Education & Training 2020 - Schools Policy

Shaping career-long perspectives on teaching

A guide on policies to improve
Initial Teacher Education

Executive summary

*Leading and supporting pupil learning
requires every teacher to embark on a
professional, social and personal journey
that involves career-long professional
development within collaborative learning
environments.*

*Initial Teacher Education lays the groundwork
and sets the direction for this journey.*

*National, regional and local governments and
stakeholders have a shared responsibility
to facilitate and sustain this in close collaboration
with each other.*

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ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy
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Executive Summary

1.1. The urgent need to improve Initial Teacher Education (ITE)

Education systems are complex and have never been easy to govern. Recent changes, including decentralisation of systems and further recognition of the role of education for societal values, economic performance and personal development are adding to the complexity. Roles and responsibilities of public authorities, schools, higher education institutions and other agencies are shifting and new demands are being placed on education systems to adapt to the changing needs of society and the economy.

Against this background, Initial Teacher Education has become a key policy area for attention and governments are increasingly focusing on developing policies to guarantee and increase its quality. Debates on the future of education often question current ways of teaching and call for a profound shift away from isolated classrooms towards new methods based on broad collaboration. Such approaches require changes towards genuine, system-wide focus on teacher education. Moreover, when teaching is considered simply as a static craft, there will be reduced incentives for professional learning. In such contexts, teaching is unlikely to be attractive to ambitious and high-calibre candidates, which is becoming a significant problem in an increasing number of education systems.

Initial Teacher Education is a fundamental area in which to support the shift towards new working cultures and to lay the foundations for teachers' capacity to adapt to changing contexts and circumstances. It is ideally positioned to play a key role in achieving two key goals: improving the development of teaching practices and attracting more high quality candidates to the teaching profession.

Enabling these changes requires robust but flexible teacher education policies based on close discussions and interactions between stakeholders. In most European countries the provision of Initial Teacher Education has been entrusted to higher education institutions with government regulation and supervision. While in most countries educational authorities are already engaged in some form of dialogue and cooperation with ITE providers and the research community, a significantly lower number engage in discussions with other bodies and organisations, including municipalities, schools and teachers (trade unions, professional associations). This hampers the possibility of creating a comprehensive approach to teacher development which can in turn have a negative impact on the overall attractiveness of the profession.

Targeted policy actions are required in order to strengthen: the role of Initial Teacher Education in changing work practices and cultures; its position within broader teacher education policies to create incentives for professional development; and its governance by recognising new structures of participation and new responsibilities of stakeholders.

The main purpose of this Guide is to support such efforts by gathering and building on current practices, research, and the knowledge and advice of experts.

1.2. Key principles

The transformation or modernisation of (Initial) Teacher Education can be achieved through a number of targeted policy actions, as outlined in this Guide. The Working Group on Schools Policy agreed on a set of principles which supported the development of these actions by reflecting the broader policy context and underpinning the work undertaken.

1. Education policies should be based on the understanding of the teaching profession and the professional development of teachers as a coherent continuum with several, interconnected perspectives, which include teachers' learning needs, support structures, job and career structures, competence levels and local school culture.

2. Attractive possibilities for professional development and diversification of careers should be important elements of such approaches.

3. Teachers should be able to develop and maintain a mindset and a practical approach which are based on reflection and inquiry, and focused on ongoing professional development.

4. Initial Teacher Education needs to be considered as a starting point for this ongoing process of professional development. It lays the foundation for this mindset and this approach.

5. School leaders and providers of Continuing Professional Development (including Initial Teacher Education providers) have key roles to play in creating opportunities and environments for practice-oriented and research-based professional development that will strengthen the agency (capacity for action) of teachers for learner-oriented teaching and innovation.

6. The professionalism of teachers, teacher educators and leaders in education should incorporate collaborative practices, and a collaborative culture. Both should therefore be promoted in the content and process of Initial Teacher Education. Leadership of collaborative practices should be given particular attention.

7. Schools and Initial Teacher Education institutions should be supported in opening up so they can benefit from engaging in networks, professional learning communities and other partnerships. Policy actions should enable such collaborative learning environments, with flexibility to allow for different contexts.

8. Governance of Initial Teacher Education should be based on collaborative approaches that involve all stakeholders (including providers of Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development, professional bodies and associations, social partners) in the processes of decision making, steering and monitoring.

9. Governments and all stakeholders should all take responsibility for (parts of) the system and should be involved in dialogue and co-operation. This implies, where necessary, the development of stakeholder capacity to take responsibility within the system.

10. The governance cycle needs to create balance between decision making, steering and monitoring processes and needs to focus on internal coherence and sustainable policies; in particular by making effective use of monitoring data on the processes and outcomes of policy measures.

1.3. Suggested policy actions

The continuum

The teaching profession needs to be regarded as an integrated continuum, bringing together five interrelated perspectives: addressing teachers' learning needs; support systems; career paths; the organisation of competence levels; the impact of school culture. The key challenge for policy-makers is to ensure continuity and coherence for each of these elements, and establish interconnections between them.

In this context, Initial Teacher Education needs to be considered as the first part of a longer and dynamic process, not as a stand-alone and complete phase. Its success will also depend on mechanisms allowing for interaction with later stages of teacher development and its position within broader policies affecting schools and teachers.

Strengthening the continuum of teacher education by linking the different phases	▪ Policies can stimulate and incentivise professional growth when they strengthen the interconnection between the different phases of teachers' professional development: Initial Teacher Education, induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).[1] *This could include official recognition of the different phases and changes in status, including a compulsory induction phase with trained mentors.*
Achieving continuity through institutional partnerships	▪ There should not be any gaps, but smooth transitions and links between Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development, and between pre-service and in-service teacher educators, as this will create the continuity that is important to a teacher's development. Policy action should create incentives and provide dedicated resources to support a variety of partnerships between teacher education institutions and schools.
Shared understanding and ownership through coherent competence levels	▪ A coherent competence framework which identifies different competence levels throughout the continuum, strongly supports a teacher's development throughout their career. Through such competence frameworks, policies can create a shared understanding, shared ownership, and shared language between stakeholders and between different phases of the continuum. *Developing such frameworks could be delegated to national teacher bodies or arranged in an interactive process involving a wide variety of stakeholders that are involved in different stages of teacher education.*
Creating a balanced offer of CPD with strong impact	▪ To improve the offer and impact of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) across the continuum, activities should be both teacher-initiated and inspired by expectations and requirements at different levels including the school and the education system. Compulsory and non-compulsory initiatives can be identified and put in place by different stakeholders, including central government, local authorities, schools and teachers. *Additional policies for Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development could direct resources to supporting particular areas of current need or low achievement in school*

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[1] Suggested policy actions are followed by examples (*in italics*) for possible actions which are further illustrated in the chapters of the Guide.

education.

Teacher responsibility: self-directed learning for their own needs	▪ To ensure high quality practice is maintained, teachers need the ability and sense of agency to assess their own learning needs and self-direct their learning. ITE curricula could include explicit objectives for teachers to identify and assess their own needs for Continuing Professional Development.
Recognising a wide range of professional development opportunities	▪ Policies that aim to stimulate teacher development throughout the continuum need to recognise formal, as well as informal and non-formal, learning as valid and powerful means of professional development. This includes promoting group learning, experimental activities and the exchange of experience among teachers. *Alongside accredited ITE programmes, or formal courses that enable and officially recognise continuing learning, actions could include national networks or initiatives with local representatives that stimulate engagement in informal teacher inquiry projects and the sharing of good practice.*
Improving practice through links with research	To achieve a creative and reflective teaching workforce, policies and actions should encourage student teachers and teachers to use and engage in new research in their learning and practice. While Initial Teacher Education lays the foundations for this, policy actions should foster innovative cultures in schools and ensure they have links with universities and other organisations that support research-informed development of teaching practices.
Making the connection between teacher development and school improvement	▪ Professional development activities and human resource policies, where they are organised at school level, should be connected to the wider agenda of the school to strengthen the impact of all three. *In their dialogue with teachers, HR professionals and school leaders could consider how to link school improvement goals to Continuing Professional Development and teacher appraisal procedures.*
Recognition of flexible career paths and multiple roles	▪ To support teacher development and flexibility in teachers' careers, policy-makers should find ways of recognising the range of entry points and roles and create inclusive policies that value and certify different skills and experiences. *For example, ITE programmes and certificated CPD courses could focus on specific teaching roles (e.g. counsellor, digital specialist, school-based teacher educator, teacher leader) which may additionally support midcareer entrance or departure from the teaching profession.*

Collaborative learning

While collaboration is an important and widespread expectation of teachers in Europe, a significant share of teachers has never experienced collaborative learning. Promoting it entails changes in practice, mindset and the development of new work cultures and environments. Building good relations and partnerships to support wider introduction of collaboration is a key challenge. It may require profound changes: collaboration needs to fit with both the context of the education system and the purpose of achieving particular learning goals.

Policymakers, educational leaders and all relevant stakeholders, including the social partners, should contribute to the preconditions required for a collaborative work culture by creating and strengthening mutual trust. This is a pre-condition for ensuring the effectiveness of particular measures and, more importantly, for designing system-wide adaptations.

From isolation to collaborative work culture	▪ All relevant stakeholders should promote collaborative forms of teaching and learning so as to make them every day professional practice, widespread among teachers, teacher educators and educational leaders. *Measures could support reflection and ongoing professional dialogue on the characteristics and the effectiveness of different practices, not just within schools but between institutions and across the system.*
Developing collaborative attitudes in ITE programmes	▪ In order to prepare future teachers for collaboration, policy-makers and stakeholders should make sure that ITE programmes develop positive attitudes towards professional dialogue, sharing, collaborative critical thinking and peer learning. Teacher educators working within Initial Teacher Education and throughout the continuum should model collaboration themselves when providing education for (future) teachers.
Incentivising and supporting collaboration between institutions	▪ When designing a new organisational or institutional structure priorities should be given to solutions favouring collaboration both within the individual institution and between institutions - at the same level and across educational levels, and between educational institutions and the local community. *Supporting measures for Initial Teacher Education could include the creation of networks or clusters, or incentives such as credits or awards.*
Autonomy and support for local collaboration	▪ The best collaborative learning environments are those that are tailored to the local context and are accepted and monitored by local partners. *Policy-makers could ensure that school leaders have the freedom and support to establish and sustain close cooperation with social partners, institutions and organisations in the local community, other schools and educational institutions.*
Supporting action research as a mode of collaboration	▪ Action research may be aimed at finding a valid solution to a challenge in classroom practice. This should be promoted by stakeholders as a means to strengthen collaborative learning environments within and between schools and with providers of Initial Teacher Education.
Adequate and cost-effective investment	▪ Initiating and sustaining collaborative work in teacher education typically requires investment, therefore stakeholders should allocate adequate time and resources and avoid financial arrangements that are linked to individual achievements only. *This could be particularly important to encourage cooperation between schools in disadvantaged areas.*
Supporting networking among teachers	▪ Stakeholders should ensure that there is equality in direct networking among teaching professionals as a basis for collaboration and continued efforts for high quality practice. *This could be achieved not only by networks of innovative schools and ITE providers but also through online platforms that offer e-*

	learning courses and the sharing of resources.
Training for all teachers in collaborative leadership	▪ Effective collaborative learning is in part facilitated by collaborative – or 'distributed' – leadership involving teachers, and measures to include leadership in teacher education should make provision for all teachers.
	Measures could include school-based or external leadership programmes that draw on the skills of existing leaders and involve team working, preparing professionals to lead collaborative practices.
Sharing good practice to advance collaborative approaches in ITE	▪ To support future development of Initial Teacher Education, there should be a mutual sharing between policy-makers and education professionals of the benefits of and good practice in collaborative learning.
	Digital tools may play a role in enabling those involved in Initial Teacher Education to exchange, experiences, approaches and outcomes.

Governance

Initial Teacher Education is a complex field involving an increasing number of stakeholders and, in some countries, different levels of government. The system of Initial Teacher Education is defined by its institutional framework, setting out the degree of providers' autonomy, and the extent to which it is subject to governmental influence. The role of stakeholders in these activities varies between countries, and it is evident that the process of governance needs to take into account the differences between stakeholders. Nevertheless, whether a system is more centralised or decentralised, more regulated or deregulated, it can still be collaborative.

Involving different stakeholders to create stronger systems	▪ Involving different stakeholders in the policy-making process, whilst respecting each partner's autonomy, leads to stronger ITE systems, based on collaborative governance.
	This could include reforms which bring together the national and local coordination of Initial Teacher Education, cluster providers at regional level, or help institutions work together to establish a joint core curriculum and final examinations.
Developing methodologies for better regulation	▪ In designing regulation, the perspectives and concerns of different stakeholders should be taken into account through a collaborative process. Different methodologies could help achieve consensus on what should be regulated through formal legislation and what might be regulated at the level of stakeholder groups or individual institutions.
	This may be achieved with the help of an independent body and/or regional conferences.
Providing special funding for collaboration	▪ To meet the changing needs and demands of Initial Teacher Education specific policies, incentives or reward schemes can help the promotion of collaboration.
	Specific measures could include rewarding ITE providers for high quality study programmes or providing a budget to support networking among them.
Maintaining high quality through	▪ In order to maintain high quality in a teaching profession that is driven by continuous development, it is important that competence frameworks covering the whole continuum

teacher selection criteria and competence frameworks	of the profession use similar structures and a shared language, and that they are used and recognised by all stakeholders. *This could include, for instance, measures to link up or integrate frameworks for both academic and for professional competences, or to create similar frameworks for teacher educators.*
Consistency of methodologies and benchmarks in order to achieve effective quality assurance of ITE	▪ For effective quality assurance and monitoring of ITE performance, policy-makers should check for consistency between objectives, processes and evaluation of programmes. All levels of governance should support the use of common methodologies, criteria, indicators and benchmarks and should recognise the coordination mechanisms to improve monitoring and evaluation of Initial Teacher Education. *Measures could include surveys of the teacher workforce carried out jointly by stakeholders; dialogue between the education and employment sectors; the setting up of monitoring committees; or the joint professional and academic accreditation of ITE programmes.*
Promoting collaborative governance based on dialogue and consensus	▪ All stakeholders – governments, ITE providers, school leaders, and teachers - should share the same goal of achieving high quality Initial Teacher Education through collaborative governance. *This could be achieved by the setting up of regular fora for dialogue (formal or informal) or the creation of independent bodies to regulate the teaching profession and oversee cooperation.*
Shared responsibility to maintain effective governance of the education system	▪ Collaborative governance of Initial Teacher Education faces challenges in decentralised systems. Governance will only be successful if both ministries and all other stakeholders share the ownership of decisions, actions and the consolidation of measures to translate policies into practice. Capacity building for each stakeholder will help them strengthen both their ability and willingness to take responsibility for Initial Teacher Education in a way that exceeds local, institutional or individual perspectives and focuses on the system as a whole. *This can, for instance, be addressed through input from independent education experts or the setting up of thematic policy groups of key stakeholders.*

1.4. Creating the Guide

The Guide presents the findings of the European Union's ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2014-15) on its priority theme 'Initial Teacher Education'[2]. The objective of this Working Group was to assist countries in improving school education by advancing policy development through mutual learning and the identification of good practices. Through discussions and peer learning in different forms (quarterly meetings, in-depth country focus workshops, questionnaires, reviews of research literature) the Working Group collected evidence on successful policy practice and reforms of Initial Teacher Education.

The main Guide summarises the findings on three themes – the Continuum of the teaching profession, Collaborative Learning, and Governance - combining a discussion of the key concepts with an examination of recent policy action across Europe, recent examples for measures to support change, and concluding with suggested policy actions.

The Guide reflects the results of the joint work of representatives of national governments from 30 EU countries and associated European countries, and European social partner organisations.

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[2] The ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy was one of six Working Groups under the Open Method of Co-ordination in Education and Training in 2014/15, bringing together experts on two priority themes (Early School Leaving and Initial Teacher Education). For more information see http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/expert-groups_en.htm