

TEACHER PREPARATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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TEACHER PREPARATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

History, Policy and Future
Directions

BY

SÉAN FARREN

Ulster University, Ireland

LINDA CLARKE

Ulster University, Ireland

TERESA O'DOHERTY

University of Limerick, Ireland



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|-------------|---|
| ASTI | Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland |
| BERA | British Educational Research Association |
| C2K | Classroom 2000 |
| CATE | Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education |
| CCEA | Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment |
| CNAA | Council for National Academic Awards |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| CSE | Certificate of Secondary Education |
| CH | Cultural Heritage |
| DE/ DENI | Department of Education for Northern Ireland |
| DFHETE | Department of Further and Higher Education, Training and Employment |
| DEL | Department of Employment and Learning |
| DES | Department of Education and Skills (Republic of Ireland) |
| DUP | Democratic Unionist Party |
| EA | Education Authority |
| EMU | Education for Mutual Understanding |
| EPD | Early Professional Development |
| ESA | Education and Skills Authority |
| ETI | Education and Training Inspectorate |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| GCE | General Certificate of Education |
| GTCNI | General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland |
| HDipEd | Higher Diploma in Education |
| IME | Irish Medium Education |
| INTO | Irish National Teachers' Organisation |
| ITE | Initial Teacher Education |
| NI | Northern Ireland |
| NICIE | Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education |
| NUI | National University of Ireland |

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| | |
|------------|--|
| NUU/ UU | New University of Ulster, University of Ulster/Ulster University |
| PGCE | Postgraduate Certificate in Education |
| QUB | Queen's University Belfast |
| REF | Research Excellence Framework |
| RSA | Research Society of Arts |
| TPL | Teacher Professional Learning |
| UCETNI | Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers, Northern Ireland |

About the Authors

Dr Séan Farren is currently a Visiting Professor at the School of Education, Ulster University. He was previously a Senior Lecturer in the School where he was a member of staff for 28 years. Prior to that, he taught at second level in Sierra Leone, Switzerland, and in the Republic of Ireland. He has also served as a member of Northern Ireland's Legislative Assembly and was the Minister of Employment and Learning in its Executive of 1999–2002. He has written extensively on the History of Education in Ireland and is the author of *The Politics of Irish Education*.

Professor Linda Clarke was born in Brooklyn, New York, moving to Northern Ireland in early childhood. She qualified as a teacher in 1983 and served as a Geography teacher and Head of Department for 15 years in schools in England and Northern Ireland. She was appointed as a Lecturer in Education at Ulster University in 2001 and served as the Head of the School of Education at Ulster from 2009 to 2013. She is currently the Research Director for Education at Ulster, Chair of UCETNI and a member of the REF 2021 Sub-panel for Education.

Dr Teresa O'Doherty is the President of Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. She qualified as a teacher in 1984 and taught at primary level until 1997, when she was appointed Lecturer in Education at the University of Limerick where she also served as an Assistant Dean. In 2003, she was appointed as Head of Education and later Dean of Education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

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Introduction

This opening chapter is an introduction to what is an eight chapter book on teacher preparation in Northern Ireland, the emphasis being on historical developments across and preceding the short history of the jurisdiction and on more recent and current policy, practice and directions.

A society's commitment to education says something special about its people, culture, traditions and heritage. It also communicates that society's ambitions for its future citizens and its future identity. The value attributed to education, and in particular teacher education, is reflective of the dominant values and is shaped by the unique history, context and structures within that jurisdiction. Although teacher education policy has been an important aspect of the education landscape, it has only recently been recognised by the OECD to be one of the most powerful determinants of the quality of an education system. This relative obscurity of the sector over many decades has meant that the sector has not been fully appreciated and the complexity surrounding teacher preparation and education has remained relatively invisible. However, in recent decades, teacher education policy has become 'deeply politicised'¹ across the UK and the wider world. This fresh spotlight on teacher education policy has provided an opportunity to interrogate the nature of teacher preparation across and within jurisdictions and to explore the unique characteristics of regional and national policies.

The history of teacher education in Northern Ireland has a distinctive place in the histories of teacher preparation internationally. Despite being rooted in a shared educational system with the rest of Ireland, when the whole island was part of the British empire, the divergent emphases in the provision of teacher education in the northern counties of the island from those in the southern counties became evident in policy and development following the partition of Ireland in 1921.

Colonised by Scottish and English Protestants during the seventeenth century, the north eastern counties of Ireland, which would comprise the territory of Northern Ireland, became an area quite distinct from the rest of the island, which was mainly Catholic and which favoured a form of independence from the UK. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as manufacturing industry developed more rapidly in the region than across the rest of the

¹M. Cochran-Smith, *Teacher Education in Times of Change* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016), p. 10.

2 *Teacher Preparation in Northern Ireland*

country, the standard of living in these counties increased dramatically, particularly for the Protestant population.² However, whilst industrialisation increased the demand for education, it did not eliminate religious and political rivalries. Rather, it seemed to have intensified those rivalries. Not surprising, therefore, when the elements of an educational system for the whole country began to be debated and devised, these same rivalries became manifest at all levels. Schools were largely controlled by one, or other of the main Christian churches. Consequently, despite encouragement from the state authorities, the Commissioners for National Education, to provide a more integrated system, denominational interests predominated. In teacher training, however, the so-called model schools, which provided initial forms of teacher preparation, a more denominationally integrated situation existed, at least initially. These schools were established and managed by the commissioners and were intended as exemplars of inter-denominational education. However, their development soon became a source of controversy with some of the churches. Later in the century when training colleges began to replace model schools, teacher preparation developed almost exclusively within the country's religious traditions and affiliations, and exclusive systems of education were strengthened. Catholic student teachers attended Catholic training colleges and taught in Catholic schools, while teachers from a Protestant background attended Protestant colleges and taught in schools attended by pupils from similar backgrounds.

Soon after the partition of Ireland in 1921, a marked difference between educational policies in both parts of the island became evident. In southern Ireland, the revival and promotion of the Irish language, as an essential element in nation building, took centre stage in education policy³ while in Northern Ireland, education policy was informed essentially along lines laid down for England and Wales with a focus on governance and structures. Following the 1923 Education Act (Northern Ireland), the exclusive pattern of schooling was reinforced. As this volume illustrates, the provision of teacher education mirrored the situation at school level – student teachers from a Protestant background being prepared at Stranmilis College, and their Catholic peers being prepared either at the female-only St Mary's College in Belfast and men at St Mary's College at Strawberry Hill in London.

Despite being a small geographical 'region' on the periphery of the United Kingdom, as this volume also shows Northern Ireland maintained an individuality. Its policies and procedures often diverged from those in England and Wales. This was particularly the case in the post-World War II decades, when teacher education in Northern Ireland displayed a dynamic that led the way in both UK

²S. McGuinness, L. Abbott and F. Cassidy, 'Northern Ireland: Some post-conflict challenges in education', in S. R. P. Clarke and T. A. O'Donoghue (Eds.), *School Level Leadership in Post-conflict Societies: The Importance of Context* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 174–191.

³T. O'Donoghue, J. Harford and T. O'Doherty, *Teacher Education in Ireland: History, Policy and Future Directions* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2017).

and Irish contexts. The extension of college courses to three years and, in some cases, to four years and the access to university degrees thereby afforded, marked an advance compared with developments in neighbouring jurisdictions. Later, the establishment of the Education Centre at the New University of Ulster and the consolidation of specialist courses into the Ulster Polytechnic also helped the drive towards an all-graduate profession.

Whilst teacher education has always been a contested area of policy development in the international landscape, in Northern Ireland, the level of contestation has been particularly heightened when basic communal interests in the sector have appeared to be challenged. This became clearly marked in the controversy in the early 1980s which followed recommendations regarding the future institutional provision of teacher education courses. Ongoing inter-communal conflict only exacerbated this situation.

A period of hope that old enmities were being set aside dawned when after almost three decades of violence political parties in Northern Ireland together with the British and Irish governments signed the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998. The establishment of a cross-community devolved government which followed, enabled the Northern Ireland Assembly and its executive to address education policies in general, and more specifically teacher education policy. However, frequent suspensions of the Assembly and its executive have prevented the many recommendations for reform in the sector being fully implemented.

In more recent times, reflecting both the dominant and contested values in society, initial teacher education in Northern Ireland has resisted the move to incorporate neo-liberal approaches to teacher education, as have been the case in Britain. Teacher education remains anchored within the universities and university colleges, and as research has become the fulcrum of teacher preparation programmes, the role of the university/academy has been consolidated within Northern Ireland.

The debate illustrates how the process of transformation of teacher education policy occurs, how it is shaped by cultural, social and economic factors, as well as local institutions, and national politics. It examines the historical development of initial teacher education within a contested geographical area, Northern Ireland, from the 1800s to the present day. Whilst charting the growth and development of teacher education across the decades, this study outlines, in parallel, the social and political developments as well as offering a deep insight into the region's society and education system. Issues that are of particular resonance in Northern Ireland are examined in the final chapters' review of recent policy developments. Contemporary global education reform is impacting on the provision of teacher education and the research and policies being developed on an international platform must inform best practice. This review discusses the numerous reviews of teacher education over the last 15 years and considers the future challenges and opportunities for teacher education in Northern Ireland.

As this volume is being submitted to the publishers in February 2019, the controversy in relation to Brexit consumes our media and our political debate, and the tensions surrounding boundaries and identity which have been ever

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present within policy development in Northern Ireland are particularly heightened and sensitive. Within this context, this book brings a new and particularly well-informed perspective to the discussion on teacher preparation. Northern Ireland is still a divided community which is working in a post-conflict environment, a reality which is often overlooked in current external analysis and debate. Peace is still vulnerable and cannot be assumed upon. Relationships between the power-sharing parties have broken down and the Northern Assembly has been suspended for more than two years. Despite the commitment of the civil servants to maintain continuity within the system, the political stasis has meant that there has been no political mandate to initiate change or to advocate for any policy development. It is now more important than ever to understand the foundations of teacher education in Northern Ireland, so that its future shape and development, can be understood. This volume is unique, in that it is the first time that the Northern Irish story of teacher education has been told from authors within its own field. In addition to studying primary and secondary documentary evidence, the authors interviewed key actors within the field of teacher education and drafts of the volume have been shared to ensure accuracy and balance. Cognisant of the sensitivities that surround this contested subject, every effort has been made to produce a volume that can contribute positively to the future development of teacher education in Northern Ireland.

Chapter 1

Establishing an Education System: 1800–1850

Teacher education in Northern Ireland has its roots in the all-Ireland arrangements developed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was during the early decades of the nineteenth century that the first initiatives to train a cohort of professionally prepared teachers were taken. These initiatives were gradually developed during the century, in the context of decisions to provide government support for a network of ‘national’, or elementary schools. Hence, the development of what became Northern Ireland’s educational legacy in 1922 when, following the partition of Ireland, its new administration took responsibility for educational services in the region. Chapter 1 reviews the early initiatives and developments over the period 1800–1850, while Chapter 2 continues the narrative up to the years immediately preceding the establishment of that administration.

1.1. Political Background

Critical to understanding educational initiatives in nineteenth-century Ireland is an understanding of the wider context of Irish life, most importantly church–state relationships as these evolved and changed throughout that period.

At a political level, the nineteenth century opened with Ireland, constitutionally from January 1801, part of the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, and was to remain such until 1920–1922 when the country was partitioned into Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921.¹ The 1801 union had been opposed by many within Ireland’s ruling Protestant ascendancy, who, as a consequence, lost their predominant role in Irish society as political decision-making was transferred from Dublin to London.² In contrast, the union was supported by several in the leadership of Ireland’s Roman Catholic community who expected considerable progress towards fully

¹The *Government of Ireland Act 1920* established devolved government within the UK for the six counties which formed Northern Ireland, while the *Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921* established the independent Irish Free State with sovereign responsibility for the remaining 26 counties of Ireland.

²The *Act of Union of 1800* abolished the Irish Parliament which had for several centuries exercised limited jurisdiction over the whole of Ireland under the British Crown.

vindicating their legal and constitutional rights. While most of the disabilities and injustices under which Catholics had laboured as a result of late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century legislation, collectively known as the penal laws, had gradually been relaxed and eventually removed during the second half of the eighteenth century, a number of significant disabilities persisted. Among these were the right of those outside the Established (Anglican) Church to sit in parliament without abjuring their religious beliefs, and the right to hold senior offices of state, not just in government and the administration but also in the judiciary and in the armed forces. The removal of such disabilities had been resisted by the exclusively Protestant Irish parliament – a major factor in persuading Catholic Church leaders to support the constitutional union. However, the subsequent failure to realise that expectation would eventually sour Catholic commitment to the union, would help ensure that Irish society would remain deeply divided along religious lines and would strengthen support for some form of self-rule and, ultimately, independence from the UK.

Not only had members of the Established Church held exclusive control of the Irish Parliament, they also continued to hold the majority of senior offices in the country: in the civil service, in the leading professions of law and medicine and in the military. The majority of landlords who owned most of the country's land were also of the Established Church; their tenants, mainly Catholic, except in northern counties where there was a significant Presbyterian community, who enjoyed somewhat more favourable tenure rights, rented their holdings on short leases and were liable to arbitrary eviction. More generally, Catholics, although now free to practise their religion, to conduct schools and to have their clergy educated in the state subsidised college of St Patrick at Maynooth in County Kildare, remained excluded from political office by virtue of the anti-Catholic nature of the oath required of members of the UK parliament.

Underlying the persistence of these impediments was a whole set of widely held attitudes that regarded Catholics, despite their church leaders' support for the union, as inherently disloyal and their church as a threat to Protestant liberties. Memories of the United Irishmen's uprising in 1798, especially in the south-east where it acquired decidedly sectarian overtones leading to the massacres of many Protestants, and of the various attempts to enlist the armed support of revolutionary France for an uprising against Britain, fed such suspicions and perpetuated a mindset that sought to maintain as far as was possible the Protestant ascendancy, or, at least to limit and delay the emergence of Catholic political influence.

The possibility, indeed, the probability, of a dominant Catholic political class was obviously very real. The overwhelming majority of the population in most parts of the country was Catholic. Overall, 80 per cent was Catholic, 10 per cent Established Church and the rest Presbyterian, Methodist and other smaller Protestant sects. Furthermore, Catholics were rapidly gaining economic power, already evident in the commercial sectors of many towns and cities, and it seemed only a matter of time before they would expect and demand a significant presence in the main professions and come to acquire significant political influence. Indeed,

UK Prime Minister Pitt recognised this likelihood when, soon after the Act of Union, he stated that the Roman Catholics of Ireland³:

[...] must finally, without bloodshed, without disturbance, without loss, without danger, without apprehension, in midst of opulence, and in amity with their Protestant fellow subjects, attain that equitable participation of political power to which they have an indisputable right to aspire.

Education would be key to achieving that goal.

1.2. Education

From the late eighteenth century, concerns were being raised about the need to provide a basic education for Ireland's fast-growing population, in line with the kind of provision being made available in many west European countries. There, significant initiatives at government level had been taken in the German states, the Netherlands and France to support elementary education including initiatives to provide forms of professional preparation for intending teachers.

In Ireland, initiatives by church authorities and by philanthropically minded individuals had led to several thousand elementary schools, many in buildings in very poor conditions, being established across the country. However, not until the Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in Ireland, popularly known as the Kildare Place Society, was established in 1811 to distribute a government grant to elementary schools, was any serious consideration given to providing a programme of teacher education.

1.3. Kildare Place Society

The Kildare Place Society was established after several government commissions on education had produced their reports. Among the recommendations frequently made had been the need to ensure that future teachers would be properly prepared for their profession. Referring to this need, one report referred to 'the deplorable want of such qualifications in a great majority of those who now teach in the common schools and to the pernicious consequences arising from it'.⁴ It was, therefore, the society's belief that:

a more essential service could not be rendered to the state than by carrying into effect a practical mode of supplying a succession of well-qualified Instructors for the children of the lower classes.⁵

³D. Bowen, *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland 1800-1870* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1978), p. 84.

⁴Fourth Report of the Commissioners of the Board of Education in Ireland – View of the Chief Foundations (Dublin, 1812).

⁵S.M. Parkes, *Kildare Place – The History of the Church of Ireland Training College* (Dublin: Church of Ireland College of Education, 1984), p. 2.

To ensure that supply of ‘well-qualified’ teachers, the society established a special committee, ‘The Model School and Training Committee’, which undertook to set up its own model school which would ‘exemplify the system of Education recommended by the Society, and also to serve as a seminary for training Schoolmasters’.⁶ The training programme adopted was essentially the master–apprentice approach widely used elsewhere by which senior pupils deemed potential teachers were designated ‘pupil teachers’. Pupil teachers observed and taught lessons under the direction of the head teacher. In addition, during after school hours, the head teachers delivered a programme of instruction, mainly on school and class management, to their pupil teachers.

The model school concept was highly utilitarian directed as it was at ensuring a working class that would be, at least, minimally literate and numerate to meet the demands of the industrial revolution and the growth of commercial enterprises that it entailed. It was also highly pragmatic given that levels of literacy and numeracy were low in society generally and the source from which large numbers of teachers could be recruited was the schools themselves. This is not to argue that a higher motivation did not inspire those who founded schools at this period. A dominant altruistic motive was the inculcation of Christian values and morality through Bible reading and regular attendance at church. Given sensitivities around religious instruction in Ireland, care was taken by the society to ensure that pupil teachers underwent religious instruction from clergy of their own denominations and that they attended their respective church services on Sundays.

While the society’s model school meant that the number of qualified teachers emerging from its training programme grew rapidly from 33 in 1814, to 78 in 1822 and to 207 in 1825, this was far from being sufficient to meet the needs of many hundreds of schools where unqualified teachers continued to be the norm. A wider network of model schools was obviously required.

1.4. Proselytising Controversy

At the time of the society’s expansion, Protestantism in Ireland was characterised by a vigorous evangelical campaign which swept parts of the country, especially the west, from the early 1820s, and which was directed at the conversion of Catholics. The campaign included the establishment of schools in which the Bible was not just read daily, as required by the Kildare Place Society, but by attempts to indoctrinate pupils in Protestant beliefs. Among the missionary societies accused of such practices in its schools was the London Hibernian Society which, as its name suggested, was organised from London and espoused avowedly proselytising objectives. Such organisations obtained financial support from the Kildare Place Society, provided their patrons agreed to abide by the latter’s rules. However, while some of its over 300 affiliated schools did abide by the rule

⁶*Regulations of the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland*, 4th Annual Report (Dublin, 1816).