

Irish Pre-Service Teachers' Expectations for Teaching as a Career:

A Snapshot at a Time of Transition

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Abstract

Recent graduates of teacher education programmes in Ireland are entering their careers at a time characterized by an erosion of teacher autonomy, increased bureaucratic demands, and narrower curriculum specifications. These changes are typical features of what Sahlberg (2011) has termed the global educational reform movement (GERM), and evidence suggests that they can have a negative impact on teacher morale, and on how teaching as a career is perceived. This, in turn, can have detrimental effects on teacher recruitment and retention. This study examined the career expectations of two cohorts of Irish pre-service teachers (n=491) at the point of transition between college and work. The data gathered were also used to investigate if recent changes to the B.Ed. programme are associated with any changes in career expectations. Overall, teachers indicated strong expectations on issues such as doing a worthwhile job, feeling satisfied with pupil achievement and fulfilling personal needs, however, expectations with regard to the adequacy of salaries were low, and appear to have diminished further throughout the period 2014 to 2016.

Introduction

The issues of attrition and turnover within the teaching profession have received a great deal of attention over the years (e.g. Borman & Dowling, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006). Rates vary internationally, but problems with teacher retention have been especially pronounced in countries such as the U.K., the U.S., and Australia (OECD, 2005). The most recent national estimates from the U.S. suggest that 8% of public school teachers leave the profession, and a further 8% transfer to a different establishment, over the course of one year (Goldring, Taie & Riddles, 2014). As career mobility is increasingly becoming the norm, it should be acknowledged that this pattern is not necessarily unique to teaching (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2008). However, given the negative impact on schools (OECD, 2005), and on individual pupil achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013), attrition and turnover within the teaching profession are issues that undoubtedly warrant attention.

Of particular concern is that attrition rates tend to follow a U-shaped curve across the professional lifespan (Guarino et al., 2006). This indicates that age-related retirement accounts for only some of the phenomenon. Indeed, some reports have suggested that 30-50% of beginning teachers in the U.S. and U.K. leave the profession within their first five years (e.g. Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). The importance of identifying the factors underlying this early career attrition is well recognized. An understanding of *which* teachers leave and *why* is essential, if we are to develop effective policy initiatives to improve teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Lindqvist, Nordänger & Carlsson, 2014; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014).

Research addressing these questions has revealed a number of factors associated with teacher attrition. These include: lack of administrative support, insufficient mentoring, poor student discipline, large numbers of low-achieving students, excessive bureaucratic demands, lack of autonomy, desire to spend more time with family, dissatisfaction with salary and career prospects, and the perceived low status of the profession (Clanindin et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Guarino et al., 2006; Kersaint et al., 2007; Scherff, 2008; Smethem, 2007; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). These factors are complex and inter-related. For instance, teachers may tolerate low

salaries if other working conditions are satisfactory (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lieu & Meyer, 2005). Similarly, the challenges associated with working in schools serving disadvantaged areas may be alleviated by the presence of effective leadership and supportive administrators (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

When interpreting the findings of Dinham and Scott's (1996) nationally representative survey of Australian teachers, Schoepner (2010) suggested that any circumstance that inhibits a teacher's ability to provide quality instruction to students will have a negative impact on job satisfaction. This theory can help explain why many of the factors listed above are associated with attrition. Indeed, studies focusing on the motives of those who choose to *remain* in the profession have converged on the importance of teacher 'efficacy' (e.g. Nieto, 2003; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). That is, the belief that one is achieving success with students may be a powerful motivator for a teacher to persist with the career. Indeed, promising findings from Morgan, Ludlow, Kitching, O'Leary and Clarke (2009) suggest that the experience of recurrent positive events related to these intrinsic rewards, on a day-to-day basis, are especially strong contributors to teachers' sense of commitment to the profession.

Perceived efficacy is undoubtedly an important predictor of teacher retention, but it should be acknowledged that this reflects a somewhat historical notion of teaching as a 'vocation', rather than a career. As Watt and Richardson (2008) pointed out, cultural changes in recent years may affect the extent to which teachers still hold this belief. Indeed, both Margolis (2008), and Gallant and Riley (2014), identified further 'hooks' that may also be necessary to keep contemporary teachers in the profession, such as the experience of differentiated roles, exposure to activities that foster their growth as individuals, and opportunities to mentor and develop others.

Teacher Expectations

One factor that may be especially worthy of consideration when making sense of teachers' decisions to stay or leave is that of their initial expectations about teaching as a career. A longitudinal cohort study by Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis and Parker (2000) revealed that those who reported greater 'imagined pleasure' prior to entering the teaching profession were more likely to remain there over the course of 15 years, suggesting that positive

expectations can influence teachers' career trajectories. On the other hand, evidence from the field of organizational psychology suggests that *unrealistically* high career expectations are associated with disappointment and frustration (Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Wiese & Carraher, 1998). As Watt and Richardson (2008) contended, it may be the case that regardless of the objective demands and returns associated with teaching, if these are poorly aligned with teachers' initial expectations, disillusionment, and consequently early attrition, will follow.

Kyriacou, Kunc, Stephens and Hultgren (2003) argued that this should not be a problem in the teaching profession if teacher education programmes succeed in providing pre-service teachers (PSTs) with an accurate idea of what the work involves. They further highlighted the possibility that some teachers may not view teaching as a long-term career to begin with. It is thus important to consider beginning teachers' expectations regarding issues such as salary, workload, social status, career prospects, and the potential for efficacy and autonomy in the profession. By tracking these prior expectations, and how these interact with the reality of the day-to-day activities of teaching over time, it may be possible to achieve a clearer understanding of how 'stayers' and 'leavers' arrive at their decisions. As Kersaint et al. (2007) pointed out, this strategy may help identify those who are at risk of early attrition, and inform the development of intervention strategies whilst teachers are still on the job.

To date, however, research focusing specifically on PSTs' expectations has been relatively rare. Kyriacou, Kunc, Stephens and Hultgren (2003) explored the issue with a sample comprised of 121 PSTs from a post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) course in York, England, and 75 PSTs from a B.Ed. programme in Stavanger, Norway. These PSTs completed a 16-item Likert-style questionnaire exploring their expectations of teaching at the beginning of their respective teacher education programmes. Responses revealed that a majority of PSTs endorsed the social value of teaching, and were confident that they would derive job satisfaction from pupil achievement. Furthermore, many acknowledged that teaching would involve some 'bad times', but nonetheless expected to stay in the profession for more than 10 years. Many had high expectations with regard to career progression, indicating that they anticipated holding management positions within a few years. Some concerns were also evident, most notably in relation to having sufficient time to do a good

job. This possibly reflects some awareness amongst PSTs of the excessive workload often experienced by new entrants, and the increasing paperwork and bureaucratic demands associated with education reform and accountability, both of which have been linked with teacher attrition (Clanindin et al., 2015; Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2016). A qualitative study by Thomson and McIntyre (2013) yielded similar findings to those of Kyriacou et al. with prospective teachers expressing positive expectations about the intrinsic rewards gained from helping students learn, alongside some negative expectations, such as job-related stress and pressure from higher authorities.

Some studies have given consideration to the idea of how teachers' initial expectations interact with their subsequent experiences. Purcell, Wilton, Davies and Elias (2005) found that after four years of teaching, most teachers felt that the job was living up to their expectations, whilst Flores and Day (2006) suggested that some teachers respond to discrepancies between their initial expectations and the reality of their experiences by 'reconstructing' the former. Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) tracked the expectations of a group of PGCE students from their time in the programme through the first two years in the profession, but concluded that it was difficult to identify a clear pattern in how initial expectations shaped the development of subsequent expectations over this time period.

Of course, PSTs' expectations, and indeed, all of the factors mentioned above, will differ across various educational and cultural contexts (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Ireland represents an especially interesting context, as, unlike many other Western countries, it has historically enjoyed relatively favourable levels of teacher retention. Indeed, a longitudinal study of B.Ed. graduates in Ireland indicated that just 11.9% left teaching over the first ten years following graduation (Killeavy, 2001). Furthermore, many of these individuals left to pursue other caring professions, further qualifications, travel opportunities, or other areas of long-standing interest; and noted that they would consider returning to teaching at some point in the future. As such, it is unlikely that this attrition reflects adverse experiences of teaching. The modest sample size of 151 limits the generalizability of these findings, although, Coolahan (2003), in Ireland's background report for the OECD's study of teacher retention, reaffirmed that the issue has not typically been a cause for official concern in Ireland, due to factors such as the over-supply of high-quality and motivated candidates for initial teacher education, and the respected status of the profession in this country.

There is, of course, no guarantee that this situation will continue, however (Morgan, Kitching, & O’Leary, 2007). In recent years, the Irish education system has entered a phase of rapid change against a backdrop of global educational reform. Indeed, although Irish educational policy originally resisted the agendas of accountability and performativity evident in many other countries (Looney, 2006), these now seem to be on the rise. This has been characterized by events such as the decision to publish school inspectors’ reports (Sugrue, 2006), and the introduction of regular mandated standardized testing at primary level, as part of the national literacy and numeracy strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2011), following disappointing outcomes for Irish pupils in PISA 2009 (Cosgrove, Shiel, Archer, & Perkins, 2010). Increasing accountability has also been evident in the higher education sector, in the form of European-led compliance-focused accountability in module and programme design (Conway & Murphy, 2013).

It can be argued therefore that today’s B.Ed. graduates are entering a distinct era characterized by an erosion of teacher autonomy, increased legislative and bureaucratic demands, and narrower curriculum specifications (see also Conway & Murphy, 2013). These features represent typical outcomes of the global educational reform movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2011). Regrettably, however, evidence from international contexts suggests that such changes can be associated with undesirable consequences, not least for teacher morale (Lauerman & Karabenick, 2011) and consequently, teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2016). Given that an appreciation of teachers’ initial expectations about the profession may add considerable value to our understanding of patterns of teacher attrition, turnover, and retention, now seems an appropriate time to map the career expectations of prospective teachers in an Irish context.

Research Design

As part of a larger study on teachers’ lives and careers (see for example, O’Leary & Morgan, 2011) the career expectations scale developed by Kyriaciou et al., (2003) for use in England and Norway was adapted and incorporated into a questionnaire investigating Irish student-s’ views on their preservice-teacher education and the teaching profession more generally. The scale ~~was~~ comprised ~~of~~ eleven statements about career expectations and prefaced with the question “When you are a qualified working teacher how certain do you

feel that ...” Respondents were provided with four response options: *unlikely, fairly sure, quite sure, absolutely certain*.

For the purposes of this study, a number of adaptations were made to the scale. For the sake of consistency across the questionnaire in general the original response options were changed to: *not sure at all, somewhat unsure, fairly sure, absolutely certain*. One item was removed from the scale (the administration associated with a teachers’ job is essential?) as it did not address the issue of career expectations directly. This was replaced with a new item (teaching will fulfil your intellectual needs?) intended to complement the item asking about expectations pertaining to personal needs being fulfilled. In addition, small changes were made to individual items to reflect the Irish context. For example, the statement: your training will have prepared you for the job, was changed to: the B.Ed will have prepared you for the job. Other minor amendments are noted at the foot of Table 1. All of these changes should be borne in mind if making comparisons across the two studies.

At the end of the 2013/14 academic year (May) the questionnaire (incorporating the career expectations scale) was administered directly to Third Year B.Ed (primary) PSTs at St Patrick’s College, Dublin City University during one of their final plenary lectures. This cohort, totaling 471 PSTs, was the last one exiting the College following the completion of a three year B.Ed. degree programme that had been in place in Ireland since 1974. A total of 295 PSTs completed the questionnaire representing a response rate of 63%. The gender breakdown among the 295 respondents was 83% female and 17% males and this mirrored the overall gender split for all PSTs exiting that year. The change from a three to a four year B.Ed. programme for primary teachers in 2012 provided another potentially interesting variable impacting career expectations. Therefore, in May 2016, the first cohort (n = 384) exiting the College from the new four year B.Ed. programme were contacted by email and invited to complete the questionnaire survey online (these PSTs were on school placement during their final semester so it was not possible to administer the instrument directly to them as had been done in 2014). In all, 196 PSTs submitted completed questionnaires – a response rate of 51%. It should be noted that males were slightly overrepresented in the sample (25%).

The Career Expectations Scale

The psychometric properties of the scale were examined initially using exploratory factor analyses. Results from the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (.83) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($< .0005$) supported the application of factor analysis to the scale. Principal axis factoring and inspections of scree plots revealed the presence of one large factor with an eigenvalue of 3.4. Most items had strong positive loadings on this first factor - ranging in value from .35 to .76 with a mean loading of .54. Just two items (you will be happy with the amount of holidays? and, you will have a good rapport with your pupils?) had loadings that were marginally stronger on the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.2). However, these values were not interpreted as providing evidence that the scale was measuring an additional valid construct beyond career expectations. The proportion of variance explained by this first factor was 31%. Scale reliability, as measured by the Cronbach alpha, was .77 which can be considered satisfactory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Separate analysis conducted by year group revealed little difference between them e.g. variances explained from the factor analyses were 30 and 33% and scale reliabilities were .77 and .78 for the 2014 and 2016 cohorts respectively. Comparative psychometric values for the original scale were not provided by Kyriaciou et al in 2003 or by Kyriaciou & Kunc in 2007.

Data from the 494 PSTs who responded to the scale were used to answer two questions:

1. To what extent are Irish pre-service teachers optimistic about teaching as a career?
2. Has the introduction of a four year B.Ed programme made Irish pre-service teachers more or less optimistic about teaching as a career?

For the purposes of quantitative analysis the following numerical values were assigned to the four response options used to rate each of the eleven statements on the expectation scale:

- 4= Absolutely Certain
- 3 =Fairly Sure
- 2=Somewhat Unsure
- 1= Not Sure At All

Responses to each statement were averaged to give an overall mean response for each of the individual statements. For example, an average rating of 3.56 indicates that respondents were about half way between fairly sure and absolutely certain about the statement.

Findings

Mean ratings and associated standard deviations for the eleven statements are presented in Table 1. The statements are numbered as they were in the questionnaire but, for ease of interpretation, are rank ordered from the high to low mean rating (i.e. beginning with statements with mean ratings closer to *absolutely certain*) for all 496 respondents. The findings with respect to the 2014 and 2016 cohorts are also presented separately in the final two columns. At the foot of the table are the three sets of overall means and standard deviations.

Insert Table 1 about here

Focusing on the data for the total set of respondents to begin with, an argument can be made that the rank ordered statements can be clustered into three broad categories – responses approaching absolute certainty (a rating of 4), those closer to the fairly sure rating and those closer to the not sure at all rating. The ratings for statements 5, 1, and 4 indicate that the respondents, on average, were close to being absolutely certain about them. In the literature the amount of holidays is considered to be an extrinsic element of job satisfaction for teachers (see for example, Seker, Deniz, & Grger, 2015) and it is interesting to see this variable at the top of the list here. Given that the length of the Irish primary school year (181 days) is close to the OECD average of 185 days (OECD, 2014), it is probably not surprising that PSTs have a high degree of certainty that they will be happy with this aspect of their job. However, extrinsic factors, even one associated with generous holidays, while important to recruitment, are not necessarily key to understanding why teachers remain or leave the profession (Coolahan, 2003). With that in mind it is significant that the next two statements (1 and 4) relating to expectations about important intrinsic factors affecting why people stay in the teaching profession, elicited responses close to the highest rating. It is clear from the data that these PSTs felt very sure about the fact that

they would be doing a worthwhile job and that they would enjoy a good rapport with their pupils. While a love of working with children is often cited as a reason for why people want to be primary teachers, it is clear from the data here that this factor is more than a cliché in terms of what is considered to be important to the career expectations of these particular respondents.

The second category of statements are those with means clustered around 3 - the fairly sure rating category. Variables here include expectations about satisfaction with pupil achievement, career choice and personal and intellectual fulfilment. These are significant in so far as studies have shown that a powerful predictor of retention is the extent to which PSTs were optimistic about gaining pleasure from a career in teaching (e.g. Wilhelm et al., 2000). Most respondents also felt fairly sure that teaching as a career would be respected by people – an extrinsic factor that features in the literature on why people enter and stay or leave a career (Kitching, Morgan & O’Leary, 2009). The relatively positive expectation about having enough time to do a good job (overall mean rating of 2.88) could be considered surprising in the context of debates about curriculum overload that were featuring in the Irish primary context while these PSTs were progressing through college (see, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2010).

Just two statements, 9 and 8, make up a third category with means of 2.59 and 2.28 respectively. Respondents indicated that, on average, they were somewhat unsure about the extent to which the B.Ed. programme will have prepared them to teach and the extent to which their teacher’s salary would be sufficient for their lifestyle. The 2016 PSTs’ response to the B.Ed programme must be considered especially disappointing given that they were the first cohort to emerge from the new four-year programme shaped to a large extent by pre-service teacher education laid down by the Teaching Council (2011). Perhaps not as surprising, given the economic environment that prevailed in Ireland during the period of the study and the fact that public service pay had been cut significantly during the post *Celtic Tiger* years, were the expectations regarding salary.

Turning now to the disaggregated data, it is clear that the same three broad categorisations discussed above apply across the two cohorts. The rank ordering of statements is almost identical (the exception being that for the 2014 data statements 1 and 5 switch ranks as do

statements 7 and 10¹) and the mean values and standard deviations are more or less consistent. There are four statements (starred) where the mean values are statistically significantly different across the two cohorts. In two of these (statements 5 and 4), the 2016 mean is significantly higher ($t(491) = 1.43, p < .002$; $t(491) = 2.08, p < .001$ respectively) but the effect sizes, as measured by the Hedges (1981) g statistic are small (.15 and .18 respectively) and render the differences unimportant. For statement 10, the 2016 mean is statistically lower ($t(491) = -2.21, p < .01$) but, again, the effect size (.20) is small. However, the differences between the two means for the statement (#8) pertaining to expectations about the teacher's salary is worth noting. Not only is the 2016 mean statistically significantly lower than the 2014 mean ($t(491) = 5.86, p < .001$), but the effect size of .54 is classified by Hedges and Olkin (1985) as moderately large. This finding could be regarded as surprising given that the opposite might have been predicted. It could be argued that the 2016 cohort might have been more optimistic about teachers' salaries than their 2014 counterparts given that they (the 2016 cohort) were leaving college just as the first verifiable trends in data showing signs of an economic recovery were appearing (European Commission, 2016). Only time will tell if these data signify a growing dissatisfaction with teachers' remuneration but it should be noted at this juncture that salary has been identified as an important variable in studies of teachers leaving the profession (Kyriaciou & Kunc, 2007).

Taking the data as a whole, the overall means presented at the foot of Table 1 hover close to 3 and provide evidence that the 2014 and 2016 exiting cohorts from St Patrick's College had reasonably high expectations for teaching as a career. This is consistent with the findings from a study conducted by O'Leary and Morgan (2011) which examined how career expectations changed as a cohort of B.Ed students (primary) progressed through their programme at St Patrick's College from entering in 2006 until exiting in 2009. Those data showed that, while career expectations diminished somewhat through the three years, in general, the PSTs remained optimistic about teaching as a career. The data also showed that on entering college, the Irish PSTs had higher expectations than similar cohorts from the UK and Norway featured in a study by Kyriaciou et al., (2003).

¹ It's also worth noting that if confidence intervals were established around ranks, differences would, in most cases, not reach statistical significance. For example, in 2014 there is just .01 between statements 5 and 1.

Gender Differences

The data gathered were also used to evaluate if gender played a part in determining the extent to which respondents had high or low expectations for their careers. As the data in Table 2 indicate, while males had somewhat lower expectations than females on the overall scale, the differences were relatively small. Even in relation to the salary issue, gender differences were inconsequential e.g. overall means of 2.32 and 2.18 for females and males respectively. Again, within the two cohorts the gender differences were small, 2.47 versus 2.32 and 2.04 versus 2.07 for females and males in 2014 and 2016 respectively. Due to the imbalance in the numbers of female and male respondents, statistical tests could not be used validly to assess the degree to which the mean differences were statistically significant.

Conclusion and Discussion

Two research questions guided the research presented in this paper. The first question was focused on the extent to which Irish student teachers were optimistic about teaching as a career. The data suggest strongly that the majority of respondents who were exiting the B.Ed programme at St Patrick's College in 2014 and 2016 had high expectations for teaching as a career. The second question asked: Has the introduction of a four year B.Ed programme made PSTs more or less optimistic about teaching as a career. It is clear from the data that, overall, the 2016 cohort held expectations that were similar in nature to their 2014 counterparts. Only in relation to teacher's salary did the 2016 cohort exhibit expectations that were significantly lower in both the statistical and practical sense. If it is logical to assume that high expectations for a career is good for recruitment and retention then the hope is that the very high expectations of Irish student teachers will continue into the future. Moreover, if as the literature suggests entering profession with positive expectations can have a significant impact on retention, the issue of large percentages of teachers leaving the profession in Ireland is unlikely to materialise as long as future generations of Irish student teachers are as optimistic as the cohorts that exited the B.Ed programme in St. Patrick's College in 2014 and 2016. However, we cannot take these high positive expectations for granted given the many factors currently affecting initial teacher education and the working conditions of teachers. Most significantly, these factors include: lengthening courses of study, new Teaching Council criteria and guidelines, the increasing

numbers of teachers attending initial teacher education programmes in private colleges and in the UK, and the financial restrictions caused by fluctuations in the Irish and global economy.

Three final points are worth noting. First, the data set presented here provides an interesting snapshot of PST expectations of teaching at a time of significant change in education nationally and internationally (Lysaght & O’Leary, 2017). As such, perhaps the overarching value of the data set lies in the potential it offers to act as a baseline for future comparisons of how Irish PST expectations for the B.Ed and for teaching as a career change over time, in light of the many issues likely to impinge on the teaching profession in the years ahead. For example, there is a need to follow up longitudinally with a sub-group from this cohort of PSTs – those who began their careers working in disadvantaged schools. It might also be relevant to reflect on the fact that in Ireland there has been an issue with teacher turnover in these schools i.e. teachers leaving the school rather than the profession (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2014). It would be especially interesting to know if career expectations were a factor in these teachers deciding to stay or leave these particular types of schools. More generally, there is merit also in continuing to gather longitudinal data from future PSTs, beginning with the first cohort to complete the 4-year B.Ed. cycle in its entirety. Indeed, the promise of such data is particularly timely in light of the recent joint publication by the DES and the Teaching Council (2017) reporting the findings and recommendations of the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Teacher Supply.

A number of recommendations are made aimed at ensuring that planning for future teacher supply at primary and second levels is based on more secure and sustainable foundations than heretofore. Mindful of “the lack of historical data and the difficulties experienced in engaging with data held by sections within the DES, the Teaching Council, schools and ITE providers” (2017, p. 36), the TWG’s call for ready access to data within and across the educational system to inform future decisions in this area is noteworthy. Trend data on PST’s expectations of readiness to assume teaching positions and their anticipation of remaining in the profession could be particularly helpful in informing on-going national conversations of regarding teacher supply, attrition and retention. In light of the finding of “a modest but steady outflow (in the order of 2%) of permanently employed teachers

leaving prior to reaching retirement age” (DES/Teaching Council, 2017, p.17), such trend data could provide important information regarding potential triggers that prompt exit by teachers within the first few years of assuming the role. In this context, it is important to continue to survey PSTs to determine if reduced expectations correlate subsequently with teacher attrition and, if not, what kinds of retention strategies help to arrest attrition among young teachers whose pre-service expectations suggest uncertainty about teaching as a profession in the long-term.

Second, the changes in PSTs’ expectations reported in this study are in many ways unsurprising. Research has established that PSTs’ expectations fluctuate – positively and negatively – and that these changes are strongly influenced by PST’s experiences of pre-service school placement as well as the extent to which pre-service programmes probe latent, often tacit, understandings of the nature of teaching as a career. Getting to grips with what Spillane, Parise and Sherer (2011) call the infrastructure of the school presents particular challenges for newly qualified teachers who face the dilemma of balancing the need to ‘fit in’ and adjust to existing school mores and legitimised practices with the corresponding desire to innovate and challenge the status quo (Correa, Martínez-Arbelaz, & Gutierrez, 2014). Of relevance here too is a growing body of literature investigating PSTs’ expectations viz-a-vis what Veenman (1984) originally termed “reality shock”, also known as “praxis shock” (Buchanin, 2015). The concern is for the dissonance that exists between PSTs’ “unrealistically high expectations of the power, control and autonomy” (Buchanin, 2015, p. 13) they can wield and the realities they encounter in the context of doing the job.

Exploration by Kim and Cho (2014) of the nature and extent of the inter-relationships between PSTs’ motivation, sense of teaching efficacy and expectations of reality shock highlights the criticality of helping PSTs to anticipate the inevitable gaps between what they learn in their pre-service teacher education programme and what they experience in their first year(s) on the job. Complementary research by Tang, Wong and Cheng (2016), into the conceptual and practical aspects of initial teacher education (ITE), serves to underline the distinct but essential contributions of both higher education and schools to professional pedagogical and content knowledge, on the one hand, and expertise in the practical realities of teachers’ work in schools, on the other. Cumulatively, this body of research foregrounds the need for future investigations of the nature and extent of PST’s anticipation and

subsequent experience of reality or praxis shock during their first year(s) in teaching and of the concomitant factors contributing to such experiences. Further, it highlights the importance of optimising PST's experiences of school-based, pre-service practica in an effort to allay expectations of reality shock and maintain PTS's expectations of their own competencies to meet such challenges as advocated (Tang, Cheng, & Cheng, 2014). Given the significant extension of pre-service in-school placement from 16 weeks in the 3-year B.Ed to 27 weeks in the first iteration of the 4-year BEd, now reduced to 24 weeks, research of this kind is of particular importance in the Irish context. If used in concert with trend data on PST's expectations, data of this kind would be particularly valuable to the Teaching Council, the DES and providers of teacher education programmes in helping to establish the optimal university-school based partnership in the preparation of future B.Ed graduates.

Thirdly, the substantial body of research underlining the essential interconnections between PSTs' learning and identity should be borne in mind. Mockler's (2011, p. 526) presentation of professional identity as "ongoing dynamic and shifting" is relevant here as is research by Tang, Cheng and Cheng (2014) encouraging an integrative focus on PSTs' perceived self-efficacy, outcomes expectations and motivation. Conceptualising teachers' careers and working lives as nonlinear, evolving, forms of "professional exploration" (Rinke, 2013) challenges us to reframe our own expectations of what PSTs' expectations of teaching as a career should be. The idea that PSTs' expectations should remain static or that indicators of depressed expectations over the course of pre-service teacher education are a worry perhaps belies a dated understanding of the relationship between PSTs' identity development, their motivation, self-efficacy and career expectations, and the implications these have for retention.

In common with PSTs, as teacher educators, we bring to our interpretation of these data deeply held views, understandings and beliefs about what it means to be a teacher, how long the teaching career should be and so forth. However, the data reported in this paper serve to remind us that even at pre-service level, the "professional exploration" (Rinke, 2013) gene is likely at play with modulations in student expectations of teaching as a career reflecting a more fundamental, albeit tacit, anticipation of non-linear careers and life trajectories. This is hardly surprising given the unrelenting discourse about education as an inherently global phenomenon, no longer restricted or fenced in by traditional nation-state,

geographical borders but enabled by international policy transfer, curriculum modularisation and assessment standardisation – all oriented to the development of the adaptive 21st century skills, prerequisites for survival in the precarious and unpredictable future that lies ahead. By implication, the pre-service teachers of today are tomorrow's educational pioneers; they are expected not only to foster and enable in the next generation of pupils an innate ability to anticipate and respond creatively to the unpredictable, but, they too, have to remain malleable to future oscillations in global educational trends that manifest in changing educational policies and practices. Framed in this way, perhaps modulations in PST's expectations of teaching should be welcomed as indicators that B.Ed. graduates are emerging as critical, reflexive practitioners, energised and challenged equally by the unpredictability of the postmodern education system.

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Table 1. Irish Pre-Service Teachers' Expectations for Teaching as a Career

When you are a qualified working teacher to what extent do you feel that ...	All (n=494)		2014 (n=297)		2016 (n=197)	
	Mean	sd	Mean	sd	Mean	sd
5. you will be happy with the amount of holidays?	3.73	.47	3.70*	.49	3.77*	.43
1. you will be doing a worthwhile job?	3.70	.51	3.71	.49	3.69	.53
4. you will have a good rapport with your pupils?	3.61	.51	3.58*	.52	3.67*	.49
7. you will feel satisfied by (elated) pupil achievement?	3.40	.66	3.41	.65	3.38	.66
10. the teaching profession is the right career for you?	3.37	.75	3.43*	.69	3.28*	.82
6. teaching will fulfil your personal needs?	3.12	.75	3.14	.74	3.08	.76
11. teaching will fulfil your intellectual needs?	3.06	.73	3.08	.72	3.03	.75
3. your chosen career is generally respected by people?	2.98	.65	2.97	.67	2.99	.62
2. you will have enough time to do a good job?	2.88	.67	2.89	.66	2.87	.69
9. the B.Ed (your training) will have prepared you for the job?	2.59	.70	2.63	.73	2.55	.67
8. your salary (pay) will be sufficient for your lifestyle?	2.28	.74	2.44*	.73	2.05*	.70
Overall	3.15	.36	3.18	.36	3.12	.36

Note: Scale adapted from Kyriaciou et al., 2003; original phrasing in brackets; statement 11 not in the original scale.

Commented [GS1]: Might explain the asterisk under the table. Also I don't think it needs to be repeated twice for each expectation. I would include it in the second column and indicate that performance either significantly higher or significantly lower compared with the 2014 cohort.

Table 2

Gender differences in Irish Student Teachers' Expectations for Teaching as a Career

		N (%)	Mean	sd
All Respondents	Female	397 (83)	3.18	.35
	Male	80 (17)	3.06	.38
2014 Exiting Cohort	Female	254 (88)	3.19	.35
	Male	34 (12)	3.10	.39
2016 Exiting Cohort	Female	143 (76)	3.16	.36
	Male	46 (24)	3.02	.42

Missing gender = 17