

## **The professional place of teachers on the island of Ireland: *Truth flourishes where the student's lamp has shone***

### **ABSTRACT**

It is timely to pause as we reach the centenary of the creation of the contested border which divides Ireland and the advent of Brexit to examine teacher education across the island, revealing intersecting contrasts and similarities which reflect both common origins and increasing divergences. The relatively high esteem of both scholarship and of the teaching profession embraces important common strengths - the student's lamp shines brightly across the island, a full century after Yeats penned the words in the title of this article. Recent reviews of teacher education provision on each side of the border, conducted by overlapping international panels, have produced quite similar recommendations but markedly contrasting outcomes. The article concludes by contrasting the recent trajectories of policy and practice for the teaching profession across the island and identifying key challenges for the next century.

KEYWORDS: Teacher professionalism, Ireland, Northern Ireland

### **INTRODUCTION**

The authors have each co-authored recent books on the histories of teacher preparation in their respective sections of this divided island (O'Donoghue, Harford and O'Doherty, 2017; Farren, Clarke and O'Doherty, 2019) in advance of the centenary of the partition of the island into Northern Ireland (NI, part of the United Kingdom) and the independent Republic of Ireland (RoI) and the likely advent of Brexit where the former will be outside the EU and the latter will remain a member. It is important to note that NI is much smaller than the RoI and is a tiny fraction of the UK, having roughly 30 percent of the population of the Island and 3 percent of that of the UK. Since partition, in May 1921, teacher education in both parts of the island has gradually diverged with Northern Ireland borrowing policies and practice from other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland striking out on its own path within the orbit of the European Union of which it is a member. Northern Ireland has not borrowed the many policy changes which have occurred in England on the introduction of a more diverse range of routes of entry into teacher education. In the Republic of Ireland there has been both convergence with course provision in other EU countries in a move to a two year masters Level provision, and a divergence, with the largest provider of primary level teacher education, Hibernia College, offering most of its teaching online and within the private sector.

Nonetheless, considerable similarities also remain and continue to emerge. Cross-border cooperation around research in teacher education has emerged as a distinctive strength through the work of the unique Standing Conference for the Education of Teachers North

and South, SCoTENS. The paper seeks to examine convergences, divergences and collaborations in policy and practice on each side of this contested border. The paper will begin with an overview of teacher professionalism in the Republic of Ireland followed by subsections which focus on key elements of provision : teacher professional development, recent reviews of teacher education and their outcomes, research literacy and capacity, and key challenges. This is followed by an analogous analysis for Northern Ireland. The discussion and conclusion will draw contrasts and comparisons whilst also highlighting key similarities and looking towards future developments in policy, practice and professionalism.

## **REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

Teaching in the Republic of Ireland remains a profession of choice, attracting highly qualified candidates who elect to teach. There are two models of teacher education– concurrent and consecutive. The concurrent model, which comprises a four-year programme, 240 ECTS in a higher education institution had traditionally been the dominant format in primary level teacher education, while the consecutive model, moved from a one year to a two-year, 120 ECTS Master’s programme as the dominant route for post-primary teaching. However, the advent of Hibernia College, a commercial on-line provider of ITE, has changed this landscape quite decidedly. Hibernia is now the largest provider of ITE (primary level) in Ireland, graduating more than one-third of all primary level teachers in 2019 (Teaching Council, 2018, 13) and more than 50% of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are now coming through a postgraduate route. While student numbers in state-funded programmes are tightly controlled, Hibernia College has the capacity to recruit unlimited numbers of students in response to market demands. Aligned with demographic changes which illustrate a sharp decrease in primary-level enrolments in the near future, and the uncapped capacity of one provider, it is anticipated that Ireland will have an oversupply of primary teachers in the very near future, with a potential negative impact on the quality of candidates. At secondary level, however, there is a shortage of teachers in some subjects, particularly STEM, modern languages, home economics and Irish and the unattractiveness of secondary teaching as a career for prospective candidates has been exacerbated by doubling in length (and fees) for the postgraduate route (Teaching Council 2018, 2).

Unlike many other jurisdictions, teachers in Ireland are represented by strong teacher unions, with significant lobbying power (Walsh 1999). Accredited with contributing to the burgeoning economy that was termed ‘the Celtic Tiger’, teachers’ salaries increased during the 1990s, and despite the later cuts during a period of intense austerity (2009-2016), these remain relatively high by international standards (OECD, 2018) and teaching continues to be perceived as a valued and trusted career within Irish society.

Despite the public valuing of teachers, the work of the teacher and of teacher education during the 1990s remained relatively obscure, determined by the universities and the churches, subject to little external review, and operating in a policy vacuum. The OECD (1991) *Review of National Education Policies: Ireland*, while recognising the high quality of teaching and teacher education, pointed to the absence of a comprehensive policy for the latter, the lack of an induction process for beginning teachers, and the optional nature of

continuing professional development (CPD). It stressed the potential that existed to develop the concept of teaching as a career, and it recommended that a statutory 'national council' be established to oversee the professionalization of teaching (OECD 1991, 98). Although this OECD review received little attention at the time, it was 'highly influential' in creating the agenda for reform that followed (Coolahan 2007, 9).

The 1990s proved to be a decade of immense change in Irish society; the role and power of the Irish Roman Catholic Church diminished in light of the many sexual abuse scandals and growing secularization, while pressure was applied to the education system to modernize in order to boost Ireland's position within the knowledge economy. Ireland's education curriculum, policies and structures had remained largely unchanged for decades, and the 1990s developed as a period of unparalleled appraisal, consultation and policy formation (Coolahan 2007). In line with the OECD recommendation that reform was 'only feasible through discreet negotiations and an unspoken search for consensus' (OECD 1991, 38), a number of public and consultative fora on the future of Irish education were convened, paving the way for the introduction of a raft of educational legislation. In a system which had largely functioned in the absence of legislation, the only previous education statute being the Vocational Education Act (1930), the passing of the Education Act (1998) represented a significant development for education in the Republic of Ireland.

The Act addressed the provision of primary and post-primary education and identified the need for teachers' ongoing development, in response to a more inclusive and diverse education system. It outlined how the efficiency and effectiveness of schools, including the quality of teaching would be assessed, and in recognition of the importance of teachers' in-career development, education centres were put on a statutory footing. Established in 1972, these centres, initially called 'teachers' centres', were to become an integral part of the infrastructure to support curriculum reform and teachers' professional development. There was an increasing awareness that the quality of an education system pivoted on the quality of the teachers, and 'influenced by the European Commission's work on teacher education' (Sahlberg et al. 2012, 14), the improvement of teacher quality and teacher education became a priority for the state. The Teaching Council Act (2001) provided the framework for the review and accreditation of teacher education programmes, the induction and probation of teachers, as well as for their continuous education, training and professional development. Reflective of the work of the General Teaching Council of Northern Ireland (GTCNI), established in 1998, the Act was aligned with the internationally focused *Teachers Matter* (2004), and the *Common European Principles for Teacher Competence and Qualifications* (2005). The Council, formally established in 2006, radically changed the landscape of teacher education and professional development in Ireland. From its inception, teachers were required to register with the Council, pay an annual fee for registration, and accept the values and code of professional conduct for teachers. Teachers must hold professional qualifications to secure registration, and only registered teachers can be employed in Irish schools. From the outset, the Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (2007) identified that teachers should take personal responsibility for sustaining

and improving the quality of their professional practice by actively maintaining their professional knowledge, by reflecting on and critically evaluating their professional practice, and by availing of opportunities for career-long professional development.

The Council also has responsibility for assuring the quality of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs (Teaching Council, 2011). While previously teacher education providers had exercised total autonomy in the design and delivery of their programs, the introduction of a regulator who would assess and accredit these according to published criteria created new challenges. The introduction of peer review and quality assurance processes generated additional demands for ITE providers. The Council recognized the need to take a 'fresh and thorough look at teacher education, to ensure that tomorrow's teachers are competent to meet the challenges that they face and are life-long learners' (Teaching Council 2011a, 6). Almost synchronously, in a response to the poor performance of Irish teenagers in PISA, the Department of Education and Science (2011) launched its new policy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and for Life*, which included specific reference to initial teacher education. The policy contained the announcement that the duration of initial teacher programs was to be extended, and that three-year BEd programs were to be extended by one year, while the postgraduate entry routes to teaching were also extended to two-year programs at master's level, bringing the Republic of Ireland closer to achieving this qualification for all teachers. To comply with the policy and the new guidelines for accreditation, programs were reconceptualized, and there was a shift from the university-led teaching practice, to 'school placement', where student teachers would spend longer periods in schools. While the extended placement experience, which incorporates aspects of professional development in addition to direct teaching, has become a feature of ITE programs, the level of partnership and sharing of professional responsibility for placement between colleges and schools which the Council had envisioned has yet to materialize.

### ***Teacher Professional Development***

In its overview of Irish education in 1991, the OECD had critiqued the lack of an induction process for NQTs; while primary level teachers completed a two-year probation period which included an assessment of the neophyte teacher's teaching capacity by a Department inspector before the NQT got full recognition as a qualified teacher, at second-level beginning teachers' suitability to teach was a matter for the principal of the school in which they worked. In neither setting was the NQT supported in a structured manner nor were the first year or years of a teacher's professional career recognized as a significant phase in their growth and development. An induction programme was introduced in 2002, when ITE providers and teacher unions collaborated to establish a national pilot programme on teacher induction. This pilot project was adopted by the Department of Education and continued to be offered on a partnership basis by the teacher unions, the higher education providers and schools until 2012. The project had trialled and researched a number of approaches to induction during its first decade and identified the importance of an experienced mentor supporting the newly qualified teacher, within a whole-school approach. During this time, the induction program ran in parallel with the established

probation processes, and the Department of Education inspectors continued to assess the teachers within the program in advance of their full recognition as a teacher.

The Teaching Council's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (2011a), which was the foundation document for the reform of ITE, also charted the future direction of the induction and in-career development of teachers. The Council adopted and built on the experience of the project and from 2010 operated a voluntary National Induction Programme for Teachers. The initial attempts to establish a single/common induction process for primary and post-primary teachers met with opposition from the teachers' unions. Following extensive consultation, the Teaching Council piloted a single model of school-based induction and probation for all beginning teachers during the period 2013-2015. As part of this pilot initiative, called Droichead (the Irish word for 'bridge'), beginning teachers participated in a minimum of 20 hours of professional development workshops and were supported by a school-based professional support team, comprising experienced teachers, including a principal and mentor, who observed and provided feedback to the beginning teacher during the induction process. Initially, the professional support team had the dual role of assisting and assessing the beginning teacher, replacing the role of the Department inspector. However, Droichead has evolved in recent years, to become a non-evaluative professional induction process, where neither principals, school colleagues nor external school colleagues evaluate the beginning teachers for registration purposes. Rather, at the conclusion of the in-school support of the teacher, both the NQT and the professional support team declare jointly that they have engaged in a quality teaching and learning process. Droichead is still being rolled out in Irish schools and will become compulsory for all beginning teachers in 2020-2021.

The Teaching Council has also been involved in generating *Cosán* (the Irish for 'pathway'), a *National Framework for Teachers' Learning* (2016). Recognizing that teachers are autonomous professionals, committed to their continued professional development and life-long learning, *Cosán* is a framework which allows them to record their engagement in a learning process which has had an impact on their teaching. Activities such as engaging in professional conversations, team teaching with a colleague, reading a research article, mentoring and coaching, or attending a professional learning event are all eligible for inclusion. The Council encourages teachers to develop a personal learning portfolio to document their learning over time, but this is not a requirement. Engagement with the framework is a voluntary activity and teachers are not required to share their portfolio with the Teaching Council, and engagement in CPD is not mandatory. Nonetheless, teachers engage in significant levels of professional development and the Council hosts an annual Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence, titled *Féilte*, where teachers share their learning with peers and the wider public. Established in 2012, *Féilte* has expanded to become one of the largest gatherings of teachers in Ireland, providing a platform for teachers to share with others the innovations in learning that they are leading. The Council promotes a culture of shared learning in which research is encouraged and applied within

the classroom setting, and its research policy, Croí (Collaboration and Research for Ongoing Innovation), is promoted through webinars, e-zines and 'Research Alive' events.

While the Teaching Council develops the overarching policies in relation to teachers' professional development, the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) working through a range of agencies, designs, funds and organizes most of the professional development programs provided for them. Established under the auspices of the DES, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), set up in September 2010, provides a generic, integrated and cross-sectoral support service for schools. The PDST assumed responsibility for delivering programmes previously delivered by a number of distinct services including the Primary Professional Development Service, the Second-Level Support Service, the Leadership Development Service, the School Development Planning Service, the Leaving Certificate Applied Service, the Transition Year Service, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme Service, the Reading Recovery Service, the Mathematics Recovery Service, An tSeirbhís Tacaíochta Dara Leibhéal don Ghaeilge, the National Centre for Technology in Education, the Junior Cycle Physical Education Service, and the Social Personal and Health Education Support Service. The fragmented nature of teacher professional development has now been streamlined into one organization, funded directly by the DES, and is now Ireland's largest single support service offering professional learning opportunities to teachers and school leaders.

Recognizing the need to develop and support teachers who aspire to become principals or who were already principals, the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) was established in 2015. This is a collaborative venture between the Irish Primary Principals Network, the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals (second-level), and the Department of Education and Skills. The CSL seeks to provide a continuum of support for school leaders, overseeing professional development programmes for aspiring leaders, the induction and mentoring of newly appointed principals, as well as providing continuing professional development for all principals. The CSL trains mentors, facilitates one-to-one coaching for principals, establishes leadership clusters and has established a postgraduate diploma in leadership in association with a cluster of higher education institutions, led by the University of Limerick. In recognition of the myriad of leadership programs that are now available to principals from varying sources, and in an effort to provide coherence and quality assurance to principals when selecting programs, the CSL now assesses and endorses those being offered by providers.

### ***Reviews of ITE***

While teacher education programmes were being reformed, the structure and provision of teacher education itself was also under review. In light of the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* (2011) the fragmented provision of initial teacher education was the focus of critique by an international panel chaired by Professor Pasi Sahlberg in 2012. At that stage, there were 19 State-funded providers of initial teacher education, offering more than 40 programs. In its findings, the panel expressed the ambition that teacher education would be 'research-based ... in internationally inspiring environments' (Sahlberg et al. 2012, 24.).

The panel identified the key characteristics of internationally recognized teacher education, among them being the expectation that programs would have a strong focus on research as a basis of teaching and learning. The panel advised that these characteristics could not be achieved within small institutions, as the absence of critical mass would limit the capacity of providers to engage in high quality research. To achieve the goal of providing internationally inspiring teacher education provision, the panel recommended that two smaller institutions should be discontinued, while other providers should be merged/incorporated into six centres of excellence. The recommendations of the Sahlberg report were accepted in their entirety by the DES, and the consolidation process has been progressing since 2012. In an evaluation of the restructuring of Irish teacher education provision, *The Structure of Teacher Education in Ireland: Review of Progress in Implementing Reform*, published in 2019, recognized the steps taken by all centres of teaching excellence to collaborate and to attain the shared commitment of the reform agenda. However, Sahlberg noted the high standard of student research, but he acknowledged that not all ITE students shared an understanding of the value of a research approach to their future lives as teachers. As a consequence, the review has recommended that research-based approaches to ITE be further strengthened and enhanced.

On its establishment in 2006, the Teaching Council began to commission research and position papers that would inform its thinking on policy generation. It was clear that the Council wished to invite researchers to gather data and review literature to guide the process of policy development. Through this process, the Council has generated Irish-specific research on teaching and teacher education. It also works to promote education research for and by teachers through the promotion of the CROÍ Research Series (Collaboration and Research for Ongoing Innovation). The Council specifically promotes practitioner, enquiry-based research which has an impact in classroom settings. On a competitive basis, the Council has funded seventy-five research projects since 2016, under the auspices of the John Coolahan Research Bursaries scheme.

The promotion of education research and the belief that teachers and teacher educators should be research active, was core to the establishment of the Education Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) in 1975. The ESAI is the professional association for educators and especially teacher educators, holds an annual research conference to showcase the work of Irish and international researchers, and since 1981 has published *Irish Educational Studies*, which is now an international, refereed journal.

### ***Research literacy and capacity***

The promotion of research literacy and capacity has also been a core ambition of the reconceptualized programs, where student teachers would develop ‘as researchers and lifelong learners’ (Teaching Council 2011b, 14). Since 2012, the concept of ‘teacher as researcher’ and enquiry-based learning have been embraced on all programs. Developing students’ research skills forms an integral part of all modules, and the Teachers’ Research Exchange (T-Rex project) is one example of where ITE providers create an online community of practice for educational research in Ireland. This platform enables pre-service teachers

and their lecturers to connect with working teachers, and in partnership to conduct authentic research as part of campus-based modules. All student teachers complete either undergraduate dissertations or master's theses and in many instances universities/colleges support these students to gain both experience in publishing and editing their research. The Student Teacher Education Research Journal (STER, [www.ster.ie](http://www.ster.ie)) provides one example of the quality and capacity of pre-service teacher education research.

### **Challenges**

It is clear that the Teaching Council has been a driving force for change in Irish education since its establishment in 2006. Dominated by teachers, the Council has had a dramatic impact on every aspect of the teaching profession. Its work in identifying and developing the continuum of teaching across the career cycle, from initial teacher education, to induction, in-career and continuing education, has led to the initiation of a wider range of policies to support teachers' professional development. The work of the Council has brought coherence and structure to what was in essence a fragmented and disparate provision of teacher education. It is clear that, following an extended period of consultation and deliberation in the 1990s and the introduction of a legislative framework in the 2000s, that the DES has choreographed a paradigm shift in teacher education. While rooted in these earlier periods of debate, discussion and consultation, within the last decade, Irish teacher education and the concept of teacher professionalism have been transformed. The rate and pace of change has been challenging as the reform has been multifaceted and implemented during a period of economic retrenchment.

The Council, while having a membership in excess of 98,000 teachers and being governed by a board comprised predominantly of teachers, does not have access to, or authority over, the resources to support the policies they develop; control over resources is maintained by the Teacher Education Section of the DES. While the Council has developed a rich tapestry of policies and procedures particularly in respect of initial teacher education, it does not disburse the resources required to implement the reforms required. In a context where funding for higher education had contracted significantly in recent years, the disconnect between policy and resourcing is a significant challenge for initial teacher education in particular.

The merger and integration of smaller colleges of education into larger higher education institutions has delivered a predominantly 'universitized' system of initial teacher education. The resultant loss of diversity within teacher education is one aspect which has yet to be researched. There are now only two denominational providers of ITE, while all other colleges have been incorporated into the civic universities. Within the universities, the potential emergence of a cleavage between the teacher educators who predominantly undertake research and those teacher educators who engage in school placement supervision and have heavy teaching loads, will also pose significant challenges to teacher education.



## NORTHERN IRELAND

Teaching is also a highly esteemed profession in Northern Ireland. Crucially, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (not ITT, Initial Teacher Training as in England) is university-led and relies on *voluntary professional partnerships* (SICI, 1998) with schools which provide school experience placements for student (not trainee) teachers. Courses are of two kinds – undergraduate, four-year, Bachelor of Education (BEd) courses for teachers in primary schools, are offered by the University Colleges, (affiliated, but geographically separate from, to Queens University in Belfast) St Mary’s and Stranmillis, and the one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is mainly offered by the two local universities, Queens’ University Belfast and Ulster University. The PGCE provision is (curriculum) subject-based with subjects shared out between the two universities and only PGCE English being offered in both. Ulster University offers the only primary level PGCE provision. Although many of these courses are oversubscribed with highly qualified applicants, the numbers of places (quotas) are controlled by the Department for the Economy. There are no school-based teacher education courses, no private sector providers (albeit universities are increasingly commercial in nature in the UK), no Teach First type provision and no government teacher education bursaries. Northern Irish universities will charge up to £4,275 for home students and may charge up to £9,250 for students from elsewhere in the UK, and universities in England charge up to £9,250, compared to €3000 in the Republic of Ireland. There are no longer any part-time ITE courses in Northern Ireland – the Open University withdrew the only part-time provision from Northern Ireland in 2015 as it had done across the rest of the UK, in response to the rapid proliferation of school-based routes into teaching in England. Upon graduation from these BEd and PGCE courses, it is possible to seek registration as a teacher from the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), although in recent years many more of those registering in recent years undertook their initial teacher education outside Northern Ireland. GTCNI was created in 1998 as the professional body for teachers. Its key policy level contribution to date has been the development of the teacher competences which are framed as *Teaching: The Reflective Profession* (GTCNI 2007) and which form the basis of ITE within all providers. GTCNI is not yet independent of the Department of Education (DE) (although this was the original intention) which regulates other aspects of teacher preparation. Although there is no guidance or regulation on the specific content of the ITE courses of the kind now found in England. All ITE courses are inspected by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) and accredited by the GTCNI – two sequential and linked but separate processes. The accreditation process *is concerned with the suitability of ITE programmes as a professional preparation*, whereas *Inspection audits and quality-assures the self-evaluation carried out by ITE* (DE 2010, 1).

The impoverished pay rises of the austerity period in the UK (2010 onwards) ushered in a period of industrial disputes which were perceived by teaching unions as a response to *low-trust, low-discretion, target-driven cultures* (National Education Union quoted by BBC 2020). Strikes and ‘action short of strikes’ resulted in an unusual form of industrial action in which there has been a boycott of school inspections in many schools across Northern Ireland

(BBC, 2017). The action did not unduly affect teacher education as schools continued to cooperate voluntarily with school experience arrangements and the inspection of PGCE courses.

Inspections of the university-based components of PGCEs took place in 2018-2019 (some ten years after the previous inspections). The inspections of the school-based course components did occur with the cooperation of teachers within local schools, and the GTCNI accreditation process followed the inspections. The inspection of the university college courses in 2020 has been disrupted by the COVID19 pandemic. The focus of the inspections is set by DE. Inspections seem to have an increasingly important role to play within ITE, not least because they guide the priorities of teacher educators anxious to attain the coveted 'outstanding' grade which can then be cited in course advertisements. On the ground in higher education institutions, it is easy to see how course content is, in effect, steered by the focus of the inspections, even in the absence of teacher education policy *per se*, towards contemporary educational priorities such as the Learning Leaders Strategy, Shared Education and current issues such as pupil wellbeing (Kirby et al. 2019). As a corollary, themes/topics which are not the focus of inspections tend to receive less prioritization within the crowded curricula of one-year PGCEs. This has been the case, for example, where education technology has been less of a prime concern than in the early years of the century where it was a key strategic focus (Clarke and Galanouli 2019) despite the growth of the technology sector, particularly 'screen' and fintech industries, in Northern Ireland in the past decade.

### ***Professional Development of Teachers***

Whilst strategic developments in teacher education may be seen to have been relatively limited in Northern Ireland, the DE's *Learning Leaders Strategy* (2014) delineated a career-long pathway for Teacher Professional Learning in the province, albeit in the absence of the funding streams which would have assisted the efficacy of the 10-year roll out. The strategy frames all teachers, including student teachers, as professionals who are leaders of learning across all aspects of their role. It promises better continuity between Initial, Induction and Early Professional Learning (Inservice) phases of a teacher's career - the three 'I's' (Moran, Abbott and Clarke 2009), with access to a range of professional learning opportunities and supportive communities of practice being made available right across a teacher's career trajectory. The UK government's austerity measures, industrial action by teachers, the reorganization of the public sector (particularly the prolonged negotiations around the creation of a single Education Authority) have slowed progress on all these developments. Nonetheless, the DE's Learning Leaders Oversight Group has set in motion forward-looking reviews of current practice and policy, drawing on the expertise of stakeholders from across the education sector. A recent desk-based study (Clarke and Galanouli. 2019) by academics from all the ITE providers (plus the Open University) under the auspices of the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCETNI) examined practice and policy in other countries and in other professions. The study highlighted the importance of three key

principles in the design of a framework for professional learning: balancing the demands of professional autonomy and accountability, ensuring continuity across the phases of a teacher's career, and sustaining professional collaborations for research and learning. If funding, infrastructure and professional practice can be harnessed to implement the Learning Leaders Strategy there is very considerable potential to enhance professional learning for teachers in Northern Ireland, from ITE onwards.

### **Reviews of ITE**

Teacher Education in Northern Ireland has undergone external review processes on several occasions over the past 30 years. The recent *History of Teacher Preparation on Northern Ireland* (Farren, Clarke and O'Doherty 2018) outlines the reviews and their outcomes. Several of these aimed either covertly or overtly, but mostly unsuccessfully, to bring about infrastructural/institutional change. The most recent review which was particularly protracted (lasting over a decade) was operationalized in two phases. Funded by the Department for the Economy (led at that time by a Minister from the cross-community Alliance Party), Part One was a financial review conducted by the consultancy firm Grant Thornton (DfE 2013). Its findings suggested that, at the time, teacher education in Northern Ireland was more expensive than in England (unlikely to be the case today given the substantial bursaries which have been necessary to increase recruitment there) and that the two University Colleges were particularly expensive, largely because of special funding premia to support small institutions.

Part Two was conducted by an international panel of five teacher education experts, chaired by Pasi Sahlberg. Its recommendations were published in the *Aspiring to Excellence Report* (DfE 2014) and reflect many of the priorities (infrastructural changes, teacher research and master's level course provision) which have underpinned recent developments of teacher education in several European countries (Hulme et al. 2019) including that in RoI. However, unlike the Republic of Ireland where there have been significant changes to course content and infrastructure, this high profile international review has not led to any significant changes in teacher education programmes or, crucially, to teacher education infrastructure, not least because (perhaps predictably) its findings did not receive cross-party support in Stormont, where the local political parties divided amongst communal lines to block potential infrastructural change (Farren, Clarke and O'Doherty 2019).

### **Research literacy and capacity**

Funding for research in Education in Northern Ireland has for many years been focused on the 'wicked issues', on the seemingly intractable problems (Knox 2015, 23) for which the country, a society still emerging from conflict, is all too infamous and whose impacts on education are well documented. Significant amounts of funding from American philanthropists (notably the International Fund for Ireland and the Atlantic Philanthropies (Knox 2019)) have supported the development of the contrasting models of Shared Education and Integrated Education. The former involves schools working together across the communal divides (shared classes, resources and teachers), and the latter involves large-scale structural change through the creation of new (grant maintained) or transformed

schools with pupils from all communities taught by teachers from all communities (McGuinness, Abbott and Cassidy 2013; Abbott and McGuinness 2020). Currently, approximately 7 percent of schools are integrated (DE 2019). The latter is seen as a threat to the faith-based education provided by established schools which are attached to religious denominations whilst the former may be viewed as maintaining the *status quo*. The employment of teachers in Northern Ireland is a unique exception to Northern Ireland's fair employment regulations; schools can (and often do) choose to employ only teachers from their own community. Milliken et al. (2019, 1) report a considerable degree of cultural encapsulation in which around *one-in-five teachers have had no educational experience outside of their community of origin*. ITE in the two University Colleges (Stranmillis and St Mary's) continues to be largely divided across communal lines whilst the Universities' PGCE cohorts are integrated. The colleges are each supported strongly by politicians from one 'side' of the political divide and this support has been significant in the face of several successive attempts to reform ITE infrastructure. Relatively little research has focused on the other key divisive dimension of education in Northern Ireland where class segregation has been sustained by economic partisanship (segregation by academic selection at 11, which is tied strongly to economic inequalities) or, indeed, to the many other important dimensions of education research (including teacher education research) which flourish elsewhere in the world, but for which philanthropic funding has not been so readily available. Even the episodically inflamed concerns about PISA scores and the pointed comments in the Chief Inspector's annual reports produce far fewer waves than the internecine political divisions around segregated schooling. The light of education research has arguably shone much too narrowly for much too long in Northern Ireland, leaving some fundamental educational priorities relatively unilluminated by research. These distinctive issues are absent from the ROI. A further key difference relates to the regulation of research, which in NI, as part of the UK, is subject to expert review in the competitive Research Excellence Framework (REF) whose outcomes are used to allocate government funding. Well documented (Beauchamp et al, 2016) tensions exist between Schools of Education with their emphasis on professional education and concomitant time-consuming regulation and student teacher supervision during school experience and other university departments where these are not required and there is more time for research.

## **Challenges**

The roll out of the *Learning Leaders Strategy* has brought a strategic direction which has been lacking in recent years where the policy emphasis has been on futile attempts at infrastructural reform which have moreover stymied the types of course developments which were recommended in the Sahlberg review, as discussed earlier. There have been some smaller-scale initiatives which have had a number of minor impacts on ITE. For example, concern about the need to 'refresh' the teaching workforce, led to an innovative initiative, *Investing in the Teacher Workforce*, which aimed to enable up to 200 teachers aged 55 years and over to apply to be released from the profession in the 2018/19 academic

year to be replaced with recently qualified teachers. In the 2018-19 Scheme, 133 serving teachers exited service and were replaced by 133 Recently Qualified Teachers. There is no immediate plan to reinstate the scheme, but the Minister has indicated that he is keen to explore the possibility of a further phase or a scheme of a similar nature during the course of the current mandate. Whilst providing sufficient full-time permanent jobs remains an issue, there are also challenges in recruitment of the very best students to some teacher education courses, notably in STEM subjects, an issue which seems to have been exacerbated by the removal of recruitment caps in English universities and the provision of substantial bursaries for trainee teachers in England (Menter, Mutton and Burn 2019).

## **DISCUSSION**

While presented in a sequential manner, the structure of this chapter should not allow the reader to believe that there are not strong, professional cross-border links. The work of Teacher Educators on either side of the border is, perhaps, most strongly interconnected via the unique cross-border teacher education network, SCoTENS (the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South), which developed in the wake of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. Belief in the power of collaboration to bridge differences, and with the ambition to develop the research capacity of teacher educators both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland, SCoTENS organizes annual conferences and doctoral seminars, provides seed-funding for north-south, collaborative research projects, (over 100 of these to date) and facilitates cross-border student teacher exchanges (Furlong et al. 2011, Clarke and Galanouli 2018). It is funded by its membership (HEIs, Curriculum Authorities, Teaching Councils, CPD providers, etc.) and by the relevant government departments, north and south. However, the potential fragility of these cross border links has been highlighted since 2017 when both DE and DFE in Northern Ireland withdrew their annual tranches of funding, leaving a somewhat lopsided funding arrangement which must have the potential to curtail the impact of SCoTENS' north-south collaborations and the formal and informal cross-fertilization of ideas and expertise which they provide.

Looking at some of the key recent developments in the two jurisdictions it is clear that the pattern of change has been very different in both. The Republic of Ireland had experienced long wave cycles of change and it could be argued that change led internally had been glacially slow and ponderous (Coolahan, 2013). By seeking the intervention of the OECD in 1991, the EU Commission in 2004, and again the introduction of expert external review panels (2012 and 2018), change has been stimulated and contrived. The role of the DES had been for many decades one of facilitator and funder of education; it is evident that the DES adopted a more proactive and direct role in the leadership of education in the 1990s. For too long education had remained in the hands of the universities, academics and churches. By introducing the process of external voices to formulate, stimulate and to map change, which would then be mediated, and moderated internally, the rate and pace of change in Ireland changed dramatically over the last 30 years. This began with a period of consultation, where new shareholders were recognized in Irish education – not just parents, teachers, churches, academia, but also EU commission, OECD, International business and

economic concern, leading to a recognition in the early 2000s that the quality of teachers is the lynchpin in the quality of the system. The ‘conditions of change’ (Goodson 2020) matter significantly and in Ireland the strong, clear and ambitious approach of the Department of Education has been pivotal to creating a momentum for change in teacher education. In Northern Ireland, the introduction of the external voice has also been an important factor. There have been successive external reviews of teacher education, mostly focused on infrastructural arrangements but few have brought any real changes, often becoming bogged down in inter-communal political tensions. The recent upheavals in the reform of public administration, particularly the contentious and protracted creation of the Northern Ireland Education Authority (Farren, Clarke and O’Doherty 2019), have presented further barriers to reform. The development of the *Learning Leaders Strategy for Teacher Professional Development* (DE 2016) is an impressive achievement in the face of such inertia. It is in the early stages of its ten-year roll out but has been hampered by a lack of funding due to the austerity drive which has spread from Westminster since 2011 – by early 2020 the only centrally provided funding for teacher CPD is derived from the philanthropic provision for Shared Education noted above.

The introduction of a raft of new legislation in the Republic of Ireland was instrumental in creating the ‘conditions for change’; the most important was the establishment of the Teaching Council. The Council is teacher dominated but works under the aegis of the Department and is managed by an executive accountable to the Department of Education and Skills. The Teaching Council has initiated steps to provide a rationale and a unifying purpose to this increasingly complex web of professional development provision which has developed under the remit of the DES. The Council’s work is very much aligned to the work of Hargreaves (2003) who espouses that “Professional development involves more than learning knowledge and skills...[it is] a personal path toward greater professional integrity and human growth” (pp.62-63). Teachers’ identity is under constant renewal and change and the transformative power of professional development as revealed in the work of Mezirow (1991), Brookfield (1987), Canrinus et al (2011), Kelchtermans (2009), Day (2004) and Taylor (2008) underpins the position taken by the Council, where they see teachers’ interaction with their context and their engagement with ongoing personal and professional development, as transformative and powerful elements in maintaining their appetite for change, their job satisfaction, and their commitment to their profession (Anglin-Lawlor, 2014). The Council has become the driver of change, and to a significant extent teacher education providers have become the reactive partners, who are now expected to be compliant with the regulations and requirements of the Council. Nonetheless, recognizing the importance of a strong Council in bringing forward much needed change, teacher education has cooperated with, and supported, the recent changes, in the interests of teacher education and promoting teacher professionalization. The legislative power behind the Council and its capacity to recognize or not the programs offered by the various academic providers, has created a new power structure in teacher education. The Council

has set an ambitious agenda for change which has largely been delivered by and through teacher education.

The role of the GTC in Northern Ireland was initially based around an ambitious and hopeful agenda as a forward-looking professional body, and the organization, as noted above, has made some important contributions to the profession, particularly in its early years. However, the demise of the Teaching Council for England and Wales following the election of the Conservative led Coalition government in 2011 called all such bodies into question and the GTCNI, unlike the more established, independent GTC Scotland, (est. 1965) has never attained independence from the Department of Education, nor has it been able to enact its full regulatory powers. The Teacher Education branch within DE and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) exert their influence mainly through low-profile dialogue with ITE providers and education researchers and through institutional inspections, in notable contrast with the prolific government-led policy changes found in England. Looking to the future In Northern Ireland, the *New Decade, New Approach* (NDNA) document (2020) which was agreed (by the UK and Irish Governments and the local political parties who had been members of the devolved, consociational government) as a way forward for a reconvened Stormont Assembly following a political breakdown which lasted some three years (Jan 2017-Jan 2020), mentions teacher education only once. It promised a fundamental review of education (defined as including teacher education) in order to *envision a radical, innovative and sustainable future for schools in Northern Ireland – yet another review of teacher education may be on the horizon*. However, the NDNA document also says that the executive would *urgently resolve* the ongoing teachers' pay dispute. This has now happened and the concomitant agreement between management and unions (Education Authority 2020) includes a commitment to review *inter alia* both teacher accountability and workload. It is to be hoped that and the return of the Stormont Assembly, improved industrial relations and enhanced funding levels may pave the way for improvements in policy, practice and professionalism.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the island of Ireland approaches the one-hundred-year anniversary of its painful partition, teacher professionalism, north and south exhibits both striking similarities and manifest differences. The exploration of how policies and practices have diverged on the island of Ireland is an interesting case study for international researchers. To all extents and purposes, much of the external forces for change in both jurisdictions have been similar if not identical, yet the responses on either side of the border in Ireland are significantly different. On this small, contentiously divided island on the periphery of Europe, neither jurisdiction has been immune to influences from Europe and from Britain, although it is difficult to predict how both of these key factors will be impacted by the impending upheaval of Brexit. Broader global impacts around the competing logics of markets, accountability and artificial Intelligence (Clarke and McFlynn 2019) will continue to influence teacher professionalism across the island, whilst the countervailing forces of tradition, inertia and strained political relations will continue to hold sway. The sudden and immediate implications of COVID-19 on education across the globe, and the consequential

pedagogical pivot to on-line teaching during Spring 2020, will continue to impact on ITE into the future. The unpredictability of a global pandemic and its profound effect on the organization of teaching will undoubtedly influence the content, design and delivery of initial and continuing teacher education, and expedite innovation in programme development. It will become a spur to the reform of organizational practices and delivery modes and will usher in a new phase of change across both jurisdictions. The Coronavirus has also highlighted the enduring relevance of Berliner's (2005, 207) three components of quality teaching - the logical acts of teaching (defining, demonstrating, modelling, explaining, etc.); the psychological acts of teaching (caring, motivating, encouraging, etc.); and importantly the moral acts of teaching (showing honesty, courage, tolerance, compassion, respect, fairness, etc). Teaching in and through a pandemic calls on a depth of professional, personal and moral capacities of teachers, and demands that initial and continuing development programmes become both practical and profound, to impact on the daily lives of classrooms.

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