OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising Practices

Massachusetts’ Review and Approval of ITE Programmes

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in the United States from 25-28 October 2016.

The OECD Review Team identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising Practice 5.
Massachusetts’ Review and Approval of ITE Programmes

Context

Over the last decade, the number of initial teacher education (ITE) providers in the United States has increased dramatically, for both traditional and alternative programmes, raising concern about the quality and accountability of these programmes (Ewell, 2012[1]). In response, in 2016, the United States Department of Education released new regulations for increasing the type and amount of data that ITE programmes and states must provide under title II of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (United States Government, 1965[2]), including evidence that providers are preparing effective teachers (US Department of Education, 2014[3]). Six year earlier, the Council for Accreditation of Education Preparation (CAEP) was established as a national accreditation body. In 2013 (CAEP[4]), the CAEP issued revised accreditation standards, describing five standards and their components that define quality in terms of organisational performance and serve as the basis for accreditation reviews and judgments:

- content and pedagogical knowledge
- clinical partnerships and practice
- candidate quality, recruitment and selectivity
- programme impact
- provider quality assurance and continuous improvement.

To earn CAEP accreditation, teacher education institutions (TEIs) must submit annual data about their teacher candidates and completers, including outcome data related to the skills of graduates from the perspective of hiring principals. Every seven years, accredited programmes submit a report that includes pedagogical artefacts. After the TEI submits the report, a team from CAEP conducts site visits, usually accompanied by state education officials, and prepares a final report that provides the basis of its decision to accredit (CAEP, 2016[5]). Currently, CAEP (2018[6]) has partnership agreements with 17 states.

But in the United States, individual States are responsible for approving initial teacher education (ITE) programmes – and the process varies from state to state, and may not include alternative providers. According to the latest State Teacher Policy Yearbook,

*Despite the fact that 41 states retain full or final authority over their process for approving all teacher preparation programs (with the remainder ceding at least some of their authority to the national teacher education accrediting body, CAEP), few states have implemented adequate accountability systems that hold programs to clear minimum standards of performance and provide information to the public about program quality (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2017, p. 18[7]).*
However, some states, such as Massachusetts and Colorado, are requiring alternative providers to meet the same approval requirements (DeMonte, 2017[8]).

**What does the Massachusetts review and approval process entail?**

The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in Massachusetts has the statutory authority to approve initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in the State of Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE) has 408 school districts, 4,267 ITE graduates and 72 ITE providers, of which 18 of which are alternative providers (MA DESE, 2018[9]). Public and private higher education institutions, districts, collaboratives, and non-profit organisations may apply for ITE programme approval, but all types of organisations must prepare candidates in accordance with the standards for licensure and programme approval and are subject to regular reviews.

![Figure 1. The ITE programme review process decisions in Massachusetts](image)

*Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016[10]), Guidelines for Program Approval, MA DESE, Halden, p. 35.*

Public and private higher education institutions, districts, collaboratives, and non-profit organisations may apply for programme approval, but all types of organisations must prepare candidates in accordance with the standards for licensure and programme approval and are subject to regular reviews every seven years (MA DESE, 2016[10]). In 2016, Massachusetts had 82 approved ITE programme providers.
In 2012, Massachusetts updated its programme approval standards to increase expectations of providers and emphasise the use of outcomes data (such as student impact scores) to evaluate programme effectiveness (MA DESE, 2016[10]). The state developed a set of explicit criteria for evaluating providers to put the standards into operation. Criteria were grouped into the following six domains:

- the organisation
- partnerships
- continuous improvement
- the candidate
- field-based experiences
- instruction

The continuous improvement domain encourages providers to regularly review and improve the quality of the programmes they deliver. The criteria for the continuous improvement domain includes whether the provider:

- monitors the quality of ITE programmes and ensures that candidates who complete their programmes have been prepared to be effective teachers
- frequently uses internal and external evidence to make decisions
- acts on feedback from internal and external stakeholders, including candidates, graduates and district and school personnel
- successfully implements improvements to programmes as set out in goals articulated in annual reports.

During programme reviews, information is collected based on the set of review criteria and outcomes data, and followed-up in a two or three-day site visit involving interviews, observations, and discussions. A judgement is made about each criteria, domain, and whether the programme should be approved, as described in Figure 1.

There are five potential approval determinations: approved with distinction; approved; approved with conditions; probationary approval; and not approved. Programmes approved with distinction are granted the longest period of authorisation and receive preference in department-funded initiatives. Those approved with conditions may have more frequent reviews or face enrolment restrictions.

Why is it a strength?

The OECD review team in its review of the United States from 25-28 October 2016 concluded that Massachusetts’ approach to review and approval of programmes is a strength in that it:

- Uses multiple sources of data to review programmes. The Massachusetts programme review process uses many sources of information including outcomes data (e.g. teacher licensure, candidate evaluation), site reviews, and evidence about the programme, such as how they partner with districts.
- Can actively contribute to programme improvement. Massachusetts’ programme review process facilitates programme self-reflection and continuous improvement by including review criteria about the collection, analysis and use of data to make programme improvements.
How could it be improved?

The OECD review team also noted that:

- *It may be challenging to apply strong consequences to poor quality programmes.* For example, it may be politically unviable to close poorly performing programmes; and difficult to get the support of faculty regarding measures of quality and the need for improvement, especially when their career incentives are based on research publications not preparing practitioners.

For more information


