

Initial Teacher Education Policy Statement – Consultative Forum

27th November 2019

Summary of issues raised in submissions to the Department

Introduction

The overall objectives of the Department of Education and Skills' Policy Statement for Initial Teacher Education are to document the current policy and provision for initial teacher education at primary and post-primary to identify strengths and potential weaknesses within current provision and potential actions to strengthen future policy and provision in this important area.

In pursuit of these objectives the Department has embarked on a comprehensive process of engagement and consultation with all relevant and interested stakeholders. A Steering Committee involving representatives from relevant sections of the Department, the HEA and Teaching Council has been set up to oversee and guide the Department's work.

The process to date has included informal consultation meetings with all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) providing primary and post-primary ITE.

The Department invited and received submissions from all of the providers of primary and post-primary ITE, as well as from the Teaching Council, Higher Education Authority, relevant sections of the Department and the Teacher Education and Teacher Educators Forum. These submissions covered a range of themes. For the purpose of this Consultative Forum, the themes have been further consolidated into five areas:

- 1. Students**
- 2. Quality**
- 3. Teacher Educators**
- 4. Schools and school placement**
- 5. Landscape and collaboration.**

The findings from the consultation process, as well as policy reports on the area show that there is much to celebrate in the commitment of and collaboration between those who are involved in initial teacher education to producing high quality teaching graduates.

The following pages give a brief summary of the submissions which have been received, across the many areas of common interest. For each topic covered, we have attempted to give a sense of those themes and how often they arose in the submissions received. The summary is presented to the consultative forum to inform delegates of the issues of concern or interest identified by contributors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the authors of the summary nor should they be relied on as wholly complete records of submissions. They are the best efforts of the Department to indicate, with some explanation, where needed, the issues raised.

A number of issues were raised under the headings of different themes. For convenience we have tried, where possible, to link issues to each of the themes as they were presented. This means that in some cases points may be repeated under different headings.

Theme 1 - Students

The submissions received from HEIs largely focused on a comparison between the various models of ITE that they offer, with support for those that their particular institution offers.

- **ITE Entry Routes.** Most submissions indicated support for the continuation of both concurrent and consecutive entry routes to ITE, with both felt to have different strengths.
- **Concurrent models.** Several submissions highlighted the benefits of concurrent models due to: depth of treatment of the subject matter; lower cost to students; more efficient route towards qualification. Some submissions questioned the 4 year “two subject” concurrent model at post-primary as trying to fit too much into a short space of time. The point was made that the PME primary should be recognised as a permanent feature of the system, although it was also noted that the intake to the PME has changed in recent years and it may be seen by some students who did not get the CAO points for primary as a second chance to take up primary teaching
- **Consecutive models.** Several submissions suggested that the consecutive (PME) model has value, in the extra time with student teachers, compared to the previous H.Dip., and this also came through in the informal consultations. Most, however, also noted that the lengthening of the PME and the associated increased costs for students mean that, while they support the idea of the Masters level qualification, they have seen these issues leading to a reduction in numbers taking on the PME, in particular at post-primary, and has led to a lack of diversity on the PME in particular. A number of submissions argued that there needs to be increased flexibility in relation to consecutive models, to facilitate those changing career, especially in areas of shortage.
- **Hybrid models.** A question was raised about the cost-effectiveness of the hybrid model, both to students and the State. The point was also made that students in their fifth year of this (4+1) programme are not eligible for support from the SUSI grant, under the same terms as undergraduate students.
- **Cost and Diversity.** The majority of the submissions from HEIs raised issues surrounding the cost of ITE for students, particularly for students undertaking the PME. Several submissions outlined the knock-on impact of the cost issue, for example reduction in applications, particularly from mature students and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds leading to an overall lack of diversity in ITE. A majority of the HEIs also suggested that additional financial support for students is needed including for example, extension of the terms of the SUSI grant to cover the 5th year of a hybrid model; the final school placement to be a paid internship programme linked with *Droichead*; fee waivers or extra supports; increased funding to support diversity through expansion of PATH and Migrant Teacher Programmes.
- **Level of qualification of graduates.** Some written submissions explicitly supported the introduction of Masters Level qualification for all. Some other submissions felt that this needs further consideration, especially in relation to the impact of the Level 8 compared to Level 9 qualifications in the system.
- **Attractiveness of the teaching profession.** Some HEIs also raised the issue of the lack of employment prospects on graduation, the difficulty in finding full-time employment at post-primary (in particular for NQTs with one subject) and different pay scales for new entrants as impacting on the overall attractiveness of teaching. One submission indicated that students are more likely to divert to other areas that offer better career prospects, particularly in STEM. The observation was made that expanding the numbers on concurrent post-primary programmes could lead to lower CAO points and reduce the status of the profession.

Theme 2 - Quality

All discussions with and submissions from providers highlighted commitment of all to quality initial teacher education, as evidenced by adherence to the Teaching Council's requirements under its *Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* confirmed through the accreditation process. Quality teacher education being, of course, a critical contributor to quality teaching and learning for all pupils in every classroom. This section emphasises features of quality not covered within the other 4 themes

- **Quality assurance of ITE.** Many submissions outlined the quality assurance measures which are in place within HEIs (academic accreditation, external examiners etc), in addition to the Teaching Council accreditation of providers, and felt that these need to be better recognised by the system.
- **Entry Requirements.** Many of the submissions support the maintenance of high standards of entry to ITE. A number of submissions specifically referred to the challenge of ensuring diversity in the teaching profession, in the context of minimum entry standards. Some HEIs outlined additional core requirements in place at HEI-level for primary and post-primary. The point was made the minimum requirements alone do not ensure that the teachers have a sufficient grasp of the core concepts relating to these subjects in order to effectively implement the principles underlying the Primary Curriculum. It was also noted that the providers have also introduced their own requirements, in some cases. At primary, some providers require the Teastas Europach na Gaeilge and others have introduced the H4 early. At post-primary, some providers also have extra requirements, e.g. H3 in language subject.
- **'Initial' Teacher Education.** Several submissions highlighted the fact that ITE is just one step on the teacher education continuum. Some submissions suggested that a set of "beginning competences" should be set down, differentiated from established teacher competences. The point was made that certain basic content knowledge needs to be assured by graduation from ITE or teacher quality will suffer.
- **ITE responsiveness to curricular and policy change.** Several submissions noted that ITE's capacity to respond to policy change can be hindered by staff levels and the complexity around programme accreditation (e.g. ECTS requirements) or change. The observation was made that better collaboration could help with this challenge. Some submissions indicated that there may be gaps in some areas that need further attention, for example, in ensuring that student teachers are familiar with learning outcomes based curriculum; with School Self-Evaluation and the *Looking at our School* Quality Framework, and with curriculum reform. (Support for teacher educators is dealt with under 'teacher educators').
- **ITE support for inclusive education.** Some submissions noted that, in the context of the current lack of diversity among student teachers, there is a real need to ensure that student teachers are prepared to teach in diverse contexts (e.g. areas of disadvantage and Special Needs Classes and schools). It was also noted that student teachers need to be able to respond to increasingly diverse classrooms and ensuring teachers have the emerging competencies to respond to diversity remains critical.
- **Post-primary curricular subject requirements.** Some HEIs raised the issue of the Teaching Council's post-primary subject requirements in particular areas, which can be challenging to meet, especially for graduates of a high-level degree in specific subjects and for international students.

Theme 3 - Teacher educators

A conference under Ireland's Presidency of the EU 2013 on teacher educators adopted the view that there is a continuum of teacher educators, and that all those who teach teachers can be seen as teacher educators. The submissions received show a cohort of teacher educators in ITE that are research active, with increasing levels of qualification. This cohort includes a mix of those with academic expertise in subject disciplines; teacher education academic expertise; research expertise and those with a teaching qualification.

- **Teacher Educator Qualifications and Experience.** The majority of submissions emphasise the importance of student teachers experiencing educators with a mix of academic and professional expertise, which can help to ensure student teachers are exposed to a plurality of ideas and disciplinary diversity. Several submissions referred to the teacher educator "profession" and submitted that this needs to be teased out further, as there are currently no specific qualifications required or no clear career path to become a teacher educator. There were a range of views relating to the balance between teaching experience and academic research, and how both are valued within HEIs.
- **Respective roles of teacher educators in HEIs and practising teachers supporting ITE.** Some submissions addressed respective roles of teacher educators in HEIs and practising teachers in ITE. There were differing views on the respective roles and potential for overlap. It was also noted that practicing teachers have a lot to bring to ITE and that there would be value in increased mobility and collaboration between teachers and teacher educators, for example, by seconding teachers into ITE.
- **Responsibilities of Teacher Educators in HEIs.** Many submissions explored issues related to the heavy workload of teacher educators within HEIs, especially because of their role in school placement. Several submissions also noted the challenge for ITE in having high number of part-time staff (typically placement tutors or part-time lecturers), which can pose risks to consistent quality.
- **Professional learning for teacher educators.** Several submissions indicated that teacher educators need a national programme of professional learning / CPD supports, including: mentoring supports for new teacher educators, communities of collaborative enquiry centred on improving their teaching practice, and integrating new evidence and models on teaching and learning, a national network and/or a national conference, overseen by a national agency for teacher education. Areas mentioned for focus included helping them to stay up to date with curriculum and policy developments, which can be a challenge, as well as working with parents. Some submissions made the point that funding should be provided to enable HEIs to provide CPD for schools, that would link teacher educators and cooperating teachers in schools.

Theme 4 - Schools and school placement

All submissions recognised the importance of school placement within ITE, as the fulcrum of the continuum of teacher education, while recognising challenges within the current model. The information provided also shows a variation across the different models of school placement, in HEIs which include different arrangements with schools, different placement durations, and different approaches to sourcing placement.

- **School placement policy.** Most submissions felt that a policy conversation around school placement is needed, to deal with issues of placement availability/supply, sustainability and ensuring quality across the board. It was noted that the work of the Teaching Council's School Placement Working Group may help with this. That there is no requirement for schools to take students on placement, was referred to by several submissions. Some suggested that all schools should be mandated to accept students on placement; others did not. The challenge from the schools' perspective, was also noted – for example, at Junior Cycle, student teachers' placements may overlap with Classroom Based Assessments. The point was also made that securing school placement may be a particular challenge for students from more diverse groups in ITE.
- **Support for cooperating teachers.** The majority of submissions felt that a model of support for cooperating teachers is needed. Several suggested a national model of support; some specifically envisaged this as being provided by the HEIs. A number of submissions referred to the need to align cooperating teachers with members of the Professional Support Team in *Droichead*. The point was raised that cooperating teachers with appropriate support could potentially have a role in evaluation of student teachers. It was also submitted that cooperating teachers' work should be recognised under *Cosán*. The point was also made that the quality of the cooperating teacher on placement is critical, for example a cooperating teacher who is up to speed with new reforms or quality inclusive education can have a positive impact; it would not be appropriate for NQTs to be cooperating teachers.
- **Opportunity for collaboration.** Many submissions pointed to the benefits of collaboration between cooperating teachers, HEIs and students on placement, for example, where a student teacher carries out research as part of his/her placement or where all engage in a collaborative professional learning experience. It was noted that this could alleviate some concerns expressed by parents about schools accepting students on placement.
- **Pressures on students around placement.** Several HEIs noted the costs to students on placement and suggested that there should be supports in place. The issue of students being put under pressure by schools to carry out substitution work was raised by several of the HEIs in their submissions.
- **Recognition of schools.** Several submissions indicated that the Department could do more to recognise schools that engage with school placement, for example through leadership posts or recognition in Inspection reports (the latter already being the case).
- **Placement tutors.** Few submissions from HEIs gave explicit consideration to the role of placement tutors. However, it was noted that there may be scope to coordinate placement tutors across different institutions' placements and that ensuring tutors are up to date on curricular developments is as important as for other teacher educators.
- **International placements.** The point was made in several submissions that there should be an option to introduce an Erasmus-type international placement for ITE students that would count towards their school placement.
- **E-portfolios.** The use of e-portfolios by student teachers, to facilitate ongoing learning that could be taken forward into *Droichead* and *Cosán*, is recommended in several HEI submissions.

Theme 5 - Landscape / Collaboration.

The development of the policy statement has involved collaboration with many of the key stakeholders in ITE. The main points raised are outlined here.

- **Teacher supply impact.** Many of the submissions raised the issue of teacher supply and the need to develop a national strategy in this area to address the needs of the system (not just more places by providers). Many of the submissions identified the ways that they have been seeking to respond to teacher supply needs, especially at post-primary. Some submissions did make the point that there are constraints on how quickly ITE can respond to system needs, and this needs to be recognised. Several submissions called for more action from the Department to encourage teaching as a career option in areas of identified need. The point was made that over-supply could also become an issue, in time. Many of the HEIs also raised the need to provide more flexible models of entry to ITE, and upskilling in particular subject areas (for post-primary) in order to meet the particular demands for teachers from the system. Some of the HEIs raised in their submissions the issue of the Department only capping the numbers for the Primary, State – funded ITE providers only.
- **Funding model for ITE.** Many submissions dealt with the funding of ITE, within higher education, and the need for HEIs and the HEA funding model to recognise the specific requirements of ITE that are not required of other areas, to meet Teaching Council accreditation requirements and to prepare students as research practitioners. The impact of the many requirements on teacher educators was noted (dealt with above). Several submissions suggested that there should be funding for research on ITE specifically. All submissions envisaged a role for HEIs in providing CPD and most suggested that funding should be available to this end.
- **Research funding.** Many HEIs raised the issue of the focus within Universities on attracting research funding, and as ITE has no dedicated research funding it is at a potential disadvantage within a university setting compared to other schools/areas. It was suggested therefore that a specific funding model for research in ITE should be considered. Some also suggested that a research strategy for ITE should be developed. This would help raise the status and profile of educational research particularly in ITE.
- **Collaboration within HEIs.** The collaboration within HEIs is emphasised in all of the submissions received. The practicalities of this collaboration vary across HEIs. In some cases, the collaboration focuses on staff linkages. In others, it also includes student-student linkages. It was noted that the staff linkages are more easily facilitated than those between students. There are different arrangements in place to facilitate this collaboration. In some cases, it is focused on specific projects. In others, there has been a realignment so that different strands of education are together within research centres.
- **University led ITE.** Several submissions highlighted the benefits of university-led ITE, as a place to prepare teaching professionals through a repertoire of well-grounded strategies and ways of thinking that can be applied in fluid, flexible ways, as opposed to preparation predominantly focused on the more technical aspects of teaching.
- **Collaboration across the continuum.** Some submissions referred to examples of collaboration across the continuum of teacher education, early years, primary, post-primary to further and higher education, however, in general, there was little detail given about how this happens. The point was made that the principles of good teaching apply across the continuum and it was suggested that there should be incentives to encourage and promote system-wide collaboration. It was also noted that each sector has specific requirements, noting, in particular, some confusion caused by student teachers being able to register under the Further Education Teacher route.
- **Collaboration and support from national level.** Many HEIs spoke of the need for more cohesive collaboration at a national level, particularly between the Department, the HEA and the Teaching Council and also with the support services. It was suggested that there is scope for improved alignment across current policies for ITE, *Droichead* and *Cosán*. It was also noted that the cohesion can take practical formats, e.g. ensuring all ITEs are invited to appropriate Department events or have access to information on changes, which can help ensure that no student teacher leaves ITE without being up to date on current policy and reform.
- **Internationalisation.** The majority of submissions raised the difficulties around internationalisation, in ITE as currently configured. Although most outlined projects with which they are currently involved, it was submitted that this could be expanded upon. It was noted that

the European Commission target is for 20% of all graduates to have international experience as part of their degree.

- **Need for evidence.** Many submissions expressed support for projects that would improve the evidence available to the system. Such projects could involve collaboration between institutions and with the Department, Teaching Council, Support Services etc. The point was made that any survey instrument on ITE should not be used for comparison between institutions.
- **Student voice.** The point was made in some submissions that student voice needs greater prominence in national dialogue.