

ASTI Submission to the Teaching Council on the Continuum of teacher education

1. Introduction

The publication of a draft policy on the continuum of teacher education is of vital significance in the work of the Teaching Council. In supporting the concept of a self regulation agency for the profession, the ASTI had long advocated that teacher education policy should be primarily determined by the profession itself. The publication of Teaching Council's Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers provided a detailed and explicit statement of the core values which underpin the work of the teaching profession in Ireland. These values are also central to the Council's draft policy on the continuum of teacher education. This is a positive connection – and one which will facilitate the integration of previously fragmented policy approaches.

2. Education is a public good

The right to education is enshrined in the most important international human rights instruments. In addition to being a fundamental human right, education is also a public good. Its role and importance in society is such that it cannot be left to the market to ensure its provision. The statement in the Introduction to the Continuum on education as both a public good and on the duty of the state to support teacher education is strongly supported by the ASTI.

3. Entry into second level teaching

The ASTI welcomes the statement in the Introduction on the casualisation of the second level teaching profession. The ASTI has already publicised the negative consequences of this entry model in its publication in 2010, *“Teachers for the Future: Entry Routes into and Securing Quality in Second Level Education”*. (Appendix 1) The current entry model into second level teaching should now be a matter of concern for the Teaching Council. It is demoralising talented and committed young teachers and it is undoubtedly already sowing the foundations for retention and attrition problems in the profession. The latter will be exacerbated by changes to salary entry points and other employment conditions in the public service.

It is entirely appropriate that the Teaching Council draws attention to this problem in its draft policy. However, the Council should not confine its concerns with this entry model to discussions on teacher education. Rather as the agency established to promote teaching as a profession, it should continue to advocate for solutions to this problem. A practical first step would be for the Council to undertake qualitative research on the impact of prolonged employment insecurity on newly qualified teachers. The 2009 OECD TALIS study notes the high rate on non-permanent teachers in second level schools and the negative impact this has on aspects of classroom practice.

The ASTI fully supported the position taken by the Teaching Council in relation to the Education (Amendment) Bill, 2010. The amendment would undermine the objective of Section 30, which is to ensure that all teachers in State recognised schools have met the Council's professional standards, and would allow a gateway into classrooms for persons who are not registered teachers. The ASTI is at a loss to understand why the then Minister considered that the legislative route was the only way to address the problem of providing substitute teachers to schools at short notice. The establishment of panels of registered teachers as a solution to the Minister's concerns regarding the provision of temporary cover in schools. In this context, the Council had properly highlighted the fact that there is currently a large cohort of unemployed teacher graduates who are registered with The Teaching Council.

4. Context for change

The Introduction refers to the evolving and dynamic context for teaching whereby new understandings and insights continue to emerge in a range of areas and shape public and professional discourse. These include developments in education itself – curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, but also developments in early

childhood education, in the neuro-sciences and understandings of the brain, lifelong learning, etc. It is important to highlight this context for change and the challenges which it brings to the profession in terms of professional practice in schools but also at the level of teacher education across the continuum.

The ASTI must also however point out parallel contexts which are important influencers in the national discourse on education. These contexts include new paradigms for public services – their role, the delivery of services, the working conditions of public service employees, and changes to systems of public service remuneration, including pension schemes. The tone and content of this public discourse over recent years has been in many instances distorted and politically motivated. It is a matter of deep concern to the ASTI that this public discourse will over time contribute to the demoralisation of the teaching profession, will impact on its status in society and will invariably impact on the supply of highly qualified graduates into the profession. It would be important for the Council to be cognizant of this broader public discourse and continue to promote a strong public profile for the teaching profession.

5. Teachers are central to education

Teachers are central to the education process. Teaching has a significant and enduring impact on how and what students learn. Learning how to teach, and working as teacher, is a long-term process that requires not only the development of both practical and complex skills but also the acquisition of specific knowledge and promotion of certain ethical values and attitudes. Teaching and learning are culture-bound activities. As is articulated in the Teaching Council's Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers, the tradition of teaching in Ireland is holistic: in addition to encompassing knowledge and skills, it is also underpinned by values and beliefs – in short, by an ethical dimension. The **Guiding Principles** underlying the Council's policy on the continuum of teacher education reflects this vision and self-identity within the profession.

6. Initial Teacher Education

The ASTI is in general agreement with the vision and content of the section on initial teacher education. Within this section, the following issues are of concern to the ASTI:

Development of a professional portfolio: this is an innovative concept, the potential of which is already demonstrated in various programmes in the third level sector. The recommendation that such portfolios should be maintained throughout the teaching career underpins the concept of the teacher as a lifelong learner. There is a need for clarity around the actual model and content of such portfolios and around how they might be introduced into the profession as a whole.

Selection procedures for initial teacher education require to be reviewed at second level. As noted previously in the document, an important "pillar" in the Council's policy is that of integration. There is both fragmentation and lack of transparency in the current PCDE entry models in the various colleges. There is also a need for selection models which assess the overall suitability of graduates for teaching. A mechanism should be in place whereby potential entrants to the profession would be required to demonstrate non-academic skills such as the ability to communicate, to relate to young people, to work as a team, etc. Clear criteria should be developed for what constitutes prior teaching experience.

The **school placement** is an absolutely vital dimension of initial teacher education. There is a need for clarity around the purpose of the placement and best forms of structured support which should be provided to student teachers. The concept of partnership approaches whereby schools would have greater levels of responsibility in the placement process is broadly acceptable. However, schools will require practical supports to enable such partnerships to emerge, including reduced hours in the timetables of experienced subject teachers to enable the latter to mentor and support the classroom practice of student teachers. The ASTI must also put on record that it has had to issue letters to school authorities arising from reports it received re the allocation of student teachers to examination classes. This practice underlines the need for clear guidelines.

The ASTI agrees that a balance should be maintained between the provision of the **concurrent and the consecutive models** of initial teacher education. It also supports the recommendation in the national action plan on literacy and numeracy for a greater number of programmes to be provided within the concurrent

model.

The ASTI supports the conclusion that extending the **PGDE to two-year programme** would allow for an innovative review of existing programmes to provide more time for extended school placements, portfolio work, core skill areas such as literacy, numeracy and ICT, and special educational needs. It is absolutely critical that graduates of such extended programmes would be awarded a qualification which would be recognised as **partial fulfilment of a Master's degree**.

7. Induction

The ASTI is broadly in agreement with the content of this section. The ASTI has long advocated for the introduction of a national induction programme which would, as stated in the introduction to this section, "*offer systematic professional and personal support to the newly qualified teacher ... usually the first year after qualifying*". In fact, it would draw the attention of Council to the lead role which the ASTI played in securing the establishment of a pilot project in teacher induction in the last decade which subsequently developed into the national pilot project on teacher induction. The report of that national pilot project should be central to the development of Council's policy on teacher induction, reflecting as it does the experiences of Irish teachers – both newly qualified teachers and mentor teachers.

The ASTI firmly supports the proposal that there should be a multi-faceted national programme for the induction of all newly qualified teachers, **irrespective of their employment status**. Satisfactory completion of this programme should be a requirement for full registration. At the same time, the ASTI would underline the need for the Council to develop policy on teacher probation in line with Section 7 (g) of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 and how it links into, but is not synonymous with, the newly qualified teacher's probationary process. The ASTI recommends that the Council proceed to develop an initial policy statement on teacher probation.

As noted above, the ASTI supports the content in this Section on the content and delivery of teacher induction. It also puts on record its extreme dissatisfaction with the induction programme introduced in September, 2010. This model is deficient in many respects not least in that it based on an out-of-school information delivery model with little engagement with the parent or local teacher education department. The ASTI would not be supportive of model of induction which did not place the induction process back in the classroom and the school, based on a partnership with teacher educators and CPD providers.

The **resourcing** of a national induction model will be central to its success. The Council correctly identifies the need for the training of mentors, discrete time allowed to mentors and newly qualified teachers both in and out of school, time for peer-observation and portfolio work.

8. Continuing Professional Development

Professional development is a process that takes place within a number of contexts. The most effective contexts are those which allow teachers to relate learning to their daily activities in the classroom and in the school, and which allow for meaningful interactions with colleagues. In this context, the tradition of collegiality in Irish schools is an important factor to be taken into consideration. The quality of school leadership is also significant in this regard. Both factors are central to the concept of the school advocated in the Continuum as an inclusive learning community.

CPD – a right and a responsibility

Continuous professional development is both a right and a responsibility contingent upon teachers' professional role. The ASTI notes the intention of the Council to work towards a position wherein registration will be conditional upon receipt of satisfactory in relation to engagement in CPD. It also notes that such a development would follow the adoption of a coherent national framework for CPD.

The ASTI is strongly of the view that an appropriate balance must be achieved in terms of motivating teachers to engage in CPD and in ensuring professional standards in the teaching profession as a whole. The Council should develop the framework in such a manner as to achieve this balance. An approach with links continuous professional learning to annual registration without taking into consideration a range of factors which affect teachers' capacity to engage in professional learning would be counter productive and only serve to diminish the confidence of teachers in the Council itself.

Similarly, approach which does not recognize the wide range of learning situations teachers engage in would also be counter productive. Learning takes place through the entire teaching career. It takes place every day, formally and informally, through a wide range of learning experiences, deepening and revitalising teachers' skills, abilities, values and knowledge. Professional development in the broad sense refers to the development of a person in his/her professional role over their career. CPD should allow teachers to integrate prior knowledge and experiences into new knowledge and practices. Such experiential learning is central to the core concepts articulated in the continuum of the "*teacher as life-long learner*" and "*the teacher as the reflective practitioner*".

"*Satisfactory evidence of learning*" should not be reduced to a narrow behaviourist checklist. A broad and dynamic concept of teacher learning should underpin any statement or definition of evidence of learning. This concept should reflect the realities of teachers' workload, their employment status and their work in the broader school community. Anything other approach would undermine teacher professionalism.

Coherent national framework

The development of a national framework for CPD must be based on an analysis of the deficiencies in the current system. It should also contain statements on how best to assist teachers to engage in continuous professional learning. In its 2010 policy document on "*Teachers and CPD*", the ASTI identified the deficiencies as follows:

- Over-reliance on knowledge-transmission model: these weaknesses have already been identified in the 2005 evaluation of the SLSS model*
- Weak link between teacher professional development and needs of their school. Professional development is most effective when it meets the learning needs of the teacher in their particular school community.
- Insufficient time for learning: The most frequent reason for weak cultures of professional learning in schools is the lack of time. Full teaching workloads simply do not allow time for the various types of "workplace learning" such as team-work on curricular or school development/policies, engaging in data collection, developing resources and projects, team teaching, etc. The influential **2003 UNESCO Report stated that in order for learning cultures to grow in schools, teachers need time both to make professional development an ongoing part of their work and to see the results of their work.
- Large Number of Non-Permanent Teachers: At present, such teachers account for up to 21% of the second level teaching workforce. The opportunities and financial capacity of these teachers to engage in CPD is highly problematic.
- Lack of accreditation of learning: Accreditation and certification of teachers' learning needs to be developed in a coherent manner. Teachers are extremely concerned that much of their professional learning is largely taking place outside an accreditation framework
- School leadership: teachers' professional learning requires a culture of learning in schools. In this regard, the role of the Principal and the school management is critical. The national report prepared for the 2008 OECD Report on "*Improving School Leadership*" provides an analysis of the weaknesses – and strengths – in the current leadership models in schools. Both Reports require careful consideration in the development of a national framework for CPD
- Lack of structured "career paths" for teachers: in many instances, the only career path for teachers who have engaged in CPD to a high level is out of classroom teaching and into school leadership or other work in the education system. While this is not the "fault" of this CPD model, nonetheless there is a need for any future national CPD framework to take this

reality into account and to chart alternative career paths whereby such teachers can continue their work in the classroom and serve to lead peer-learning in a curricular or school development context.

- Absence of paid educational, sabbatical leave: Such leave is rarely highlighted in discussions of CPD yet for practising teachers, they are frequently identified as meeting both personal and professional development needs. “Time-out” of teaching is viewed by teachers as a time for personal renewal and for professional learning. Not enough consideration has been given to these models notwithstanding the submission of a claim on both by the teacher unions to the Department in 2001. A further model for learning which is also under-developed but nonetheless has enormous potential for teacher learning is that of teacher mobility to study in other EU countries.

The ASTI recommends that the Council framework address these widely perceived deficiencies in the current model and policy.

* *An Emergent Approach to Teacher Development*, Dr Gary Granville 2005

** *UNESCO Report on “Teacher Professional Development: An International Review of the Literature, 2003*

Resourcing of CPD

The ASTI fully endorses the statement that the provision of CPD should be supported by appropriate resources, structures and processes at regional, national and local level. It would equally underline that the Framework address in some detail as to what constitutes appropriate resources, etc. Lack of detail on these vital dimensions of CPD would invariably undermine the confidence of teachers in the framework.

Teacher formation

The ASTI broadly supports the recommendations here. It would also underline the need for the framework to develop the concept of the portfolio and to clarify what role it would play in supporting “satisfactory evidence of learning”.

Design of CPD

The ASTI broadly supports the recommendations here. It endorses the need for the development of attractive career structures for teachers – within and out of school. The ASTI refers at this point to the statement in its 2010 “*Teachers and CPD*” policy document on problematic aspects of the design of CPD.

*“Professional development activities are diverse by nature. They include different types of activities and take place in different institutional settings. One of the problems in articulating a coherent strategy for professional development is the lack of research on the effects of professional development. Overall, the research indicates that the outcomes are highly dependant on the particular circumstances in which the activities are undertaken. (OECD, 2005, p.127) The 2005 OECD **Teachers Matter** Report stated that:*

“The most effective forms of professional development seem to be those that focus on clearly articulated goals, provide ongoing school support to classroom teachers, deal with subject matter content as well as instructional strategies, and create opportunities for teachers to observe, experience and try new teaching methods” (p.129)

*For professional activities to work, it is important that they facilitate a close connection between the teacher’s own development as an adult learner, their teaching responsibilities and school culture and goals. The Report notes that a frequent criticism of programmes is that they treat teachers’ professional development as an activity distinct from teachers’ daily work, which both limits its effectiveness and restricts the opportunities for schools to benefit from teachers’ learning – formal and informal. Hargreaves, in his seminal 2003 study, “**Teaching in the Knowledge Society**”, stated:*

“To encourage schools to become learning organisations requires ensuring among teachers; the motivation to create new professional knowledge; the opportunity to engage actively in innovation; the skills of testing the validity of innovations; and the mechanisms for transferring validated innovations rapidly within their school and into other schools”. “

Partnership and collaboration

The ASTI broadly supports the recommendations here.

Accreditation of CPD

The ASTI broadly supports the recommendations here. It would underline its concern that teachers be incentivized to engage in accredited learning through such measures as financial support, qualifications’ allowances and reduced teaching workload.

Priority areas

The concept of teacher competence requires more elaboration. There is currently insufficient understanding of the concept among the profession. It would be damaging if the public discourse on teacher professionalism or teacher learning became reduced to narrow, behaviourist concepts of competences.

The ASTI advocates that the definitions employed in the 2005 OECD Report, “*Teachers Matter*”, be central to the Council’s definition. Noting that society now has a “demanding concept of professionalism” for teachers, the Report states that there needs to be “profession-wide standards and a shared understanding of what counts as accomplished teaching”. In this context, it advocates a competences approach linked to the concept of a profile of what is expected from teachers. It proceeds to list the type and range of competences as follows:

- strong subject matter
- knowledge pedagogical skills
- capacity to work effectively with a wide range of students and colleagues
- contribution to the school and the wider profession
- teacher’s capacity to continue learning

The profile would express the different levels of competences appropriate to the different stages of the teacher’s career.

9. Alternative models for entry into teaching

The ASTI notes that the draft policy paper does not refer to alternative models of entry into teacher education. This has become prominent at second level in the wake of reports on difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified Mathematics teachers. The ASTI believes that the teacher education institutions should develop programmes to enable graduates to move from different professions into teaching. It is extremely important that such programmes are well designed and are not perceived as expedient, “fast-track” routes with less demanding academic entry and exit standards. The Council has a statutory role in ensuring that such alternative routes meet robust accreditation requirements. In addition to the question of quality which alternative entry routes raise, there is the broader issue of how public discussion around “fast-track” routes into teaching can tendentially undermine concepts of teacher professionalism.

10. Conclusion

The ASTI is broadly supportive of the content and direction of the draft continuum on teacher education. It represents an important statement on the professional education of teachers and will underpin quality in the profession into the future.

The ASTI is extremely conscious of the economic and political context now shaping discourse and policy on public services and public servants. Government decisions in response to the fiscal crisis have undermined

morale in the profession. In common with other public sector workers, teachers are fearful that more professional demands and workload will be placed on them without due consideration for capacity to meet such demands.

The Teaching Council should be very alert to these concerns in framing its policies. In particular, the ASTI advocates that a balanced and realistic approach to any future operationalisation of the proposal to link teachers' professional learn with annual registration. The Teaching Council must retain the confidence of teachers. Registration requirements which are un-realistic, unduly onerous and do not take into account their daily workload will fail to motivate teachers to engage in the range of learning opportunities envisaged by the Council.