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Teacher Education Reform in Ireland: Policy and Process

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The central role of teachers in ensuring the quality of education has been increasingly recognised internationally in recent decades. This paper reviews various shifts that have occurred in the initial teacher education agenda internationally during this time period. The paper reviews the radical reform that has occurred in the structure and provision of Irish teacher education since 2012. The paper considers the approach taken to reducing fragmentation within the Irish system and concludes with a discussion of the author's concerns and recommendations for the future of initial teacher education, with particular reference to Ireland.

International Context

The central role of teachers in ensuring the quality of education has been increasingly recognised internationally in recent decades. In 2005, the OECD publication *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers* stated:

> Teachers are central to schooling. They are even more critical as expectations grow for teaching and learning to become more student-centred and to emphasise active learning …. This calls for demanding concepts of professionalism; the teacher as facilitator, as knowledgeable, expert individual: as networked team participant, oriented to individual needs; engaged both in teaching and in research and development (OECD, 2005, cited by Coolahan, 2007, p.23).

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OECD's *Building a High Quality Teaching Profession: Lessons from Around the World* (2011), concluded:

> Making teaching an attractive profession requires supporting continuous learning, developing career structure to give new roles to teachers and engaging strong teachers as active agents in school reform, not just implementers of plans designed by others. It also requires strengthening the knowledge base of education and developing a culture of research and reflection in schools so that teaching and learning can be based on the best available knowledge (OECD, 2011, p. 24).

Another OECD report published the same year analysed the international PISA results of 2009 to draw some conclusions on what were the characteristics of "strong performers and successful reformers in education". As regards teachers and teacher education, the report stated, 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers and principals' (OECD, 2011b. pp 238, 239). It indicated that other professions and national governments know that they have to pay attention to the pool from which they recruit; how they recruit; how they select their staff; and the kind of initial training their recruits get before they present themselves for employment.

The report pointed out that many of the countries which were studied for the purposes of identifying successful strategies**,** have moved "from a system in which teachers were recruited into a large number of specialised low-status colleges of teacher education, with relatively low entrance standards, into a relatively smaller number of teacher-education colleges with relatively high entrance standards and relatively high status in the university." The report added:

> Apart from raising entrance standards to make them comparable to those of other professions, teacher-education programmes in the top-performing countries are working to move their initial teacher-education programmes towards a model based less on preparing academics and more on preparing professionals in clinical settings, in which they get into schools earlier, spend

more time there and get more and better support in the process (OECD, 2011b., p.237).

OECD PISA Results 2009

Around the time these reports were published, the results of the 2009 OECD PISA tests of literacy and numeracy of 15-year-olds had been a wake-up call for education policy makers in Ireland. Until then, Ireland had been well-placed in the international league tables of pupil performance (Perkins et al, 2010). But in 2009, Ireland's overall ranking fell to 21st among 65 participating countries and 17th of 34 OECD countries. In the literacy tests, Ireland's ranking fell from 5th place in 2000 to 17th in 2009[1]. This decline was the largest across all 39 countries which participated in both PISA 2000 and PISA 2009[2]. As regards mathematics, Ireland ranked 32nd among 65 participating countries and 26th of 34 OECD countries[3]. The PISA scores also showed significant disparity between the educational attainment of young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds and those from less advantaged backgrounds.

Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2011

The deterioration in the attainment of Irish 15-year-olds between 2000 and 2009, as indicated in the PISA tests, led the Irish government to re-appraise the teaching of literacy and numeracy in

[1] In the 2009 PISA tests, Ireland's mean score on the reading literacy of 15 year olds was 495.6 - close to the OECD average of 493.4. The mean score for Ireland in reading was some 31 points lower in 2009 than in 2000.

[2] It is gratifying to note that since then, Ireland has regained its ranking in the OECD PISA tests. Eeivers et al (2017) report on the 2016 PIRLS assessment illustrates that Ireland's primary school children are best in Europe and OECD countries for reading skills.

[3]Ireland's performance in mathematics declined by 16 points between 2003 and2009, the second largest decline among countries participating in both years. Ireland's mean score was 487.1, a score that was significantly below the OECD average of 495.7.

Irish schools and in July 2011 a strategy document entitled *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People* was issued. This strategy set out a number of qualitative and quantitative targets for improving literacy and numeracy standards for the period 2011 to 2020. Among the key areas addressed in the strategy were the need "to ensure the development of teachers' skills in literacy and numeracy teaching" (DES, 2011, p.30) and to improve the professional practice of teachers through changes in both pre-service and in-service education (DES, 2011, 34).

Actions in the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* to improve teacher education included the following:

- Lengthening the B.Ed. degree programme for primary teachers to four years and the diploma for primary teaching to two years;
- Replacing the study of humanities (also known as 'academic electives') within the B.Ed. programme (for primary teachers) with a range of optional courses more closely related to education;
- Lengthening of H.Dip.Ed. courses for post-primary teachers from one year to two years;
- Ensuring that modules on the teaching, learning, and assessment of literacy and numeracy are a mandatory requirement for all primary and post-primary teacher education programmes;
- The allocation of a minimum of 40% of the extended programmes to school placement.
- Continuing professional development courses for teachers to include mandatory units on literacy, numeracy and assessment;
- Improvements to education courses for staff working in pre-schools (DES, 2011, pp 34-36).

As regards teacher education, the decision to extend initial teacher education programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels by one year would pose wide-ranging challenges for ITE

providers, but was nevertheless welcomed, as such an extension had been sought by teacher educators and commentators on many occasions during the previous twenty years (Byrne, 2002; Murphy & Coolahan, 2003; Coolahan, 2004; Kelleghan, 2009). There were also major challenges to be met in re-focusing ITE programmes as set out in the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*.

National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030

Six months after the Minister's announcement that ITE programmes were to be extended, the Department of Education published its national strategy for higher education until 2030. This strategy, which focused on system development, saw collaboration, locally, regionally, nationally and internationally as being key. The document advocated inter-institutional collaboration across a range of activities such as programme design and provision, access, transfer and progression, research, knowledge transfer, and shared support services. The strategy indicated that it was an immediate priority is to enhance the quality and cost-effectiveness of programmes, through developing shared collaborative provision at under-graduate and post-graduate levels. (HEA, 2011., p.84ff). While recognising the value of retaining diversity within the higher education sector, the Strategy document noted that collaborations and alliances may lead over time to consolidation, which would bring academic and other benefits to the HEIs involved and the wider system. The strategy recognised that Ireland had a significant number of small higher education institutions in receipt of public funding and recommended that these should be consolidated, where appropriate, to promote coherence and sustainability (HEA, 2011, 107-108).

Shortly after the publication of the National Strategy, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) published a paper on its implementation, setting out its vision for higher education in the future and referring to the need to maintain an element of competition in the sector while at the same time encouraging collaboration:

> Competition between institutions, both public and private, is an essential feature of any higher education system. But care needs to be taken that competition does not create unnecessary and wasteful duplication. Elimination of unnecessary duplication of provision, while maintaining capacity to meet future student demand, will be an important part of the HEA's system co-ordination role. The HEA will facilitate and co-ordinate analysis by the relevant institutions of programme and disciplinary offerings to explore on a system basis where unnecessary duplication arises and how rationalisation can be achieved. Regional clusters provide an ideal platform to ensure coherence and comprehensiveness of provision locally and regionally (HEA, 2012, p.9).

The HEA envisaged that regional clusters would develop in an evolutionary and organic way in the years ahead, and that different clusters would develop at different paces and in different ways, according to institutional and regional needs. It emphasised that the purpose of clusters was not to suppress institutional identity and stated that "a major risk that needs to be managed and mitigated will be that the different missions of the institutions within the cluster could, over time, lose their distinctiveness and particular types of provision would be lost from the region" (HEA, 2012, p.22). The HEA was of the view that "It will be essential that this does not take place and that the systems for review and evaluation pay particular regard to this" (p.22). In its correspondence with heads of higher education institutions, the HEA anticipated that smaller institutions would be "consolidated through incorporation into or merger with existing universities, institutes of technology or into technological universities" and that "public funding of these small institutions will not be continued except in circumstances where there are significant reasons of a strategic kind for continuing funding as separate institutions" (HEA, 2012, p.9).

Each higher education institution was asked to make a submission to the HEA setting out its strategic intentions as to where it proposed to position itself in the Irish higher education system in the coming years. Submissions were to cover such areas as the institution's

distinctive mission, its preferred institutional type and structure having regard to current strengths, its institutional alliances and its involvement in regional clusters and any other matters relevant to its future strategic development.

A Review of the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland – April 2012

Six months after the publication of the *National Strategy on Higher Education*, the then Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, requested the HEA to undertake a review of the structure of initial teacher education (ITE) provision in Ireland[4]. The HEA commissioned a team of international teacher education experts, consisting of Pasi Sahlberg, John Furlong and Pamela Munn to undertake this task. At that time, there were 19 publicly-funded teacher education providers in Ireland with over 30 separate teacher education programmes accredited by the Teaching Council for teaching at primary and second levels.

Having met with some of the providers and policy-makers, and having considered the background paper and the issues raised, the Review Panel set out its vision for the future of teacher education as follows:

> By 2030 Ireland will have a network of teacher education institutions based on a small number of internationally comparable institutes of teacher education. Each of these institutes will offer research-based teacher education in internationally inspiring environments, provided at Masters level initially or through continuing professional development. Each will also offer further professional development services on the continuum ranging from early childhood to in-service training of teachers and leaders (Sahlberg et al, 2012, p.24).

The panel reiterated that the key characteristics of internationally recognised teacher education systems included high quality

[4] Letter dated 20th March 2012 from the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn to the HEA.

instruction on both pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge; a strong focus on research as a basis of teaching and learning; a close and systematic engagement with schools; and real internationalisation of the institutions providing initial and continuing teacher education. Experience from other education systems suggested that it would be difficult to have these key characteristics unless the size of teacher education institutions was sufficiently large and had a "critical mass". The report went on to state:

> Therefore, the Review Panel recommends that teacher education should be facilitated in a university setting with systematic links to clinical practice in field schools which provide where possible for the full range of sectoral teacher education, spanning early childhood to adult education. This would facilitate greater synergies between the different levels of education. It would also provide a critical mass for improving capacity for high quality research, the integration of students and staff across a number of disciplines and the promotion of balanced international mobility of students and staff. These require that all teacher education institutions are equipped with full-time staff and rely only when absolutely necessary on part-time personnel (Sahlberg et al, 2012, p.25).

The Review Panel recommended that in order for this vision to be realised, provision by two of the smaller providers should be discontinued and the remaining 17 publicly funded providers should be clustered into six centres of excellence, with initial teacher education located in one setting within each cluster and organised with a title such as "institute of teacher education" or "centre for teacher education". Other issues raised by the Review Panel were the calibre of applicants to ITE programmes and the issue of supply and demand of teachers. As regards the former, the Review Panel recognised that the calibre of school leavers applying to ITE programmes in Ireland was "amongst the highest, if not the highest in the world.[5] The panel indicated that this should be

[5] Successful applicants for undergraduate ITE programmes in 2011were in the top-achieving 12.5% in the Leaving Certificate examination.

maintained, stating that this "rich resource should be highly valued and student teachers should be challenged to their full potential" (Sahlberg et al, 2012, p.19). As regards the supply/demand issue, the panel recommended that a review of teacher supply and demand be undertaken as a matter of urgency.

Review and Revision of the Content of Initial Teacher Education Programme

During this period, the Teaching Council was reviewing the content of teacher education and in 2011 its policy document *on the Continuum of Teacher Education* was published. This policy document envisaged a life-long learning approach to the teaching profession involving initial, induction and in-service education. The Council saw the continuum of teacher education as encompassing "initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development and indeed, late career support, with each stage merging seamlessly into the next and interconnecting in a dynamic way with each of the others" (Teaching Council, 2011a, p.8).

Parallel with the publication of this policy document, the Council published two other documents *Initial Teacher Education, Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Teaching Council, 2011b), and *Strategy for the Review* and *Professional Accreditation of Existing Programmes* (Teaching Council, 2011c) which set a new standard for all initial teacher education programmes. As well as adding an additional year to all ITE programmes, a striking feature of the new approach was the much greater emphasis on partnership and collaboration between the ITE providers and the schools, and an enhanced role beyond teaching practice for student teachers to experience the general life of the school.

Challenges in Implementation

The challenges for ITE providers in meeting the new requirements were very significant. The time frames set by the national policy makers for introducing change were very short. For example, the

Teaching Council informed ITE providers in July 2011 that the new concurrent ITE programmes would have to be in place by the beginning of the academic year 2012/13 and the consecutive programmes by 2014/15. The period in question was one of austerity in the public finances and there was a moratorium in place on the appointment of new staff in all publicly funded institutions.[6] Moreover, the starting salaries of beginning (i.e. newly qualified) teachers (NQTs) was reduced and because of the cutbacks, there were fewer posts available for NQTs. It would appear to be an inauspicious time in which to introduce such a major reform of initial teacher education. On the other hand, the shortage of new posts meant that the system could survive a year when there would be virtually no NQTs, because of the addition of an extra year to ITE programmes. And yet, in spite of the challenges, the proposed reforms – including duration and content of programmes, and the re-structuring of the ITE system - were largely implemented on target.

In a recent book on *Teacher Preparation in Ireland*, its authors summarised the changes faced by ITE providers, as follows:

> The situation was not helped by the issuing of a directive in 2011 that the colleges providing programmes for initial teacher preparation would have to design and develop new programmes, achieve university validation, and secure Teaching Council accreditation, within less than one year. Furthermore, what was already a challenging process was aggravated by the manner in which the changes required were mandated. The initial announcement that they would be taking place was made unexpectedly by the Minister for Education: it was to be found nested within the document on the nation's new literacy and numeracy strategy published back in 2011. This was a major surprise to personnel within the colleges and universities as they had no sense that anything so major was imminent (O'Donoghue et al, 2017, p. 191).

[6] A moratorium on public service appointments had been introduced as one of the conditions of the economic "bail-out" provided by the troika after the collapse of the banking system in Ireland.

The ongoing challenges were recognised by the HEA in its report to the Minister for Education on 17 April 2013, where it stated

> The coming years will probably see a significant level of merger activity in the higher education system. Mergers are envisaged within the institutes of technology sector and some incorporations of smaller colleges and colleges of education into universities are expected. Mergers in higher education are notoriously difficult and can only be driven by mutual recognition that the ultimate outcome will justify the effort and inevitable short-term disruptions. Central authorities must also set the policy parameters and funding mechanism appropriate to spur collaboration, rationalisation and eventual merger where this is a viable and necessary outcome. … Successful mergers need strong leadership and good communications to ensure that they are well managed and that the negotiation and implementation processes stay on course (HEA, 2013, p.18).

As John Coolahan wrote in 2013:

> We are living in a period where a paradigm shift may be afoot in the duration, design, quality and process of teacher education in Ireland …. Following a long gestation, a great deal of change is now being compacted in a short period (Coolahan, 2013, p.9).

Developments in the period 2012 to 2017

Impressive progress was made during the period 2012 to 2017 in reforming both the content and the reconfiguration of ITE programmes. At the time of writing (October 2018) all providers have reformed their ITE programmes to meet the Teaching Council requirements and initial teacher education is now reconfigured into seven institutes or centres. The recommendations of the 2012 *International Review Panel* report have been fully implemented in the case of The Institute of Education, Dublin City University; The School of Education, Maynooth University and The School of Education, University College Cork (UCC). In the case of the NUI Galway/St. Angela's Sligo centre - incorporation is almost complete and senior management teams in both institutions are committed to finalising the incorporation as soon as legal issues are resolved. In Limerick, the four HEIs involved - University of

Limerick (UL), Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) and St.Patrick's Thurles - collaborate on research, CPD and Masters and Doctorate programmes through their National Institute for Studies in Education. As far as ITE is concerned, there are now two sub-clusters in Limerick – MIC and the UL. The combined campuses of MIC and St. Patrick's Thurles offer a full suite of ITE programmes - early childhood, primary and post-primary - all of which are validated by the University of Limerick. Seven km. away, on the north side of the city, UL in collaboration with LIT, provides a range of both concurrent and consecutive programmes for post-primary teachers.

The sixth cluster was to comprise Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Dublin (UCD), the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and Marino Institute of Education (MIE). However, while there are some research collaborations between UCD and TCD, and both institutions have a positive working relationship, both institutions have made it clear that they do not plan to collaborate in the provision of ITE. Their current proposals envisage two separate clusters here – one comprising UCD and NCAD and the other comprising TCD and Marino Institute of Education (MIE).

Factors which contributed to the reform agenda

A number of factors have contributed to the success of what has been the most ambitious reform agenda in initial teacher education since the foundation of the State. Probably the most important among these factors was institutional commitment and leadership. Where implementation was successful, there was clear and sustained commitment by the university and college of education presidents and by the trustees of the colleges involved to engage in the reform and to prioritise and lead the incorporation agenda. The institutions involved in each cluster shared their vision with members of their senior management teams and provided the financial, human and other resources necessary for successful implementation. During the period of the incorporation, considerable time and energy, as well as significant financial

resources, both national and institutional, were deployed to achieve a successful outcome. As well as the academic aspects of incorporation, there were financial, legal and infrastructural challenges involved and human resource and industrial relations issues to be resolved. In clusters where there was a less successful outcome, commitment to incorporation or merger was either not articulated or less clearly articulated by the leaders and senior management. In some cases, there were also changes in the leadership team, either because the term of office of the President and Registrar came to an end or because of the retirement or resignation of a senior member of staff.

Unintended Consequences of Recent ITE Reforms

Fewer applicants for consecutive programmes: While the extension of the duration of teacher education programmes was welcomed when the decision was announced in 2011, it had some unintended consequences, especially in the case of consecutive post-graduate ITE programmes. In the case of post-primary teachers, the additional year has extended their period of study to a minimum of five years (three years' undergraduate followed by a two-year postgraduate ITE programme). Since the duration of a Level 8 (honours) STEM undergraduate degree in all universities and arts, humanities and business degrees in some universities is four years, it now takes six years for graduates of these programmes to qualify as post-primary teachers.

Within a year of the introduction of the reformed ITE programmes, the numbers of STEM applicants for ITE programmes began to fall and in recent years, the fall has been dramatic. Overall, the number of graduates applying for the two-year Professional Masters in Education has more than halved since 2012. This is a matter of great concern to ITE providers and to school management, who are already finding it almost impossible to fill posts in some subject areas. The number of applications has increased somewhat for four and five-year concurrent STEM ITE programmes – which now exist in all centres - but if the current trend continues there is likely to be

a serious shortfall of STEM teachers and teachers in other shortage subjects within a few years.

Cost of Graduate Programmes: Another reason for the reduction in applications for the two-year consecutive ITE programmes is cost. The annual student fee for an undergraduate programme in Ireland is c. €3,000. The fee for a Master's degree is more than €6,000 per annum - so fees alone for the two-year PME cost €12,000. In addition, students have to pay for accommodation and subsistence, as well as for travel and various other costs associated with the programme[7]. During the recession, grants which had previously been available for students taking post-graduate programmes, and who came from low-income families were withdrawn, and while these grants have been partially restored in the recent past, they do not cover all the costs associated with the PME. There is concern that post-primary ITE programmes will only be affordable for students from more financially advantaged families and also that the overall fall in the number of applicants could result in a deterioration in the academic calibre of applicants. If this were to happen, it would be a very unfortunate unintended outcome of the reform agenda.

So far, the academic calibre of students accepted onto concurrent programmes for both primary and post-primary students has remained high, although there is concern that the intake into these programmes is disproportionately skewed from a socio-economic point of view. A special targeted fund, Programme for Access to Higher Education (PATH), has been set up to encourage ITE clusters to set up access programmes for under-represented students (from lower socio-economic and minority ethnic groups) to apply

[7] Since the programme for Medicine is an undergraduate programme – fees for medical programmes are lower than fees for ITE programmes. Moreover, the duration of a medical programme is five years whereas the duration of an ITE programme can now be 6 years, so it costs less in terms of student fees for a student to qualify as a doctor than to qualify as a post-primary teacher.

for ITE programmes, but it is as yet too early to comment on the success or otherwise of this initiative.

Reduction in starting salaries of teachers: The reduction in the starting salary of teachers, introduced during the recession, has meant that teaching is no longer as attractive a profession in Ireland today as it was in the past. Although the salary anomaly between teachers who entered the profession since 2012 and their longer-serving colleagues is currently being addressed, the starting salary of teachers compares less favourably with that of some other professions and with some non-teaching jobs than it did in the past, especially in the private sector. Moreover, the cost of living, especially of accommodation, is so high in some Irish cities (e.g. Dublin) that some NQTs have indicated that they cannot afford to accept teaching posts in these cities. This has resulted in their accepting better paid jobs in industry (especially in the IT sector), or emigrating to take up teaching posts in other countries, e.g. the Middle East, where remuneration and working conditions are more attractive.

Supply and Demand of Teachers: The Striking the Balance Report: The Report of the International Review Panel in 2012 found that there was an increasing reliance on out-of-field teachers in some subject areas at second level, and advised that the supply of and demand for teachers be monitored continuously. The report recommended that "appropriate databases and forecasting mechanisms are developed to ensure that an adequate supply of teachers with the required specialisms are in place" (Sahlberg et al, 2012, pp.19-20).

In this regard it might be mentioned that in the past, what is now referred to as "out-of-field" teaching was common in Ireland, especially in smaller second-level schools outside large centres of population. However, since the setting up of the Teaching Council, teachers are accredited to teach specific subjects and it is generally expected that students will be taught by teachers qualified in that subject. A relatively small school in a sparsely populated area may not have enough posts to employ a full-time teacher for a subject

for which there is only limited demand. That school might be in a position to offer a part-time post of ten hours a week, but the salary for such a post would not provide a living wage for a qualified applicant. Consequently, it is not surprising that schools often find it impossible to attract a qualified teacher to accept a part-time post in a subject such as Physics or a modern European language.

The Future?

The key catalysts for the reform of initial teacher education during the period 2012 to 2017 were the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* issued by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2011, and the 2012 *Report of the International Review Panel* led by Pasi Sahlberg (commonly known as the Sahlberg 1 Report). In 2018, Sahlberg returned to Ireland to review progress on implementing reform, and his report (known as the Sahlberg 2 report) was approved by the Higher Education Authority in June 2018.

The report commended the leadership and staff of all institutions on their commitment to the implementation agenda and on the outcomes achieved. It noted that the structural reform of ITE in Ireland took place at a time of national economic retrenchment while also coinciding with significant reform of ITE programmes following the decision to extend those programmes by an additional year (i.e. an additional 60 ECTS credits).

As regards the 2012 proposal that TCD, UCD, NCAD and Marino Institute of Education be reconfigured as one centre, the Sahlberg 2 report accepted the point made by the four institutions that the logical approach would have been to propose two separate clusters, one made up of TCD and MIE and one made up of UCD and NCAD. In the case of the TCD/MIE cluster, the report noted that MIE is the only provider of ITE which is still directly funded by the Department of Education and Skills and recommended that MIE be brought under the auspices of the HEA like all other ITE providers. It also recommended that research and other collaborations between all four providers in the two clusters should be extended and developed.

As regards Limerick, the report recognised that both MIC and UL (as well as LIT) are committed to working in close collaboration. It recommended that MIC be recognised as a free-standing provider of ITE programmes for early childhood, primary and post-primary teachers and that UL should continue to provide concurrent and consecutive ITE programmes for post-primary teachers and provide academic validation for MIC programmes. It pointed out that the recommended re-configuration in Limerick raises issues relating to consistency of staffing arrangements across the sector which will need to be addressed.

As well as recommending that Ireland should have seven centres of excellence in ITE (as opposed to the six centres recommended in 2012), the report made a number of further recommendations. It stated that in all seven centres, the key strategic focus should be on creating a coherent range of ITE provision from early childhood education to adult and higher education teacher preparation. This should take place by further strengthening research-based approaches to teacher education, quality of pedagogy and instruction throughout various programmes, building coherent linkages between theory and practice and broadening internationalisation of ITE, including both students and academic staff.

It recommended that higher education authorities and other policy makers should aim at creating a self-improving professional ITE system in Ireland where centres of excellence would have more autonomy from the state level central administration and would enhance collaboration with each other. It suggested that the authorities should provide timely and continuous feedback to the centres, especially when there are reasons to publicly recognise good work. It recommended that incentives should be provided to encourage the centres to reach their strategic goals - for example, it suggested that part of the annual spending on CPD could be distributed to the centres through a competitive funding scheme that would seek novel and innovative solutions to further develop the impact of CPD provision.

As regards research-based ITE, while recognising developments since 2012, the report recommended that all centres should make extra efforts to ensure that students understand not just how to read and do research but also how to think as researchers when working in or with schools. It also noted that ITE programmes now place a stronger emphasis on school placement than was the case in 2012, but recognised that difficulties were experienced by some student-teachers in relation to school placement. In view of this, the report recommended that a review of current placement practice be undertaken and based on the findings of that review that necessary changes should be made in policy, funding and practice in order to bring practical elements of ITE closer to the universities. The report also suggested that two or three centres might arrange to have a clinical teacher training school or schools closely integrated into their normal operations. Such a development should be introduced on a pilot basis in the first instance and should include rigorous and ongoing evaluation of the quality of student outcomes.

Other Longer-term Concerns raised by this author

Status of Education Departments in Universities: In the university sector in Ireland, Education Departments traditionally had low status and were often treated as institutional "cash cows" with a large intake of ITE students, very high student-staff ratios and often with poor accommodation. While the situation has improved in some universities in recent decades, the legacy still remains in others. Education as a discipline in many universities has, in the past, compared unfavourably with colleges of education, where education was the *raison d'etre* of the institution. In the case of the centres where the incorporation of colleges of education has been successful, the leadership engaged positively with staff concerns in this regard and showed commitment to supporting parity of esteem and equality of opportunity between college of education staff and their university colleagues. They also took steps to improve the physical facilities of the newly formed Centres or Institutes. It is essential that going forward, leaders of the new centres ensure that such parity of esteem and equality of treatment becomes embedded

in university policy, structures and practice and that the staff of the new centres engage fully in the activities of the university to earn this esteem.

HEA Funding Model: While it is not easy to access data in relation to the historic funding of colleges of education and education departments in universities, there is no doubt (in terms of Euros per student) that colleges of education in the past were more generously funded than most university Education departments. There were complex reasons for this. While the HEA resource allocation model for universities treated education students more generously than (for example) Arts or Humanities students, the weighted grant was not necessarily passed on to the Education Department within the universities' own internal resource allocation model. Colleges of Education in the past received their funding directly from the Department of Education on the basis of an annual budget, and this resulted (in general) in colleges of education being more generously funded per capita than university education departments.

During the recent incorporation negotiations, the HEA agreed to maintain the more generous financial allocation which colleges of education had enjoyed prior to incorporation for a period of five years following incorporation. This five-year guarantee is welcome and was a crucial element in the success of cluster negotiations. Vigilance and strong leadership will be required on the part of the leaders of the new Centres and Institutes to ensure that he discipline of Education does not lose out in the longer term to financial exigencies within the universities.

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