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Bain, Yvonne; Bruce, Jayne; Weir, Douglas

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Changing the landscape of school/university partnership in Northern Scotland

Yvonne Bain, Jayne Bruce and Douglas Weir

School of Education, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Aberdeen AB24 5UA

Tel: [+44 \(0\)1224 274776](tel:+441224274776)

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Corresponding author: Yvonne Bain – y.c.bain@abdn.ac.uk

Authors: Jayne Bruce – j.h.bruce@abdn.ac.uk

Douglas Weir – d.weir@abdn.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article is a descriptive analysis of the local impact of a national school/university partnership programme in Scotland. Starting from a high-level report on improving teacher education, a series of recommendations was filtered through various stages and agencies until local providers (local authorities and higher education institutions (HEI)) were faced with having to decide how best to respond to a large national agenda but in a manner which was appropriate for local circumstances. How one university and its partners engaged with this agenda, while experiencing considerable staff shortages and in the light of ongoing financial constraints, is described and analysed through the lenses of local and national policy. The most significant learning from that engagement is how national priorities shift and are replaced without much sustainability or continuity while the ‘locals’ remain committed to more fundamental and long-term issues of working together to enhance teacher and pupil learning. In the analysis, considerations of professional development through partnerships are also discussed in an international context.

Keywords: national policy; partnership; local government; universities.

Introduction

Throughout the 21st Century, there have been a series of ‘official’ reports which concerned improving the structure and quality of teacher education in Scotland (e.g. Scottish Executive 2000, Scottish

Executive 2005). Each of these was directed at a part of the teacher education continuum of initial teacher education (ITE), Induction and career long professional learning (CLPL), sometimes called continuing professional development (CPD). In 2009 the Scottish Government commissioned a review of the whole continuum in an attempt to join the various component parts and this was completed in December 2010 (Donaldson 2011). Over the following five years a series of processes were created to implement the recommendations of this report ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ (TSF) [The Donaldson Report] and this implementation phase concluded with the publication of an evaluation report in March 2016 (Scottish Government 2016b). This article attempts to track, from the perspective of a Scottish university engaged in teacher education, how the implementation of TSF affected the university staff and their local authority partners (teachers, schools, and local government managers) as they attempted to engage with the aspects of the implementation which were premised on closer cooperation (formal and informal) amongst these participants. The kernel of that cooperation was the TSF recommendations which addressed a closer partnership amongst those responsible for the career-long education and training of teachers. How that closer partnership developed in the North of Scotland will be described and analysed here from the perspective of the authors who played a key part in stimulating the partnership, building its programmes and negotiating the ‘new’ roles of a collaborative nature for staff of the University School of Education and its local authority partners. The data for that description and analysis will be taken from documents produced on TSF partnerships by government sources and by the School of Education, as well as our observations and commentary on the manner in which partners reacted to, and responded to, the changing climate for partnership.

Status of Partnership

The merit of using partnership approaches as the vehicle for dealing with the dynamic of the teacher education continuum have been recognised for at least the past four decades. (Holmes Group 1986, Benton 1990, Goodlad 1994, Zeichner 2010.) In the United Kingdom context the typology of partnership was fully described by Furlong et al. (2000) and the Scottish experience of that within the UK context was set out by Smith *et al.* (2006 a).

In these approaches a number of models have been identified, ranging in ITE terms from the complementary (separatist) where “the student is left to integrate their essentially ‘separate’ higher education work and school-based work” ; to the HEI-based (duplicative) where “the types of roles and responsibilities assumed by HE tutors overlapped with those which could be assumed by teachers and partner schools”; to the HEI-led where “school staff will have agreed formally to accept specified roles and obligations within the HEI-led partnership”; to the ultimate goal of the collaborative, a “form of reflective practice in the student which draws upon the different forms of professional knowledge contributed by staff in higher education (HE) and staff in schools, seen as equally legitimate”. (Smith *et al.* 2006 a, pp. 147-50). Those same authors concluded (p. 161) that collaborative models were an “‘ideal type’, more likely to remain unachievable than achieved” due to insufficient support from the teachers and from the government, and due to the changing roles which the collaborative models required of the teachers and lecturers.

However, the rhetoric of partnership is now more embracing than simply concentrating on initial teacher education (ITE), and has moved a long way from ‘HEI-based’, as we will indicate. The Donaldson Report and the subsequent action funded by government has led to a concerted drive to improve partnership across the whole continuum of teacher development – Initial Teacher Education, Teacher Induction, and Career Long Professional Learning.

This forward agenda seeks to bring Scotland more in line with the Professional Development Schools (PDS) philosophy which emerged in the USA from the Holmes Group's work in the 1980s where,

Most PDS partnerships support four broad aims: preparing pre-service teachers in field-based experience, supporting in-service teachers in partnering schools, reforming teacher education, and improving student achievement. (Breault 2013, p.92).

There is a long and strong track record of partnership between the School of Education at Aberdeen and local authorities and schools in northern Scotland, albeit in the HEI-led manner which was characteristic of Scottish teacher education.. Although there was a tradition of teachers being reluctant to take on a greater role in ITE (Smith, Brisard and Menter, 2006 a, p.160), the Donaldson Report's recommendations offered new opportunities and before the end of 2011 we had already joined with local authority partners in a Summit meeting to map out ways of realising Donaldson's aspirations (Northern Partnership 2011).

Tensions in partnerships

From the international literature on school-university partnerships we identified a number of notes of caution and a number of points of encouragement. Our intention has been to heed the caution and build on the encouragement.

For example, it is crucial that each partner respects the other's different approach and that the resulting outcome is greater than the individual parts; but, at the same time, the auspices under which partnership is often launched, i.e. external funding, can encourage a pragmatic, compliant approach in order to secure the funding (Taylor 2008, p.65).

Similarly, as Knight (2015) reminds us, partnerships which utilise a mix of on-campus and off-campus staff are not novel as the Oxford Internship Scheme from the 1980s demonstrated. But, the effective use of ‘off-campus’ teacher educators can reconcile “academic and practitioner knowledge” (Martin *et al.* 2011, p.300). To achieve this, however, requires that off-campus staff share in the collaborative learning opportunities that on-campus teacher educators generally take for granted (White 2013). “It is therefore imperative that partnership activity is established through explicit discussion of expectations and collaborative processes, and is supported by a high-level commitment through the provision of appropriate resources” (Walkington 2007, p.292). Without that, the off-campus group will feel second-class but will also be distanced from the learning which helps influence programme development. On the cautionary side, Mockler (2013) and Kennedy and Doherty (2012) emphasise the poor track record of partnership and the slippery nature of the term. Mockler’s study of partnerships over a 15 year period concludes:

Increasingly, projects have been guided by instrumentalist approaches that emphasise efficiency, such that university-based partners are positioned more as ‘providers’ of professional development than learning partners, and relationships are conceived of as short-term and funding dependent. (p.273)

Kennedy and Doherty, for their part, see the new Scottish partnership model as a ‘divide and rule’ endeavour by the state. They emphasise:

So, while the partnership – in this case schools, local authorities and universities – has a shared responsibility for teacher education, it is mandated and ultimately controlled by government. It could be suggested, therefore, that in the absence of an explicitly articulated educational rationale for a partnership approach in the Donaldson Report, that the promotion of what could be termed ‘network governance’ is more to do with issues of control :...(p.845)

There are, however, helpful summaries from a number of authors (Peters 2002; Burstein *et al.* 1999) which draw upon the history of partnership and suggest a number of conditions which effective school-university partnerships must achieve. These include: ensuring that the conditions for collaboration are clearly expressed and carefully negotiated; recognising that the work norms and conditions of each partner are different and account has to be taken of this; creating time for collaborative learning to develop; ensuring that the leadership group in each partner organisation works actively to grow the partnership; and being prepared for a long process with numerous delays and challenges.

In addition the most comprehensive, recent, review of partnership initiatives (Breault 2013) presents both sides of the picture. On the one hand there are risks such as how to sustain a partnership when stakeholders change or resources shrink; there are risks if the partners seek prestige or power rather than meaningful change; there are risks if the teachers and lecturers who participate are not valued or not given adequate time for their innovative work; and there are risks if the partnership activity is launched without adequate consultation and involvement of those who are to be its participants. Yet Breault also points to the advantages or solutions. It is an advantage if any structures or bureaucracies set up to facilitate the partnership are loose and involve staff in the key decisions, i.e. are 'enabling'; it is an advantage when the staff teams can work jointly in course development and delivery such that a trust and support in and for each other grows; and it is an advantage if a previous climate of respect for each other's contribution to the programme exists so that the well-documented 'theory-practice' distinction can be made irrelevant through all partners populating both theory and practice domains and all partners adapting their practice to deliver the new approaches that each particular partnership espouses. In reviewing the impact of Scotland's parliamentary devolution from 1999 Ozga (2005) anticipated such new relationships in education as being driven by "a more extended, self-directed and developmental version of professionalism." (p. 213.)

So, there are risks in attempting to create a sustainable partnership process but there are also solutions. Above all, there is an imperative to succeed if a significant university contribution to the education of teachers is to be sustained.

There is a great deal of impatience with colleges and universities across the country for what is perceived to be our unwillingness to change and work with schools and communities in closer and more respectful ways across teachers' careers. Despite the complexity of bringing this new epistemology of teacher education into the mainstream, unless we are able to do so relatively soon, college- and university-based teacher education may be replaced as the main source of teachers for the nation's public schools. (Zeichner 2010, p.96)

This perspective from USA is echoed in England (Furlong *et al.* 2000, Burgess, 2014) where, most recently (2015), the government shifted the emphasis in student teacher recruitment yet further from HEIs towards school-based training, and capped university intakes at a very early stage in the cycle (Husbands 2015).

In Scotland, whilst taking account of Donaldson's suggestion that school-based training be considered, there is a hesitancy to implement such approaches. A significant factor in this is that Scotland has an independent General Teaching Council (GTCS) which mandates the professional registration and on-going professional development (Professional Update) of all teachers through the Standards for Registration (GTCS a, 2012), Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning (GTCS b, 2012, and Standards for Leadership and Management (GTCS c, 2012) and sets the guidelines for programmes of Initial Teacher Education (GTCS, 2013). Central to all of these activities is the expectation of a robust partnership between schools and universities.

Although this risk to these partnerships is minimal at present in Scotland, and universities are the exclusive providers of initial teacher education, politicians have noticed the comment in the Donaldson Report (p.6) that the possibility of school-based ITE should not be ignored, especially when there are

certain areas of the country where teacher recruitment is difficult and staff turnover high. Scottish Government has challenged universities and local authorities to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of a collaborative role for each of them in teacher education, and failure to do this may have consequences, as again has been noted in England (Brown *et al.* 2015).

Scottish Proposals

When Graham Donaldson promoted the concept of university/school education partnerships in “Teaching Scotland’s Future” (2011) he was seeking to build on an existing pattern of cooperation. Three brief extracts from the Donaldson report indicate the extent of Scotland’s ambition in regard greater partnership:

Partnership with local authorities and schools should be strengthened to create relationships which are collaborative rather than complementary. (p.8)

New and strengthened models of partnership among universities, local authorities, schools and individual teachers need to be developed. These partnerships should be based on jointly agreed principles and involve shared responsibility for key areas of teacher education. (p.48)

The partnerships which we have advocated for initial teacher education should continue to be developed to support learning for teachers at all stages in their careers. (p.71)

And there was a further significant change to the ITE component of the teacher education continuum in that he proposed that the undergraduate ITE programme be adapted to “strengthen undergraduate provision through greater engagement with staff and courses in the wider university” (p.8).

The pre-existing partnerships were at different stages of health and vigour in different parts of Scotland. One of the most vigorous was in North/North-East Scotland, with the University of Aberdeen as host. There, a combination of geographical isolation, teacher shortages and good leadership had facilitated a spirit of cooperation between the local providers of school education and the university. But that cooperation was mainly on initial teacher education matters such as the provision, timing and structure of school experience placements. The question or discussion of more fundamental matters such as the role and purpose of teacher education, the input from schools to those processes and the ways in which partnership working could enhance teacher professional learning lay mainly dormant. And the most relevant explanation for that gap between the administrative and the profound lay in a) the deference which teachers and local authorities paid to the university (O'Brien and MacBeath, 1997) for its role in advanced learning, and b) the trend in the 21st Century for anything beyond initial teacher education to be allocated to local authorities and schools for their control (Gray and Weir 2014, p.577). Meanwhile, our own 'local' analysis commented:

For many years, the Northern Partnership has worked with the concept of partnership as an embedded feature of the professional learning developments so that the partnership extends beyond being a consortium of sharing. Instead, the Northern Partnership explicitly seeks to support partnership activities which require the...co-construction of professional learning developments which are identified within the partnership.

The Northern Partnership works within the already existing Local Authority infrastructures and stages of development...to meet the different needs in the different local authority settings. This way of working is fundamental to the inclusive and collaborative nature of the Northern Partnership. Our way of working is about respecting and acknowledging diversity, to work

collaboratively to enhance the principles of sustainability, reciprocity and connectedness.

(Northern Partnership 2015, p.4)

In parallel with the Donaldson Report, and as part of their own strategic plans, the Scottish Schools of Education were developing new approaches to partnership. In Aberdeen, a programme of Technology-Enhanced Professional Learning (TePL) which linked a number of school sites virtually to the university, for purposes such as experimenting with pedagogy, and exploring practice, to explore what is observed, was set up in 2012. At around the same time, the School of Education responded to partner requests for an innovative part-time PGDE programme for intending primary teachers which would address teacher shortages and open the profession up to a more diverse population of non-traditional entrants. The resulting Distance Learning Initial Teacher Education (DLITE) programme took an innovative, blended, approach to distance learning and seized the opportunity for delivery of the course curriculum to be jointly staffed by local authority and university personnel.

Furthermore, there was a growing recognition that teachers would benefit from more advanced learning throughout their careers and, drawing on the experience of Finland and other countries where the academic level and length of training of teachers were greater than in Scotland, a number of Scottish ITE programmes, including Aberdeen, were piloting approaches which would engage their students in the process of advancing towards Masters degrees. However, while the Scottish Induction programme for probationer teachers has been highly praised by international reviewers (OECD 2007) for its professional learning, prior to Donaldson it gained no academic credits. Accordingly a large-scale Masters programme leading from the embryo Master's opportunities in ITE into Induction began to evolve.

The new climate and additional funding from government encouraged the University of Aberdeen School of Education and its local authority partners to enhance approaches to partnership which are

more collaborative and extend more widely across the teacher education continuum. When a Summit meeting of the North/North-East of Scotland school and local authority representatives and university colleagues was held (Northern Partnership 2011), shortly after the Scottish Government confirmed that it would move to implement all the Donaldson recommendations, there were many suggestions for partnership priorities. The key headings from the discussion highlight a desire for:

- Better linkage between ITE and Induction
- Greater interaction among local authorities and with the university on induction programmes and approaches to mentoring
- A collaborative rather than a consultative partnership
- Better relationships over placement in ITE and discussion of alternative ways of delivering and assessing placement
- More sharing of course delivery between school and university staff and consideration of flexible school/university appointments

Those suggestions became the starting point for an extended discussion among the Northern partners, into which the priorities chosen by national government and its agencies were fed.

Implementation

Although the Scottish Government quickly accepted the Donaldson review recommendations (Scottish Government 2011), it was reluctant to move unilaterally to implement them, except for the changes to the undergraduate ITE programme which were to be implemented by each School of Education as soon

as its programmes fell due for re-accreditation by GTCS, to ensure that “Undergraduate student teachers should engage with staff and their peers in other faculties much more directly as part of their general intellectual and social development” (Donaldson 2011, p.6), . As is often the case with comprehensive public reviews of key services, support for the principles of the report are often outweighed by disagreements over individual recommendations. To minimise these disagreements, Scottish Government invited stakeholder representatives to form a national partnership group (NPG) to ensure that the other recommendations which would eventually be implemented were those which commanded a reasonable cross-sectional support. That group took a further year before producing a report (National Partnership Group 2012) which provided the roadmap for change - a set of 20 actions points based on the Donaldson Report and these stakeholder conversations.

This was still not the end of the bureaucratic process however because, from the end of 2012, a further body – National Implementation Board (NIB) – was asked by government to oversee and, partly fund some of the changes which would deliver the Donaldson agenda, including the new approach to the teacher education continuum and, particularly, to local authority/ university partnerships. Beck (2013) makes a series of observations on this process, informed by interviews with participants, and concludes that a glaring omission was the lack of teacher involvement in these processes which could prove fatal since “as a policy is further defined, it becomes decreasingly malleable to change and translation” (p.10).

Nevertheless, a series of desired actions emerged which resembled a ‘pecking order’ of aspects of Donaldson which would be given highest priority. These were encapsulated in a ‘Workplan’ which set out NIB’s main targets (Meeting held on 5 March 2013). Those which affected the partnership dimension of teacher education most were:

- An increase in Master’s level learning, including a Scottish Masters of Education;

- A new Educational Leadership Qualification;
- Formal partnership agreements between local authorities and universities; and,
- As the implementation evolved - an Aspect Review of the new partnership arrangements by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIe),.

Although some of the NIB activity was the responsibility of national agencies such as General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) and Education Scotland, most of the actions, particularly concerned with the teacher education continuum fell to local authorities and their 'local' universities. But the sponsor (and funder) of the activity differed from case to case.

At national level, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), representing local authorities and the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC), representing universities, created the 'Framework Agreement' which each university and its 'group' of local authorities signed up to. A core component of that agreement, around which the funded initiatives clustered was:

“Collaborative engagement. Partnership arrangements should be developed and implemented through the fullest possible collaborative engagement of all parties... taking account of local circumstances, workload and the need for consistency of approach at a local level. Partnership arrangements should foster collaboration not only in supporting the professional learning of student teachers and newly qualified teachers during initial teacher education and induction, for example, through mentoring, peer observation, learning conversations and joint seminar discussions, but also in relation to creating opportunities for teachers' career long professional learning, such as, professional enquiry and joint research activity in relation to curriculum development, the enhancement of pupil learning and school improvement initiatives and processes, with or without Masters level accreditation under the Scottish Masters in Education framework.” (STEC/ADES 2013)

Next, a particular initiative of the NIB was to part-fund and encourage the development of professional learning among teachers in the early phase (the first five years) of their careers. Walkington (2007) shows a clear justification for this activity:

Professional experience for preservice teachers is rarely connected overtly to other professional learning that teachers undertake. Making the links between preservice teacher learning and the learning of in-service teachers explicit would acknowledge the broader and connected nature of the teaching experience. There is, however, a ‘gap’ between the university and school that inhibits the development of these links. (p.281)

Various networking approaches to this element were piloted by different regional partnerships.

Then, the government commitment to Donaldson recommendation 44, where “Masters level credits should be built into initial teacher education qualifications, induction year activities and CPD beyond the induction year” (Donaldson, 2011, p99), saw £3m. of additional funding allocated to universities and their partner local authorities to stimulate further CPD opportunities, especially among early career teachers, which would be calibrated at Level 11 on the national framework for education and training (SCQF - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) but which also could be validated by universities as Masters level credits. The universities were expected to drive this process (and found support for Masters credits from some local authorities) but were in the hands of their partners in terms of clients. How were teachers to be encouraged to participate in these programmes – even if their fees were being paid - when a previous initiative (Chartered Teacher) foundered not just on cost but on perceived relevance? For many local authorities the answer was to include this new programme within the Induction year for probationer teachers and to oblige them to participate in an additional programme of professional learning.

In addition, programmes such as DLITE, “as a means of increasing diversity and broadening the base of the profession by encouraging even more part-time opportunities and mid-career recruitment”

(Donaldson 2011, p.6), were funded through the national grant for ITE, subject to approval from Scottish Government and accreditation from GTCS , while the TePL initiative had Scottish Government discretionary grant funding.

Therefore, from the anticipatory actions of Schools of Education and the pump-priming funding from NIB and Scottish Government, a whole raft of new initiatives commenced across the teacher education sector. The main difficulties in their implementation have been the number of different bodies making demands on partnerships and the constraints of staffing particularly in universities (Gray and Weir 2014, p.582) but also in schools.

Local Initiatives

In Aberdeen, the existence of the Northern Partnership Forum where local authority and university staff met together regularly made it relatively easy to stimulate the Summit meeting to discuss the implementation of the Donaldson recommendations. The main emphasis of the Forum was on decisions and advice about ITE. Responding to the wider agenda arising from Donaldson required a different structure and so, over a period of a year the partners worked together to ensure that the membership of the Forum enabled it to: address the report's issues; coordinate various combinations of partners to launch successful bids to different funding streams; and achieve agreement from all partners to the Framework Agreement.

With regard to the Framework Agreement, we were more fortunate than Schools of Education in the Central Belt of Scotland as our northerly territory had only one major provider of teacher education - Aberdeen. But an emerging provider – University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) - would raise other issues over time, and some local authorities in our partnership who took student teachers from a

number of providers had the complication of signing an agreement with each of these. However, it is difficult to judge whether the Framework Agreement played any major part in the subsequent development of education partnerships.

Each of the funded initiatives was attractive to a different group of local authorities jointly with the university, and the timescales for the individual initiatives were not harmonised. A great deal of responsibility therefore lay on the university to build the connections between initiatives and to find ways of sharing the new learning with each local authority partner especially about a programme in which they were not directly involved. We sought to work with partners to deliver a number of attributes which would denote the Northern Partnership culture. These included: connectedness, collaboration, reciprocity, sustainability, and quality of learning (Northern Partnership 2015). The initiatives were as described in the previous section.

What was certain from the past experience of partnership was that local authorities would initially look to the university to drive the joint initiatives. While our aspiration was for a more ‘collaborative’ approach, our instinct and the existing evidence showed that the preceding culture of teachers and their professional associations being reluctant to assume these wider professional responsibilities would only diminish with sustained effort over time, by stakeholders and particularly by government (Smith 2006 b).

Driving this more collaborative approach was therefore not without problems. We knew from our own longstanding relationships that local authorities often used different officers to liaise with and organise ITE placements, to organise Induction, and to oversee in-house and external CPD, with typically no single person taking an overview of all. The partnership had to move beyond a professional requirement to shared engagement in ITE and develop a commitment to collaboration across the teacher education

continuum which was grounded in the belief that it led to pupil and teacher learning gains (Livingston 2008).

In addition, since government was reluctant to prescribe the membership of partnerships or their responsibilities, partners could decide which of the new additionally-funded initiatives to participate in and which of their staff to designate as the link officer for each initiative. In the School of Education, however, the responsibility for all aspects of partnership was in the hands of a small group acting in concert, who were anxious not to be forced to act unilaterally in responding to the initiatives of the government and other agencies. Accordingly, we had to use a similar approach to that described by Breault (2013):

To the degree that large PDS partnerships promote enabling bureaucracies, they are able to support and sustain meaningful work within the partnerships. For this to happen, partnerships need to promote a loose coupling between schools and universities where the links between the institutions are weak but multiplex in nature... When partners are loosely coupled, they are able to respond to one another in more flexible ways while maintaining their own institutional identities. (p.94)

The best way to describe how Teaching Scotland's Future (Donaldson 2011) moved from a set of recommendations to their delivery of them was that, starting from a national aspiration and filtered through at least two subordinate processes (NPG and NIB), action passed into the hands of various stakeholders, some national and some local. Their action was decided in a disparate fashion by each stakeholder acting independently, accountable through external funding, and with the expectation of a national audit at some future date which would match aspiration against delivery. With particular regard to the Aberdeen School of Education, much of the responsibility for responding to the national partnership agenda and determining what and how to implement it, fell to us, but not of our choosing.

Feedback

In this section there are three accessible sources of data and our commentary. The accessible sources are the School of Education document about partnership progress which were shared with stakeholders – both national and local, and the documents produced by the stakeholder organisations and shared with our School of Education individually or with all interested parties in a ‘public’ manner.

An opportunity to reflect on and receive feedback arose when the NIB commissioned an Aspect Review of the implementation of partnerships from the national agency, Education Scotland. This was to take place early in 2015 when teams of Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI), assisted by representatives of schools, local authorities, student teachers and university lecturers would visit each university provider of teacher education and hold discussions in the university, in the local authorities, and in schools with a range of participants about the various elements of the Donaldson recommendations for teacher education. The review would be conducted using a common set of questions, the majority of which addressed ITE elements, with a subset looking at Induction and a further subset examining Master’s level provision.

For us, this review raised issues regarding the relevance of deriving national prescriptions from local initiatives. Each School of Education served different parts of the country (with some overlap, especially in the Central Belt of Scotland) and had to prioritise the review recommendations in a different fashion. For us, the revisions to the undergraduate degree involved a deepening of subject learning and the novel element of access to Master’s level learning. Little more was required since the model drawn on by the Donaldson team was based on the Scottish Teachers for a New Era programme, where we had been the

pilot institution, and which already included a programme of study which involved the wider university (Hulme and Menter 2013 p 910 - 911). Furthermore, the pressing need for the local authorities in our geographical area was to ensure a more diverse and secure intake to teaching at a time of serious and ongoing staff shortages. Accordingly we found some of the Aspect Review questions were more skewed to a desire to demonstrate 'national', almost, uniform, implementation rather than how we were interpreting the national agenda in the light of local circumstances. But the reviewers did invite a submission from the university and this gave some opportunity to highlight our key activities (Northern Partnership 2015).

Due to the diverse nature of the Northern Partnership, activities are underpinned by the principles of sustainability, reciprocity and connectedness. (p.4)

A key strategy in the continuum of professional learning experiences is the focus on professional enquiry as part of the developing Masters professional beginning with ITE experiences and continued through career-long professional learning. (p.5)

The Professional Enquiry M Level... collaborative projects... build on developing enquiring professional mindsets for ITE students and beyond. (p.8)

The DLITE programme requires the partnership between the University and the local authorities that allow the learning to be contextualised with the local authority provision and support whilst co-constructing the learning with the University of Aberdeen PGDE tutors. (p.10)

TePL is an innovative teacher learning network across the North of Scotland. This initiative is piloting how shared-learning spaces linking teachers, pupils, student teachers, LA development officers, teacher educators and researchers across geographical boundaries provide new ways of learning for everyone. TePL uses web-linked and video technology to create the shared learning spaces which are associated with a wide range of partnership opportunities..... (pp. 10/11)

The Northern Partnership Professional Learning Network is both a virtual network space and a collaborative professional learning development with the University and some of the local authority partners in the north and north-east of Scotland....(It) seeks to create and support

professional learning dialogue, sharing and collaboration within and across the local authorities. Initially, this is targeted at the induction year teachers, having a focus on action research or professional enquiry.... (p. 12/13)

In the eventual review report (Education Scotland 2015) a great deal of the local colour was reduced or removed, and the reviewers continued to attempt a national overview. This led to a 'lowest common denominator' report with Key Findings of the following type:

Areas of positive practice

- All partnerships have a strong commitment to building on existing practices and strengthening relations within and across partnerships.
- There are several examples of very good practice which can be shared across the system. Networking opportunities within and between partnerships provide a very important framework to encourage further improvements. The aspect review process itself helped to facilitate this. ...
- Most Masters level students (83%) felt that their current programmes of study contributed a very great deal or quite a lot to their wider professional learning. (p.2)

Areas for development

- Most partnerships do not convey sufficiently well to all students and staff, their collective role and joint contribution as a partnership in supporting student teachers. Students are also unclear about the partnership's longer-term role in supporting high quality career-long professional learning (CLPL).
- A few partnerships still have significant work to do in terms of creating the conditions to support effective joint assessment of students...
- Overall, there is a continued need to further strengthen partnership practices to bring about greater consistency within and across partnerships in students' experiences during ITE and Masters level learning. (p.3)

As far as the Aberdeen work was concerned, TePL was highlighted in the review report (Education Scotland 2015, pp.25-28) as a noteworthy example of partnership. In addition, private feedback was given to each university and the Aberdeen feedback concentrated on issues, again mainly ITE, such as joint assessment of students on placement and better communication of course content and purpose with students and schools, which were to be addressed before a return visit by the Aspect Review group. For us, the local feedback was helpful but only in the terms which Education Scotland had set out, rather than in terms of our own aspirations for collaborative partnerships, while, from a national perspective, the feedback might have given policy-makers the impression that their agenda were being met. However, the review process provided little evidence that this national level approach to assessing the quality of a diverse programme was a helpful approach, and also gave the impression that improving ITE and increasing the take-up of Masters credits were the main goals of the Donaldson Report.

A more comprehensive review was provided by Ipsos MORI Scotland, independent consultants, who were commissioned by Scottish Government in 2015 to “evaluate the early impact of Teaching Scotland’s Future on teacher education and professional learning” (Scottish Government 2016b). Although the consultants report that “Our findings in this report are broadly in line with those of the Aspect Review, particularly in relation to joint assessment and placements, and the impacts of collaborative working” (p.42), their emphases were slight broader. With regard to local authority/university partnerships, for example, they suggested that more work was required to get class teachers involved in partnership activities, to consolidate contact between probationers and ITE providers, and to facilitate a greater contribution by local authorities to the partnerships (p.46). (Their data showed that local authorities felt less involved in partnership planning and delivery than they wished, although our data has drawn attention to the progress being made in achieving continuity and consistency of local authority involvement despite the priority the authorities have to give to dealing

with staffing shortages.). And, with regard to career-long professional learning (CLPL), they suggested that more work was required to deal with supply cover shortages which prevented some teachers engaging in CLPL, giving more support to the development of professional learning networks, and raising awareness of options for and benefits from study at SCQF level 11 (Masters) (p.65). (These findings were particularly pertinent to our own situation, and emphasised the necessity for continued funding of a general rather than a specific nature.)

Parallel with this evaluation, but taking a broader context, a review team from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), was asked to investigate and report on the direction of the Scottish curriculum – Curriculum for Excellence- and other key aspects of education policy, in order to highlight area where further change or development would add value (OECD 2015, p.3), Inevitably this involved them in studying the impact of Teaching Scotland’s future where their findings included a concern that the current climate of austerity would affect the levels of support required for effective teacher continuing learning; a suggestion that the drive for improved professional learning would depend on greater consistency and coherence amongst stakeholders; and an effort to improve partnerships among local authorities both at local and national levels. But the experts’ suggestion that has met with most discussion was that too much development in Scotland depends on ‘top-down’ approaches when a more productive approach would be “leading from the ‘middle’” (p.136).

For the OECD that “might best be realised through a new *forum* aiming at growth, coherence and making connections, rather than a *board* managing the programme from the centre. We believe in reinforcing the “middle”, through fostering the mutual support and learning across LAs, together with schools and networks of schools.” (p.121)

How then would the Scottish Government respond to all of this feedback, especially with a Scottish general election due in May 2016?

Discussion

Throughout Europe in the past few decades, there has been a redistribution of authority in many states from national to regional and local bodies. In the same fashion, the United Kingdom has devolved more autonomy to the nations of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, and within Scotland the official rhetoric has been to devolve more authority particularly to remote and outlying areas. In that context, the implementation of the Donaldson Report was welcomed in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen as it seemed to promise a more distinctive and local approach to teacher education across a Northern Partnership which contained most of the remote and outlying parts of Scotland.

Most of the developed world is still struggling with the effects of the financial meltdown of 2008 and, for governments this has meant a reduced capacity to implement any changes which require additional resourcing other than those which seem most efficient. Accordingly, any attempts to address local partnership needs have been constrained by resources or shaped to accommodate government funding. That this has not been entirely negative is shown by a summary of our four core collaborative partnership initiatives.

The least productive has been the attempt to achieve the goal of a Master's level teaching profession. Government has attached numerous conditions to its funding in order to meet specific priorities in curriculum and pedagogy rather than 'our' preference for growing a culture of commitment to advanced professional learning from ITE into Induction and on to career-long learning. The Ipsos MORI feedback (Scottish Government 2016b) indicates that the key is in encouraging a disposition among teachers to

Masters study rather than mandating specific courses, and there are signs that the government also now appreciates this. A difficulty still remains, however, in convincing local authorities how a strategic plan for CLPL which includes Masters programmes will improve teachers' professional practice.

On the success side, the technology-enhanced initiative (TePL) has resources which it can utilise to continue, finds favour in the Aspect Review (Education Scotland 2015), and by a merging of practicum and academic through cooperative, collaborative learning opportunities keeps the currency of the ITE programme fresh and innovative.

More successful still is the distance learning programme (DLITE) which grows in intake numbers and in partner local authorities each year, and now has its imitators in half of all Schools of Education in Scotland. There is, of course, a reason for its growth beyond any perceived quality. Local authorities which suffer from difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers see people who are already settled in their area and likely to remain in post to be a more stable workforce. This, in turn, reduces both local and national expenditure on the training and replacing of staff. Accordingly, the government allocates continuing full funding for these programmes, and the desire to ensure sustainable staffing levels gives authorities a greater commitment to join collaboratively with the university in delivering this programme.

But, by a number of measures, the Partnership Network (NP-PLN) has the greatest potential for meeting the needs of the north and north-east of Scotland. It only had pump-priming funding but it has demonstrated a potential which a number of partners wish to develop further. It has brought local providers together around a shared agenda of Induction and transition from ITE into Induction; it offers social network and 'streamed' opportunities for beginning teachers across most of the region to engage with professional learning which is mostly created locally to serve local needs; and it can be used for professional learning for others such as mentors through whom the continuum of professional learning

leading to a Masters' profession can be fostered. Paradoxically, a key driver to partnership in this was the reduced resource base of local authorities and the lack of additional government funding.

From our experience of initiating and then co-delivering the range of 'partnership' activities a number of key lessons about sustainable partnership have emerged.

From the university point of view, some of these were presented in a bid to Scottish Government in 2015 for continuation funding for Masters level activities, where we emphasised the value of better relationships with local authorities, where we asserted that programmes to achieve a Masters level profession had to start in ITE then into Induction and beyond, and where we acknowledged that only by harnessing the expertise of local authority and university staff in co-construction and co-delivery would these changes happen.

Our situation is not unique and chimes with cross-national issues:

These efforts involve a shift in the epistemology of teacher education from a situation where academic knowledge is seen as *the* authoritative source of knowledge about teaching to one where different aspects of expertise that exist in schools and communities are brought into teacher education and coexist on a more equal plane with academic knowledge. This broader view about the kinds of expertise that are needed to educate teachers expands opportunities for teacher learning, as new synergies are created through the interplay of knowledge from different sources. (Zeichner 2010, p.95)

In summary, although we have been seeking solutions to university-school partnership issues which best fit the local and regional circumstances in which we and partners find ourselves, we have gained experience of the professional learning process which may help to inform comparable partnership development in other cultures, and have learned much about how partnerships must evolve to meet current social, economic and political circumstances.

For example, partnerships need a strength of purpose which enables them to combat the short-termism and special interest funding models which national government uses to maintain its control. The

partnership needs to set medium and long-term goals and ensure that funding, irrespective of source and purpose, can still be used to meet these goals. Next, it is helpful if partnerships are stable, involving a university and a consistent set of local authorities and/or 'chains' of schools. This enables trust and confidence to grow on the basis of key personnel working together over a significant period of time to co-construct and deliver programmes of professional learning. But it is also important to avoid too strong a push for uniformity, since each partner has an agenda beyond the explicit goals of the partnership and in that broader agenda needs to maintain its unique identity and credibility among its citizens.

For teacher education, partnership development needs to be recognised in all its complexities by policy makers and practitioners, and requires "shared conceptualisation of the professional knowledge that teachers require" (Mutton 2016: 216) whilst recognising the tensions and constraints of meeting individual professional needs.

Finally, there is a temptation to seek answers to professional learning needs from other cultures, irrespective of compatibility, and to jump from one international 'policy borrowing' to another. Often the answers lie in 'policy learning' from the history of policy development in one's own culture, while nevertheless using international experience to throw light on one's own system (Raffe 2011). The Northern Partnership has a history stretching back over decades which it can use to plan for the future, so long as it continually looks outside itself for alternative policies and practices to further develop its achievements to date.

Conclusion and Postscript

A model for sustainability

Government additional funding will taper and disappear. The crucial question therefore is the extent to which the new collaborative approaches to partnership in professional learning can be sustained. Kari Smith (2007) highlights the risks:

Moreover, its implementation requires time, a thing which is not in surplus to school-based teacher educators and which university staff feel is spent at the expense of research, meaning less

promotion opportunities. Time is not only required during the initial implementation, but after that, it is also a major factor in sustaining the model. (p. 290)

In each of the activities mentioned here, there is a different threat to sustainability, and an overall threat caused by the still relatively low level of commitment to partnership and the management of it by the local authorities.

For them there are, justifiably, day to day concerns about the level of resourcing in an era of austerity and the difficulty of staffing their schools to an acceptable level which overwhelm any desire to attend to government concerns over partnership. We have not yet reached the tipping point where effective partnership is seen also as a major contribution to resourcing and staffing, although each of the activities could become powerful if a model of joint working was found to which all partners would commit coherent management. In the short term, however, effecting sufficient change in the working practices of all partners is difficult when staffing is constrained and likely to become more so.

Co-construction and co-delivery

Nevertheless there are a number of promising developments where partners are working together to construct and deliver professional learning across the teacher education continuum. Among these developments is a new collaboration between the School and some partners to improve the linkages between School Experience (practicum) and teacher Induction (Donaldson recommendation 10), echoing Martin et al. (2011):

Within the collective third space, conversations between university-based and school-based teacher educators can serve as sites to grapple with understandings of teaching practices and challenges of learning to teach. In this way, reconciling academic and practitioner knowledge, as

seemingly oppositional points of view, can generate both new understandings and enhanced practices (p.300).

There are also developments in co-working in the Masters programme and in DLITE but, as yet, no bringing together of all these in one integrated suite of qualifications.

Postscript

Much of this analysis has concerned the tension between the national perception and the local. Our 'Northern' interpretation of the Donaldson process has not always coincided with the 'Edinburgh' (Government) interpretation. And yet both perceptions are valid since the education system must serve the needs of the nation as well as its localities. Since the Donaldson Report and the setting up of the successor bodies (NPG and NIB) there has been a change of First Minister and a change of Cabinet Secretary for Education. There are new priorities such as a "National Improvement Framework" (Scottish Government 2016a), and, for the time being, continuing delivery of the "Teaching Scotland's Future" agenda is in the hands of a new Strategic Board for Teacher Education on which key stakeholders sit.

But, at the same time, the government party, Scottish National Party, in its manifesto for the 2016 election, which it won, is proposing a means of recognising the OECD (2015) concept of the 'middle'. There is also the proposal for new regional mechanisms for delivering school education and teacher education which will bring groups of local authorities together in partnerships (Scottish National Party 2016). Our experience suggests that this would certainly enable the partners in North/North-East Scotland to deliver more effectively and would create the types of 'forum' proposed by OECD.

(Text 7992 words + abstract + references)

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