching is delivered mostly by teacher educators and academics from other faculties within some universities, as well as external speakers, such as social workers and health visitors, to enhance course content. To assess the manner and extent to which the principled approach adopted by the *Framework for Inclusion* was taken up by teacher educators in their courses, SUIG undertook to map practice across ITE in Scotland's schools of education. All ITE courses in Scotland are accredited by the GTCS to prepare student teachers to meet the Standard for Provisional Registration based on a recognition of the universal value of inclusion and inclusiveness. Six of the eight SUIG universities participated in the study.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (2018) ethical guidelines. Ethical approval was obtained from each

participating ITE provider. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw without consequence. Informed consent was secured prior to data collection. Measures were taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality, and all data were stored and handled in accordance with relevant data-protection regulations.

Given that the researchers were also members of the universities in which the ITE programmes were delivered, additional ethical attention was paid to issues of positionality and potential bias. Although they were not participants in the study, their professional roles and proximity to the programmes under investigation had the potential to shape data generation, interpretation and reporting. To address this, the analytical framework produced by the research team was critiqued by a colleague who was not a member of SUIG. Their team undertook collaborative analysis and cross checking of interpretations to reduce the influence of individual perspectives and to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Method

Due to the range and complexity of university-based ITE, determining whether and how the principles of the *Framework for Inclusion* are embedded in courses is not straightforward. To capture this complexity, we selected the Council of Europe (CoE) *Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education* (Hollenweger et al., 2015). Based on Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001), itself being relevant for the ‘collaborative real-world research’ that we were undertaking (Colville et al., 2023, p. 23), this tool was designed to be adaptable for different national and institutional contexts to help map inclusive teacher education and professional development activities promoting inclusive education.

Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education

The CoE *Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education* (CoE Tool) offered a useful way to exploring how the concept of inclusion is being addressed within different courses (Andrews et al., 2021). [Figure 1](#) displays how it was designed to examine the range of activities taking place in varied teacher education contexts.

The components used in the CoE Tool respond to the following questions:

- Who does it (subject of activity)?
- How is it done (tools and artefacts)?
- Where is it done (social and physical context)?
- What is done (object of activity)?
- Why or what for is it done (outcome of activity)?

Procedure

In 2018, the Scottish Council of Deans of Education approved a proposal from SUIG to undertake a collaborative research project to explore the range of ways in which the *Framework for Inclusion* is used in ITE using the CoE Tool. Over the course of the 2018–

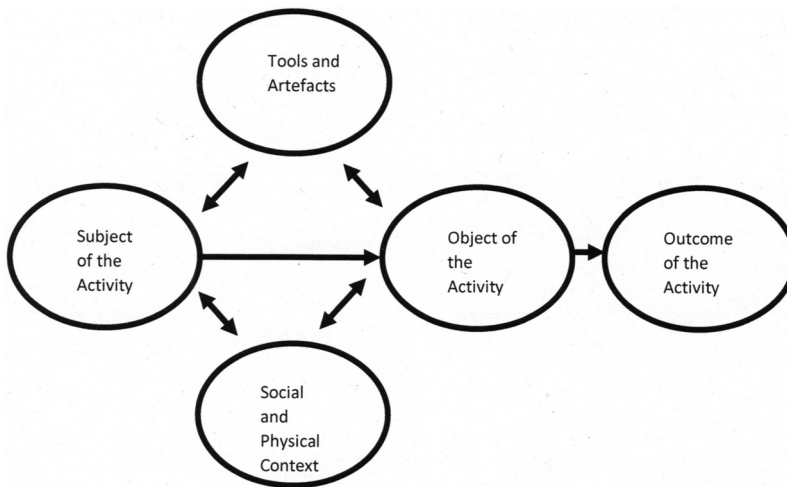


Figure 1. Council of Europe (CoE) Tool to Upgrade Teacher Education Practices for Inclusive Education (from Author 2015).

2019 academic year, members of SUIG undertook an audit of practice in their respective institutions. Following internal discussions six universities obtained ethical approval to share the findings from the mapping exercise, and these became the dataset for analysis. The names of Scottish lochs are used as pseudonyms to refer to each participating institution. Table 1 shows an overview of ITE provision across the participating universities.

While all of the university providers promote the inclusive practice that they wish to see in their student teachers' classroom practice based on the concept of inclusive

Table 1. Overview of ITE provision offered by participating ITE providers.

Course	Number of years	Qualification awarded	Description of teaching	Description of placements
Undergraduate offered by Dubh, Esk, Insh, Katrine, Maree, Ussie	4	BA (Hons), MA (Hons) or MEd	Modular, with some core teaching shared between primary and secondary courses. This includes topics on inclusion, equality and diversity. Two universities offer specialist options for primary teachers. One offers a concurrent degree where a specialist pathway can be followed.	A mixture of individual days and block placements each year. Overall, almost all programmes include at least 30 weeks in school. The concurrent degree offers 18 weeks in school.
Post-graduate Primary offered by Dubh, Esk, Katrine, Maree, Ussie	1	PGDE (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education)	Core course with optional electives. Some core teaching shared between primary and secondary courses. This includes topics on inclusion, equality and diversity.	Two or three block placements, with total of 18 weeks spent in schools.
Post-graduate Secondary offered by Dubh, Esk, Katrine, Maree, Ussie	1	PGDE (Professional Graduate Diploma in Education)	Core course content. Some core teaching shared between primary and secondary courses. This includes topics on inclusion, equality and diversity.	Two or three block placements, with total of 18 weeks spent in schools.

pedagogy embedded in the *Framework for Inclusion*, they do so in ways that are appropriate to their own contexts. Modes of delivery vary based on the aims and vision of each university.

For example, some PGDE courses bring primary and secondary student teachers together to learn about common topics relevant to becoming a teacher across the whole 3–18 age range. Others retain a more traditional primary/secondary divide. Content such as assessment of learning takes place through a range of media, including presentations and written assignments, and summative assessment of teaching placements. Although ITE provision establishes core content, students may undertake optional courses, often in other departments, which enables them to follow personal interests or to develop a specialism. In addition, some universities offer a placement in a non-school context or opportunities to study abroad.

Data collection

For the purpose of data collection, SUIG members representing their respective universities were considered ‘the research team’. The University of Maree took the lead in piloting how the research teams might collect data using the CoE Tool. These efforts were discussed at SUIG meetings and trialled by research teams. Following ethical approval from each School of Education, teacher educators in each participating university were invited to identify activities associated with inclusive practice and describe where the activity was located within the ITE courses (e.g. lecture, tutorial, assessment, etc.). Two universities included a follow-up stage with semi-structured conversational interviews and/or focus groups guided by questions aligned with the CoE Tool (reported in Barrett et al., 2025). Participation was voluntary and as members of teaching teams, research teams were able to obtain information from a wide range of participants. In addition, course documentation was reviewed to supplement the data from professional discussions. Each university developed an internal procedure to obtain information from course documentation and from colleagues using audio recordings and/or field notes.

Data analysis

The University of Maree developed a protocol following a seven-step process (Gale et al., 2013) for analysing qualitative data: (i) data extraction; (ii) familiarisation with the data; (iii) coding; (iv) developing a working analytical framework; (v) applying the analytical framework; (vi) charting data into the framework matrix; and (vii) interpreting the data. As these steps were trialled and discussed within the SUIG team, they served as a guide for the other university research teams.

Step 1: data extraction

The CoE Tool was shared with the research participants in advance of professional discussions forming the basis of data collection to gather responses to the questions outlined in the CoE Tool.

Qualitative data were extracted from field notes and audio recordings of professional discussions, as well as from course documentation. Audio recordings of the discussions were used to supplement field notes when necessary, rather than producing full transcriptions.

Step 2: familiarisation with the data

Members of research teams read and re-read the qualitative data to become familiar with the whole dataset. Reading the course documentation helped to interpret points the research participants had made during the discussions. For example, if a participant referred to an assessment, the research team were able to access the full assessment descriptor from the published course documentation.

Step 3: coding

The research teams worked collaboratively to standardise an approach to coding. This process operated at two levels. Initially, codes were developed to ensure a common understanding and language for describing practice for questions about who, how, social context and learning outcomes. For example, the category *Who teaches this?* was coded as shown in [Table 2](#).

This process was repeated for other course elements linked to the CoE Tool including learning intentions and intended outcomes. Teams independently applied the codes to course data, taking care to note any new codes or data which did not fit the initial analytical frame. As these activities were discussed during SUIG meetings, a more refined understanding of how the CoE activity model could be applied more coherently emerged. For example, learning intentions and intended outcomes were initially coded to link to the ‘what’ question of the CoE Tool as objects of a teaching activity. However, these data were subsequently decoupled from intended outcomes because learning intentions are fundamental to outcomes and thereby more appropriately considered tools. The final coding frame is shown in [Table 3](#).

Consequently, a cross-university team reviewed the university level data to ensure consistency in how data were recorded. This was member-checked by each research team. In addition, the qualitative data on intended outcomes which answer the ‘why’ question in the CoE Tool were coded in alignment with the three assumptions of inclusive pedagogy that informed the *Framework for Inclusion 3rd edition* (Cantali et al., 2025; SUIG, 2022). [Table 4](#) shows how the raw data collected from professional discussions were coded.

Table 2. Coding who teaches this?

Code	Descriptor/Example
Internal School (university department) Subject Specialist (SpSoE)	Course co-ordinator – to promote ethos of inclusion
Internal University Subject Specialist (SpUoM)	Guest lecturers from wider university. Tend to deliver one-hour lectures.
External School-based Specialist (SpExt)	Guest speakers e.g. local head teacher
External – other specialist (SpOther)	Input from social worker and health visitor
Internal SoE Generalist (GenSoE)	Staff with primary background
Internal UoM Generalist (GenUoM)	Tutors from across the University of Maree

Table 3. Applying the CoE Tool: SUIG mapping project.

Subject Teacher	Tools and Artefacts Curriculum	Social and Physical Context Context	Object Learner	Outcome of Activity Intended Outcomes
Teacher educators are the agents or subjects, and it is through their eyes that this tool looks at educational practices.	Curriculum is used here as an umbrella term for the contents, goals and strategies applied to teaching and learning.	The context of teacher educators' activities is mainly the university classroom, but also other spaces in schools and the community.	The teacher educators' overall activity is orientated towards the learner e.g. PGDE(P) ITE student teachers, Undergraduate Year 1 ITE student teachers.	This is a modification of the CoE model as we cannot yet know if the outcomes have been met.

Table 4. Coding 'why'.

Principle 1: Difference is ordinary and should be expected	Principle 2: Teachers are capable of teaching all children – problems are challenges for teaching	Principle 3: Collaboration with others may be needed to address challenges for teaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand the lived lives of children and adopt pedagogical approaches that account for the diversity in the classroom. To develop a positive image of the child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To find the 'edge' of what children can do rather than adopt a deficit view of learning. To teach with understanding of socio-cultural learning, recognise the competence of children and be respectful and respond positively to diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For students to develop a network of peer support.

Step 4: developing a working analytical framework

As the research teams worked independently, the analytical framework was subjected to critique by a colleague who was not a member of SUIG. Codes were discussed in terms of why they had been interpreted as meaningful and what they told us about the research participants' views. These discussions contributed to the final analytical framework that was used by SUIG. It also enabled an exploration of how the analytical framework might be useful for internal reflection about how the concept of inclusion is covered in specific ITE courses.

Step 5: applying the analytical framework

The research teams applied the agreed analytical framework to the whole dataset. Progress, problems and issues arising were discussed as a standing item at SUIG meetings. These included difficulties in scheduling discussions with busy colleagues and how to capture data when courses were undergoing review or being revised. A decision was taken to limit data collection to one academic year (2018–2019) and accept that the data collected would represent a best effort, but also one that would be incomplete. Nevertheless, the value in generating maps of practice and assessing these against the GTCS Professional Standards (GTCS, 2021) and the guidance promoted by the *Framework for Inclusion* (SUIG, 2022) would help us to understand how we taught about inclusion in our ITE.

Step 6: charting data into the Framework matrix

An Excel spreadsheet was used to tabulate the data. A tab was created for each of the CoE Tool questions. Data were entered by course for each question. This enabled us to document how issues of inclusion were covered. Care was taken to record what participants reported. What was important to participants was recorded and charted for each course. There was no expectation that colleagues all would approach inclusion in the same way. As noted above, the data on intended outcomes was coded by a cross-university team following the Inclusive Pedagogical Approaches in Action (IPAA) (Spratt & Florian, 2015) principles to document the extent to which the described activities and actions undertaken within courses could be said to align with the principled approach to inclusion embedded in the National Framework. As shown in Table 4, the team aimed to strike a balance between the raw data (what the participants said) and the essence of what this meant in terms of the principles of inclusion.

Step 7: interpreting the data

As with other real-world research projects where researchers are also participants, there are opportunities and threats to the generation of meaningful data. All of the research teams were able to document practice within courses and identify the extent to which practice aligned with the expectations set by the *Framework for Inclusion*. However, as the ITE providers differed with regard to number and size of courses, it was not possible to obtain complete information on all provision. Nevertheless, we proceeded with data collection and interpretation knowing that it would capture much but possibly not all activity and therefore be incomplete or missing in some cases. We appreciated that colleagues were genuinely interested in participating and appreciated the opportunity to talk about their work. They were curious to know about the findings and how they might contribute to course developments.

While the teams encountered inevitable difficulties in finding opportunities to engage everyone who might have participated, they saw value in the study and agreed that the procedures we developed to undertake the study would still yield valuable information. By using a common format for displaying the data, research teams would be able to share findings in a way that might permit the wider SUIG team to look for patterns, similarities and differences across the datasets that would be useful not only to the study participants but to other providers as well. The collaborative nature of the data analysis proved sufficient to sketch a landscape of teacher education for inclusion in Scotland. This process generated insights about inclusive curricula that map the landscape of teacher education practices with implications for teacher education and professional development.

Limitations

The study and its findings presented below are characterised by some limitations that reflect the scope and practical constraints of the data-collection process. Limiting the data collection to a single academic year (2018–2019) meant that the dataset produced offers a snapshot rather than a comprehensive account of the practices within our respective ITE courses against the principles of inclusive pedagogy as embedded in the *Framework for Inclusion*. In addition, the complexity

of working in university-based teacher education made it unrealistic to reach every potential research participant within the available timeframe. As a result, the maps document many activities but inevitably omit others, producing a partial yet informative description of the landscape. Despite these gaps, the research team considered the data sufficiently robust to support the analysis, and university teams validated the maps as accurate but incomplete accounts of practice at that moment in time.

Findings

Maps

As shown in Table 5, a total of 18 maps reflecting activity in one-year and four-year programmes of study in primary and secondary ITE were produced from the available data. The use of landscape maps models an approach to generating knowledge about the content of programmes that are, by definition, varied and difficult to compare and contrast.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 provide examples of maps that detail how the different ITE providers cover issues of inclusion within year groups at different universities. As shown in these figures the maps proved useful for considering not only what teacher educators are doing but how, and what they hoped to achieve.

The use of maps proved sufficient to display the ways in which a principled approach to teacher education for inclusion in Scotland was enacted across programmes. However, as noted, difficulties in ensuring that all the activities that were underway were documented leaves open the possibility that the dataset is incomplete. Where data were not recorded at all, we noted this as ‘no data’ (Table 5).

Landscape

To make sense of partial data while also acknowledging its incompleteness, we applied the metaphor of the landscape to our mapping exercise as an organising tool to help us present our findings following Fosnot and Dolk’s (2001) idea of the ‘landscape of learning’ for mathematics, whereby key landmarks are categorised as *big ideas*, *strategies* and *models*. In our landscape, big ideas refer to the principles of inclusive pedagogy embedded in the *Framework for Inclusion*. The strategies refer to the approaches taken by each of the ITE providers to build their courses and answer questions posed by the CoE

Table 5. Number of activity maps by university and course.

University	Dubh (1 map)	Esk (1 map)	Insh (4 maps)	Katrine (5 maps)	Maree (5 maps)	Ussie (2 maps)
1 YR Secondary – S Primary – P Primary and Secondary – P/S	PGDE S (1 map)	PGDE P/S (1 map)	No Data	PGDE P/S (1 map)	PGDE S (1 map)	PGDE P/S (1 map) (For example, see Fig. 4)
4 YR Undergraduate (UG) primary	No data	No data	UG ITE (4 maps) (For example, see Fig. 3)	UG ITE (4 maps) (For example, see Fig. 2)	UG ITE (4 maps)	UG ITE (1 map)

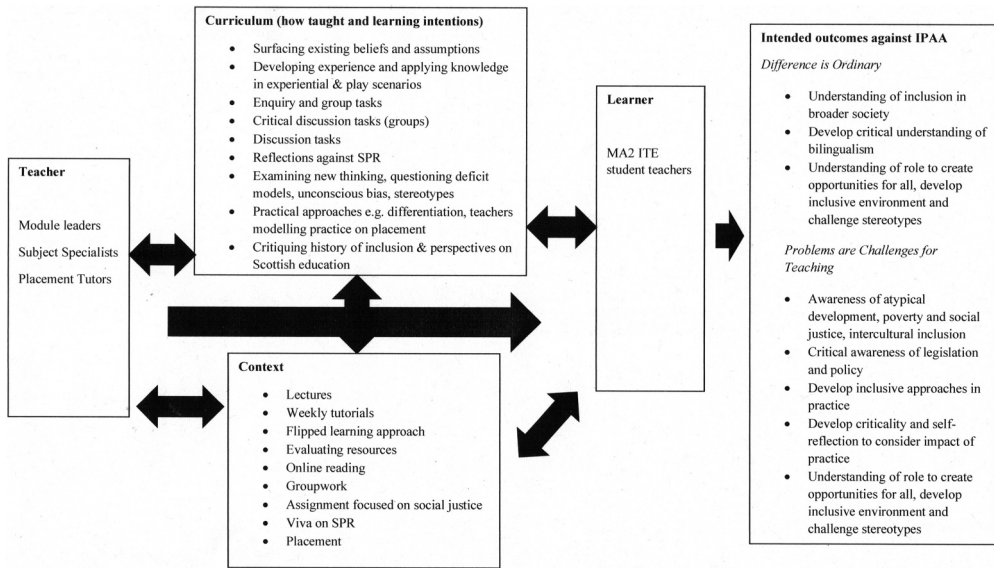


Figure 2. University of Katrine: Year 2 example.

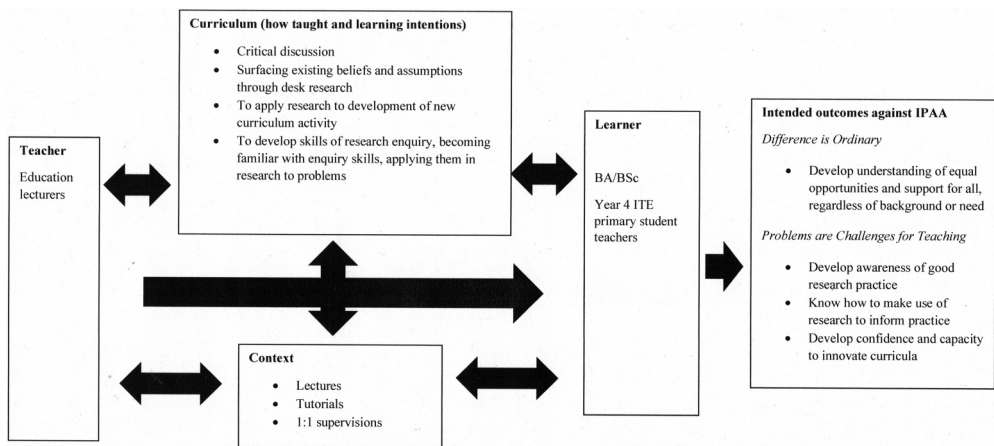


Figure 3. University of Insh: Year 4 example.

Tool. The models refer to different exemplars of provision such as the PGDE. The metaphor of the landscape surfaces the dynamic nature of the principles, strategies and models that reflect how ITE providers exercise discretion in developing distinctive approaches while adhering to common values and national standards. Distinctive models of ITE provision are reflected in the combination of full and/or part-time courses which may be offered on campus, online and/or in combination with partners. These might include a four-year Master of Arts (Hons) Education, or a one-year post-graduate Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at primary or secondary level.

Though distinctive, each university model draws from a set of familiar strategies to deliver ITE courses. As can be seen in the Katrine and Insh maps above, for example, the

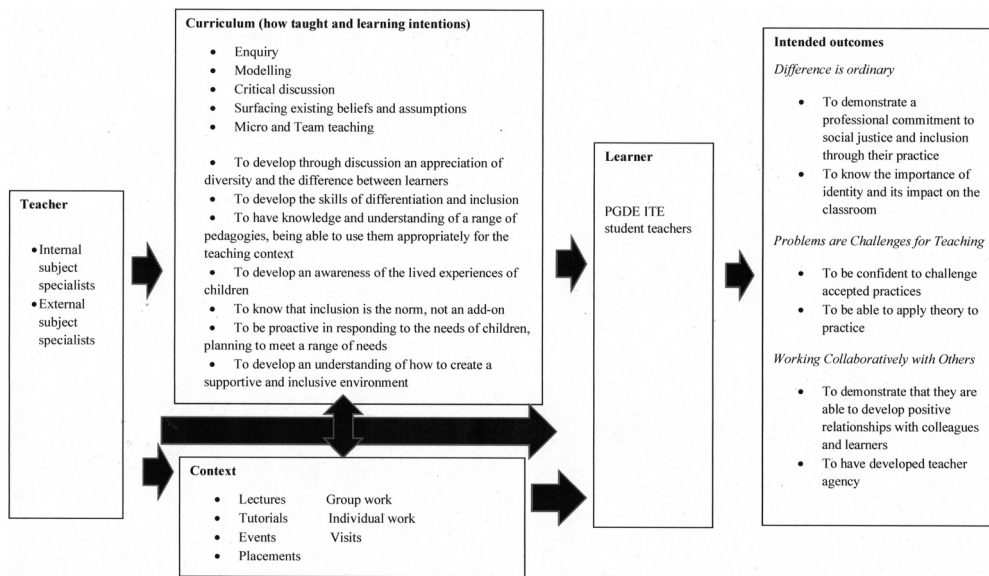


Figure 4. University of Ussie: PGDE example.

strategies include delivery of content by various mixes of education lecturers and guest speakers, individual and/or collaborative learning activities, and practical and/or academic assignments. There was also evidence of some teacher educators modelling inclusive pedagogy in their own teaching and using this modelling to engage in discussions of how inclusion can be enacted and what an inclusive classroom might look and feel like. The different ways providers assemble familiar strategies to build their context specific models reflects the different ways they have operationalised the principles of inclusion embedded in the *Framework*.

The big ideas, articulated by the principles of the inclusive pedagogical approach, were evident in the intended outcomes which are displayed in accordance with the IPAA coding frame that was developed to help observers see the enactment of the principles of inclusive pedagogy in the teaching practices of graduates. (For further details see Cantali et al., 2025; Florian, 2015; Florian & Spratt, 2013). This is important because the challenges associated with understanding a complex process such as preparing teachers for inclusive practice necessitates an approach to research that takes account of complexity. By using the CoE Tool to document the ‘who, what, how, where and why’ of teacher education practices as they are aligned with principles, or ‘big ideas’ of inclusive pedagogy that underpin a values-based approach to ITE aligned with the GTCS Professional Standards, a more substantial and robust landscape is revealed.

Landmarks

Some key findings that emerged from the analysis have become noteworthy landmarks in our landscape. The first is methodological. The incompleteness of the data revealed a partial landscape that reflects current practice as well as the difficulties in capturing it. While the quality of the data that were collected was not in question, the data-

collection process was so wide ranging and involved so many people that it proved impossible to reach everyone. When compiling the data, it became clear that while many activities were documented, others that were known to occur were not recorded. However, in discussions with the research team, we agreed that the available data were sufficiently useful to justify the finding of a partial landscape. University teams validated the maps as accurate but incomplete snapshots of activity at a particular point in time. However, all of the SUIG group, including members who did not participate in the research, found the mapping exercise valuable for professional learning and development as well as a way of assessing practice collaboratively so that it could be shared and extended. In this way the research assists SUIG in ongoing development aimed at improving consistency of content coverage within a range of diverse approaches to ITE.

This is important because our analysis also found that there are gaps in how well providers are taking account of all the big ideas essential to an inclusive pedagogical approach. These gaps are also important landmarks. In this study, the inclusive pedagogical principle of viewing ‘teachers are capable of teaching all learners’, expressed in practice as seeing problems as challenges for teaching, was most strongly emphasised across courses. Not surprisingly, topics ranged from pedagogy (creating opportunities for all, applying theory to practice, using particular pedagogical approaches), to removing barriers to participation for children and young people, avoiding a deficit view of learning and creating an inclusive ethos in the classroom. The focus on the principle of ‘*difference as ordinary*’ was also strong and included an emphasis on such topics as: inclusion policies; the influence of the structural features of schooling including the formal and informal curriculum; awareness of broader social context in which children and young people live; principles of democracy; and social justice. However, the principle of collaboration with others was less evident. While there was some attention directed to inter-agency collaboration, it was surprisingly little given the emphasis in Scottish policy on integrated children’s services. The maps have helped SUIG to identify gaps in content coverage that can be addressed. They also identified gaps in knowledge about activity that was not documented due to missing data.

Discussion

While the form and structure of teacher education varies within and between countries, the important role that teachers play in providing a good-quality education to all learners is widely accepted. Yet gaps in knowledge about how to prepare teachers to work with diverse learner groups persist. Cochran-Smith and Villegas’ (2015) synthesis of research on teacher education made a significant contribution to understanding what is known, but gaps in knowledge remain.

Inclusive ways of working that encourage participation of all learners are rightfully addressed in ITE provision. However, contested ideas and different ways to prepare teachers to work in inclusive schools, along with the many different professional learning and development activities that aim to promote inclusive practice, are difficult to evaluate, and little is known about what works or how inclusive curricula might be improved. Tristani and Bassett-Gunter’s (2020) systematic review of the North American and Australian literature on teacher education for inclusion confirmed variation in mode and method of preparing teachers. However, this review focused on inclusive education

as an effort to prepare teachers to work with learners with disabilities, a stance that has been challenged as the concept of inclusive education has evolved to encompass a wider diversity agenda (Council of the European Union, 2022). More recent efforts to synthesise teacher professional learning for inclusive education, such as the Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2022), helpfully document teaching competences and strategies for supporting inclusive education, but these efforts do not focus on providers or teacher educators. By beginning to map the landscape of teacher education for inclusion, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of the work of teacher educators as well as the research needed to document and evaluate it. Additionally, the study contributes new knowledge about how distinctive ITE courses can align within a national context that supports a principled approach to inclusive pedagogical practice when preparing newly qualified teachers to enter the profession.

Teacher education as a site for research is continuously evolving in response to directives from government or accreditation and professional registration agencies. Understanding how university-based providers of ITE prepare teachers to understand that each and every child or young person is a unique individual, and any pupil may need additional support at some time during the school years, is a key concern for teacher educators. The collaborative, cross-university work of SUIG offers an original and sustained attempt to address the difficulties that teachers face in responding to the challenges of working with diverse learner groups. Our work in developing inclusive curricula draws on an inclusive pedagogical approach that begins with an expectation that teachers will encounter a wide diversity amongst learners in every classroom. This approach views the challenge faced by teachers who feel unprepared to teach a diverse group of learners is how to adopt pedagogical approaches that foster the inclusion of all in the life and learning of the classroom in ways that do not stigmatise or mark some learners out as different. Rather than categorising learners into groups, and provide something additional or different for some, the approach asks teachers to consider how to extend what is available to everybody by considering difficulties experienced by some learners as opportunities for teaching, rather than deficits.

The approach to inclusion that is promoted in our Schools of Education supports a coherent national approach to inclusion within teacher education. This study documents the extent to which this theoretical stance is embedded in our professional practice as teacher educators, and how this informs the enactment of our courses. It extends previous research (Florian, 2015) that demonstrated how the theoretical ideas taught on an ITE course could be linked to the practice of graduates by focusing on what teachers *do* in their classrooms rather than (self) reports of how their course influenced practice. In this study, we used a tool developed by the Council of Europe to map the complex activity of teacher education. The CoE Tool proved flexible enough to capture various activities in the range of contexts in which we work and therefore served as a useful way of exploring how inclusion is addressed within the different course structures in Scotland's universities. It enabled us to take a significant step in examining how, and to what extent, adopting a principled approach to inclusion was enacted across the various distinctive ITE models in six university providers. Its distinctive focus on teacher educators who, as Walton (2025) has noted, have been invisible in this work, marks it out as a valuable new contribution to research focusing on inclusive education.

Considering the extent to which teacher educators enact theoretical ideas within courses is complicated work not easily undertaken. It relies on a theoretical platform as well as the willingness, time and resourcefulness to subject it to scrutiny. Scotland's *Framework for Inclusion* (STEC, 2009, 2014; SUIG, 2022) provides a theoretically derived practical structure for teachers at all stages of their careers to reflect on inclusive practice, in the context of the GTCs Professional Standards for Registration (GTCs, 2012, 2021). Though the *Framework* was developed specifically for the Scottish national context, the rights-based principles underpinning it have been found relevant for other national contexts as well (Cantali et al., 2025; Herrera-Seda & Pantić, 2025).

Research that explores how teacher educators teach prospective teachers about inclusive practice in the different contexts of their workplaces is scant. This is partly due to the difficulties inherent in conducting such research. This study was designed to add to understanding about how a principled approach to inclusion is being implemented by a range of university providers in one national context. By systematically mapping activity across settings, we aimed to strengthen our shared understanding of how the *National Framework for Inclusion* is embedded in our efforts to prepare teachers to be inclusive practitioners.

Finally, this study demonstrates how the ongoing commitment of SUIG members to meet regularly, share practice and collaborate in research and development activities is not only a valuable professional development opportunity for university staff, but also an important site for research that addresses gaps in the literature on teacher education. This is important because, as Walton (2025) has noted, teacher educators are often invisible in research on teacher education. However, as this study demonstrates, when teacher educators collaborate with academic researchers, and actively participate in research themselves, new contributions to knowledge about how, and in what ways, ITE courses enact the task of preparing teachers for inclusive education are made. By interrogating our own examples of inclusive curricula, we also reveal gaps in terms of what is not addressed or might be addressed more robustly within ITE provision.

As ITE providers are increasingly being asked to account for how they prepare teachers to work with diverse groups of learners and demands are being made for more course hours to address specialist teaching, we must not lose sight of the importance of embedded ways of working inclusively within primary and secondary teacher education courses. While there is a place for specialist teaching and specialist knowledge, it does not absolve class teachers from their responsibility to teach all learners in their care. How teacher educators engage with the challenge of preparing them to deal with difference, remove barriers to participation and implement policies of inclusive education remains salient. The *Framework for Inclusion* promotes an inclusive pedagogical approach as a way of ensuring good experiences of learning for all. The research reported here has revealed the strengths of this approach, but it also foregrounded the fragility of sustaining this way of working as courses, teaching staff and student numbers undergo continuous changing in light of evolving policy directives. Ongoing work on embedding inclusive oriented curricula and its practical applications is needed to support prospective teachers to respond positively to the wide diversity of children and young people that they will all encounter throughout their careers.

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