OECD Initial Teacher Preparation study

Promising practices

ITE programme accreditation in Wales as a means to strengthen research-informed initial teacher education programmes

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This case study describes a “Promising practice” drawn from an OECD international workshop on Initial Teacher Preparation in Wales from 15 to 17 March 2018.

The OECD Review Team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Kirsti Klette (University of Oslo), Kjetil Helgeland (OECD), Danielle Toon (Learning First), Emily Rainey (University of Michigan), Ee Ling Low (Nanyang Technological University Singapore) and Edmund Misson (AITSL) and Nóra Révai (OECD) – identified a number of “Promising practices” in Wales. 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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ITE programme accreditation in Wales as a means to strengthen research-informed initial teacher education programmes

Context

Many countries have accreditation systems for higher education programmes, including ITE programmes, to monitor and ensure their quality (OECD, 2008[1]). Although, the impact of accountability levers such as accreditation on teacher quality and effectiveness is inconclusive, they can strongly influence the way ITE providers plan and implement their programmes (Allen, 2005[2]; National Research Council, 2010[3]).

Following Furlong's 2015 review of initial teacher training in Wales, the Welsh Government developed new criteria for accrediting ITE programmes to improve the quality and consistency of ITE provision. Since 2017 all new and existing ITE programmes in Wales must be accredited by the Education Workforce Council (EWC) according to three sets of criteria (Welsh Government, 2018[4]):

- Programme structures and processes, and in particular the role of the higher education institution-school partnership and management;
- Programme content;
- The alignment of programme outcomes with the professional teaching and learning standards.

ITE programme accreditation in Wales

Programme structures and processes

In order to be accredited, programmes are required to designate a number of ‘lead partnership schools’. These schools contribute to the leadership and management of the programme, including the design and content of the programme, the selection of students, and quality assurance and evaluation of the programme.

One fundamental criteria is to enable teachers to develop research knowledge and skills, both as consumers of research and as participants in it. Partnerships are required to evidence how higher education institution teaching staff are supported to be research active and to show how their research will inform the development of their ITE programmes. The new Welsh ITE accreditation criteria specify the following routes to developing teacher educator capacity in higher education institutions (Welsh Government, 2018[4]):

- Improve the qualification of teacher educators so that teaching staff have a qualification at a higher level than the accreditation level of the course on which they are teaching; if not, they should be working towards it;
- Develop research activity of teacher educators so that lecturers and tutors should normally be research active and take lead roles in assimilating, conducting, publishing and supervising;
- Demonstrate that teacher educators are active in professional development programmes relevant to their role within ITE.
Programme inputs

Institutions are required to present programme details for accreditation, including the conceptual framework, course aims, course design and areas of study, entry requirements and selection procedures, assessment of student teachers and mandatory topics (such as professional and pedagogical studies, subject studies, wellbeing, school experience). The accreditation guidelines expect that research-informed practices are included in several areas of the ITE programme. For example, the programme should be supported by a clearly articulated conceptual framework informed by values, principles and research. The course aims should include the preparation of teachers who engage actively with educational research. In addition to requiring programmes to draw on research to develop student teachers’ professional knowledge, the Welsh accreditation guidelines also require ITE programmes to explicitly develop student teachers’ research skills. In particular, these guidelines encourage the support of professional enquiry in the development of effective practice and the use of action research projects to assess student teachers.

Programme outcomes

Based on the accreditation guidelines, ITE programmes must produce teachers who can achieve the award of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) according to the Welsh Government’s professional standards for teaching and leadership. These standards identify the requirements for entry into the profession and comprise five essential elements of teacher's work: pedagogy; collaboration; innovation; professional learning; and leadership. Understanding research and applying it in practice is a key component of the professional learning element of the standards (Welsh Government, 2017[5]). Consequently, ITE programmes must include how they consider, understand and assess student teachers in light of the requirements to gain the QTS.

Why is it a strength?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Wales from 15-17 March 2018 concluded that ITE programme accreditation is a strength in that it:

- **Provides a clear set of guidelines for incorporating research into ITE programmes.** The Welsh Government accreditation guidelines provide a clear description of how to incorporate research into various aspects of ITE programmes including course design as well as the development of student teachers and teacher educators.

- **Recognises schools as an important partner in the design and delivery of ITE programmes and the creation and use of research.** School and higher education institution partnerships are a fundamental component of the accreditation guidelines, with institutions required to partner with schools for the design and delivery of the programme. Practice-based research is encouraged in the guidelines and there was an eagerness on the part of some schools to participate in research.

- **Strongly engages stakeholders in the reform process.** The Welsh Government convened a Teacher Education Accreditation Group to develop and consult on the draft accreditation criteria. Stakeholders across the board expressed a strong desire to improve current practice and a willingness to change.
How could it be improved?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Wales from 15-17 March 2018 noted that there is:

- **A need to build up research capacity in education faculties in order for ITE programmes to meet the criteria set out in the accreditation guidelines.** A number of teacher educators in Welsh universities do not currently have a lot of academic research skills and very few mention research other than action research (as raised by the 2015 Furlong report).

- **A need to incorporate more subject-specific expertise into teacher training and research.** Many ITE programmes are focused on generic aspects of education, rather than subject-specific expertise (such as pedagogical content knowledge) in teaching and training teachers.

- **A risk of getting the wrong balance between accountability and innovation.** Too much central control in relation to the implementation of the accreditation guidelines can stifle local innovation and the ability for institutions to act on feedback from their partner schools. The Welsh Government must balance its role as an accreditor and its role in building capacity and helping institutions continuously improve. Productive accountability mechanisms encourage the development of organisational policies and practices related to continuous ITE programme improvement. (Peck and Davis, 2018[6])

For more information


