

EARLY TEACHER EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The areas for discussion:

The fundamental steps necessary to ensure that:

- Government's strategic and policy objectives for education are reflected in the content of the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses.
- The process of Induction for beginning teachers provides the necessary bridge from ITE to effective professional practice and takes account of the need for ongoing professional development.
- The Early Professional Development (EPD) of beginning teachers builds progressively on the competences developed during their ITE and Induction phases.
- The process of Induction and EPD makes a real and sustained contribution to school improvement and to raising classroom standards?

What future partnership arrangements/protocols/service level agreements could/should be put in place?

What roles could/should the individual stakeholders play?

What arrangements need to be put in place to ensure that the work of all teacher educators [including schools and teacher tutors] involved in ITE, Induction and EPD is informed by the most up to date teaching and learning strategies, and practice?

1. PARTNERSHIP

- Worth remembering that the existing Partnership arrangements emphasise co-operation, collaboration and sharing – while the Teacher Education Partnership Handbook identifies lead partners at each stage – it also states that the other partners should assist the lead partner.
- Further, the view was expressed that if the current system was being implemented fully then beginning teachers' work would naturally link with school improvement priorities.

COMMON VIEWS EXPRESSED

- To ensure coherence, consistency and continuity in the professional development of student and beginning teachers, the programme of professional development needs better co-ordination and increased collaboration.
- Education and Skills Authority (ESA), the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and schools need to reformulate their relationship – need for stronger links to ensure that the partnership is effective.
- The Teacher Education Partnership needs to move from a voluntary to a constitutionally different basis with clear governance, sharpened up through service level agreements. Such service level agreements would ensure a firmer set of relationships between ESA, HEIs and schools.
- The need for a professional forum such as a Professional Education Committee involving the partners.
- To promote a more collaborative partnership relationship – there is a need for dynamic staff exchange between the 3 partners - more porous staffing arrangements between the providers of support in ITE/Induction/EPD - extension of the role of the HEIs – to work more closely with the other key partners – an involvement in Induction and working with schools.
- Closer working relationships between the partners would assist the development of common understandings of the competences across the stages of Early Teacher Education (ETE).

CONCERNS RAISED ABOUT:

- The professional support element in ESA – supporting and challenging – given the demands of the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum, School Improvement – can ESA provide the necessary support for beginning teachers in Induction and EPD? What can ESA actually deliver? Will it be staffed sufficiently to deal with teacher education? If not, can HEIs be contracted in?
- Possible overlap between ESA [the professional advice arm] and the HEIs. Uncertainty prevails in terms of how this relationship will shape itself.

- Quality Assurance of both the support for schools and of the support provided by schools during ETE - By whom? How? ESA will need to guard against there being only one body providing the service.

REFERENCE MADE TO:

- The work carried out by Partnership Management Board with regard to the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum – a useful model of greater co-ordination between support service and schools – development centred in schools with external support.
- Also, the School Improvement Programme model is based on self-evaluation and pedagogical support – building schools’ capacity to become self-reflective and self-evaluative.

2. CONTINUITY, PROGRESSION AND ACCREDITATION

COMMON VIEWS EXPRESSED

- The role of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) in tracking teachers’ progress through ETE.
- That professional development is inherent to being a teacher – suggestion that at some point, teachers’ continuing registration with GTCNI could be made dependent upon their involvement in ongoing professional development.
- Given the importance of evidence to illustrate competence, an e-portfolio is an important visible vehicle for demonstrating competence and promoting continuity. The development of the teacher e-portfolio is essential
- EPD raised to Masters Level and CAT points issued.

3. CONTENT OF ITE COURSES

- On the one hand, a view expressed that the content of the ITE courses already reflects government policies and priorities – danger if the process of ITE becomes overly formalised.
- But questions raised – though no definitive answers - about the implications of the Entitlement Curriculum [given the present configuration of post-primary schools] and the extent to which ITE can educate the full range of teachers with the necessary skills and subjects.
- Concern about the capacity of ITE programmes to absorb multiple initiatives – use of data, school improvement, revised Northern Ireland Curriculum/skills, the professional and technical curriculum, etc. What of literacy, numeracy and ICT?
- HEIs need flexibility to deal with these challenges.

- There needs to be communication channels between the Departments and the HEIs to improve dialogue. There needs to be clarification of who validates HEI courses in future – GTCNI? DE?
- UCET and DE should meet on the research agenda – and there should be extended dialogue between ETI and HEIs regarding inspection outcomes.

4. STABLE EMPLOYMENT FOR BEGINNING TEACHERS

- Need for a guaranteed year for beginning teachers – evaluate the Scottish system.
- Do beginning teachers have an “entitlement to teach” – if so, who provides for and manages it?
- Pointed out that Induction does not always follow ITE in neat chronological order.
- ESA provides an opportunity to improve the experience of beginning teachers – through its challenge function - to take a duty of care as the employer of beginning teachers.
- Beginning teachers must also take greater responsibility for their own professional development.

5. ROLE OF TEACHER TUTORS

COMMON VIEWS EXPRESSED

- Significant role of Teacher Tutors in managing improvement in schools – need for better qualifications.
- Build their capacity to lead beginning teachers forward – raise their profile – help them to structure learning communities within schools to assist beginning teachers – suggestion that there could be productive interchanges between Teacher Tutors and the HEIs – Teacher Tutors spending time in the HEIs and HEI staff spending time in schools?

6. SCHOOLS’ ROLES

COMMON VIEWS EXPRESSED

- Schools play a pivotal role in shaping learning communities – in providing support for beginning teachers in such learning communities.
- Schools need to buy into ongoing professional development – from ITE, into Induction, EPD and CPD – need for a whole school approach to supporting professional development.

- Schools may need to network/form partnerships with other schools or organisations in order to meet the needs of beginning teachers – also, if a beginning teacher is in a weak school, there needs to be a variety of back up support available to enable the beginning teacher to progress – provide support on an area basis, clusters, links with other teachers, ICT, etc.
- Need for effective leadership in schools – allowing leadership to develop at all levels – if leadership is poor, then systematic support for beginning teachers will not happen.
- There is a balance to be struck between ESA’s responsibility for strategic workforce planning – that is planning for the whole range of people required to provide services to young people – and the commitment to devolve as much autonomy to schools as possible.
- A lot of the work in Induction and EPD is contextually based – it depends on the schools in which the beginning teachers are teaching. There will be a spectrum in the capacity of schools to support beginning teachers – some schools will be fully capable of providing high quality support but others may not. In the latter instances, ESA will need to be able to step in to ensure that beginning teachers get proper support. Further, there was a suggestion that Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should report on schools’ capacity for promoting professional development.
- Given full service/extended schools, some group members expressed the wish to see increased opportunities for inter-professional learning. Further, the role of specialist schools was raised though there was no agreement on their role in teacher education.
- Teachers need a better understanding of teaching in other sectors [primary, post-primary, FE].

7. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM THE PLENARY SESSION

Early Teacher Education:

- Comment that there is a third model of Partnership in which one partner takes on a more enhanced role across the 3 phases.
- When considering the content of the ITE courses and what we want/expect student and beginning teachers to know/understand/be able to do at each stage – we need to think of ETE holistically rather than 3 separate stages – that is, we cannot consider ITE in isolation but must consider it in the context of the 2 further stages.
- With regard to CPD – need to think of it within a Life Long Learning context and we need to consider how accreditation can work within this context.
- The competence framework and the philosophy of the GTCNI as teachers’ professional body provide constants around which we can build ETE and CPD.

Stable Employment for Beginning Teachers

- There is a need for a guaranteed year.
- The question is who would manage this year and how would the beginning teacher receive recognition for this year?
- There is a potential role for specialist schools in Teacher Education (TE).
- The possibility of assigning beginning teachers to a cluster of schools/partnership of schools provides an opportunity to provide more continuity in employment and professional development.

Inter-Professional Learning

- Increase opportunities for student teachers to meet and interact with a wider range of young professionals – to integrate professional exchange from an early stage of TE as this type of working will be increasingly required in education.

Performance Level Agreements

- Question asked as to whether this signalled the funding of schools to undertake work with HEIs and student teachers?

Strategic Workforce Planning

- ESA has a responsibility for strategic workforce planning.
- Question asked whether DE intends to devolve its current responsibilities to ESA – answer was that the decision on this had yet to be taken.
- The need to consider a professional career structure for classroom assistants and their role in TE.

ITE Content and the Enriched Curriculum

- The current allocation of student teachers to HEIs reflects the current needs of the schools – e.g. in the PGCEs it is on a subject basis?
- The question was raised as to whether the current model of allocation reflects future needs?

Need to ensure that those working with beginning teachers have close contacts with schools

- Point made that support staff involved in working with beginning teachers should have experience of day to day work in schools – these are the people best placed to provide support.

- CASS officers' experience and skill should not be overlooked.

Role of Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD)

- If PRSD process is optimised in schools there would be benefits for beginning teachers and for staff development and school improvement.

Important issues that need to be addressed

- The need to close the gap between high and low performing schools and the contribution that TE can make to this process.
- A Shared Future – the role and contribution of TE needs to be articulated clearly.
- Early identification of leadership – a need to identify and grow a cadre of leaders more quickly, if they have the capacity.

Strategic use of Research

- Proposed that there needs to be a better way of the HEIs engaging with DE to strengthen the strategic link between policy and research.

Make Teacher Education a more research/problem-based process

- Whatever system is put in place, it is vital that the support people have opportunities to keep their pedagogy fresh – make TE more problem-based – encourage people to open up TE more – to work outside their silos.
- Encourage greater flexibility in the partnership arrangements – encourage openness rather than driving people defensively into their silos.

The Role of Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH)

- It was pointed out that the current PQH is really a preparation for leadership rather than a straight preparation for headship. Suggested that there is a need to re-define PQH.
- Good that the new competences combine both pedagogical and leadership excellence – as one develops as a teacher one also develops as a leader.

Reconsider the Length and Nature of the PGCE

- Suggested that the current 24/12 structure of the PGCE should be reconsidered.