Teachers and Education Staff

There are two main categories of teacher in Ireland for whom formal teacher education requirements exist. One category is primary teachers who teach 96% of children of the age range 6 to 12, and the majority of children aged 4 and 5, in state-funded primary schools throughout the State. The other category is post-primary teachers who cater for the age range 12 to 18/19 in post-primary schools. Even though the post-primary schools have varying titles – secondary, vocational, community college, community school and comprehensive school they provide broadly similar curricula and the students sit for the same state examinations – the Junior Certificate at age 15-16 and the Leaving Certificate usually taken at age 17-19.

Teacher education is a deep-rooted tradition in Irish education. Shortly after the establishment of the national education system in 1831, the Commissioners of National Education instituted the Central Training Establishment for male student teachers in 1838 and the female Training College in 1842. These were operated on the mixed denominational principle. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Commissioners agreed to give State support to denominational colleges – four Catholic and one Church of Ireland. The course was extended to two years in 1884. In 1974 the colleges became linked to the universities for validation purposes, and the B.Ed. degree was instituted, with a three-year course framework. The B.Ed. for primary teaching became a four year programme in all state colleges of education in 2012.

Formal training for secondary teachers emerged in the early years of the twentieth century. A Chair of Education was established in the University of Dublin (Trinity College) in 1905. Following the Irish Universities Act of 1908, which led to the setting up of Queen's University Belfast and the National University, Chairs of Education were established in all these institutions in the years immediately afterwards. The Higher Diploma in Education, which was a one year post-graduate course, was instituted in 1912.

The vocational education system was established in 1930 under the Vocational Education Act, 1930. Teachers of practical-technical subjects in that system were recruited by the State usually following completion of apprenticeship training and either high-level technological qualifications or high-level experience in a trade (craft). They were subsequently educated and trained as teachers of their technological and craft specialisms. Teachers of general subjects and other disciplines required a degree in the particular subject but were not required to have pedagogical training, although many would hold or subsequently acquire the Higher Diploma in Education. Teachers in the vocational system in general were required to hold a Ceard Teastas, which was a certificate of basic linguistic competence (oral and written) in the Irish language, as circumstances could arise where they would be required to teach their subject through Irish. The vocational education system was replaced by the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) in 2013.
In the early 1970s, Thomond College of Education was established in which students of practical-technological subjects and of physical education underwent a four-year concurrent degree programme. This College was merged with the University of Limerick in 1989 and its courses are currently an integral part of the university’s Department of Education and Professional Studies. As part of national policy in establishing an all graduate teaching profession, other categories of teachers for subject areas such as home economics, art, and religion also witnessed an up-grading of their education and training to degree status in the early 1970s. Since 2013, a number of these degrees have been extended to five years in duration and are offered at master’s level.

In the 1960s a common basic salary scale was devised and introduced for all teachers, primary and post-primary. The common basic scale continues to date as the basis on which teaching salaries are determined.

In 1991 a review by the OECD of Irish education, with special reference to teacher education and the teaching career, praised the quality of the Irish teaching force and, while suggesting some improvements, also endorsed the quality of teacher education and the infrastructure which existed in developing high quality in-service education for teachers. In 1998, the Minister for Education set up two review bodies, one for primary and one for post-primary teacher education, which reported in 2002.

Changes to the content of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes were proposed in the National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 and have been incorporated into the Teaching Council’s Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education and Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers. The improvements bring made to primary and post-primary courses include the reconfiguration of the content and increasing the duration of courses.

Concurrent ITE programmes will be a minimum of four years duration and postgraduate programmes of teacher education will be of two years duration. The lengthened and reconfigured programmes will include:

- Substantial periods of school placement as central to student teacher development (at least one year in total in the case of primary teachers);

- A number of mandatory elements in all ITE programmes, such as:
  - Literacy;
  - Numeracy;
  - Early Childhood Education (Primary)/Adolescent Learning (Post Primary);
  - Teaching, Learning and Assessment including School and Classroom Planning;
  - Differentiation;
○ Behaviour Management;

○ Inclusive Education (Special Education, Multiculturalism, Disadvantage, etc.);

○ ICT in Teaching and Learning.

The reconceptualised programmes will include major changes to the academic staff/student ratio and programmes should at a minimum have an academic staff/student ratio of 1/15. This will allow for small group work, for the modeling of effective teaching methodologies and for teaching the skills necessary for meaningful reflective practice.

A reconfigured and extended Bachelor of Education (Primary) commenced in September 2012. The reconfigured extended post-primary concurrent degree programmes commenced by September 2013. The reconfigured extended Primary Postgraduate programme and Post-Primary Professional Diploma in Education commenced in September 2014.

Places on the primary B.Ed. are allocated in order of merit on the basis of performance in the Leaving Certificate examination. There are also minimum entry requirements including specified grades in English, Irish and Maths. There are also a number of special entry schemes for mature students, students from disadvantaged areas and students from the Gaeltacht (Irish speaking districts).

Alternatively, persons who hold an honours primary degree (level 8 on National Framework of Qualifications) or a qualification at level 9 or 10 on the NFG can participate in an eighteen-month long post-graduate diploma course in primary level education. This post-graduate diploma course may be completed in a college of education or by means of an on-line diploma course offered by an independent private college.

In the case of post-primary teacher education, more than 88% of student teachers follow the consecutive model, with a one-year professional course following a degree course. Teachers of some specialist subjects e.g. art, physical education, the sciences, technology, home economics, follow a four- or five-year concurrent course. In all courses, significant provision is made for practical teaching experience, success in which is essential for graduation.

**Structural Reform of Teacher Education Provision**

In 2012, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) carried out a review of initial teacher education structures. An international review panel was established to carry out the review. Its report and recommendations were accepted by the Minister. The panel recommended that:

- Teacher education be facilitated in an environment conducive to high quality instruction on pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge; a university setting, 'critical mass' and competitiveness for good teaching and research, synergies between different levels of education;
- Six groupings of teacher education institutes. The current 19 ITE providers regroup themselves into six groupings to become centres of excellence for cross sectoral teacher education.

The review is in keeping with the recommendations of the [National Strategy of Higher Education 2030](#) which sees local, regional and international collaboration as the key to higher education system development.
The Minister for Education & Skills accepted the recommendations of the review and requested the HEA to submit a detailed report, before the end of 2012 on how to implement the recommendations of the Panel. The HEA consulted with the Institutes involved and to-date has provided an implementation plan and two progress reports to the Minister on the matter.

**Teaching Council of Ireland**

Since its establishment by statute in 2006, the Teaching Council, as the professional body for teaching in Ireland, has taken a lead role in drafting policy on teacher education in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and the Minister. The role of the Teaching Council is, inter alia, to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers, and to regulate standards in the profession. The Teaching Council’s functions span the entire teaching career – from entry to initial teacher education programmes; induction of newly qualified teachers into the profession; and the continuing professional development of teachers throughout their careers. Following an extensive consultation process, the Council published its Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education in July 2011. This provides the guiding framework for the Council’s functions relating to teacher education.

Access to the profession of teaching in recognised schools in Ireland is regulated. The Teaching Council is the designated competent authority for the regulation of the profession. In common with most self-regulated professions, the Teaching Council has established and maintains a register of its members, as provided for under Part 3 of the Teaching Council Act 2001. Over 86,000 teachers are currently registered with the Council. The register of teachers is intended to function as the main regulatory instrument of the Teaching Council. It stands as a verifiable expression of the standard of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence that teachers aspire to have and maintain. To be registered, a teacher must have attained a satisfactory level of professional qualification and education. Thus, the register is intended to act as a statement of the standards required of teachers. Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act 2001 was commenced on 1 November 2013 and will become operational from 28 January 2014. The enactment of this legislation will ensure that only teachers in recognised schools who are registered with the Teaching Council can be paid from public funds except in very exceptional circumstances.

The continuum of teacher education has traditionally been referred to internationally as the ‘three Is’ of initial teacher education, induction and in-career development. It describes the formal and informal educational and developmental activities in which teachers engage, as life-long learners, during their teaching career. It encompasses initial teacher education, induction, early and continuing professional development and, indeed, late career support, with each stage merging seamlessly into the next and interconnecting in a dynamic way with each of the others.

**Initial Teacher Education**

The Teaching Council’s published policy paper sets out the duration and nature of initial teacher education programmes which should have regard to the professional and personal development needs of student teachers at this crucial, foundation stage and the need to ensure that qualifications are recognised internationally. The policy indicates that the duration of concurrent programmes should be a minimum of four years while post-graduate programmes of teacher education should take place over two years. This should facilitate an innovative reconceptualisation of current programmes.

The Department of Education & Skills published the [National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020](#). It sets out national targets covering early childhood, primary education and post-primary education. The targets seek to foster a better culture of reading and more positive attitudes towards mathematics among young people. A key element of
the plan relates to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and contains the following actions:

- Lengthening the Bachelor of Education degree programme for primary teachers to four years and the dropping of many academic subjects in colleges of education in favour of the study of education and literacy and numeracy teaching;
- Lengthening of the Graduate Diploma courses for teaching to two years;
- Longer and more structured teacher practice sessions.

The initial teacher education courses are not simply to be lengthened, but to be reconfigured so that there is greater integration of academic and practical elements, to enable graduates to be reflective practitioners capable of self-direction and applying current research on an ongoing basis to enhance their own teaching.

**Induction and Probation**

The Teaching Council Act, 2001 states that the Council shall establish procedures for the induction of new teachers and procedures and criteria for their probation. These responsibilities transferred to the Teaching Council on 1 September 2012. A National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction, incorporating primary and post-primary strands was initiated in 2002 and in 2010 The National Induction Programme for Teachers was established under the aegis of the Department of Education & Skills, the Minister for Education and Skills recognises the importance of the transition from an initial teacher education programme to working as a teacher in a school and supports this transition through the National Induction Programme for Teacher. The induction support programme is available to all newly qualified teachers who are on probation and who have been granted conditional registration by the Teaching Council.

In the case of primary teachers, the probationary process must be completed satisfactorily if they are to fulfil the conditions of their registration with the Teaching Council. The probationary process incorporates two elements - a period of satisfactory service in a school (the “service” requirement) and demonstration of professional competence in a school setting (the “professional competence” requirement). The probation requirements for primary teachers must be met within three years of conditional registration.

Currently, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills continues to evaluate the professional competence of primary teachers for the purposes of informing the Teaching Council’s decisions regarding the conditional or full registration of primary teachers.

Following an evaluation of teaching and learning in the classroom, the inspector provides advice and oral feedback to the teacher and determines whether professional competence has been demonstrated. The teacher must satisfy the Teaching Council as to his/her fulfilment of all requirements. Decisions regarding the teacher’s registration are a matter for the Teaching Council.

The probationary period ends when the Teaching Council is satisfied that both the service requirement and the professional competence requirement are fully met. The Council provides confirmation to the teacher regarding his/her conditional or full registration as a teacher.

The regulations for secondary teachers to complete a two-year probationary period, changed in the 1960s, when the duration of probation reduced to one year. However, the tradition of inspectorate visits during probation became a very tenuous one. PQE is a condition of registration for post-primary teachers. In order to gain full registration as a post-primary teacher, all teachers must complete a period of Post-Qualification Employment (PQE). This involves providing evidence of 300 hours' teaching experience in a recognised school, which is verified and signed by the school principal. A minimum of 200 hours of the approved teaching experience must relate to the teaching of a
recognised curricular subject to a designated class on the school's timetable and may also include Guidance and Counselling. Up to 100 hours of the approved teaching experience may be carried out in a learning-support, special needs, language support, or guidance counselling role. A maximum period of three years is permitted to meet this requirement.

The Teaching Council hopes to pilot a new probation and induction process at primary and post-primary level in 2013/14. The process, known as Droichead will be school based with a team of fellow professionals (Professional Support Team) providing both support and judging quality (signing off on NQT reaching the standards laid down by the Council). Inspectors will continue to evaluate the work of NQTs in non-pilot primary schools on behalf of the Council (2013/14 and 2014/15).

**Continuing Professional Development**

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers has greatly expanded since the early 1990s. The Department of Education and Skills has a number of support structures in place across the primary and post primary sectors to enable teachers to meet the ever evolving needs of the education sector and to support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning generally. A national network of Education Centres is supported and appropriate groups, bodies and institutions are empowered to design, develop and deliver Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes from which teachers can select courses appropriate to their needs. While it is not yet mandatory for teachers to attend CPD events run by these bodies, they are encouraged to attend.

As well as focussing on curriculum changes, CPD programmes for teachers provide support for teachers and schools across a range of other areas including teaching methodologies, special educational needs, literacy and numeracy, leadership development, induction, substance misuse prevention, school self-evaluation and curricular support. Teachers can access these supports by responding to invitations from service providers, by identifying areas for support and requesting same through their school principal, or by using online/telephone support where available.

Ireland has participated in the international OECD study Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers completed in November 2004, and which included many features of the teaching career in contemporary society. Ireland is also a participant in the current EU study on the education of teachers, being conducted under the auspices of the EU's Lisbon Objectives. In 2001 Ireland enacted legislation to establish a Teaching Council which allocated greater powers and responsibilities to the teaching profession in relation to the conduct of its affairs, including teacher education. Thus, a good deal of background documentation is in place to guide future action on teacher education.