

Doing Things Differently: Responding to the 'policy problem' of Teacher Education in Wales

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ABSTRACT

Responding to a clear justification for the reform of initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales (Furlong, 2015) the Welsh government has committed itself to strengthening provision through 'a truly collaborative system, where universities and schools work in robust partnership, supported by the consortia, recognising the importance of research' (Williams, 2017: 1). The publication of the national criteria for the accreditation of ITE programmes in Wales (Welsh Government, 2017) set out the requirements for all ITE programmes, emphasising the need for an integrated approach to student teacher learning within collaborative models which are research-informed at all levels. Using Vidovich's (2007) dynamic model of policy analysis, which takes into account influences on policy text production at the macro, intermediate and micro levels, the paper examines the process by which these particular reforms (covering a six-year period from 2013 to 2019) have been proposed and set in motion and the ways in which recently-accredited providers in Wales have begun to respond to the challenging agenda that they represent. The paper concludes by offering a view as to what the opportunities and challenges for ITE providers in Wales might be in terms of further developing models of research-informed clinical practice.

Key words: teacher education policy, teacher education reform, initial teacher education in Wales

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Introduction

The reform of initial teacher education (ITE) has been a feature of policy in most international contexts over the past 20 years (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012; Menter, 2019). In many cases such reforms have been driven by a wider global agenda, resulting in different interpretations of neoliberal policies and practices (Furlong, 2013a; Tatto, 2013). At the heart of these policies is the idea that improved rankings in international tests such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are dependent on improvements in teacher quality, which in turn depend on improving the effectiveness of teacher education programmes. As a result, governments across the world often cite poor performance in international tests as providing the imperative for proposed teacher education reform and look to the solutions offered by intergovernmental organisations. *The Importance of Teaching* White Paper in England (DfE, 2010), for example, makes frequent references to the McKinsey report (Barber and Mourshed, 2007), as does the final report of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group in Australia (2014).

While intergovernmental organisations thus clearly shape the way in which national governments develop and implement educational reform (Lingard and Rawolle, 2010; Sellar and Lingard, 2013), national forces remain 'significant and mediate or translate global policy in distinctive way' (Ozga and Jones, 2006: 3). Thus 'travelling policies' (2006: 1) – such as the promotion of deregulation as one response to improving quality by introducing a quasi-market in teacher supply – come up against existing policies and practices at local or national level, resulting in what Ozga and Jones have described as 'embedded' policy.

From their analysis of teacher education reform initiatives across a number of countries, Kosnik *et al.* (2016) identify as many as eight different types of reform: the increased use of standards; minimum programme requirements; research-based teacher education; increased assessment and accountability; diversification of routes; subject knowledge emphasis; relating theory to practice; and emphasis on continuing professional development. These have been deployed in different ways to different extents and in different combinations within different national contexts, often creating significant internal tensions. Mindful of the extent and complexity of such reforms, Mayer *et al.* (2019) provide examples of the competing accountability discourses in teacher education that are currently evident in many of these areas including: governance and regulation;

qualifications for teaching; notions of the professional teacher; the contribution of initial teacher education; and, the processes of learning teaching. Debates about these issues often become polarised, with questions of accountability and governance, for example, setting the deregulation of university-based professional preparation on the one hand, against ‘a defense of professionalism grounded in the academy’ on the other (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012:154). In some jurisdictions, notably the United States and England, this has led to widespread deregulation of teacher education and opportunities for alternative provision within a market model, accompanied by a reduced role for universities. Zeichner (2015) discusses the introduction of increasing numbers of ‘entrepreneurial programs’ (2015: 122) in the United States as a challenge to traditional models of teacher education located in colleges and universities, but argues that these institutions can only respond effectively to the challenge if they themselves engage in reform. Such reform, he argues, requires:

a paradigm shift in how we think about whose expertise should contribute to and who should be responsible for the education of professional teachers for public schools. (Zeichner, 2015: 132).

Central to this debate is the perennial issue of the relationship between theory and practice and their integration (or, more precisely, the lack of it) within programmes of initial teacher education. Often presented as an unhelpful ‘conceptual binary’ (Murray and Mutton, 2015: 70), the argument is often framed as a question about whether it is schools, or higher education institutions, that are best placed to provide the opportunities for beginning teachers to develop the knowledge and skills that they require. However, in addressing this ‘conceptual binary’ many have argued for closer alignment between different aspects of teacher education programmes (McIntyre, 1990; Hammerness, 2006; Burn and Mutton, 2015), an approach endorsed by both the Carter Review (2015) in England and the BERA/RSA Inquiry into research in teacher education (2014). The latter highlighted:

... the benefits of clinical preparation, through carefully designed programmes of initial teacher education, which allow trainee teachers to integrate knowledge from academic study and research with practical experience in the school and classroom. (BERA/RSA, 2014: 18–19).

Teacher education policy reform in Wales therefore sits within a policy context where the influence of intergovernmental organisations and

'travelling policies' are seen to operate globally and where such policies are subsequently reconfigured in order to take into account specific local and national contextual factors. Although there was a previous review of teacher education in Wales in 2006 (Furlong *et al.*), the most recent reforms can be traced back to the decision by the Welsh government to hold a subsequent review in 2012. The review was conducted by Ralph Tabberer, as 'part of a multi-faceted reform plan designed to raise standards in Welsh schools' (Tabberer, 2013: 2) and argued that initial teacher education provision in Wales was failing to meet the highest standards internationally, a judgement supported by the results of inspections by Estyn (the body that inspects the quality of education provision in Wales); one of these inspections had taken place prior to the review report and three others took place subsequently. Tabberer's first recommendation was for the Welsh government to 'appoint a senior adviser with specific responsibility for ITT' (2013: 18), which it did, resulting in the appointment of John Furlong to the role in 2014. His own report for the Welsh government (Furlong, 2015) was highly influential and it was the government's acceptance of its recommendations – particularly the recommendation for a 'revised set of accreditation criteria which focus in detail on the nature of university/school partnerships and which give schools leading responsibilities in key aspects of ITE programmes' (2015: 24) – that paved the way for the significant reform that was to follow. It is important to note, however, that this reform has taken a very different course to reform of teacher education elsewhere. While at one level *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* (Furlong, 2015) appears to echo the policy rhetoric that has characterised teacher education policy elsewhere, particularly in England, Furlong goes on to state that there is 'little appetite to move away from university led provision' in Wales, which he attributes to Welsh universities' 'very strong tradition of engagement in teacher education' (2015: 15).

Our aim in this article is to examine the processes by which teacher education reform in Wales has been set in train, highlighting the way in which the process of policy reform and the early stages of implementation have been both similar to, and different from, what has happened in other jurisdictions internationally. In order to carry out this examination we have drawn on the full range of teacher education policy documents produced in Wales in the six-year period from the Tabberer Review (2013) to the present.

Methods

In our analysis of these documents we have drawn on Vidovich's (2007: 290) 'hybridized framework for policy analysis.' Vidovich provides a dynamic model of the 'policy cycle' which takes into account influences on policy text production at the macro, intermediate and micro levels. Macro-level influences indicate the way in which global or international influences might, for example, have an impact on the policy process, while analysis at the micro-level takes into account the contextual influences at an institutional level, acknowledging that influences can vary both within and between individual institutions. Drawing on Ball's identification of three primary policy contexts (see Bowe *et al.*, 1992), Vidovich suggests that policy-making should be interrogated within each of the three relevant contexts:

... the context of influence (where interest groups struggle over construction of policy discourses); the context of policy text production (where texts represent policy, although they may contain inconsistencies and contradictions); and the context of practices/effects (where policy is subject to multiple interpretations and recreations). (Vidovich 2007: 288–289).

Using this framework as a tool we identified all relevant policy documents (see Appendix 1 for a full list). It should be noted that this range inevitably represents policy documents of different levels of status, but all integral to the reform process. The documents might be described as falling into four main categories: those that represent the case for reform and subsequent recommendations (Tabberer, 2013; Furlong, 2015); those that represent the position of the Welsh government (for example, Lewis 2013; Williams, 2015; Welsh Government 2013; 2017b; 2017c; 2018); those that provide the statutory frameworks (Welsh Government 2017a; 2019); and those from other bodies (for example, Estyn, 2018). A further separate category includes documents at the level of practice, represented by the details published online of the newly re-accredited teacher education programmes themselves.

The analysis within each context was framed by the questions below, which were taken from a fuller list suggested by Vidovich (2007). In selecting the specific questions to address we focussed on what appeared to be the central questions around policy development in Wales, while recognising that we lacked the scope within a single paper to address related issues such as funding and policy evaluation.

Context of influence

1. To what extent are global and international influences operating and to what extent are these mediated?
2. Who are the policy elite and what interests do they represent?
3. Which other interest groups are attempting to influence policy, and how?

Context of policy text production

- What are the dominant discourses of the policy text?
- What issues constitute the focus of the policy?
- Are there inconsistencies and contradictions in the policy text?

Context of practice/effects

1. How open is the policy to interpretation by practitioners?
2. What processes are used to put the policy into practice and why?
3. Are practitioners at the local level able to respond rapidly to meet localised needs in this policy domain?
4. Is there a disjunction between the original policy intent and subsequent practices and if so why?

Given the wide range of policy actors involved in the reform of initial teacher education policy in Wales, and the potential for a number of competing discourses, this paper reflects (i) the way in which teacher education in Wales, as elsewhere, has been constructed as a 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Cochran-Smith, Piazza and Power, 2013) and (ii) the influences on how the problem has been both framed and addressed.

Findings

The context of influence

To what extent are global and international influences operating and to what extent are these mediated?

Analysis of the initial teacher education reviews commissioned by the Welsh Government and of the policy documents produced in response clearly reveals that policy development has taken place within a wider

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global context, reflecting the ‘global trend that has pervaded parliaments and policy discourses throughout the world’ (Rautalin *et al.*, 2019: 515). Before examining this influence, it is perhaps worth noting that some kinds of global influences that are of considerable concern elsewhere do not seem to feature in policy formulation in Wales. There is little mention, for example, of the movement of people and the resultant need to prepare teachers who are ready to engage with diverse groups of students (Paine *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, the influence of certain global ideas can be clearly seen, as can the role of global policy actors – powerful international organisations, such as the OECD, which is cited in a range of different policy documents.

Tabberer (2013), for example, begins by referencing what he calls ‘World Class Standards’ (2013: 8) and situates the review firmly in the context of the second McKinsey Report (Barber and Mourshead, 2009) and a series of OECD publications, quoting heavily from Andreas Schleicher’s summary in the publication he edited in 2012. The review then goes on ‘to map out the distinctive features of ITT and broader teacher development in high performing systems’ (2013: 10) before extensive quotes from yet another OECD publication (Musset, 2010). Likewise *Teaching Tomorrow’s Teachers* (Furlong, 2015) argues for change in the system of teacher education in Wales based on the findings of the Tabberer Review, Estyn’s 2012–13 annual report and the report *Improving Schools in Wales: An OECD Perspective* (2014). Andreas Schleicher introduces the latter report, noting that it:

draws upon lessons from PISA, high performers and successful reformers in education, and on the research and analysis of key aspects of education policy in Wales undertaken by the OECD-Wales Review Team (2014: 3).

Similarly, OECD publications are cited in the *Criteria for the Accreditation of Initial Programmes of Teacher Education in Wales* (Welsh Government, 2018) in order to provide further evidence to support some of the principles on which the accreditation criteria are based. Estyn’s (2018) report, *The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education*, draws on OECD international comparisons to highlight the positive aspects of ‘research-based learning processes’ (2018: 5).

The overall picture is therefore one in which the OECD appears to be highly influential, although it has to be acknowledged that this is only one influence amongst others. The various reports listed above for their citation of OECD publications also draw on a range of other sources (for example Menter *et al.*, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 1999, in Tabberer 2013;

BERA-RSA, 2014 in Furlong, 2015) although such references are generally more limited.

Who are the policy elite and what interests do they represent?

Although the reforms in Wales have been carried out in consultation with a range of interested stakeholders, including Estyn, the universities, school leaders and teachers, the trade unions etc., it appears that these reforms have been driven mainly by a small number of influential individuals. To a certain extent this process is indicative of the way in which other education policies in Wales in recent years have been informed by the model of external review carried out by independent experts (for example, the review of assessment carried out by Daugherty (2004). In relation to teacher education reform, however, other than named government ministers, the key individual has been John Furlong who, following one of the recommendations of the Tabberer Review, was appointed by the Welsh Government to be the national Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Adviser for Wales. It was Furlong who set out the options for initial teacher education reform in Wales in *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* (2015), who chaired the Teacher Education Accreditation Group which produced the new criteria for accreditation, and who made recommendations to the government having carried out the resulting accreditation process. In addressing the question as to what interests might be represented here it is worth reflecting that Furlong is, first and foremost, an educational researcher and it is the collected body of his research that has been brought together to inform his recent work in Wales. In spite of the previous posts he has held, as well as his work on the role of universities, it is a mistake to assume that he simply represents the university sector, since he has also conducted extensive research into the work of mentors and the role of schools, as well as examining how nature of partnerships in initial teacher education. In each case this work has tackled a range of complex questions, for example:

1. what skills and knowledge can only be learned from direct experience in schools? (Furlong, Hirst, Pocklington and Miles, 1988; Furlong and Maynard, 1995);
2. what forms of knowledge is higher education best placed to provide? (Furlong, 2013b); and
3. how do we design effective teacher education programmes? (Furlong *et al.*, 1996; Furlong *et al.*, 2000).

Additionally, the influence of his work as chair of the BERA/RSA Inquiry can be seen to be reflected in the reforms in Wales, particularly the call for the development of teachers' research literacy. The influence of this body of research on the reforms in Wales would seem to suggest that it is the interests of teacher education and the teaching profession more widely that are being served, rather than any particular political perspective.

It should be noted, however, that *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* and the subsequent accreditation criteria do not represent simply the views of one individual. The report indicates that each stage of the review process was based on extensive consultation with appropriate stakeholders, including those involved in the teacher training sector; school teachers and school leaders; Estyn; university staff; those within the regional Consortia in Wales, and members of appropriate national bodies.

Finally, Estyn has also played a significant role in teacher education policy reform, not least in highlighting the need for change through its own publications (see, for example, Estyn 2018) and through the influence that it has in determining the framework by which initial teacher education programmes in Wales are inspected (Estyn, 2015; 2019) It should be noted, however, that Estyn has, in turn, also been subject to its own independent review (Donaldson, 2018).

Which other interest groups are attempting to influence policy, and how?

While there are clearly international and national influences at play in the formulation of teacher education policy in Wales, two potential sources of influence are notable by their absence. First, there is no defining ideological position taken by the Welsh government over the period of reform, in marked contrast to the way in which change in England over recent years has been driven by the Department for Education. Here a distinct ideology is clearly reflected in the policy documents that emerged in the early days of the coalition government, including *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and the two subsequent policy documents related specifically to the radical reform of teacher education (DfE, 2011a; DfE 2011b). Second, in Wales, the initial teacher education providers themselves seem to have had little influence in terms of policy reform. In this case, their exclusion is more consistent with the pattern of reform in many other countries, where teachers' and teacher educators' 'level of professional agency' can be seen as being in proportion to the level of trust that society and/or politicians ascribe to them (Menter, 2019: 275).

The context of policy text production

Here again the influence of the OECD is clearly evident. Underpinning the perceived need for teacher education reform in Wales over the past decade has been a wider concern for the quality of education in light of the country's performance in successive PISA tests. A previous review of teacher education (Furlong *et al.*, 2006) had not, at the time, highlighted particular issues around quality as giving rise to any significant concern. Although the review acknowledged Estyn's judgement that there was insufficient provision 'of the highest quality' it also noted the finding that 'the quality of current ITT provision in Wales is good' (2006: 12). It suggested that quality overall needed to be addressed through partnership, staffing and the number of schools involved, and thus pointed mainly to the need for structural reform, which subsequently took place. At the time, the number of teachers being trained exceeded the numbers of newly qualified teachers required in Wales and the review recommended both a reduction in student numbers and the reconfiguration of provision nationally into a smaller number of regionally-based schools of education. Policy texts since 2010 have, however, been focussed on the need to improve Wales's position in international comparisons, such as PISA tables, through reform of both the school curriculum and the preparation of new teachers. As noted above, the process by which this has been achieved has been one based on reviews carried out by invited external experts followed by government acceptance (almost in their entirety) of the recommendations made.

What are the dominant discourses of the policy text?

There are a number of different, inter-related discourses evident in the policy reform documents, but with a relatively high level of consistency across all of them. First, and common to policy documents from many jurisdictions around the world over the past decade, is the discourse of international comparison (Mayer *et al.*, 2019). The influence of international organisations such as the OECD in policy formation, as noted above, is inevitably reflected in the discourse of the policy documents themselves and this is reflected particularly strongly in the Tabberer Review (2013), where such comparisons are clearly to the fore as the case is made for what is seen as much needed reform:

... after seeing disappointing results from international assessments of student performance (2013: 7).

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Given the context of the wider school reform in Wales, it is reasonable to set current ITT practice against an international quality benchmark. (2013: 8).

... it is possible to map out the distinctive features of ITT and broader teacher development in high performing systems. (2013: 9).

The evidence from inspection and self-evaluation shows that ITT provision in Wales is not meeting the standards set by the highest performers globally. (2013: 14).

Second, and again almost inevitably, given the context of such comparisons, there is initially a discourse of inadequacy and/or deficit which runs through many of the policy documents:

The current quality of ITT in Wales is adequate and no better. (Tabberer, 2013: 14).

ITT provision could be better. And to help raise standards throughout Wales, it needs to be much better. (Tabberer, 2013: 14).

... there is a widespread consensus that overall it is not of sufficient high quality to serve the needs of Wales either now or in the future. (Furlong, 2015: 5).

Third, having identified the major issues and what is required in order to address the perceived problems, there is a discourse of a new vision for the future, closely aligned to the wider vision for education in Wales. This is particularly evident in the Welsh government publications as it responds to the recommendations of the various reviews. The Accreditation Criteria document includes a whole section on 'vision', which this is reflected strongly elsewhere:

From initial teacher education, into the classroom and through career-long professional learning, our national approach focusses on ensuring and further developing a high-quality teaching profession. (Williams, 2017, online statement).

... we welcome these recommendations to schools as they mirror our own expectations and reflect our vision of ITE in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018)

What is not, however, evident in the discourse in Wales is the language of marketisation and diversification of routes. Wales has not followed the policy trends evident in other countries such as England, Hong Kong and the United States, of developing 'market-driven pathways' where prospective teachers can 'choose from an array of alternatives' (Darling-Hammond and Lieberman, 2012: 153). The issue is addressed in *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* (Furlong, 2015), where it is clear that the diversification of routes is not part of the policy agenda.

Universities in Wales remain central to the provision of initial teacher education. Unlike England or some states in the USA, there seems little appetite to move away from university led provision. Employment based routes (GTP and Teach First), though important in their own ways, remain very small compared with the numbers enrolled in university led courses. In some ways this is unsurprising. Wales' universities have a very strong tradition of engagement in teacher education. (2015: 15).

Another element present only to a limited degree in the discourse, and certainly not identified as a dominant theme, is reference to issues of equity and social justice within teacher education. Cochran-Smith *et al.* (2017) argue that what they call 'democratic accountability' in teacher education needs to be based on notions of 'strong equity' that recognise:

... the societal and educational systems and structures that produce and reproduce inequality but also acknowledges teachers' and teacher educators' roles in challenging these. (2017: 83).

It has also been demonstrated that 'teachers in Wales generally welcome policies with a strong element of social justice' (Grigg, 2016), yet neither the Tabberer Review nor *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* refers to equity or social justice, although the criteria for accreditation do mention equity in two specific ways. First, in requiring all ITE programmes to conform to UK-wide disability legislation and second, when indicating that 'professional and pedagogical studies' within any accredited programme should enable trainee teachers to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to:

1. meeting the needs of pupils from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure equity; and
2. meeting the needs of pupils with additional learning or other special needs to ensure equity (Welsh Government, 2017a: 21).

What we do see in the policy documents, however, in terms of wider equity issues, is a focus on the Welsh language and the clear assertion in the criteria that: the teaching profession will play a key role in ensuring the continued survival and growth of the Welsh language (Welsh Government, 2017a: 18). This policy is understandably consistent with the Welsh Government's aim 'of ensuring all learners will be able to use the Welsh language when they leave school' (Welsh Government, 2017c: 18).

What issues constitute the focus of the policy?

In addition to the focus on improving quality discussed above, one key issue identified throughout the policy review documents is, perhaps to be anticipated: the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education. Tabberer (2013) talks about the ‘the difficulties that ITT providers face getting the balance between theory and practice right’ (2013: 15) and Estyn, in their recent report on school-based mentoring, published ahead of the implementation of the newly accredited ITE programmes, identifies ongoing concerns:

Currently, there are too few links between the university-based and school-based aspects of ITE programmes and too few opportunities for students to connect educational theory to teaching practice. (2018: 7).

Furlong (2015), drawing on the BERA-RSA Inquiry (2014), argues that:

The best programmes internationally ... develop strong links between theory and practice, in a way that helps students to understand and explore the interconnect-
edness of educational theories and classroom practices. (2015: 8).

This is an approach reflected in the accreditation criteria which make many references to the different forms of knowledge on which student teachers need to draw, for example:

Professional and pedagogical studies should draw on theory, research and student teachers’ direct experience in schools to develop their knowledge, understanding and practical skills (2015: 21).

The development of teachers’ research literacy is a related issue and underpins policy development throughout. Furlong (2015) is explicit about the need to apply the findings of the BERA-RSA Inquiry (2014) to the Welsh context and the emphasis on the need to develop research literacy as part of any teacher education programme permeates all subsequent policy documentation. In order to further this agenda, the Welsh government commissioned academics at Sheffield Hallam University to produce a ‘quality enhancement tool ... designed to support ITE partnerships to meet the ITE accreditation criteria’ (Welsh Government, 2017b: 2). The introduction to this document affirms the central role of research-informed practice in the reforms in Wales.

The means by which programme integration is intended to be achieved forms the second clear focus of the policy reforms – namely the development of teacher education partnerships. Partnership has been identified as

being a central component of quality in teacher education (Bills *et al.*, 2008, Mutton *et al.*, 2018) and the accreditation criteria endorse the sort of partnership working that the Welsh government sees as leading to effective programme integration. The criteria make clear that:

There are also implications for joint planning. Only if universities and a group of 'lead partnership schools' jointly engage in planning the programme as a whole will it have the coherence that is needed. Finally there is a need for joint accountability. If truly collaborative teacher education is to be achieved then 'the Partnership' – the HEI together with all of their partner schools – must take joint responsibility for their contributions to the programme. (Welsh Government, 2017a: 5).

The influence of previous research on partnership, particularly that carried out two decades ago by John Furlong, can be seen to inform the principles underpinning the reforms in Wales. The notion of 'collaborative partnership' was first identified by the Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) project (Furlong *et al.*, 1996; Furlong *et al.*, 2000) as one of the 'ideal-typical' models but the researchers found little evidence of such a model in practice in spite of the wider rhetoric around such a model. It is worth quoting here in full the researchers' explanation of what a 'collaborative model' entails since this illustrates many of the key components of the model emerging in Wales:

[A]t the heart of this model is the commitment to develop a training programme where students are exposed to different forms of educational knowledge, some of which come from school, some of which come from HE or elsewhere. Teachers are seen as having an equally legitimate but perhaps different body of professional knowledge from those in higher education. Students are expected and encouraged to use what they learn in school to critique what they learn within the HEI and vice versa. It is through this dialectic that they are expected to build up their own body of professional knowledge. For the model to succeed, teachers and lecturers need opportunities to work and plan together on a regular basis; such on-going collaboration is essential if they are to develop a programme of work for the student that is integrated between the HEI and the school. (Furlong *et al.*, 1996: 44).

Are there inconsistencies and contradictions in the policy text?

Overall the way in which teacher education policy has been re-configured in Wales has shown a high degree of consistency across the different policy texts, as well as agreement as to the steps needed to bring about the desired

improvement. These include: the need for enhanced partnership arrangements between universities and schools; a greater focus on the processes of professional learning and, in particular, the development of models of research-informed clinical practice; the development of increased research capacity across teacher education providers in Wales; the introduction of new professional standards for qualified teacher status; a review of the role of Estyn in the inspection of teacher education programmes; and close alignment between teacher education and recent curriculum reform in Wales.

The context of practice/effects

How open is the policy to interpretation by practitioners?

While individual teacher education providers have been given the autonomy to devise their own teacher education programmes, initial proposals for these programmes have had to meet the Welsh government's Criteria for Accreditation and have been subjected to a rigorous process of scrutiny before accreditation has been awarded, with not all providers who submitted programmes being successful in the first instance. These criteria are accompanied by new statutory standards for qualified teacher status in Wales and quality of provision will continue to be monitored by Estyn, with a revised remit. The overall approach has therefore been developed through what might be seen as a 'top-down' strategy, comparable to the approach in other parts of the UK as well as internationally.

What processes are used to put the policy into practice and why?

Within this top-down model there has been a clear pattern of review, recommendations and subsequent implementation, with a similarly clear and, it might be argued, logical policy trajectory. All of the recommendations of the Tabberer Review were agreed in principle and John Furlong, as national ITE advisor, then went on to carry out a further review, which presented the Welsh government with a number of options. It was the option recommended by Furlong that the government took forward and integrated into its wider education reform policies. These wider policies included the major reform of the school curriculum, following the Donaldson review of curriculum and assessment in Wales (Donaldson, 2015). Initial teacher education then becomes an integral part of the government's wider

'mission' and 'vision' for the future (Welsh Government, 2017c). This wider strategy is consistent with the recommendations of the OECD review of education in Wales (2014) which has also been influential in informing subsequent policy development. The Education Workforce Council (EWC), established by the Welsh government in 2014, was, in 2017, given the statutory responsibility for accrediting programmes of initial teacher education and monitoring compliance against the criteria, with the power also to withdraw accreditation where appropriate. Once applications had been submitted, there followed a four-stage accreditation process, involving a review of the applications, a 'partnership site visit' by the accrediting board, separate individual provider meetings, and notification of the decision (EWC, 2017). In the case of the latter, interim approval was accompanied by further conditions to be met.

Four partnerships were awarded accreditation for programmes beginning in September 2019: Aberystwyth ITE Partnership; CaBan – Chester (Caer)/Bangor North Wales Partnership; Cardiff Partnership; Yr Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership¹. Two partnerships were subsequently accredited for programmes beginning in 2020 (University of South Wales ITE Partnership; Swansea University Schools' Partnership). When the final decisions were announced, John Furlong declared that:

the accreditation process has been conducted in an open, fair and rigorous way. Moreover, it is evident that as a result of the changes to provision that are now in progress, Wales will soon have an ITE sector of which it can be proud; a sector that can provide the high quality new teachers that we need for our children and young people, now and in the future. (EWC, 2018: online announcement).

The process was therefore conducted very much within a top-down model, whereby criteria were developed by the Welsh government and then applied to all applications for accreditation, using the same assessment process. Given the overall size of ITE provision in Wales, it was possible to maintain consistency across the whole country by having one accreditation board that was able to consider all the applications and to carry out the site visits. It is difficult to imagine how such consistency might be achieved on a larger scale.

Is there a disjunction between the original policy intent and subsequent practices and if so why?

It is too early to tell precisely how teacher education policy in Wales at the macro (national) level is being re-contextualised at the intermediate

(institutional) level, both in terms of the specifications for new programmes within the accredited partnerships and the way that these will be implemented in practice from September 2019 onwards. Programme details are not publicly available but from the information already published on ITE partnership websites it is possible to discern the way in which new programmes intend to operate. No definitive analysis can be made at this stage since some partnership webpages contain specific details of course content whereas others provide only general detail as to the broad nature of the programme, but it is nevertheless possible to advance some initial observations.

As is to be expected in publicly available documents, each of the programmes clearly states the influence of the accreditation criteria in its underlying principles, for example:

Our teaching philosophy is one of engaging our student teachers in lively debate and active learning that develops your critical thinking and engagement. This will prepare you to be a research-informed and research-active teacher, ready to make a difference to young people's lives (Yr Arothfa Partnership website²).

Together with your fellow students on the primary and other secondary programmes, you will study the principles of effective pedagogy, assessment, lesson and curriculum planning. You will participate actively in learning, contributing to seminars, delivering presentations and engaging critically with research. (Aberystwyth ITE Partnership website³).

The methods used emphasise and facilitate student teachers' critical development skills, and cohere around the integration of research and enquiry, practice and theory. (Cardiff Partnership website⁴).

Each of the accredited providers for whom more detail is available, affirm the centrality of research in their individual teacher education programmes (both primary and secondary, and at Bachelor or postgraduate level). The CaBan – Chester (Caer)/Bangor North Wales Partnership programmes, for example, each include modules on 'research-based teaching', presented with the following statements of purpose:

The content and delivery of the module will encourage ATs to offer advanced critical review of the importance of being consumers and producers of research; and to analyse, synthesise and critically reflect on the spectrum of research that informs teaching practice. ATs will also be encouraged to offer advanced critical evaluation of practice-based or close-to-practice research.

The module will develop advanced knowledge of teacher scholarship and the long-term impact of involvement in research on their personal developing

professionalism and what it means to be a research-informed teacher. The module will encourage advanced mastery of what it means to develop a 'culture of enquiry' within self-improving school systems, schools as learning organisations, and the importance of developing and participating in Professional Learning Communities. (CaBan – Chester (Caer)/Bangor North Wales Partnership website⁵).

At the level of policy enactment, in terms of the design of the new programmes there appears to coherence, but that is to be expected since draft programme specifications needed to be written in order to meet the accreditation criteria. What will be interesting, and a focus for future research, is the way in which, over time, new programmes are able to achieve these ambitious goals and exemplify a change in approaches to initial teacher education.

Discussion

In reflecting on the range of findings revealed by this 'dynamic' analysis of policy at the macro, intermediate and micro levels, it is pertinent to return to the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith, who first drew attention, some 15 years ago, to the way in which teacher education had come to be framed as a 'policy problem' (Cochran-Smith, 2005). In applying this description to policy discourse, she was obviously focusing attention on the context of text production, highlighting both the line of reasoning that underpinned the discourse and the implications of framing teacher education in this way. The former worked from concerns about pupil outcomes to claim that there must be a *problem* with the quality of teachers and by extension with the quality of the preparation that teachers received. The latter – the framing of teacher education as a *policy* problem – focused attention on what policy-makers, rather than other stakeholders, could do to address the issue: seeking to determine 'which of its broad parameters that can be controlled by policymakers is most likely to enhance teacher quality and thus have a positive impact on desired school outcomes' (Cochran-Smith, 2005: 4).

In more recent examination of particular contexts of practice in the United States (specifically the work of new Graduate Schools of Education) Cochran-Smith (2019) extended her analysis, suggesting that the notion of teacher education as 'policy problem' could be seen as encompassing not one, but three kinds of problem: a problem of regulation (identifying the

parameters that can be changed and adapting them appropriately); a problem of accountability (holding practitioners responsible for the outcomes); and the persistent problem of the gap between theory and practice. Examining the ways in which each of these policy problems has been framed and addressed in the contexts of influence and text production reveals the highly distinctive approach that has been adopted in Wales and helps to identify some of the key challenges that may lie ahead in the context of practice.

A problem of regulation

Within the contexts of influence and text production, Wales can be seen as subject to exactly the same kind of international influences that led elsewhere to the framing of teacher education as a ‘policy problem.’ As illustrated above, the Tabberer Review (2013) made frequent reference to the ‘disappointing results’ from international assessments of student performance and insisted that raising standards throughout Wales would require initial teacher preparation to be ‘much better’ (2013: 14). The appointment of John Furlong as the national Initial Teacher Training Advisor for Wales and the process that he led to establish new criteria for accreditation across the system represent an emphatic endorsement of the assumption that policymakers can exert significant influence through their power to adjust and define the parameters within which teacher education is conducted.

In terms of the specific adjustments proposed and adopted in the framing of the new accreditation criteria, it is equally clear that Wales has embraced the use of standards as a means of driving up quality. What is notable, however, is the fact that the government has chosen to apply these standards not simply to the *products* of teacher education programmes – by stipulating the ‘values, knowledge, skills and attitudes’ (Welsh Government, 2017a: 19) that newly qualified teachers should have developed – but also to the nature and structure of these programmes – as reflected in the distinctive expertise that each partner is expected to contribute and the ways in which they are expected to work together. While other countries, including England, have witnessed a fierce ‘tug-of-war’ between deregulation and professionalization, the appointment of Furlong, an Emeritus Professor of Education, signalled very clearly a commitment to professional *education* for all new entrants rather than the endorsement of diverse new employment-based *training* routes that has characterised market-based approaches elsewhere.

A problem of accountability

The distinctive nature of the policy trajectory in Wales is also reflected in the way in which issues of accountability have featured in the reform process. While there is no doubt about the need for accountability within the system, there is little emphasis within the policy discourse on the need for outcome measures in the form of pupil assessment data, or outcome data for student teachers, in order to determine the quality of provision. Obviously such data could not be required at the *start* of any new programme, but the consistent concerns that have shaped the design of the accreditation process are essentially focused on the capacity of potential providers to offer the distinct kinds of learning opportunities – both ‘rigorously practical and intellectually challenging’ (Welsh Government 2017a: 4) – that professional education requires. The way in which the process has been designed, with provisional accreditation subject to further checks on the extent to which school and university-based partners have gone on to fulfil their commitments to capacity building and partnership development, also makes it clear that judgements about quality are essentially based on the nature of the programmes offered and on the expertise of those in school and university who contribute to them. More radical still perhaps is the way in which *both* schools and universities will be held accountable through the inspection regime for the quality of their provision.

A theory-practice problem

In emphasising the essential and distinctive contributions of both partners to initial teacher education, the policy adopted in Wales has not merely rejected apparent solutions to the theory-practice problem that operate by minimising or eliminating the theoretical; it has insisted that teachers’ *continued* engagement with theory – as expressed through critical engagement with research – is an expected outcome of the new programmes. It is perhaps precisely because Furlong’s own research into the nature of partnership within English teacher education programmes revealed how few providers had embraced genuinely collaborative forms of partnership (Furlong *et al.*, 2000) that the Welsh policy texts have not only specified what is expected of each partner but also insisted that both must be held accountable by Estyn. Recognition of the challenges entailed in achieving partnership without a shared vision also lies behind the insistence on each partnership demonstrating that it has established a ‘clearly articulated conceptual

framework informed by values, principles and research' (Welsh Government, 2017a: 19).

At a national level, articulation of the vision obviously represents an essential first step and the analysis that we have been able to undertake of the limited programme details published online illustrates how influential this vision has been in shaping the commitments that providers have made. But it is important not to overlook the context of practice and the nature of the demands that providers face as they seek to translate those commitments into action. The role of universities has been not merely defended but enhanced by the policy's emphasis on the intellectual basis of certain aspects of teachers' knowledge and the need for research literacy. As the accreditation criteria make clear, this enhanced role requires university-based teacher educators who are themselves both engaged in and with research, and formally qualified at a level above that of those they are educating. Within postgraduate teacher education programmes, this means that many long-standing faculty members with little or no research experience now find themselves obliged to embark on PhDs or EdDs. While the new accreditation criteria provide some leverage in securing the time necessary for such work (by insisting, for example, that teacher-student ratios are brought into line with those on other postgraduate courses), the demands of part-time doctoral research are significant, especially when combined with programme development and the negotiation of new working relationships. Early findings from a current study examining this process of negotiation (Waters *et al.*, 2019) have not only suggested that university-based teacher educators seem somewhat less positive than their school-based colleagues about the impact of the policy reforms on their roles and responsibilities, they have also revealed the extensive variation *between* university staff, whose sense of agency in each case is profoundly shaped by their previous experience and current position and by their vision of the future.

While school-based teacher educators might be expected to feel more secure in the kinds of knowledge that they have to offer beginning teachers, it is important not to overlook either the extent of the new responsibilities that they too are expected to assume or the extent to which the whole education system in Wales is being simultaneously transformed by the introduction of a new curriculum (Welsh Government, 2017c). Alongside new kinds of mentoring responsibilities, experienced teachers are simultaneously being asked to conceive of traditional school subjects in new, more integrated ways and to assume new roles as creative curriculum makers.

While many are undoubtedly excited by the sense of responsibility and trust invested in them (Waters *et al.*, 2019) the novelty of these roles also brings with it uncertainty and anxieties and may make it difficult for them to offer practical advice rooted in deep experience or to model the kind of expert practice that they would have previously felt confident to share. Our own experience of working on small-scale development projects with volunteer mentors (Burn, 2007), keen to work collaboratively on selected aspects of the curriculum that they had identified as in need of improvement, revealed (much to our surprise) the extent to which asking questions about one particular aspect of their practice prompted them to doubt other aspects, making them much more reluctant to share their existing knowledge and expertise with their student-teachers. As Edwards and her colleagues have recognised in their examination of the importance of relational agency in tackling complex problems, schools are bounded systems that depend on a high degree of stability in order to operate effectively (Edwards *et al.*, 2017). While the change that is sought is intended to be transformational, destabilising too many elements at once may risk collapse or defensiveness and withdrawal.

While the challenges of the policy should, therefore, not be under-estimated, the fact that the initial phases of its implementation are already the focus of research studies, at least some of which are adopting participatory designs (see, for example, Daly *et al.*, 2019), allowing the teacher educators themselves to both examine and shape the necessary processes of change and development, represents a very positive start. It demonstrates commitment both to the necessary capacity building, without which the ambitious vision set out in *Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers* cannot be achieved, and to the close integration of theory and practice that the new programmes will be expected to offer, while simultaneously modelling the kinds of inquiry stance that future members of the teaching profession will be expected to adopt.

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Appendix 1

Policy documents examined for the analysis

- Review of Initial Teacher Training in Wales (Tabberer, 2013)
- Review of Initial Teacher Training in Wales – Recommendations and Welsh Government response (Welsh Government (2013)
- OECD report: 'Improving Schools in Wales' (OECD, 2014)
- 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers' (Furlong, 2015)
- Minister's written Statement (Lewis, 2015)
- Minister's written statement (Williams, 2017).
- Accreditation criteria (Welsh Government, 2017a)

- Connecting research and teacher education. Quality enhancement for ITE Partnerships. Information document no: 197/2017 (Welsh Government, 2017b)
- Education in Wales: Our national mission. Action Plan 2017–21 (Welsh Government, 2017c).
- Report on the Teachers' Professional Learning and Education Inquiry (National Assembly for Wales, Children, Young People and Education Committee, 2017)
- The professional learning continuum: mentoring in initial teacher education (Estyn, 2018)
- Response to the Estyn thematic report on ITE and mentoring (Welsh Government, 2018).

Notes

- 1 <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/education/itt-pgce/>
<http://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/education/Pages/Department-of-Initial-Teacher-Education.aspx>
<https://caban.ac.uk/english.html>
<http://athrofa.cymru/professional-learning-partnership/>
- 2 <http://athrofa.cymru/> (accessed 3 September 2019)
- 3 <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/education/itt-pgce/> (accessed 3 September 2019)
- 4 <http://www.cardiffmet.ac.uk/education/Pages/Department-of-Initial-Teacher-Education.aspx> (accessed 3 September 2019)
- 5 <https://caban.ac.uk/english.html> (accessed 3 September 2019)