

Recommendations from the International Advisory Panel in Teacher Education

28. May 2018

In the commissioning letter establishing the Advisory Panel in Teacher Education, the Ministry of Education and Research describes the group's task as follows: 'to stimulate the institutions' quality work on the new primary and lower secondary teacher educations through advice, recommendations and feedback...The group's mandate includes giving recommendations to higher education institutions, UHR-LU, NOKUT and the Ministry'. More specifically, the letter asks the group to 'consider whether the national guidelines...incorporate elements and knowledge from internationally recognized research on good teacher education', as well as to 'develop a norm for the level and composition of academic environments, and for how the new academic supervision regulations at MA level can be operationalized for integrated MAs in teacher education'.

The Advisory Panel in Teacher Education has so far pursued its mandate mainly by creating arenas for dialogue, learning and discussion with the teacher education institutions. In response to the institutions' stated desire for us to work with them as directly as possible, we arranged three regional meetings for all institutions in the autumn of 2017. Feedback on the meetings was excellent, and participants were especially enthusiastic about the opportunity for discussions between institutions and practice schools, as well as between practice schools in the same area - in many cases, this was the first time practice teachers and institution-based teacher educators had had a chance to meet. The discussions focused on the core questions of teacher education, e.g. the goals of teacher education, characteristics of the programme, coursework, teaching practice supervision, MA thesis, research in teacher education, roles of teacher educators at teacher education institutes and schools, as well as possibilities and challenges related to collaboration between teacher education institutions and practice schools. We are following up the discussions that emerged with a national meeting in May of this year, and plan to repeat the pattern of regional and national meetings in 2019.

Having established this dialogue and reached a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the field, we would like to take this opportunity to give some recommendations to the Ministry within a particular area: the various policy frameworks and regulations that structure Norwegian teacher education. We do this in keeping with our interpretation of our mandate as an International Advisory Panel-- that the Ministry and NOKUT would like feedback on whether and to what extent these frameworks and regulations, in our view, help to ensure and stimulate quality in the new teacher educations, and whether there are any potentially useful changes to make. We do this in light of our collective international expertise in initial teacher education practice, teacher education research, and teacher education policy. This document is our response to this aspect of the mandate.

The Advisory Panel members are, in general, very positive to Norway's teacher education policy, which we see as ambitious and exciting, in particular as regards the new MA programmes in primary and lower secondary (PLS) teacher education. In our experience of teacher education internationally, it is not common to see a national teacher education policy that supports research and research-based education so strongly in the frameworks, regulations and teacher education curriculum guidelines on all levels. Current policy conditions in Norway provide excellent possibilities for the development of a 5-year MA-level teacher education.

These ambitious policies have led to high expectations, not least when it comes to institutions' ability to build capacity in practice-based research and the supervision of practice-based research as well as developing and supporting the idea of research-based teaching and teacher preparation. The Advisory panel believes that capacity-building is one of the main challenges facing Norwegian TE, and that the TEIs will need to build sustainable research capacity to a greater extent than they are doing at the moment. Based on our analysis of the Norwegian

reform and our dialogue with TEI faculty and school-based educators in all regions of the country, we have concluded that currently, some policy frameworks and regulations support the kind of capacity-building that is needed, while others may be hindering it.

With this in mind, this document's purpose is to make recommendations for changes to some of the frameworks and regulations that govern Norwegian TE and/or in some cases, to modify the ways the frameworks and regulations are interpreted and put into practice. One of our recommendations, on MA supervision, does not relate directly to regulations but rather addresses a potential fruitful area for Ministry funding.

The ultimate aim of our recommendations is to improve Norwegian TEIs' capacity-building in research-based practice in teaching/teacher education as well as practice-based research. Both of these are necessary to allow TEIs to achieve the objectives of the MA reform. Since these frameworks and regulations are put in place and operationalised by the Ministry and NOKUT, we address our recommendations to these two organisations, though we include some notes for institutions on what our suggested changes would mean and require from them. Below we present recommendations in five main areas: staff composition, the organization of practice, supervision of the MA thesis, additional support for deans and program leaders, and NOKUT's future supervision of the teacher education programs.

Recommendations

Staff composition

The current situation: NOKUT's Academic Supervision Regulations section 2-3, 'Requirements for the academic environment', regulate the staff composition of those who teach in MA programmes as follows: '50 per cent of the members of the academic environment must have at least associate professor qualifications [i.e. hold a doctorate or have doctorate-equivalent qualifications]. Within this 50 per cent, at least 10 per cent must have professor or docent qualifications'. In NOKUT's latest round of PLS programme accreditations, this regulation was interpreted to apply to *each subject area* in which the programme offers an MA specialisation. This meant that if, for instance, a programme offered a PLS teacher education MA with a specialisation in mathematics, 10% of the staff teaching in this area would need to have professor or docent qualifications in the relevant field.

Recommendations: In the future, we recommend that NOKUT should interpret the numerical regulations in section 2-3 as applying to the teacher education programme as a whole, not to individual MA specialisations. In particular, requiring that 10% of staff have professor-level qualifications within each of the MA specialisations has the potential to create a counterproductive and very difficult to meet hiring pressure for TEIs. In practice, this pressure may lead to the rapid, short-term hiring of staff with professor-level qualifications in low-percentage part-time roles (most often "professor II" roles), with the primary aim of passing a numerical bar, rather than to building capacity more gradually and sustainably.

We recognise that NOKUT's current interpretation of the regulation is an attempt to ensure that the new programmes have an adequate level of research competence distributed across their key teaching areas. In teacher education, research specialisations are not necessarily generalizable, meaning that a high percentage of doctorate-holders on staff does not in itself mean that the programme has teachers with in-depth subject knowledge in the full range of areas the programme aims to cover. For instance, a staff member with a doctorate in physics will raise the total percentage of doctorate holders on staff, but will obviously not easily be able to fill a

teaching need in the field of Norwegian didactics. For this reason, if NOKUT does change its interpretation according to our recommendation, institutions will still need to ensure that their staff composition allows for the necessary subject knowledge and research competence in their key teaching areas. For many institutions, this will require a process of capacity-building over time. We advise institutions to focus both on new hires and on professional development for their existing staff, making use of research capacity-building organisations like NAFOL.

We believe it is especially important for institutions to ensure a good distribution of staff members with *doctoral-level* qualifications. The uneven distribution of staff members with *professor-level* qualifications is a less pressing issue, since the added importance of professor-level expertise has less to do with their specific subject knowledge and more with their greater research experience, which allows them to contribute to the research development of the academic environment as a whole by collaborating with and providing guidance for colleagues. Institutions should work to ensure that they make broad and cross-disciplinary use of their professors' research expertise.

Practice

The current situation: The Regulations Relating to the Framework Plan for Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education specify that programmes should include at least 110 days of practice (that is, days where students of teaching are working in schools and classrooms) in total, with at least 80 days across years 1-3 and at least 30 days across years 4-5. In practice, to the best of our knowledge, many, if not all TEIs place the final 30 practice days in year 4 and have no practice at all in year 5.

Recommendation: The framework regulations should be changed to specify at least 30 days of practice in year 4 and at least 30 days of practice in year 5. This change could be accomplished in two ways. The first option is to increase the total number of practice days from 110 to 140. The other option is to reduce the number of practice days from 80 to 50 in years 1 to 3, while increasing the number of practice days from 30 to 60 in years 4 and 5. From our international perspective, the first option is highly preferable, but we are well aware that this would be costly, and would require the government to increase its funding to the teacher education programs. Our second option does not increase the total number of practice days, thus it is budget neutral for the programs. However, both suggestions will require changes to the national framework regulations. Our main point is that students need more practice late in their studies, and that there are different ways to achieve this. Again we highly recommend option 1 with the overall number of days of practice increased.

This recommendation is based on the fact that it is preferable for PLS-students to have a higher concentration of practice time when they are further into their education and thus more able to make use and further develop their knowledge and skill base when they are actually closer to entering the field. It is also essential that the practice periods be long and coherent enough to allow for significant professional tasks to be accomplished, including for example, long-term planning, curriculum development, making accommodations for those with special learning needs, working with colleagues and parents, and conducting and learning from both formative and summative assessments. In addition, long coherent supervised teaching periods allow student teachers to learn the skills and practice of teaching in interaction with more experienced practitioners and teacher educators.

Second, the *Regulations Relating to the Framework Plan for Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education* stipulate that the master thesis should be "profession- orientated and

practice-based.” Although the policy documents do not specify what these terms mean, based on our international expertise in teacher education, we recommend that these terms be interpreted to mean that the master thesis focus on “problems of practice,” which emerge from student teachers’ full participation in the life of the classroom and school. In order to investigate these problems in their schools and classrooms, the PLS-students would engage in teacher research or other forms of practice-based inquiry. This kind of practice-based research, which draws on data from the classroom, yields knowledge that is highly usable in the local context. This knowledge is valuable to school-based educators who are hosting the PLS-students in their classrooms, but often this knowledge is also of interest well beyond the local setting. In order to conduct this type of research, it is necessary to expand the number of days the PLS-students spend in the schools during the last two years of the programs.

MA supervision

The current situation: One of the central capacity issues facing the new MA programmes is MA supervision. By 2020, large numbers of PLS-students will be in need of supervisors with the experience and skills to offer research supervision.

Recommendation: While many more skilled research supervisors with doctoral-level research experience are clearly needed in the TEI programmes, doctoral research experience is only one of many potentially important qualities for a teacher educator, and hiring processes need to take other forms of experience into account as well. This means that institutions should not rely solely on new hires to increase their supervision capacity, but should be encouraged to explore other forms of capacity-building. We recommend that the Ministry sets aside funding for TEIs to develop innovative and collaborative research supervision practices, including for example, cohort or group supervision, peer support processes, and supervisory partnerships between TEIs and schools. One such form of collaborative supervision, cohort supervision, involves a staff member with PhD-level or professor-level research qualifications collaborating with a group of other TEI staff members and/or school-based educators to supervise the MA thesis work of a group of students. This kind of approach has multiple benefits for the students’ thesis work, including at least: increased supervision expertise among TEI staff, increased collaboration across the TE programme; and enhanced collaboration between TEIs and practice schools. This approach would also make it possible to link in productive ways the research of the PLS-students to the ongoing research projects and interests of the schools.

Additional Support for Deans and Program Leaders

The current situation. Many of the deans and program leaders at the newly-merged institutions are new to leadership roles and also to some of the institutions they are now working with. Both the deanship and program leader position are challenging jobs in TEIs, especially in the midst of multiple institutional changes and challenges. These individuals are expected to lead major structural changes (institutional mergers) as well as deliver new teacher education programs across multiple campuses. Without strong competent leadership and collaboration between leaders at different institutions, there is a risk the PLS TE reform might fail to live up to its potential.

Recommendations: We recommend that the Ministry provide resources for drawing together the deans and program leaders from across TEIs and for offering coaching aimed at bringing the institutions together around the PLS TE reforms. This coaching could focus on building research capacity, internationalisation, building collaboration, and extending networks.

2020 NOKUT supervision of TEIs

The current situation: NOKUT is currently considering the possibility of a supervision of teacher education institutions in 2020. Although it is our understanding that NOKUT has yet to determine the best form for this process to take, our experience meeting with teacher educators at the TEIs suggests that they are anxious about the prospect of an upcoming supervision and that, to a certain extent, they are making decisions about their new programmes more to be sure they are in compliance with the new regulations than because the decisions are best for the programmes.

Recommendations: We believe that the prospect of a potentially punitive supervision may be making TEIs counterproductively risk-averse. The International Advisory Panel recommends that NOKUT replace the 2020 supervision with a formative evaluation. This would take the immediate pressure off the institutions, particularly with regard to their staffing levels and research capacity. This would also make it more likely that the TEIs, which are undergoing many major changes, will be able to take risks and be innovative. In addition, we believe that an evaluation with well-chosen focus areas and a clear formative purpose could be useful in providing feedback and guidance regarding the institutions' change processes.

We suggest that the evaluation focuses on the following:

Regulatory areas:

- Supervision arrangements (both academic and practice-oriented)
- Distribution of practice days
- Institutions' active steps and strategies to build their own research capacity in education and to support practitioner research literacy in schools
- Arrangements for partnership with the schools, including interaction between supervision of practice and thesis

Broader, more formative areas:

- Partnership with the students – how the programme builds on understanding their motivations, professional aspirations, challenges and expectations
- Integration across the different forms of knowledge included in the programme (subject, education research, practitioner knowledge etc.)

Conclusion

From an international perspective we believe that there the PLS TE reform is an ambitious reform that is definitely moving in the right direction and that it has the potential to educate strong Norwegian teachers. Yet, as we discuss above, we believe the Ministry of Education and Research and NOKUT will need to address the issues we discuss above in order to increase the likelihood of success of this ambitious reform.

We look forward to continuing our work for the next 18 months. We have now gained an understanding and appreciation for the regulatory framework, the reform, and the challenges the institutions and teacher education academic staff is facing. In the coming months we look forward to continuing to support the institutions and teacher education academic staff in their efforts to provide stronger teacher education in Norway.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Cochran-Smith,
Professor, Boston College

Viv Ellis,
Professor, King's College London

Mikael Alexandersson,
Professor, Göteborgs universitet

Lexie Grudnoff,
Associate Professor, The Univ. of Auckland

Alis Oancea,
Professor, University of Oxford,

Auli Toom
Professor, Helsingfors universitet

Karen Hammerness,
Director of Educational Research and Evaluation,
American Museum of Natural History