

# The impact of ‘bursary tourism’ or the desire for a ‘fulfilling, challenging, and emotionally rewarding career’? Career entry motivations and perceptions of preservice teachers from England

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## Funding information

Faculty of Education, Monash University

## Abstract

Why teachers choose their career has been a popular topic of research in many contexts since the introduction of the FIT-Choice framework by Watt and Richardson in 2007 to study teacher motivations. Although altruistic motivations have been identified as the common driving factor behind preservice teachers' (PSTs') decision to enter the field, there are other motivational factors—such as teaching being a career that fits well with family commitments, or choosing teacher education as a ‘fallback’ option—that are widely reported in different contexts. The introduction of incentives for student teachers in certain subjects has been subject to media criticism in England as promoting ‘bursary tourism’. This study investigates the career entry motivations and teaching perceptions of PSTs from a university that is one of the key teacher education providers in the country, using the FIT-Choice framework. The paper discusses the findings ( $N=115$ ), including validation of the FIT-Choice scale, collecting data on 12 motivations and six perceptions, along with preliminary findings. It was identified that intrinsic career values were the highest rated motivation, followed by altruistic

Sindu George and John Thornby contributed equally to this paper.

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values such as the desire to make a social contribution and being a part of shaping the future of children and adolescents. Perceived abilities were also rated higher, while personal utility values and task returns—including monetary rewards—were rated very low. While the participants agreed that the job is professionally and emotionally demanding, it was promising to note that they were highly satisfied with their career choice, implicitly indicating their intention to continue in the teaching profession. Gender differences, along with field of study and training pathway differences in motivations and teaching perceptions are also discussed, with practical implications.

#### **KEYWORDS**

FIT-Choice, perceptions, teacher education, teacher motivations

### **Key insights**

#### **What is the main issue that the paper addresses?**

Teacher recruitment and retention—especially in STEM areas—have been reported as a concern in England. Providing incentives for trainees was one of the initiatives adopted by the Department for Education to address the shortage of teachers. The current study investigates the career entry motivations of trainees; whether they were lured by the incentives or intrinsically motivated to be teachers.

#### **What are the main insights that the paper provides?**

Based on the current findings, higher intrinsic values, perceived teaching abilities and a greater desire to contribute to society are reported as the key motivations to choose a teaching career, rather than extrinsic motivations or incentives. The generalisation that individuals choose teacher education lured by bursaries needs re-evaluation. Also, career entry motivations and their perceptions about the teaching profession need to be considered while recruiting teacher trainees.

## **INTRODUCTION**

There has been much research across the world into the motivational factors that affect an individual's choice to become a teacher (e.g., Richardson, Karabenick et al., 2014; Watt et al., 2017). A commonly held belief is that most teachers are motivated by the desire to help others, which appears to be consistent with Brookhart and Freeman's (1992) findings that 'altruistic, service-oriented goals and other intrinsic motivations are the source of the primary reasons entering teacher candidates report for why they chose teaching as a career' (p. 46). The OECD (2005) report, synthesising results from several studies carried out independently in the developed world, indicated three key motivations for their career choice: the desire to work with youth, the potential for intellectual fulfilment and the wish to make a social contribution. This desire to work

with children has been a key finding in numerous studies since, and is a result that has been replicated over time across a range of contexts in the developed world (e.g., Richardson, Watt et al., 2014; Watt et al., 2017). Interestingly, extrinsic motives such as salary, job security and career status have also been found to be more prominent in different sociocultural contexts, most noticeably in the developing world (e.g., Suryani & George, 2021). However, it is to be acknowledged that contextual differences have a key impact on reported motivations and perceptions, resulting in variations in findings among developed and developing countries.

## THE LANDSCAPE OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

The United Kingdom suffered a recession in 2008, resulting in an economic downturn that saw manufacturing output fall by 7% and a rise in unemployment to 8.3% at its peak in 2011. A review on the impact of economic situations on teachers' career decisions (Hutchings, 2011) revealed that there is a strong correlation between economic conditions and applications to teacher training, which aligns with the factors of *environmental conditions and events* in the social learning theory of career decision-making by Krumboltz (1979), which are beyond the control of an individual. In the context of teacher education, these factors include the availability and accessibility of jobs and training opportunities; selection policies and procedures; and the role of return, which represents the ratio of potential monetary and non-monetary rewards to the cost of preparation for teaching. This was reflected during the recession when the competitive job market pushed many individuals towards teaching—lured by the promise of a comparatively safe and stable job in otherwise uncertain times—but in more buoyant economic conditions those individuals have increasingly more employment options in other sectors. Worth and Faulkner-Ellis (2021) have reported the trend of an increase in the number of people choosing a teaching career during the recession and the Covid-19 pandemic in England. This has also been borne out by the under-recruitment of initial teacher education (ITE) courses in England, which have consistently failed to meet government targets in the period of economic recovery since 2011 (Worth & Van den Brande, 2019), until a sharp resurgence in applications in late 2020. This implies that extrinsic motivations have a non-negligible impact on teacher recruitment, even in developed countries. There are studies reporting how the job market and relative job opportunities other than the teaching profession would strongly influence preservice teachers' (PSTs') career motivations, suggesting that a strong job market negatively affects teaching motivations (e.g., Rots et al., 2014).

To address teacher shortages, there has been a history of recommendations for the use of positive incentives for teachers, particularly within STEM subjects, where the shortages are most noticeable (Roberts, 2002). These incentives have included attractive tax-free bursaries for trainee teachers, and the figure has grown significantly from £7000 in 2005/06 to £24,000 currently, having peaked at £30,000 in 2017/18 (depending on discipline area and previous qualifications), in addition to a modest scholarship of £2000 available from subject associations and learned societies. These bursaries greatly exceed typical graduate starting salaries, but effectively result in teachers taking a pay cut upon qualification. This has led to so-called 'bursary tourism'—a phenomenon whereby some young graduates undertake teacher training as an alternative to a graduate job, but with no long-term intention to remain in the profession. However, criticism of this funding model has recently given rise to changes in the bursary framework for mathematics and science, such that payments are now staggered; only two-thirds of the money is payable during the training period, and the rest is kept in reserve to reward teachers for staying in the profession. Nevertheless, these changes imply a marked shift towards a more extrinsically motivated workforce, which is borne out by comments from head teachers who report that pay negotiations (particularly with science

teachers) are becoming increasingly common, with some teachers commanding salaries up to £10,000 above the top of the official pay scale (Cassidy, 2015).

## School Direct scheme

In addition to a bursary policy in a state of flux, the 2010 coalition government laid out a clear plan for expansion in school-based routes into teaching (Department for Education, 2010). Their follow-up implementation plan introduced 'School Direct', a school-led training scheme placing schools in charge of recruitment and selection of their own trainees. The proposal offered two pathways: an employment-based salaried route and a training route in which fee-paying students can be offered incentives in the form of bursaries. School Direct therefore represents a more vocational, employment-based model of training that takes place predominantly in schools, with comparatively little educational input from a partnering higher education institution.

The impact of School Direct on teacher supply has been several-fold. Enabling schools to take control of their own recruitment has, in many ways, been empowering for them, but experience shows that this power can be abused. School Direct has afforded schools the ability to be more agile and respond proactively to local demand, but has, in some cases, resulted in recruitment of non-specialists and other unsuitable candidates as a cheap, short-term solution to their immediate staffing shortage, rather than a long-term investment in teacher supply. This can result in inexperienced trainees being given their own classes to teach, unsupervised, from day one of the academic year and finding themselves in a 'sink or swim' situation.

This 'turn to the practical' (Furlong & Lawn, 2011, p. 6) is in stark contrast to the prevailing European model of teacher education, in which student teachers follow a university course for several years, with a pedagogy embedded from the start and with only brief practicum placements in school. Conversely, the British model positions teaching more as a skill than an intellectual exercise, and situates teacher training as an apprenticeship in the workplace (Brown et al., 2015). Historically, a teacher training applicant would have needed a degree that was at least 50% in the subject they wished to teach; however, in response to the increased demand for teachers in shortage subjects, this criterion was removed, in turn allowing ITE providers to recruit more pragmatically, widening the pool of eligible applicants by placing less stringent requirements on their degree subject. In principle, applicants' knowledge can be developed within so-called 'Subject Knowledge Enhancement' courses—intended to 'supplement the content of applicants' degrees' (Woolhouse & Cochrane, 2015, p. 87) and help applicants to 'gain the depth of knowledge needed to train to teach their chosen subject' (Department for Education, 2015, p. 3). At present there is no accreditation, accountability or quality assurance framework surrounding Subject Knowledge Enhancement, which has led to significant discrepancy in the quality and scope of provision between providers (Edwards et al., 2015).

## MOTIVATIONS AND TEACHING PERCEPTIONS

While there were several studies available investigating teacher motivations (e.g., Book & Freeman, 1986; Brown, 1992; Robertson et al., 1983; Wang, 2004; Yong, 1995), it was only in 2006 that a theoretically sound and psychometrically validated framework was developed to study why people choose a teaching career (Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2007). The FIT-Choice framework is underpinned by the expectancy–value theory (EVT) framework (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), according to which

expectancies for success and value judgements are the two immediate predictors of people's action or behaviour. Expectancies of success are defined as individuals' beliefs about how well they will do on an upcoming task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The FIT-Choice framework acknowledges both components of expectancies, 'self-concept of ability' and 'perception of task difficulty' (Eccles et al., 1983), as significant. Values are defined with respect to the qualities of different tasks and how these qualities influence individuals' desire to do the task, hence the term 'task value' (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Eccles et al. called task value 'subjective', as various individuals assign different values to the same activity, and theoretically defined four different types of value: intrinsic (how much a person enjoys doing a task); attainment (how important a person thinks it is to do well on a task); utility (how useful a person finds a task for their lives); and the negative value, cost.

The FIT-Choice model and scale consist of 12 motivational factors (see Watt & Richardson, 2007 for further details), including intrinsic career value, social utility values (e.g., making a social contribution), personal utility values (e.g., job security), expectations about teaching ability, prior teaching and learning experiences, social influences and teaching as a fallback career choice. Data on different perceptions, such as task demands (e.g., expert career), task returns (e.g., social status), along with career choice satisfaction and the extent of experienced social dissuasion, are also collected. According to EVT, the difference between task demand and task return is interpreted as the cost (Watt & Richardson, 2007). The model and scale have allowed comparative measurements of teacher motivations across the world and have been used in numerous studies in different countries and educational contexts to better understand the motivations to become a teacher (see, e.g., Watt et al., 2012, 2017). A few researchers have included other factors in the FIT-Choice framework to extend the model; for example, a study investigating epistemic values along with personal and utility values as predictors of PSTs' desire to pursue leadership positions (Torsney et al., 2019).

The reported FIT-Choice findings from different parts of the world attract the attention of researchers, ITE providers as well as policymakers considering the theoretical and substantive implications of these findings. Some interesting differences were evident in PSTs' career entry motivations across different contexts. For example, while social utility values were the highest-rated motivations of participants from Asian contexts, including China (Lin et al., 2012), Turkey (Eren & Tezel, 2010; Kiliç et al., 2012) and Indonesia (Suryani, 2017), perceived ability and intrinsic values were the highest-rated motivations in the Western world, including Australia (e.g., Richardson & Watt, 2006, 2014; Watt & Richardson, 2007), the United States, Germany, Norway (e.g., Watt et al., 2012), Canada (e.g., Klassen et al., 2011) and Switzerland (e.g., Berger & D'Ascoli, 2012), although other researchers have reported high social utility values along with intrinsic values and ability in a German context (König & Rothland, 2012). This trend was reflected in other parts of Europe, including Croatia (Jugović et al., 2012), Serbia (Simić et al., 2022) and the Netherlands (Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). Intrinsic career values were rated highest in a Spanish context (Gratacós & López-Jurado, 2016; Gratacós et al., 2017), along with social utility values.

Variations in teaching perceptions are reported in different contexts. For example, Australian participants rated task demands generally high, perceiving teaching as a demanding occupation that requires specific skills and expert knowledge, while task returns were rated low (Watt & Richardson, 2007). Although findings from China (Lin et al., 2012) and Turkey (Eren & Tezel, 2010) revealed job demands being rated as low and moderately low, respectively, Indonesian participants rated task demands highly (Suryani et al., 2016), thereby making any generalisation based on collectivist culture unacceptable. As in the case of the Australian sample, US participants also rated task returns, in particular salary, very low (Lin et al., 2012; Watt et al., 2012). A similar trend was noticed in Spain (Gratacós et al., 2017), Norway (Brandmo & Nesje, 2017) and Estonia (Taimalu et al., 2017), with participants rating high on task demands and low on returns. Interestingly, the German



and Swiss studies have reported participants rating high on salary (König et al., 2016). In general, it has been reported that participants across multiple contexts were satisfied with their career choice.

The net effect of the current policy landscape has been to make it easier and more financially attractive to enter the teaching profession in England. While this may be considered beneficial in tackling a teacher shortage, it seems to have also opened the door to applicants who are more extrinsically motivated by the practical benefits of factors such as the incentives or less stringent recruitment procedure to training, rather than the altruistic and intrinsically motivated archetypal teacher identified in previous studies. As such, the fluctuating policy landscape around teacher recruitment in England has recently given rise to questions about the authenticity of some applicants to teacher education, which form the basis of this empirical study. A recent study analysing the effectiveness of current recruitment strategies in England (Klassen et al., 2021) highlights the potential threat of teachers not sustaining in the profession due to the focus of recruitment strategies being confined to social and personal utility values rather than the task demands and identifying the right people with the key attributes, who will fit better into the teaching profession.

Considering the qualitative variance in motivations and teaching perceptions of PSTs across the world, the current study has relevance in terms of educational, recruitment and policy implications, especially given that policies influence teachers' highly complex motivational patterns (Chiong et al., 2017). A recent Forbes article identified that 'an economic slump sees more people head into teaching as a "safe" profession, while it is harder to attract teachers when the economy is booming' (Morrison, 2021), which further underscores the need for identifying the potential antecedents of choosing a teaching career and the consequences related to these motivations and perceptions. The current study is an attempt to move a few steps forward in addressing this enduring issue, with the key research questions: Can the FIT-Choice scale be used as a valid tool in an English context to explore the career entry motivations and teaching perceptions of PSTs? (*RQ1*); What are the key career entry motivations and perceptions of teacher trainees in the country, especially in the context of the prevalent media criticism of introducing bursaries to teacher education to address teacher shortages? (*RQ2*); Are there differences in terms of career entry motivations and perceptions among subsamples based on gender, training pathways and subject specialism? (*RQ3*).

## METHOD

### Participants

Following departmental ethics approval, explanatory letters were distributed along with paper-based questionnaires to PSTs in an English university that is a key provider of teacher education in the United Kingdom. All participants were enrolled in secondary teacher training. Out of the participants ( $N = 115$ ), the majority were women ( $n = 77$ ) and one participant did not reveal their gender. The mean age of participants was 28.68 ( $SD = 9.746$ ), ranging from 21 to 68 years. Participants were following different training pathways. Most of the participants ( $n = 59$ ) were completing their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) through a traditional university-led teacher training course, while the rest of the cohort were following an alternate route: school-led teacher training. Out of the 56 participants who were following the second option, only 12 belonged to the category 'School Direct (salaried)', while the remaining 44 identified themselves as 'School Direct (fee-paying)'. Their subject specialisms were different, mostly from non-STEM fields ( $n = 63$ ) including humanities, arts and languages, while 52 participants were specialising in a STEM subject, mostly mathematics.

Less than half of the participants ( $n=48$ ) indicated that they had a close relative in the teaching profession.

## Materials

The 12 motivational factors in the FIT-Choice scale were measured by multiple item indicators, with response options ranging from 1 (not at all important) through to 7 (extremely important). A common stem to each item in the scale is 'I chose to become a teacher because...'. There were six factors under teaching perceptions, measured by multiple-item indicators. Participants were asked to rate the extent of their agreement with each item, with response options ranging from 1 (not at all) through to 7 (extremely). Career choice satisfaction and social dissuasion were also measured. There was an open-ended question to elaborate on 'why they wanted to become a teacher', collecting further information on their motivations and career intentions.

## Analyses

Analyses were performed in two stages. Considering that validation of the FIT-Choice scale in various contexts has yielded different results, it was decided to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Amos 28, to validate the 12-factor structure of the motivation scale and the 6-factor structure of the perception scale in the British context. Descriptive statistics explored the factor means for both motivations and perceptions. Use of an open-ended question helped to get a deeper understanding of their career intentions, adding authenticity to the quantitative data. There are criticisms on the use of the FIT-Choice scale without considering the background characteristics of participants (e.g., See et al., 2022), analysing the influence of sociological factors on their motivations. Hence, the second stage involved multivariate analysis testing the differences in motivations and perceptions among the participants. In particular, the effects of gender, teaching area (STEM and non-STEM) and teacher education pathway (university led and School Direct) are analysed.

## RESULTS

### Validation of FIT-Choice scale

Preliminary analyses showed that one motivation factor, '*Job Transferability*', was not applicable in the setting (Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha=0.52$ ) and was consequently omitted from the analysis. This scale has been excluded from analysis in many other contexts too (see Watt et al., 2012). The factor '*Intrinsic Career Value*' also revealed low reliability, with  $\alpha=0.48$ . However, it was noted that deletion of the item B7 'I've always wanted to become a teacher' resulted in a significant improvement in the scale reliability (Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha=0.72$ ). To address the first research question (RQ1), a CFA was conducted testing the 11-factor maximum likelihood model of motivations, with 32 items, using Amos 28. Fit indices for the models were examined, followed by modification indices (MIs). The fit indices reported are the two non-centrality parameters—comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA); the relative fit index—Tucker–Lewis index (TLI); and the absolute fit index—standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). Although the frequently reported cutoff criteria are TLI and CFI  $\geq 0.95$ , RMSEA  $\leq 0.06$  and SRMR  $\leq 0.08$  (Hu

TABLE 1 Motivations CFA: summary of action and fit statistics.

Model	$\chi^2$ df, $p < 0.001$	$\Delta\chi^2$ , $\Delta$ df	RMSEA (90% CI)	CFI	TLI	SRMR	Action
Base model	785.057, 472	–	0.076 (0.067–0.086)	0.833	0.802	0.079	Delete B37
Model 2	691.813, 440	93.244, 32	0.071 (0.061–0.081)	0.855	0.826	0.076	Delete B16
Model 3	629.503, 409	62.31, 31	0.069 (0.058–0.079)	0.868	0.840	0.075	Delete B2
Model 4	573.790, 379	55.713, 30	0.067 (0.056–0.078)	0.880	0.853	0.073	Delete B31
Model 5	516.002, 350	57.788, 29	0.065 (0.052–0.076)	0.892	0.866	0.072	Delete B53
Model 6	456.069, 322	59.993, 28	0.06 (0.047–0.073)	0.907	0.882	0.069	Delete B24
Final model	400.133, 295	55.936, 27	0.057 (0.042–0.070)	0.900	0.923	0.064	–

Abbreviations: CFA, confirmatory factor analysis; CFI, comparative fit index; CI, confidence interval; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardised root mean square residual; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.



**TABLE 2** Motivation scales: factor loadings (LX), measurement errors (TD) and Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ).

Motivation scales	$\alpha$	Items	LX	TD
Perceived teaching abilities	0.77	B5	0.83	0.68
		B19	0.82	0.67
		B43	0.58	0.33
Intrinsic career value	0.72	B1	0.74	0.55
		B12	0.77	0.59
Fallback career	0.74	B11	0.85	0.73
		B48	0.68	0.46
		B35	0.61	0.38
Job security	0.86	B14	0.81	0.66
		B27	0.86	0.75
		B38	0.79	0.62
Time for family	0.79	B4	0.80	0.63
		B18	0.66	0.44
		B29	0.71	0.50
Shape future of children/ adolescents	0.66	B9	0.62	0.38
		B23	0.67	0.45
Enhance social equity	0.89	B36	0.77	0.59
		B49	0.95	0.89
		B54	0.86	0.74
Make social contribution	0.73	B6	0.71	0.50
		B20	0.81	0.66
Working with children	0.84	B13	0.86	0.73
		B26	0.86	0.74
Prior teaching and learning experiences	0.81	B30	0.94	0.87
		B39	0.55	0.30
		B17	0.81	0.66
Social influences	0.86	B3	0.79	0.62
		B40	0.95	0.90

& Bentler, 1999), in general, the SEM literature recommends RMSEA should be less than 0.08 and TLI and CFI should be above 0.90 (Byrne, 2010).

The estimated 11-factor model for motivations with 32 items did not reveal a good fit with the data:  $\chi^2(472, N=115)=785.057, p<0.001$  with fit indices CFI=0.833, TLI=0.802, RMSEA=0.07 and SRMR=0.08. High MIs, which were subsequently examined for estimation. Item pairs with high MIs were carefully examined to free the error covariances if substantively meaningful to improve the model fit. However, this was not the case and subsequently, deletion of cross-loaded items was considered. It needs to be acknowledged that deletion of items resulted in improved reliability of respective scales. Table 1 summarises the sequential steps followed to improve the model fit. The final model revealed acceptable fit with the data:  $\chi^2(293, N=115)=400.133, p<0.001$  with fit indices CFI=0.923, TLI=0.900, RMSEA=0.06 and SRMR=0.06.

Standardised item loadings for the sample are summarised in Table 2, along with Cronbach alpha measures of internal consistency. The latent correlations among the factors ranged from low to medium, suggesting that PSTs in general distinguish between these factors (Table 3).

TABLE 3 Latent correlations among motivations for teaching.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Perceived teaching abilities	–	0.68	0.19	0.17	0.28	–0.07	0.20	0.22	0.04	0.17	–0.16
2. Intrinsic career value		–	0.07	–0.09	0.39	–0.02	0.33	0.33	0.18	0.16	–0.62
3. Job security			–	0.21	0.04	0.08	0.15	0.13	0.11	0.30	0.25
4. Time for family				–	–0.08	–0.08	0.20	0.01	0.09	0.37	0.54
5. Shape future of children/adolescents					–	0.47	0.57	0.55	0.57	0.20	–0.31
6. Enhance social equity						–	0.13	0.36	0.04	0.03	0.03
7. Work with children/adolescents							–	0.15	0.14	0.14	–0.20
8. Make social contribution								–	0.06	0.34	–0.18
9. Prior teaching and learning experiences									–	0.40	0.15
10. Social influences										–	0.23
11. Fallback career											–

TABLE 4 Perception scales: factor loadings (LX), measurement errors (TD) and Cronbach's alphas ( $\alpha$ ).

Perception scales	$\alpha$	Items	LX	TD
Expert career	0.83	C10	0.76	0.57
		C14	0.77	0.60
		C15	0.84	0.70
High demand	0.62	C2	0.56	0.32
		C7	0.32	0.11
		C11	0.89	0.79
Social status	0.85	C4	0.79	0.62
		C5	0.49	0.24
		C8	0.77	0.59
		C9	0.62	0.38
		C12	0.82	0.68
		C13	0.74	0.55
Good salary	0.93	C1	0.90	0.81
		C3	0.97	0.94
Social dissuasion	0.66	D2	0.52	0.27
		D4	0.53	0.28
		D6	0.91	0.83
Satisfaction with choice	0.79	D1	0.53	0.28
		D3	0.92	0.84
		D5	0.82	0.68

TABLE 5 Latent correlations among perceptions of teaching.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Expert career	–	0.19	0.18	0.08	0.03	0.11
2. High demand	–	–	0.08	-0.03	0.06	0.00
3. Social status			–	0.62	-0.16	0.01
4. Good salary				–	0.04	0.07
5. Social dissuasion					–	-0.04
6. Satisfaction with choice						–

The strongest positive correlation was noted between '*perceived teaching abilities*' and '*intrinsic career values*' (0.68), which aligns with the prior studies reported in other contexts. The '*intrinsic career values*' were positively and moderately correlated with social utility values (ranging from 0.33 to 0.39), which was also not surprising. An interesting correlation (0.54) was present between the personal utility factor '*time for family*' and '*fallback career*', while '*fallback career*' was negatively correlated with '*intrinsic career values*' (-0.62).

CFA was performed to test the 6-factor model of perceptions of teaching with 24 items. The model revealed a very good fit with the data:  $\chi^2(155, N = 115) = 173.119, p < 0.001$  with fit indices CFI=0.979, TLI=0.974, RMSEA=0.03 (CI 0.000–0.056) and SRMR=0.06. Standardised item loadings for the sample are summarised in Table 4, along with Cronbach alpha measures of internal consistency.

The latent correlations among the factors were low in general, except for a stronger correlation between '*social status*' and '*salary*' (0.62), suggesting that PSTs in general distinguish between these factors (Table 5). The negligible correlations between '*social status*'

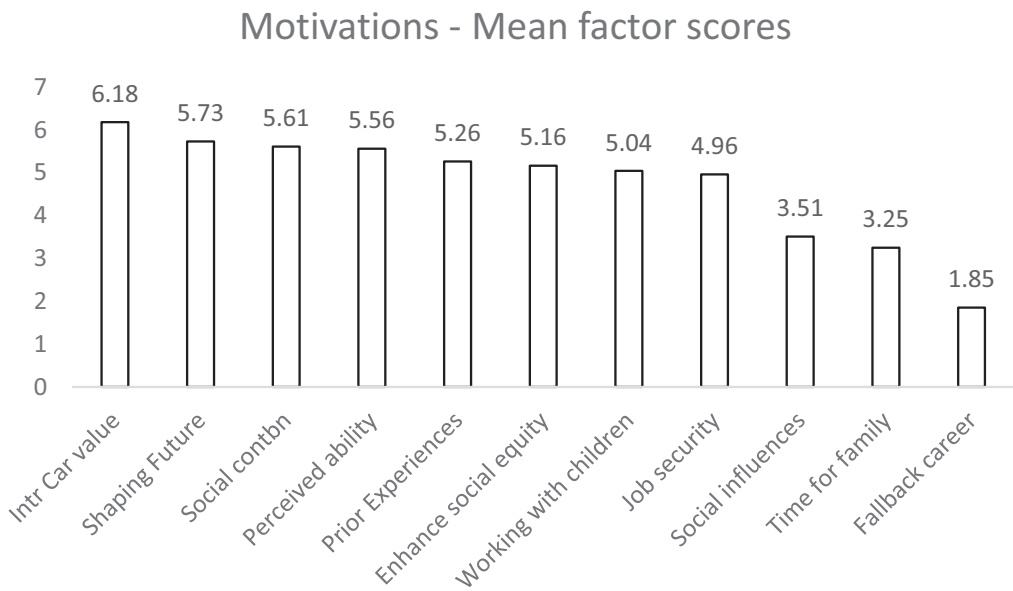


FIGURE 1 Motivations for choosing teaching career.

and '*satisfaction with career choice*', as well as '*salary*' and '*satisfaction with career choice*', further underscore that the participants did not assign much importance to extrinsic rewards while making their career choices.

The next stage of the analysis explored the factor means for both their motivations for teaching and perceptions about teaching as a career. The highest-rated motivation was '*intrinsic career value*', followed by altruistic values of '*shaping the future of children and adolescents*' and '*making a social contribution*'. '*Perceived ability*' was the next strongest driving factor to choose teaching, along with '*prior teaching and learning experiences*'. The lowest-rated motivation factor was '*fallback career*', which is considered as a negative motivation for choosing a career. '*Time for family*' was also rated low, indicating that the PSTs were aware of the demanding nature of the teaching profession and did not perceive it as a '9 till 5' job with plenty of spare time and holidays to spend with family—although that is a common opinion among the British public. Figure 1 provides a comparative picture of how the participants rated different motivations for choosing teaching as their career.

Their responses to the open-ended question further underscored this identified trend. Many of them expressed how they wanted to contribute to society through teaching; for example, '*Coming from a working class, broken home, school was a safe space, I owe everything to education. It is my ambition to give the same opportunity to others*' (Participant, School Direct). Another participant (School Direct) indicated how they were intrinsically motivated to be a teacher: '*It's something that I've always been drawn into, and I feel that my strengths lie in this field. I feel extremely comfortable standing in front of a class of students*'. Some of the comments indicated that their '*intrinsic career values*' and altruistic values were intertwined; for example, one commented: '*I have always wanted a role of guidance, leading others to achieve. I come from a disadvantaged background and want to encourage others like myself to keep going. I want to help young people get through the most stressful times of their lives*' (Participant, School Direct). PSTs who were in the traditional university-led pathway also expressed similar sentiments, by sharing how they were intrinsically motivated to choose this profession and wanting to contribute to society. For example:



**FIGURE 2** Perceptions about teaching career.

*My main reasons for teaching are that I have always wanted to be a teacher, particularly within art since I was in primary school as it allowed me to pursue a career that would allow me to work with children. I knew that I wanted to work with my subject in art and encourage students to be unique and express themselves.*  
(Participant, PGCE)

Some responses revealed that teaching was the only career they had considered, for example: *'I can't imagine doing another thing. I want to enable pupils to learn as much as they can, about what interests them'* (Participant, PGCE); *'Ever since I was younger, I know it was my calling. I wanted to inspire the next generation'* (Participant, PGCE).

Analysing their reported teaching perceptions, it was noted that even though they perceived teaching as a profession which is emotionally and cognitively demanding and rated *salary* the lowest, they indicated that they were in general highly satisfied with their career choice, which is promising. [Figure 2](#) presents a pictorial summary of their ratings of the six 'perceptions of teaching' factors.

Their realistic understanding of the demands of a teaching career was reflected in their response to the open-ended question: *'Teaching offers a stable career. It does require a lot of hard work and planning. However, making an improvement to the children's education and being a role model is something that I will strive to push'* (Participant, PGCE). Another comment was: *'To do a job/career that will challenge me on a daily basis. To help young people develop into adults'* (Participant, School Direct).

Finally, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to analyse the differences in motivations and perceptions among subsamples based on gender (men and women), subject specialisms (STEM and non-STEM) and training pathways (university-led and school-led ITE). Six separate MANOVAs were performed. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted for each analysis to check for normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and multicollinearity, with no serious violations noted. The first MANOVA was performed to identify the mean-level gender differences among the motivations, which revealed no significant multivariate difference between men and women:  $F(11, 100) = 1.55$ ;  $p = 0.120$ ; Pillai's trace = 0.159; partial  $\eta^2 = 0.159$ . The second MANOVA tested the mean-level gender differences among the perceptions, which also did not reveal any significant multivariate difference:  $F(6, 111) = 1.79$ ;  $p = 0.107$ ; Pillai's trace = 0.092; partial  $\eta^2 = 0.092$  ([Table 6](#)).

TABLE 6 Means and standard deviations: subsamples based on gender.

Factor	Men		Women	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Motivations</i>				
Ability	5.58	0.810	5.56	0.901
Intrinsic value	6.13	0.848	6.22	0.859
Fallback career	1.82	1.15	1.79	1.16
Job security	4.71	1.23	5.01	1.36
Time for family	3.03	1.28	3.30	1.34
Shaping future	5.77	0.942	5.69	0.893
Enhance social equity	4.90	1.44	5.21	1.33
Make social contribution	5.96	0.868	5.45	1.03
Work with children	4.94	1.23	5.13	1.28
Prior experiences	5.40	1.17	5.17	1.41
Social influences	3.44	1.87	3.53	1.71
<i>Perceptions</i>				
Expert career	5.41	1.03	5.50	0.942
High demand	5.98	0.657	6.35	0.602
Social status	4.46	1.13	4.58	0.966
Good salary	3.41	1.28	3.53	1.25
Social dissuasion	3.76	1.39	4.16	1.49
Satisfaction with choice	6.17	0.602	6.25	0.762

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.

The third and fourth MANOVAs were performed to identify the effect of subject specialisms on career entry motivations and perceptions about teaching. Significant multivariate differences between people with STEM and non-STEM teaching specialisms were identified in their motivations:  $F(11, 101)=2.04$ ;  $p=0.03$ ; Pillai's trace=0.179; partial  $\eta^2=0.179$  and perceptions:  $F(6, 107)=2.69$ ;  $p=0.02$ ; Pillai's trace=0.131; partial  $\eta^2=0.131$ . The effect of subject specialism on each of the motivation scales was further explored by univariate  $F$  tests, which revealed no significant difference (Table 7).

Univariate  $F$  tests revealed significant differences in their perceptions of teaching as a highly demanding job. It was interesting to note that participants with non-STEM teaching specialisms rated higher on this scale (Table 7).

Finally, the effect of training pathways on motivations and perceptions about teaching was analysed. No significant multivariate difference between people choosing a traditional university-led ITE course and those choosing school-led teaching pathways was identified in their motivations:  $F(11, 100)=1.55$ ;  $p=0.120$ ; Pillai's trace=0.159; partial  $\eta^2=0.159$  or perceptions:  $F(6, 107)=1.43$ ;  $p=0.210$ ; Pillai's trace=0.074; partial  $\eta^2=0.074$  (Table 8).

It was interesting to note that the mean ratings of those who followed the school-led pathway to teaching rated higher on both personal utility values ('job security' and 'time for family') than those who were following a university-led pathway, while 'perceived ability' and 'intrinsic value' were rated higher by the cohort following the traditional university-led pathway. This pattern was reflected in their written responses too. A few of the reasons highlighted by School Direct participants for choosing the teaching profession were: '*Passion for subject. Need for a job(!) Intrigued by the challenge and the opportunity to develop myself*



**TABLE 7** Subject specialism differences in career entry motivations and perceptions about teaching.

Factor	F(1, 111)	p	Partial $\eta^2$	STEM		Non-STEM		Total	
				Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Motivations</i>									
Ability	0.292	0.590	0.003	5.60	0.689	5.51	1.00	5.55	0.869
Intrinsic value	0.093	0.761	0.001	6.22	0.843	6.17	0.861	6.20	0.849
Fallback career	2.29	0.133	0.020	1.99	1.34	1.67	0.947	1.81	1.15
Job security	2.62	0.108	0.023	4.74	1.27	5.14	1.34	4.95	1.32
Time for family	1.50	0.224	0.013	3.39	1.24	3.09	1.38	3.23	1.32
Shaping future	0.745	0.390	0.007	5.80	0.891	5.65	0.947	5.71	0.920
Enhance social equity	0.036	0.849	0.000	5.11	1.33	5.16	1.41	5.14	1.36
Make social contribution	4.72	0.032	0.041	5.85	1.01	5.45	0.966	5.63	1.00
Work with children	0.096	0.757	0.001	5.10	1.10	5.02	1.40	5.06	1.27
Prior experiences	1.23	0.269	0.011	5.09	1.37	5.37	1.32	5.24	1.35
Social influences	0.551	0.459	0.005	3.37	1.64	3.62	1.85	3.50	1.75
<i>Perceptions</i>									
Expert career	0.482	0.489	0.004	5.39	1.01	5.51	0.946	5.46	0.974
High demand <sup>a</sup>	10.465	0.002	0.085	6.01	0.682	6.39	0.572	6.22	0.649
Social status	3.657	0.058	0.032	4.33	1.04	4.69	1.00	4.53	1.03
Good salary	0.241	0.624	0.002	3.43	1.21	3.55	1.30	3.50	1.25
Social dissuasion	1.959	0.164	0.017	4.24	1.41	3.85	1.49	4.02	1.46
Satisfaction with choice	0.506	0.478	0.005	6.16	0.678	6.26	0.744	6.22	0.714

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.  
<sup>a</sup>Significant; Bonferroni corrected p value = 0.008.

TABLE 8 Means and standard deviations: subgroups based on training pathways.

Factor	University-led		School-led	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<i>Motivations</i>				
Ability	5.60	0.753	5.51	0.983
Intrinsic value	6.28	0.809	6.10	0.886
Fallback career	1.82	1.25	1.80	1.05
Job security	4.82	1.21	5.06	1.41
Time for family	2.95	1.23	3.49	1.36
Shaping future	5.77	0.947	5.63	0.887
Enhance social equity	5.26	1.39	4.98	1.33
Make social contribution	5.72	1.06	5.52	0.934
Work with children	4.92	1.23	5.17	1.31
Prior experiences	5.36	1.29	5.09	1.39
Social influences	3.42	1.63	3.56	1.87
<i>Perceptions</i>				
Expert career	5.61	0.921	5.29	1.01
High demand	6.15	0.676	6.28	0.617
Social status	4.48	1.06	4.57	1.00
Good salary	3.47	1.27	3.53	1.24
Social dissuasion	4.14	1.42	3.90	1.51
Satisfaction with choice	6.21	0.753	6.22	0.676

Abbreviation: SD, standard deviation.

as teacher and earner'; 'Fulfilling, challenging, emotional rewarding, works with family commitments'; and 'Stable income, career progression'.

## DISCUSSION

One of the main objectives of our study was to test the validity and reliability of the FIT-Choice scale in the English context (RQ1). The wide use of the scale in both Eastern and Western contexts attests to the usability and adaptability of the scale in different parts of the world. However, the meta-analysis of reliability generalisation of the FIT-Choice scale by Navarro-Asencio et al. (2021) draws the attention of researchers to the context-specific interpretation and meaning of different constructs in the scale and the potential delimitation of quantitative instruments in terms of concealing cultural differences. Acknowledging the minor amendments introduced to the scale in different countries, as reported by different researchers, and attending to the concerns raised by some researchers regarding the 'uncritical use of FIT-Choice instrument' (See et al., 2022, p. 20), we tested the scale validity and reliability, confirming the FIT-Choice scale factor structure for both motivations and perceptions in the context of the study, although it was a small sample. With the motivation scales, we excluded the subscale 'job transferability' due to low reliability; and item B7 was excluded to improve the reliability of the scale 'intrinsic career value' (consistent with Watt et al., 2012). There were a few items that cross-loaded over multiple constructs, which we

eventually excluded from the analysis to improve the model fit. Similar results are reported in various contexts (e.g., Hennessy & Lynch, 2017; Watt et al., 2012).

Considering the cohort as a whole, it is heartening to learn that intrinsic and utilitarian factors feature most prominently among the motivational factors, with more extrinsic and social factors less pronounced (RQ2). This supports a belief that most people in the sample have embarked on teacher training due to their personal interest and desire to make a worthwhile contribution to society, and accords with previous results from other Western contexts (e.g., Watt et al., 2012). Especially with the prevalent and substantial media criticism of 'bursary tourism' in the country, with the bursaries being the main attraction for people choosing teacher education with no intention to stay in the profession, the findings reassure us that the participants in this study have been intrinsically motivated to choose a teaching career path. Interestingly, social influences appear to be of low importance overall ( $M=3.50$ ), although the standard deviation is quite large for this scale (1.75), which suggests that the influence of this factor may be of variable significance on an individual basis. This accords with anecdotal experience in England, where the reputation of the teaching profession has become somewhat tarnished in recent years. Teaching lacks the social status that it once held and it is widely acknowledged that it is a challenging and emotionally draining profession, with comparatively poor remuneration (supported by the perceptions of teaching profession data in this study). This results in a poor public perception of teaching, often reinforced by the popular press and other media. Derisory expressions such as 'those that can do; those that can't teach' are also common, so it is easy to understand how individuals might be dissuaded from teaching. While we cannot know from the FIT-Choice data what motivates those who do *not* choose to teach, we might surmise that the low scores for social influences perhaps represent an ability for individuals to ignore the dissenting voices in society more so than being talked into the decision by friends and relatives. Moreover, analysing the written responses, it is to be acknowledged that no single participant indicated teaching as a short-term career option or as a career they may not enter, as opposed to concerns raised over the provision of incentives to teacher education students who may not enter or stay in the profession for long.

As reported in a recent study (Klassen et al., 2021), the current teacher recruitment strategies in England focus on social and personal utility factors. The commonly held misconception about teaching in England—that teachers have short working days and long holidays, and in turn can get more time for family—is often touted by outsiders as one of the main selling points of the profession. It is interesting, therefore, that '*time for family*' was one of the least important factors in determining respondents' teaching career choice ( $M=3.21$ ). This might suggest that our sample are well-informed and aware of the rigours of the profession, or it could also suggest that people in general are less motivated to have a family. The birth rate in England has been decreasing over the last decade, with couples waiting longer on average to start a family than in previous generations.

The overall factor scores suggest that teaching as a fallback career was not a strong factor in determining most people's career choice ( $M=1.85$ ), and although '*job security*' was rated higher ( $M=4.96$ ) it was the least important factor out of all those that scored above the scale mid-point. This is also promising; those who are choosing the profession are not coming for a trial-run experimentation, or enjoying 'bursary tourism', but have a strong desire to become teachers. It is worth noting, however, that these data were captured prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Teacher recruitment spiked quite significantly in England during 2020, and one might reasonably assume that redundancies in other sectors contributed to this, as well as new graduates entering a contracted job market. It would be interesting to see if teachers from the 2020 recruitment cycle exhibit stronger motivational characteristics in these areas.

Comparing the subgroups within the sample (RQ3), there are no statistically significant gender differences in motivational characteristics within the sample. Previous studies in comparable settings have shown that women report stronger motivations of intrinsic career value, desire to work with children and compatibility with family life (e.g., Simić et al., 2022; Watt et al., 2013), the pattern of which is replicated in our data but not in a statistically significant way. This might be explained by a shift towards more progressive societal views on gender roles, but alternatively could simply be that our dataset is too small for these patterns to be established with statistical significance. The same studies also report that men are more likely to have arrived in teaching as a fallback career, which is also borne out in our data, but the differences are negligibly small. Our current study does identify women rating higher on perceptions of teaching as a high-demand career. This replicates a similar result by Simić et al. (2022), which they ascribe to being 'probably due to their traditional orientation towards raising children, which makes females more aware of the demands' (p. 47).

In our comparison of STEM and non-STEM PSTs, we find a statistically significant multivariate difference between both groups' motivational characteristics, but no significant univariate differences. This suggests that there is a more complex relationship between the factors that cannot easily be identified. In Watt et al.'s (2013) study, STEM teachers reported being more significantly motivated by teaching as a fallback career and time for family than their non-STEM counterparts, and less motivated by prior teaching and learning experiences. These same patterns are observed in our data but were not statistically significant, suggesting an insufficient sample size. There was a statistically significant difference between the groups' perceptions of teaching as a demanding profession, but no obvious social or cultural justification for this. There might be a tenuous argument that the public perception is that STEM subjects are 'difficult', leading to selection bias in post-compulsory education that favours typically more high-achieving individuals (because less successful students opt out at an earlier stage and pursue other disciplines). This could lead to the STEM group under-estimating the demands of teaching because they are used to finding things comparatively easy, however it is difficult to draw this conclusion from the current data alone and some form of qualitative exploration is probably required.

Finally, the comparison of training pathways between traditional PGCE students and School Direct revealed no statistically significant differences in their career entry motivations or perceptions of teaching. This was a positive observation, in turn addressing the criticism of 'bursary tourism'. Although it was a modest sample, it could be concluded that all those who follow a School Direct pathway to teacher education are not motivated by extrinsic factors. However, we would like to acknowledge that the timing of the study might have limited the effects of the main differences between these training pathways. The surveys were administered during the induction period of the ITE course (within the first couple of days), so none of the participants had even set foot in a school at this point (or at least not as a formal part of their training programme). This means that their responses capture a somewhat raw opinion, unshaped by any practicum experience. The main distinguishing feature between the two groups at this stage was that they were recruited via different processes: PGCE students were all recruited by the university via a consistent process, whereas School Direct students were recruited directly by schools via potentially very different and inconsistent processes (although with some oversight by the university for the purposes of quality assurance). It is unlikely that any significant differences would emerge in these groups at this early stage in the course. However, it was interesting to note that students who followed the university-led pathway rated teaching as an expert career higher than those who followed a School Direct pathway, although the difference was not statistically significant. This further attests to the concern that the School Direct initiative has led to teacher training losing some of the academic rigour it used to have when located solely within universities. It is to be analysed carefully whether the research-informed practice

and theoretical considerations have become somewhat squeezed, along with pedagogical content knowledge, while moving away from traditional teacher education.

Applicants typically select the School Direct route as it gives them more control over the school in which they are placed for most of their teacher education, meaning in most cases they can stay local to their home. It tends to be more popular with applicants who are more firmly established in the area—typically older, often with families. One might naively assume that this would lead to the School Direct group being more motivated by time for family, which is borne out in our data but is not statistically significant. However, this trend warrants further research.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

There are a few limitations associated with the current study. The data were collected from a small sample of 115 participants. We would like to acknowledge that the modest sample size is likely to affect the scale validation process and we strongly recommend further validation in the context with a larger sample size. The time of data collection might also have affected the findings. The data were collected at the beginning of the programme, when the participants were less than a couple of weeks into the programme. Collection of data towards the end of the training programme, or at multiple time points, needs to be considered in the future, to address the limitation of capturing their raw opinion prior to formally engaging with the training programme. Similarly, it is to be emphasised that the results need to be interpreted carefully, considering that the findings are drawn from self-report survey data. For example, there was no exclusive data to identify what factors impact their decisions not to teach despite completing the training. There are studies focusing on these factors reported in other contexts, like Indonesia (Suryani & George, 2021). It would be worth conducting further studies investigating this under-explored area.

It is also important to consider the possible impact of response bias in the data. The questionnaire was administered at the university during a teaching session. A member of the research team briefed the participants about the research during a lead lecture to the entire cohort, but the surveys were administered afterwards in smaller breakout groups, supervised by a large team of teaching fellows. Engagement with the survey was variable according to these different teaching groups. This was a result of colleagues' differing willingness and/or capacity to devote some of their teaching time to distributing and overseeing the survey. Since the participants were grouped according to subject specialism, this meant that there was some systematic bias in response rates, resulting in a slight under-sampling of non-STEM participants and a quite significant over-sampling of mathematics trainees within the STEM group. This might have important consequences, but there is insufficient data to consider individual subject groups in a meaningful way and there are seemingly no clues from previous FIT-Choice studies, as they have not looked in any more granular detail than broad STEM/non-STEM categories. Further studies are recommended to analyse the difference between participants with different subject specialisms within the broad STEM and non-STEM categories, as interest in a subject has been reported as an important influential factor affecting individuals' teaching career choices (Glutsch & König, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

While mindful of the limitations, we would like to acknowledge that the study has implications both at conceptual and substantive levels. The findings substantiate the validity and reliability of the FIT-Choice scale as a measure to understand the qualitative differences in individuals' career entry motivations and perceptions about teaching in the English context. Given

the calls from researchers to reconsider recruitment strategies by identifying key teaching attributes and recruiting people who are a better fit for the teaching profession (e.g., Klassen et al., 2021), the current study, reporting the career entry motivations of teacher trainees, makes a significant contribution. It is essential for the social infrastructure of the country that the government, the relevant governing bodies (e.g., Department for Education) and policy-makers better understand the motivational factors that predict positive early career teacher pathways. It is to be noted that the participants in the study did not rate personal utility values such as time for family or job security as the most important motivational factors. Also, a realistic understanding of task returns in terms of social status and salary, as well as the task demands (regarding job demands and required expertise), was evident in the response. We have not found any direct evidence of *bursary tourism*, and both the quantitative and qualitative responses were indicative of entering teaching for the anticipated reasons. It may not be the incentives offered that attracted these people to a teaching career, but their perceived teaching abilities and/or a desire to enter a career they consider as an opportunity to contribute to society. However, we would like to acknowledge that since the data were collected using a voluntary self-report survey, there could be response bias—those who are less motivated to teach are likely also to be less motivated to spend time filling in a survey about their teaching motivations. Moreover, since these findings are from a modest sample, we are not making any claims to generalise these to the country-wide teacher trainee population, but at the same time would like to reiterate that a blind criticism of individuals choosing teacher education lured by bursaries is also not generalisable. There is no doubt that both pre-career and early career attrition are a concern, especially when trainees have been provided with incentives to take on teacher education, which then becomes a poor investment of public monies. For the same reason, it is important to aim for a more sustainable teacher workforce who are intrinsically motivated, hold realistic perceptions about teaching and can meet the demands and challenges of the teaching profession. Against this background, empirically identified motivations for career choice and entering teaching—the key contribution of our study—should be of considerable interest to policymakers and training providers.

### **FUNDING INFORMATION**

This study was partly funded by the Monash Faculty of Education Dean's Award for Partnership Development received by Dr Sindu George.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Open access publishing facilitated by Australian Catholic University, as part of the Wiley - Australian Catholic University agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The dataset is not shared as it includes sensitive and unpublished information.

### **ETHICS APPROVAL**

Ethics approval was granted by the first author's institution (MUHREC—Project ID 001704).

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**How to cite this article:** George, S. & Thornby, J. (2023). The impact of 'bursary tourism' or the desire for a 'fulfilling, challenging, and emotionally rewarding career'? Career entry motivations and perceptions of preservice teachers from England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 00, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3887>