

A Review Paper on Thinking and Policies Relating to Teacher Education in Ireland

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December 2007.**

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1. A Backward Glance

(a) An Era of Positive Action

Education as an academic and research subject, and teacher education as a professional education programme have had a chequered history in Ireland ¹. As a process of review and re-appraisal of teacher education programmes and qualifications is being undertaken by the Teaching Council it would seem useful to refer succinctly to some recent aspects of that history in establishing a context for potential new developments. The decade 1965 to 1975 (approx) was the last time fundamental restructuring of teacher education took place. This coincided with a period of major social, economic and cultural change in Ireland, when a vibrant national economy provided resources and motivation for significant reforms, not dissimilar to the period from the middle nineties to 2007. A number of reports were issued which had important implications for education and teacher education including the Investment in Education Report (1966), the Commission on Higher Education Report (1967), the Higher Education Authority (HEA) Report on Teacher Education (1970) and the Report on An Chomhairle Mhúinteoiréachta (1974).

Among key changes which took place regarding teacher education were the following. The old teacher training colleges were re-modelled as colleges of education and benefited from new buildings and facilities. Courses were re-structured and the colleges assumed more academic independence from the Department of Education, and staff numbers and expertise were expanded. Student numbers increased, single sex colleges gave way to mixed colleges, the student body became more diversified and they lived a more “open” than boarding lifestyle. Education became more central as a subject aimed at giving students a more theoretical underpinning to their studies. The establishment of the Educational Research Centre in 1966, on the campus of St. Patrick’s College, was symbolic of a new interest in educational research relating to schooling issues. Libraries became better stocked and staffed, and teaching methodologies became more varied,

including the use of educational technologies. A landmark development was the introduction of the B.Ed. degree course in 1974, with the various colleges of education becoming affiliated to universities.

As regards the education departments of the universities, heed was taken of the calls of the Commission Higher Education (1967) that they should be expanded as a matter of urgency, and that a more active research role should be developed. Each university appointed new professors and the recruitment of more fulltime staff with various specialisms took place. Premises and facilities were also improved, particularly in the areas of audio-visual equipment, micro-teaching studios, resource rooms and library resources. The Higher Diploma in Education was re-structured as a one-year full-time course, with a better balance between university and school-based experience. Post-graduate work was much expanded, with new M.Ed. degrees being introduced to accompany the established MA and Ph.D programmes. A range of specialist post-graduate diplomas in education were developed with many benign effects, including promoting a greater research orientation for both university staff and participating teachers.

A significant new departure was the setting up of the National College of Physical Education in 1970, which developed into Thomond College of Education in Limerick. Thomond College was designed on different lines from the traditional colleges of education and from the university education departments. It dealt with the teacher education of teachers of practical subjects on a four-year concurrent degree course, with teaching practice taking place on block placement. The degrees were conferred by the NCEA at that time. The NCEA also conferred most degrees for art teachers of the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), which was re-structured as an institution more independent of the Department of Education, as was also the case with the Crawford Institute, Cork. The two colleges of home economics – Sion Hill, Dublin and St. Angela's, Sligo – followed a concurrent course model and became associated with the universities. Many teachers of religion followed the four-year concurrent course in the

Mater Dei Institute and their degrees were validated by the Pontifical University of Maynooth, later by Dublin City University.

Teacher education was also enriched and deepened by a contemporaneous flowering of educational research and of scholarly associations with an educational research interest, such as the Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) (1975) and the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI), 1976. A greater awareness of the importance of in-service teacher education was in evidence with the establishment of regional Teacher Centres, from the early seventies. The Report of An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta recommended the establishment of a Teaching Council in its report of 1974, but this did not come to pass until thirty years later².

Overall, it is very striking how much action took place on teacher education within that decade or so. New institutions were established, old institutions were expanded, modernised and equipped, new course structures were designed with new styles of pedagogy, staff expertise was expanded, new course accreditation processes were introduced, teaching became an all-graduate profession, with a mixture of concurrent and consecutive initial teacher education programmes, post-graduate research degrees in education were expanded, and educational research and publications, based on Irish circumstances, became generally available. That so much happened in such a short time bore evidence of the pro-active work of many agencies, including the Department of Education, the academic institutions and the teacher unions, all of whom realised that reform was timely and necessary. The investment of time, effort and resources has paid off for modern Irish society on many levels.

(b) A Period of Retrenchment

However, the momentum was not sustained and, for whatever reason, it would seem that teacher education fell well down the priority policy list within the Department of Education. The White Paper on Educational Development (1980) paid almost no attention to teacher education, confining its treatment to desultory comments on “In-service courses for teachers”. The report of the Ministerial Committee on In-service

Teacher Education, published in 1984, was ignored by the government. The Programme for Action in Education, 1984-1987, (1984) ruled out action on the report during the four year span of the programme. The Programme proposed reviews of the B Ed degree and of Higher Diploma in Education, but these did not take place. It hoped to give greater priority to in-service needs but, it stated, “It is not envisaged, however, that such improvement can cover additional payroll costs.” The numbers taking the Higher Diploma in Education course were to be “controlled”, and the general tone of retrenchment in the teacher education chapter can be sensed from the following quotation, “The overall reduction in student numbers in Colleges of Education will have to be accompanied by corresponding operational savings in the Colleges and by a restriction in staff recruitment and replacement”³.

This was the climate in which the decision was taken in 1987 to close the largest teacher education college in the state, Carysfort College of Education, despite the strong opposition of teacher education and general education interests. It was also the climate which led to a cabinet decision in January 1991 to close three of the then five education departments in the universities, which provided Higher Diploma in Education courses. On this occasion the opposition to such action was more successful, although a capping of numbers on the courses was agreed. A working party convened by the Minister for Education, in May 1990, to report on the establishment of a teaching council proved abortive and never completed its work due to alleged legal problems raised by the Department of Education chairman and officials. Such indications of national policy caused much uncertainty in teacher education circles at the time and tended to have an undermining effect on the qualitative, developmental work in educational studies and practice which had been nurtured in the era of positive action, 1965 to 1975, and developed subsequently.

2. Appraisal and Policy Proposals, 1991 – 1995

However, the nineties ushered in an era of unprecedented analysis, appraisal, consultation, educational policy formulation and legislation which greatly changed the general climate and re-established a more affirmative, partnership approach on teacher education as on

education policy generally. In the context of major economic growth and social developments which set in from the mid-nineties, education was regarded as a central plank of economic and social development. With the emergence of what became known as “the knowledge society” politicians, economists and educationalists have been emphasising the desirability of Ireland developing its niche. It was realised that a high quality education system was a sine qua non if the ambitious aspirations for the society’s development were to be realised, and that such a system is contingent on the availability of a quality teaching force. A range of reports from the early nineties made recommendations on teacher education and the teaching career. The reports were not always consistent with each other but, cumulatively, they have greatly changed the policy climate and effected many changes regarding the teaching profession. Not all the proposals and implications of reviews have yet been fully rolled out and implemented. It is arguable that we are still in the implementation phase of this remarkable recent period of policy appraisal. The remainder of this paper seeks to highlight the key proposals on teacher education of the main reports, or statements, and establish a linking commentary to provide an informative background framework for decisions of the Teaching Council on the teacher education continuum for the future.

In June 1991, the OECD published its review of Irish education, with particular reference to the teaching career. The views of the external, international review experts were very significant in steadying attitudes at the then period of uncertainty which existed. They stated unambiguously that “Ireland has been fortunate to maintain the quality of its teaching force”⁴. As regards initial teacher education, they remarked:

We visited nearly all the initial education institutions and were impressed with the quality and commitment of their staffs, the strength of the programmes and the standard of buildings, teaching spaces, laboratories, equipment and other facilities now generally available. Despite the pressures, initial teacher education is already of a good and appropriate standard and, happily, the means very largely exist at present for the further development that should and will undoubtedly occur. Most important, the quality of teacher educators is high. The reforms of the 1970’s and the injection of resources for capital works, equipment and

staffing, have provided a foundation upon which to continue to build. Thus, a well organised, effective and professionally and academically sound structure for initial teacher education already exists⁵.

This was a very strong endorsement of the nature and potential of initial teacher education at the time, and it is interesting that they paid tribute to the earlier period of innovative policy and resourcing which provided the basis for it.

The reviewers opposed the policy of retrenchment and closure of institutions based on “a short-term economic strategy”, in favour of collaboration and merger relationships between institutions. They pointed out that “The existing training institutions are potentially the only sure guarantee of a high quality system of in-service training”⁶. The reviewers strongly emphasised that teacher education should be seen as a continuum throughout the career – “It is our basic contention that the education and training for this career (teaching) should be continuing and not seen simply as a preparation for and introduction to it. This entails creating a framework in which the elements of induction and in-service play a role at least as vital as that of initial training”⁷. The report went on to state categorically, “We believe that the best returns from further investment in teacher education will come from the careful planning and construction of a nationwide induction and in-service system using the concept of the teaching career as the foundation”⁸. This was a landmark, authoritative statement, delivered in 1991 on what the bedrock policy should be for teacher education in Ireland, which has not yet been fully achieved.

The reviewers had specific things to say about each stage of the 3 I’s – initial, induction, in-service teacher education. They regarded both the consecutive and concurrent models of initial education as having “their place and meeting real needs”, stating that the two approaches “should be seen as complementary rather than competitive”. While recognising that both types of programme were “overcrowded”, they did not favour the extension of the courses, but considered that an induction year, with the involvement of the institutions was a preferable option. It was considered that the provision of induction and more in-service for teachers should relieve the initial programmes of some of the

overcrowded content. They expressed unease at the optional character of school placements for teaching practice in the consecutive model. They expressed the view that substantial improvements had taken place in the curriculum of initial teacher education “by thorough going reappraisals” by the institutions involved, and considered that they would continue to modify their programmes. Without being specific on modalities, the reviewers favoured close contact between the training institutions and the schools.

The reviewers stated it was necessary “to treat induction as a distinct and discrete phase in the professional development of the teacher with its own clearly-spelt out objectives, procedures, role definitions and resource allocations”. They went on to state that “since induction must be treated as a formal part of the responsibilities of senior staff, it must be built into the definition of their role and provided for in staffing profiles, teaching loads and in salaries”⁹. The final statement was that induction should be regarded “as an essential component of a policy for maintaining quality of schooling and teachers”. Such comments amounted to a very categorical insistence on the centrality of induction to enlightened teacher education policy.

Unlike induction which related to a finite period, the concept of in-service education (INSET) was seen as addressing the total teaching career in all its variety and extending for up to four decades. The reviewers stated they believed that, at regular intervals, every teacher should satisfy certain performance criteria in relation to the processes of teaching and learning. The reviewers envisaged the school as a learning community and, as well as more traditional forms of in-service, they urged direct participation by teachers with their peers in school-based in-service. The report suggested that the delivery of teacher education must involve a large and varied array of agencies. The reviewers urged the further expansion of post-graduate courses and support for in-career teachers participating in them. The existing network of teacher centres ought to be expanded and strengthened. The reviewers urged new incentives for teachers to engage in INSET. The review also urged greater evaluation of INSET provision.

Finally, the OECD Review stated that a “National Council” was needed “to address the issues of teacher selection, initial training, credentialing, induction and in-service education”¹⁰. It should be statutory, reporting to the Minister for Education, and be representative of a wide range of interests apart from the teachers themselves. In this latter proposal one can see the prefiguring of the teaching council.

Overall, it can be concluded that the OECD set out a comprehensive agenda for teacher education policy, based on international research and experience, but tailored to the Irish education context which they examined with discrimination. While the report did not get wide publicity or dissemination in Ireland at that time its agenda for reform can be seen to be highly influential in subsequent years. It could be said that it had a major shaping influence on the attitudes and discourse on teacher education of many involved parties for many years.

The influence of the OECD can be detected in aspects of Ireland’s first Green Paper on Education: Education for a Changing World, published a year later, in June 1992. In the opening paragraph tribute was paid to “the enormous contribution to Irish society” made by teachers and it was affirmed that teaching should continue to be an attractive and rewarding career. As a demanding job it “requires high quality initial training and preparation, supported by in-career development to meet continually changing needs and demands”¹¹. While quoting the OECD’s endorsement of the quality of existing initial teacher education, it made the surprising proposal to drop the concurrent model of primary teacher training in favour of the consecutive model, stating “A common form of initial training for all teachers appears to have considerable merit”. All teachers would be expected to do a probationary year, “consisting of part-time teaching complemented by attendance at a range of training modules provided by, or under the auspices of, the teacher training institutions” Thus, the plan was to align probation with an induction process. This was the first time a government policy proposal for formal induction was made. The probation aspect was to be certified by the school principal on the basis of set criteria. The Green Paper quoted the OECD review on its remarks on the best return

from further investment being on induction and in-service. The paper formally adopted the policy on the continuum stating:

Ideally, teacher education should be seen as a continuum in which high quality initial training and properly structured induction are followed by well-devised in-career training programmes, available periodically throughout a teacher's career¹³. In-service courses were seen as relating to the system's needs as well as the personal and professional development of teachers. A broad view of in-service provision, on lines advocated by the OECD, was proposed:

Courses of varying duration will be required, including some long-duration courses leading to certification, and teachers will continue to be facilitated in pursuing such courses for their professional development¹⁴.

It was stated that full use would be made of the wide range of agencies available for INSET, locally and nationally. As was advised by the OECD, the inspectorate would have a monitoring role on in-service, rather than a delivery role. It was also envisaged that teachers with recognised competence might be seconded to support and advise teachers and schools in the locality. The Green Paper also stated that, "The problem of unsatisfactory teaching must be debated and resolved, including, at the end of the remedial procedures, the withdrawal of recognition if deemed chronically unsatisfactory". Finally, the Paper favoured the establishment of a Teaching Council and expressed the hope that inhibiting legal issues might be resolved shortly to allow planning to proceed.

Thus, it can be seen that there was considerable concordance between the proposals set forth in the Green Paper and those of the OECD Report. Most importantly, there was an acceptance of the 3 I's teacher education continuum as the supportive framework for the teaching career. A specific process of induction was proposed and a broad perspective of in-service education was formulated. The favouring of a teaching council was also in line with the OECD's "national council", involving many responsibilities for teacher education.

Some actions were taken in the wake of the Green Paper which indicated some commitment to policy changes. These included the setting up of the In-Career Development Unit, in 1992, within the Department of Education to provide co-ordination and direction in relation to in-service education. The Unit liaised with the educational partners in relation to INSET issues. The research committee of the Department of Education was re-vivified and, in November 1992, the first ever forum on educational research took place, between Department of Education personnel and academic educational researchers, which betokened a more integrative relationships between both parties in the future. When preparing for the National Development Plan, in 1993, the Department successfully sought over £35 million from the HROP fund of the EU for the increased provision of INSET, and a further £10 million was secured from the ERDF of the EU for the expansion and development of Teacher Centres, which became known henceforth as Education Centres.

The Green Paper gave rise to an unprecedented level of debate throughout the country at meetings, conferences, symposia and seminars. Almost 1,000 written submissions were lodged with the Department of Education in response to the Paper. In advance of the Government finalising its policy decisions in a White Paper, the Minister for Education convened the National Education Convention. It took place over two weeks in Dublin Castle in October 1993, and was attended by representatives of forty-two organisations. The report on the Convention was published in January 1994.

The Convention supported the policy proposal of the Green Paper which viewed the teaching career as a continuum involving the 3 I's. With regard to initial teacher education a strong preference was expressed for the retention of the concurrent and consecutive modes of teacher preparation, opposing the Green Paper proposal. The duration of the B.Ed and Higher Diplomas in Education courses, which had not been changed since the early seventies was regarded as too short for the demands of teacher education in contemporary society. The Convention urged closer partnerships between the training institutions and the schools, and more use of teachers as mentors for the

students on teaching practice. It considered that the practice of using student teachers as timetabled staff in some post-primary schools was undesirable.

The Convention gave a warm welcome to the Green Paper proposal for a more structured induction year into teaching, following initial training. While welcoming the active role of school staff in the induction process, it did not favour the principal teacher as the arbiter of successful probation. The Convention considered that much detailed planning was required if the conditions for successful induction were to be realised. It stated that if a Teaching Council were in place it could play a useful role in the planning and implementation of the induction year. The Convention's views on in-service education were largely in agreement with the views of the OECD and the proposals in the Green Paper. INSET should take account of the personal and professional needs of the teacher, as well as of the system. It urged that a co-ordinating agency should be developed to plan INSET provision, and it considered that a Teaching Council would have "important inputs to make to the planning of in-service education." Under a strategic plan for INSET, teachers and schools should have access to the provisions on a regional basis, and for school-based provision. Appropriate incentives for teachers to engage in certificated in-service courses should be put in place, with improved arrangements for teacher substitution on in-service courses. The Convention supported the Green Paper's proposals for the secondment of skilled teachers for in-service work to schools. The Convention expressed confidence that Irish education could be on the threshold of a new era for the continuing professional development of teachers. The Green Paper's proposal to establish a Teaching Council got widespread support at the Convention, seeing it as promoting "a distinguished future for the teaching profession in Ireland." The Report sketched out a range of functions which such a Council could accomplish¹⁵.

One of the significant features of the National Convention was that it was such a representative body of those with an interest in education. The very strong endorsement it gave to almost all the Green Paper proposals on teacher education indicated that a large consensus of opinion existed on what needed to be done. It also reflected a climate of relative optimism that policy was back on the right track, and that development, rather

than retrenchment was the way to go. The more buoyant economic circumstances, no doubt, fostered the more positive outlook.

The Government took great note of the deliberations of the National Education Convention and in its White Paper: Charting Our Education Future, published in April 1995, it built on the level of consensus which had been achieved. The introduction to the chapter on “The Teaching Profession” endorsed quotations from the Convention Report regarding the importance of maintaining the status and profile of the teaching profession. The Paper also quoted approvingly the view of the Convention of the teaching career as a continuum involving initial teacher education, induction processes and in-career development opportunities, available periodically throughout a teacher’s career. As distinct from the three previous reports asserting this view, the White Paper had the status of expressing government policy on the matter, and ought now to be taken as the established, official position. The White Paper accepted the view of the Convention that the concurrent model of teacher education should be retained for the initial education of primary teachers. Among other comments on the pre-service courses, the Paper stated that they should not be narrowly confined to the immediate requirements of the system but should include the personal education and development needs of students. It also recognised that courses now lay special emphasis on the development of a broader range of competencies within an integrated curriculum. As regards pre-service education for post-primary teachers, the White Paper stated “the Higher Education Authority will be asked to undertake a systematic review of pre-service education for second-level teachers and to make recommendations for its development”¹⁶. It set out seven features which should underpin the professional preparation of such teachers, which reflected a broad, liberal approach to such training. This policy intention was not put into effect, though a different process of review was adopted three years later.

Concerning induction it adopted the proposal of the Green Paper, which had got a general welcome at the Convention. The White Paper stated:

A well-developed and carefully managed induction programme, coinciding with the teacher's probationary year, will be introduced for first – and second-level teachers¹⁷.

Teacher education institutions were to maintain links with the newly qualified teachers by providing additional opportunities for learning to supplement those already provided in initial training courses. Schools were to contribute to the induction process by providing mentors who would advise the newly-qualified teachers. As part of the induction programme the teacher education institutions were to prepare individual profiles on the strengths and weaknesses of graduating students, which were to be updated at the end of the induction period as the basis for the preparation of personal development plans for the new teachers. At the end of the induction year school principals, following appropriate consultation, would adjudicate on the inductee's suitability for registration. The inspectorate would monitor a representative cross-section of teachers before their final registration as teachers. Thus, the White Paper was mixing the induction process with the probationary process, was clearly identifying the principal teacher as the assessor, and envisaged joint roles for teacher education personnel and school mentors in the induction process. No mention was made of logistical arrangements, teaching time remission, reward for mentors or such, but it was stated that detailed planning would be undertaken "with the relevant interests".

As regards in-service teacher education, the White Paper endorsed the OECD's Report's emphasis on this issue, and it also endorsed the views of the Education Convention. It announced that with the support of the EU, the Government was committed to the expenditure of £40 million for in-service education from 1994 to 1999. Concerning in-service education policy it indicated a desire to shift the balance between provider driven INSET to the needs of participants. To help bring more co-ordination of provision, the White Paper robustly declared:

The Department of Education will formulate, in active co-operation with the partners in education, a strategic framework for the in-career professional development of teachers with explicit, achievable objectives, specified target

groups and criteria for evaluating the impact of in-career development programmes¹⁸.

The strategy would set out priorities and associated budgeting allocations. The Paper set out eight “critical matters” on which the strategy would be based and it urged that the in-service would be more school focused and conducive to high levels of teacher participation in all aspects of the process. Priorities for in-career development were also identified. The In-Career Development Unit within the Department was envisaged as having a key policy and organisational role. The Education Centres would benefit from more full-time staff and better resourcing. They were seen as providing a focus for development programmes for teachers, parents and boards of management. The inspectorate were to be responsible for evaluating the national strategy for in-career development.

The White Paper endorsed the Convention’s view of the desirability of a Teaching Council and stated that the Minister would publish a draft legislative framework for the operation of the Council. This section of the White Paper concluded by listing an extensive range of functions for such a Council¹⁹.

When one reflects on the reports and policy documents from the OECD report in 1991 to the White Paper 1995, one is struck by a number of common features. There is an acceptance of the importance of the teaching force to the societal needs which were developing. There is an acknowledgement that Ireland has been fortunate in maintaining a high calibre teaching force, still attracting high quality candidates. There is a strong acceptance that the old model of teacher training was outdated. However, there is an assurance that, as the OECD remarked, a good foundation existed on which to build the new structure. The older model needed to be replaced by a reconceptualisation of teacher education, involving the continuum of initial, induction and in-career education, throughout the teaching career. The expectation is that provision of the latter two elements will relieve the tendency to overcrowd initial training courses. There is a welcome for the role of many agencies in the provision of various forms of teacher education. The underlying conception of all forms of teacher education is in the liberal

education tradition and has regard for the personal, professional and system needs. There is an emphasis on close partnerships between the training institutions and the schools. In the induction and in-service provision school personnel are viewed as being active participants. There is a realisation that long duration, certified courses with a research dimension are important if teachers are to build up their expertise to be catalysts among their peers. The concept of a Teaching Council is gradually developed and gets its most assured exposition in the White Paper. Indeed, as one would expect, the White Paper, coming at the end of the process of reflection and discussion, deals with the issues in a strong, expressive and assured tone. One might expect that, with the help of a buoyant economic context, the stage was now set for early direct action to implement these key dimensions of government policy on teacher education. However, this was not the case and the impressive momentum which had built up on teacher education lost its urgency, and, what might be termed, a period of policy drift set in. There was no withdrawal from the conceptual exposition of the issues, but implementation greatly lagged. To instance some of the key issues, no formal initiative was undertaken at the time on initial teacher education, though no doubt, the institutions continued their best endeavours in their work. No initiative was taken on the policy an induction process for newly qualified teachers. No “centrally co-ordinated strategy” for in-career development was devised. Neither did any early action take place on the establishment of a Teaching Council.

It may have been that the Department of Education became pre-occupied with the preparation of the University Act (1997) and the Education Act (1998) but, whatever the reason, there was a hiatus of several years before these central planks of official policy were again seriously re-visited. This is not to say that everything regarding teacher education was moribound. Valuable work went on in many areas, both in initial, in-service, and research work in education. Post graduate courses expanded. The Education Centres developed their roles, with new resourcing. Moves towards the secondment of teachers to work with their peers were underway, but the harvesting of many aspects of the policy debates went unattended.

3. Revisiting Teacher Education Issues

When the issue of teacher education came on the official agenda again, in 1998, no reference back was made to the debate and decisions of the early nineties. It seemed as if one was starting anew, from a clean sheet position. The Minister for Education indicated that he was setting up review teams to report on primary pre-service teacher education and on post-primary teacher education. The terms of reference and the planned time scales for these reviews were most unusual and were not reflective of good planning. The Working Group on Primary Pre-Service Teacher Education was convened in January 1999 and was required to report within six months. As well as a general brief it was given ten specified elements on which to report. Furthermore, it was asked to make recommendations on the duration of the B.Ed. programme. Despite the title for the working group – on pre-service – it was also asked to report on the provision of in-career development programmes. No mention was made in the terms of reference of an induction process. The Group was requested to prioritise and cost its recommendations. This was a remarkable brief to be accommodated within six months.

The Advisory Group on Post Primary Teacher Education was given its general brief on pre-service and in-service teacher education (with no reference to induction) in 1998. The brief specified thirteen elements for attention on pre-service, as well as the duration of courses and in-career development issues. This Group was also to report within six months, and was to prioritise and cost its recommendations. It seemed as if an unrealistic formula was applied to the two review groups. In the event, the formula could not be fulfilled, and the subsequent fate of these reports may have been linked to inadequacies in the strategic planning within the Department of Education. As was to be expected, the work took much longer to perform than the six months allocated but, in the meantime, it was difficult to achieve action on teacher education policy issues. For instance, from 1996 the Committee of the Heads of Education and the Teacher Unions pushed hard for action on the White Paper (1995) commitment to an induction process. It took six years, to 2002, before a pilot programme on teacher induction was approved, which will be discussed later.

The Primary Working Group submitted its report to the Minister for Education in April 2002, and it was published that year with the title, Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century. The report made sixty-one recommendations, with sixty focussing a pre-service education. No recommendation was made regarding induction, and the one recommendation on in-service education urged the Department to provide more effective incentives for teachers to pursue post-graduate studies. Recommendations were not prioritised, nor were they costed. Of the many changes in society which called for new approaches to the preparation of teachers, the Group selected ten major challenges which needed to be addressed. Its reflection on these prompted the Group to go for “a root and branch reform based on a reconceptualisation of (initial) teacher education”²⁰. The report categorised the areas in which student teachers needed to acquire competence, but it did not attempt to define the competences. Among the key recommendations were that a fourth year be added to the B.Ed. degree and that the post-graduate programme be extended from eighteen months to two years. It was recommended that the Colleges prepare and submit to the Department restructured programmes based on the recommendations of the Report. This submission should include the list of subjects to be offered, and specify course content, course structure, modes of delivery, allocation of time and standards of performance. It was also urged that teaching practice should be restructured and accord a more formal role to teachers in schools. The Group suggested that the Minister should respond to College submissions within six months.²¹

The report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education was submitted in October 2002, and the report was also printed that year, but not disseminated. It made 24 recommendations on initial teacher education programmes, 10 on induction, 10 on in-service, 12 on ICT in teacher education, 10 on access and recruitment issues, and a further range of proposals on the implementation of the recommendations. The recommendations were not costed, but it was clearly indicated that a great deal of investment was required for successful implementation. The report did not seek an extension of time for pre-service courses but favoured greater attention to induction and the beginning years of teaching. It endorsed a 3 I’s conceptualisation of teacher education²². It recommended greater partnership between teacher education departments

and schools, but did not indicate how this might be resourced. The Group recommended the retention of the consecutive and concurrent modes of post-primary teacher preparation. The report unambiguously stated that “Induction programmes should be provided for all beginning teachers,”²³ with the provision of mentors and reduced teaching hours for the inductee teacher.

Among the recommendations on in-career development were more flexible provision for accreditation of participation by teachers in in-career development programmes. A special value was placed on school based, collaborative research, carried out by teachers in teams and supported by teacher education departments. Teachers were encouraged to be active participants in their own continuing professional development. Schools should be provided with a continuing professional development budget. The report suggested ICT should be fully integrated in teacher education programmes and teacher education departments should be major players in distance education with ICT. Among other recommendations were that more research should be undertaken on teacher education issues. The Advisory Group recommended that attention should be paid to the under-resourcing and under-staffing of education departments. The Group saw a major role for the Teaching Council regarding the Group’s recommendations and it urged its early establishment²⁴.

Overall, both reports highlighted the need for reforms in a variety of aspects of the teacher education programmes, needed by the social context in which current and future teachers would be operating. They identified areas for attention, most of which were part of informed discourse on teacher education, and they made suggestions for reform. They were not prescriptive and did not adopt a competency approach in their reviews. They expressed confidence that the institutions had the capability to engage in on-going reforms. Without costing their proposals it was still clear that they implied a quantum leap in funding, and a great deal of co-operative engagement within the institutions, and between the institutions and the Department of Education and Higher Education Authority.

While the original six month time limits for the reviews might suggest that there was an urgency for action within the Department of Education, when the reviews were presented three years later what was most obvious was the lack of urgency, if not lack of interest. There was no formal launch of the reports, and in the case of the post-primary report it has never been circulated at all. No national debates took place on the recommendations, and to a large degree they were allowed slip from the public consciousness, despite requests from educational interests for debate and action on them. At a conference in November 2004 the Chairman of the Working Group on Primary Teacher Education stated, “It is not yet clear if the recommendations of the Working Group have been accepted by the Department or the colleges ... at least a commitment in principle to accept the basic tenets of the Working Group might have been expected”²⁵. No Minister of Education has made a public remark on the report of the Advisory Group on Post-Primary Teacher Education. Such treatment of the work of these representative groups is at least strange bearing in mind the long accepted wisdom that we are living in a fast-changing society. Even in periods of less change it is accepted that teacher education courses benefit from periodic reform and restructuring. Thus, it seems fair to conclude that an opportunity for follow-through on such reports was lost, and valuable time was wasted in the process. This is not to say that the institutions themselves did not continue to up-date their programmes, but they lacked the type of resources, official commitment and supports which could achieve more fundamental reforms. It should be noted that most, if not all, the education departments have in recent years, come under the scrutiny of the quality assurance processes now operating in the university sector which involve a detailed examination of all aspects of the departments’ work.

Another key dimension of the early nineties debate and of the White Paper’s decisions was also revisited when, in November 1997, the Minister for Education set up a Technical Working Group and a Steering Group to advise on the establishment of a Teaching Council. The report of the first group was presented in April 1998 and that of the Steering Group in June 1998. This report set out the context and rationale for a Teaching Council, the role and functions of such a Council, teacher registration aspects, the professional education of teachers, the composition and structure of the Council,

administration and finance, and “Making it Happen”. Chapter four set out the role of the Council on the recognition of teacher education qualifications, on induction to teaching, on the assessment of probationers, and on in-career development. This report provided specific guidance on many aspects of the work of the Council, but chapter four was of landmark importance in spelling out that for the first time the teaching profession, through the Council, would exercise a significant measure of control of the continuum of teacher education. The report envisaged that the first meeting of the first Teaching Council would take place in January 2000, a symbolic date for the opening of the new millennium²⁶. However, events showed that this was too ambitious. Legislation for the Teaching Council was enacted in 2001, but it was spring 2005 before the first meeting of the Teaching Council took place. This was ten years since the government’s decision to establish the Council was announced in the White Paper of 1995. Whatever faults may be imputed to the system, precipitate action is not one of them. It may well be, however, that the Teaching Council will be the vital agency to establish the teacher education continuum as it was envisaged in the documents of the early nineties and help to ensure that the standards in operation within the 3 I’s are appropriate, to the needs of this, and evolving Irish society.

Meanwhile the weakest of the 3 I’s, induction, has been gaining ground, albeit it is still in a pilot phase after five years. Useful experience and insight has been built up over these years which involved a partnership between the training institutions, the teaching profession and the Department of Education and Science. It is particularly valuable that there has been good liaison and exchange of research between the experience of the primary and post-primary sectors. However, it seems time to take a more expansive, up-front and daring approach to a national system of teacher induction, as was envisaged in the Green and White Papers.

Another proposal of the nineties documents which has been making impressive progress is the secondment of cohorts of skilled teachers to work with their peers on various aspects of the educational change agenda. These are organised as support service teams, which are managed by Representative Steering Committees. They employ a variety of in-

service strategies attuned to the context and purpose, and involving modern technologies. The support teams work very closely with the schools and the work involves good professional experiences both for school staffs and the team members. Indeed, one considers that if members of the OECD team of 1991 returned to observe, they would be very impressed! Some forms of accreditation exist for participation on support services programmes. Support teams include the Primary Curriculum Support Group; the Second Level Support Service; School Development Planning for both primary and post-primary schools; Social Personal and Health Education Support Service; Leadership Development for schools. The support teams work in close liaison with the Education Centres. The Department's Teacher Education Section (TES), which evolved from the ICDU in 2004, has particular responsibilities regarding the support services, and for many other forms of current in-career development initiatives²⁸.

An unexpected development in teacher education took place with the recognition by the Department of Education and Science, in 2003, of an on-line programme for pre-service primary teacher education provided by a private agency. One understands that this was done without consultation with the existing colleges or reference to the report of the Working Group on Pre-Service Primary Education which had recently been presented. In any case, it has provided a novel pathway into the primary teaching career, but misgivings exist as to the appropriateness of an on-line course for the initial formation of primary teachers.

A further relevant development of recent years has been the restructuring of the school inspectorate. Among key features of its new policy direction are school and system evaluation and the publication of reports on evaluation activities. New evaluation methodologies have been designed for whole school evaluation, for subject evaluation at post-primary and for the evaluation of primary teachers on probation. Within the inspectorate an Evaluation Support and Research Unit (ESRU) has been established which, among other responsibilities, organises professional development of inspectors on all aspects of their evaluation work. The inspectors operate according to The Professional Code of Practice on Education and Reporting for the Inspectorate, published

in 2002. The inspectorate has also produced documents, such as Looking At Our School, encouraging schools to use the process of internal self-evaluation and planning as tools for school improvement. In the approach of the contemporary inspectorate there is a sharpening and clarification of thinking on evaluation of teaching and school performance, a clear articulation of evaluation criteria and procedures, an enrichment from research evidence and from engagements with its peers on the international stage. This makes a valuable contribution to current thinking on teacher preparation and the sustaining of teaching standards in the education system.

4. **International Perspectives**

At international level, over recent years, agencies such as the OECD and the EU, of which Ireland is an active member, have been giving priority attention to educational policies and issues. It is now accepted by all that good quality education is essential if societies are to be in a position to meet the many new challenges and changing socio-economic circumstances of this new era. There is a general recognition of the centrality of a quality teaching force to achieving the aims of the knowledge society, and of the strategy for lifelong learning, which has been accepted as the leitmotif for education policy for the twenty-first century. Both the OECD and the E.U. launched major international studies on the teaching career and teacher education in recent years, which this section of the paper draws upon. In background documentation for the OECD study, Teachers Matter: Attracting Developing and Retaining Teachers, launched in 2002, the OECD put the issue succinctly, but forcefully, when it stated:

Teachers are central to schooling. They are even more critical as expectations grow for teaching and learning to become more student-centred and to emphasise active learning. They must be in a vanguard of innovation, including the informed, judicious use of ICT. Teachers must work in collaboration with colleagues and through networks as well as through active links with parents and the community. This calls for demanding concepts of professionalism: the teacher as facilitator, as knowledgeable, expert individual; as networked team participant, oriented to individual needs; engaged both in teaching and in research and development.

Having surveyed all aspects of the teaching career from recruitment to retirement, in twenty-five countries, the OECD set out a range of concerns about the teaching force internationally. (An accompanying paper to this one gives an account of these and sets the Irish experience against them). Here the focus remains on aspects relating to teacher education.

In undertaking its work the OECD issued a template to each country on which to prepare a “Country Background Report”, which was to comprise of 6 chapters addressing various aspects of the teaching career. While the material is predominantly factual and descriptive there is much in the content of chapters 3 to 6 which would be of interest to the Teaching Council, particularly the concluding sections of these chapters entitled “Policy Initiatives and Their Impact”. For the purposes of this paper one just includes the piece on “Among priorities for policy development in educating, developing and certifying teachers”, from the end of chapter 4:-

- the extension of the pre-service education courses,
- the restructuring of some course content to give a greater sense of integration and foster a reflective practitioner approach,
- closer links with school personnel on teaching practice,
- the establishment of a national induction system with appropriate financing for necessary reduction in teaching hours and the support of school mentors,
- a more strategic policy agency which would more overtly develop a coherent partnership between all relevant agencies for continuing professional development,
- more direct financial support or recognition for teachers undergoing certificated in-service courses,
- more flexible support structures whereby other career personnel might be attracted to teaching.

Action on these issues would greatly enhance the teaching profession’s preparedness for the challenges which lie ahead, and position it well to build for

the future on the solid foundations which exist. There would be strong support among stakeholders for such policy options. Many of the issues involved have been widely discussed, and the initiatives would be seen to be timely and appropriate. The main difficulty would appear to be the provision of the necessary financial resources to bring them about, rather than any sectoral opposition. A strategic development plan in relation to the teaching career, setting out priorities over an agreed time span, would be a judicious way forward

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The OECD Report, Teachers Matter was published in 2005. As regards teacher quality, it stated, “There is now substantial research indicating that the quality of teachers and their teaching are the most important factors in student outcomes that are open to policy influence”³⁰. With regard to teacher education, as might be expected, it fully endorsed teacher education as a continuum, involving the 3 I’s. However, it stated, “The stages of initial teacher education, induction, and professional development need to be much better interconnected to create a more coherent learning and development system for teacher”³¹.

As regards the concurrent and consecutive models of teacher education it stated that “both models offer distinctive benefits and countries gain by offering both.” The report’s remarks on the duration of courses are revealing:

The length of initial teacher education programmes varies substantially between countries. On average, primary teacher training programmes are 3.9 years in length, lower secondary 4.4 years and upper secondary 4.9 years. The overall range is from 3 years (e.g. for some primary teachers in Ireland and Spain) up to 8 years for some secondary teachers in Italy³².

Ireland is under the average for both primary and post-primary course duration. Of the 30 countries listed, only Austria, Belgium, Spain, and Ireland limited the primary teacher education course to 3 years.

Commenting on the length of course the report states, “The general trend has been for the length of initial teacher education courses to increase. In many countries primary

teacher education has been increased to 4 years, and secondary teacher preparation has increased by one year.” The OECD report was cautious about increasing such courses “even further”, and considered “there could be better value from providing more resources to improve teacher development throughout their careers”. This remark was taken out of context by the Minister for Education and Science at a dissemination conference on Teachers Matter, and used a justification for not increasing the duration of the primary teacher education course in Ireland from 3 to 4 years. Ireland is one of the countries listed as “not offering” teacher induction programmes, though note is taken of the pilot project. Ireland is also listed among the countries where there is “no minimum professional development requirement for teachers in a school year”³⁴.

In its priorities for policy development on teacher education Teachers Matter urged a shift of emphasis in traditional initial courses towards more reflective practice, “Initial teacher education must not only provide sound basic training in subject-matter knowledge, pedagogy related to subjects, and general pedagogical knowledge; it also needs to develop the skills for reflective practice and research on the job”³⁵. Regarding teaching practice it stated, “There is a need for more overt and deliberate forms of partnerships between schools and teacher education institutions, in order to provide trainee teachers with a more integrated experience”. It also urged that mentor teachers receive appropriate training and support, including time allowances. The report considered probation should be essential and certification as a teacher “should be taken by a panel of internal and external personnel who are well trained and resourced for the task”.

As regards induction, the report stated its “crucial importance is now widely acknowledged”. It is seen as a form of internship requiring continuing close interaction with the teacher education institution and well-trained and resourced mentor teachers in schools. The report states, “Central to the success of induction are the resources dedicated to the programmes and the quality of mentor training”³⁶. Teachers Matter lays great emphasis on well organised and qualitative in-career development programmes. It

is seen as a means for improving the quality of teachers and for retaining them in the service. The report states:

Effective professional development is ongoing, includes training, practice and feedback, and provides adequate time and follow-up support. Successful programmes involve teachers in learning activities that are similar to ones they will use with their students and encourage the development of teachers' learning communities. A key strategy involves finding ways for teachers to share their expertise and experience more systematically"³⁷.

In general, it can be stated the sentiments and recommendations of Teachers Matter on the continuum of teacher education are in harmony with long established understanding, as distinct from implementation, of the issue in Ireland. Where a difference occurs is the emphasis which the OECD gives to teacher profiles as a key co-ordinating and guiding factor for teacher education. It stated:

The overarching priority is for countries to have in place a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. This is necessary to provide the framework to guide initial teacher education, teacher certification, teachers' on-going professional development and career advancement, and to assess the extent to which these different elements are being effective³⁸.

The report adopts a teacher competences approach linked to the concept of the profile of what is expected from teachers. It stresses that the profile should be evidence-based and be built on the active involvement of teachers:

A fundamental precondition for the preparation of a profile of teacher competences is a clear statement of objectives for student learning. Teachers' work and the knowledge and skills that they need to be effective must reflect the student learning objectives that schools are aiming to achieve. There needs to be profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching. The profile should be evidence-based and built on active involvement by the teaching profession in identifying teacher competences and

standards of performance. A clear, well structured and widely supported teacher profile can be a powerful mechanism for aligning the various elements involved in developing teachers' knowledge and skills³⁹.

The report goes on to identify a range of competences which it considers are required, but it does not define them:

The teacher profile must reflect the broad range of competences that teachers require to be effective practitioners in modern schools. It should encompass strong subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, the capacity to work effectively with a wide range of students and colleagues, contribution to the school and the wider profession and the teacher's capacity to continue developing. The profile could express different levels of performance appropriate to beginning teachers, experienced teachers, and those with higher responsibilities. The profile would emphasise demonstrated attainment of key knowledge, skills and competences for effective professional practice⁴⁰.

The report considers that an inhibitor to the full realisation of reforms in teacher education has been the lack of clarity about the competences that beginning teachers need to launch their careers. It also considers that clear profiles and competences for different stages of the teaching career would help to provide a purpose and a framework for continuing professional development.

In its final chapter on "Developing and Implementing Teacher Policy", the report makes the significant point, "Experience from a number of countries indicates that unless teachers and their representatives are actively involved in policy formulation, and feel a sense of "ownership" of reform it is unlikely that substantial changes will be successfully implemented"⁴¹. Interestingly, the report recognised the value of Teaching Councils in providing "a mechanism for profession-led standards setting." It was also noteworthy that the report drew special attention to the planned role and function of the Teaching Council of Ireland, in this regard⁴². Thus, it is clear that the key policy way forward for the OECD was the articulation of a teacher's profile and the competences he/she would

be expected to exhibit at different stages of the career. Apart from general indications of elements that should be included, the report did not set out any specific framework of competences although it did include an outline of the performance standards in operation for teachers in England, Quebec in Canada, and Victoria in Australia.

As was the case with the OECD, the EU analysed trends and challenges for education arising from the emergence of the knowledge society and sought to promote a more collaborative EU response. The teaching career was given new attention:

Teaching as a professional role faces decisive change in the coming decades: teachers and trainers become guides, mentors and mediators. Their role – and it is a crucially important one – is to help and support learners who, as far as possible take charge of their own learning ... active learning presuppose the motivation to learn, the capacity to exercise crucial judgement and the skill of knowing how to learn. The irreplaceable heart of the teaching role lies in nurturing, precisely these human capacities to create and use knowledge⁴³.

A landmark event was the European Council held at Lisbon in March 2000. This set the strategic goal for Europe of becoming by 2010, “The most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.” Then, at the Barcelona European Council of March 2002, the following more precise goal for education and training was set, “The European Council sets the objective to make Europe’s educational training systems a world quality reference by 2010.” The three key objectives were:

- Increasing the quality of education and training;
- Facilitating the access of all to education;
- Opening up education and training system.

There were thirteen associated objectives.

Among the issues set out were:

Providing the conditions which adequately support teachers and trainers as they respond to the challenges of the knowledge society, including through initial and in-service training (sic) in the perspective of lifelong learning and securing a sufficient level of entry to the teaching profession, across all subject and levels, as providing for the long-term needs of the profession by making teaching and training even more attractive.

This was the first time that the teaching career was highlighted across the member states as an appropriate issue to take action in support of the profession.

A set of eight working groups was established to promote elements of the general policy agenda. It is noteworthy that the first working group – A, was devoted to “Improving the Education of Teachers and Trainers”. The first two key issues identified by the Ministers at Barcelona for the working group were:

- Identifying the skills that teachers and trainers need given their changing roles in society;
- Supporting teachers and trainers as they respond to challenges of the knowledge society⁴⁴.

Working Group A decided to focus on the question of the competences teachers need to respond successfully to their new role. They sought to identify generic competences of a teacher in (i) Learning process competences and (ii) Learning outcome competences. The aim was to develop a European framework for the qualification and competences of teachers and trainers and to devise a single framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences, which would be attested by a Europass.

The policy reference for the working group for this aspect of their work was as follows:

Teaching competences and qualification profiles, based on the socially expected role of teachers and on the European dimension of education, are defined as

criteria for the development and external quality assurance of teaching education provision.

The Committee shifted emphasis from inputs and supply side indicators to learning outcomes.

The working group identified the following clusters of competences which teachers are expected to foster within the pupils.

Learning Outcome Competences

Contribution to citizenship education of pupils and trainees.

- (i) Living in a multicultural, inclusive and tolerant society;
- (ii) Living according to sustainable lifestyles regarding environment issues;
- (iii) Dealing with gender equality issues in family, work and social life;
- (iv) Living as a European citizen;
- (v) Managing his/her own career development, in the framework of increasing labour market internationalisation for instance.

Another set of competences was grouped around “Competences for knowledge and lifelong learning society.” They were listed as follows:

- (i) motivation to learn beyond compulsory education;
- (ii) learning how to learn/learning in independent way;
- (iii) information processing (with a critical eye);
- (iv) digital literacy;
- (v) creativity and innovation;
- (vi) problem-solving
- (vii) entrepreneurship;
- (viii) communication;
- (ix) visual culture.

The third category related to the “Integration of competence-centred curriculum with school subject-centred curriculum.” This referred to “the integration of the development of these new competences in school curriculum with the development of the learning outcomes of traditional school subjects”⁴⁶.

The emphasis of the above is on the learning outcomes for pupils rather than a designation of teacher competences per se. However, the working group surveyed many features of the teacher’s role. The intent is quite clear that in establishing teacher profiles and associated competences the concern is for outcome-based criteria of teachers’ performance:

At policy level, a teaching competences and qualifications profile does not mean a national teacher education curriculum, indicating the subjects, scientific content, and the methodology to be employed that is, defining input or process curriculum criteria, regarding what and how to teach the prospective teachers. This profile should mostly be referred to outcome-based criteria, indicating what the teachers must be able to do; the European dimension of education, including the changing dimensions of the role of teachers, should be a relevant source for defining such a profile. The curriculum design would be left to the autonomous higher education institutions and can be submitted to ex-post quality assurance.

Thus, the institutions would design the programmes in the light of general guidelines and the teacher education curricula would be subject to external accreditation by a variety of stakeholders. In line with the Bologna process, teacher education institutions are expected to develop descriptors of the learning outcomes of teacher education programmes, and incorporate ECTS credits. It is pointed out that this approach

.... challenges teacher education institutions and teacher educators to participate proactively in the policy definition of teaching competences and qualifications profiles, paying attention to the social demand, and to develop and implement a coherent and appropriately co-ordinated teacher education curriculum focused on the role of teachers and learning outcomes rather than on a collection of

individual academic subjects (even if they are on education and didactics) which are not consistently related to the goal of enabling teachers to deal with their role demands⁴⁸.

Thus, as with the OECD viewpoint, a teacher competency approach to teacher education programmes is the policy perspective, but the teacher educators are seen to have a proactive role in identifying and designing the precise competency framework.

As was the case with the OECD report, the competency approach is structured by E.U. within a broad concept of the teacher education continuum:

Teacher education should be seen as a process of lifelong learning and career development for the individual teacher. At a more structured level there is a need for a continuity of purpose between initial training, induction and ongoing professional development. Of central importance in this context is the creative and reciprocated collaboration between the university, the school and other stakeholders in the education process. New types of working are necessary which prepare new teachers to respond flexibly to new teaching scenarios and which support the teacher to be a key actor in his/her own professional development⁴⁸.

This broad and liberal concept of the teaching career is spelled out in some detail in the European Commission's, "Common European Principles for Teacher Competence and Qualifications" (2005).

The EU has defined competences as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the content". It has identified the following eight competences as "those which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment":-

- Communication in the mother tongue
- Communication in a foreign language
- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
- Digital competence

- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competence
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

These are the competences or capabilities which it is believed citizens need if they are to live at the level of their times in contemporary society, and which schools have a major role in developing in their students.

The word competence has assumed rather pejorative connotations, linked to narrow conceptions of the term arising from behaviourist and positivist thinking⁴⁹. Different models of competence criteria are in existence, and some are impressive in their expression. Depending on the mode devised, the competency approach can be professionally, positive and benign, or it can, alternatively, be of a narrow, check-list character and be professionally malign. In teacher education circles in Ireland the traditional discourse favoured the terms knowledge, attitudes and skills. The term “capability” may be a more neutral term than competence.

What would seem to be most important in the debate is the identification and clear articulation of the capabilities which professional teachers need to possess for contemporary and emerging forms of schooling. There would seem to be much to be gained by making explicit what is often left unstated about the criteria involved in high quality teaching. All existing teacher education courses have their criteria for assessing teaching quality. What would seem most valuable for Ireland at present is to ensure that all forms of teacher education contain the content which is needed for modern education, accompanied by a clear specification of the knowledge, attitudes, skills and pedagogic qualities required of teachers, at different stages of their careers. It is important that such a specification should incorporate the values which have underpinned the Irish conception of the teacher and his/her role in society.

5. Concluding Comments

This review of thinking and policy on teacher education pertaining to Ireland highlights how teacher education has been an issue of debate, discussion and reportage over the last sixteen years. There is a great deal of consistency in the perspectives put forward by different agencies over this period. It may be helpful to summarise such viewpoints:-

- A humane, liberal conception of the role of the teacher;
- A high valuation of the work of teachers;
- A concern that improvements are made in teacher formation and development;
- A strong commitment to the conception of teacher education as a continuum incorporating initial, induction and in-service
- A commitment to maintain both concurrent and consecutive modes of teacher education;
- A desire to reform and update existing initial teacher education courses;
- A concern about the overcrowded character of initial teacher education courses, operating within among the shortest course durations in the developed world.
- A desire to provide student teachers with more small group and individual attention during their initial formation;
- A concern for closer forms of partnership between teacher education agencies and schools;
- A desire to provide training and supports for school mentors;
- A concern that ICT be integrated into all aspects of teaching;
- A desire to establish a national teacher induction programme, building on the current pilot project;
- A concern for an overall strategic policy on in-career development for teachers;
- A commitment to varied forms of in-career education, including long-duration certificated courses;
- A desire to give more incentives to teachers to engage in such courses;
- A commitment to forms of school-based in-service education;
- A concern that highly skilled teachers be seconded to act as supportive agents for their peers in the schools;

- A concern that forms of in-career development be available regionally; optimising the use of Education Centres and teacher education agencies
- A desire that a spirit of partnership and co-operation exist between all agencies involved in teacher education.
- A desire to establish a Teaching Council with extensive powers, including the promotion of quality teacher education.

While no macro plan was established to implement the various policy aspirations, and while progress has been dilatory, nevertheless, improvements have taken place on all three dimensions of the continuum – initial, induction and in-service teacher education and, of course the Teaching Council is established and very active. Furthermore, one can draw affirmation and confidence from the extent of informed consensus which exists on teacher education policy issues in Ireland. What has been absent up to date has been an overall cohesive agency to co-ordinate multi-faceted action, and the lack of a political will to take the necessary action. Furthermore, teacher education has continuously suffered from inadequate resourcing. It may well be that circumstances are now more propitious for the required action than formerly. The agencies are in place and willing to act co-operatively. Let us hope that the political will and resources may also be present. When considering national development planning in contemporary circumstances and in casting eyes ahead “towards 2016”, it would, indeed, be appropriate if the teacher education continuum were championed as a policy priority.

The Teaching Council has already done a very valuable service in publishing the Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers. It has also carried out a wide range of consultations with the education partners on teacher education issues. There is a readiness to go forward and realise the policy aspirations for the continuum. Recently, the Chief Inspector, Mr. Eamon Stack, emphasised that “Inspection also has a role in developing better teachers and better schools”. He also stated:

It is now recognised by all that the ongoing changing educational context requires a review of the content and processes of current teacher education programmes....

A programme of induction as well as high quality continuing professional development is also essential to ensure that serving teachers are able to update their skills in the personnel, professional and pedagogic domains ⁵⁰.

In welcoming this statement, one would just make the comment that on the evidence of this review paper these issues have been long recognised. The necessity now is for action and, in this context, the Chief Inspector looks to the Teaching Council as having “a key role” to play. In his view it is the Council “which will engage and bring to a conclusion the policy formulation process relating to teacher education and standards in association with relevant partners for deliberation by the Minister” ⁵¹. He has stated that significant work has been done in the Department on teacher education policy which will now be shared with the Council as it fulfils Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, relating to teacher education. With the Teaching Council, the Department of Education and Science, the teacher education agencies and the teaching profession working together one may hope that the aspirations and policies for teacher education in Ireland, recorded in this review, may reach fruition in the near future.

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