

Change and Reform in Teacher Education in Ireland: a Case Study in the Reform of Higher Education

Spremembe in reforma v izobraževanju učiteljev na Irskem: študija primera reforme v visokem šolstvu

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Abstract

This paper begins by setting the context for reform of teacher education in the Irish case. It takes the 1991 OECD review of the education system in Ireland as a point of departure and highlights the policy reforms which have taken place throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. The structure of teacher education is briefly outlined. The implications of social and legislative change for initial teacher education are considered. Trends and issues at entry to teaching are examined and the paper points to some of the features and challenges of in-career development and lifelong learning for teachers. The implications of the Bologna Process for the structuring of courses are outlined.

Key words

teacher education in Ireland; entry to teaching; implications of the Bologna Declaration; reform; social, policy and legislative change

Povzetek

Ta članek prikaže na začetku kontekst reforme izobraževanja učiteljev na Irskem. Kot izhodišče jemlje OECD poročilo o izobraževalnem sistemu na Irskem iz leta 1991 ter osvetli reforme izobraževalnih politik, ki so potekale skozi devetdeseta leta v sedanje desetletje. Na kratko je orisana struktura izobraževanja učiteljev. Obravnavane so posledice družbenih in zakonodajnih sprememb za začetno izobraževanje učiteljev. Obravnavani so trendi in vprašanja o vstopu v poučevanje, članek pa tudi opozarja na nekatere poteze in izzive za profesionalni razvoj ter vseživljenjsko učenje učiteljev. Orisane so implikacije bolonjskega procesa za strukturiranje študijskih programov.

Ključne besede

izobraževanje učiteljev na Irskem; začetek poučevanja; implikacije Bolonjske deklaracije; reforma; socialne, strateške in zakonodajne spremembe

Introduction

'A child is not a vessel to be filled, but a lamp to be lit'.

The little proverb quoted above illustrates the perennial and on-going challenge to teachers, and thus indirectly, to teacher educators. Starting from this values perspective we can begin by arguing that teaching is both a moral and ethical activity, not just a technical or even a professional one, and that interpersonal relationships are at its heart. The learner, be it child or adult, must be at the centre of teacher education reform and modernisation and must be the yardstick by which we measure the effectiveness of reform.

This paper begins by setting the context for reform of teacher education in Ireland by briefly mapping its structure. The implications of socio-economic and legislative change for teacher education are considered. Trends and issues at entry to teaching are examined. Then, taking the 1991 OECD review of the education system in Ireland as a point of departure, the paper highlights the policy reforms which have taken place throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. The discussion points to some of the features and challenges of in-career development and lifelong learning for teachers. The implications of the Bologna Process for the modernisation and reform of teacher education are outlined.

The Structure of Teacher Education in Ireland

Teaching in Ireland has been an all-graduate profession since the 1970s. Teacher Education is provided by education departments in the seven universities, or by colleges of education affiliated to one or other of the universities. The dominant model of teacher education for post-primary teachers - i.e. for students aged 12-18 - is provided on the consecutive model but the concurrent model is also used, especially in the technical, craft, physical education and science areas, for about a fifth of the annual output of second level teachers (Gleeson, 2004). Teaching is a regulated profession and the number of places on teacher education courses is limited by the Higher Education Authority, in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science. Currently, there are 1,000 places on post-primary teacher education courses. Students specialize in their chosen areas of study (Arts/Humanities, Business, Science, etc.) to Bachelors degree level for a period of three or four years, depending on the university or programme of study (i.e. programmes of 180-240 ECTS). This is followed by a one-year, post-graduate, teacher education programme – the Higher Diploma in Education (60 ECTS) – which is

the professional qualification for recognized second level teachers. Concurrent teacher education programmes for second level schools are all of four years duration (240 ECTS). For primary education, most teachers undergo concurrent education courses of three years duration (180 ECTS), with a minority undertaking a four-year programme or consecutive courses. Supervised and assessed teaching practice and school experience is an integral part of teacher education in Ireland and forms up to 50 per cent of the time spent on programmes.

In order to become a fully qualified teacher, graduates of the various teacher education courses must also complete a probationary year in a recognised school. Unlike Northern Ireland, Great Britain and many other countries, the Republic of Ireland does not have a system-wide induction programme for newly qualified teachers. As the result of increased awareness of the need for a structured system of induction, a partnership project on induction was established in 2002. The results of this pilot project have proved very positive and have led to the recommendation that a well-structured and resourced induction programme for newly qualified teachers in Irish schools be established. At a National Colloquium on Teacher Induction in January 2004 senior officials in the DES emphasised that induction programmes could strengthen teacher professionalism (Killeavy et al., 2004).

Recognition of awards for the purposes of entrance to secondary schools is currently the provenance of the Secondary Teachers' Registration Council and of the Department of Education and Science. A Teaching Council is in the process of being established arising from the implementation of the *Teaching Council Act, 2000*. When it is fully established on 1st March 2006, the Teaching Council will take over the function of the registration of teachers, and will also:

- review and accredit the programmes of teacher education and training provided by institutions of higher education and training in the State;
- review the standards of education and training appropriate to a person entering a programme of teacher education and training; and
- review the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required for the practice of teaching.

The establishment of the Teaching Council is a landmark measure for the teaching profession in Ireland and incorporates significant self-governing powers for teachers (Coolahan, 2003). It will give the teaching profession a considerable degree of control over entry to teaching and over all facets of the education of teachers. The responsibilities designated to the Teaching Council are more extensive than those of similar bodies in other countries (ibid). The establishment of the Teaching Council on a statutory basis (*Teaching Council Act, 2000*) is, itself, a very substantial educational reform and has the potential to enhance the status and professionalism of teaching – issues raised by a range

of research and policy reports over the years at national and international levels (Burke, 1992; Buchberger et al., 2000; Drudy et al., 2005; OECD, 2005).

With regard to the third 'I' of teacher professional development in Ireland - i.e. in-career development - recent analyses acknowledge: that there has been a very substantial increase in in-service or continuing professional development opportunities for teachers since the beginning of the 1990s; that there is now a multiplicity of providers (including the state and the universities); that there is a need for a more strategic approach to in-career development, both with regard to the provision of a more coherent framework and with regard to a greater needs focus, particularly on state provision of in-career CPD as much of this has focused on the implementation of curricular change; that there is a need to consider the issue of an accreditation credit accumulation pathway for professional studies up to masters and doctoral levels (Drudy and Coolahan, 2002). Studies and professional development courses for teachers and other educational professionals to masters and doctoral levels are provided by the universities or by colleges of education affiliated to universities. One of the impacts of the Bologna process in the Irish system is the increasing modularization and semesterisation of programmes in the universities. This will no doubt facilitate a greater coherence and more transparent pathways for university accredited professional development programmes for teachers and other educational personnel.

Social, Policy and Legislative Change in the 1990s and 2000s

It is widely acknowledged that, in Ireland and internationally, the decade of the 1990s and the first years of the 21st Century have been a period of unprecedented change in both society and education. In the context of the Irish education system, 1991 is a good point of departure in the assessment of change. In that year the OECD published its second major review of Irish education with particular reference to the teaching career. The report was very complimentary to the quality of the teaching force and of the personnel and infrastructure in place for teacher education (Coolahan, 2004). It recommended supports for the professional development of teaching based on a '3 Is' approach - i.e. that teacher education should be comprised of high quality initial, induction and in-career education and professional development. This policy framework was subsequently incorporated in Government policy documents such as Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (1992) and the White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995). It is also evident in European policy documents such as the EU Directorate General on Education and Culture's common education principles for teacher competences and

qualifications (2005), and in the recommendations of the OECD in their study of 25 countries, *Teachers Matter* (2005).

This period has also been characterised by unprecedented economic growth, which in Ireland has surpassed that of most other countries. In the 1990s Ireland became one of the new 'tiger' economies with increases in transnational corporation exports accounting for up to three-quarters of the economic growth, particularly in computer related industries (O'Hearn, 1999: 125). The remainder of the growth was in associated service and construction sectors, and in tourism. Ireland became a 'showpiece of globalization, a prime example of how a region could turn around from economic laggard to tiger in just a few years, by integrating itself maximally into the global division of labour' (ibid.). Ireland, at the beginning of the twenty first century, is the most globally integrated country in the world due to its deep economic links and its high level of personal contact with the rest of the world as well as its technological/internet connectivity and its political engagement with international organisations (A.T. Kearney/*Foreign Policy*, 2004). This growth was associated with the international re-structuring of economies and the increasing centrality of knowledge-based industry.

This unprecedented economic growth has brought about changing patterns of employment and unemployment in Ireland. It has resulted in changing patterns of migration. From the Great Famine in 1847 Ireland had been a country of high emigration, mainly to the UK, US and Australia. As recently as the 1980s the Irish economy was stagnant, with high unemployment and high emigration. However, from the mid-1990s there was an increase in net migration (i.e. inward migration less outward migration). For example, between 1996 – 2002 the increase was 26 per cent. This accelerated from the time of the accession of former Eastern European countries to the EU in 2004. In 2004 alone there was an increase in net migration of 31.6 per cent (Central Statistics Office, 2005). These new developments have resulted in a mix of responses. At one level, schools have responded very constructively to the changes in their pupil populations but there are many challenges, not least from the lack of education of substantial sections of the teaching workforce around issues of diversity and interculturalism.

There have been other changes also. Major changes have occurred within major social institutions such as the family, with increased rates of marriage breakdown and single parent families. The power and influence of the Churches (especially the Roman Catholic church) has waned, although the Churches, mainly the Roman Catholic Church still own and control most of the education system at first and second level, and have significant influence over primary teacher education. Increasing prosperity has brought some social problems, for example increasing levels of substance abuse, and this has a very direct effect in schools. Economic growth has not benefited all equally. The failure of education as a social institution to eliminate social-class-related inequalities is

well documented (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Nolan and Smeeding (2005) argue that the spectacular economic growth in Ireland in the past decade has seen the gap in average income between Ireland and the richer OECD countries narrow dramatically. The number of people living in consistent poverty has dropped from 15 per cent in 1994 to 5 per cent in 2001 (Combat Poverty Agency, 2003). However, income poverty is still significant with over one fifth of the population (22 per cent) below the 60 per cent median income line (ibid.). Nor has the economic growth greatly affected the Irish ranking in terms of income inequality. Ireland remains an outlier among rich European nations in its high degree of income inequality, though still falling well short of the level seen in the United States (Nolan and Smeeding, 2005). These factors affect the nature and inclusivity of the school system and mean that teacher education has the very difficult job of preparing teachers, and supervising and assessing their performance, in a variety of very different social, economic and motivational contexts.

There has been significant impact on teachers, schools and teacher education from reports, recommendations and directives from an increasingly powerful and integrated European Union, as well as the influence of organisations such as the OECD on government policy. Policy analysis and debates around government green and white papers such as the Green Paper, *Education for a Changing World* (1992), the White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995), *Ready to Learn*, the White Paper on Early Education (1999), the Green and White Papers on Adult Education (1998 and 2000) have all helped to shape change in education.

Legislation reform and change from the end of the 1990s is also having a powerful effect. Although important pieces of educational legislation were enacted from the end of the nineteenth century and throughout the 20th century, Ireland was unusual insofar as it never had a comprehensive education act since the establishment of the state system of education in 1831, by Ministerial letter, until the passing of the *Education Act*, in 1998. Since then there have been quite a number of pieces of legislation such as the *Qualifications (Education and Training) Act*, 1999, *Education and Welfare Act*, 2000, the *Teaching Council Act*, 2000, *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act*, 2004. This legislative reform affects all parts of the education system and is having a significant impact in management, planning, definition of rights and responsibilities, admission of pupils, although the law has also copper-fastened the existing patterns of ownership and control in the system. One example of the impact of the legislative change on teaching and teacher education is in the area of the mainstreaming of children with special educational needs. Until the 1998 *Education Act*, children with significant disabilities and special educational needs ('low incidence' special educational needs) were mainly educated in segregated settings with very unclear entitlements in the mainstream system. A

combination of policy developments and constitutional court cases taken by parents, together with the implementation of the Education Act have brought about dramatic changes in the education and supports for children with disabilities. From a position in which relatively few teachers other than those specialising in special educational needs had any education or training in this area, the Irish mainstream school system has now moved to a position where the majority of mainstream classroom teachers have at least some children with special educational needs in their classrooms. There is a long tradition among Irish teachers that they work in isolation from other staff in their individual classrooms. The impact of the mainstreaming of children with disabilities means that for many teachers they must now learn how to interact with other adults in their classrooms. From a position less than ten years ago where there were only a handful of support teachers or special needs assistants in primary classrooms there are now some 1,530 learning support teachers, 2,745 special needs and resource teachers, 4,800 full- and part-time special needs assistants who must interact with pupils and teachers in their classrooms. There is a clear need for changes in initial and in-career education for teachers in this regard.

The changes in the economy, society and education just outlined, and the increasing propensity of society to look to schools and the teaching profession to address social problems, confirm the complexity of the teacher's role. These changes also have implications for teacher education in many different respects including the ones just outlined.

Trends at Entry to Teaching

Research conducted at entry to teacher education courses reveals some interesting patterns in the Irish case (Drudy et al., 2005). First, teacher education courses are still proving very attractive to good students. Competition for places on first cycle and second cycle courses is intense. Entrants to teaching are good academic performers. Average points levels in the Leaving Certificate Examination required for entry to concurrent teacher education courses remain high. A substantial proportion of student teachers in the colleges of education would have been eligible for any course in the university system, including most of the so-called "high prestige" courses (ibid).

Second, students prioritising primary teaching (since this was the main focus of our research) were more interested in things like job satisfaction, fulfilment and creativity when choosing a career than were people choosing other courses. They were also much more likely to place a high value on caring, "making a difference" to others and on looking after children than were other students. On the other hand, they were less interested in things like pay and prestige. Not only were those choosing primary, (and indeed other forms of teaching), more

orientated to children and to caring, they expressed gender egalitarian views more frequently than did their peers. And they were mostly young women. The data show that, on average each year, approximately 90 per cent of primary college entrants are women.

Not only are most of the people in the colleges of education female, they are disproportionately from rural, farming and middle class backgrounds. When asked to give their reasons for having chosen primary teaching over half of the students teachers gave reasons which related to young children – either involving the satisfaction of showing them how to do things, liking them, having experience working with them or wishing to help disadvantaged children.

A recent survey of entrants to second level teaching on the Higher Diploma in Education in one of the universities provides a comparison with the primary entrants. Females were disproportionately represented, but less markedly so than among primary entrants - some 74 per cent were female and 26 per cent male. Just over 85 per cent of these students had been awarded their degrees at honours level, also indicative of a high academic calibre of entrants to second level teaching (Killeavy, 1999). Just a quarter of these students had decided to become teachers before entering university – suggesting, perhaps, that the relatively poor perception that second level students have of second level teaching (Drudy et al. 2005) makes it a difficult choice to make while still at school. Interest in their subjects was the chief motivator for these entrants to second level teaching, while an interest in working with young people and a desire to help create a better world were also significant motivators. While the working conditions associated with teaching were also regarded as attractive, a teaching salary was not rated highly as a career incentive (*ibid.*). Ireland thus shares some of the features identified as problematic by the recent major OECD (2005) study on attracting, developing and retaining teachers, such as the high proportion of female entrants. However, it is still more fortunate than many countries in the high academic calibre of its entrants. It is also, as a profession, beginning to diversify somewhat. For example, consecutive courses now attract more mature students and more students with previous employment experience than formerly (Clarke, 2005). However, the student body still remains relatively homogenous with regards to ethnicity and social class background (*ibid*; Drudy et al., 2005). These factors raise difficult issues in relation to admission criteria to teacher education courses, such as whether to have quotas for different categories of person, how to attract more men, how to maintain the high academic standard of entrant, and so on.

Teacher Education Reform and Modernisation

While all universities and colleges engage in a continuous process of programme evaluation and change, there have been two major reviews of initial teacher education programmes over the past five years – one on primary teacher education (Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education, 2002) and the other on second level teacher education (Advisory Group on Post-primary Teacher Education, 2002). The primary review body made 61 recommendations which included: the extension of the concurrent programmes for primary teachers from three years to four; the institutionalisation of the consecutive model for primary teaching as a permanent feature rather than to address shortfalls in supply; increasing the mathematics requirement at entry; the establishment of middle management structures in the primary colleges (Working Group on Primary Pre-service Teacher Education, 2002; Kelleghan, 2004). The post-primary review body made over 65 recommendations including: an emphasis on the value of enquiry-based models of teacher education; the establishment of partnership boards between universities and stakeholders; a minimum of two different school sites for teaching practice (not yet universal); retention of both the consecutive and concurrent models; flexible pathways of accreditation; diversity education on all courses; structured induction for all newly qualified teachers; increasing full-time staff levels in education departments (Advisory Group on Post-primary Teacher Education, 2002). Some of the recommendations of these two bodies have already been incorporated in many of the teacher education programmes. Other recommendations require considerable state exchequer funding and that has not, as yet, been forthcoming.

Teacher education in Ireland is now increasingly research based. A major study of patterns of entry to teaching, and the perceptions of teaching by school leavers has been commissioned by the Department of Education and Science. This has played a significant part in relation to policy formation on attracting more males into teaching and has been published as research publication (Drudy et al., 2005). An additional major research project on the experience of student-teachers on consecutive courses is now under way by a consortium of academics from a number of university education department/schools and, when completed, will inform future developments on these courses (Clarke et al., 2005). A national project on the establishment of a structured induction system for newly qualified teachers has been conducted and the results have implications for initial teacher education as well as for early professional development (Killeavy et al., 2004).

Teacher educators in Ireland are now considering the implications of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 and the Berlin Communiqué of 2003 (see Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, 1999 and Communiqué of

the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education, 2003), and of subsequent developments in this process. The key point which has emerged from the Bologna Declaration is that the European Ministers of Education have agreed to the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement, in order to promote European citizens employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system

Ministers have agreed the adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate. Access to the second cycle will require successful completion of first cycle studies, lasting a minimum of three years. The Berlin Communiqué envisages that the degree awarded after the first cycle will also be relevant to the European labour market as an appropriate level of qualification. The second cycle should lead to the master and/or doctorate degree as is already the case in many European countries.

The approach envisaged in Bologna-related documents and debates, such as the report of the TUNING project and the Berlin Communiqué, see the teacher as a facilitator of learning. This approach to teaching and learning focuses on the learning outcomes of programmes, including teacher education programmes, and implies active learning methodologies and reflective practice (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003). Ireland has always had a two/three cycle system of higher education, although there are some anomalies with regard to the placement of the post-graduate consecutive programmes within the framework (many student-teachers will have studied full-time for five years to acquire their teaching qualification for the second level system). Changes under way in the system mean that universities are now moving to the adoption of modular structures in which programme objectives are learner focused and couched in terms of learning outcomes. The Diploma Supplement is now embedded in the system. The Irish universities have not all yet incorporated ECTS at postgraduate level, and certainly not yet fully as an accumulation system, although they are moving in that direction.

Conclusion

The Irish system still values teaching and entry to teaching is still very competitive. Teacher education has been the subject of much review, reflection, reform and development over the last fifteen years. However, the recommendations of the expert groups given the task of review have not been supported by state exchequer funding. The establishment of the Teaching Council is likely to have a major impact on teacher education when it is fully operational. What of the learner at the heart of the process? Has the flame been lit? Certainly many teacher educators value the idea of lighting that flame, and

keeping it alive (see, for example, Hogan, 1995). However, as a final comment it must not be forgotten that learners are themselves a very diverse group, characterised by differences based on factors such as gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, to mention but a few. All have different needs, priorities and even learning styles. In Ireland, as in many other countries, the ‘institutionalisation ... of invidious status hierarchies between different post-primary schools serves to reproduce existing status hierarchies’ (Clancy, 1995). At second level, the Irish school system is divided into a hierarchy of four strata with varying levels of privilege and disadvantage in each (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). These status hierarchies between different types of schools also serve to make it difficult for schools to become more inclusive. They also present very different experiences and challenges to student teachers, and to teacher educators. Reform of teacher education also requires reform of the education system itself in order that the needs of all learners can be met and the flame kindled right across the social and economic spectrum.

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