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# Teacher education in Scotland:

the Donaldson Review and the early phases of teacher learning

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Scotland is a discrete jurisdiction within the devolved governance arrangements of the United Kingdom, and education is the largest area of devolved responsibility. The preparation of teachers in Scotland remains different from other UK provision, particularly in England. The proposals contained in the 2011 report Teaching Scotland's future, conducted by Graham Donaldson (former Chief Inspector at Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education), are discussed. Insights are offered into the resulting action progress made to date and the implications for the future of initial teacher education and early career development north of the border.

## INTRODUCTION: THE SCOTTISH EDUCATION CONTEXT

Since devolved government was introduced to the United Kingdom in 1998 with the establishment of a Parliament in Scotland and Assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland, education policy in the UK has become markedly differentiated.

Westminster retains responsibility for the educational system and policy in England, but the Scottish Parliament has responsibility for educational matters in Scotland. Historically, Scottish education has claimed distinctiveness, as education was an important signifier of national identity (Devine, 2000). Reviewing post-devolution developments, Arnott & Menter (2007: 253–4) indicate that Scotland had long enjoyed substantial local autonomy but that prior to the election of New Labour in 1997 there had been significant challenges to such autonomy that in turn may have increased demand for devolution:

In the late 1980s, during the time of the Thatcher government in Westminster, when Michael Forsyth was Education Minister in the Scottish Office, there was a concerted attempt to implement Thatcherite policies. However, the Scottish education community resisted such policies and so even under this draconian regime, there was a significant dilution of policy before it was introduced into Scotland. Thus, for example, rather than a National

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Curriculum, Scotland introduced Curriculum Guidance 5–14, and rather than testing children three times before they sat public examinations and publishing the results, Scotland relied on teacher assessment. Even where equivalent policies were forced through, they were sometimes quietly subverted or ignored, as in the case of Devolved Management of Schools and schools opting out of local authority control.

In England, under New Labour, Thatcherite views continued to prevail and these emergent policy approaches favouring managerialism, consumerism and rights successfully challenged the previously dominant policy concepts of professionalism and bureaucracy. Since 2000 a

continuing divergence of approaches in Scotland is evident, underpinned by prevailing political, social and cultural differences and values, but perhaps with the same intended aims and expected outcomes, ie greater accountability and centralised regulation masquerading as obvious common-sense solutions, with responsibility and decision-making at local levels. Keating (2005: 428) argues the difference in approach may be essentially about style:

*Instead of this strategy of reward and punish, the Scottish departments seek to work with the service providers to identify problems where they arise and agree on strategies for improvement. The Scottish style also involves a great deal of consultation in policy making and working with interest groups and stakeholders in the wider society.*

Certainly education, and schooling in particular, has been a priority in post-devolution Scotland, with a range of initiatives – The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (Scottish Executive 2000) was the first major legislation of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Executive (later in the decade renamed the Scottish Government) declared a set of National Priorities (Scottish Executive, 2001b) for schooling; engaged in a National Debate with parents and stakeholders (Munn et al., 2004) about the purposes of schooling and the need for change (Scottish Executive, 2003) which confirmed the innate 'conservatism' of the system; dealt with serious teacher unrest over pay and conditions of service via an Inquiry (Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED), 2000); and reached the landmark McCrone agreement (SEED, 2001a) which at its centre had a new approach to professional development (O'Brien, 2007) and a flattening of school management career structures to be supported by an emphasis on enhanced professionalism, autonomy and management collegiality within schools (Anderson & Nixon, 2010).

## INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION (ITE) SINCE DEVOLUTION

Seven universities are the exclusive providers of ITE in Scotland, ostensibly working in partnership with employers and teachers, with significant time spent by student teachers in school-based activity in preparation programmes approved by government through the General Teaching Council Scotland (Brisard et al., 2006). There has been policy resistance to the various school-based approaches prevalent in England. Globally, in addition to greater emphasis being placed on partnership with schools, the period witnessed greater accountability introduced to teacher education usually through regulatory requirements such as the introduction of competence Standards (Bates, 2004). Since the mid-1990s a series of Scottish teacher Standards has emerged forming a 'framework' for professional development (Christie & O'Brien, 2005). A Standard for Initial Teacher Education initiated this move, but the remaining Standards emerged in a rather episodic way with a Standard for Headship (O'Brien & Torrance, 2006) preceding a teacher induction Standard (Draper & O'Brien, 2006) and then an 'expert teacher' or Chartered Teacher Standard (Kirk et al., 2003). While Standards were instrumental in effecting change, consistency of provision was not evident, as Fenwick & Weir's summary assessment of the new induction arrangements affirms (2010: 504):

*The induction year has generally been welcomed as a positive step providing continuity of experience, mentoring support, a reduced timetable and structured CPD opportunities. It has, however, received criticism linked to a lack of consistency across schools and local education authorities (LEAs), variable mentoring quality and access to CPD and the compliance culture of the Standard for Full Registration (SFR)...*

It was concerns about variability and quality across the country in initial and continuing teacher education which led to the establishment in 2009 of a teacher review group led by Graham Donaldson (formerly Chief Inspector at Her Majesty's Institute of Education), charged with considering the spectrum of teacher preparation and continuing professional learning.

## POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION – THE DONALDSON REVIEW

Despite the early policy initiatives espoused in post-devolution Scotland, continuing doubts remained about the extent to which the system was improving, and more recently questions were raised about teachers being prepared to respond to the challenges of the emerging 'Curriculum for Excellence' in schools (Priestley & Humes, 2010).

After the McCrone settlement (SEED, 2001c), concerns focused on teacher education, with the setting-up of a First Stage Review of Initial Teacher Education by the Scottish Executive (Deloitte & Touche, 2001) that was followed up by the second stage (SEED, 2005). While a range of ITE-associated issues were identified concerning the roles of teachers, universities and local authorities in the preparation of new teachers, despite 'action plans' little concrete change materialised. Nevertheless the system was surprised when the Donaldson Review was announced: perhaps it was an attempt by the new nationalist government of Scotland, – which at that time was a minority government – to make its mark, or alternatively teacher education, particularly its ITE element, was viewed as a soft target? As Humes (2001: 9) acerbically remarked:

*Teacher Education Institutions in Scotland have traditionally been reactive to government policy rather than innovative. They have been weak*

*in terms of creating their own agenda. When told to jump by government, they have simply asked, 'How high?'*

However, Donaldson (2011: 3) in his overview states the need to build on the strengths of the Scottish teacher education system of which university involvement is one – he confirms the centrality of university involvement in teacher education (p. 104) – and the achievements of the competence standards and effectiveness approach, but suggests,

*the most successful education systems do more than seek to attain particular standards of competence and to achieve change through prescription. They invest in developing their teachers as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change.*

While there are numerous recommendations since ITE provision (O'Brien, 2011) affirming the importance of professionalism and the above view that teacher learning is a continuing process, this paper focuses on the changes to ITE and early professional development that Donaldson proposes. How is ITE to be improved in the Donaldson vision? Overall, some 50 recommendations were made in the Review, not all associated with ITE. The Review (p. 5) rejects simplistic approaches: 'Simply advocating more time in the classroom as a means of preparing teachers for their role is therefore not the answer to creating better teachers.' The ITE recommendations (Donaldson, 2010: 8) are an attempt to

*clarify the relationship between the school and the university; strengthen undergraduate provision through greater engagement with staff and courses in the wider university; make much greater use of blends of different kinds of high quality learning approaches; clarify priorities for the initial stages of teacher education and those which may require longer*

*timescales; make more effective use of ICT; extend available time by identifying opportunities for study beyond the conventional university year; and achieve much better integration and progression between initial teacher education and the period of induction during probation. (Donaldson, 2010: 8)*

Given the background to the review and its remit, several proposals are unsurprising. Unlike some of the announcements of change to the system in England, the Review involved an open consultation (<http://www.reviewofteachereducationinscotland.org.uk>) process and evidence was sought from a range of stakeholders, eg an online survey of teacher views, and results were published along with commissioned research (cf. Menter et al., 2010) as part of the evidence base to underpin the recommendations. For Donaldson, key areas include teachers:

- having high levels of pedagogical expertise
- having deep subject/content knowledge
- being self-evaluative
- being able to work in partnership with other professionals
- engaging directly with well-researched innovation
- engaging in advanced study
- acting as agents or catalysts for change
- who perceive themselves to be educators not just of the students in their charge but of their colleagues locally, nationally and internationally.

How are such aims to be realised? Concerned with teacher quality, the Review states, 'We need to be clear about the qualities and capacities which are associated with high quality teachers and develop procedures to select for those qualities' (p. 26), while action is proposed to 'broaden the base of selection to involve local authorities and schools as more equal partners' (p.

5). Reflecting consultation views about the poor literacy and numeracy skills of some entrants to the profession, the diagnostic use of literacy and numeracy tests is proposed as part of the selection process: 'The threshold established for entry should allow for weaknesses to be addressed by the student during the course' (p. 26). The current teacher standards framework should be reviewed to be 'explicit about the core knowledge, skills and competences that all teachers need to continually refresh and improve as they progress through their careers' (Recommendation 35, p. 97). The Review recognises that 'Even the most capable new teacher is still at the beginning of the journey of professional development' (p. 54), and that 'Any expectation that initial teacher education will cover all that a new teacher needs to know and do is clearly unrealistic' (p. 34). It had been suggested that Donaldson would recommend an extension of the one-year postgraduate diploma to 18 months or two years. In recessionary times, financial restrictions on potential students and on government itself probably determined that this was not mooted in the Review; instead he sought to amalgamate the induction year with the PGDE or BEd, hoping to create a more coherent two-year or five-year early phase of teacher education. The content of ITE programmes, especially the BEd Primary Education degree, is to be reconsidered in the light of concerns about lack of intellectual challenge and the possibilities of 'an over emphasis on technical and craft skills' (p. 39), while the wider involvement of university subject staff beyond those in education faculties and schools is proposed (p. 41).

Partnership is a strong underpinning concern of the Review that confirms that the rhetoric of partnerships clearly outstrips its practical effectiveness, and there is a call that (p. 48):

*New and strengthened models of partnership among universities, local authorities, schools and individual teachers need to be developed. These partnerships should be based on*

*jointly agreed principles and involve shared responsibility for key areas of teacher education.*

## POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN TEACHER EDUCATION: THE RESPONSE

The Scottish Government welcomed the Donaldson Review and formally responded in March 2011 (Scottish Government, 2011), in broad terms accepting all of Donaldson's recommendations. Subsequently a National Partnership Group involving all major stakeholders was established 'with a clear remit to establish the new and strengthened partnership working to support delivery of effective teacher education and professional development in every school in Scotland' (Scottish Government 2011: 2). The National Partnership Group is a practically focused implementation group with a number of sub-groups. One of these is focused on the early phase of professional learning and tasked inter alia with:

- developing proposals for more rigorous selection for ITE courses, particularly proposals for diagnostic assessments of competence in literacy and numeracy;
- developing proposals for the delivery of a reconceptualised model for the early phase of teacher education – ITE and Induction;
- considering the impact of placements on professional learning
- ensuring placements are in schools that meet quality standards
- considering how school staff can take the prime role in assessment of students during placement and how new models of joint staffing between schools and universities might improve the placement experience;
- developing proposals on the nature of degrees, including the phasing-out of the traditional BEd degree with the development of degrees combining professional studies

with in-depth academic study beyond education.

The group established a working plan, the report is expected during the summer of 2012, and 2013 and 2014 look to be busy years for all those involved in the early phases of teacher education.

## OUTCOMES

Without doubt the Donaldson Review is another watershed in Scottish education, encompassing as it does the entire spectrum of teacher professional development, and while it revisits some of the issues identified but not subsequently resolved by the McCrone Report a decade earlier, it does offer a genuine way forward. How practically realisable its recommendations are remains to be seen. While broadly welcomed, the Review has been subjected to a number of critiques.

Hulme and Menter (2011) in an interesting comparative analysis of the English White Paper (DfE, 2010) and Teaching Scotland's future consider the differences in approach between Scotland and England in their respective attempts to address the continuing issue of teacher reform.

With respect to the Donaldson Review they state (2011: 391) that 'Responses from professional bodies to the report have been very positive in most cases. This is perhaps not surprising given the very strong emphasis on teaching as a profession based on high-quality provision.' Professionalism in Scottish teaching is highly valued, but O'Brien (2011: 789) indicates that

*Donaldson stresses professionalism throughout the report but includes several variants, again perhaps reflecting the conceptual difficulties that exist. Various he refers to 'extended professionalism', 'enhanced professionalism' or 'twenty-first century professionalism' and further talks of the 'reinvigoration of professionalism' and the need to redefine and re-conceptualise professionalism. With partnership and leadership, 'twenty-first century*

*professionalism' appears to be a pillar underpinning his recommendations.*

With regard to recent developments, Smith (2010; 2011) has been much exercised about partnership, especially as it relates to ITE. Smith had argued in his 2010 paper (p. 44) for collaborative partnership to be adopted

*so that university staff are able to concentrate on their distinctive research-based contribution to ITE, and so that school staff confidently assume full responsibility for the distinctive contributions which their practitioner expertise makes them best placed to deliver. Moving to the collaborative model will enable university and school staff to achieve 'knowledge of practice' through the 'inquiry as stance' approach to the knowledge–practice relationship.*

He argues (2011: 18–19) that the Donaldson Review

*needed to address more directly and robustly the likely challenges to achieving full implementation of this partnership... not enough simply to leave such issues to the implementation phase now being taken forward by an 'implementation' National Partnership Group and its various sub-groups... the Report does not provide a sufficiently broad and flexible base for future innovation in ITE, but instead threatens some new narrowness. In particular... the proposal to base primary undergraduate ITE exclusively on a concurrent degree model, with the removal of a B.Ed. model, should be reconsidered.*

Among the challenges Smith (2011: 20–1) identifies are 'the conservative school staff attitudes which must be addressed, and the need to challenge these'; the resource issues associated with school staff taking on new roles and responsibilities; the difficulties in wresting total responsibility for teacher induction from school staff and local authorities; and the possible issues surrounding limiting the number of schools involved in ITE.

Historically, Scottish educational policy initiatives have both benefited from and suffered from a certain conceptual 'fuzziness', particularly when there are questions of definition or purpose involved. It will be interesting to see the extent to which vested interests and suspicions are genuinely overcome with the practical suggestions and development plans expected soon from the National Partnership Group. Good ideas and suggestions have foundered, eg the mentoring initiative in the early 1990s, or at the very least not flourished when the practical implications for the workloads and budgets of various stakeholders have become evident. The Scottish teacher unions, especially the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) leadership, for a decade have actively been involved in policy development and it has been some time since the dogs of war have been unleashed in any major industrial dispute involving teachers. However, the lack of employment opportunities for newly qualified teachers, and concerns about teacher pensions changes, combined with resistance to aspects of the 'Curriculum for Excellence', particularly in secondary schools, may have created an atmosphere where innovation may prove unacceptable to the rank and file. One hopes for successful initiatives to flow from the Review, and resistance and legitimate concerns to be managed appropriately, but at a time of recession, finance may prove the ultimate stumbling block to the implementation of many of the reforms suggested in the Donaldson Review. ■

## May 2021 Postscript

The Donaldson Review affirmed the central role that universities should play in developing the 21st century teacher professional; MacDonald and Rae (2018) suggest that "Donaldson recognised the complexity of teaching, and the necessity of investing in a system that values and supports intellectual challenge" (p.838), and that this heavily influenced the developing nature of programmes of initial teacher education (p. 840). The ITE providers responded in diverse ways: the PGDE continued; sometimes 'tweaked' to allow some online or blended activity. New alternative models emerged in addition to the experimentation in the system evident prior to Donaldson's Review. The BEd primary programmes were a major casualty across the system replaced by 4-year undergraduate MA or BA provision with concurrent degrees and access to other disciplines made possible. Flexibility of pathway was initiated by some TEIs allowing students to defer career decisions. Workforce planning remains a key element in government thinking and teacher education numbers remain strictly controlled. In 2016, in response to a Government demand for 'new and innovative routes' to alleviate concerns about possible teacher shortages (Kennedy, 2018), there emerged STEM-specific provision; Masters-level routes; dual primary/secondary qualifications; distance learning programmes and fast-track routes combining ITE and the induction year. Menter (2017) confirms the Scottish Government enabled the establishment of university and local authority partnerships involving both strategic and operational collaboration especially on professional placement. This major partnership has been relatively successful and continues to jointly determine policy and implementation by issuing appropriate guidance e.g. on Professional Placement policy in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic (2021). At local levels partnership has become much more collaborative, integrated and authentic in

ITE preparation programmes providing well-structured clinical experiences. 'Fuzziness', however, remains alive and well with continuing tensions among the 'players' and within government policy itself. The Scottish Government wants to raise attainment in schools and seeks a form of transformative 'teacher professionalism' supported by Donaldson but also a form that 'delivers' and measures improvements identified by government. In this vein, Kennedy (2018) highlights government support for Masters-level developments and fast track PGDEs while simultaneously planning to allow school-based routes. This 'Teach First'-like initiative was roundly condemned by Universities and teacher unions alike but provision was developed and approved. The Scottish Government claims that the alternative routes initiative has been successful in attracting additional individuals into teaching from diverse academic and professional backgrounds especially those seeking a change of career. STEM subject teachers have increased in rural areas while more generally the professional competence of existing teaching staff has grown through mentoring provision. Nevertheless, as Kennedy (2018, p.833) comments "It is fair to say that while there is considerable emphasis on the transformative orientation, increasing importance being given to Masters-level learning and explicit policy statements about the need for teachers to be enquiring, there is also a more managerial, technician discourse at play, driven in part by teacher supply concerns, and in part by a political desire to impose more easily measurable, externally imposed accountability measures." The review of developments policy and practice generated post Donaldson is ongoing and for the interested reader, Beck and Adam (2020) is worthy of consideration as is the entire edited book by Shanks, (2020). ■

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