

From classroom to career: unveiling trainee teachers' insights on course preparedness for school employment

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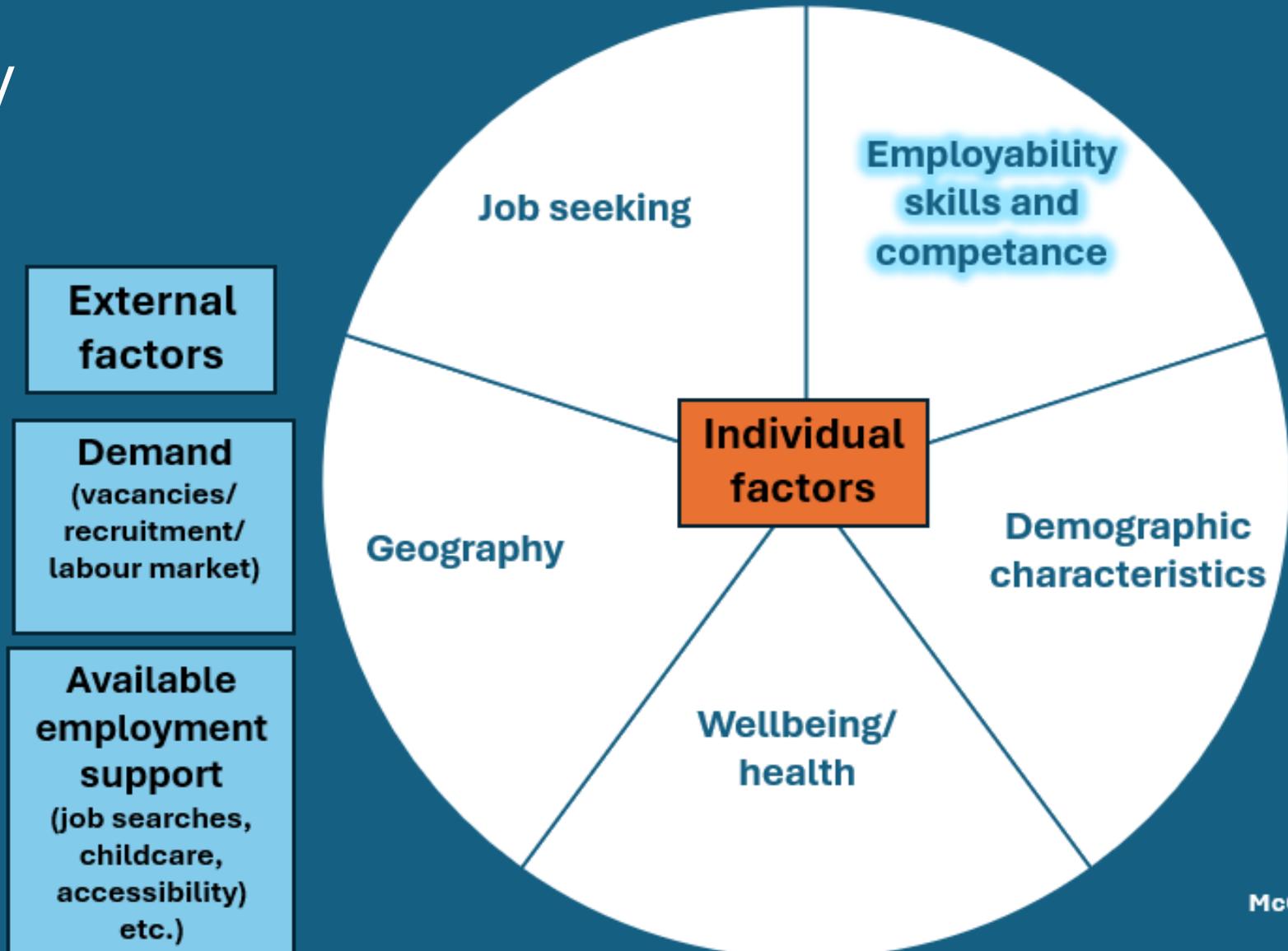
What were the aims of our study?

1. To investigate students' views about the support their programme of study is offering in terms of developing their employability skills
2. To investigate students' views about the aspects in their curriculum they would like to see in order to become more employable





Factors impacting employability & our focus



What is employability and what is ITE's role?

Current Employment Trends:

- Declining employment rates for PGCE students in state schools (DfE, 2023).
- Employment varies by subject; shortage subjects have more job opportunities.

Understanding 'Employability':

- More than just securing a job; involves developing skills and lifelong learning (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007).
- Includes flexibility, adaptability, teamwork, sector-specific skills, and self-awareness.

Role of ITE Providers:

- Must prepare trainees with skills to meet future employers' needs (Ofsted, 2023).
- Curricula should focus on employability skills and adaptability to changing school demands.

Challenges and Gaps:

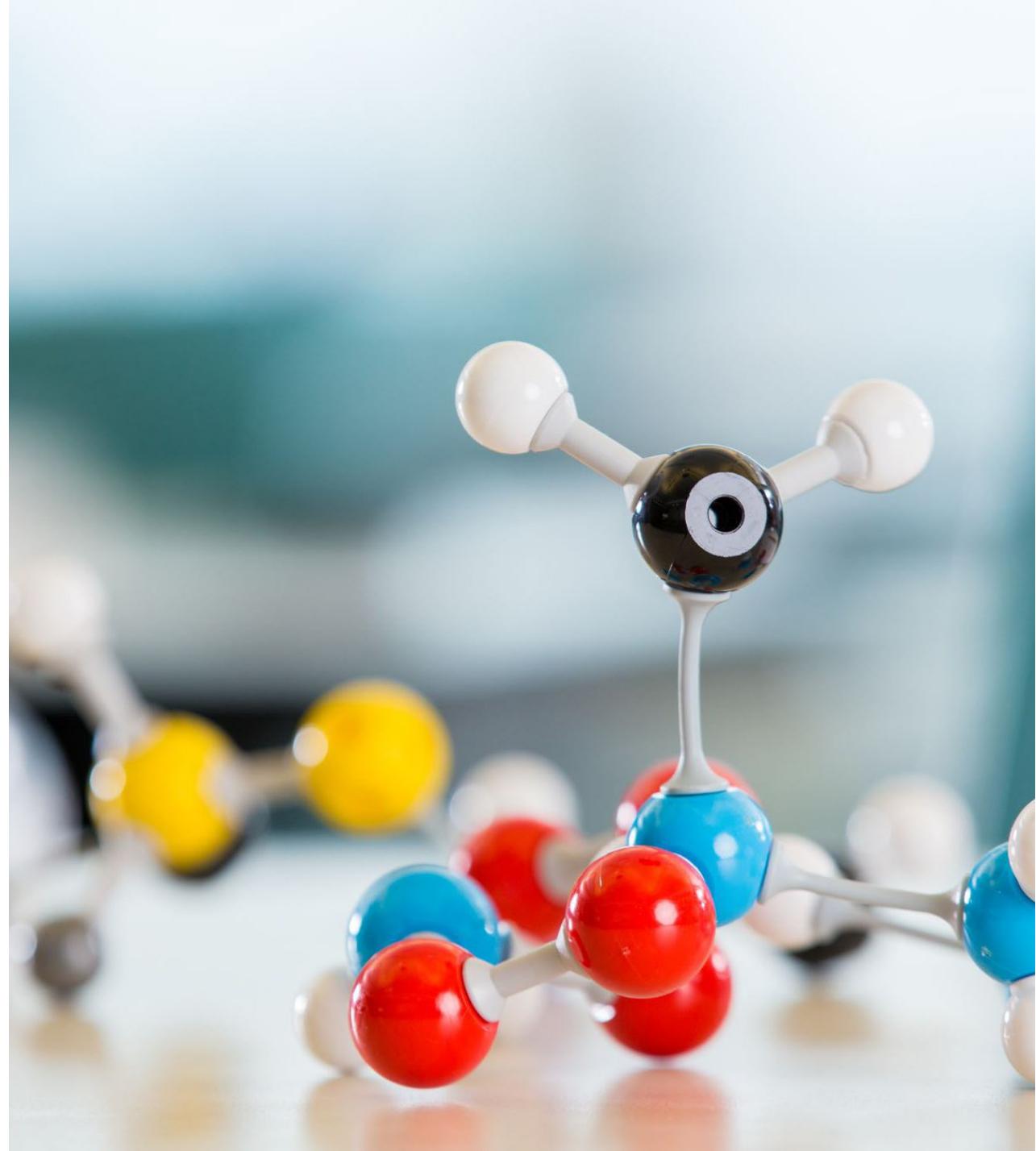
- Limited UK-based research on PGCE students' perceptions of employability.
- Need to understand PGCE students' experiences and support needs in developing employability skills.

A Call for Contextualisation: *Barriers and Recommendations*

Potential barriers to building employability skills in an ITE context	Recommendations
1 Context-specific requirements vs Standardization	Dynamic and flexible curricula
2 Ambiguities in frameworks	Clearer guidelines
3 Barriers specific to international PGCE students	Support for international students (visas) plus workplace mentoring/industry placements (Fakunle and Pirrie, 2020)
4 Differences between university training and school/placement expectations	Collaborative partnerships, diverse placements, outside local context (Casinader and Clemans, 2018)
5 Risk of social inequality when hiring from/teaching to locale only (Espinoza et al., 2020)	Rich, diverse curricula and experiences

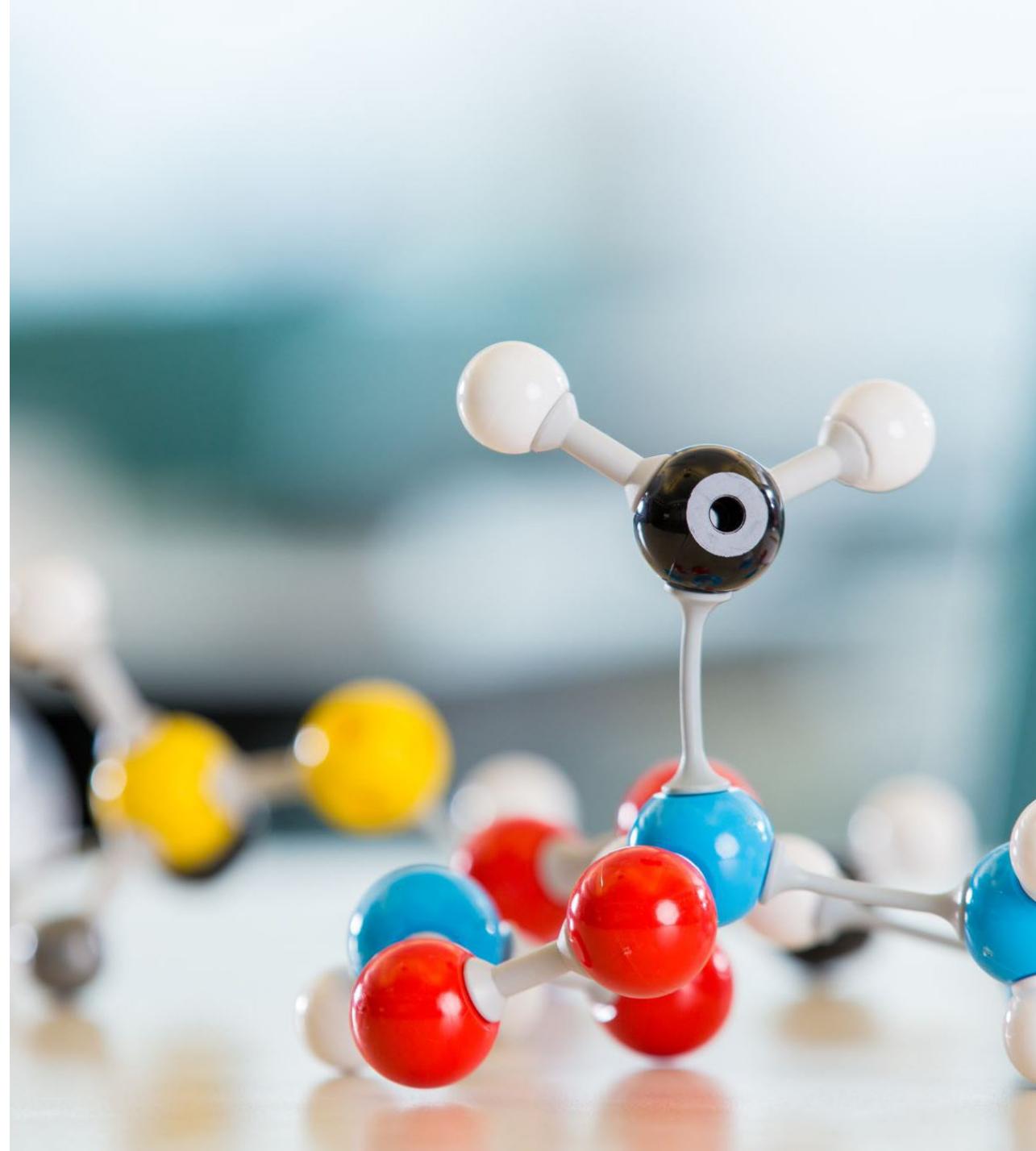
Methodology

- Aim: to explore students' views about support and opportunities they have regarding employability during their course
- Sample: PGCE Secondary Education students (Geography, Computer Science, Science, Drama)
- Data collection methods: 30-40 semi-structured interview



Methodology

- Evgenia's previous research in Early Years identified skills/practices that led to employability as:
 - Collaboration (group/peer work and opportunities)
 - Trust and respect (supportive, safe environment)
 - Classroom culture (building cohort identity)
 - Classroom participation (embedded, collaborative, psychological safety)
 - Reflective practices (directly linked to increased employability)
 - Opportunities for self-improvement (skills-building)
- These formed the foci for our interview questions.



Data analysis and Discussion

Context & Background

Who are our students?

- 10 PGCE Secondary students from a London university.
- Diverse backgrounds: different subjects, ages, genders, and prior teaching experience.
- Motivated by family influence, prior teaching experience, and course flexibility.

What does 'employability' mean to them?

- Primarily seen as the ability to secure a job in teaching.
- Also understood as developing skills to be successful and marketable in the education sector.
- Key skills identified: communication, adaptability, empathy, and social skills.

Data analysis and Discussion

Objective 1

How effectively does the PGCE programme support employability skill development?

- Reminder: our research identified the skills/practices we should be looking for as:
 - Collaboration (group/peer work and opportunities)
 - Trust and respect (supportive, safe environment)
 - Classroom culture (building cohort identity)
 - Classroom participation (embedded, collaborative, psychological safety)
 - Reflective practices (directly linked to increased employability)
 - Opportunities for self-improvement (skills-building)

Data analysis and Discussion

Objective 1

How effectively does the PGCE programme support employability skill development?

- **Strong informal employability development:** collaboration, peer support, and mentoring were central to employability development. Micro-teaching, peer feedback, and flexible group working supported communication, confidence, and professional identity. Mentorship relationships fostered trust, psychological safety, and professional confidence.
- **Positive professional culture:** respectful tutor–student relationships enabled openness, risk-taking, and reflection. Students valued being treated as emerging professionals rather than passive learners. Peer networks (e.g., WhatsApp groups) functioned as informal employability spaces, including job-seeking advice.

Data analysis and Discussion

Objective 1

How effectively does the PGCE programme support employability skill development?

- **Limitations and tensions:** time pressure and course intensity limited opportunities for deeper reflection and collaborative learning. Inconsistencies in tutor practices led to uneven experiences of feedback and clarity. Mismatch between university pedagogies (collaborative, constructivist) and school placement practices (often directive) created uncertainty about which practices were most “employable”.
- **Key finding:** employability was largely embedded but implicit with students developing key skills through participation and relationships rather than explicit employability instruction. This risks uneven/inconsistent development of these skills from both a delivery and participation perspective.

Data analysis and Discussion

Objective 2

What do students think could help to make them more employable? What could be added, changed or sustained as part of their curriculum?

- Strengthening 'out-of-field' subject knowledge
- Embedding practical, hands-on learning opportunities
- Maintaining subject-specific CPD post-graduation
- Supporting long-term career sustainability
- Preparing to manage work-life balance in teaching
- Developing interview skills

Recommendations for Employability

- **Make employability explicit:** clearly articulate employability skills within the curriculum and link them to professional practice.
- **Explicitly frame reflective practice as a lifelong employability skill, not only an assessed task:** to do this, strengthen reflective and collaborative space, build protected time for structured reflection and deeper collaboration.
- **Strengthen university–placement/industry partnerships** to support early-career employability beyond qualification.
- **Improve support for international trainees:** provide clearer guidance on employment regulations, cultural expectations, and career pathways in UK industry-specific settings. Develop culturally responsive employability and career support within ITE provision.
- **Focus on sustainable employability:** shift emphasis from short-term employment outcomes to adaptability, resilience, and long-term professional growth in a changing education landscape.

Thank you for listening!



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