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ABSTRACT

If teacher education is to be taken seriously, it must be research-based with teacher educators as active researchers and perceived as 'public intellectuals'. This re-positioning of teacher education to be 'research driven' comes with pressure on teacher educators to focus on securing research funding and increase publication output. This expectation for research productivity competes with increasing calls for more relevant and imaginative teacher preparation programmes. To present the challenging contexts in which Irish teacher educators operate with respect to fulfilling both a teaching and research remit, this paper maps the changing higher education landscape, the regulation of teacher education along with a myriad of curricular reforms at primary and post-primary level. The paper then explores current teacher educators' positioning in the Irish context as active users and producers of research through in-depth interviews with ten experienced teacher educators.

Introduction

It has been proposed for some time now that if teacher education is to be taken seriously, it must be research-based with teacher educators as active researchers and perceived as 'public intellectuals' (Cochran-Smith 2005; European Commission 2015). This re-positioning of teacher educators results in associated teacher education programmes being expected to be 'research driven', developing a research disposition among teacher educators as well as preparing consumers and producers of research (Tack and Vanderlinde 2014). Such a focus is accompanied by pressure from university leadership for teacher educators to focus on securing research funding and increase publication output (Furlong 2013; Stern 2016). In mapping the field of teacher education research in the UK, Menter et al. (2010) commented that teacher education research remains a young sub-field of education research more generally. The notion of a 'dual economy' in the teacher education space has become more evident where some academic staff are primarily teacher educators and others are primarily researchers, with some teacher educators experiencing tension between the two forms of academic activity (Christie and Menter 2009; Munn and Baron 2008).

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To appreciate the positioning of teacher educators in Irish higher education, it is imperative to understand the changing expectations and challenges facing higher education following a decade of austerity and a global financial crisis. We begin by sharing such expectations and challenges before focusing on teacher education in the Irish context. We then focus specifically on teacher educators in the Irish education system before sharing the methods, results and discussion from the study.

Irish higher education and teacher education context

Higher education in ireland

While Ireland is one of the faster growing economies in Europe (https://tradingeco nomics.com/ireland/unemployment-rate), the legacy of the financial crisis still resonates in higher education presenting significant issues for teacher education (DES 2016). During austerity, the capacity of higher education in Ireland increased significantly and the government expects student numbers to increase by another third between 2016 and 2023 (Department of Education and Skills 2016). While this growth is part of the vision of the *National Strategy for Higher Education* (DES 2011), there remain serious challenges for staffing and a sustainable funding model in the sector. In 2014, the Minister for Education and Skills established an Expert Group (Department of Education and Skills 2016) to identify options for future funding of higher education. The Group reported that, 'Falling resources since 2008, a deteriorating student: staff ratio, inadequate facilities and other pressures are having a severe impact, particularly on the ability to provide high-quality undergraduate programmes' (6). While no decisions on how to fund higher education have been made, Irish universities continue to lag behind global rankings with no Irish university listed in the top 100 universities and six of the eight losing ground on the 2018 QS World University Rankings (https://www. timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-ireland). The pressures to increase research metrics (more publications and successful funding bids by academic staff) is a key focus of every university strategic plan and a key expectation for teacher education staff.

Concurrent with the *National Strategy for Higher Education*, the government established a Research Prioritisation Steering Group to identify priority areas around future investment in publicly funded research (Forfás and Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (DJEI) 2011). Fourteen priority areas (e.g. Marine Renewable Energy, Food and Health, Medical Devices) were targeted and were to 'account for the majority of future Government investment in publicly performed research and development in HEIs [Higher Education Institutions]' (Forfás and DJEI 2011, 13). Education research was not a listed priority area and, while government stated researchers from all disciplines should be eligible to submit proposals for research calls that were issued, researchers would have to show 'impact on the priority areas is evident' (13). A funding stream for educational research was not a consideration, with Irish educational researcher Sugrue (2009) arguing that Departments of Education/Schools of Education have suffered from an absence of appropriate structures and serious resource limitations. Academic staff at universities are expected to increase their research activity and higher education institutions must, 'develop sophisticated review mechanisms, performance metrics and

promotional criteria to ensure parity of esteem for differentiated research missions' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 12). Schools of Education are not immune to the impact of such increased demands and teacher educators seeking promotion must present a competitive research portfolio (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014).

Teacher education in the Irish context

It was not until the late 1960s/early 1970s in Ireland that universities' departments of education (where many teacher educators resided) began expanding and appointing staff who were prominent researchers, 'Staff in the colleges of education and in the education departments in the universities came to see engagement in research on education as an integral part of their professional responsibility' (O'Donoghue, Harford, and O'Doherty 2017, 145).

Teacher education in Ireland has been in the crosshairs of reform for the last decade and been reconfigured significantly (Coolahan et al. 2017; O'Donoghue, Harford, and O'Doherty 2017). Teacher education in Ireland has, 'entered a period of increased surveillance and control' (Waldron et al. 2012, 3). The establishment of the Irish Teaching Council, poor Irish PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results, and a Minister for Education and Skills at the latter end of his political career who wanted to make a difference, have also provided a 'perfect storm' to challenge Irish teacher education provision and Irish teacher educators in post Celtic Ireland (Looney 2012). Critics suggest Ireland has seen politicians rush into reform mode (Gleeson, Sugrue, and O'Flaherty 2017) with such endeavors resulting in, 'policy overreach and moral panic with insufficient attention to existing resources and the capacities of teacher educators to implement reconceptualised and reoriented ITE programmes' (19). Four educational policy developments in Ireland have helped to reframe the role of teacher education and educational research and the work profile and expectations of teacher educators. These are the establishment of the Teaching Council, extension of teacher education preparation, restructuring of teacher education and major curricular school revisions.

First, the Teaching Council, established on a statutory basis in 2006, is now the professional standards body for teaching. It has significant powers for teacher education and standards, policies and procedures for the education and training of teachers (Teaching Council 2001). Under Section 38 of the Act, initial teacher education programmes are subject to review and accreditation by the Teaching Council for registration purposes. A series of Teaching Council documents outline standards for teacher education programme design (e.g. entry requirements, curriculum content, partnership model for school placement, staff student ratios, and staffing qualifications). Teacher educators are expected to have significant teaching experience and, 'be research active and take lead roles with regard to assimilating, conducting, publishing and supervising research' (Teaching Council 2011/2017, 19). The Teaching Council also advocated that courses for teacher preparation should be research-based in the sense that student teachers would both generate and use research in their practice, advocating for 'teacher-as-researcher' (O'Donoghue, Harford, and O'Doherty 2017).

Second, in response to poor learning outcomes among children measured in PISA 2009, there has been a 'heightened and more urgent interest in curriculum and teacher

education policy in Ireland' (Conway and Murphy 2013, 28). The Irish Government implemented a National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (DES 2010). Teacher education preparation was extended from three to four years for undergraduate primary teacher education and from one to two years for primary and post-primary teacher education to accommodate this strategy and the Teaching Council accreditation demands. These ministerial decisions, announced in the middle of the national austerity crisis, resulted in limited resources for teacher education units to reflect the new programme and staffing demands.

Third, the Minister for Education and Skills requested a radical restructuring of the way in which teacher education is available in Ireland, which had its genesis in the *National Strategy for Higher Education* (Department of Education and Skills 2016). Until that time, primary teacher education was provided by Colleges of Education while secondary teacher education was the responsibility (for the most part) by education departments within university. Up until 2012, primary teacher education had been predominantly an undergraduate degree programme while most secondary teacher education programmes were a graduate diploma (some exceptions have been physical education, technology education, and home economic education). Many of the teacher education staff (particularly in Colleges of Education) had been practicing teachers who had been seconded from schools. There was a government perspective that the number of providers of teacher education programmes could be reduced and standards raised. An international panel (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012) was tasked to 'identify possible new structures which will recognise and address weaker areas in the system of teacher education; leverage the current strengths in the system; and envision innovative strategies so that Ireland can provide a teacher education regime that is comparable with the best in the world' (6). The report noted the 'lack of a critical mass for research purposes … the lack of common understanding by HEIs [i.e. teacher education units] with regard to research terminology calling for a culture of research in teacher education where staff are familiar with current research and are engaged in research on critical areas of teaching and teacher education (20–21). It recommended 'teacher education should be facilitated in a university setting with systematic links to clinical practice in field schools [which] would also provide a critical mass for improving capacity for high quality research' (25). The Department of Education and Skills (2012) noted that the vision for the structure of initial teacher education provision in Ireland was that by 2030 each network of teacher education institutions 'will offer research-based teacher education in internationally inspiring environments' (24). This has created tensions among teacher education communities across the sector that have yet to be resolved.

Fourth, governmental interests in curriculum following the 2009 PISA scores also led to major curricular revisions at primary and post-primary level with significant impact for teacher education programmes. The teacher education units find themselves responding not only to the content and pedagogies of their programmes but also the capacities and activities of initial teacher education faculty to address the teaching and research expectations of the Teaching Council and their university strategic priorities (Gleeson, Sugrue, and O'Flaherty 2017).

Thus, the changing higher education landscape, the regulation of teacher education along with a myriad of curricular reforms at primary and post-primary level are challenging contexts in which Irish teacher educators operate. This challenge is heightened by

the lack of human, material and financial resources to support such restructuring and reconceptualizing of initial teacher education programmes (O'Donoghue, Harford, and O'Doherty 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore current teacher educators' positioning in the Irish context as active users and producers of research through in-depth interviews with ten experienced teacher educators.

Teachers and teacher educators in the Irish education system

The teaching profession in Ireland continues to attract a student clientele of very high academic achievement and personal commitment, with entrance to teacher education programmes remaining highly competitive (Coolahan et al. 2017). It has been noted by an international review panel that the academic standard of applicants in Ireland is amongst the highest, if not the highest, in the world (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012).

The dominant professional pathway to working in teacher education in Ireland has been, until recently, that those with professional experience as teachers, along with a Master's degree, would have been initially seconded to a teacher education post for a period of up to ten years and the secondment would have been perceived as a positive career move (Waldron et al. 2012). Over time, most of these teachers secured permanent posts and opted to stay in the university. Until quite recently, these teacher educator recruits would not have been expected to have a doctoral qualification. While they would have been expected to be research-informed as to best practices in teacher education, they would not have been expected to be research active. This would also be a common scenario in European teacher education programmes (Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen 2014) though much less so for teacher education recruitment in the USA (Cochran-Smith et al. 2008).

Given this departmental staffing profile in education, Gleeson et al. (2012) explored the potential for research capacity building in initial teacher education programmes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In presenting not too dissimilar findings to those previously shared around the 'dual economy', they reported an identifiable tension between the identity of initial teacher education faculty as 'teacher educators' and 'educational researchers'. They noted the requirement to critically unpack the meaning of initial teacher education-based research and what it means to be 'research-active' as a teacher educator. They also reported that a significant minority of initial teacher education staff rated their own research experience as satisfactory or poor and that they would like more time to devote to educational research activity. Teacher educators working in the Republic of Ireland noted that pressure to publish emanated 'mainly from competitive individualism alongside changing institutional cultures particularly in the universities (...) [and] noted the influence of and the increasing importance being attached to research profiles both for academic appointments and subsequent promotions' (Gleeson et al. 2012, 6). In a more recent study conducted with a sample of teacher educators working in the Republic of Ireland (the data reported in this paper in a sub-sample of that teacher education cohort), it was reported that the top three professional learning activities valued by teacher educators all related to research – personal reading, role of research when studying one's own practice in teacher education and the extent to which research is essential to inform teacher education practice (Czerniawski et al. 2018).

Method

Participants

A sample of ten higher education teacher educators in Ireland were sourced after completing a European survey that set out to establish the professional learning experiences and needs of teacher educators (Czerniawski, Guberman, and MacPhail 2017). Each of these teacher educators noted in the survey their interest in being involved further in the study. The sample of teacher educators in this study resulted in a range of demographics across age, gender, qualifications, years of experience as a teacher, years of experience as a teacher educator, academic roles and responsibilities and future aspirations as a teacher educator. Interestingly, all had achieved a PhD/EdD. Demographics for the sample of teacher educators are noted in Table 1. The differing trajectories that led to the ten individuals entering teacher education are illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 1. Teacher educator demographics (NR = no response).

| Pseudonym	Gender (Female/ Male)	Age group (years)	Range of experience as a school teacher (years)	Range of experience as a teacher educator (years)	Current institute (University/College)
Deirdre	F	55–64	10	25	University
Jean	F	35–44	1.5	6	University
Keith	M	45–54	0	7	University
Tom	M	45–54	3	10	University
Pauline	F	55–64	5	29	College
Madeline	F	55–64	17	15	University
Fiona	F	55–64	20+	18	College
Moira	F	55–64	5	28	University
Sarah	F	45–54	6	15	College
Ian	M	35–44	0	18	University
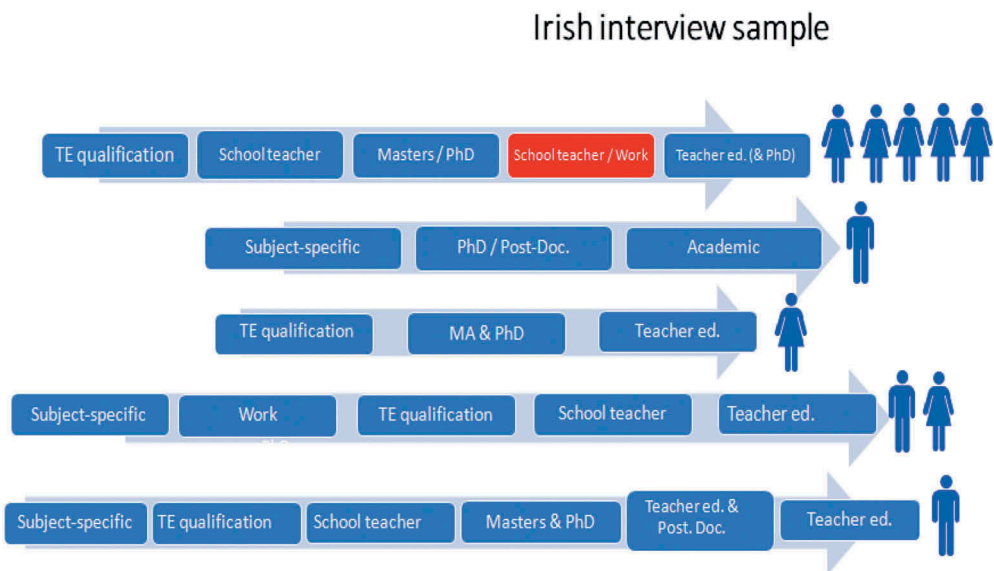
Figure 1. Trajectories leading to entry to teacher education.

Interviews

The semi-structured interview protocol was piloted with teacher educators who were not part of the sample. The pilot was conducted to ensure the wording and spirit of the questions

appropriately addressed the specific foci (research being one such foci) we intended to explore in further depth from the initial survey. Those who were responsible for conducting the pilot studies were the same individuals who conducted the main study semi-structured interviews. The interview questions closely mapped the sections of the previously completed survey and constituted questions on (i) background and demographics, (ii) professional learning opportunities and (iii) teacher education and research. Interviews were conducted in a setting of each participant's choosing and took place at the participant's place of work or over Skype. Interviewees providing informed consent for the interviews. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 90 minutes and each were transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed thematically. Initially, the two researchers identified themes related to the teacher educator as researcher. A coding process, used in identifying similar text units, followed by linking and retrieval of similarly coded segments (Mason 1996), was standardized. These were arranged under specific themes (the continuing conflict on what is considered as 'research', the extent to which teacher educators engage in research activity and the nature of such research activity, research metrics and the link between teaching and research). The data were then re-analyzed under these themes to consider their alignment with the professional development opportunities as articulated by these teacher educators. New themes emerged that necessitated further consideration and analysis of previously coded data. Two themes are now explored in the results section, (i) teacher educators' perceptions of autonomy in engaging with research activity and (ii) their perceived links between the roles of being a teacher and researcher. We discuss each theme by exploring (a) shifting goalposts and related tensions and (b) levels of professional community and self-initiated support.

Selected quotations from teacher educators are chosen to provide the reader with the teacher educator voice to reinforce the main observations. Pseudonyms are used when referring to quotes from the teacher educators.

Results

Autonomy in engaging with research activity

Shifting goalposts and related tensions

A strong research discourse was prevalent across the sample of teacher educators which was interesting as not all the teacher educators considered themselves as 'research active'. This is perhaps due to the central focus on research at the respective teacher educators' institutions (i.e. university or college in which they work), to the extent that

teacher educators stated that their institutions conveyed research expectations more clearly than expectations for teaching;

> I think it's a little easier to identify research professional needs in terms of a teacher educator sometimes because the writing is so clear on the wall in terms of what you ought to be doing and the standards you need to be meeting, whereas sometimes with teaching or in assessment (…) there's very little celebrated. (Jean)

It was apparent that some teacher educators had very quickly engaged with the research metric culture of their institutions, availing of numerous opportunities to learn about improving their research profile. They realized the necessity to become more involved in research-related activities if they intended to progress their academic career;

> very quickly I accessed workshops around journals, journal metrics. I think it is part in parcel of who we are as academics now [understanding research metrics]. We almost need to have a degree in bibliometrics as academics to be able to source the right articles, et cetera. (Keith)

In alluding to research metric discourse and the associated expected outcomes, one teacher educator noted, *If I was younger, I'd worry about it* (Moira). This draws attention to those teacher educators (like Moira) who have been working in institutions of higher education for a significant amount of time before the research rhetoric and performance metrics became key performance indicators for academic staff. While some teacher educators were not overly concerned about the change in rhetoric, others conveyed a level of frustration with what could be considered 'moving goalposts' in terms of their remit as a teacher educator and for a successful academic career;

> I do feel under pressure to research. I have had a conversation this week with my head of school about this (…) I suppose I've been at it a long time. I also say there's only so much I can do. We work for very long hours, and I do feel under pressure, I do … The rhetoric around here now sometimes is getting … People say things to you like, "We need to raise our profile." That kind of thing. Like, to be told, when you've been working in an area for 18 years, where everybody knows you, where you have produced research (…) Where something like what you've done [subject specific textbook for schools] has been so positively received, to be told to raise your profile I find quite insulting, to be honest. (Fiona)

There was a sense from the more established teacher educators that the focus of higher education institutions had shifted significantly from prioritizing and valuing teaching and supporting students to attracting research funding and undertaking research. These teacher educators were fearful that such a shift would diminish not only the focus on teaching as a successful academic career but the standing of teaching which was traditionally the central aspect of teacher education.

Others noted the difficulty and frustration in defining research-related activities specific to the content of their subject-disciplines. One such example was that of an Art and Design teacher educator who was conscious that, to be considered research-active, they were having to reconsider the way in which they could align their common practices of producing artefacts and hosting exhibitions as research activities.

Levels of professional community and self-initiated support

Some teacher educators appeared resigned to having a research expectation as part of their role. Others conveyed a genuine excitement around research;

> I love conducting research. I love inquiring (…) I think I'm naturally very inquisitive and I have an inquiry-based mind so I actually just like research, so I find an intrinsic motivation to do it very easy. It does drive me sometimes in very challenging working conditions where you have a lot that you need to do but I think I'm lucky and long may it last that that [professional] drive pushes me to engage anyway so I keep at it. (Jean)

Teacher educators conveyed a preference for many of their <u>teacher education activities</u> to be undertaken with teacher education colleagues as part of a learning community. This was also pertinent to <u>research-related activities</u> with teacher educators valuing a supportive environment that created the space and opportunity to engage with peers and colleagues around academic writing. One teacher educator admitted to being reliant on doing research with one international colleague who had a complementary skill set to theirs and in learning from others working on research projects, *that engagement stimulates me. I learn best in social situations, I know that. I learn best from interaction with other people, having those conversations* (Moira).

While teacher educators were aware of how their respective institutions defined research and associated outputs, they conveyed different degrees of flexibility in pursuing research activities and being held accountable;

> It [research identity] is determined by ourselves, really. It's just work that's going on. We've got funding through external agencies ourselves to fund a lot of these. It's not coming from the college specifically. It's quite a flexible environment to work in (…) We seem to have a bit of space and room to do things if we feel like it, if we have ideas to go with them, and so it's good like that. (Deirdre)

> There is the acknowledgement that research is important from the highest level, but if you didn't do it, I don't think there would be any consequences. Unless you were looking for a particular promotion. (Pauline)

Some teacher educators admitted to deliberately becoming more aggressive in terms of meeting the output requirements of the institution, specifically with regards to publishing in academic journals that were internationally renowned;

> I would very much say that my priority has largely swung to ISI [International Scientific Indexing] and Web of Science and that's very much a practical requirement. (Tom)

In some instances, teacher educators explained that research was built into their job descriptions when they worked in institutions that enacted a 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% service weighting to their work as an academic. There was also the opportunity for teacher educators to consider requesting extended time to undertake research-related activities through special research leave and sabbatical leave.

It was also clear that many were left to their own devices, without a close-knit teacher educator community or indeed institutional support, in their pursuit of research;

> Very attuned to the expectation that you will do research but do not feel supported or encouraged to do so (…) the expectation is actually a stronger part of the cultural script of the institution as opposed to feeling encouraged. Having said that, I have a massive intrinsic

value around research so I encourage myself. I set goals. I set targets. Then I engage where I can in supports to try and drive that agenda. (Jean)

Another teacher educator reported that while her institution expected all academics to have individual research plans, they were simply filed and consequently considered as a 'box-ticking exercise' providing no meaningful dialogue on progress or targets toward a research agenda;

> The Graduate School does expect us to have individual research plans, but they're just filed. Then I'm supposed to summarize those for the Graduate School. Again, it's a box ticking exercise rather than a meaningful exercise in my opinion. (Pauline)

Only one teacher educator alluded to concentrating on building groups of research-active teacher educators and lead them in their research endevours.

Nature of the links between the roles of teacher and researcher

Shifting goalposts and related tensions

The teacher educators who were interviewed were clear advocates for the inextricable link between teaching and research, noting that research activity was integral to the role of being an academic/teacher educator and that there was an expectation from universities that academics be research-active. Interestingly, teacher educators chose to discuss how research informed their teaching practices rather than how teaching informed their research (the latter perhaps assumed in their use of the 'teaching-research nexus' phrase);

> (…) it's [research] something that I value as a really important part of being scholarly. Not just necessarily a stereotypical way of saying that you want to keep up to date with current research, which is fine, which is true I suppose, but improving my own understanding of the areas that I teach is really important. (Ian)

The importance of doing research with children, teachers and student teachers to generate new knowledge to inform future practice as teacher educators (commonly referred to as 'practitioner research') was acknowledged;

> Unless we have some empirical understanding of what it is we do, who we are as teacher educators (…) we need the teacher research with teacher education to move forward (…) it provides us a venue to understand and to move forward, which then, hopefully, has spiraling kind of impact in terms of, I would like to think what we do here, influences what happens in schools, and ultimately influences children and youth in terms of their quality of life. (Moira)

Different to those teacher educators who were categorical in their belief that to be a teacher educator you had to be a researcher, some teacher educators implied that while they were an active 'user' of research they were not an active 'producer' of research. This was not to say that such teacher educators did not appreciate the link between teaching and research but rather that their reliance on the relationship was in sharing research with their students. The same teacher educators believed it was essential to be research informed and aware of current developments, thinking and practices in teaching and teacher education. They commented on the excessive time commitments in their role as a teacher educator and perceived lack of funding for

education research (particularly practitioner research) as two key barriers to being research active.

Levels of professional community and self-initiated support

The conversation that ensued regarding the link between teaching and research reflected a discourse that was reliant on teacher educators working individually, while seeking to access more communal research opportunities;

> Having supporting colleagues is really, really helpful, and colleagues who also practice and have a conviction (…) That's certainly really, really helpful. Now, having a commitment, having an interest, having a passion in that area is one thing, but also it doesn't obviate the need to also hit and connect with the metric requirements. It has to cross over. (Tom)

> to be part of the [research] group now is fantastic, because that's going to challenge my thinking. Some of the people in that group, and it is a small group, [and] their thinking around core ideas around teaching and learning are fantastic (…) sometimes they're theorizing things that I think are very practical, and so it's great for the old gray matter, to be meeting people like that. (Sarah)

Teacher educators also noted the lack of a shared academic community conversation that accommodated their interest in ensuing a teacher-researcher identity;

> (…) at university level it irritates me that we tend to hear from people who are promoting teaching or we hear from those who are promoting research, but we never hear from them collectively, and each side assumes that we can give all our time to that activity exclusively. I'd like to think that those communities come together and discuss. (Keith)

Discussion

The recent policy context in Ireland has re-framed both the positioning of teacher education in the high education sector with a 'research rich university environment' and the role of research in teacher education programmes. Significantly, the joint influences of the positioning of teacher education within a research rich environment as recommended in the recent *International Review Panel Report* (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012), along with increased rankings pressure on universities, has meant that there is more pressure on teacher educators who work in Irish higher educational institutions to acquire a PhD and produce research outputs. It was evident that all teacher educators interviewed in this study were familiar with the ongoing and pervasive discourse surrounding the necessity to be research active as a university faculty member.

While there would be a view that teacher educators should be active researchers of their practice and of teacher education (Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012), others (Velon: The Dutch Association of Teacher Educators) would hold the view that it is more important that teacher educators are research informed about teacher education but not necessarily research active (see http://www.lerarenopleider.nl). It was apparent that the sample of teacher educators interviewed for this study viewed their work in higher education aligned with the concept of a dual economy as articulated by Christie and Menter (2009) and to be both a teacher educator and an academic scholar. Some interviewees conveyed a distinction between their role as a scholar and as

a researcher, implying that the role of the academic scholar is more about being an informed academic of the relevant literature and the researcher is deemed to be more outcome-based. As alluded to earlier in the paper, an additional expectation for teacher educators was to familiarize themselves with significant curriculum changes to school subject content syllabi and the need to revise their teacher education programmes to best reflect these changes. Along with new curricular specifications for some school subjects being introduced, there was a changing focus to more pedagogies that reflected student voice and student-centred teaching and learning.

The interviewees from this study confirmed the high percentage of teacher educators in Ireland who have previously been noted as research active (Czerniawski et al. 2018), believing they should be doing research in their current role in higher education as well as conveying capabilities not just in teaching but also both doing and presenting their research with and to others. Interestingly, some teacher educators did not identify as being 'research active', while all appeared to appreciate the necessity to become more involved in research-related activities. In striving to become more involved, some teacher educators suggested the necessity of a research community to motivate them to be research active while others were determined even resigned to being research active without such an infrastructure.

The teacher educators hinted at the potential lack of alignment between their research activities and their teacher educator responsibilities. That is, they were less engaged with or familiar with research on the preparation of future teachers (as in specifically teacher education research). Some teacher educators acknowledged the necessity for them to determine how best they could assure that the nature of their research engagement aligned with their teacher education responsibilities. If the research they are reading or doing is not teacher education research, then such research might not often inform their work as teacher educators. This interpretation would be supported by Lunenberg, Dengerink, and Korthagen (2014) extensive review of the research on teacher educators where they noted that often teacher educators are 'insufficiently informed about the [teacher education] literature and … not focused on strengthening their theoretical knowledge base' (74) of teacher education.

Conclusion

This small Irish teacher educator cohort was an active and engaged group of academic staff who were practicing teacher educators. Their commitment to preparing teachers for contemporary schooling was evident and they were not afraid of hard work. However, their frustrations with local working conditions reflected a level of academic freedom to follow their research interests but with limited supports, recognition or research funding for the teacher research they valued (action research with students, teachers and school partners (Forfás and Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2011). These teacher educators were clear about expectations for research productivity and building a national and international research profile, securing grants to support their research yet without the necessary national/university level infrastructure for teacher education research. There is little value for research autonomy among academics if the absence of appropriate infrastructures makes for little more than benign neglect (Tom 1997). Consequently, the necessity

(posed by Sahlberg, Furlong, and Munn 2012) for a national research institution for educational research funded by the government continues to be a welcomed, and hoped for, research infrastructure for teacher education and teacher educator research.

For most (though not all), the expectation for promotion and career development demanded a research profile as teacher educators. They were members of the university community and were keen to engage in research. For most, the policy changes to teacher education accreditation as imposed by the Teaching Council were met with energy and a willingness to comply. Many welcomed these changes, viewing the process of programme accreditation as a time to reflect and update elements of their programmes. However, the failure of government and local departments to resource these changes (longer programmes, new modules, collaborative partnerships with schools in support of longer school placements) left some frustrated, feeling as Gleeson, Sugrue, and O'Flaherty (2017) noted 'squeezed between the demands for extended school placements and … pressures to be research active' (28). The slow pace of change is inevitable when minimal attention is given to change strategies and to resources to implement the plan (Tom 1997).

These teacher educators felt squeezed in other ways within this dual economy (Gleeson, Sugrue, and O'Flaherty 2017). Their commitments to teacher education research was to be research informed about best practices in teacher education. Many, however, noted they should be more active but struggled to manage the level of teaching required with the time to be research active. They wanted to be learners and researchers who engaged with a departmental teacher education learning community. Yet some described how they measured that engagement carefully while focused on generating the right kind of research metrics (citations, funding submissions, publications). These teacher educators did not speak to the potential for complementarity between these activities. The implication here is that the collective voice of teacher educators is compromised in this demanding dual economy of teacher accreditation and research productivity. We suggest that, despite these challenging contexts, and to avoid being compromised even further, professional responsibility demands 'keeping open spaces and opportunities' (Solbrekke and Sugrue 2014, 19) to articulate as a community the purposes and the values of the work they do as teacher educators and thereby shape the discourses of reform of research and teacher education. The recent establishment of a National Teacher Education and Teacher Educator Forum in Ireland intends to provide such a space by supporting the professional development of teacher educators and contributing to a collective voice on shaping national teacher education and related research discourse.

The findings from this study do shed light on who are some of the teacher educators in Ireland, how they see their roles in higher education, and what opportunities they have or believe they need in support of their role as teacher educators in a fast-changing policy environment that is the Irish context.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributors

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