



THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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In approaching a study of the development of teacher education in the Irish Republic a number of questions present themselves. These questions include the following:

- What were the priorities following political independence?
- What was the course structure and approach for teacher education?
- How was 'Education' as a subject regarded?
- What was the underlying conception of teacher education?
- What were the characteristics of the training institutions?
- What were the major reform initiatives?
- How were difficulties surmounted?
- What are the main contemporary trends?
- Is there a coherence in the policy on teacher education?
- How is teacher education positioned for the future?

This article seeks to address such questions and, in the process, give a synoptic account of the progress of teacher education, with a particular emphasis on initial teacher education, from 1922 to 2003.

Teacher Education in the Early Years of Independence

Prior to 1922 teacher education operated in a common pattern throughout the island of Ireland. Initial teacher education for primary teachers had deep roots, going back to the establishment of national schools in the 1830s, and had established a set pattern over a period of almost ninety years. By 1922 the teaching colleges provided a two-year course of training in single-sex, denominational institutions, with a heavy emphasis on the socialisation of student teachers to fulfil well-defined tasks in the schools. Prior to independence the colleges operated very much under the aegis of the Commissioners of National Education, with their graduates under the close scrutiny of the school inspectorate. Formal teacher education for post-primary teachers was of later origin, taking the form of the consecutive training model whereby, following the obtaining of a university degree, aspiring teachers undertook the new one-year, part-time Higher Diploma in Education Course (H.Dip. in Ed.) in the Education Departments of the universities. The H.Dip. in Ed. dates from 1912, and with the implementation of the regulations of the new Secondary Teachers Registration Council in 1918, the acquisition of this Higher Diploma became an essential requirement for recognition as a registered teacher. Registration became a prerequisite for eligibility for incremental salary, introduced in 1924.

One of the main driving forces for political independence was the ideology of cultural nationalism, one of the key tenets of which was that the possession of a distinct language was a key justification for seeking independent statehood. In the years prior to independence nationalists laid great stress in the necessity for a newly independent Ireland to promote the Irish language as a central and animating feature of its education policy. Education was regarded as a crucial agency in the revival and regeneration of the Irish language and culture which, it was alleged, had been neglected and repressed under British rule. After independence Irish was mandated as the language of instruction in all infants classes and regulations were laid down for the compulsory study of the language throughout the entire school system. This created difficulties for the teaching profession since only 9% of primary teachers had 'Bilingual Certificates' and were deemed



competent to teach through the medium of Irish. A further 23% held 'Ordinary Certificates' but these were not regarded as indicators of proficiency in the language. It was not surprising, therefore, that early attempts would be made to "gaelicise" the teacher training colleges as the formative and nurturing institutions of the new teaching force. Very quickly Irish was declared a compulsory subject for entry to the training colleges. Internally in the colleges steps were taken to promote Irish as the medium of instruction and the language for college social life and routine administration. For teachers in service summer courses in Irish were expanded, and residential periods in Irish-speaking regions were promoted. In 1926 the Government established a series of Preparatory Colleges. These were boarding secondary schools, fully conducted through the medium of Irish, at which children of the Gaeltacht, and some others with high standards in Irish, would receive free secondary education, with a view to their progressing as Irish-speaking cohorts to the training colleges. In these early years the concentration within the training colleges was on promoting fluency and competence in Irish, rather than changing aspects of the course in Education.

However by 1933 a new framework was given to the course of studies in the colleges. This was divided into three components – a professional course in educational studies, a general education in academic subjects, and an optional course. 'Education' was re-organised as "Principles of Teaching", to which 25% of marks were allocated in the final examination. Teaching practice was known as "Practical Teaching", and for the first time in the colleges success in both these elements was deemed obligatory if the student was to qualify. A significant problem arose in the context of the lack of textbooks in the Irish language. Some translation work was undertaken and, of course, lectures were delivered through the medium of the Irish language. Examinations were conducted through Irish. A tendency of producing lecture notes in Irish for students to study came to prevail, with less attention being paid to education texts in English. The old tradition of "Crit" lessons, whereby students in college carried out practice lessons in front of their peers and college staff gradually declined. Teaching practice tended to be organised in block release periods, amounting to six weeks per annum for each student. The practice took place in nearby national schools associated with the colleges. Senior inspectors from the Department of Education monitored standards of teaching practice by evaluating a cross-section of the student teachers.

Features of the Training Colleges, 1922–1960

The new state inherited five teacher training colleges: St. Patrick's, Drumcondra; Our Lady of Mercy College, Carysfort; and the Church of Ireland College, Rathmines - all in Dublin city; Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; and De La Salle College, Waterford. The latter college closed later, but the Christian Brothers' College in Marino, which had been established in the early 19th century in Waterford, became affiliated to the Department of Education after independence. All colleges were denominational and, except for the Church of Ireland College, were single sex. They operated as boarding institutions, with limited times allocated for extra-mural visits. The colleges had no links with other higher education institutions, and the students had no structured linkages with students other than student teachers. Students who performed at a high level in their final examinations, and who presented certain subjects, could be remitted the first year of the B.A. (General) by the universities. The daily life of students in the colleges was carefully structured on a timetable basis very similar to secondary boarding schools, with set times for religious services, meals, classes, dormitory etc.

The academic programme was dominated by a heavy lecture load. As late as 1959, the average lecture load was 30 hours per week, apart from other organised activities. There was very little time for personal reflection and little emphasis on extra reading by the students. The libraries were inadequately stocked and little used; in some colleges they were rarely unlocked. The colleges had very little academic autonomy. Entry



standards and student numbers were decided by the Department of Education, whose staff also approved the courses and corrected the examination papers. Lecturers were neither expected nor facilitated to engage in educational research, other than lecture preparation. The retention of scholarly or research interests was a matter for themselves.

Despite a sub-culture which grew up in the colleges that might be termed anti-intellectual, some committed and gifted staff members and intelligent and creative students went beyond the general academic and cultural levels required. Students tended to be from the top echelon of school leavers, as measured by the Leaving Certificate examination, and many of them were gifted with talents of an artistic, cultural or sporting type. A “call” to teacher training held high esteem in local society. The ethos was one of strong vocational commitment to a role which held high social status. While the ethos was not one that fully challenged such bright students intellectually, yet the work ethic was strong in support of the conception of teacher formation which was shaped in the nineteenth century, and which continued to prevail.

Secondary Teacher Training, 1922-1966

The years prior to independence had seen significant development in relation to educational studies within the universities. The establishment of chairs of education in the universities (Trinity College 1905; UCD 1909; UCC 1910; UCG 1915; QUB 1914) was potentially of major importance. The Higher Diploma in Education training course began in 1912 and was supported by the regulations of the Registration Council from 1918. The founding of the Association of Secondary Teachers (ASTI) in 1909 was a further pressure for improvement. Moves were afoot at the time to establish education as a serious academic subject within the university as, for instance, in UCD., where education became available at Diploma and Higher Diploma levels in early 20th century. It was offered as an undergraduate subject for the B.A. and B.Sc. degrees, and also at M.A. and Ph.D. levels. An Education Society was established within the university and publication of educational studies was initiated. However these promising omens did not lead to an inspiring era for education in the universities during the four decades following independence.

The Higher Diploma in Education continued to be offered as the training course for secondary teachers who sought to be registered with the Registration Council. However, the course was conducted under very difficult circumstances. Up to the nineteen seventies lectures had to be given in the late afternoon or evening and the course was regarded as a part-time. The staffs of university Education Departments remained pitifully small throughout the period. Indeed, the very serious development occurred whereby different universities left the Chair of Education vacant for considerable periods of time eg. TCD from 1916-1922; UCD from 1950-1966; UCC from 1962-1969. The predominant concern of the small staffs became the teaching of the Higher Diploma in Education. The status of Education as a subject declined among other university staff. Furthermore, the fact that for several decades almost 50% of secondary teachers (mainly religious) were unregistered weakened the status of pre-service teacher education for secondary teachers. Only very small numbers undertook Masters Degrees in educational studies, and very little research work in education was published.

Thus, over the decades, while established subjects were being strengthened and other subjects e.g. psychology and sociology, were being developed within the universities, education was holding a very tenuous position within the sector. It had reached a very weak position by the early 1960s just at the time that there was to be a great renewal and expansion of post-primary schooling in Ireland. This dire condition was highlighted in the Report of the Commission on Higher Education (1967) when it drew attention to the fact that in 1965-66 the four large universities had 722 education students enrolled with a staffing



establishment of 14 full-time academic staff, only four of whom were above junior lecturer status. In the decade 1959 to 1969 the number of Higher Diploma students increased fourfold from 345 to 1,330. This put great strains on the educational studies infrastructure which had been seriously neglected within the universities since independence. In this period, teacher training for vocational teachers was conducted in short part-time courses under the aegis of the Department of Education, many of which were located in Colaiste Carman in Wexford. The emphasis was on applied pedagogics, and encouragement of fluency in the Irish language. Two tests were conducted for the latter – the Teastas Timire Gaeilge and the Ceard Teastas.

Developments in Colleges of Education in the Post-1960 Period

The 1960's was a decade of significant re-appraisal of the state of the nation and developments pointed the way towards significant changes in teacher education and educational studies. A number of reports were issued which had important implications for education and teacher education such as the *Investment in Education Report* (1966), the *Commission on Higher Education Report* (1967) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) *Report on Teacher Education* (1970). It became clear that major reforms were required, in tune with many other social, economic and cultural changes in the society. A more vibrant national economy provided resources and motivation to move forward.

The training colleges, which had been built in the late nineteenth century, were re-modelled and benefited from new buildings and facilities. They now became more generally known as colleges of education, and 'teacher training' was dropped as a term in favour of 'teacher education'. Student numbers in the colleges increased in line with attempts to improve teacher-pupil ratios in the schools. The colleges became more "open" as institutions, with more personal responsibility devolving on students in the management of their scholastic and leisure time. Their older traditions as boarding institutions died away. The single sex colleges gradually gave way to mixed colleges, with female students forming the majority of the student body. The student body also became more diversified by a greater infusion of university graduates on a one-year training course, and the participation of what were known as "mature" students (not school leavers) within the student community.

Staff numbers were expanded in the colleges, and lecturers more specialised in subjects which would form part of the new primary school curriculum of 1971 were employed. From 1962 the colleges assumed greater scholastic responsibility for their courses and examinations, and were less under the control of the Department of Education. An important change occurred in 1963 when, following discussions between college of education personnel and the Department of Education, new courses were devised which reduced the number of subjects to be studied and established a restructured course in education. Education became more central as a subject with revamped courses in methods and the principles of education. This latter now included psychology and elective courses such as history of education, sociology of education and comparative education. The change was directed at giving a more theoretical underpinning to the students' studies. There was also a shift in course emphasis toward more child-centred perspectives. Teaching practice now included some block teaching placement in schools close to students' homes in June or September of the first and second years of their course. Libraries became better stocked and staffed, tutorials/seminars were introduced, and students were expected to utilise libraries in preparing assignments. Educational technology also became more utilised in the delivery of college courses. The establishment of the Educational Research Centre in 1966, located on the campus of St. Patrick's College, was symbolic of a new concern that the health and vitality of a modern education system required empirical research studies on the system.



The national teachers union, the INTO, had long sought a university linked award for primary teachers and a number of reports had suggested that the time was ripe for the establishment of such a degree. Eventually, the Government decided to request the universities to agree to the award of degrees to primary teachers, and a notable landmark in teacher education was the introduction of the Bachelor in Education Degree (B.Ed) in 1974. The three largest colleges became “recognised” colleges of the National University of Ireland, while the Church of Ireland College, Marino College and Froebel College became associated with Trinity College Dublin for their B.Ed degrees. (In the early 1990s St. Patrick’s College became a college of Dublin City University and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick became a college of the University of Limerick). For the great majority of students the B.Ed. degree is a three-year honours programme, while students in the colleges associated with Trinity College undertake a fourth year to achieve an honours degree. Under the B.Ed. structure, Education has become the central subject, and the extended time has facilitated a deeper study of the area. The colleges have assumed the normal academic freedom traditional within the universities. Methodology involves a range of approaches including lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, microteaching, practice teaching, and literary/research studies. Education is seen as both a theoretical and practical discipline, and the emphasis has shifted towards developing “reflective practitioners”. The colleges continue to benefit from very high calibre student intake, and college lifestyle has become attuned to preparing them better for teaching in a fast-changing society.

Re-Building the University Education Departments

With regard to Education within the universities, heed was taken of the calls of the Commission on Higher Education (1967) that the university departments should be expanded as a matter of urgency, and that a more active research role be developed. Each university appointed new professors and all chairs of education were filled. Recruitment of more full-time staff with various specialisms took place. Premises and facilities were also improved, particularly in the areas of audio-visual equipment, resource rooms, microteaching studios, workshop spaces, 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. Over time, class numbers were reduced and better staff-student ratios were achieved. This allowed for less reliance on mass lectures and more scope for seminar, tutorial and workshop groups. More individual attention was given to students on teaching practice. More emphasis was placed on psychology and sociology of education, and greater numbers of students opted to specialise in educational technology, microteaching and other elective courses. Efforts were made to give a more practical emphasis to the courses. In later years the quality and motivation of entrants increased and by the 1990’s entry to the Higher Diploma in Education courses became very competitive.

All university Education Departments have re-vitalised their postgraduate work since 1970. M.Ed. courses were introduced, while MA and Ph.D. degrees in Education were expanded. There has been a great expansion of specialist post-graduate diplomas in education, such as guidance and counselling, remedial education, computers in education, educational management. The expansion of these certificated in-career development courses for teachers has had many benign effects. It has fed in productively to aspects of initial teacher education, has helped to established closer links between Education Department staffs and experienced teachers, and has promoted a greater research orientation for both university staff and involved teachers.

Towards an All-Graduate Teaching Profession

A significant new departure in teacher education was the setting up of the National College for Physical Education in 1970 which, within a few years, developed into Thomond College of Education. Thomond



College was designed on different lines from the traditional colleges of education and from the university education departments. It was to concern itself with the education of specialist second-level teachers in areas such as physical education, woodwork, metalwork and rural science. The students followed four-year concurrent courses, with teaching practice taking place on the block placement model. The degrees were initially awarded by the National Council for Education Awards. Thomond College was subsequently absorbed into the University of Limerick (UL), following its establishment in 1989. Thereafter, Thomond's degrees were awarded by UL. Thomond College also began to offer some postgraduate teacher education diplomas, such as the Higher Diploma in Business Studies.

The National College of Art and Design (NCAD) was re-structured as an institution more independent of the Department of Education in the early seventies. In more recent years, the NCAD has become a recognised college of University College Dublin. Art and design teachers are trained on a dual model – the concurrent four-year programme, or the consecutive programme where a single year of professional studies follows the attainment of an undergraduate degree. Art teachers are also trained in the Crawford Institute, Cork. Its academic awards are conferred by the NCEA. The two colleges of home economics became associated with universities - Sion Hill, Dublin with Trinity College and St. Angela's, Sligo with the National University of Ireland, Galway. They too follow a concurrent course model. In the late 1960s, the Mater Dei Institute of Education was established by the Archbishop of Dublin for the education and training of teachers of religious education. It follows the concurrent model. Its degrees were for many years validated by the Pontifical University of Maynooth. In recent years the Institute became a college of Dublin City University, which now gives the awards for its initial teacher education course, B.Rel.Sc., and its in-career courses.

Thus within a short period in the 1970s the teaching profession became an all graduate one, with a mixture of concurrent and consecutive initial teacher education programmes on offer, and all new categories of teachers having degree status. The changing profile of the teaching profession was also reflected in the establishment of a common salary scale for teachers in 1972, with extra allowances for qualifications and the exercise of responsibility posts. It was also reflective of great change that a report issued in 1974 recommended the establishment of a Teaching Council, which would involve the exercise considerable self-governing powers by the teaching profession. This proposal was not, however, implemented at that time.

While reforms of initial teacher education had dominated policy concerns in the late sixties and early seventies, a greater awareness of the importance of in-service teacher education was also in evidence. This was signalled, in part, by the setting up of regional Teacher Centres to support in-service activities for all categories of teachers in the regions. Accordingly, one can conclude that the decade 1965 to 1975 was a momentous one for the teaching career and for initial teacher education in particular.

Developments in Research Aspects of Education

Initial teacher education was also enriched and deepened by a contemporaneous flowering of educational research, and of scholarly associations with an educational research interest. The Educational Research Centre provided valuable findings particularly in the area of empirical research studies. Staff in the teacher education departments and institutions came to see engagement in educational research as an integral part of their professional responsibility. There has been a very significant increase in research-based Masters and Ph.D. degrees. The education holdings of academic libraries have been greatly expanded. External research agencies, such as the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Linguistics Institute, have focussed more on educational research issues. The Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) was founded in 1975, and the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) in 1976. State funding for educational



research remained lamentably small, but has improved since 1992 with the establishment of an Educational Research Committee within the Department of Education and Science. Many reports, pamphlets, books and articles with an educational research emphasis have become available. These have helped to build a knowledge base, with an Irish dimension to it, to underpin initial and in-service teacher education, as well as teacher education policy issues.

Policy “Wobbles” and “Steadying” the Policy Approach

From the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties much creditable work had been done in teacher education. However, linked to national economic difficulties, a slowdown of momentum occurred from the mid-eighties, and a number of policy “wobbles” threatened to undo some of the progress which had been made. There was a lack of government action on a number of policy reports such as *The Report on the In-Service Education of Teachers* in 1984. That year also marked the beginning of a decline in the birth rate. Short-term thinking led to the very controversial closure of the country’s largest teacher education college, Carysfort College, in 1987. An even more drastic development occurred when, in January 1991, the Cabinet decided to close three of the five university education departments offering Higher Diploma in Education Courses. Due to strong opposition by university leaders, this decision was never implemented. Instead, the Higher Education Authority conducted a review, arising from which a quota system for intake to Higher Diploma in Education courses was agreed by a tripartite Committee of the Authority, the Department of Education and the universities. This quota system is still in operation.

These developments caused uncertainty in teacher education circles at the time, but a more “steadying”, affirmative attitude came to prevail shortly afterwards. In June 1991 the OECD published its 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. Instead of retrenchments, it recommended developments in support of the teacher career viewed from a “3 Is” perspective – good quality initial teacher education, followed by a structured form of induction and greatly expanded in-service teacher education. This approach was also endorsed in major policy papers which followed. Chapter six of the government *Green Paper on Education* (1992), chapter eleven of the *Report on the National Education Convention* (1994), and chapter eight of the government’s White Paper on Education (1995) endorsed the “3 Is” policy, affirmed the quality of the teaching force, proposed qualitative reforms for a better future and recommended the establishment of a Teaching Council. These strategic statements of policy coincided with a dramatically improved performance in the national economy, and with a greater political and public realisation of the centrality of a good education system for the promotion of the economic, social and cultural life of Irish society.

What might be termed as a “rolling” reform process was set in motion. Through the nineties various on-going reforms took place in initial teacher education programmes. There was a further expansion of the postgraduate, in-career certificated courses. In 1992 the In-career Development Unit (ICDU) of the Department of Education and Science was established. Significant expansion in in-service teacher education, now more commonly termed continuing professional development (CPD), took place with a range of providers in a variety of modes. The Teacher Centres were up-graded and provision extended under the new title of ‘Education Centres’. A structured system of induction was slow to take off, but in 2002 pilot schemes were initiated for primary and post-primary teachers, which hold much promise for development.



Shaping Teacher Education and the Teaching Career for the “Knowledge Society”

Since the early nineties Irish education has been subject to an unprecedented amount of re-appraisal, analysis, policy formulation and legislation, within a lifelong learning paradigm. The policy process engaged in has been very consultative. This has cultivated a high degree of public awareness of, and engagement with, the issues. Politicians, economists and educationists have been emphasising the desirability of Ireland’s developing its niche within the evolving knowledge society which is opening up. Within this context it is realised that a high quality education system is a *sine qua non* if the ambitious aspirations are to be realised, and that such a system is contingent on the availability of a quality teaching force. A range of recent developments in teacher education are best considered against this background.

In 1998 reviews of primary and post-primary teacher education were initiated. The reports have been available since 2003, and it is understood that the Department of Education and Science is preparing to respond to these reviews in the autumn of 2004.

The Department has recently established a new section to deal with teacher education issues. A more controversial issue arose in the summer of 2003 when the Department recognised the qualifications of a new distance teacher education agency, Hibernia College, which had no track record in the field and about whose courses many reservations have been voiced.

In 1998 a report of a ministerial committee was presented on the establishment of a Teaching Council. Legislation was passed in 2001 for such a Council and procedures are underway in autumn 2004 for elections to the Council. The Teaching Council will have significant powers relating to the standards of entry to the profession, approval of initial teacher education courses, promotion of induction and continuing professional development, commissioning research, and advising the Minister on supply and demand issues in teacher education. The Teaching Council has the potential to be a major influence on the future shape of teacher education and of the teaching career.

Ireland has also been an enthusiastic participant in the major OECD study *Attracting Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers, 2002-04*. The synthesis report of this study, drawing on the experience of twenty-five countries, is scheduled for publication in late November 2004. Ireland has, of course, also been a member of the EU study on the education of teachers and trainers, under associated Objective One of the EU Lisbon objectives. The chairperson of this working group is an Irishman, Mr. Sean Feerick, who is giving an address on this study to the Annual Conference of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS) on 11th November 2004. For a number of years SCoTENS has been fostering greater communication about, and research on, teacher education issues on a cross-border basis. Thus there is a confluence of reports and reflections on teacher education and the teaching career from national and international sources which are likely to be influential in charting new pathways for the future. There is a preparedness and appetite to continue the rolling reform process within the teacher education community, which cherishes Ireland’s valuable asset of very high quality candidates for teacher education. Within the professional and technical issues involved, there is a realisation of the moral purpose of teacher education, and that quality in teacher education should be an Irish benchmark.