

## **Paper (2000 words)**

### **Introduction**

In Ireland the scale of change and new initiatives in teacher education (TE) since the establishment of the Teaching Council (2006) has been reported as being “unprecedented” (O’ Donoghue, Harford and O’ Doherty, 2017). Examples of this are manifest in the myriad of phases the reconceptualization of TE has passed through with the aim of ‘progressing standards’ and achieving greater levels of success vis-a-vis various global metrics. One such initiative was the 2011 “Review of the Structure of Initial Teacher Education Provision in Ireland” (Sahlberg, 2012) which instigated an on-going process of rationalisation of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers resulting in institutional consolidations, mergers, and takeovers. Irish ITE programmes are now characterised as either consecutive models (postgraduate) or concurrent models (undergraduate). Whereas the latter has long been part of the Irish ITE ‘landscape’, the former was a product of the 2011 Sahlberg Report, which recommended introducing a two-year Masters level qualification to replace the one-year diploma.

Despite the mania for reform of most facets of ITE by the state, the financial structure(s) have for a number of reasons remained untouched. For those students undertaking a consecutive programme (the focus of this paper) they are still expected to be entirely self-funding; including programme fees, living costs and associated programme costs. In short, the financial responsibility for their professional education is solely borne by the student and in many instances, his/her family. For those on concurrent programmes there are no direct programme fees or restrictions to grants. The authors argue that the gains made are being threatened and jeopardised by unintended consequences of the additional costs both emotional and financial. These unintended consequences in turn impact negatively on the attractiveness of entry to the teaching profession and thereafter on teacher supply.

This paper presents important findings that highlight issues of ITE programme costs (emotional and financial), student-teacher well-being, equity, access and engagement with ITE programmes, inclusion/exclusion of student-teachers and student-teacher/teacher socio-economic class in Ireland.

## **Objective/Purpose**

The objective of this paper is to focus specifically on the research findings from a post-primary (secondary) student-teacher sample (PME) (n=391) and addresses the overarching research question: “What is the cost of being a student teacher in Ireland?” through both a qualitative and a quantitative lens.

The interest in the impact of costs (emotional and financial) was piqued in the main by anecdotal evidence observed and noted by the researchers during the PME programme. It was noted that one of the most challenging aspects for students and indeed a possible impediment to completion or full engagement in the PME were the actual costs for students. Mindful of Miles et al’s (2014) contention that research questions represent the facets of inquiry that the researcher most wants to explore, the researchers opted to focus on the net effect of costs and how they impact on student outcomes.

## **Perspective/Theoretical framework**

Murchan (p 99 2018) reports that adjustment to policy and practices in education are “increasingly frequent, often in response to actual or perceived needs or deficits”. A prioritised response to the PISA (2009) results in Ireland (Cosgrove et al., 2010; Perkins et al., 2010) focused on initial teacher education (ITE). This mirrored global responses and reforms in ITE in other jurisdictions which were epitomised by “high-stakes accountability, market-based reforms and highly politicised questions about where and how teachers should be prepared” (Cochran-Smith, 2017). Prior to this and underpinned by the Bologna process, teacher education systems across European countries had begun to converge along a parallel structural path (Harford, p 249, 2010) which was epitomised by a “universitisation of teacher education and the concomitant professionalisation of teaching” (Harford, p 249, 2010). Murchan’s (2018) reference to the concept of “policy-borrowing” typically relating to innovating and improving processes at home in a desire to remain educationally and economically competitive (2018) is relevant in this research case. The provision of two years postgraduate study in Finland was reported (Niemi, Jukku-Sihvonen, 2009) to afford

student teachers the opportunity to engage in a high-quality programme of ITE focusing on breadth, width and depth of knowledge while supporting an inclusive but differentiated approach. This was further supported by a noticeably smaller achievement deficit between higher and lower achievement levels of post-primary level students in Finland (Caldwell, 2012; Walsh, 2015) attributed to high-quality, purposeful ITE programmes. Additionally, Murchan's, (2018) spotlighting of the issue of the fidelity of policy implementation at local level in the implementation of educational reforms raises the issues of policy ambiguity, ambitiousness of instructional ideas, institutional and individual capacity and push-back from stakeholders (Elmore 2003; Coburn et al. 2016).

### **Methods/Techniques/Modes of Enquiry**

This research project was designed as a two-phase case study; Phase 1 was a pilot conducted in 2016 with a smaller cohort of participants (n=157) while Phase 2 included a more extensive and investigative case study conducted in 2018 across a wider cohort of participants (n=474).

The methodology for Phase 2 of the study involved the distribution of an online questionnaire to PME students nationally. The intention was to generate data from students to answer the following research question:

- What is the cost (financial and emotional) of being a student teacher in Ireland?

The authors designed a questionnaire to generate both quantitative and qualitative data which consisted of four sections: 1) Background Information, 2) Financial Expenditure and Income, 3) Financial Stress, Impact and 4) Future Suggestions. The questions included a mixture of dichotomous questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. In Section 1 and 2, the majority of questions were taken directly from the instrument used in the 2016 pilot study as these were deemed to be sufficiently validated and robust. The questions in Section 3 relating to Financial Stress were adopted from a validated instrument designed by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (2015) in the U.S. Section 4 comprised of two open-ended questions and one Likert scale question adopted directly from the Eurostudent Survey V (Harmon & Foubert, 2009). This question asked students to determine the extent to

which they were currently experiencing financial difficulties. Prior to distribution, the full questionnaire was piloted with four PME students (two Year 1 and Two Year 2) who offered advice regarding its layout and structure and the wording of some questions. The final version of the questionnaire was then transcribed into Survey Monkey and following institutional ethical approval was circulated via email to Education departments in HEIs around the country in March 2018.

## **Data Sources**

The findings in this paper refer specifically to the data generated through responses from post-primary (secondary) student teachers to the online questionnaire.

## **Results**

### *Section 1: Background Information*

In total 391 post-primary student teachers completed the questionnaire. This was split evenly between Year 1 (49%) and Year 2 (51%) students. The sample was predominately female (72%) and the age of respondents ranged from 20 – 47 years (modal age (24%) was 23).

Prior to entering the PME programme, the majority of respondents (57%) reported that they were full/ part-time students. When asked how they funded the PME programme, the most common response was Family/Partner (38%), with a further 3% noting it was a combination of both Self-Funding and Family (see Figure 1). A cross-tabulation between Sources of funding and Parents Income revealed some noteworthy findings. As shown on Table 1, students whose parents/carers joint income was less than €35,000 were less likely to rely on support from family / partner (i.e. 24% compared to 69% in the '> than €100,000' category) in each of the four categories respectively). They were much more likely to rely on a loan from a financial institution (33% compared to 12% in the '> than €100,000' category).

### *Section 2: Financial Expenditure and Income*

In brief, the mean weekly expenses of participants are outlined in Table 2. The mean weekly amount spent by participating students was €614. In order to pay for such expenses the majority of students undertook work while registered on the PME programme. Overall, 76%

of participants got paid for work carried out in schools while on school placement. The majority of this (84%) was substitution work and overall the hours ranged from 1 – 20 per week (mean of 4.7 hours). This resulted in a mean payment of €119 per week. A high number of participants (71%) also worked outside of the school setting while registered on the programme. This was commonly in the hospitality sector (29%) and overall the working hours ranged from 1 - 35 per week (mean of 13.1 hours). This resulted in a mean payment of €153 per week. Other sources of weekly student income such as savings, loans and scholarships are outlined in Table 3 which determines that the mean weekly amount of income for participating students was €513; on average, students had a weekly deficit of €101 over the course of the two-year PME programme.

### *Section 3: Financial Stress*

In order to predict students' level of financial stress the authors utilised a financial stress index created by NSSE (2015). The results of these scales are outlined in Tables 4 and 5. In brief the results showed that over 70% of students either often or very often:

- Worried about having enough money for regular expenses
- Chose not to participate in an activity due to lack of money
- Investigated working more hours to pay for costs

Furthermore, 73% of participants were in agreement that working for pay interfered with their academic performance.

### *Section 4: Impact and Future Suggestions*

As evidenced in Table 6, 35% of participants noted that they were currently experiencing serious or very serious financial difficulties. Participants were asked to provide a brief overview of the impact (if any), that the costs associated with the PME programme had on them and were asked for suggestions for how the Irish Government could alleviate some of the financial pressures currently facing student teachers. In short, the net impact of the costs on participants was increased levels of stress, anxiety and diminished mental health, which in turn impacted negatively on performance and progression. Participants' main proposal to alleviate financial pressures included a payment on placement (Practicum)

and/or government support in the form of a bursary/grant. Table 6 shows a small sample of data generated in this section.

### **Substantiated Conclusions**

A policy decision to introduce a significant change to the way Irish student-teachers were to be prepared as teachers was commendable and aspirational as a legitimate effort to raise education standards nationally and to ensure long-term gains. However, this research demonstrates how policy-borrowing from other jurisdictions to underpin local implementation without comprehensively scoping out the local landscape, consulting with all stakeholders and adjusting accordingly has left a bitter aftertaste for Irish student-teachers. These research findings are very concerning in terms of the long-term sustainability of the model of ITE underpinning the PME. Long-term gains may well be lost to short-term and limited preliminary thinking. The current shortage of teachers in Ireland may also endure further negative impact in the long-term as the profession struggles to attract potential teachers, the attractiveness and viability of the PME as evidenced in this research does not help the cause in any way.

### **Scholarly Significance**

Emphases in the literature (Conway et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010) refer to flexible pathways into teacher education in order to ensure a diverse teaching force representative of contemporary societies. Under-representation by some minority groups and low socio-economic status (SES) groups at ITE stage of the continuum is a significant concern (Keane and Heinz, 2015). This also creates questions regarding equity and the marked differential treatment of two types of ITE student; consecutive and concurrent.

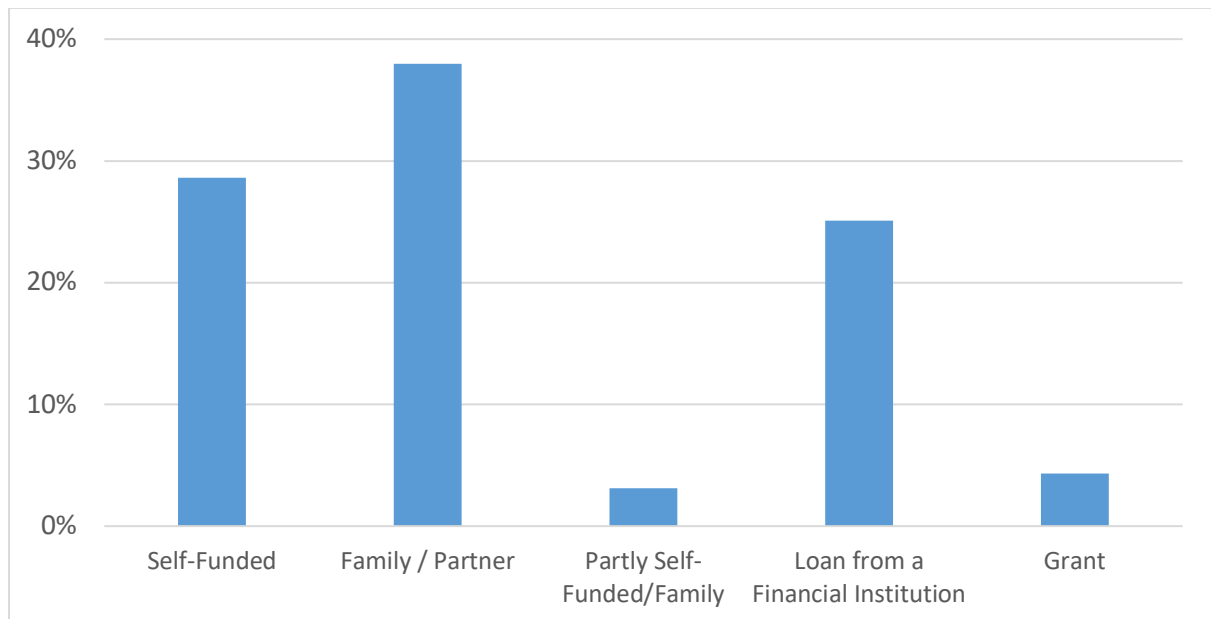
Sahlberg acknowledges that Finland is held up as a “good model” and “a witness of successful transformation of public education” (p2, 2015). Sahlberg’s claims are valid and he advocates implementation in collaboration with academics, policymakers, principals and teachers. Murchan (2018) refers to Bell and Stevenson’s (2006) identification of the unpredictability of events during a policy reform and insufficient attention to long-term

implementation. This research exposes significant challenges within a well-intentioned ITE policy reform that threaten and jeopardise the long-term implementation.

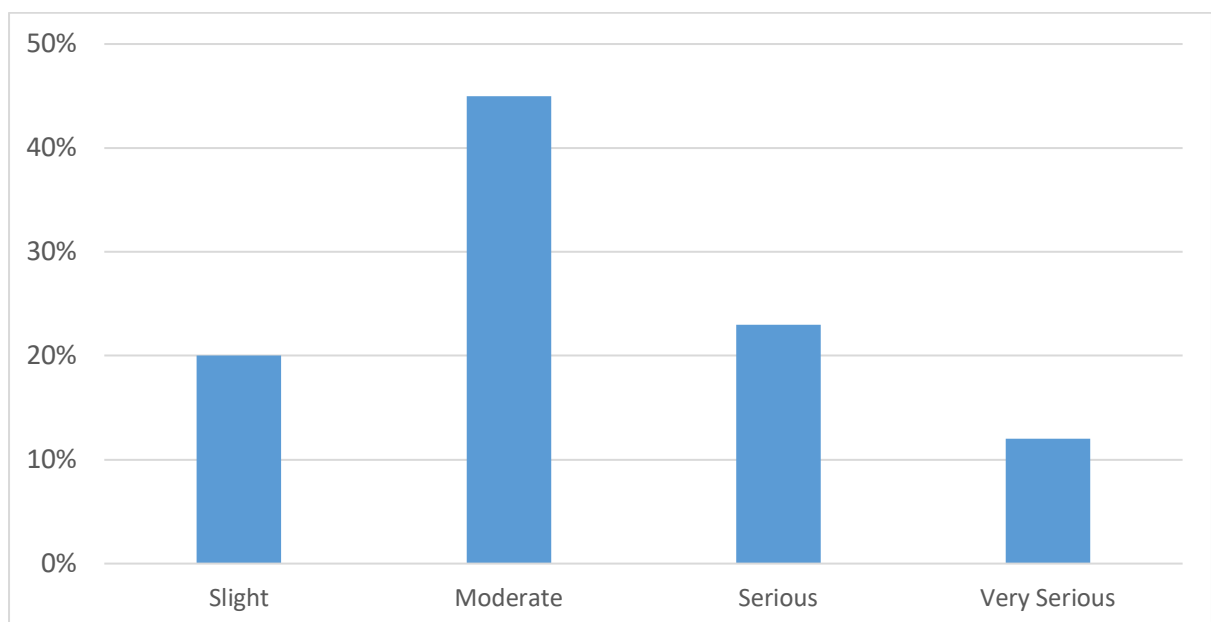
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## Figures, Charts and Tables

**Figure 1:** Source of Funding for PME programme



**Figure 2:** Extent of Financial Difficulties being experienced by participants





**Table 1:** Cross-Tabulation between Funding and Parental Income

	Less than €35,000	€35,000 - €64,999	€65,000 - €99,999	More than €100,000	
Self-funded	41	48	19	2	110
Family / Partner	35	59	38	11	143
Loan from Financial Institution	47	40	8	2	97
Scholarship Grant	1	1	1	0	3
Partly Self/Family	14	2	1	0	17
	6	3	0	1	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>380</b>

**Table 2:** Typical Weekly Expenditure

<b>Expenditure Type</b>	<b>Weekly Mean (nearest €)</b>
Accommodation (mean of €450 per month)	€113
Utility Bills (mean of €125 per month)	€31
Food	€56
Transport	€49
Socialising Entertainment	€33
Teaching Materials	€22
Course Fees (mean of €5466 per annum)	€105
Loan Repayments (43% of cohort – mean of €195 per month)	€49
Childcare (2% of cohort – mean of €567 per month)	€142

Other course related expenditure (mean of €741 per annum)	€14
<b>Mean Expenditure per Week</b>	<b>€614</b>

**Table 3:** Typical Weekly Income

<b>Income Type</b>	<b>Weekly Mean (nearest €)</b>
Paid work on School Placement (76%)	€119
Paid work outside of School Setting (71%)	€153
Support from Family/ Partner (43%)	€87
Savings (89%)	€42
Grant / Scholarship (22%)	€36
Repayable Loan (37%)	€76
<b>Mean Income per Week</b>	<b>€513</b>

**Table 4:** Financial Stress Index – Part 1 (NSSE, 2015)

	<b>NEVER</b>	<b>SOMETIMES</b>	<b>OFTEN</b>	<b>VERY OFTEN</b>
Worried about having enough money for regular expenses	3.88% 9	16.81% 39	27.16% 63	52.16% 121
Worried about paying for college	15.09% 35	17.67% 41	28.02% 65	39.22% 91
Chose not to participate in an activity due to lack of money	5.17% 12	20.69% 48	28.45% 66	45.69% 106
Chose not to purchase required academic materials due to their cost	10.34% 24	37.07% 86	25.00% 58	27.59% 64
Investigated withdrawing from college due to costs	56.03% 130	27.16% 63	8.19% 19	8.62% 20
Investigated working more hours to pay for costs	5.17% 12	19.40% 45	31.03% 72	44.40% 103
Investigated increasing borrowing to pay for costs	24.14% 56	30.17% 70	22.41% 52	23.28% 54

**Table 5: Financial Stress Index – Part 2 (NSSE, 2015)**

	Not at all		Very			
	Much					
Financial concerns interfered with my academic performance	8.62% 20	9.05% 21	12.93% 30	25.43% 59	14.22% 33	29.74% 69
Working for pay interfered with my academic performance	10.34% 24	6.03% 14	10.78% 25	9.91% 23	22.41% 52	40.52% 94
I worry about making enough money after college to repay my student loans	26.29% 61	9.91% 23	16.81% 39	11.64% 27	6.90% 16	28.45% 66

**Table 6: Impact of Costs and Future suggestions (selection of student qualitative data)**

Stress/Anxiety/Worries/Concerns	Payment on Placement
<i>"It has caused me stress and required me to work when I should be studying/participating on course work/preparing for school placement"</i>	<i>"Paid Placements. Increased access to grants"</i>
<i>"Unable to afford bills at times. Working every weekend and commuting every morning. Illness and tiredness as a result with anxiety and stress due to financial worries and academic pressure."</i>	<i>"I think that student teachers should be paid a small amount for school placements. .... It's very tough working in school all week and giving your lesson plans and resources 100% and then having to work all day Saturday and Sunday also. I find that this adds to the stress and the workload and personally leaves me very stressed and pressurised"</i>
<i>"I'm mentally and physically draining myself working most nights to try and have money for regular things"</i>	<i>".. students should at least be paid while on placement. I teach 12 classes a week, am available in school from 9-4, Tuesday to Friday from September to May and I don't receive a cent"</i>
<i>"Stressful, wasn't focusing on my college work at times because I was worried about finances"</i>	<i>"I considered postponing my studies several times and considered dropping out at times due to the lack of pay during placement."</i>

<p><i>“Due to the cost of the PME course I have increased my working hours in my part time job, this leaving me exhausted and drained... I have had to rush assignments due to lack of timing between placement and work. Overall it has had an impact on my mental health also”</i></p>	
<p><i>“I have never been more stressed than this year, I had three jobs last summer and every cent from the three of them have gone to paying accommodation and fees”</i></p>	<p><i>“The problem comes from my placement school. Myself and the other PMEs regularly do substitution work which we do not get paid for. Last week, I was owed over €150 and I received €20 .... So far this year I am owed about €1000 and I’ve received around €300”</i></p>
<p><i>“It has interfered with my progression throughout the entire course. I had a six-hour daily commute .... Not alone that but the physical toll that took on me, I got to the first week of May and I had to come out on sick certs because I could no longer function properly.”</i></p>	<p>Pay student teachers for school placement - a reduced wage especially in PME Year 2 when you have to do 21 weeks of unpaid teaching practice and you are practically doing the same work as a full-time teacher. If you were paid for your placement it would at least cover the costs to get to school, clothes and materials. It’s very disheartening and you feel like free labour. It deters young people wanting to become teachers. It’s miserable.</p>

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