

The 'contested enterprise' of Initial Teacher Education

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Since 1990 Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in New Zealand has undergone significant change following organisational shifts across the education system. Yet key issues from earlier years are still contested, with ongoing debates over the locus and oversight of ITE, the nature of quality teacher education, and the establishment of national standards for ITE programmes and their graduates. The debates have been underpinned by changing social and cultural expectations, the establishment and development of new regulatory bodies, New Zealand and international research. This paper examines these debates and argues that policy makers and practitioners in ITE face contradictory pressures and challenges such as the continuing pressure for quick fix and uniform solutions and deficit thinking about ITE. Progress depends on ongoing dialogue at both national and local level, rigorous evaluation of new developments, an acknowledgement of complexity, and a need for mutual trust and accountability.

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Since its beginnings in the mid-19th century, Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has been a 'contested enterprise' (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005, p. 69). Dissatisfaction with what is happening in schools results in calls for changes to the way teachers are prepared for their classroom roles. From the late 20th century this process has intensified. Bates (2008) claimed that 21st-century teacher education was under scrutiny in virtually every country, with economic globalisation as a key driver of strategies aimed at competitive economic advantage, informed by international testing. Governments seek to codify and define key strategies and outcomes for education and find ways to monitor process and outcomes. At the same time, there are calls for a new emphasis on local history, cultures, and languages. In New Zealand this is focused on honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi). Cochran-Smith and Fries (2005, p. 43) suggest four contradictory agendas for reform: professionalisation, deregulation, regulation, and social justice. This paper outlines changes to English medium ITE in New Zealand since the systemic changes of 1989-90 and addresses ITE issues within the wider educational system and their drivers. In spite of ongoing change, ITE has remained problematic and contested. There is ongoing debate about the locus of programmes, quality control measures, entry standards, the definitions of quality and professionalism, funding and supply, and partnerships with the profession.

New Zealand maintained a system of stand-alone ITE institutions till 1990. As late as 1983, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) examiners described our education policy as "consensual and incremental, guided by a combination of individualism and tolerant conformity within ... a society characterised by common values to an unusual degree" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1983, p. 10). But there were already seeds of change: a more independent foreign policy,

British entry into the European Common Market, global oil crises, and feminist and Māori challenges to the status quo. From 1987 government policy posited competition rather than co-operation as a key driver of educational quality. Accountability was conflated with performativity. Systemic changes from 1990 were made in a neo-liberal climate where professional autonomy was distrusted.

There were claims teachers could not be trusted to work in the interests of their students. A Parliamentary Select Committee report (Education and Science Select Committee, 1986) advocated greater accountability for teachers and teacher educators. In 1987, a Treasury brief to the incoming government (The Treasury, 1987) posited 'provider capture' as a threat to quality education. Following major reviews of early childhood, school, and tertiary education (Department of Education, 1988a, 1988b; Hawke, 1988), the government took sweeping action (Ministry of Education, 1989; Ministry of Education, 1990). The Department of Education (DoE), which had provided oversight and direction for 125 years, was disestablished, replaced by a new policy-oriented Ministry of Education (MoE). The six colleges of education became independent entities. The DoE had provided a one stop shop for ITE; the reforms of 1989-90 established new competing agencies. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was responsible for approving programmes across non-university institutions. The university sector's monopoly of degree granting ended. The Education Review Office (ERO) would evaluate school performance. The Teacher Registration Board (TRB) would register teachers and thus determine what qualifications and experience would be required in the future.

To interact with these new entities and teacher unions, the now independent Colleges of Education formed the New Zealand Council for Teacher Education (NZCTE), establishing an office in Wellington to assist liaison. Colleges became fully responsible for their finances, could determine their staffing needs, develop curriculum, and recruit students. Principals became CEOs, dealing with industrial relations, staff remuneration and property as well as professional programmes. Initially they welcomed the new freedom as an opportunity to enhance the status of teacher education and enlarge its scope through greater emphasis on the continuing education of teachers. Their optimism was soon dashed (Alcorn, 2006) as funding became a serious challenge. While student fees rose, government funding decreased every year. Funding for secondary teacher education was arbitrarily cut by one third in 1993. Colleges had to enrol more students to maintain the same income.

Teacher supply then became a major issue. School rolls were rising fast, and principals could not find staff. Minister of Education, Lockwood Smith, pledged in 1996 to provide 1,000 new teachers within a tight time frame. The MoE announced two significant changes. The protected field of teacher education was opened up to any institution willing to develop an approved programme, and the government would fund intensive one-year courses for graduates wishing to enter primary teaching. This offer was tempting since teacher education was the only field in the tertiary sector to have growth funded that year. A number of private providers and polytechnics responded, especially in the early childhood area. NZCTE expressed concern that new providers would lack resources, cut corners, and lower standards. By 1997 there were 28 centres where teacher education was being offered with a total of 44 programmes. In 2000, Minister Trevor Mallard placed a moratorium on new programmes, concerned about proliferation, but the field was permanently changed. By 2006 all former Colleges of Education had amalgamated with neighbouring universities and offered bachelor's degree programmes in ITE for both

primary and early childhood students and one-year graduate programmes. In 1996 the first distance/digital degrees were offered to reach students unable, for family or other reasons, to study on campus. These new degrees were compressed into three years (rather than four as international standards called for) and focused on professional learning rather than curriculum depth. Some newer programmes were faith-based or committed to a Māori world view.

The early 1990s had been a difficult time for the school sector as schools became autonomous units, encouraged to compete for students and funding. There was a new national curriculum, and the student body was becoming more diverse, culturally and linguistically. Schools lacked the advice they had previously received from the inspectorate. In this context principals sought beginning teachers competent across all areas with little need for the support to which they were entitled and for which schools were funded. The Education Accord – a loose confederation of the Principals' Federation, the School Trustees' Association (STA), and the teacher unions – requested a review of teacher education. The MoE published a green paper in 1997 called *Quality Teachers for Quality Learning*. Its perspective was narrow; its focus on value for money. In place of the broad vision of individual entitlement of the Fraser/Beeby statement “that every child ... shall have access to a free education of the type for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers” (Fraser & Beeby, 1939, p. 2), the green paper demanded “a world class teaching profession, capable of serving the country's needs into the future” (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 6), with versatile and well-trained teachers committed to success. “The public must be assured that public spending on teacher education produces and maintains a consistently high-quality teaching profession” (p. 10). The green paper called for “minimum standards of competence as an assurance of teacher quality” (p. 29) to be specified by a new professional body established by the government on the lines of the Ontario College of Teachers.

Setting standards

The deregulation of 1996 forced the TRB into action, concerned that some new providers entering the field had little idea about developing a conceptual framework for their programmes or the standard of work required at diploma or degree level. The TRB remained staunchly supportive of a professional focus, underpinned by research-informed practice. It also initiated a system of monitoring to ensure that programmes complied with their approval documents. It delineated four satisfactory teacher dimensions for new graduates and teachers renewing registration: professional knowledge, professional practice, professional relationships, and professional leadership (Teacher Registration Board, 1997). But requirements were confusing. The MoE, in negotiating collective agreements with teacher unions, embedded other standards in them. NZQA tried to impose its model of unit standards on teacher education programmes and produced a list of over 200. ERO, which evaluated school performance, published *Pre-service Training for School Teachers* (Education Review Office, 1999). Calls to raise the standards of entry into ITE were frequent.

A change of government in 1999 resulted in legislation to replace the TRB in 2002 with the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC), governed by an elected rather than an appointed board. It was to set standards, approve ITE programmes and deal with teacher conduct deemed unprofessional. Its status was ambiguous. It was designated a professional body for teachers, but teacher unions also claimed that role. It was set up by government but funded by teacher registration fees. As a Crown agency it could not speak

out in opposition to government policy. Building on the work of the TRB and widespread consultation, it published a *Code of Ethics for Teachers* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004), establishing guidelines which were to be reflected in ITE as well as schools and centres. Work on standards for beginning and experienced teachers began the following year with a literature search by an independent tenderer, charged with including New Zealand material such as the MoE's Best Evidence Syntheses studies and the Te Kotahitanga project. The report highlighted a dilemma: standards could be both 'banners,' a rallying point for professional consensus, and 'measurement,' both formative and summative (Kleinherz & Ingvarson, 2007). They could be both aspirational and punitive, beacons of good practice or merely a checklist which failed to capture the multidimensional and complex realities of teaching. A Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) commissioned paper argued that standards encourage performativity and that specified standards would set up a compliance culture and an industry of verification (Thrupp, 2006). Nevertheless, NZTC faced strong calls for a definitive set of standards for graduating teachers which would provide guidelines for ITE (See Alcorn, 2015, pp. 57-80).

NZTC set up a working party to design a document against which ITE programmes could be measured and that studied standards in other countries. It was agreed that the standards would apply to individual graduates, be generic and cover all three sectors: early childhood, primary, and secondary. The MoE was hesitant, claiming that standards should be very specific about what knowledge, skills and dispositions beginning teachers should be able to display. Some of its staff advocated instituting a national examination for all graduating teachers. Such a low trust model would have alienated both teacher education providers and their practicum partners. The final document, *Graduating Teacher Standards* (GTS) (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007) was launched in March 2007 and mandated seven standards under three headings: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Values and Relationships. Yet while this work was in progress, Education Minister Steve Maharey requested a consultation document from the MoE covering ITE issues, most of which lay in the Council's domain. Intervention from the council ensured that the resulting MoE report *Becoming a teacher in the 21st century: A review of initial teacher education policy (September 2007)* (Ministry of Education, 2007) acknowledged the Council's work and agreed that the Council, the MoE and the profession should work together to find solutions to the questions it posed.

Once the standards were published, programme approval became a major activity. The NZTC had to fight for space between large and powerful teacher unions and the Ministry of Education but negotiated to be the lead body on programme approval panels, appointing and training panel chairs and members. Providers could find these processes irksome. Established providers resented the expense and time involved and the need to document and have every programme variation approved. Newer providers, often small and sometimes remote and finding it difficult to attract qualified and experienced staff, found the requirements worked against their meeting a felt need. Approval involved preparing voluminous documentation, hosting an approval panel on site, having staff, students and representatives of schools available to meet with the panel, and meeting panel costs. A review of approval process was commissioned and presented in 2008. It recommended clarification, simplification and consistency. After widespread consultation, revised approval guidelines were published in 2010 (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2010). Programme approval now required institutions to demonstrate a clear conceptual framework, be based on research, demonstrate how students would meet the Graduating Teacher Standards, and meet the Council's requirements for entry. The latter

included academic qualification, literacy, numeracy and IT competency, te reo competency, English competency for English as an Additional Language (EAL) applicants, and a satisfactory police vet. There were also guidelines for practicum length and visiting. Approved programmes were monitored annually for the first iteration and then biennially. A new set of approval standards in 2019 began the process once again (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2019).

New directions

The Council had no control over programme funding, the responsibility of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) or policy guidelines, the purview of the MoE. This limited its ability to make changes to length and composition of programmes. While the NZTC worked to embed the standards, the MoE set up an Education Workforce Advisory Group (EWAG), tasked with examining ITE, induction and mentoring of beginning teachers, career pathways, leadership, and accountability systems. Its report *A vision for the teaching profession* (Education Workforce Advisory Group, 2010) recommended graduate entry into ITE. Influenced by patterns in Finland, the United States and parts of Australia, they supported a master's level degree, including a period of internship, which they believed would "raise the quality, status and attractiveness of the profession" (p. 7). The report had a mixed reception, but in 2013 the Ministry called for tenders to offer a master's programme in ITE, though the funding promised did not include the internship which was a key factor overseas. Initially, two 'exemplary' programmes were funded by the MoE and approved by NZTC. Close collaboration between partner schools and university staff and students was mandated, with a commitment to strive towards enquiry and adaptive expertise, and the needs of priority learners. An independent evaluation (Bellett & Fanselow, 2018) found the graduates from these programmes were widely seen as superior and well prepared but that the intensive nature of the programme led to students and staff becoming exhausted. Despite the best efforts of providers, the intakes continued to be less diverse than hoped and finding school partnerships which could offer deep contact with priority learners and other low-income students was difficult. The report failed to note that the government policy of paying an additional allowance to students in the traditional graduate diploma programmes, but not to master's students, caused some students to choose the former. At the same time as the master's programmes were developed, a University of Auckland programme in conjunction with the Teach First New Zealand Foundation, offered a two-year programme of intensive university-based study combined with full time work in selected low socio-economic schools for which students were paid at the untrained teacher rate. By 2020, when the moratorium was lifted, there were programmes for high achieving graduates and others wanting to change professions to complete a one-year intensive programme in the Auckland Schools Teaching Coalition (ASTC) in conjunction with a university. University fees were paid by schools which offered employment on graduation. Centre-based programmes by private providers in Early Childhood Education (ECE) also continued.

EWAG also recommended changes to the NZTC, including a board appointed from widespread nominations rather than elected. Minister Hekia Parata established a review of the Council, which supported a higher entry level for entry to ITE as recommended by EWAG. Its key finding was:

As currently structured, governed and positioned, the Teachers Council cannot effectively set and enforce clear standards for entry, progression and professional accountability with the full support of the profession. It has a unique role and purpose but these are not sufficiently differentiated from the work of both government and industrial advocacy organisations. (Winter et al., 2012, p. 1)

Following widespread consultation over a compressed time-period, a new body called the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (ECANZ) was established in 2015. This was fiercely opposed by the Post Primary Teachers Association, which saw the new body as an ‘unelected quango’ (Post Primary Teachers Association, 2014, p. 16). The Minister insisted on a mandatory Code of Conduct for teachers, which met with sector resistance as teachers saw the Code of Ethics as appropriate and sufficient.

ECANZ, together with the MoE, commissioned a think piece on ITE, to be ‘thought provoking, innovative and offer a number of different perspectives for consideration.’ *Strategic options for developing future oriented initial teacher education* (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016) argued that ITE should not be discussed in isolation but as part of a wider perspective which included ongoing professional learning and leadership. Significantly, it recommended consideration of the case for “an increase in the per student funding rate for ITE to support the quality of programmes needed and possible changes” (p. 3). The role of ECANZ was “to facilitate the development of a coherent vision as to how the system should move forward and to co-ordinate the actions of the different players to achieve that vision” (p. 8). ECANZ set up an ITE Advisory Group and engaged in consultation. Unsurprisingly there was a range of different reactions. Concern was expressed that graduate entry could make the profession less attractive and affordable and perhaps reduce student diversity. There was particular concern in the ECE sector where not all teachers needed to be qualified and where pay rates were not equal to those in other sectors. Only 40% of respondents supported graduate entry. A separate hui was held with Māori-medium providers and kura (schools) to scope a way forward that would respond to their needs. The strongest responses were for raising literacy and numeracy entry requirements, strengthening practicum arrangements (though schools wanted more support for associate teachers), and setting clear standards for graduates.

After a change of government in 2017, ECANZ was replaced by the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (TCANZ) with board members elected by the profession. The profession was indifferent. Only 6% of teachers voted in the first board election. The Chief Executive of ECANZ felt obliged to resign though he was widely supported by professional groups, but otherwise staff continued as they had in other council transitions. TCANZ issued new ITE requirements in 2019 after lengthy engagement with stakeholders. The requirement for a conceptual framework disappeared. Instead, providers were required to develop an assessment framework and ensure that all graduates met the new standards. These emphasised flexibility, authentic, reciprocal partnerships with schools, early childhood centres and iwi, a culminating integrative assessment against the new standards (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017), and increased emphasis on capability in te reo Māori. Beginning teachers would need support to reach the standard for registration. The documentation is daunting: 95 pages long and full of detail. ECANZ’s requirements reflect research findings and the MoE imperatives for New Zealand education, but it would be difficult for those who have spent considerable time in teacher education not to feel that their expertise and knowledge of teaching is distrusted, that they are thought to be isolated from the real world of education, and that they are

responsible for non-authentic partnerships. By late 2022, 92 programmes across 26 institutions had been approved under the new guidelines.

Issues

Both teaching and ITE have been “subject to relentless evaluation and review over the last 25 years” (Fitzgerald & Knipe, 2019, p. 155). The same issues reappear: admission criteria, locus and length of programmes, the practicum, standards and accountability. In spite of all the work on standards and consistency, there is little agreement about the answers to these questions. Where once beginning teachers were prepared to become part of a national system, changes to educational administration have created a network of individual schools, all supposedly meeting the needs of their local community. An ERO report on the preparation and confidence of newly graduated teachers (Education Review Office, 2017), while it noted the need for more teachers and raising standards, concluded that “opinions are mixed about the relative merit of different programmes, with some school/early childhood leaders favouring graduates from particular programmes while others state they would not consider graduates from the same programmes” (p. 5). Nor do changes appear to satisfy lobby groups. A Radio New Zealand report was headlined ‘Principals want overhaul of initial teacher education’ (Gerritsen, 2021). No longer is there rhetoric about becoming part of a profession: instead ITE should ‘deliver’ what employers (i.e., individual schools’ boards of trustees) want.

A recurring feature of advice on ITE is the need for ‘authentic’ partnerships with schools. Working with and in schools has always been a feature of New Zealand ITE. Current partnerships are not limited to practicums. They include research projects (such as those funded by the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI), cooperative work in school classrooms, and professional sharing. A key barrier to partnerships is often not an unwillingness to work together and respect each other’s expertise, but rather work pressures and finance. Teachers whose workload has increased find it difficult to allocate time to partnership activities or even to becoming an associate teacher.

In spite of the requirements to fund practicum experiences (payments to schools, travel, time from other work, administrative support), ITE is funded at a lower level than other professional programmes. The compressed nature of programmes for graduates also increases pressures for ITE and schools. The 2016 think piece noted:

ITE programmes are currently funded at a rate that is lower than many other applied professional qualifications. The current Exemplary Programmes project developed by the Ministry of Education provides higher levels of funding to support enhanced practicum experience, as well as stronger research linkages. The Education Council supports consideration of ITE moving into a higher funding category, in conjunction with a move to a post-graduate level qualification, and moves to strengthen the quality of outcomes. Tighter entry requirements and some further reduction in funded enrolments (there has already been a 25% reduction between 2010 and 2014) could help to manage the fiscal cost of such a change. (Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2016, p. 2)

Changing beliefs and behaviour is complicated but a key task of ITE. In the successful *Te Kotahitanga* programme (see <https://tekotahitanga.tki.org.nz/>), teachers learned to form culturally respectful relationships with students and whanau, which resulted in accelerated academic progress. But these teachers received intensive professional development, in-class supervision and individual feedback which was time and cost intensive (Bishop et al., 2010).

ITE faces contradictory pressures. As well as developing 'authentic' partnerships with schools, centres and iwi, ITE staff must engage in research to inform their practice. Before 1990, successful school practice was essential for an ITE appointment. Now that all ITE programmes result in a degree level or equivalent qualification, ITE staff are required to research and take part in six-yearly research assessment exercises of the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). For ITE the first PBRF assessment in 2003 was badly timed. Although education as a field had the third highest number of A-rated (internationally recognised) academics of any university discipline, 74.8% of education staff nationally were rated as research inactive. While these statistics changed dramatically in later assessments, 2003 was a blow for staff morale and for the standing of education within the university sector. It also affected institutional funding. This focus on research has led some institutions to appoint ITE staff with doctorates but little or no classroom teaching experience, causing difficulties for partnerships. Inadequate funding exacerbates the problem.

Since 2017 there has been an apparent shift away from international trends in education policy to more local concerns (EII, 2021). National standards for primary school students, an attempt to address international league tables but fiercely resisted by many teachers, were abolished. New national priorities for education place anti-racism and upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi as central. Most ITE programmes were already committed to inclusive education and culturally responsive pedagogy, as was ECANZ. The new standards, however, have meant greater emphasis on te reo me ona tikanga (the Māori language and its customs). A new history curriculum mandated for all levels of schooling focuses on local histories and the effects of colonialism. Working to meet these new standards has placed more pressure on ITE academics to enhance their skills.

The way forward

ITE is a vital part of our education system. It has been hampered by a lack of trust and attempts at control, deficit thinking, lack of funding, and ongoing changes demanding ever new programmes and accountabilities. Since 1990 all four of Cochran-Smith's agendas have driven policy approaches, causing confusion. Some ITE providers have pushed professionalism, others deregulation. Successive Councils and the MoE have supported regulation but also deregulation. A social justice agenda concerned with both indigeneity and poverty has grown as the extremes of neo-liberalism have faded. ECANZ and its forebears have made a genuine effort to engage with New Zealand and international research on quality teaching and ITE. They have worked hard to consult with the profession. But they have continued to construct ITE as a problem. Rather than constantly call for more practice and less theory, policy makers need to be convinced that theory is embedded in and inseparable from practice (Schon, 1983 cited in Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 37). Gunn and Trevethan (2019) have demonstrated that evidence from research on effective ITE practice in New Zealand has not impacted on policy documents.

The MoE determines overall direction for the education sector. Longer term co-operative planning needs to address teacher supply issues to avoid kneejerk policy decisions. Funding issues for ITE and its partner schools need to be urgently discussed to maintain quality programmes. Recent work on longer term priorities which do not change with each new government is a sign of hope.

The issue of proliferation remains and affects both the deregulation and regulation agendas. Singapore, a country with a comparable population to New Zealand (but a different geography), has one ITE institution. A number of small programmes make

professional cooperation and dialogue, collaborative research, and provision of resources more difficult. It is hard for small programmes to offer ongoing professional learning and qualifications and to engage in ongoing professional inquiry. New Zealand has two medical schools and eight law schools but 27 ITE providers.

Teacher educators themselves must ensure their collective voice is heard in policy debate. ITE, like teaching, is complex and demanding. The Teacher Education Forum of Aotearoa New Zealand (TEFANZ) has organised forums and conferences, made submissions, provided representatives for committees, lobbied, and published local research projects. The Deans of Education have also worked in policy development. Teacher educators must champion ongoing professional dialogue at both national and local level, evaluation of new developments, an acceptance of complexity and difference, and a need for tolerance, trust and mutual accountability. It is crucial that regulatory bodies, teachers and ITE providers work together to strike a balance that respects professionalism as it safeguards students and their whānau (extended family).

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