

## White Paper

### The Importance of Teacher Educators: Professional development imperatives

The International Forum for Teacher Educator Development (InFo-TED)

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#### Abstract

This White Paper identifies an under-addressed issue in European education policy, namely the professional development of teacher educators. It details the activities of the multi-national InFo-TED group in gathering the largest body of evidence to date on European teacher educators' professional learning.

The White Paper outlines the challenges in this type of professional development, identifies ways in which the work of InFo-TED has addressed them, and then proposes evidence-based ways forward. The knowledge gained from the project has been used to create a range of online and face-to-face resources and events, including an extensive website and a Summer Academy for teacher educators, as well as engagement and dissemination events for policy makers across Europe and wider international contexts. The overall focuses have been to support communal and interactive professional development, to invest in knowledge creation and to create a shared European vision for teacher educators.

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## 1. Introduction

While it is accepted that teachers contribute significantly to children's learning through the quality of their teaching, there is far less focus on the teacher educators, that is all those who

are responsible for ensuring that future teachers are well educated throughout their careers, remaining competent to deliver high quality teaching.

In addressing this issue, a European Commission (EC) report *Supporting Teacher Educators for better learning outcomes*, stated:

“Teacher educators are crucial players for maintaining - and improving - the high quality of the teaching workforce. They can have a significant impact upon the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. Yet they are often neglected in policy-making, meaning that some Member States do not always benefit fully from the knowledge and experience of this key profession. It also means that teacher educators do not always get the support and challenge they need, for example in terms of their education and professional development” (EC, 2013, p.4).

Furthermore, the report stated:

“In most Member States, government policy on the quality requirements for teacher educators, or on their academic and professional development, does not exist or is underdeveloped; this is especially the case for those who educate teachers in early education, adult education, as well as vocational education and training” (EC, 2013, p.4).

In 2013 then, the EU clearly acknowledged the importance of teacher educators – defined as *all* of those involved in the education of intending and serving teachers - and highlighted how the support for this broad professional group was under-developed across Europe. This welcome report was the first time that the EU had made such a clear declaration about teacher educators.

Since 2013, however, this issue has once again dropped down the EU educational policy agenda. There have been some minor initiatives, often only at national levels, but with the exception of the Erasmus + funding of E0.4 million awarded to the Info-TED group from 2016 – 2019, no other major initiatives from the European Commission.

It is our contention, based on the evidence accrued over the past three years of research and development by InFo-TED, that the issues of teacher educators’ knowledge, skills, attributes and identities, and particularly their professional development, badly need to be addressed in European educational policy. This White Paper outlines the challenges in achieving the goals inter-linked with those issues. It then identifies how the work of InFo-TED has addressed them, at small-scale, and further proposes evidence-based, larger-scale and pan-European ways to strengthen teacher educators’ development – and hence the school system overall - in all EU Member States.

## **2. Developments since 2013**

The socio-economic and political contexts for all European educational initiatives – and for teacher education, in particular – have changed significantly since 2013. On-going economic restrictions have put public budgets in all Member States under great pressure, resulting in cut-backs in public funding for education (EC, 2015:2). The migrant crisis of 2015 has increased the social, cultural and linguistic diversity of many European states, exacerbating

existing socio-economic inequalities. A further factor here is the very fast pace of technological change and the ways in which this impacts society and social relations. All of these things pose huge challenges to schooling and teacher education, in general, and to teacher educators, in particular.

In teacher education, there has been an intensification of co-operation between Higher Education (HE) and schools. Many countries have experienced what has been termed ‘a turn to practice’ involving more pre-service teacher education work located in schools and a higher valuation of ‘practical knowledge’ about teaching. This has led to discussions about the identities and role diversifications of HE-based teacher educators and school-based teacher educators.

In other countries, where there are already clear policy focuses for encouraging school-based teacher education, there have been resulting needs for more school-based teacher educators or mentors. This has created requirements for enhanced professional development programmes for these groups. In countries, such as Ireland, where there has been increasing attention to the induction phase of teacher development, this has created additional needs for new cohorts of high-quality teacher educators in Higher Education. At the same time, in some European countries, including Norway, there have been initiatives to re-position all pre-service teacher education at Masters levels. This has led to the need to educate most HE-based teacher educators to doctoral levels.

Across Europe, there is a demand for closer links between research and practice. While teacher educators are often positioned as the experts in mediating between theory and research and practice, there are few structures in place to support them in such roles, at the same time as meeting the other, multiple and varied requirements of their work.

Recruitment patterns and entry criteria vary for teacher educators coming into teacher education work in universities, colleges and schools. Yet, despite this diversity and the clear professional development needs it implies, induction programmes for teacher educators are still scarce and often do not receive financial support from governments or other major stakeholders. The existence of national associations of teacher educators (for example, in the Netherlands and Flanders) have proven to be good stimuli for collaborative teacher educator development, especially when those associations cooperate with universities and schools.

The government of Flanders is one of the few EU Member States to fund teacher educator development. In Norway, there is governmental support for educating school-based teacher educators as mentors and, through the NAFOL initiative, for supporting teacher educators studying for a Ph.D. The European Doctoral School in Teacher Education (EDITE), an EU Horizon 2020 project ending in 2019, is also funded to provide doctoral education on a pan-European model. Outside the EU, the government of Israel funds teacher educator development through the Mofet Institute. But, in contrast, in most EU countries, structural governmental support for teacher educator induction and further professional development are lacking.

Evidence suggests that, since 2013, researchers are increasingly identifying the complexity and multi-faceted work and identities of teacher educators, and discussing what that means for the knowledge, skills, aptitudes, aptitudes and professional development of this diversifying group. Yet investments and actions in this area are still badly neglected by governments, policy makers and other stakeholders.

Within the research community, there is growing insight that ‘one size fits all’ competence frameworks badly undervalue the diversity and complexity of teacher educators as an occupational group. They are therefore very rarely ‘fit for purpose’ in terms of providing professional development frameworks for teacher educators.

We conclude then that the, often small-scale, developments that have taken place in teacher educators’ professional development since 2013 have, in the main, been initiated by professional groups, the research community and individual organizations or institutions. They have not been sufficiently addressed by policy makers within national governments or by European Union policy makers.

### **3. The Achievements of InFo-TED (the International Forum for Teacher Educator Professional Development)**

InFo-TED was initially established in 2013 by four experienced teacher educators and researchers from Belgium, England, The Netherlands and Norway. This founding group decided that, after the European Commission 2013 initiative, it was time to highlight the importance of teacher educators and the complexity of their professional learning. InFo-TED has now expanded to become an active group of 20 researchers from six European countries (Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, England, Scotland, Ireland). In addition, the group draws on the expertise of the Mofet Institute in Israel and has other external members from the USA and Australia. Since 2016 InFo-TED has received E0.4 million of funding overall through the Erasmus + funding stream. In general, InFo-TED disseminates ideas, knowledge and research via our Summer Academies, website (<https://info-ted.eu/>) and stakeholder events.

The group’s achievements to date include:

- Developing a conceptual model for teacher educators’ professional development. This model has a twofold purpose: to provide a map to explain the object of our interest, i.e., teacher educators’ professional development; and to give a common language to frame the issue of teacher educator professional development. The latter is a necessity given the diversity in teacher educators’ work across Europe and beyond, and our need to communicate with, and understand, one another. As such, our conceptual model of teacher educator development is primarily descriptive and communicative, and should not be read or understood as a normative blueprint (Kelchtermans, Smith & Vanderlinde, 2017). Further details of this model, which provides the context for all later work are given in Appendix 1.
- Developing a questionnaire and interview schedule to explore the professional development needs of higher education-based teacher educators. This was the largest ever survey on this subject, collecting data from 1,158 teacher educators in seven countries. Main findings reported from the empirical research included that teacher educators are only moderately satisfied with their professional development experiences and have strong desires for further professional learning (Czerniawski et al., 2016). A number of relevant issues arose through the survey, including the importance of self-initiated professional development, working and learning through collaboration with peers and colleagues, accessing opportunities to improve teacher

education teaching practices, and the need to increase research skills (MacPhail et al., 2018). Further details of the research are included in Appendix 2.

- Developing a portal for teacher educator development through the creation of our website (<https://info-ted.eu/>). This site contains hundreds of items in the form of articles, blogs, videos and discussions on teacher educators' professional development. In April 2019 our statistics showed that, after only one year of operation, the site had had 7, 986 user views from over 35 countries. It is clear then that this portal already provides a valuable resource bank for teacher educators and their development across Europe and more widely. Further details can be seen by accessing the website.
- Conducting a Teacher Educator Summer Academy (a face-to- learning event) in July 2018. The goals of this Summer Academy, supported by a virtual learning platform, were: the dissemination of the conceptual model for teacher educators' professional learning and the evidence-based experiences of InFo-TED; the collaborative professional development of the 42 participating teacher educators; the stimulation of pan-European networks; and the instigation of collaborative research and practice within these networks. Evaluations show that the Academy promoted in-depth collaborative learning of the attending teacher educators. Participants disseminated their learning back in their home institutions, and are still working in peer-review groups. This will contribute to capacity building across Europe as these people will go on to play a key role in teacher educator development locally, nationally and internationally. The model and schedule of the Summer Academy were finalised into a reusable framework which will be the basis of a second Summer Academy to be organized in the summer of 2020.
- Organising three trans-national meetings, to date, for policy makers in Scandinavia (Trondheim, November 2017), the Low Countries (the Netherlands, January 2018) and the British and Celtic Isles (Glasgow, November 2017). In total, these meetings were attended by 78 policy makers and stake holders.
- Holding an invited seminar for the European Educational Research Association in Bolzano, Italy, in September 2018. To this audience of policy makers and researchers, the InFo-TED group gave a presentation of work to date and its implications for teacher education and schooling internationally. The event was attended by more than 45 stakeholders in teacher education from 18 different countries, 11 in Europe (including European nations as diverse as Poland, Denmark and Spain) and 7 wider international nations, including Japan, Hong Kong, Australia and Canada.

#### **4. Summary of InFo-TED project findings**

The evidence from all the InFo-TED project activities indicates that:

- Education will not be improved by repeated reforms and structural changes without equal attention to the professional development of the teacher educators who take the lead in mediating these reforms.
- The professional development of teacher educators is still neglected. Little pan-European progress has been made on this issue since the European Commission 2013 report.
- There is a need for policy makers to acknowledge the urgency of supporting teacher educators to achieve pan-European, over-arching goals of improving education.
- Teacher education should be a shared responsibility between the practice field and HE working towards the common goal of educating and supporting the professional development of competent teachers who deliver quality teaching for better learning.
- The complexity of teacher education and the diversity in the teacher educator ‘profession’ working in various contexts and the consequent diversity of practices is clear.

There is therefore a need to identify and clarify the roles of professional teacher educators in school and HE contexts. HE- and school-based teacher educators could jointly play central roles in establishing the dialogue.

- There is a need for more research on what teacher educators’ professional knowledge includes in these specific contexts and practices, looking specifically at the variety of workplace contexts for teacher educators.
- There is a danger that, unless such action is taken soon, the increasing focus on school-based teacher education may lead to professional insularity, and the inefficient dispersion of expertise and funds. If that happens, then it will reduce teacher education to local skills-training, breaking up the nexus of research / practice in teaching, and weakening school-improvement and innovation.
- There is then a need to provide sufficient resources for research and professional development activities for all teacher educators in schools, as well as in higher education.
- An additional imperative is to strengthen mentors’ identities as school-based teacher educators, including defining their knowledge, skills and attributes, and then supporting their professional development in acquiring these capacities.

## 5. Recommendations

At the European level (and in cooperation between EU countries), InFo-TED recommends establishing an awareness of the need for and creation of more coherent national infrastructures for the professional development of teacher educators, in whichever education setting they work, and the diversity of their roles in supporting the initial education, induction and career-long learning of teachers.

Given its many achievements, we suggest that the InFo-TED group is well placed to develop more work in this area.

InFo-TED further recommends that the EU should:

- Organize a pan-European series of peer learning seminars for practitioners, researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders in this field, leading to an update of the EU 2013 report and advice to the European Commission for the years 2020-2030. InFo-TED is credibly positioned to organize and support such a peer learning network, drawing on its existing bank of expertise, evidence and research.
- Support collaborative learning and capacity-building of experienced teacher educators in various ways. For example, by subsidizing links between a special section in the European Teacher Academy and the InFo-TED portal/Virtual Learning Platform and the Summer Academies organized by InFo-TED.
- Provide financial support for future International Summer Academies for teacher educators under the leadership of InFo-TED.
- Support pan-European doctoral programs for teacher educators, drawing on national and international infrastructures and drawing on the achievements of NAFOL and EDiTE.

At a national level, InFo-TED recommends that:

- National centres for teacher educators' development and learning are established and maintained with government support. These national centres could then be inter-linked in a virtual pan-European network.
- A formal, nation-wide support system for novice teacher educators is developed in each country. Again, these national systems could be inter-linked in a virtual pan-European network.
- Financial support for professional development programmes for school-based teacher educators or mentors is provided nationally.
- Professional associations for all teacher educators, wherever their work is located, are developed and supported in each country
- National support for doctoral programs for teacher educators, partially following the exemplar of NAFOL, is provided.

## **6. Conclusion**

This White Paper has been written to discuss a still under-addressed issue in European education policy, namely the professional development of teacher educators. As identified in a 2013 European Commission report, developing this occupational group is a key part of improving the overall quality of educational outcomes in schools and HE. Yet there has been little, coherent action in this area from policy makers at Member State or pan-European levels.

In addressing this issue, the White Paper has detailed the activities of the InFo-TED group which has, since 2013, worked across national borders to engage in a joint effort to build an interactive network of European teacher educators. The overall focuses have been to enable teacher educators to learn from each other, create resources to support the professional development of teacher educators and invest in knowledge creation and a shared European vision for teacher educator development and leadership.

With EU funding since 2016 Info-TED has gathered the largest body of evidence to date on European teacher educators' professional learning, and then used this knowledge to create a

range of resources and events, including engagement and dissemination meetings for policy makers across Europe and in wider international contexts. The funding for this important group comes to an end in August 2019 but InFo-TED hopes to continue its efforts in cooperation with national and EU agencies.

The main message of InFo-TED is that teacher educators continue to play a central role in the effort to improve education at all levels and that their professional development cannot be over-looked, if educational outcomes are to be improved overall. The importance of this occupational group and the support for their development is not, however, sufficiently acknowledged by policy makers at national level or at pan-European level. There is then a need for national, European and wider international cooperation to disseminate the awareness that ‘Teacher Educators Matter’. In this report evidence-based recommendations are made to take action on this important matter at pan-European and national levels.

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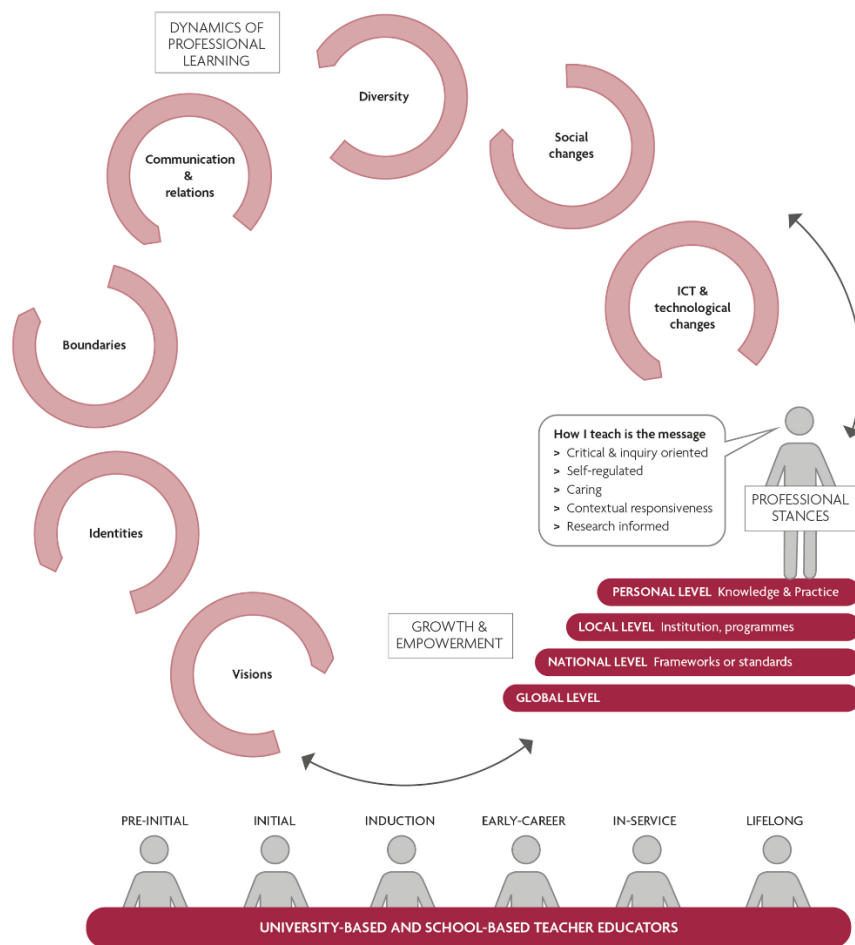


## **Appendix 1: The Conceptual Model**

InFo-TED developed a conceptual model that describes how teacher educators' professional development is envisaged. The model has a twofold purpose:

- To provide a map to explain the object of our interest, i.e., teacher educators' professional development.
- To provide a common language to frame the issue of teacher educator professional development. This is a necessity given the diversity in teacher educators' work across the world and our need to communicate with, and understand, one another.

As such, our conceptual model of teacher educator development is primarily descriptive and communicative, and should not be read or understood as a normative blueprint (Kelchtermans, Smith & Vanderlinde, 2017).



The core elements and assumptions of our conceptual model are presented in the circles of our model. The starting point (outer circle in our model) for the professional development of teacher educators has to be their practice. Our assumption is that acting teacher educators have good reasons for doing their job in the way they are doing it. We call this a ‘practice-based approach’, contrary to a blueprint approach. Our model starts from a positive appreciation of the practice in which teacher educators ‘enact’ their expertise. In our understanding of research and our own experience in the field, we understand teacher educators’ practices as messages and reflections of their professional stance, and likely to include being critical and inquiry-oriented, self-regulated, contextually responsive, and research-informed.

### Contexts of teacher educators' practices

In our conceptual model, teacher educators’ practices are situated in the context of the local teacher education institute and/or within the national or regional policy context. The local level refers to, for instance, the culture of the teacher education institute, the existing teacher education programmes, or teacher education curricula. The national level refers to national policy measurements, existing frameworks, or standards for teacher educators. Finally, teacher educators’ practices are situated in a global level stressing their relation with supranational and societal change.

### Dynamics of professional learning

As a next step in developing our model, we situated messages of teacher educators in what we called the ‘dynamics of professional learning’. These are presented in the left-hand side of our model where we present a non-exhaustive list of possible content domains that we believe ought to be included in opportunities for teacher educators’ professional development. These domains are related to, for instance, social and technological change, diversity in society, communication and relations between teacher educators and different stakeholders, the multiple identities teacher educators, and the broad visions teacher educators have about the nature and future of ‘good’ education.

#### Teacher educators' diverse backgrounds

Our conceptual model further contains two arrows. The first arrow reminds us that thinking about teacher educators’ professional development means thinking broadly about teacher educators practicing as both university-based and school-based professionals. This arrow prompts an inclusive definition of teacher educators encompassing a wide spectrum of positions in the educational system and field, and implies that we are aware that teacher educators enter the profession with different backgrounds. Some, for example, enter having been working as teachers, some as researchers with or without a PhD, and others may come from a variety of education-related roles. At the same time, this double-ended arrow implies that we stress the importance of thinking of teacher educators’ practice and professional development as situated in a temporal context that recognizes that teacher educators enter the profession at different moments in their careers, with different experiences and different learning needs.

To conclude, the conceptual model that we have developed illustrates that our starting point for teacher educators’ professional development should lie in teacher educators’ actual practice. With our conceptual model, we take a stance against a blueprint approach that would attempt to identify, as well as assess, professionalism via an exhaustive list of standards or competencies (knowledge, attitudes and skills) that teacher educators need to have in order to rightfully consider themselves to be ‘professional’. Contrary to this approach, the InFo-TED conceptual model starts from a full appreciation of the work teacher educators are doing and of the way they are doing it, i.e., their enacted practice.

## **Appendix 2: The Survey Research**

InFo-TED developed a questionnaire exploring the professional developmental needs of higher education-based teacher educators. The questionnaire was completed by 1,158 teacher educators. These teacher educators were working in higher education institutions from the seven countries represented on the InFo-TED Council. Main findings reported from the survey include that while teacher educators are only moderately satisfied with their professional development experiences, a strong desire exists for further professional learning (Czerniawski et al., 2016). A number of prevalent issues arose through the survey, including self-initiated professional development, the importance of experiencing professional development through collaboration with peers and colleagues, accessing opportunities to improve teacher education teaching practices, and the inextricable link between teaching and research and, consequently, the need to upskill in research skills (MacPhail et al., 2018). The survey has also resulted in it being possible to draw out complexities and diversity that emerge when exploring a professional group of educators responsible for the preparation of a future generation of teachers (Czerniawski et al., 2016). A special issue of the *European*

*Journal of Teacher Education* (edited by Kari Smith & Maria Flores), titled ‘Teacher Educators as Teachers and as Researchers’ is due for publication in 2019 and reports further findings from the InFo-TED survey with respect to specific jurisdictions. The findings from the InFo-TED survey have been presented at several international academic conferences including the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE), American Education Research Association (AERA), British Education Research Association (BERS), European Education Research Association (EERA), Teacher Education Policy in Europe (TEPE). Further information on InFo-TED conference presentations are available at <https://info-ted.eu/>. The references for publications to date related to the InFo-TED survey are provided at the end of this document. InFo-TED are currently finalising a second questionnaire that will explore the professional learning needs of school-based teacher educators.