Introduction
The policy landscape in England for teacher education is undergoing ‘turbulent times’ (Whitehead, 2011) with diversification of routes into teaching and an increasing emphasis on schools-led provision (DfE, 2010, 2011). Policy frameworks and contexts for special educational needs (SEN) are also changing. This paper explores the field of SEN within the context of teacher education in England. The policy landscape for each of these aspects is described and explored, then analysed with in relation to general-specialist dimensions of teaching, examining how different policy drivers pull/push in different directions. Possible implications for teacher education are then considered.

Policy landscape in England for teacher education and special educational needs

Diversification of routes into teaching
There is a range of routes into teaching in England (see Table 1); all involve the acquisition of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), but operate at differing academic levels over different time periods and with different connections and involvements with schools.

Government policy over many years has increased the level of school involvement in ITE. This has influenced school–university partnership developments and has led over time to changes in the number of days required in placement schools, with an increase from 90 to 120 days in the 180 day year in postgraduate ITE. More recently, however, a view of teaching as ‘a craft ... best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman’ (Gove, 2010) has been revived and promulgated as underlying a major policy move to school-based provision has occurred (DfE, 2010, 2011). The School Direct route, where schools recruit and train their own teachers, often within groups or alliances of schools, was established in 2012 and 500 places were allocated in 2012-13. In 2013-14 6580 new entrants on postgraduate ITE programmes were on a School Direct programme compared with 20690 on HEI or SCITT programmes (DfE, 2013a). For 2015-16 postgraduate School Direct initial allocations have increased further to a total of 17609 representing 48% of allocated ITE quota (with 42% to HEI providers and 10% to SCITT providers) (NCTL, 2014a). This increase in School Direct provision has meant that many ITE programmes in HEIs have had their quotas significantly reduced or cut altogether (UCU, 2012; Universities UK, 2013) and some HEIs have withdrawn from ITE altogether (Elmes, 2013). Other HEI providers have
increased their numbers by engaging with schools involved in School Direct. See Table 1 which summarises this range of possible routes.
### Routes into teaching in England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Routes into teaching in England</th>
<th>Provider</th>
<th>Length of programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate</strong></td>
<td>Higher Education Institution (HEI)</td>
<td>3-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTS through undergraduate degree eg BA QTS, BEd</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution (HEI)</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) - SCITTs have government approval to run their own training. They often link with an HEI to provide a PGCE qualification.</td>
<td>1 year</td>
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<tr>
<td>QTS, usually with a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE). HEIs must be involved to provide the academic credit in a PGCE.</td>
<td>Teach First - trains graduates with leadership potential to become teachers in low income communities. The trainee is employed by the school as an unqualified teacher. Teach First links with an HEI to provide a PGCE qualification.</td>
<td>1 year (plus commitment to a further year as a Newly Qualified Teacher in the same school)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School Direct (fee paying) – training ‘on the job’, trainee recruited by and based in a school. Often operated by a group or alliance of schools, in partnership with an HEI or SCITT.</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Direct (salaried) - an employment-based route into teaching open to high-quality graduates with three or more years’ career experience. The trainee is employed as an unqualified teacher by a school.</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
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*All ITE programmes must include as a minimum 120 days in 2 placement schools*

**Table 1: Routes into teaching in England**

In England there has been no discrete whole programme ITE for learning to teach students with special educational needs (SEN) since 1992 (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005) and a separate or different qualification is not required to teach these learners. Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2013b) mostly focus on *all pupils* – for example, to ‘adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils’ (p11) and only one specifically mentions SEN: to ‘have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs ... and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to
engage and support them’ (p12). ITE programmes contain very variable foci on SEN: some trainees may be based in special schools through School Direct programmes, especially as part of alliances; some HEI or SCITT programmes feature SEN as a specialist pathway; some may include optional and/or additional modules and/or special school placements (Peter, 2013); others have minimal content in the area of SEN. There have been continuing concerns about the adequacy of teacher education in the area of SEN (OFSTED, 2008; House of Commons, 2010; DCSF, 2010; Hartley, 2010) and additional training materials related to teaching these learners were developed (for example, TDA, 2007, 2009a); however, this bank of resources is now archived and may or may not be used by teacher education providers.

**Diversification of schools**

There has also been a diversification of school types in England with the introduction of academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges (DfE, 2014a) and the removal of the requirement for teachers in these schools to gain QTS (DfE, 2012). The number of converter academies (those schools which have voluntarily converted to academy status) for secondary age pupils increased from 827 in 2012 to 1299 in 2014 and there was a more than twelve-fold increase in the number of free schools for secondary age pupils from 6 to 76 schools (DfE, 2014b). Almost 30 per cent of all school pupils in England in 2014 are enrolled in academies and free schools (DfE, 2014b).

A further development has been the introduction of Teaching Schools. These are ‘outstanding schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development to new and experienced school staff’ (NCTL, 2014b), also part of the government’s commitment to a schools-led system. One of the main responsibilities of Teaching Schools is ‘to lead the development of school-led initial teacher training through School Direct or by gaining accreditation as an initial teacher training provider’ and to ‘offer a range of professional development opportunities for teachers and school support staff … build[ing] on initial teacher training and induction’ (NCTL, 2014b). They are therefore a key component in the teacher education landscape.

Black and Norwich’s (2014) analysis of Department for Education data shows that for the two years of 2012 and 2013 the more autonomous secondary schools (converter academies and free schools) had a consistently lower percentage of pupils with SEN (at school action plus or with statements of SEN) than maintained schools and sponsored academies (those with ‘weaknesses’ which are forced to become academies governed by outside trusts) had the highest percentage of pupils with SEN. Interesting patterns are also evident regarding the distribution of pupils with different types of SEN in different types of secondary school. Black and Norwich’s (2014) analysis indicates that the SEN categories of ‘moderate learning difficulties’ and ‘behavioural emotional and social difficulties’ were more prevalent in maintained schools and sponsored academies and that the category of ‘specific learning
difficulties’ was more prevalent in converter academies and free schools. The diversification of school types, then, might be affecting the distribution of pupils with SEN.

**Diversification and fragmentation of continuing professional development**

Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers is frequently emphasised as important for teachers’ careers and for teacher retention (DfE, 2010; House of Commons, 2012; DfE, 2013c). The world of CPD, however, also seems to be increasingly fragmented with a wide range of provision and providers, for example: schools themselves; academy chains; for-profit and not-for-profit providers and HEIs. In particular, schools are encouraged and expected to work together and support each other through initiatives such as ‘school-to-school support’ and part of the remit of Teaching Schools is to ‘lead peer-to-peer professional and leadership development’ (NCTL, 2014b). The emphasis on Masters level CPD varies. On the one hand, governments have emphasised and sought to emulate countries where teaching is an M level profession (e.g. Finland, DfE, 2010) and have, at times, promoted M level qualifications through policy iterations and funding, for example, Postgraduate Professional Development funding over 2005-2011 and a Masters in Teaching and Learning (TDA, 2009b) which was piloted in specific regions of England for one year before being abandoned by the new Coalition Government in 2011. In addition, most ITE programmes incorporate M level credits within PGCEs. However, in the current policy climate, there seems to be a move away from this level of CPD.

A continuing concern about teacher education for teaching pupils with SEN, as mentioned earlier, and the influence of government reports (Lamb Report, DCSF, 2009a; Salt Report, DCSF, 2010) led to the development of a range of CPD materials for teachers in addition to ITE materials (now available through [www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd/](http://www.nasen.org.uk/onlinesendcpd/)) and government teacher scholarship funding has been specifically targeted for SEN (NCTL, 2014c). However, it is unknown to what extent these materials are used for CPD that relates to pupils with SEN / disabilities.

**SEN frameworks**

**OFSTED inspection frameworks**

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspection frameworks exist for schools (OFSTED, 2014a) and for ITE providers (OFSTED, 2014b) and thus form part of the policy landscape for teachers and teacher education. The school inspection framework includes one specific reference to SEN:

> ‘When reporting, inspectors must also consider the extent to which the education provided by the school meets the needs of the range of pupils at the school, and in particular the needs of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs’. (OFSTED, 2014a:5)
This ‘in particular’ emphasis on the quality of provision for pupils with SEN, their achievement and progress continues consistently throughout the inspection handbooks for schools and ITE (OFSTED, 2014c; 2014b).

**Special Educational Needs Coordinators**
The role of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in schools and in the teacher education landscape now seems to be well established. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 state that there must be a SENCO in maintained schools, academies and free schools and that the SENCO must be a teacher. If new-to-role, the SENCO must gain the National Award for SEN Coordination, a Masters level qualification, within three years. The SENCO Learning Outcomes, revised in 2014 (NCTL, 2014d) now have a greater emphasis on leadership and increased status associated with the SENCO role has been noted (Griffiths and Dubsky, 2012; Tissot, 2013).

**Revised SEND Code of Practice**
The revised *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice* which took effect from September 2014 (DfE and DoH, 2014) makes some amendments to the graduated response to pupils’ SEN with the amalgamation of the previous School Action and School Action Plus stages into one stage of SEN Support. This change has also been interpreted, rather than an amalgamation of stages, as removing the stage of School Action, partly, perhaps, in response to OFSTED’s (2010: 5) proposition that the term ‘special educational needs’ was being used too widely and that ‘as many as half of all pupils identified for School Action would not be identified as having special educational needs if schools focused on improving teaching and learning for all, with individual goals for improvement’. This would seem to suggest that the proportion of children designated as having SEN, which was 17.9% in January 2014 (DfE, 2014c) will decrease. The *SEND Code of Practice* also strongly emphasises the responsibility of the class teacher and the importance of high quality teaching (paras 6.36 and 6.37). In addition, there is a change to one of the SEN areas of need as defined in the revised *SEND Code of Practice*. The previously labelled category of ‘behavioural, emotional and social difficulties’, which accounted for 20% of children at School Action + or with a statement in January 2014 (DfE, 2014c), is now entitled ‘social, emotional and mental health difficulties’. It seems likely that this apparently narrower focus will reduce the number of children included within the category and thus, perhaps, the number and proportion of pupils designated as having SEN.

**Increasing complexity of pupil need**
A final aspect of the landscape for teachers in the area of SEN relates to the increasing complexity of pupil needs. There has been a considerable increase in numbers of pupils with severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties of approximately 30% since 2004 (DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2014c) with projections indicating further growth (Emerson, 2009). More premature babies are surviving and medical science is prolonging
lives that would previously have been lost in infancy (Marlow et al, 2005). The numbers of children with severe disabilities is thus growing concomitantly (Johnson et al, 2011). Many children with severe disabilities are educated in special schools (DfE, 2014c). However, the increase in numbers and the continued, if slightly diluted, impetus for inclusion in terms of presumption of education within mainstream schools contained within the revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) suggests that pupils’ needs will also increase in severity and complexity within mainstream schools.

**Implications of this policy landscape for SEN in teacher education**

Three types of implications are discussed: increased variability in experience; the potential dilution or, alternatively, concentration of focus on SEN; and the possible policy impulses in relation to general-specialist teaching positions.

*Increased variability in experience*

Several studies have found that trainees regard the school placement as the most important aspect of their ITE for learning about SEN (Nash and Norwich, 2008; Lawson, Norwich and Nash, 2013). One of the issues highlighted by OFSTED (2008: 4) was, however, a ‘high reliance on school placements’ to provide training in teaching pupils with SEN and an additional concern was the ‘considerable differences’ noted ‘in the quality of provision’. Lawson et al’s (2013) study also found that experiences were very variable between schools, and even within schools, in terms of the number of children with SEND in the trainees’ class/es and the amount and quality of supervision/mentoring of trainees’ teaching. Their study highlighted the importance of the values and ethos in the school, organisational practice and attitudes of individual staff members. McIntyre (2009: 602) argues that ‘whatever is achieved in the university, the teaching practices and attitudes that student-teachers usually learn to adopt are those currently dominant in the schools’. There are therefore possible limitations inherent in relying on schools for this aspect of ITE. However, the increasingly schools-led ITE policy agenda, in promoting a greater amount of time in school generally and within one school in particular, would seem to exacerbate the potential for this variability in provision.

The diversification of schools and pattern of placement of pupils with SEN (Black and Norwich, 2014) also indicates that a trainee teacher’s experience may be very variable, and may be very narrow, depending on the type of placement school. With increasing ITE quota going to School Direct and Teach First (NCTL, 2014a) where trainee teachers typically spend more time in one school, a smaller amount of time in a second school placement and less time in higher education study, there seems to be a danger that a broad and critical understanding of SEN and provision for pupils with SEN may be weakened. As one of the participants in Lawson et al’s (2013) study notes:

> Whereas before it didn’t matter what school you were in because the Uni[versity] was giving it to you so you all had the same, but now where your placement is
depends on what quality you get. When I did my PGCE most of it came from the University so we were all having the same quality. But now of course it’s all coming from the schools.
(school subject tutor, Lawson et al, 2013: 150)

**Dilution or concentration of SEN focus**
The diversification of training routes and the broadness of Teachers’ Standards in relation to SEN seem to dilute the position of SEN within ITE. On the other hand, the option of specialising in SEN to some extent within ITE seems to have increased with an increase in SEN pathways and with ‘extended placements’ in special schools (Peter, 2013. This appears to indicate a concentration of the position of SEN in ITE for some trainees. Both of these may be regarded as problematic: dilution because there may then be insufficient emphasis on, and experience of, learning to teach pupils with SEN; and concentration because of the potential association with the teaching of pupils with SEN as the responsibility of some, rather than all, teachers. This mirrors the often noted tension between SEN content being integrated or immersed throughout an ITE programme with the risk of it being sidelined, and additional or alternative specialist sessions and optional modules on SEN being available but not for all and not integrated through the ITE programmes.

In schools, the emphasis on class teachers’ responsibility for children with SEN, expectations around high quality teaching and the move to a single category of school-level action, SEN Support, may lead to a reduction in the numbers and proportion of pupils identified or designated as having SEN. As noted in the SEND Code of Practice, ‘making higher quality teaching normally available to the whole class is likely to mean that fewer pupils will require such support’ (DfE and DoH, 2014: 94-95). Similar to the case of diversification of training routes above, this would seem to promote a dilution of focus on SEN. Again, however, this policy change may also, alternatively, intensify and concentrate the SEN focus on a smaller proportion of pupils with more significant needs. This narrower interpretation of SEN may also initiate a propensity to move away from an interactional model of SEN which has been prominent within the English education system since the Warnock Report (1978), conceptualising SEN as the result of an interaction between the child and the environment (Wedell, 1981), to a more within-child perspective. Such an approach may conceivably promote increasingly separate provision and narrow the focus of the role of the SENCO.

**General-specialist positions**
The tension and interaction between these SEN lens of dilution and concentration echoes the debate and tensions around the general and/or specialist nature of teaching pupils with SEN (Lewis and Norwich, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates this position in a binary way.
A general position proposes that all teachers are involved in teaching pupils with SEN within a value stance of inclusion. General pedagogical knowledge and strategies are considered appropriate and relevant for pupils with SEN (no specialist pedagogies exist) and general teacher education for learning to teach all pupils is provided. An interactional model of SEN may be adopted, where personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of the child and environmental factors, barriers and support, are regarded as interacting. On the other hand, a specialist position suggests that specialist SEN knowledge exists and is important for teachers to know and that specialist pedagogical strategies are required for teaching pupils with SEN. Specialist teachers are therefore required and specialist separate teacher education is thus also needed. A within-child model of SEN is adopted where deficits, difficulties and strengths are located within the child.

The different aspects of the policy landscape described and discussed above can be seen to be exerting a push and pull influences across these general-specialist alternative positions as illustrated in Figure 2.
The diversification of schools and routes into teaching both seem to propel thinking and provision to a more specialist position as different types of schools seem to increasingly contain different types of pupils (Black and Norwich, 2014) and special schools become involved, as part of Teaching School alliances and through School Direct, as providers of ITE. The increasing complexity of pupils’ needs and the increasing use of special school placements may also, on the one hand, propel to a more specialist position, as trainee teachers see these schools and placements as separate, special and additional. On the other hand, research also suggests that trainee teachers experiencing placements in special schools learn pedagogic strategies that are transferable to mainstream contexts (Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Peter, 2013; Walton and Rusznyak, 2013), that they experience a wider range of children and incorporate their learning within their general teaching approach, thus pulling to a more generalist position.

The revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH, 2014) similarly seems to exert forces in both directions. The removal of ‘behaviour difficulties’ from the areas of need and the likelihood of reduced numbers of children being designated as having SEN may suggest that, as applicable to only a small minority of pupils, SEN is a specialist area. On the other hand, the emphasis on class teachers’ responsibility for all and high quality teaching for all emphasises and provides impetus for the general position.

The future for teacher education
Collaboration between schools in the area of teacher education, as well as partnerships between universities and schools, would seem to be an increasing possibility, especially considering the role of Teaching Schools. Ho and Arthur-Kelly’s (2013) study of a professional development programme in special schools in Hong Kong highlights the potential of school cluster working. The CPD was facilitated by a collaboration with ‘expert’ school teachers and teacher training lecturers; special school teachers worked in within-school pairs and across-school groups undertaking, for example, co-planning and peer observations, alongside practical and academic course content.

In addition to providing special school placements (Lindsay et al, 2011), there are also examples of broader relationships between ITE providers and special schools in England. The Institute of Education, London, and Swiss Cottage School, for example, have collaborated on a DfE funded pilot project involving additional experience in SEN as part of PGCE provision (Grant, 2013). Interestingly, the focus of this interrelationship is not on additional specialist teaching but general principles of strengthened personalised learning, evidence-based inquiry and anchored reflective practitioners (Mulholland and Patel, 2014). These would seem to be relevant for all ITE and not specific to a special school and this emphasis is interesting to note in terms of general-specialist positioning and the role of special schools in ITE.
Some European countries (for example, France) are strengthening the university context and academic emphasis in ITE (EASDNE, 2011). In Ireland the length of postgraduate ITE courses has been increased to two years from September 2014 (The Teaching Council, 2014) with 50% of the time spent on ‘Foundation Studies and Professional Studies’ in universities or colleges and 40% (120 days) in schools. In England there is a minimum of 120 days in school in a one year programme and the ITE policy agenda increasingly concentrates on the role of schools rather than universities.

In this diverse market, schools seem to have greater autonomy and a more predictable future than HEIs with regard to ITE. For HEIs, the uncertainty of quota allocation is unsettling and makes future planning almost impossible. Many HEIs have engaged with School Direct such that the proportion of School Direct in relation to HEI ‘core’ provision for some HEIs is more than 60% of their places allocated for 2015-16 (NCTL, 2014a). Some of this School Direct provision, however, almost places the HEI in a quality assurance rather than provider role. There is some evidence (Universities UK, 2014) that HEIs may experience increasing difficulty in finding quality school placements for trainee teachers as partnership schools engage further in School Direct. On the other hand, the capacity for schools to act as lead providers and to resource key elements of ITE has also been questioned (Hodgson, 2014).

Notes:
1. There are also routes for ex-service personnel (Troops to teachers http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/troops-to-teachers) and academics with doctorates (Researchers in schools http://www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/teacher-training-options/school-based-training/researchers-in-schools).
2. The category of ‘behavioural emotional and social difficulties’ (BESD) is no longer a category of SEN within the revised SEND Code of Practice 0-25 (DfE and DoH, 2014) and has been replaced by the category of ‘social, emotional and mental health difficulties’.

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