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Report of a Peer Learning Activity
in Reykjavik, Iceland
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'The Profession of Teacher Educator in Europe'

This note summarises the main conclusions of a Peer Learning Activity (PLA) in which experts from several European countries exchanged ideas on policy approaches to the competence requirements, the selection and the professional development of teacher educators (both those based in schools and those based in Teacher Education Institutions).

Context

- 1 Current policy discourse in Europe and in other parts of the world emphasises the crucial role played by the teaching profession in helping young people to acquire the competences they need to develop their full potential and to be active members of society and of the workforce.
- 2 For this reason, the development of policies to help raise the quality of the teaching profession is high on the agenda in many countries and, since the publication of the European Commission's Communication 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education'¹ in 2007, teacher education has moved higher up the political agenda in Europe. Ministers agree that improving the quality of education requires improving the quality of teaching, and therefore of Teacher Education.
- 3 Until recently, little attention has been paid to the profession that plays the central role in this endeavour: the profession of Teacher Educator, sometimes called 'the hidden profession'. However, in the Council Conclusions of November 2009², Ministers agreed, amongst other things, that Teacher Educators should have 'solid practical teaching

¹ 'Improving the Quality of Teacher Education', European Commission, Brussels, 3.8.2007, COM(2007) 392 final

² Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders (OJ 2009/C 302/04)

experience, good teaching competence and a high academic standard' and invited the Commission to 'prepare a study of the existing arrangements in Member States for selecting, recruiting and training teacher educators'.

- 4 The peer learning Cluster 'Teachers and Trainers' conceived of this PLA as a first attempt to map out the field of policy concerning Teacher Educators, who should be defined broadly to include not only those working in Teacher Education Institutions (whether specialising in pedagogy, didactics, school subjects, field practice or educational research, etc.) but also other staff with responsibilities for educating teachers (such as some staff in schools). They agreed that the peer learning should focus on the following key questions:
 - Who are Teacher Educators?
 - How do they get the education they need in order to do their job well?
 - How do we assure the quality of the work done by Teacher Educators?
 - Where does responsibility lie for making sure that this happens?

The PLA process

- 5 The Icelandic Ministry of Education together with the University of Iceland hosted the PLA in Reykjavik from 21 to 24 June 2010. 15 people representing ministries or Teacher Education institutions (TEIs) in nine countries (AT, B(vl), EE, HU, IS, NL, PT, SE, TR) and one stakeholder group (the Association for Teacher Education in Europe, ATEE) took part.
- 6 The host country was assisted in the preparation of the PLA by a small group comprising representatives of BE(vl), HU, and NL.
- 7 The overall objective of a PLA is to derive policy conclusions and recommendations to help Member States to develop their education policies. The PLA provided participants with an opportunity to learn from other countries' policies and practice, and to reflect critically on the current arrangements in their own countries with a view to making appropriate modifications.
- 8 Preparatory material was circulated prior to the event by the host country and the Commission, and each participating country circulated a brief assessment of the place of Teacher Educators in their Education and Training system. Documentation relating to the PLA, including preparatory material, country 'homework' the programme, and presentations can be accessed at <http://www3.hi.is/~jtj/PLA%20June/PLAJune2010do.htm>.
- 9 In addition to a detailed examination of the Icelandic situation, presentations were made about relevant policies and practices in the Netherlands, Hungary and Sweden, and inputs were provided by ATEE and relevant Icelandic stakeholders. Comparison and contrasting of these different policies enabled participants to elucidate a number of key issues and questions.
- 10 Some participants agreed to act as facilitators/ chairs for one day of the PLA each. As on previous occasions, this worked well.
- 11 At the end of the PLA, participants gave feedback to the host country about the challenges it faces in this area. They also identified the actions they would each take in their home countries to feed the conclusions of the PLA to relevant policymakers and stakeholders.

Policy Conclusions

Why focus on policy concerning Teacher Educators?

- 12 As mentioned above, Teacher Educators are the key players in the endeavour to improve the quality of teacher education; they should therefore be supported to be the linchpins in innovation both within teacher education and in schools
- 13 Furthermore, Teacher Educators are role models. From them, many teachers acquire the competences (knowledge, skills and values) that they deploy in the classroom. By modelling effective teaching strategies, Teacher Educators potentially play a key role both in maintaining and in improving the quality of the education system (through their impact on student teachers and serving teachers) and in developing it (through their role as developers and mediators of knowledge about education, and as educational innovators.)
- 14 Against the background of recent developments (such as the Bologna process), teacher education, which for a long time in many countries was outside, and cut off from, mainstream Higher Education, is now gradually finding a new place in Higher Education systems. This has not been without significant challenges for the profession, and its consequences are still unfolding.
- 15 However, it is still premature in many Member States to refer to ‘a Teacher Education system’, as if there were a single, coordinated and coherent continuum encompassing Initial Teacher Education, Induction and continuing professional development³.

Who are Teacher Educators?

- 16 The PLA adopted as a working definition of Teacher Educator: “All those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers”. This includes those involved in the continuing professional development of teachers as well as those involved in Initial Teacher Education.
- 17 However, the profession of Teacher Educator is understood very differently in different countries, and even within the same country or the same institution. As ETUCE has pointed out (ETUCE, 2008), the various profiles of teacher educators include:
 - academic staff in Higher Education who are teachers of education
 - academic staff in Higher Education who are teachers of school subjects
 - other teachers of didactics or general courses
 - education researchers
 - supervisors of practice in schools closely linked to initial teacher education institutes
 - trained and experienced teachers supervising practice in other schools
 - tutors (counsellors, coordinators, mentors, guides etc.) supervising prospective teachers at the “on-the-job” qualifying phase
 - networks of supporters in the “on-the job” qualifying phase.
- 18 Teacher Educators are, thus, a very heterogeneous group. They:

³ ‘Improving the Quality of Teacher Education’, European Commission, Brussels, 3.8.2007, COM(2007) 392 final; see also Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on improving the quality of teacher education (Official Journal C 300, 12.12.2007).

- work in a variety of environments (e.g.: in a school or group of schools; in a university Faculty of Education; in another university Faculty [Mathematics, Chemistry, Arts...], in a non-university institution, or in the private sector, etc);
 - come from different educational backgrounds; some may have started their professional careers as school teachers, others as educational researchers, others as (for example) chemists or mathematicians. It is therefore not uncommon for a Teacher Educator to possess no teaching qualification;
 - have different levels of qualification (BA, MA, PhD ...) in different subjects (Education, Chemistry, Psychology ...); and
 - possess different types of competence (teaching, educational leadership, research) to different degrees.
- 19 One consequence of this heterogeneity is that Teacher Educators have different levels of commitment and loyalty to Teacher Education; a Teacher Educator working in a Faculty of Education may devote the whole of his working time to teaching teachers or researching into teaching or learning; by contrast, a Professor of Chemistry in the same institution may spend only 10% of her working time teaching future teachers, and may not spontaneously refer to himself as a Teacher Educator.
- 20 From a policymaking perspective, this fragmentation poses a number of challenges, because in any one country it is unlikely that all those involved in educating teachers can be dealt with as (or consider themselves to be members of) a single, homogenous professional body. For example:
- Teacher Educators based in schools may have little contact with those based in universities (or other Teacher Education Institutions), while in some contexts university teachers working with subject departments have limited contact with their colleagues working in faculties or departments of education; this has serious implications for shared knowledge development, for the relevance and accuracy of what is taught in Teacher Education Institutions and for the coherence of the support that student teachers receive in the development of their professional identity and competences as a teacher;
 - the recruitment, selection, education and professional development of different groups of Teacher Educators may be the responsibility of different actors (universities, schools, government departments ...); and
 - Teacher Educators based in university (or other Higher Education Institution) Faculties of Education may see their roles differently from those based in other Faculties (which has consequences for the development of coherent concepts of professionalism, and quality, as well as for the coherence of the content of Teacher Education delivered to student teachers).

Teacher Educator Identity and commitment

- 21 A key conclusion, therefore, is that many different kinds of people share responsibility for educating teachers, but it cannot be taken for granted that they share the same levels of commitment to Teacher Education, the same ideas about quality in teaching, or a common system of professional values.
- 22 Research evidence is only starting to emerge, but it suggests that different Teacher Educators adopt very different – and often multiple - professional identities.

“We found four sub-identities of teacher educators in the literature: teacher educators as school teachers, teacher educators as teachers in higher education, teacher educators as researchers and teacher educators as teachers of teachers (or second-order teachers).” (Swennen et al, 2010).

- 23 Professional identity is in part linked to the professional competences deployed. Although some phases of Teacher Education are located within Higher Education, it is important to recognise that, to be effective, Teacher Educators are required to deploy specific competences in addition to those required of other university or school teachers; in particular, as *second order* teachers, they require competence in:
- reflecting upon how they teach,
 - communicating about how they teach, and
 - modelling good teaching practice to student-teachers.
- 24 Ideally, therefore, Teacher Educators have a dual role: to be producers of knowledge about education, learning and teaching, and to be educators of teachers. However, it is still the case that many Teacher Educators (whether or not they are given this title) do not undertake research into teaching.
- 25 The PLA participants identified a number of ways in which stakeholders and policymakers might strengthen the coherence of the profession; these include:
- establish common goals and objectives for the task of Teacher Education;
 - define a common set of core competences for Teacher Educators;
 - define clear quality criteria e.g. for entry into, and for attaining different levels within, the profession;
 - introduce professional standards, systems of registration, etc. for members of the Teacher Educator profession.
 - introduce systematic programmes for Teacher Educators' initial education, induction and continuous professional development;
 - improve communication between Teacher Educators, including via journals, internet platforms and conferences that bring together Teacher Educators from different settings;
 - improve the dissemination of new knowledge about Teacher Education and the profession of Teacher Educator;
 - stimulate possibilities for Teacher Educators to be involved in research on teaching and learning – both practice-based and academic research;
 - encourage Teacher Educators to join a national Teacher Educators' professional body, linked to international associations of Teacher Educators;
 - undertake cooperation projects between Teacher Educators in different regions and countries;
 - strengthen working relationships between Teacher Education Institutions and schools / other educational institutions;
 - enable Teacher Educators to become involved in the development of school curricula, projects, etc; and
 - encourage Teacher Educators to become involved in policy making.

Teacher Educator Competences and Standards

- 26 Teacher Educators are key actors for quality in education, as Snoek *et al* have pointed out:

“When the general consensus is that teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of their pupils’ learning, it seems appropriate to assume that teacher educators are an important factor influencing the quality of

the learning of student teachers. The issue of the quality of the teacher educator then becomes an issue of paramount importance.” (Snoek et al 2010)

- 27 However, there appears in Europe to be little explicit policy either to define what quality means in Teacher Education or to define the formal education or professional development requirements of teacher educators. Based upon information about the countries taking part in the PLA, it appears that few Member States have set standards for Teacher Education or defined the competences required to be allowed to work as a Teacher Educator.
- 28 Some examples do exist, however, which can serve as a starting point for a wider debate. In Portugal, for example, Teacher Educator competences are specified in law; in Austria, a list of Teacher Educator competences is currently being prepared, and in the Netherlands, the relevant professional body has devised a set of professional standards for teacher educators.
- 29 A question for further discussion is whether different competence profiles are justified for Teacher Educators working in different contexts (e.g. Higher Education, school ...). The PLA participants agreed, however, that, because of the wide range of competences required by Teacher Educators, a team approach is desirable, such that the Teacher Educator team as a whole possesses the full range, with individual members of the team bringing different areas of knowledge and expertise. This approach requires effective management.
- 30 The areas of expertise or knowledge required by Teacher Educators (many of which are distinct from those required by other teachers in Higher Education, or by teachers at other levels of education) include:
- the pedagogy of educating teachers
 - educational studies
 - (practice-based) research
 - schools as institutions
 - professionalism
 - the discipline
 - the discipline as school subject
 - the discipline didactics
 - general didactics
 - school-based education
 - new skills (e.g. transversal Key Competences, digital competences ...)
- (based upon Jónasson, 2010)
- 31 As a first attempt at a listing, the PLA concluded that the competences required by Teacher Educators include:
- first order teacher competences (competence in teaching learners)
 - second order teacher competences (competence in teaching about teaching)
 - knowledge development (research)
 - system competences
 - transversal competences
 - leadership competences

- competences in collaborating and making connections with other areas.
- 32 As has been pointed out (Swennen, van der Klink, 2009), “[*Teacher Educators*] need to act in such ways that other stakeholders, including policy makers and education authorities, recognise [their] professionalism.” They advocate the development, by the profession of standards and / or codes of conduct which could encourage Teacher Educators to reflect on their current performance and further development and could result in the development of a shared language enabling teachers, teacher educators and school leaders to use the same frame of reference for teacher quality and professional development.
- 33 The PLA concluded that further work is required in order to help Member States and Teacher Educators to define competences required, professional standards and ‘quality’ for Teacher Educators; this work could take as a starting point the existing national competence profiles or standards. One aim could be to devise on a European level an illustrative Frame of Reference for the professional development and assessment of Teacher Educators, that can inspire and support the development of profiles or standards on the national level.

Lifelong Learning for Teacher Educators

- 34 Teachers have to prepare young people with the competences they need to enter a world that is in rapid evolution; this means that school curricula, and approaches to the organisation of education and to teaching need to adapt very rapidly to the changing needs of society and of the economy. As the people responsible for making sure that teachers’ knowledge, skills and attitudes are kept up to date, Teacher Educators must themselves be open to constant evolution in their own professional body of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and must be able to adapt rapidly to changing needs.
- 35 Lifelong Learning is as important for Teacher Educators as it is for teachers and others, and provision should be structured as a coherent continuum. The form that the Initial Education of Teacher Educators should take requires further discussion. PLA participants were clear that all Teacher Educators, whatever their point of departure, need to take part in a suitable programme of induction into the profession of Teacher Educator as well as into their new employer institution. Thereafter, they need access to continuing professional development opportunities of the highest quality, throughout their careers; these might be course-based or tailor-made, formal or non-formal, individual or collective. The possibility of developing a common frame of reference for the induction of Teacher Educators was suggested.
- 36 An issue requiring careful consideration is whether all Teacher Educators should possess a teaching qualification. Another question is about the level of Teacher Educators’ qualifications and competences; one view is that a Teacher Educator should always have, or be working towards, a qualification higher than the qualification of those s/he is teaching.
- 37 All types of Teacher Educator, at all levels need to have access to an adequate supply of suitable educational and professional development opportunities. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that ‘qualification’ can mean more than BA, MA, or PhD. It may be that other courses leading to other qualifications need to be developed to cater for the varied needs of different kinds of Teacher Educator. The potential offered by Professional or Educational Doctorates should be further explored.

Stakeholders and responsibilities

- 38 The stakeholders who need to be involved in decisions about the profession of Teacher Educator include:
- Government / educational authorities
 - Employers of Teacher Educators
 - Teacher Educators themselves
 - Employers of teachers
 - Teachers
 - Professional Associations of Teacher Educators
 - External quality agencies
 - Unions
- 39 For the work of Teacher Educators to be fully effective, a number of conditions need to be met. These include, for example:
- creating the necessary conditions / legislative framework in which the Teacher Educator profession can be most effective;
 - safeguarding the coherence of the Teacher Educator system;
 - providing a framework for quality within the Teacher Educator profession and in Teacher Education generally;
 - setting quality criteria for the (initial and continuing) education and development of Teacher Educators
 - setting competence criteria for the selection of Teacher Educators;
 - regularly assessing the quality of Teacher Educators;
 - providing adequate Initial Education, induction and CPD opportunities for Teacher Educators.
- 40 Whilst the mechanisms for undertaking these responsibilities, and the stakeholders involved may, of course, vary according to different national contexts, it would appear that in many countries some of these key conditions are not being met, often because it is unclear who is responsible for them, with the negative consequences for the profession that have been highlighted above.

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