A Mixed Methods Study

of a

Blended-Learning Irish Teacher Education Course

-   what can we learn from this course that
might inform future practice?

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A dissertation submitted to Dublin City University in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Education

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January 2015

Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____   (Bernadette McHugh)

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father Joseph Blake who died during my course of studies in Dublin City University and who was a lifelong learner himself right up to his death at 92 years of age. I have been privileged to have experienced his unconditional love, his inspirational enthusiasm, his joy of life, his love of learning and his deep spirituality. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my immediate and extended family for their continuing love and support, most particularly my ever patient husband Gerard who has always inspired me and Gearóid, Ann, Joseph, Nicola and Saoirse who make life worth living.

I would like to thank my mother Vera for the happy home she created with my father and for waiting patiently for me to complete this study. Thanks also to her namesake, my niece Vera Shanahan who counted and categorised the myriad of student responses with me and my son Joseph McHugh who assisted with the interview transcripts.

Sincere thanks also to my fellow colleagues for their assistance most particularly Mr. Jim Enright, Director of Laois Education Centre for sharing his computer knowledge so willingly with me.

Thank you to my fellow doctoral students who made the taught aspect of this programme so enjoyable especially Dr. Martin Brown whose 'can do' philosophy was so inspiring and who encouraged me to return and complete the work following life's distractions. His time and practical advice is deeply appreciated.

I wish to acknowledge the support of the management committee of Navan Education Centre and to thank my colleague Joan Shankey for her assistance with formatting and computer packages. I am indebted to the participants who took part in this study for the generous gift of their time. Without their input this research would not have been possible.

Finally and most importantly I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Professor Gerry McNamara. His wise counsel, clear direction and most especially his calm demeanour motivated me to bring this study to fruition.

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List of Acronyms

ATECI   Association of Teacher/Education Centres of Ireland

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

DES   Department of Education and Science (1997-2010)

DES   Department of Education and Skills (2010-present)

GST   Graduate student teacher

HC   Hibernia College

HDAPE   Higher Diploma in Arts in Primary Education

HEA   Higher Education Authority

HELMS   Higher Education Learning Management System

HETAC   Higher Education and Training Awards Council

ICT   Information and Communications Technology

ITE   Initial Teacher Education

INTO   Irish National Teachers' Organisation

NCC   National Competitiveness Council

NCCA   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

OECD   The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OFSTED   The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services $_+$ Skills

SP   School Placement

TC   Teaching Council of Ireland

TDA   Training Development Agency for Schools

TP   Teaching Practice

QQI   Quality and Qualifications Ireland

Abstract

Title: A Mixed Methods Study of a Blended Learning Irish Teacher Education Course – what can be learned about this unique course that might inform future practice

Author: Bernadette McHugh

The purpose of this research was to examine the blended-learning primary teacher education course, the Higher Diploma in Arts in Education (HDAPE), offered by Hibernia College in Ireland with a view to ascertaining what can be learned from this unique course that might inform future practice at college and national levels.

An investigation of this blended-learning course is warranted as it has not been conducted previously and thereby this research adds to the bank of knowledge on teacher education. Hibernia College is unique because it is the only private provider of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) for primary and post-primary teachers in Ireland. Furthermore it is the only provider to utilise a blended-learning approach and now as the largest provider of primary teachers in Ireland, Hibernia College exerts a significant influence on the number of primary teachers trained using the consecutive model of ITE.

This researcher used a mixed methods approach gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. A qualitative investigation of the genesis of the college, the values underpinning the HDAPE programmes, how quality provision is assured and the opinions of external evaluators on the programme was undertaken through the use of interviews and document analysis. A questionnaire elicited the student experience of the programme. Finally school principals' views were sought on their opinions of graduates from Hibernia College as practising teachers.

A series of recommendations, arising from the findings, which have implications for Hibernia College (13) and for the wider education community (4) were posited along with possible future research enquiries.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION   AND   BACKGROUND

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1   Research Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of the research reported in this thesis is to examine the blended-learning primary teacher education course offered by Hibernia College in Ireland with a view to ascertaining what can be learned from this unique course that might inform future practice.

Specifically, this researcher intends to employ a particular methodology and research design to discern the values underpinning the establishment of the course, how students perceived the course, how quality is assured, how the course is rated by external evaluators and how employers view teachers trained by Hibernia College (henceforth HC).

An investigation of this Irish blended-learning course is worthwhile, as it has not been conducted previously and thereby adds to the bank of knowledge on teacher education. An exploration of this blended-learning course, a unique form of primary teacher education in Ireland, could inform and posit possible changes to future practices at college and national levels.

As HC is the largest provider of primary teachers in Ireland today, conducting an examination on the nature and outcomes of its course provision can provide an important insight which could have implications at a national level. The conclusions of this study could also make a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing debate on concurrent versus consecutive models of teacher education.

1.2 Research Genesis

This researcher's interest in pursuing this line of enquiry had its genesis in an earlier research assignment on leadership which was conducted as part of the overall taught doctorate programme. Interviewing the President of HC in his role as an educational leader acted as a catalyst for me to explore this unique institution in greater depth. Some of the findings of this first interview with the President have contributed to this research and have acted as the first exploratory phase of this thesis.

1.3 Hibernia College - A Contextual History

This outline history is not written to endorse the work of the college or to critique its accomplishments to date. It is written to provide a factual and non-evaluative contextual description to the reader of the scope, reach and publicly acknowledged achievements of the college in the first decade of its existence.

The private college known as Hibernia College was first established in Ireland in 2000 with a two-year gestation period. The college offered one course in 2002 and now offers a full and ever-growing suite of accredited professional courses. HC is accredited by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) [now called Quality and Qualifications Ireland, QQI] and approved by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Teaching Council of Ireland (TC) as an initial teacher education (ITE) provider. The college specializes in postgraduate, undergraduate and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for students and professionals across the globe in collaboration with various governments, universities, educational institutions and commercial companies.

The college is now the largest provider of trained primary teachers in Ireland and is the only fully online provider of post-primary teacher education in England recognised by the Training Development Agency for Schools (TDA). It delivers its pharmaceutical medicine course to doctors and scientists working in 32 countries worldwide and provides a host of diplomas, undergraduate and Master

degrees. In 2011 the college received approval from the TC and accreditation from HETAC to commence the first ever blended-learning course to train students as post-primary teachers in Ireland. This development puts HC in the unique position of providing post-primary teacher education in both Ireland and England.

The College offer degrees at Master's Level in Pharmaceutical Medicine, in Regulatory Sciences, in Teaching and Learning for teachers, in *i*Learning and in Financial Management and Control. In November 2013 the President of HC, Dr. Seán Rowland announced the future availability, (working in collaboration with Plymouth University) of Ireland's first blended-learning Ph.D. programme commencing in 2014. The college records state that it collaborates with over 30 International Universities and companies. The college has offices in Dublin, Mayo and London and over 6,000 students from 32 countries currently undertaking online and blended courses of study.

The college has grown from an idea gestating in the heads of two people in 2000 to an employer of over 100 fulltime staff and over 400 contracted part-time staff employed on an occasional and recurring basis. HC was set up with an investment fund of approximately €10 million raised from private investors. In the 14 years of its existence the college has bought back all company stock from private investors. The College President Dr. Rowland is the majority stockholder with over 60% of the company's stock.

The senior management team includes; Dr. Seán Rowland, President; Professor Thomas Mitchell, Academic Chairman; Dr. Don Thornhill, Chairman; Sara McDonnell, Executive Vice-President; Dr. Nicholas Breakwell, Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Knowledge Management; Lars Christian Smith, Vice-President for Business Development and Naomi Jackson, Registrar.

HC won awards for excellence in 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2013. The first award in 2007 presented at the Digital Media Awards ceremony recognising excellence in the field of digital media conferred on HC the title of "e-Learning Company of the Year." In 2009 the college won two awards – a silver award for the best use of e-

learning and a bronze award for the best online or distance learning project. The silver award was in recognition of the college's use of e-learning across all of its postgraduate courses and the bronze award was in recognition of the impact the college's Higher Diploma in Arts in Primary Education (HDAPE) has had on the Irish educational landscape. The 2010 honours included gold and bronze awards at the UK e-Learning Awards. HC won its gold award in the 'Best use of synchronous e-learning' category for its teacher education programmes; the HDAPE in Ireland and *i*Teach in England. The college won a bronze award in the 'Best online or distance learning programme' in recognition of the impact *i*Teach has had on the English educational landscape, addressing the shortage of secondary Maths, Physics and Chemistry teachers by facilitating professionals who wished to move from industry into teaching. In 2013 HC was voted overall winner in the e-learning and education category of the Eircom Spiders 2013 awards. Finally the 2008 Ernst & Young Award was presented to Dr. Rowland in his personal capacity as the "Emerging Entrepreneur of the Year."

In addition to award citations, the college has published the following testimonials on its website (posted Tuesday 12 July 2012);

A.

> *Quality is all that matters, and that's what Hibernia College is all about*
>
> (Enda Kenny, Taoiseach of Ireland (*Prime Minister*)

B.

> *Teacher education in Ireland had followed pretty traditional delivery methods over very many years. The advent of Hibernia College has created a new perspective and a paradigm shift in teacher education. The college not only provides an excellent service but it has caused traditional providers to re-examine their modes of delivery.*
>
> (Seamus Puirséil, CEO of HETAC, 2001-2008)

C.

> *It doesn't matter who provides, what's important is the quality of the provision and I think what you're demonstrating at Hibernia is that the private sector can do, sometimes better than the public sector what had been traditionally regarded as public sector jobs.*

(Rt. Honourable Lord Patten of Barnes, CH, Chancellor of the University of Oxford)

D.

> *They are a young, enthusiastic, dedicated organisation who want to make a difference and want to be successful. These are the sort of partners you look for no matter what business you're in.*

(Dr. Jack Watters, Vice President of External Medical Affairs, Pfizer Inc.)

1.4 Hibernia College in an Irish Context

Of particular interest to this researcher is the primary teacher education course, the HDAPE which the college introduced in 2003. HC is now the largest provider of Irish-trained primary teachers. HC is unique in Ireland as the only private college accepted by the DES as a graduate primary teacher college of education. All other primary teacher colleges of education in Ireland are affiliated to Irish universities and are substantially funded by the State to offer undergraduate and post-graduate primary teacher training courses.

In Ireland HC is accredited by HETAC and is recognised by the TC as one of six colleges in the State empowered to train students as primary teachers. The other five colleges of education offer traditional on-campus courses. Hibernia offers a blended form of provision in which 55% of the course is provided through "face-to-face" onsite contact and 45% is provided through synchronous and asynchronous online tutorials. This ratio of face-to-face versus online tutorials will be examined later in this research. Students in the other five colleges of education attend lectures during the day in lecture rooms located in their respective colleges. HC students participate in their online lectures in the evening, allowing them to work during the day (if they wish or need to), and they attend onsite lectures on Saturdays in various locations

around the country in small groups of 25-30 students. This model of provision will be examined later in this research.

While the opportunity to work and study is also available to students in traditional colleges who study in the daytime and may work at night, this researcher is interested in asking Hibernia students, many of whom studied in traditional third-level colleges as undergraduates, if the juxtaposition of studying online at night (often in a solo capacity) was beneficial to them.

All post-graduate students in all colleges must undergo a stipulated number of weeks of school placement (teaching practice) in state primary schools in the country and must spend time in a Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking area) improving their spoken Irish. HC meets all the requirements of HETAC, the DES and the TC that the other colleges of education must meet and upon graduation its students are eligible to present themselves for positions as teachers in primary schools throughout Ireland carrying the same status as students from any other Irish college of education.

Hibernia's blended 'onsite and online' provision is perceived as affording its students greater accessibility in terms of location and greater flexibility in terms of co-ordinating home, family and work life and is in high demand. HC conducts ongoing interviews for admission and has been oversubscribed to date for each cohort of the two large groups of students they admit each year. HC is free to set its enrolment policy on a yearly basis, unlike other colleges where the number of students enrolled is dictated to a large extent by the availability of State finances. This enrolment freedom exercised by HC is closely linked, according to the College to its analysis of market sustainability in terms of teacher retirements, pupil numbers and the prevailing pupil-teacher ratios at national level.

However this view is not necessarily shared by the wider educational community, as there are those who perceive that the freedom to enrol large numbers of students enjoyed by HC alone, has resulted in the recent oversupply of primary teachers. An oversupply of teachers can have negative outcomes as stated by Barber and Mourshed (2007:18), "Failing to control entry into teacher training almost invariably leads to an oversupply of candidates which, in turn, has a significant negative effect

on teacher quality." The quality of HC trained teachers as perceived by school principals will be examined later in this research.

The present global recession, the particular financial difficulties of the Irish State and the political implications inherent in the financial assistance given to Ireland from the International Monetary Fund, The European Union and the European Central Bank have already had an adverse impact on primary teacher employment prospects in Ireland and further government stringency measures may continue. The traditional desirability of primary teaching as a secure, pensionable form of employment is being undermined and all Irish teacher education colleges including HC will face increasing challenges in the future in terms of employment opportunities for their graduates.

The commissioned McCarthy report (2009) advising the Government on reductions in expenditure recommended the closure of some smaller colleges of education and noted the existence of HC and the availability of trained primary teachers at no cost to the state (McCarthy, 2009). A precedent already exists for college closures by the State: in 1987, Carysfort College, at the time the largest primary teacher training college in the State, was no longer funded by the State and had to close down. McCarthy's recommendation represents a strong incentive to radically decrease expenditure on the State funded colleges. This recommendation could be enacted at any time in the future and posits the possibility that HC could become the sole provider of the consecutive model of primary teacher education in the State that would be cost-neutral to the State.

A report by the International Review panel presented to the DES in 2012 reviewing the structure of ITE provision in Ireland gave the following statistics detailing respective provider enrolments, (Sahlberg, Munn and Furlong, 2012:17 adapted) shown in Table 1:1. This table shows that with the exception of 2008 Hibernia College had the largest intake per year with a significant difference evident in 2010 and especially 2011.

Table 1:1 Providers of ITE Programmes (Primary) in Ireland

Undergraduate Provision Concurrent Model	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Marino Institute of Education	88	84	70	83	85
St. Patrick's College	357	357	365	**35**	360
Froebel College	63	70	66	75	71
Mary Immaculate College (B.Ed)	360+	397+	353+	377+	407+
B.Ed (Psych)	0	27	34	24	31
Church of Ireland College of Education	27	30	28	33	29
Postgraduate Provision **Consecutive Model**					
Marino Institute of Education		39	72	92	51
St. Patrick's College		170	160	169	59
Froebel College		30	57	60	32
Mary Immaculate College.		94	136	135	59
Hibernia College **Cohort 1 and** **Cohort 2**	**226+246** **472**	**250+244** **494**	**252+280** **532**	**310+337** **647**	**338+375** **713**
	1,591	1,810	1,873	2,053	1,887

In 2013, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) in Ireland reported to the Minister for Education and Skills on system reconfiguration, inter-institutional collaboration and system governance in Irish higher education. The HEA recommended that; "smaller publicly-funded institutions ... be aligned with, or incorporated into,

institutions of sufficient scale to enable overall quality and efficiency objectives to be met" (HEA, 2013: 9).

All five primary ITE providers funded by the State have now been aligned with and recommended for incorporation into larger university clusters. The outcome of these amalgamations remains to be seen. HC as a private provider remains outside of this rationalisation. This represents another interesting facet when one considers the long-term future viability of the current ITE providers at primary level. The fact that all providers of ITE in Ireland will shortly be incorporated into the university structure raises the question if this will affect HC in the future.

1.5   Hibernia College – A Unique Irish Institution

Given the uniqueness of the college on the Irish educational landscape a key question worth posing is this: What can we learn about this blended-learning teacher education course that might inform future practice? As a new enterprise in Ireland, little or no research has been published on the college to date, yet in terms of teacher education HC is already making an impact at a national level. If this position is sustained over several years, there could well be more Hibernia graduates working in the primary sector than graduates from any other college of education. This will also have an effect on the ratio of primary teachers trained undertaking a consecutive model of training as opposed to those who undertake a concurrent model. Equally of value is what HC could learn from the findings of this research.

Traditionally, there have been two models of teacher training in the primary sector in Ireland. The first and oldest model has been the concurrent model. In this model students are chosen from the top cohort of students sitting the Leaving Certificate Examination (the final national examination at post-primary level). They undertake a three-year course of study specifically focussed on primary teacher education. The colleges of education also offer a consecutive model (the second model), giving university graduates an opportunity to train as primary teachers by undertaking an additional 18-month Higher Diploma course following their basic degree course. As minimum entry requirements to basic degree courses in Irish universities are lower

than minimum entry requirements to the colleges of education through the concurrent model, the students undertaking the consecutive model represent a more eclectic mix in terms of academic standards, but all have achieved a basic degree in their chosen subjects. When the newer consecutive model was introduced, it met a spike in demand for primary teachers, but the numbers of students undertaking both models in the different colleges of education have been tightly controlled by the State, ensuring a link between the number of teachers trained and the number of teachers required in the workforce on an ongoing basis.

Equally when the DES approved HC there was an increased demand for trained primary teachers, however as a private college there was no limit placed by the DES on Hibernia's yearly intake of students. Hibernia has consequently become the largest ITE provider at primary level and has thereby had a considerable impact on the ratio of teachers trained under the two models. The State control of teacher numbers has effectively been overtaken by the actions of one private college.

The blended-learning mode of delivery described earlier, which is used by the College is also worth investigating. Researching the use of a 21st century educational tool in the context of a particular programme traditionally taught by other methods may have implications for future policy. This method offers huge opportunities for extending the pathways into teaching for many. Conway et al (2009: xvii) state that the "development of flexible pathways into teaching is part of an effort to ensure that the teaching force reflects the diversity of a population." The emphasis now appears to be "on enhancing methodologies in ITE ... that will prepare teachers well for the early years in teaching rather than in arguments for extending ITE itself" (ibid: 66). Other questions worth considering are, what is HC's understanding of quality teacher education and how does the blended-learning mode of delivery ensure quality in teacher education?

The TC has promoted quality in ITE provision in recent years primarily by increasing the length of both the undergraduate teacher education programme from three to four years and the length of the graduate programme from 18 months to two years as a requirement placed on all providers. In June 2013 HC was awarded a Master's degree status for its proposed new two year programme. Prospective

students from September 2014 onwards undertaking their graduate teacher education with HC will receive a Master's degree rather than a Higher Diploma award.

1.6 Blended-Learning Courses at Hibernia College

Attending a course of study in a traditional third level college/university involves attending a particular campus for lectures, accessing tutorial support in smaller groups, availing of a college library for research and study purposes and having face to face and email access to lecturers for feedback and further guidance.

Attending a similar course of study through HC involves interacting with course content from a home computer in three main forms on a weekly basis:

- On-demand content (asynchronous interactive, online lecture material)

- Live virtual classes (synchronous scheduled 'live' tutorials that support the on-demand content)

- Learner communities (student collaboration and reflection occurs through discussion forums)

The online content is developed using the COACT theoretical framework, which was adapted by Hibernia College. COACT is an acronym for *Concept*, *Overview*, *Active Discovery, Critique and Think*. It is a set of pedagogical principles that is designed to ensure that higher-order learning takes place. It is diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.1

Figure 1.1

HIBERNIA COLLEGE DUBLIN

COACT development framework

| CONCEPT: Describe and contextualise main concepts. | → | OVERVIEW: Summarise expectations, including objectives and outcomes. | → | ACTIVE DISCOVERY: Facilitate active and collaborative discovery. | → | CRITIQUE: Empower students to construct evidence-based criticism. | → | THINK: Encourage reflection on relevance and importance of concepts. |

- As students progress through a topic, they move along this continuum.
- They are required to perform tasks that involve:
  – Seeking out new information
  – Making critical judgements
  – Reflecting on what they have learned and on how they might put it into a meaningful context in terms of their professional practice

Each online lesson takes the student through the tutor's narrated lecture notes incorporating visual aids and intermittent self-tests and quizzes. Assigned readings are also presented along with hyperlinks to various external resources. Each subject is also associated with an online forum where tutors pose reflective questions for students to consider based on the lessons undertaken that week. Equally students are free to pose questions to the tutors and expand the dialogue beyond the confines of the lesson as well as answering the reflective issues posted by the tutors and are also free to co-construct knowledge through interaction with their peers. (See Appendix A for a full description of the COACT Framework). This approach would be in line with much of the literature associated with online teaching and learning (Hrastinski, 2009, Gulati, 2004, Garrison and Anderson, 2003) which advocates a constructivist theory of learning where the tutor facilitates a community of learners and encourages them to collaborate and co-construct knowledge. Of interest to this researcher is the HC students' perceptions and experiences of such a system.

This *virtual* campus the HC student attends involves logging on to the secure password protected site called HELMS (Higher Education Learning Management System) where they can download college documents and upload course assignments and become part of a community of learners through discussion forums, e-mail, a shared resources area and blogs and where they can further their research through the facilities of the online library. Face to face contact with tutors only occurs at onsite lectures but feedback on progress and assignments is given in written form and support from a tutor is available via email and the forum. This research will ascertain students' opinions on whether the face-to-face, onsite tutorials were more or less beneficial than the online provision.

Onsite lectures are held on Saturdays where small groups of 25 to 30 students are assigned a specific tutor for the particular subject being studied. The sessions commence at 9.30 a.m. and conclude at 3.30 p.m. with a half an hour for lunch. The onsite sessions are held in Education Centres throughout the country. HC rents the rooms from the Education Centres on a needs basis. To date they have used the education centres in Sligo, Mayo, Galway, West Cork, Cork City, Tipperary, Wexford, Kildare, Navan, Blackrock, Dublin West and Drumcondra. They also avail of the facilities of hotels, educational colleges, institutes and universities for their onsite sessions and since moving to larger premises in Fenian Street in Dublin in 2013 they now also use their own premises.

Tutors attend a pre-onsite session with a lead tutor to ensure that everyone presents the same content in the lecture/workshop. A powerpoint presentation of the content is placed on HELMS for students the following Monday. Tutors are also expected to provide further email and forum support to students as part of their contract. Onsite sessions are evaluated by the students within each module and tutors are also asked for their views in order to refine the onsite content for future cohorts. Tutors are contracted on a needs basis.

1.7 The Research Enquiry

This thesis used a mixed methods approach to examine the blended-learning primary teacher education course offered by HC in Ireland to ascertain what can be learned from this unique course which might inform future practice. Subsidiary questions also worthwhile investigating include:

- What was the genesis for and the values underpinning the establishment of Hibernia's HDAPE programme?
- How does Hibernia College ensure that its primary teacher education course achieves quality standards?
- What are DES inspectors' and other external evaluators' opinions of this HDAPE programme?
- What are students' perceptions of this blended-learning ITE course they have completed?
- What are primary school principals' opinions of Hibernia graduates as primary teachers in their schools?

1.8 Research Design - A Mixed Methods Analysis

This study used a mixed methods approach, a discrete method of enquiry that uses both qualitative and quantitative tools as the method of enquiry and analysis (Creswell, 2003, Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2012). It utilised strategies of enquiry that involve, "collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems" (Creswell 2003:18). The data collection also involved gathering, "both numeric information (e.g. on instruments) as well as text information (e.g. on interviews) so that the final database represents both quantitative and qualitative information."(ibid:18) A defence for using a mixed methods approach will be given later in this research.

A variety of research tools were used in conducting the research. Following the completion of the pilot phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were

conducted with key college personnel on their understanding of quality ITE, how they ensure they maintain quality provision and their perceptions of what added-value the blended-learning mode of delivery offers. An ongoing review of the pertinent college documentation acted as a form of triangulation to the interview process.

To ascertain students' perceptions of this blended-learning course a questionnaire was piloted and conducted with those students who are due to complete the course in the summer of 2011. A second questionnaire was used to elicit the views of school principals on their perceptions of HC teachers who are employed in their schools. The study also includes an examination of the literature on mixed methods analysis as an appropriate research tool in this instance; a consideration of the benefits and problems associated with blended-learning; and an investigation into what constitutes quality teacher education.

1.9   A Worthwhile Case

In autumn 2011 HC commenced training post-primary teachers in Ireland following the model used at primary level. This private college will also have an impact at second level ITE provision. It is posited therefore that conducting research on this institution, by eliciting their understanding of quality teacher education, and considering how this 'quality' is implemented and assured through their HDAPE course, how it is perceived and received by their students and how that translates in practice in schools is worthy of investigation. It is hoped that such an investigation will add value to the debate on whether or not utilising a blended-learning technology and facilitating more diverse pathways into teaching through the flexibility such technologies allow represents a new and sustainable dimension to teacher education in Ireland.

1.10   Limitations of the Thesis

This research is a study of a specific teacher education course, the HDAPE course offered by HC at a particular point in time. Therefore a specific cohort of students had to be chosen to be used as the lens through which the research would be anchored. As a student of Dublin City University undertaking doctoral studies on a part-time basis my work on this thesis was scheduled to commence in the Autumn of 2010. At that time, the HC student intake of October 2009 and February 2010 were completing their HDAPE in the summer of 2011. These two cohorts were chosen as the groups upon which to focus my research. Their opinion of the course forms a very specific component of the study. These students were among the last cohorts to experience the eighteen month course however, as shortly afterwards the TC required all ITE providers to increase the duration of the course to two years for graduates undertaking the consecutive model. The students admitted in October 2011 onwards have undertaken a two year course and the students of September 2014 will undertake yet a different course receiving a Master's Degree as opposed to a Higher Diploma award.

One could therefore ask the question why conduct research on a course that has changed in duration and will change in academic status. If the research study was confined to course content and the opinions of the students of October 2009 and February 2010 the question might be valid. However this study is designed as an iterative process ascertaining the values of the founders and examining if those values were evident in the college documentation and in the implementation of the HDAPE. Furthermore reports from external evaluators on HC offer a form of triangulation of the evidence on the quality provision espoused by the college.

Most importantly a seminal feature of this study is ascertaining the views of school principals on HC graduates as teachers. The vast majority of the HC teachers teaching in Irish schools today are those who have undertaken the 18 month course. Since the graduates of the two year course entered the workplace in 2013, there has been a significant decrease in the number of positions available in schools. When principals were queried on their opinions of HC graduates as classroom teachers in 2014 they are in general referring to those trained under the eighteen month course

of instruction. Therefore a study which follows through from founding principles to classroom delivery offers a more complete answer to the research question posed earlier – what we can learn from this unique course which might inform future practice?

1.11 The Researcher in Context

Conducting this study is of relevance to the professional work of this researcher. As a qualified primary and post primary teacher who has taught at all levels over the course of my teaching career quality teacher education has always been an area of interest. At particular points in my career I have worked as a part-time lecturer or guest lecturer on various modules in different Colleges of Education (including HC) and Universities around the country. I have also facilitated workshops on different aspects of Education in many Education Centres around Ireland. Through my occasional work with HC I have an insight into the operation of onsite sessions, synchronous, asynchronous and forum sessions, the supervision of teaching practice (now school placement) and how HC provides mentor support to students needing extra assistance on school placement.

My present occupation as Director of an Education Centre involves providing for the continuing professional development needs of the personnel in both primary and post-primary schools in my catchment area including; school principals, teachers, boards of management and allied school personnel as well as parents in their role as educators of children. My catchment area includes all the primary and post primary schools in three specific counties of Ireland namely Meath, Louth and Cavan (for ICT support).

From September to May each academic year I have access (four days per week) in my centre or outreach venues to the newly qualified teachers from various ITE providers as they attend the induction course stipulated by the TC as a requirement of their registration. At the moment many of those who are attending have temporary work, or substitute work and a very few lucky ones have secured permanent positions. It is wonderful to meet these young teachers so early in their careers, to

ascertain their needs, to encourage them to attend other courses and to forge links with them as they start their professional journeys of lifelong learning and CPD. To conduct research on HC's primary teacher education course adds immeasurably to my own professional knowledge.

1.12   Thesis Structure

The chapters which follow this introductory chapter consider specific aspects of the thesis in some detail. In Chapter 2 an investigation is conducted of the relevant literature to ascertain what constitutes quality teacher education. A critical consideration is also undertaken of the benefits and problems associated with blended-learning as cited in the literature. Chapter 3 reviews the relevant literature pertaining to mixed methods research and defends the choice of methodology as an appropriate research tool in this instance. It also outlines the steps taken at the different stages of the research within the context of the research framework within which it is set. Chapter 4 describes and presents the findings of this study as it unfolded across the various research tools employed while Chapter 5 discusses these findings as they relate to the research question and subsidiary questions posed at the outset. Finally Chapter 6 concludes this study by bringing closure to the thesis and proffering recommendations for the future.

1.13   Chapter Summary

In this chapter the rationale for undertaking this thesis was explained. A brief historical outline of HC was presented to provide context and the uniqueness of the college in terms of Irish teacher education was highlighted. A short description was given of what undertaking a course of study through the means of blended-learning entails. A case was made for pursuing a study of the HDAPE in terms of originality and added value to the bank of knowledge on teacher education. The findings from this study may also inform future teacher education policy and HC policy and practice alike. A brief mention was made of the literature review to be undertaken. The main research question was posed and subsidiary questions were listed and the

research tools to be employed were described. Within the context of an ever-changing educational landscape the limitations of the study were outlined and the chapter concluded with this overview summary.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE   REVIEW

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This Literature Review focuses on an examination of initial teacher education emanating from recent pertinent research. It briefly explores the concept of quality in an educational context, it also considers the nature of online learning, and the value of blended-learning as a form of adult learning. The chapter concludes with an overview summary.

2.2 Trends and Issues in Initial Teacher Education

The twenty-first century encompassing a borderless knowledge economy, an incessant drive for innovation, a mobile, flexible and accessible workforce has fuelled a renewed interest globally in the importance of education in general and teacher education in particular. This interest in education acting as a catalyst for economic growth and employability, (OECD, 2011) has led to an international interest in the schools' improvement agenda and a concomitant interest in school accountability measures. Oftentimes these school evaluations/accountability measures can be contentious and principals and teachers have found themselves defending other values they believe to be important, "increasingly against a rising tide of regimes of accountability" (Sugrue, 2008: 40). In recent times a compromise amalgamation of internal and external accountability measures with "school self-evaluation running parallel to whole-school evaluation conducted by the inspectorate" (McNamara et al 2002: 209) has been promoted in many countries.

Equally the field of teacher education as a professional field has been the subject of increased investigative research and hence further policy changes. While considerable teacher education takes place in "research-intensive universities,

teaching led universities and further education colleges" (Boyd, Harris and Murray, 2011: 9) their respective links and forms of partnership with the schools with whom they interact can vary considerably. Yet schools play an important function in the education of student teachers.

While ITE provision differs considerably in form and duration across OECD countries, in general teaching is a graduate profession with both the concurrent and the consecutive models of ITE available. Course duration ranges from three years (Ireland and Spain, primary) to eight years (Italy, post-primary) (OECD, 2005:105). The international trend recently with many countries, including Ireland, is to increase the duration of ITE.

Just as HC's blended-learning HDAPE course emerged at a time of teacher shortage in Ireland, in Chile, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden distance–learning is also being utilised to facilitate those for whom on-campus ITE is not an option.

There has been a growing trend also in England, Wales and the Netherlands recently, for school based ITE to operate, "largely independent of higher education" (Boyd et al, 2011: 9). This allows mature students to earn an income while studying. This movement has mirrored the 'Teach for America' concept of onsite in-school training which has gained pace in the United States and has been wrought from the same difficulties relating to lack of teacher supply. Conway et al, (2009:111) criticise these courses as being "typically shorter, involve minimal coursework and focus on immediate concerns via a 'tricks of the trade' approach to the curriculum." However, the OFSTED report reviewing Britain's Teach First ITT 2008 programme cited in Donaldson (2010:26) stated that, "a commitment to excellence is a significant feature of the programme, with over half of trainees demonstrating outstanding teaching capabilities."

Professional knowledge is strongly situated and very pragmatic (Blackler, 1995). Indeed the question can be asked does initial teacher training need to be based within the context of a university model or would the concept of the 'expansive learning environment' as developed by Fuller and Unwin (2003) and expanded upon by

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) represent a more focused and practical form of initial teacher education?

An expansive learning environment offers wide ranging opportunities for learning, working in close collaborative teams with colleagues mutually supportive of enhancing teacher learning as a dimension of normal working practices. Reviewing, reflecting on and re-evaluating the day's work as a form of ongoing professional practice offers a unique perspective and opportunity to the student teacher. The practical wisdom of experienced teachers as evidenced on a daily basis as a form of mentorship provides a real learning context for real life situations as they occur and has the possibility of demonstrating best practice and solution focussed learning.

However I contest that teacher wisdom wrought from experience is deeply bound in the educational setting of the particular school and specific situations. I further contend this form of ITE risks schools being supplied with inadequately trained teachers who would lack the depth and breadth of pedagogical practice which comes from the exploration and implementation of theory in practice.

I suggest that quality teacher education needs to expose student teachers to the wider canvass of educational theory and research to offer them a more rounded education steeped in the underlying concepts of educational theory, principles, beliefs and values. Teacher educators need to create and implement a complex pedagogy in which their student teachers are both, 'learning to teach' and 'teaching to learn' (Loughran, 2006). Student teachers need to be trained to ask the 'why' questions. I posit therefore that teacher education should include as wide a perspective as possible across theory, research, practice and school settings.

Boyd et al (2011: 12) would concur stating that the role of the teacher educator is "underpinned by scholarship, research and a wider perspective" and that teacher educators need to have, "high level skills and confidence in practitioner research, so they support their student teachers in enquiry and action research activities" (ibid: 12). Cochran-Smith (2005: 219) refers to the "reciprocal, recursive and symbiotic relationships" between the dual functions of research and practice as "working the dialectic" (ibid: 219). Notably the concept of reflective practice has become a key

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component in ITE provision internationally in recent years as well as "an enquiry/research stance, the use of portfolios and in other countries the completion of a research thesis" (Conway et al, 2009: xviii).

2.3   Issues regarding Quality

Given the different approaches to ITE one could ask, what then is quality teacher education? Kumar and Sarangapani (2004) suggest that the usage of the term 'quality' in the discourse of education became significant from the 1950s onwards. Yet quality, like beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Quality is a contested and multifaceted concept which has also become linked with evaluation as a means of assessing quality.

While the pursuit of quality is as old as civilisation the concept of quality has taken many different shapes, from the merchant guilds in the thirteenth century who regulated quality and developed apprenticeship programmes to ensure proper training and regulation in each craft to the Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes of more recent decades, (Murgatroyd and Morgan, 1993, Sallis 2002, Oakland, 2003).

I agree with Sallis (2002) who considers that quality has a variety of meanings. Terms such as quality as excellence, quality as fit for purpose, as value added, quality as exceptional, quality control, quality assurance proliferate. Perhaps the concept of quality is contested and complex because it is something ephemeral in itself, it is dynamic and fluid and identifying it has become interwoven with evaluating it. Murgatroyd and Morgan, (1993), considered the nature of quality from three competing viewpoints, quality which is implicit and indefinable, 'you know it when you see it,' quality which is measured, satisfying predetermined standards, or quality which is simply a matter of reputation. In the context of schools, Nusche et al state (2013);

> *Strong emphasis is being placed on better equipping and encouraging teachers to carry out self-appraisal and student formative assessment, on providing the incentives and means for school self-evaluation, on encouraging "value-added" evaluation and on more regular*

standardised testing of students and national monitoring of the overall system. (Nusche et al. 2013: 17)

Indeed Harvey (2005: 272) considers that the term quality is "used far more frequently, in practice, as shorthand for the bureaucratic procedures than to refer to the concept of quality itself." However Leu (2005: 4) states that, "education systems are always structured around a vision of quality" therefore the meaning of quality will vary among different cultures, and quality assurance measures and the benchmarking of a quality standard will differ accordingly.

A concept of quality that has gained momentum is that of quality as transformational. In an educational context transformational education refers to the development and more particularly empowerment of students through the learning process. The concept of quality as transformational is based on the assertion that students are not seen as products, consumers, or customers but as active participants engaged in, "an on-going process of transformation" (Harvey, 1997:138). According to Harvey (1997: 137), "rather than excellence, value for money, fitness for purpose … at root, quality is about transformation."

This concept of quality resonates with me as it affirms the dynamic nature of quality and allows for an active iterative engagement with a course of study that "arises from the process of change, with a focus on student learning" (Löfström and Nevgi 2007: 313) and "institutional changes which might transform student learning" (Newton, 2007: 15). The transformational quality of the HDAPE course in terms of student learning and in terms of teaching outcomes through the school principals' perceptions of their HC trained teachers is an area which is explored in this study. As Carmichael et al state, (2001: 451) "there is a strong case for student learning to be placed at the very heart of quality systems in all sectors of education, and also therefore in related sectorial quality assurance programmes and processes."

2.4 Initial Teacher Education - Seminal Constructs

In recent times quality provision across the continuum of teacher education has exercised policy makers in many countries. This policy interest is based on the assumption that the formulation of policy and the design of teacher preparation and continuing professional development "optimally takes into account the whole spectrum of teacher learning, that is, teachers' opportunities to learn from their own prior schooling and throughout their own teaching careers" (Schwille and Dembélé, 2007: 29).

Shulman's (1987) seminal work postulated seven types of teacher knowledge pertinent to teacher education namely; (1) content knowledge, (2) general pedagogical knowledge, (3) curriculum knowledge, (4) pedagogical content knowledge, (5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (6) knowledge of educational contexts, (7) knowledge of educational ends. The ever expanding research on the importance of teacher knowledge since Shulman has informed policy makers and research studies up to recent times, (OECD 2005).

Schleicher (2012) highlights the profound change which the 21st century demands of teachers. In the past teaching a fixed syllabus of content was a central tenet of teaching in most countries, today when content can be accessed by anybody through the world wide web the teacher's role has changed to being an enabler;

> *enable people to become lifelong learners, to manage non-rule based complex ways of thinking and complex ways of working ... the past was about delivered wisdom, the challenge now is to foster user-generated wisdom among teachers and school leaders.* (Schleicher, 2012: 35).

I suggest that today teaching is not so much about delivering *content* as it is about developing five other 'C's **-** facilitating *creativity,* fostering *critical thinking*, *communicating* effectively, *critically critiquing* outcomes and *collaborating* with others.

2.5   Initial Teacher Education - what constitutes quality provision?

Conway et al (2009: xiv) state that, "it is now widely recognised that ITE [initial teacher education] cannot give teachers all they need for a demanding career spanning a number of decades. Rather, the focus of [ITE] ought to be on providing teachers with a set of high-level beginning competences rather than preparing fully-formed teachers" and they also state that the "development of flexible pathways into teaching is part of an effort to ensure that the teaching force reflects the diversity of a population"(ibid: xvii).

In 2012 an International Review Panel was commissioned to examine and report on the structure of ITE provision in Ireland and make recommendations to the DES for the future by identifying "possible new structures which will recognise and address weaker areas in the system; 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" (Sahlberg et al, 2012: 13). In this report they highlight the importance of investing in enhancing ITE citing those countries considered by the OECD to have strong performing systems namely, Singapore, Korea, Canada and Finland whereby;

> *in all of these education systems teachers are educated in academic universities where theory and practice are combined to form a foundation for teaching that is on par with other academic professions ... teaching is also perceived by young people as an attractive career choice which makes admission to teacher education highly competitive and intellectually demanding*   (Sahlberg et al, 2012: 13)

Finland is often highly acclaimed for its education system and particularly the quality of its teachers. Teacher education in Finland is research-based and is conducted over five years to Master's degree level. On being employed in Finland, "teachers assume professional responsibility for curriculum planning, student assessment and school improvement, enjoying a high level of autonomy in their work and high status in society" (Sahlberg et al, 2012: 14). As an aside, it is interesting to note, the values the Finnish educators hold dearer than scoring the highest in the PISA 2009 rankings, (something coveted by other nations). Sahlberg cited in Rubin (2013) contends, Finnish educators are not thrilled about PISA, TIMSS, or any other international

comparisons. They would rather hope Finland is seen as a country where four out of five taxpayers trust their public school system, and where three out of four citizens think that their publicly funded education system is their most significant accomplishment since independence in 1917. They celebrate these achievements rather than high rankings in global education league tables (Rubin, 2013).

The sole provider of ITE in Singapore, the National Institute of Education (NIE) ensures that, "evidence-based and research informed learning" underpins their programmes (Sahlberg et al, 2012:14). Furthermore they also value and seek out partnerships with other universities in Asia, Europe and the USA in order to collaborate on research and engage in student and staff exchanges.

Sahlberg et al (2012) would concur with research-based teacher education being a seminal component of ITE asserting that such an education, "expands conventional teacher competences so that teachers are able to use educational research as part of their work in schools" (ibid: 15). In this way they can diagnose their own practice using up-to-date research methodologies and ascertain best practice based on research evidence and thereby, "understand their professional development through critically reflecting on their own thinking and behaviour" (ibid: 15). This resonates with the concept of quality ITE as transformational. Sahlberg et al (2012) also highlight the trend internationally in linking theory and practice at school placement level through a more systematic focus on "clinical learning in special teacher training schools or carefully assigned regular schools where highly trained master teachers" (ibid: 15) oversee the training of student teachers. Sahlberg et al (2012) summarize quality teacher education as being;

> *university-based with high quality instruction on both pedagogy and pedagogical content knowledge, a strong focus on research as a basis for teaching and learning, systematic clinical practice in school settings, and real internationalisation of the institutions providing initial and continuing teacher education*
>   (Sahlberg, Munn and Furlong, 2012: 18)

An interesting comment made by the international panel pertinent to this research on HC was that in order to ensure high quality candidates, "a more effective modelling

of the supply and demand for new teachers should be developed as a matter of urgency" (Sahlberg et al, 2012: 20). While a minimum entry standard is set by the TC many entrants far exceed this minimum and the panel therefore recommended that, "all providers, including Hibernia College, be required to submit data to the DES with regard to the standards of their entrants" (ibid: 20).

In the 2007 McKinsey report on the top performing education systems, Barber and Mourshed, (2007:18) concur with the importance of regulating supply and demand in order to continue to attract high calibre students to teaching when they state, "Failing to control entry into teacher training almost invariably leads to an oversupply of candidates which, in turn, has a significant negative effect on teacher quality." Furthermore they found three fundamental similarities across high performing school systems which included;

- *They get the right people to become teachers (the quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers).*
- *They develop these people into effective instructors (the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction).*
- *They put in place systems and targeted support to ensure that every child is able to benefit from excellent instruction (the only way for the system to reach the highest performance is to raise the standard of every student)*

(Barber and Mourshed, 2007:13)

2.6 Initial Teacher Education in Ireland - A brief historical perspective

The OECD (1991) published a review of Irish Education in 1991 and stated that, "the quality of teacher educators is high [and] … a well organised, effective and professionally and academically sound structure for initial teacher education already exists"(OECD, 1991: 97). The authors considered that "Ireland has been fortunate to maintain the quality of its teaching force" (ibid 1991:100) and approved of the provision of both the concurrent and consecutive models of teacher education. It was all the more surprising therefore that the government's first Green Paper on education (Government of Ireland, 1992) proposed dropping the concurrent model

of primary teacher training in favour of the consecutive model believing that a common form of initial training for all teachers would be the best way forward. However in a National Convention held in 1993 with representatives of all the education partners responding to the Green Paper there was a strong call for the retention of the concurrent model of teacher training.

The subsequent White Paper (Government of Ireland, 1995) and thereby government policy affirmed the retention of the concurrent model of teacher education for the initial education of primary teachers. It viewed the teaching career as a continuum involving initial teacher education, induction processes and in-career development whereby learning opportunities would be made available to teachers throughout their careers. This policy position had implications therefore for the 3I's of - initial, induction and in-career teacher education.

Following on the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) which placed the primary education sector on a statutory basis for the first time and before the official launch of the revised primary curriculum on the 9/9/1999 a working group on primary pre-service teacher education was convened in January 1999 and reported to the Minister in 2002, making sixty recommendations focussing on pre-service education and one recommendation on in-service education advocating support for teachers to pursue post-graduate studies. Ultimately the working group advocated "a root and branch reform based on a re-conceptualisation of (initial) teacher education" (DES, 2002:19). Among the recommendations was the recommendation that a fourth year be added to the B.Ed. degree (concurrent model) and that the post-graduate programme (consecutive model) be extended by six months from 18 months to two years. This view was also endorsed by the OECD (2005) report which stated that Ireland was among only four countries of thirty listed where primary teacher education was limited to three years. The working group report also suggested that teaching practice should be re-structured and that a more formal role be given to classroom teachers in participating schools in the process.

The DES did not act on the recommendations of this report nor did they act on the 'sister' report at post-primary level but they have since delegated such functions to the Teaching Council which was established on a statutory basis in 2006. The then

Chief Inspector, Eamon Stack, (2007) representing DES and cited in Coolahan (2007: 37) stated that the TC was the body to bring the DES's "policy formulation process relating to teacher education policy and standards" to fruition when it fulfils Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act. Stack also stated (ibid: 36) that "It is now recognised by all that the ongoing changing educational context requires a review of the content and process of current teacher education programmes." Coolahan believes (ibid: 34) that what is most important now for high quality Irish teacher education is "the identification and clear articulation of the capabilities which professional teachers need to possess for contemporary and emerging forms of schooling. He continues that there is much to be gained "by making explicit what is often left unstated about the criteria involved in high quality teaching" (ibid: 34).

2.7 Components of Contemporary ITE Programmes

In order to develop students into effective teachers the OECD (2005:107) found that most ITE programme providers offer some combination of coursework in: "subject matter; teaching methods, child/adolescent development, psychology, sociology, history and philosophy of education; and curriculum studies together with a period of teaching practice." This would appear to represent a standard set of requirements yet on issues such as which combinations or what set of emphasis should be employed there appears to be a lack of comparative and cross national studies as stated below;

> *Which pedagogical courses and instructional methods best serve professional teacher preparation? What are the effects of subject matter courses and pedagogical courses and which mix is most effective? Little is known about the impact of different forms of field experience on teacher effectiveness, or how these are best combined with more theoretical studies. Longitudinal research is needed on the entrants to initial teacher education and their subsequent careers, including those who enter the profession through alternative routes.*
> (OECD, 2005: 220)

Schleicher (2012) describes the new model of teacher education from one of the top performing systems, Singapore. This model (TE21) is aimed at producing the

'thinking teacher' for the 21st century and focuses on three value paradigms "Learner-centered, Teacher Identity, and Service to the Profession and Community" Schleicher (2012: 36). The model also underscores the requisite knowledge and skills that teachers, "must possess in light of the latest global trends, and to improve student outcomes" (ibid: 36). This model is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 2.1

Figure 2.1

Developing Education Professionals
Values, Knowledge , Skills - a spiral approach
Singapore's TE21 Model of Teacher Education
Source : Schleicher (2012:36)

Value 1 – Learner-Centered Values
- Empathy
- Belief that all children can learn
- Commitment to nurturing the potential in each child
- Valuing of diversity

Value 2 Teacher Identity
- Aim for high standards
- Enquiring nature
- Quest for learning
- Strive to Improve
- Passion
- Adaptive and Resilient
- Ethical
- Professionalism

Value 3 - Service to the Profession and Community

- Collaborative learning and practice
- Building apprenticeship and mentoring
- Social responsibility and engagement
- Stewardship

Skills
Reflective skills and Thinking Dispositions
Pedagogical skills
People management skills
Administrative and management skills
Communication skills
Technological skills
Innovation and entrepreneurship skills
Social and emotional intelligence

- **Knowledge**
- Self , Pupil , Community
- Subject content
- Pedagogy
- Education Foundations and policies
- Curriculum
- Multicultural literacy
- Global awareness
- Environmental awareness

This model is similar in many respects and includes many of the same criteria which are now incorporated in the Irish Teaching Council's (2011) criteria and guidelines for programme providers in Ireland.

2.8 Components of Contemporary Irish ITE Programmes

In order for Irish students to become competent teachers ready and able to meet the challenges facing them in educating future generations the TC in Ireland set out criteria and guidelines for programme providers in 2011 based on inputs, processes and outcomes (Teaching Council, 2011). While quite strict criteria were laid down in terms of both inputs and outcomes, discretion was afforded programme providers in terms of the process by which they would achieve these outcomes. Indeed the publication, setting out the criteria and guidelines for programme providers has produced, "for the first time in the history of teacher education in the State, learning outcomes for all graduates of ITE programmes" (Teaching Council, 2011: 6).

In terms of inputs, the criteria and guidelines set out for programme providers should be set within a clearly defined conceptual framework which should identify "the principles, beliefs and values about education, about teacher education and about teaching and learning … should provide a rationale for the model of ITE adopted [and] linkages between the programme aims and the conceptual framework should be evident" (Teaching Council, 2011: 8). Students should be enabled to become reflective practitioners, flexibly adapting to meet the ongoing needs of their pupils as well as cater for national priorities and be able to assume their professional roles in the context of, "a collaborative, dynamic school environment, helping them to engage with colleagues, co-professionals and parents and understand their respective roles"(ibid: 9). The TC has stipulated the mandatory elements of the programme to which all providers must adhere as well as directions for teaching and learning strategies, school placement, staffing, facilities, student support systems, the duration and nature of the ITE programmes and proposed higher level entry requirements which will become effective from the 2016/2017 intake of new student entrants.

In terms of processes, each provider should put in place systems which facilitate the process of lifelong learning and expose students to the concept of the continuum of teacher education and develop their capacity to plan their future learning paths. In this context students, "should have opportunities to engage in research as the foundation of their practitioner-based enquiry stance in the future" (ibid:21). Processes and systems should also be put in place to ensure the development of the core values and professional commitments detailed in the Teaching Council's, *"Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers"* (2007), a second updated edition of which was published in 2012.

In terms of outcomes, for the first time programme providers have specific learning outcomes which must be achieved for graduates of their ITE programmes. These learning outcomes are divided into three main domains namely;

- **(a)** Knowledge-Breadth/Knowledge-Kind;
- **(b)** Know-How and Skill-Range, Know-How and Skill-Selectivity;
- **(c)** Competence-Context, Competence-Role, Competence-Learning-to-Learn; Competence-Insight (see Appendix B for a summary of these criteria and guidelines).

The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes cited above across the three domains represent the present understanding of quality teacher education in Ireland as gleaned from the extensive research conducted by the TC. These three domains are very similar to the three values, the skills and the knowledge espoused in Singapore's TE21 Model of Teacher Education.

Indeed the Filmer-Sankey et al, (2006) report comparing ITE across the five jurisdictions of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland concludes that there is a, "considerable convergence in terms of what is required of teacher trainees. Areas of divergence are on a more cosmetic level and it is suggested that standardisation of the ways that the standards are presented … would reduce system difference." (Filmer-Sankey et al, 2006: vi).

In Ireland all ITE providers from 2011 onwards are required to meet the learning outcomes mandated by the TC and to put in place the processes to achieve these. The implications for the ITE providers in terms of ensuring that their teacher educators are adequately equipped to perform their revised duties and the implications for schools in terms of their increasing role in mentoring and evaluating students in 'schools of excellence' have huge ramifications in terms of professional development, time management, as well as human and resource management. This closer marriage of theory and practice, of university staff working more closely with schools and of schools being more involved with the formation of future teachers while laudable presents certain challenges which will have to be addressed if the full implementation of the learning outcomes as espoused by the TC is to come to fruition in the years ahead in Ireland.

Consideration of these issues is worthy of time and debate but will not be undertaken in this research. For the purposes of this research however, many of the learning outcomes appropriate to this study given above will form the bedrock of the questionnaire which will be conducted with primary school principals in ascertaining their views of how HC trained teachers on their staffs perform as classroom teachers and as professional colleagues.

2.9 Digital Learning in Context

Whether we are digital 'natives' comfortable with ICT (like the present generation from pre-schoolers to third level students) or we are digital 'immigrants' there can be no doubt but that these new technologies are here to stay and have the capacity to permeate every aspect of our lives. Certainly ICT could be said to have the potential to bring about fundamental even paradigm shifts in the purposes of education and the role and function of teachers in a digital age. With the arrival of the world wide web came a new dawn for learning. Information was at the fingertips of those who could access it. For those with a computer and an internet provider there was equity of access. The issue was no longer access to information but the ability to discern information. The interconnectivity of digital technology and teaching and learning

processes became increasingly more evident and learning through the use of digital technology became a global reality.

This reality poses certain challenges to traditional forms of education which include among others, illiteracy, political challenges and intercultural diversity. Such challenges I suggest require innovative pedagogical-methodological innovations on behalf of teachers. Kaye as far back as 1992 cut to the heart of a significant challenge when he talked about the potential for "learning together apart" (Kaye, 1992:1). If indeed the use of digital technology is to allow us to be able to learn together apart then the potential of ICT in the context of education is enormous. Consider the possibility of human beings engaged in collaborative dialogue and the co-construction of knowledge, concepts and ideas, unfettered by distance, location, or time, then we can envisage a global community of teacher/learners in 'virtual schools' without boundaries.

2.10 Online Everything - the Internet changes everything

The phrase "the Internet changes everything" is attributed to Larry Ellison who was the founder of the software giant Oracle. While some might query whether it represented a positive change in lifestyle, others would hail its arrival, placing its invention on par with the wheel, the printing press, the internal combustion engine and the development of aviation.

Stephenson, (2001: ix) defines online learning as the, "electronic means of distributing and engaging with learning, typically via the Internet and related electronic media services." He postulates why learning online would be enthusiastically received at the macro level by Governments, large corporate companies, entrepreneurs and educational institutions and administrators by asserting that online learning, "offers the prospect of direct delivery of learning to existing learners and to groups traditionally excluded by personal circumstances from institutional learning, coupled with assumed economies of scale"(ibid: ix).

At the micro or individual level increased knowledge of and experience with ICT increases a person's employability; teachers favour the potential of ICT to experiment with the design of learning materials and "online *anything* is becoming a preferred way of communicating with friends, assessing entertainment, surfing for information, banking and electronic purchasing"(ibid: ix).

In terms of communication, social networking, banking and finance and purchasing products and services the benefits of online facilities and potential appear very desirable. In terms of education however there are those who question, if online teaching and learning, has added anything of real value other than faster delivery on a greater scale to more participants and in some cases is nothing more than an electronic page turning exercise. Investors and entrepreneurs seeing the market potential of online education have been quick to capitalise on this new and untapped source of revenue. Allen and Seaman, (2013) citing the Sloan Consortium state that. 6.1 million students took at least one online class during autumn 2010 in the USA and the rise of online and virtual universities has grown significantly in recent years. While the course offered by HC under investigation in this study is a 'blended-learning' course providing some content online and other content onsite, HC also offers fully online courses in other subjects and would be one of the many Colleges using online technologies which has emerged as an educational provider and expanded into various countries across many continents in recent years.

Alexander and Boud, (2001: 3) suggest that a lot of the potential of online learning has been lost because too much of the pedagogy of online learning, "has been transferred unreflectively from didactic traditional teaching where the computer substitutes for the teacher and textbooks as conveyor of information." Laurillard, (2012) notes that "the internet does not educate, nor does it actively support learning. Mostly, it provides information," (Laurillard, 2012: 29). Garrison and Kanuka (2004: 104) emphasise the importance of assessing the effectiveness of online and blended-learning and state that, "In addition to assessing the learning outcomes, the learning process should also be assessed." What therefore one could ask constitutes effective online learning?

2.11   Online Learning - defining features

According to Ramage, (2002:1) the term 'online instruction' is a generic term that, by definition, implies that "the student is physically separated from the faculty and 'connected' through the use of a computer and a network or Internet link." Related terms include "Computer Mediated Conferences (CMC), Computer Mediated Instruction (CMI) and Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) and if the element of time is taken into account, Asynchronous Learning Networks (ALN)" (ibid: 1). He contrasts this form of instruction with traditional classroom instruction which is defined as "time and space bound face-to-face instruction, typically conducted in an educational setting and consisting primarily of a lecture/note-taking model" (Ramage, 2002: 2).

In recent times there have been many studies comparing the learning outcomes attained through online instruction versus traditional face-to-face instruction. Most of these studies have examined both forms of instruction using the data on the grades at the completion of a course as the comparator. Studies by Smeaton and Keogh (1999), Wade (1999), Sener and Stover (2000), Fallah and Ubell (2000) all found either in a range from no significant difference between the two forms of instruction up to a 5% increase in students' grades in favour of online instruction. Ramage, (2002) in reviewing the literature on the effectiveness of online learning found that no study cited lower test scores for online learners as compared with traditional face-to-face instruction. The theory of no significant difference between distance/online learning and the more traditional face-to-face learning has developed because of such studies.

2.12 The Theory of No Significant Difference

Russell's (2001) comparative research on the theory of no significant difference is an important resource which annotates 355 different research studies that support the conclusion that no significant difference exists between the effectiveness of classroom education and distance learning. There are also studies such as Ferguson and Tryjankowski's (2009) research with Master's students providing examples of

significant difference. Ramage, (2002) in critiquing both sides of the 'no significant difference' debate criticises both sides for conducting studies using variables to suit their own purposes. He equally concedes however that the construction of a definitive study containing all the salient variables and taking into account the gaps in previous research in order to provide valid data which would posit measurable difference on either side of the divide would be practically impossible. He asserts, "It is difficult, if not impossible, to apply scientific methods to social science hypotheses … the best that can be done is to try … to review the impact of media and method, account for efficiency of design and cognitive efficiency and to ensure that the right questions are asked and the right messages are taught" (Ramage, 2002: 5).

Others studies have used other variables to critique the effectiveness of either form of instruction. For instance (Leasure, Davis and Thievon, 2000:149) considered students' perceptions of both forms of instruction and found that students preferred online courses for reasons of cost, convenience and flexibility and that those favouring face-to-face courses chose them for the perception of "increased opportunity for interaction, decreased opportunity to procrastinate, immediate feedback and more meaningful learning activities." The perceptions of HDAPE students on both forms of study will be ascertained in this study.

2.13 Recent Considerations

The most recent variable, which is attracting a lot of consideration is the professional development of faculty staff to improve their pedagogical skills using online technologies. Kim and Bonk, (2006) believe that the role of the teacher in the online setting differs from that of the teacher in the face-to-face setting and that online tutors are settling for transferring their traditional teaching skills into the new online platforms without capitalising on the opportunities the new technologies present or more worryingly making accommodation for the challenges online teaching presents. I would agree with their assertions and would see this as one of the limiting factors of online learning; for example in synchronous instruction the lack of face-to-

face contact for the tutor eliminates the physical cues of interest, understanding and engagement and/or lack thereof.

Conrad (2007), Hrastinski (2009) and Laurillard and Masterman, (2010) acknowledging the social nature of teaching and learning, contend that there is a need for online teachers to transform their practice to include more active collaborative and co-operative online teaching approaches and activities. Laycock, (2009) recognises that the need to enhance online teaching and learning interactions is placing demands on online teaching faculty and Loughran, (2010) asserts that online tutors must invest time in themselves upskilling their knowledge and competencies if they are to teach effectively in the new online environments. Palloff and Pratt, (2011) consider that because of this need to upskill and update there is a requirement for colleges to provide faculty teaching online with appropriate professional support and training.

While there is literature on the methodologies and competencies online tutors need to teach effectively in online settings, Collison et al (2000), Ko and Rosen (2004), Salmon (2008) and Palloff and Pratt (2011) much of this work relates to asynchronous situations. With the onset of synchronous technology whereby online teachers and students can discourse with each other instantaneously, irrespective of location, Kaye's (1992:1) maxim "learning together apart" takes on vital new dimensions and contexts and proffers further challenges to, as well as opportunities for online teachers.

Synchronous technology or synchronous computer mediated conferencing (SCMC) as it is known, require teachers and students alike to be able to discourse with one another using a combination of text, audio and video in a live setting. Tutors in this context can play videos and seek opinions from the students immediately after viewing the video together, the tutor can place the students into various chat rooms to discuss their opinions and the tutor can call into each of these chat rooms. Instantaneous evaluations and opinion polls can be taken on the relevance of the session, individual students can send queries through text messages which can be shared with all or seen only by the tutor. This form of instantaneous reciprocal discourse and dialogue places demands on both teacher and student alike.

Of interest to this research are the findings of an unpublished doctoral thesis (Hallissy, 2014) who conducted an investigation into the quality of the interactions between online tutors and learners during synchronous tutorials on the Masters of Arts in Teaching and Learning (MATL) course offered by HC. Hallissy found that;

> *students and tutors did not have an agreed set of ground rules for these online events and thus there was a need for a signature pedagogy to clarify this … the level of interaction during these tutorials was predominantly teacher led with little evidence of student voice. Further analysis found that there was also limited evidence of critical discussion*
>
> (Hallissy, 2014: iii)

He further postulated that his study had implications for the scholarship of teaching online. Though online learning has the potential to transform learning;

> *… the evidence of such transformational practice is limited. Therefore there is a need for much greater work around how technology can transform learning online by assisting teachers to design and implement more democratic classrooms that engage in critical discussion. Ultimately SCMC technologies are designed to facilitate conversations and discussions but teachers and students will need guidance and support to enable these to take place.*
>
> (Hallissy, 2014: 133)

2.14   Blended-Learning – A Blended Approach

For the purposes of this study which is investigating a teacher training course offered through the use of a blended-technology, it is worth exploring the nuanced opportunities offered to teachers and students alike through the use of a 'blended' approach to augment online learning. Blended-learning involves the use of virtual and physical learning resources using a combination of multiple approaches to learning which involves face-to-face learning, online collaborative learning and self-paced learning. Graham, (2005) would include cellular or smartphones, satellite television channels, videoconferencing and all other electronic and emerging media

which could be utilised in blended-learning in order to provide realistic practical opportunities for teachers and learners alike to sustain and develop through independent learning. A comprehensive definition proffered by Heinz and Procter, (2004) emphasises the importance of clear communication as they believe that while blended-learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, it must also be founded on transparent communications amongst all parties involved with a course if it is to be effective.

Garrison and Vaughan, (2008:146) contend that blended-learning actually "questions conventional practices and the belief in the lecture as an effective approach to engage students in critical and creative thinking and learning." They place blended-learning within a framework of a community of enquiry which requires the three key elements of; social-presence, teaching-presence and cognitive-presence and which, "appropriately integrates these elements and provides a means to guide the design of deep and meaningful educational experiences" (ibid:9). Bartlette, (2009: 110) would agree that blended-learning is constructed on the framework of a community of enquiry but also suggests that through its design approach it also offers, "the possibility of recapturing the traditional ideals of higher education in today's context." McNamara and O'Hara, (2008: 203) researching the development of educational professionalism through self-evaluation conclude that a virtual learning environment can "provide an interesting and motivating environment within which working research relationships can develop and flourish."

Holden and Westfall, (2010: 35) state, "Blended learning allows the instructional designer the opportunity to leverage the strengths of instructional media with the efficacy of the instructional components to ensure the instructional goal is attained." They believe that, "the most important single factor in media selection is the *instructional object*, with the end result of improving human performance" (ibid: 49). They cite the U.S. Congress Report (1988) which stated that, "The quality and effectiveness of distance learning are determined by instructional design and technique, the selection of appropriate technologies and the quality of the interaction afforded to learners," (ibid: 49) and they conclude their own work by stating, "it is important to remember that instructional media are basically distribution systems,

and the most critical consideration in selecting a medium is the preservation of instructional effectiveness" (ibid: 49). Just as in the synchronous online learning discussed above, the role of the teacher in blended-learning is critical as Stephenson, (2001:148) states, "What the teacher knows about learning and the relationship he or she develops with the students, remains just as essential in virtual classrooms as in physical classrooms." Hallissy, (2014:134) reaffirms the importance of the teacher from his research concluding, "The study has found that teachers and not technology are the real agents of change within an educational organisation."

2.15 Implications for this Research

Following a review of the literature on quality ITE provision and on online and blended-learning I have formed the view that seeking comparisons of traditional versus blended-learning approaches to teaching and their efficacy in terms of ITE would be limiting and even futile in the context of this study. I contend that an investigation of Hibernia's blended-learning course could more profitably focus on the students' opinions of the course and from these deliberations examine, as Twigg (2001) says, the capabilities afforded by blended-learning to improve learning outcomes. Alternatively the obstacles which students encountered with blended-learning could also enlighten and as Sener (2004) suggests contribute towards developing pedagogies that make the best use of current technologies.

2.16 Chapter Summary

This Literature Review focused on an examination of ITE, explored the concept of quality in an educational context and considered the nature of online learning, and the value of blended-learning as a form of adult learning.

With respect to ITE pertinent trends and issues were discussed, the concept of quality was briefly explored in the context of educational provision. Seminal constructs in ITE and quality ITE provision were described. A brief historical

overview of ITE in Ireland provided a context for a consideration of the components of contemporary issues emerging in ITE as stipulated by the TC.

Exploring online learning set out at the outset to place digital learning in the context of today's world and highlight the significance of the Internet as a tool of communication which has transformed not just education but the world of global finance, commerce, retail purchasing and entertainment. The benefits of online learning together with its limitations were explored and the nature and value of blended-learning were considered. The chapter concludes with brief comments linking the learning from this chapter to the work of this study in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH   DESIGN

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

This chapter places the research within a particular paradigm and provides a description of this researcher's philosophical assumptions. The study is located within the constructivist research paradigm arguing the case for a phenomenological epistemology and holistic ontology. The research is emic and iterative and uses a mixed methods approach to gathering data and to data analysis. A full description of the mixed methods research methodology is given in order to further elucidate the paradigm choice and consequent research design used in the study. The management of the research is clearly delineated and a framework is outlined giving the research strategy and phases employed. The chapter also outlines the ethical standards applied throughout the study. Issues concerning coherence and validity are discussed in terms of ensuring quality in mixed methods research. The chapter concludes with a summary overview.

3.2 Research – Towards a Definition

Bassey (1999: 38) defines research as "systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute towards the advancement of knowledge and wisdom." Stenhouse (1981:113) adds an external evaluative dimension when stating that research is, "systematic and sustained enquiry, planned and self-critical, which is subjected to public criticism and to empirical tests where these are appropriate." I concur and would define research as a systematic, disciplined, rigorous, transparent, ethical and accountable enquiry which aims to add further to a specific bank of knowledge.

The array of literature accompanying the quantitative *versus* qualitative paradigm debate engaged Western researchers during the latter half of the last century. Those debates could be said to be equalled if not surpassed by those emanating from the ensuing traditions of critical theory including, emancipatory, feminist and queer theory as well as action research and mixed methods alternatives to mention some of the more prominent traditions. Heck and Hallinger (2005: 232) in considering research in the field of

education suggest that researchers employing "different conceptual and methodological approaches often seem to pass each other blindly in the night. They ask different questions and base their enquiry on widely differing epistemological assumptions." I would suggest that it is precisely because the researchers cited above are asking vastly different questions that they base their enquiry on differing epistemological assumptions. The research question is therefore key.

In the case of this research the key question emerged following completion of a required assignment on leadership as part of this taught doctoral programme. My first interview with the President of HC acted as a catalyst in pursuing this present study and as the exploratory pilot phase of the study provides the basis upon which a justification for the chosen methodology was subsequently made. The key question is this; what can be learned from this unique blended-learning teacher education course which might inform future practice? An investigation into this unique Irish teacher education course was warranted following this first interview and the methodological approach chosen as most appropriate was a mixed methods approach as will be detailed later.

3.3   Research Statement

As stated the research method used in this study is that of a mixed methods approach which is considered as a discrete method of enquiry that uses both qualitative and quantitative tools as the method of enquiry and analysis (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson 2006, Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006) consider that mixed methodologies present an alternative to qualitative and quantitative traditions by advocating the use of whatever methodological tools are required to answer the research question. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) suggest, and I concur, that as well as being a method of enquiry mixed methods research is also a research design with philosophical assumptions. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) these philosophical assumptions should be articulated by researchers in their mixed methods research work.

3.4 Paradigms - The Wider Context

For Greene (2007:15) "Paradigm ... refers to an integrated set of assumptions about the nature of the social world, about the character of the knowledge we can have about the social world, and about what is important to know." Research design is ultimately shaped by purpose, context and resources and will also depend on the researcher's paradigmatic stance, for as Creswell (2013:15) states "whether we are aware of it or not, we always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to our research."

A brief consideration will now be given to the different methodologies inherent in each tradition, as methods employed in any academic endeavour relate to the overarching paradigm and the assumptions that tradition makes on the nature of reality. While any tradition is but one understanding of reality, it is that understanding which directs the search for greater knowledge and ultimately truth. A defence of mixed methods as the appropriate method utilized in this research will be made within this wider context.

Maykut and Morehouse, (1994: 3) consider positivism is, "objective inquiry based on measurable variables and provable propositions … it is the insistence on explanation, prediction and proof that are the hallmarks of positivism." Later on they define qualitative research used by the phenomenological tradition as placing emphasis on understanding through, "a close examination of people's words, actions and documents in order to discern patterns of meaning which come out of this data" (ibid: 16).

In certain core fundamental ways the positivists' view of the world or major conceptual constructs differ significantly from that of the phenomenologists. The positivists view the world as open to scrutiny through the precise and careful examination of its component parts. As a detached, objective observer the positivist believes that s/he can experiment with and track change and its significance as well as the nature of relationships through linear causality, the hierarchical organisation of information and an examination of the predictability of controlled variables. Here concept formulation, detached observation and precise measurement with accurate reporting are key constructs.

In a competing and contrasting world view the phenomenologists consider that the world is complex and differentiated with information organised in hierarchies. By taking a

perspectival stance the phenomenologists seek to understand webs of mutual and multiple causality and to discover the morphogenic nature of change and relationships. Bryman (2001: 285) provides an overview of these contrasting conceptual views which I now synthesise as follows. Positivists are concerned with a macro orientation often depicting a static image of social reality which is analysed through a precisely structured approach. This yields hard reliable data on behaviour from artificial settings reported in quantifiable terms and producing generalizable results. This contrasts with the phenomenologists who are concerned with the micro aspects of an evolving interactive social reality. This yields rich deep data on the meaning behind behaviour from natural settings producing findings of great contextual understanding.

Essentially the positivist and the phenomenologist each view the world through a different lens at the outset. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000: 28) concur stating that for positivists, "observed phenomena are important" while for phenomenologists "meanings and interpretations are important."

Phenomenologists could claim that the positivist tradition is simplistic in terms of social research with linear concepts of cause and effect, dealing only in a singular reality and seeking an ephemeral goal of objectivity. They believe that the true nature of social behaviour is only understood as interpreted social reality which is a complex inter-related series of multi-directional relationships. They might decry the search for objectivity claiming it to be a defunct concept and insist that subjectivity is required in order to understand human life as seen by people themselves. They could consider the use of complex mathematical formulae inappropriate in a social context and they would concur with the sentiments of Maykut and Morehouse (1994: 16) who state that quantitative "tests for significance," are often "confused with indicators of importance" (ibid: 16).

Equally positivists could critique the anecdotal nature of qualitative research as well as the possibility of over-representing participant accounts that agreed with the researcher's own value system and/or under-reporting those which did not. The possibility for the researcher to influence or lead the participants and likewise the degree to which interviewees might seek to please the researcher could also be cited as possible design constraints. The ability of the qualitative researcher to analyse comprehensively the huge amount of raw data generated could be queried. Equally the discernment needed to make

appropriate decisions in an unbiased fashion on what to report can be questioned. The fact that qualitative researchers place an emphasis on contextual findings could be seen as a design limitation in terms of making any worthwhile generalisations. Furthermore the limited focus of the research could be considered to generate findings of value and significance only to the participants and researcher/s involved. Positivists could suggest that the increase in the store of human knowledge following qualitative research would in no measure be commensurate with the effort undertaken. The findings from such research would also have far less impact with policy makers.

The ontological, epistemological and teleological differences between the two paradigms give rise to different methodological practices. Positivist research using quantitative methods is generally associated with a predetermined research design which is in contrast to the emergent design indicative of qualitative research. While positivists establish their hypotheses and precise research design, methodology, sample and experimental procedure at the outset, phenomenologists assert that the theory and methodology will be developed and tested as part of the process of the research enquiry.

While the research question and principles of methodology would be present from the start, a critical design feature for qualitative researchers is the necessity for inbuilt design flexibility, where decisions on data generation, sampling and other design features are made in light of the evolving and ongoing research analysis. This iterative process facilitates the creation of a spiral, reflexive, dynamic design resulting in contextual findings. Here concepts of objectivity, reliability and external and internal validity so important to the positivist have their parallels in confirmability, dependability, transferability and credibility respectively. Believing primarily that only a human being is multifaceted enough to capture the intricacies of human activity the phenomenologists use the 'human-as-instrument' and indwelling, together with contextual critical analysis, as verification tools. The broad church encapsulated by this paradigm includes among others, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, naturalism, ethnography, ethno methodology and ethogenics, all pursuing a research principle of working with people.

3.5 The Critical Theoretic

Essentially critical theorists are critical of both paradigms and of their neglect of the political and ideological contexts in which research takes place and their seeming acceptance of the status quo. The epistemological position taken by critical theorists is that there is no knowledge that is value free. Critical research seeks to get below the surface, uncovering the interest at work, exposing real relations and the effect of historical, cultural and social conditioning on society in order to challenge and change the social order towards a more equitable and democratic society. The concept of praxis, that personal theory and practice are inextricably linked is a central tenet in critical theory. Here no researcher can claim neutrality, ideological or political innocence.

3.6 The Mixed Methods Viewpoint

To avoid polarisation and division between traditions and to build bridges across traditions a case can be made for considering the value of mixed methods research. While mixed methods may be frowned upon by purists, researchers advocating the alternative paradigm stance consider that traditional enquiry paradigms have become irrelevant to research practice. New emerging paradigms such as pragmatism, scientific realism and critical realism consider that adopting a compatabilist position allows researchers to mix and match their design components to provide the best examination possible of what can be complex, multidimensional, interdisciplinary queries in social enquiry. Indeed Burke-Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, (2004:15) contend that "epistemological and paradigmatic ecumenicalism is within reach in the research paradigm of mixed methods research."

Given that mixed methods researchers advocate the use of qualitative and quantitative techniques and reject the concept of incompatibility of methods, there is recognition that quantitative and qualitative research are each connected with distinctive epistemological and ontological assumptions, but as Bryman, (2001: 631) asserts "the connections are not viewed as fixed and ineluctable." Research methods are perceived as autonomous. "A research method from one research strategy is viewed as capable of being pressed into the service of another."(ibid: 631).

Philosophically mixed methods research is pragmatic, inclusive, pluralist and through its eclectic approach affords researchers opportunities to conduct research which as noted by Sechrest and Sidana (1995) incorporates the strengths of both traditions. The use of mixed methods is based on the philosophical assumption that, "a mixed methods way of thinking rests on assumptions that there are multiple legitimate approaches to social inquiry and that any given approach to social inquiry is inevitably partial."(Greene 2007:20). Burke-Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define mixed methods as;

> *The class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a study and considers that its logic of enquiry includes the use of induction, deduction and abduction.*
>
> Burke-Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:17)

Greene (2007:13) expands the definition of mixed methods to include the concept of mental models. For her the essence of mixed methods research involves the inclusion of, "multiple mental models into the same inquiry space for purposes of respectful conversation, dialogue and learning one from the other," leading to a "collective generation of better understanding of the phenomena being studied" (ibid:13). Mixed methods allows for the creation of user-specific, complex across-stage and within-stage, mixed model designs. This understanding of mixed methods centres on the concept of difference, respecting and learning from difference. Greene, Benjamin and Goodyear, (2001: 32) state, "In good mixed methods evaluation, difference is constitutive and generative." Rather than glorifying convergence through triangulation mixed methods research can generate empirical puzzles, paradoxes and conflicts which if addressed correctly can create new knowledge out of dissonance and difference which is characteristically more insightful and creative.

Advocating mixed methods is essentially an advocacy for epistemological and methodological pluralism. I do accept that this may be difficult to justify in theory to purists but in practice credence should be given to the approach. In mixed methods research, the researcher is guided by the research as it unfolds and, if needed, uses an eclectic contingent process of enquiry by moving back and forth within the research question. Furthermore, by using mixed methods research, the researcher is not merely trying to find methods that are fit for purpose but rather is attempting to achieve as

Greene (2005: 208) states, "the generation of important understandings and discernments through the juxtaposition of different lenses, perspectives, and stances."

Certain issues pertain to methodology design however as mixed methods practice is far more difficult than mixed methods theory according to Schwandt (2003). As stated earlier research design is ultimately shaped by purpose, context and resources. Design will also depend on the researcher's paradigmatic stance, the independence/interactivity of the chosen research methods and data, the degree of status afforded them and their sequence of implementation.

Teddlie and Tashakkori, (2006) have worked on typologies for designing mixed methods studies but as Maxwell and Loomis (2003: 244) assert "the actual diversity in mixed methods studies is far greater than any typology can encompass." In this context validating mixed methods research can be a "conceptual and procedural challenge" (Greene 2007: 174). Inference quality is a term used by Teddlie and Tashakkori, (2003: 36) to mean "the accuracy with which we have drawn both our inductively and deductively derived conclusions" and they highlight both design quality and interpretive rigour as crucial. Schwandt (1996: 66) proposed a guiding ideal of democracy and emphasised deliberation and dialogue with researchers conversing with "coherence, expansiveness, interpretative insight, relevance ... [and] beauty," while Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006) concentrate on the concept of legitimation for mixed methods validity.

Finally the issue of presentation is more complex in mixed methods as the requirements to give equity of voice to the different traditions as well as to participants and to have meaningful dialogue with the various community of enquirers who would hold different expectations of a research text, gives mixed methods researchers "a crisis of representation" (Sandelowski, 2003: 321) but the rewards for orchestrating such a feat offers the potential for far greater insight, understanding and inclusive communication.

Faced with the differing world views of the positivist, phenomenologist, critical theorist and mixed methods proponents, one could be said to be faced with a symbolic crossroads. Indeed Hammersly (1992: 172) likens the research journey to a maze rather than a cross roads, "a complex maze where we are repeatedly faced with decisions, and where paths wind back on one another."

In journeying through the different paradigmatic shifts and their different foci, one can see a development in terms of an increasingly more holistic and multifaceted approach to knowledge generation. With reference to Bassey's (1999) definition of research cited at the outset, I would conclude that researchers from within the various paradigms approach the research task in a systematic and self-critical manner seeking empirical data from within their own theoretical viewpoint. Equally they are open to offering their work up to the candid scrutiny of other researchers through the explicit and public sharing of their findings. Therefore in spite of all their differences they each add to the intricate tapestry of life, knowledge and the human condition. While I agree with Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000: 29) that, "what counts as knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge," when it comes to knowledge generation it appears to me that the task of conducting and evaluating research is not an epistemological one but rather it is essentially both a practical and moral task.

I contend that all researchers should have a tolerance and a respect for the manner in which each paradigm seeks credibility through its own unique measure of reliability and validity. But ultimately each researcher must seek the research design that probes the research question most comprehensively, faithfully and thoroughly within the confines of resource effectiveness and time efficiencies.

The essential criteria for evaluating research, differs depending on each paradigm. Various core concepts such as rigour, objectivity, critical analysis and self-reflection seem impervious to translation into enduring standards across the paradigms. The moral task therefore before the researcher is to remain true to the research data generated, to respect and value the research participants, to be aware of and acknowledge the biased theory laden assumptions and epistemological limitations that plague all humans and to do no harm.

I suggest that honest endeavour, integrity of purpose, faithfulness to role and humility in findings will ensure that the research conducted will contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom in the long run.

3.7 Rationale for a Mixed Methods Approach

At the outset I had considered pursuing a purely qualitative study. In my Master's thesis completed in 1993 which was later published (Spelman and McHugh, 1994), and is used in primary schools I developed a screening instrument (using purely quantitative methods) for the detection of learning difficulties in young children. My introduction to qualitative enquiry in Dublin City University while undertaking this taught doctoral programme represented new learning and exposure to a different paradigm for me. I considered conducting a series of interviews with a wide range of personnel holding different positions in HC to achieve an understanding of the inputs and processes and quality provision of the college from their different perspectives. This would have allowed me to answer the research question from one particular angle. Following the initial interview with the President of HC and a preliminary consideration of the internal College documentation made available to me, it became clear that a mixed methods approach could yield more fruitful results for a number of reasons.

Firstly interviewing a number of employees in a private institution whose identity could not be protected (the nature of their work in the organisation would pinpoint their identity) could possibly compromise them, may risk doing harm, or generate uncritical responses of limited value relative to the time expended.

Secondly the number of external evaluations and reports on the work of the college by highly expert evaluators such as HETAC evaluators and DES inspectors led me to believe that for this small scale individual study more could be gained by ascertaining the views of students and school principals on college outputs and outcomes rather than on focusing on college inputs and processes. Thus a mixed methods approach would be best suited to answering the research question from a number of much more diverse perspectives.

Finally from a pragmatic point of view as quantitative research is often understood as producing objectivity through deduction and qualitative research is considered to be subjective through the use of induction, surely then by ignoring either subjectivity or objectivity in favour of the other could be deemed to only limit the quality of the research. Adopting a framework using a mixed methods approach would allow for the

integration of both subjective and objective data and the subsequent interpretations could benefit and add value to the research outcomes and conclusions.

3.8 The Research Question – and subsidiary questions

The key question as an integral component of the investigation into the blended-learning teacher education course is as follows: what can be learned from this unique blended-learning teacher education course that might inform future practice? In seeking knowledge concerning the core question, the methodology employed also elicited answers to the following subsidiary questions:

- What was the genesis for and the values underpinning the establishment of Hibernia's HDAPE programme?
- How does Hibernia College ensure that its primary teacher education course achieves quality standards?
- What are DES inspectors' and other external evaluators' opinions of this HDAPE programme?
- What are students' perceptions of this blended-learning ITE course they have completed?
- What are primary school principals' opinions of Hibernia graduates as primary teachers in their schools?

3.9 The Research Strategy

To achieve the objectives of this research the following aspects of data collection were chosen. A semi-structured interview was initially conducted with the College founder, the President of the College, to ascertain the pertinent research questions worthy of investigation and following from that interview to seek permission to investigate the HDAPE further. The data from the first interview together with information acquired from my literature review laid the basis for the development of a semi-structured interview process focussed on the HDAPE with key college personnel. This questionnaire sought to ascertain their values and vision and how they ensured that quality provision

was maintained in the College. Continued consideration was given to the contents of relevant archival records, including internal College documents, and external reports and validations. The internal documents and external evaluations acted as a form of triangulation of the findings from the interviews. This represented the qualitative aspect of the mixed methods approach.

The next stage involved eliciting the views of students as they completed the course. How did they experience the various components of the course, what was good, what could have been better, would they pursue another course using a blended-learning approach? This questionnaire brought together all of the components of the HDAPE programme experienced by students in order to investigate their perceptions of what this course felt like in practice. Comparing the opinions of the key personnel on the implementation of the HDAPE with the practice of the course as perceived by the students was important. This could only be achieved through the use of a mixed methods approach and represented another and very different lens through which to investigate the course.

Finally I wanted to explore how students educated though the HDAPE were perceived by their employers. The views of primary school principals were elicited through the use of a questionnaire. This final questionnaire brought together all the components of how students were assessed in the college for school placements as well as a variety of other areas relevant to teacher effectiveness. This questionnaire focussed on how principals perceived the effectiveness of their teachers educated by HC and did not seek comparisons with other colleges or other employees. Such comparisons would be outside the remit of this study which remained at all times purely an investigation of the HDAPE offered by HC. These two questionnaires of both students and school principals represented the quantitative aspect of the mixed method approach.

3.10 The Research Steps

The overall sequence for collecting the pertinent data is illustrated using the outline steps below.

Step A
- Consider relevant research literature
- Conduct Pilot interview with College President
- Transcribe interview
- Conduct initial analysis
- Write up findings from pilot interview

Step B
- Continue review of the relevant literature
- Develop conceptual framework
- Develop semi-structured interveiw questions
- Conduct Interviews with Key College Personnel
- Transcribe interviews
- Conduct initial analysis

Step C
- Continue review of relevant literature
- Construct and pilot students' questionnaire
- Finalise student questionnaire
- Administer student questionnaire to chosen cohort on completion of their 18 month course
- Conduct analysis on the student questionnaires

Step D
- Construct and pilot Principals' questionnaire
- Finalise Principals' questionnaire
- Administer Principals' questionnaire
- Conduct analysis on Principals' questionnaire

Step E
- Draw findings gathered from all sources
- Write up all findings
- Consider implications of data and possible recommendations for the future
- Write up and conclude final draft of Thesis

The five steps described above must be seen in the context of an iterative process with the findings from each stage colouring the implementation of the next stage. The stages are not discrete but rather overlap and intertwine and are best understood within the context of the conceptual framework given below.

3.11 The Conceptual Framework

Lankshear (2004) suggests that an effective research design should be structured into different stages where each stage enables the researcher to plan for significant milestones in the investigation while at the same time ensuring that different stages of the research complement and build on each other. This study used a multi-phase convergence research design consisting of four distinct phases**.** Each phase of the research consisted of concurrent levels that were sequentially aligned with other phases in order to build upon and provide an overall interpretation of the study.

Phase one of the study involved one exploratory level. This phase of the research consisted of a review of the literature, a pilot interview with the College President, the development of the research questions and the development of the conceptual framework for the study. (Figure 3.1)

Phase two of the study consisted of two exploratory concurrent levels conducting interviews with key college personnel, completing a questionnaire with students and developing a questionnaire for principals based on the findings. (Figures 3.2 and 3.3)

Phase three of the study consisted of two explanatory concurrent levels completing a review of internal and external evaluations and completing a questionnaire with a sample of school principals. (Figures 3.4 and 3.5)

Finally, **Phase four** of the study consists of a consideration of all the findings accumulated to date in light of the research question by converging all of the various stages to form an overall interpretation of the study as presented in Chapters 5 and 6 of the study. (Figure 3.6a). These phases are diagrammatically illustrated below in the overall summary adapted from Youngs and Piggot-Irvine (2012) (Figure 3.6b).

Figure 3.1: Exploratory phase 1.

Level 1 **Process** (Qualitative)		Level 1 **Product**
Review of literature and Pilot	→	Conduct first pilot interview with College President Conduct initial analysis Write up findings from pilot interview
		Develop research questions Develop conceptual framework for study
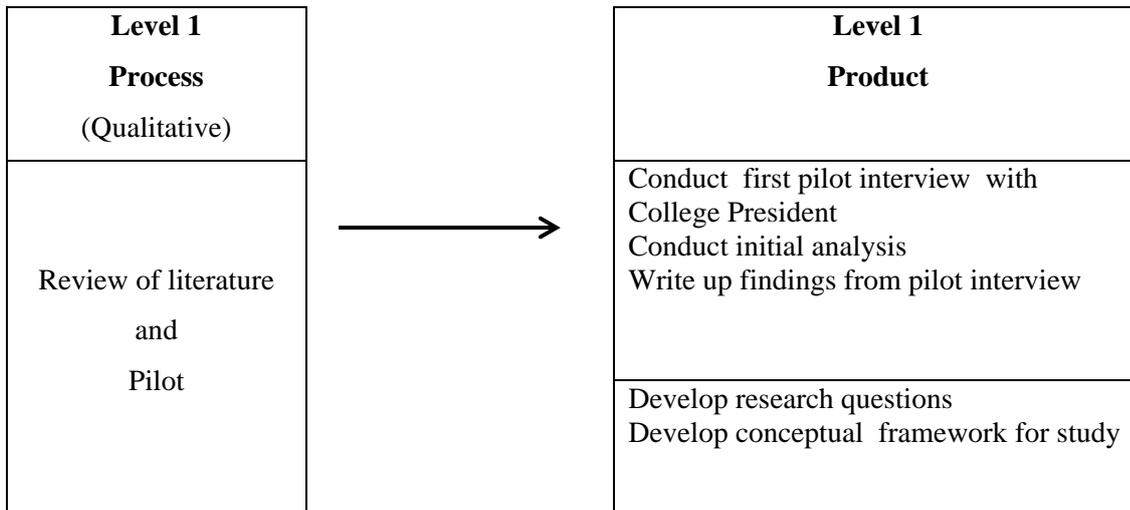
Figure 3.2: Exploratory concurrent phase 2.

Level 2 **Process** (Qualitative)		Level 2 **Product**
Interviews	→	Development of semi-structured interviews from outcomes of phase 1
		Conduct Interviews with key College personnel Transcribe and analyse qualitative results. Develop questionnaire for students
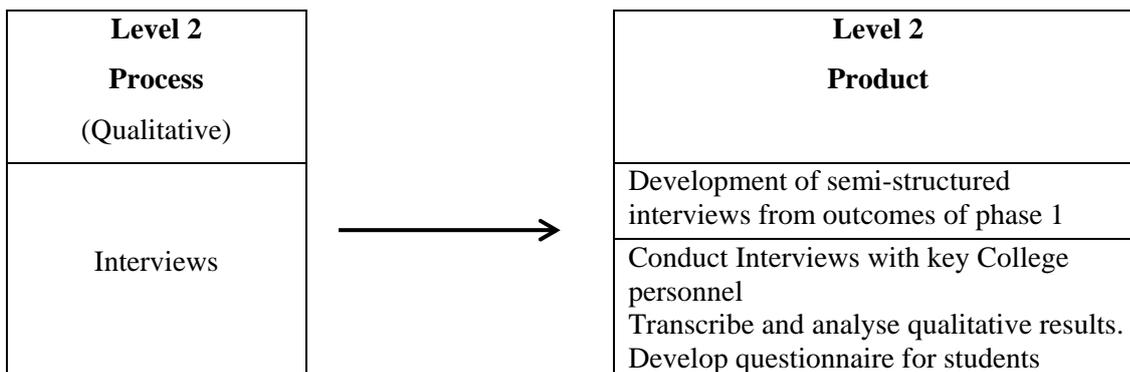
Figure 3.3: Exploratory concurrent phase 2.

Level 2 **Process** (Quantitative)		Level 2 **Product**
Student Questionnaire	→	Piloting and final distribution of student questionnaire Conduct analysis of Quantitative results
		Development of questionnaire for school principals
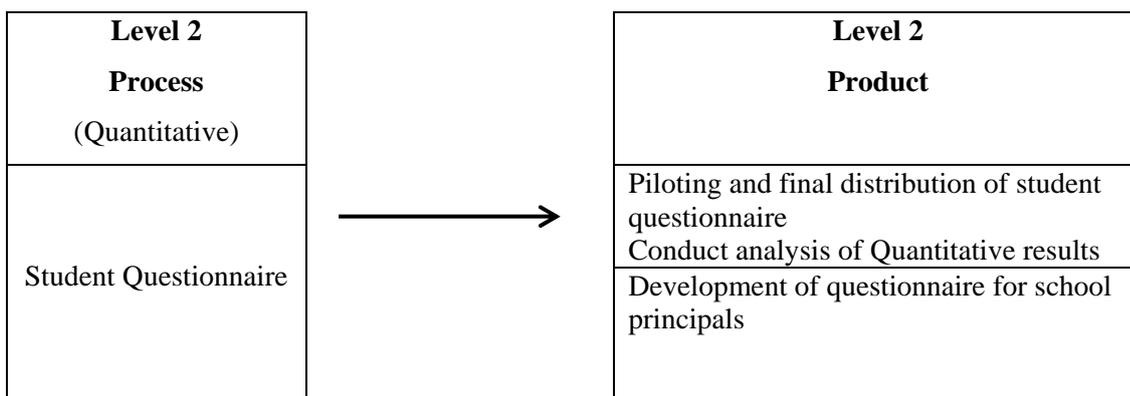
Figure 3.4: Explanatory concurrent phase 3.

Level 3 Process (Qualitative and Quantitative)		Level 3 Product
Internal and External Evaluations of the College and of Student Outcomes	→	Conduct analysis of the various internal and external evaluations of the college. Conduct analysis of student outcomes
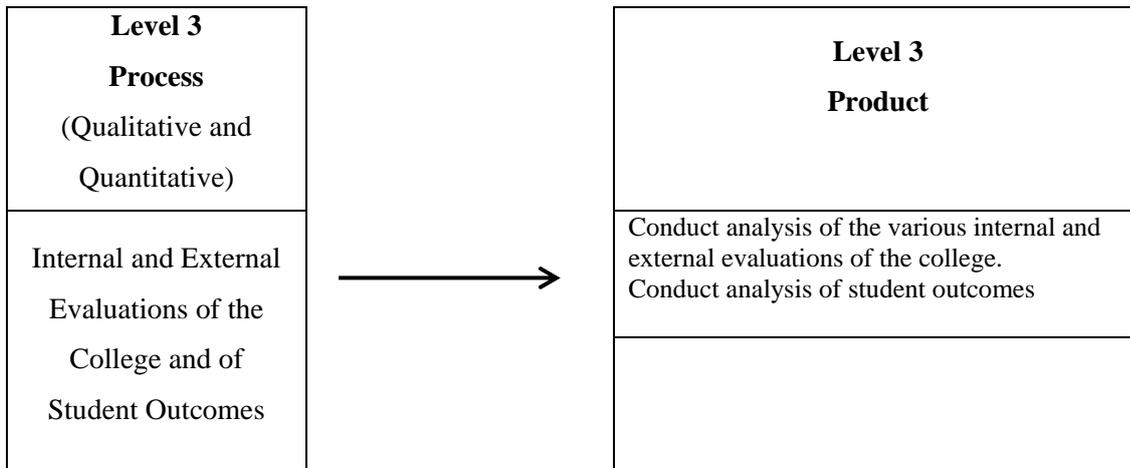
Figure 3.5: Explanatory concurrent phase 3.

Level 3 Process (Quantitative)		Level 3 Product
Principals' Questionnaire	→	Piloting and final distribution of school principals' questionnaire
		Conduct analysis of quantitative results
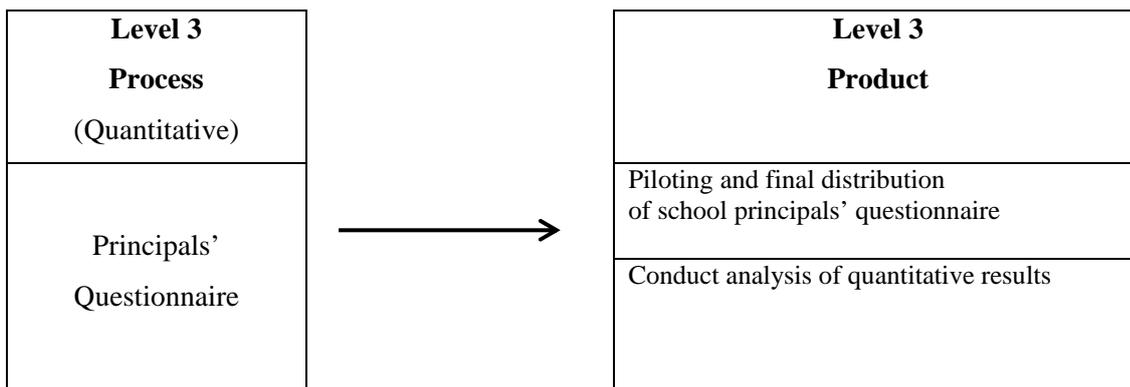
Figure 3.6a: Convergent phase 4.

Level 4 Process (Qualitative and Quantitative)		Level 4 Product
Presentation and Analysis of all Data	→	Presentation and Analysis of all results
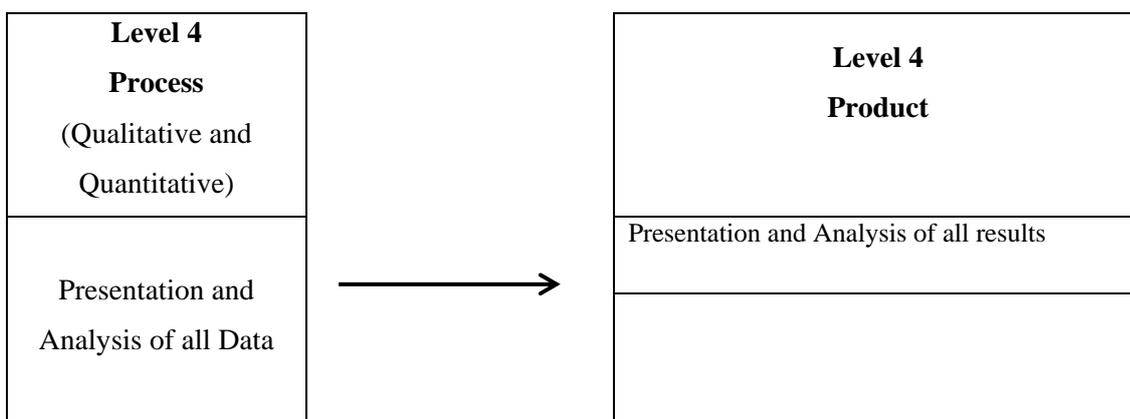
Figure 3.6b: Overview of Individual phases in the multi-phase design:
Adapted from Youngs, H., and Piggot-Irvine, E. (2012).

PHASE I EXPLORATORY PHASE 1	Phase II EXPLORATORY PHASE 2	Phase III EXPLANATORY PHASE 3	Phase IV CONVERGENT PHASE 4
Level 1 **Process** (Qualitative) Review of literature **Product** (**1**) Conduct Pilot interview with College President (**2**) Conduct initial analysis (**3**) Write up findings from pilot interview and research questions (**4**) Develop conceptual framework for study	**Level 1** **Process** Review of literature **Product** On-going analysis **Level 2** **Process** (Qualitative) **Product** (**1**)Develop semi-structured interview questions from outcomes of level 1 (**2**) Conduct Interviews with Key College Personnel (**3**) Transcribe and analyse Qualitative results (**4**) Develop questionnaire for students **Level 2** **Process** (Quantitative) **Product** (**1**) Piloting and final distribution of student questionnaire (**2**) Conduct analysis of Quantitative results (**3**) Development of questionnaire for school principals	**Level 1** **Process** Review of literature **Product** On-going analysis **Level 3** **Process** (Qualitative) Internal/External College Evaluations **Product** Conduct analysis of the various internal and external evaluations of the college. Conduct analysis of student outcomes **Level 3** **Process** (Quantitative) **Product** (**1**) Piloting and final distribution of school principals' questionnaire (**2**) Conduct analysis of Quantitative results	**Level 1** **Process - Qualitative** Review of Literature and Conduct pilot interview **Level 2** **Process – Qual. and Quant.** Conduct Interviews and Student Questionnaire **Level 3** **Process – Qual. and Quant.** Analysing documents and evaluations and piloting and conducting principals' questionnaire **Level 4** **Process - Quant. and Qual.** Presentation and Analysis of all results **PRODUCT OVERALL INTERPRETATION OF THE STUDY**

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3.12 Ensuring Quality in mixed methods research

By using a multi-phase convergence research design comprising of four iterative stages I contend that cohesion was built into the study. By using multiple methods for gathering data I suggest that quality and rigour were added to the study though I concede that using mixed methods does leave the study open to certain threats to quality. While every threat cannot be fully eradicated, seminal issues such as research ethics, coherence, validity, reliability and trustworthiness can be dealt with in mixed methods research (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Mertens, 2005) and issues of quality should be addressed within the context of the study as a whole (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

3.13 Validity - Integration and Legitimation

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define validity in mixed methods research in terms of integration and legitimation. There two issues were addressed in this study under the following three headings;

(a) Multiple perspectives, Insiders-Outsiders
(b) Weakness Minimization
(c) Sequential Research

With respect to (a) Multiple perspectives, Insiders-Outsiders – this aspect refers to the accuracy of the researcher's representation of a multiplicity of views within the study. The first and second stages of this study generated subjective data, while the third and fourth stages generated objective data. The emic analysis of the researcher, an insider, was also enriched by the etic perspective demonstrated by the external evaluators, the outsiders, as evidenced in the documentation available to me. This also acted as a form of triangulation and added rigour to the study.

(b)Weakness Minimization refers to the extent to which the researcher succeeds in designing a research methodology in which the weaknesses of one methodology is compensated for by the strengths of the other and vice versa. The qualitative data of the

first two stages provided a certain amount of information but would not have been sufficient alone to answer the research question. The quantitative data supplied by conducting the two questionnaire surveys produced richer data giving multiple perspectives and complementing the qualitative data in such a way as to enable a more comprehensive answer to the research question to be posited. The four phases of the research combined together to enrich the outcome of the study.

Finally, (c) Sequential Research refers to the need for the researcher to show that the results of the various stages of the process have not unduly influenced the results of other stages. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) consider that this is a necessary requirement in order to claim validity/legitimation. One way of considering this aspect is to explore if the results of the study would have been the same had the order of data collection been reversed. In the case of this study there was no cross pollination of data in terms of the results of each of the different stages. Each set of participants whether they were engaged in a qualitative endeavour or a quantitative process were discrete groupings and the document analysis was conducted on reports and evaluations already written before this study took place. Reversing the process of data collection would have yielded the same results.

3.14 Research Ethics

In terms of conducting research four seminal ethical principles have been highlighted by Bogdan and Biklen (1982:50). These are paraphrased here as, the protection of subjects' identities so that the information collected does not embarrass or do harm, treating subjects with respect and seeking their co-operation, negotiating permission to do the study and abiding by the terms of the agreement and telling the truth in reporting findings. I set out to abide by these ethical principles. At the outset when inviting each of the different groups of participants to engage with the study the nature and purpose of the study was fully described, the principle of informed consent was emphasised and the right to withdraw from the study at any time was clearly communicated. While anonymity for the three interviewees was not possible, nor deemed necessary by them, participant anonymity was guaranteed in questionnaires to both students and school principals. The

first three principles above therefore became an integral part of negotiating access and conducting the interviews and questionnaires, the final ethical principle of telling the truth in reporting findings was and is the goal of the completed thesis.

3.15 Research Methods - Achieving Access + Co-operation for the Interviews

Seidman (2012: 9) believes that, "at the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth." My initial interview with the President of HC as stated above acted as a catalyst in pursuing this present study and is documented fully in McHugh (2010). This interview answered questions on why and how the College came into being and what his vision was for the college among a range of other issues relating to leadership.

Following the initial interview I sought to re-interview the President of HC, Dr. Seán Rowland this time with a focus entirely on the HDAPE course. I also sought interviews with Dr. Don Thornhill, Chairman of the Board of Directors of HC and with Dr. Nicholas Breakwell, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Knowledge Management at HC.

Kvale and Brinkman (2009:1) define qualitative research interviews as, "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences." Here I sought to understand what their visions were for the college, as well as their views on primary teaching and on the blended-learning course provided by the college. The interviews were exploratory and while they were conducted in a conversational style they were purposefully designed and structured. In this study I adopted a semi-structured interview style to capture factual, value laden and attitudinal data. Interview questions or categories, which were later used to assist the analysis of the data were pre-established i.e. *a priori*.

At the outset I prepared an outline document which set out the parameters of the study and the manner in which the interviews were to be conducted. This ensured that I was clear in my intentions and was accountable for my actions in a written document (see Appendix C). Following a telephone conversation which secured Dr. Rowland's

agreement to participate in the interview with me a letter of thanks, which also acted as a reminder of the interview date, was forwarded to Dr. Rowland (see Appendix D). The questions were also sent in advance for his consideration should he wish to review them (see Appendix E). A similar process was followed for the subsequent interviews which took place by phone with Dr. Nicholas Breakwell and Dr. Don Thornhill.

3.16   Research Methods - Conducting the Interviews

Immediately prior to the interviews the process was reiterated and an opportunity was given to interviewees to ask any questions. Each interviewee gave prior permission for the interview to be taped. Anonymity was not an issue at these interviews so each interviewee was addressed by his real name. As stated above, the semi-structured interview was selected as the most efficient means of gaining an insight into the interviewees' visions for the college, their views on primary teaching and on the blended-learning course provided by the college.

Questions were constructed in a manner that created an opportunity for specific focussed answers. Some more open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to elaborate in their own words drawing upon their own experience and expertise. The interviews were taped and transcribed and the interview transcript was proffered for verification that it represented an accurate record of what took place should that be required. The transcriptions remained true to the tapes with only the 'ems' and 'you knows' removed to assist reader clarity.

Ribbins (2007: 208) states that we, "interview people to explore their views ... and report our findings in as near as we reasonably can their own words." Remaining within the epistemological framework of the qualitative researcher I sought to discover nuggets of gold through "searching for understanding, rather than facts; for interpretations rather than measurements; for values rather than information" (Watling and James, 2007: 355) and through reporting these endeavours using the words and statements of the interviewees. (See Appendix F for the transcript of the interview with Dr. Rowland, Appendix G for the transcript of the interview with Dr. Breakwell, and Appendix H for the transcript of the interview with Dr. Thornhill).

3.17   Research Methods - Achieving Access to College Documents

Following a discussion with Dr. Rowland access was granted to all relevant documents except financial records. I was given access the college's HELMS system having received a specific code at research level which allowed me access many relevant documents. Other documents were available on request and by appointment from the relevant college personnel. Throughout the data collection period an examination took place of the pertinent documents including the following: the evaluations made by the DES Inspectors on the students in their final teaching practice, the external examiners' reports on the students, the external HETAC examiners' reports on the students, the external programmatic review on the college and the internal systems of quality assurance, (see Appendix I for the list of internal and external documents consulted).

3.18 Research Methods - Constructing + Piloting the Students' Questionnaire

Following an analysis of the various components of the HDAPE course and of the seminal interactions between various staff, tutors, programme co-ordinators, supervisors, ICT personnel and students, a draft questionnaire was produced. This draft was given to a small cohort of students and tutors to complete with critical comments for improvements. Following their inputs, one question was removed as redundant and one question was rephrased for greater clarity and following discussion with my thesis supervisor my Likert Scale became a five point scale with descriptors of equal measure of positivity and negativity on either side of the median scale.

3.19   Research Methods - Distributing the Students' Questionnaire

With the questionnaire revised (Appendix J) and an introductory letter composed (Appendix K), the students from the October 2009 and the February 2010 cohorts received the questionnaires in June 2011. A response rate of 32.67% was achieved with

246 student replies. A mitigating factor in the context of replies relates to the fact that at the time of distribution the October 2009 group had completed their examinations and some were quite likely to have left the country for the summer and the February 2010 group had yet to sit their examinations over the summer period and may not have been disposed to completing a questionnaire while studying. Unfortunately this timing issue could not be resolved as to wait until September 2011 when both cohorts were working in schools either in Ireland or abroad risked a greater loss of responses.

I was at pains to assure both groups that as researcher I would abide by the ethical principles listed above and would hold as confidential any information which would be made known to me. I emphasised that their anonymity would be protected at all times and participating in this questionnaire could not affect their examination results as all data was sent to a secure site seen only by myself. The voluntary nature of the exercise was also highlighted. One follow up call only for further responses was made respecting the fact that one cohort would be coming close to their examinations.

3.20   Research Methods - Constructing + Piloting the Principals' Questionnaire

Following an analysis of the various data compiled to date a draft questionnaire for use with school principals was produced. This draft was given to a small cohort of principals to complete with critical comments for improvements. Following their inputs and suggestions the questionnaire was revised. One qualitative question was added and two questions were refined for greater clarity. The same five point Likert Scale was used for quantitative questions which merited a scale rating.

3.21 Research Methods - Distributing the Principals' Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed (Appendix L) to a particular cohort of school principals. An accompanying letter detailing the nature of the study and rationale for the questionnaire and the ethical principles by which I would abide was attached to the questionnaire (Appendix M). Furthermore I informed the principals that I would hold as

confidential any information which would be made known to me and I emphasised that their anonymity and that of their teachers was protected as there were no questions asked that could in any way identify a school or a teacher. The voluntary nature of their participation was also highlighted.

At the outset it was difficult to ascertain the actual valid population of the sample. There is no database detailing which schools have employed HC trained teachers as such. Therefore, a sample of schools from across the country was chosen, using the Association of Teacher/Education Centres of Ireland's (ATECI) network.

The primary schools in 10 of the 21 full-time education centres constituting a broad geographical spread were invited to participate in the questionnaire: The Education Centres in Monaghan, Navan, Drumcondra, Dublin West, Kildare, Portlaoise, Wexford, Cork, Galway and Mayo were chosen. This choice of centres represented a division of the general population roughly into three thirds. The first third is represented by the following centres; Navan, Drumcondra, Dublin West and Kildare. The second third is represented by Wexford, Portlaoise and Cork. The final third of the general population is represented by Monaghan, Mayo and Galway.

As mentioned these education centres represented a good spread of centres across the country from east to west, north to south. A map showing the locations of the centres illustrates this point (Figure 3.7). The concentration on centres with schools towards the east coast of the country is also in line with the distribution of primary schools whereby one half of the school going population would be based on the eastern side of the island (Appendix N).

Figure 3.7 Education Centres participating in distributing the principals' questionnaire
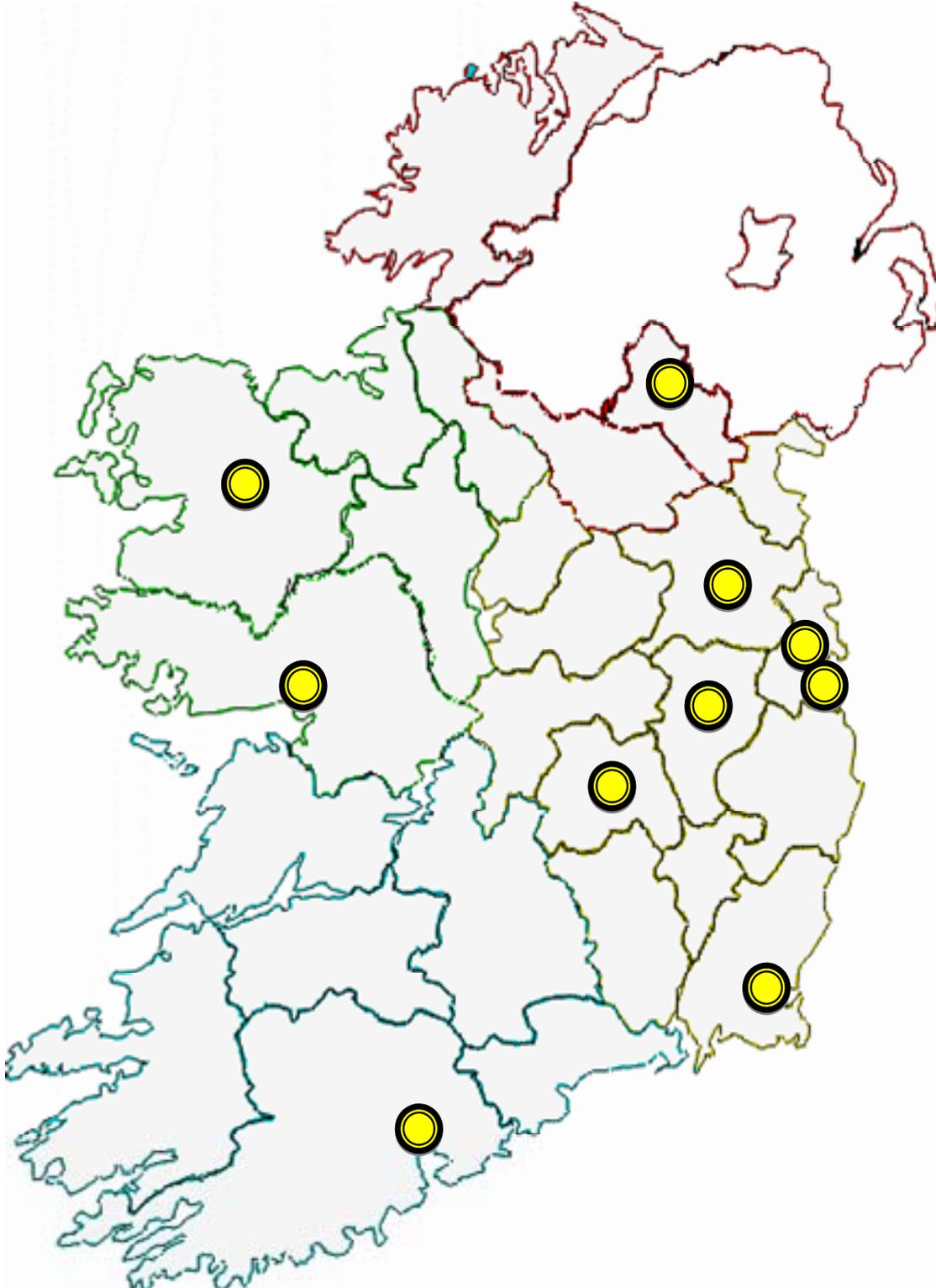
An accurate response rate is somewhat incalculable in percentage terms because as mentioned there are no statistics available on how many schools have employed HC students. In the absence of such data I sought a geographical representation of schools by inviting all primary school principals in the catchment area of the chosen education centres above irrespective of whether or not they had Hibernia trained teachers on their staff. The response rate to the questionnaire would therefore be predicated upon the following factors.

Firstly there would be those principals for whom the questionnaire is relevant who would reply and those principals who would not reply. Primary school principals are inundated with surveys and questionnaires on a regular basis. Many would not answer on the basis of workload and lack of interest and this phenomenon is applicable to all questionnaires sent out to this professional group.

Secondly and most importantly however in the case of this research there would be another cohort of school principals who would not reply because the questionnaire was not applicable to them as they have not employed a Hibernia graduate in their schools.

In the initial invitation I wrote personally to the primary school principals. After an appropriate time had elapsed one follow up invitation to respond was made. For the second invitation I enlisted the support of my fellow professional colleagues, Directors of Education Centres from the chosen centres above, who penned a note asking for the support of the primary principals in their catchment areas in answering the questionnaire (see Appendix O). I considered that this personal touch from the local Director could yield more responses.

I also added a new request into this second call for responses by asking (through my fellow Directors) if the principals would let me know by email if the questionnaire did not apply to them. This request came as a consequence of emails from some principals following my first invitation that the questionnaire did not apply as they had no Hibernia trained teachers on staff. In this way I attempted to address the difficulty of ascertaining the valid population of the sample size.

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The questionnaire was sent out to 1,646 primary schools. I received a communication from 385 schools achieving a response rate of just over 23%. The responses included 184 completed questionnaires from principals, 4 principals stating they were declining as they worked in a part-time capacity for HC and felt that they would be biased in favour of the college and 197 respondents stating that the questionnaire did not apply to them as they had no teachers on staff trained by HC.

While this response rate could be considered to be small, it must also be seen in the context of the three mitigating factors mentioned above. Additionally the fact that so many principals took the time to let me know that they didn't have any Hibernia trained teachers on staff when requested on the second reminder suggests that I could profitably have asked this question on the first invitation.

Furthermore my experience in the field suggests that the following mitigating factor should also be considered. In Ireland more than two thirds of all primary schools are small schools with teaching principals and staff numbers of 6 or less. These schools tend to be relatively stable both in pupil numbers and in staff numbers. Many did not experience the large increase in the school-going population which beset the eastern regions of Ireland in the last decade, therefore I suggest that for a large percentage of rural schools in the west coast of Ireland the questionnaire did not apply. However in the absence of any data on where Hibernia trained teachers have found employment the safest methodology was to take a geographically representative sample as this study did.

3.22. Research Methods - Data Analysis

The quantitative data contained within both questionnaires was analysed using the tools available on *Microsoft-Excel* and the *Survey-Monkey* computer programmes. The quantitative data was represented in diagrammatic form showing both numeric and percentage comparisons. These diagrams were generated from the statistics by the respective computer packages. The open-ended questions within both questionnaires were coded in the same manner as the qualitative data detailed below and different categorisations of responses were also shown using numeric and

percentage comparisons. Miles and Huberman (1994:56) consider coding an essential element of analysis when they state, "To review a set of field notes … and to dissect them meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis."

In considering how to analyse the qualitative data emanating from the various stages of this study, I was drawn to Creswell's (2009) data analysis process for the qualitative analysis of the interviews, the content of various documents and the qualitative questions contained within the questionnaires. This is diagrammatically summarised in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8 Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

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                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
              ┌────▶│  Interpreting the Meaning of     │
              │     │      Themes/Descriptions         │
              │     └──────────────────────────────────┘
              │                   ▲
              │     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
              │     │  Interrelating Themes/Description│
              │     │ (e.g., grounded theory, case study)│
              │     └──────────────────────────────────┘
              │          ▲                      ▲
              │     ┌─────────┐          ┌─────────────┐
              │     │ Themes  │          │ Description │
              │     └─────────┘          └─────────────┘
              │          ▲                      ▲
 ┌────────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
 │ Validating the     │  │        Coding the Data           │
 │ Accuracy of        │──│      (hand or computer)          │
 │ the information    │  └──────────────────────────────────┘
 └────────────────────┘                 ▲
              │     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
              │     │     Reading Through All Data     │
              │     └──────────────────────────────────┘
              │                   ▲
              │     ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
              └────▶│ Organising and Preparing Data for Analysis │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘
                                   ▲
                    ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Raw Data (transcripts, field notes, images, etc.) │
                    └──────────────────────────────────┘
```
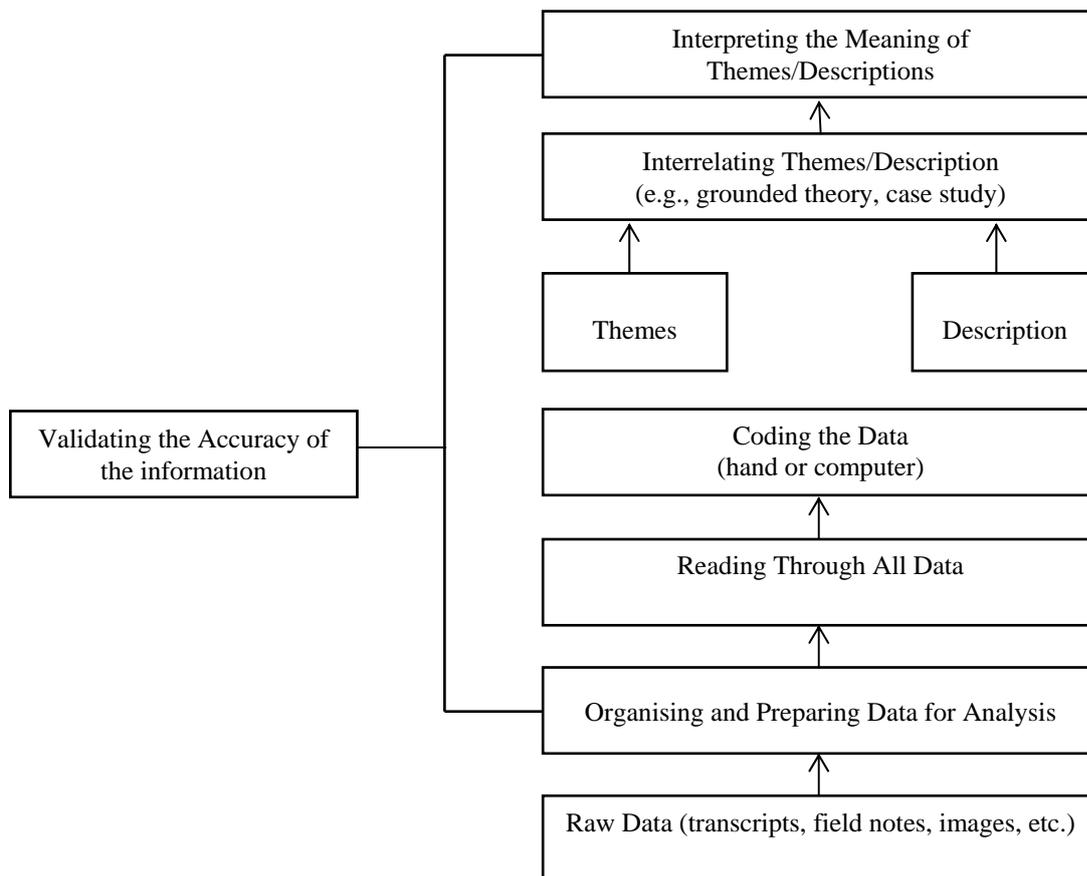
(Source: Creswell, 2009: 185)

In the case of this study the stages above were applied to accomplish the task of data analysis (see Appendix P for a sample of how qualitative data was coded).

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Stage One : Data Transcription and Initial Coding

Following transcription, the interview data was initially coded according to the participant or specific document where the unit of information is located. Each unit of information was given a specific identifier code. In the cases of the interviews, the participant's input is identified by their first name (e.g. D for Dr. Don Thornhill) and the page number from which the quote is taken (eg. D6). In the case of the students' questionnaire and the principals' questionnaire each participant was assigned a number from the collated data and is referred to by that number (eg. S6 or P9). Quotations made or references given to any documents are identified using the list number for that document given in Appendix I and the page number from where the quotation had been given (e.g. **E**3/2 for the third external report listed in Appendix I, page 2, or **I**8/4 for the eight internal report listed in Appendix I, page 4).

Stage Two – Data Immersion

Before each statement was classified, interview data was read, reread and examined through a process of data immersion which Borkan (1999: 180) suggests, "provides a means to move from the research question, the generated text and/or field experience, and the raw field data to the interpretations reported in the write-up." As well as addressing the *a priori* questions I remained vigilant for emerging themes because Creswell (2007:152) cautions, "if researchers use a prefigured coding scheme then they should be open to additional codes emerging during the analysis."

Stage Three – Data Analysis

The qualtitative analysis for this study used a combination of predetermined codes (as in interviews) and emerging codes (as in qualitative answers within questionnaires and examinations of college documents and the emerging themes emanating from the dialogue in the semi-structured interviews). With respect to the interviews a matrix was drawn up to illustrate the range of predetemined and emerging themes which resulted from the analysis.

Stage Four - Interpreting and Inter-relating the Data

Synthesis follows analysis. Having presented the seminal units of meaning emanating from the qualitative data and the factual information arising from the quantitative data which resulted from this mixed methods study it is important both to interpret the data and inter-relate the data sets one to the other. This allows for a description of the multiple realities and the representation of the different voices being encountered in the study. The meaning brought to this endeavour comes from the understanding I bring to this aspect of the study as researcher as well as the meaning I have derived from the findings in the literature. Presenting my findings in such a cohesive manner ensures as Thorne (2000:70) asserts in relation to the presentation of findings, "the relation between the actual data and the conclusions about data is explicit and the claims made in relation to the data set are rendered credible and believable."

3.23 Chapter Summary

In this chapter a review of the relevant literature pertaining to qualitative and quantitative research was carried out and a defence was made for a mixed methods approach as the most effective and efficient approach for use in this study of a specific teacher education course at a particular time in its history. The steps taken at the various stages of the research and the *modus operandi* put in place to implement these stages of the study were also outlined. The management of the research was clearly delineated and a framework was outlined giving the research strategy and phases employed. The research ethics which would underpin the study were stated clearly. All aspects of the research methodology were delineated from eliciting the support of personnel for interviews, to gaining access to documents and finally to conducting different questionnaires.

The findings from the work above and the analysis of the data investigated will be dealt with in full in further chapters. In Chapter Four the findings from the research outlined above will be presented while Chapter Five will discuss those finding within the context of the research question and subsidiary questions. The implications of the analysis of the

data should posit possible recommendations for the future and this will be considered in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Chapter 4: Presentation of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the evidence garnered from the various sources of data collection and is divided into five main sections based on the conceptual framework described in Chapter Three as follows:

Section A - Presentation of summary findings from the pilot phase

Section B - Presentation of the findings from Interviewing Key Personnel

Section C - Presentation of the findings from the Students' Questionnaires

Section D - Presentation of the findings from the Principals' Questionnaires

Section E - Pertinent findings from College Documents

This chapter systematically presents the salient findings from the data of the various qualitative and quantitative methods employed in the study. The chapter concludes with a summary overview.

4.2 Section A: Presentation of Summary findings from the Pilot Phase

As mentioned earlier the full findings of the pilot study on 'Leadership and Organisational Effectiveness' have already been presented in McHugh (2010). The summary findings presented below relate to those aspects of my initial interview with the College President, Dr. Rowland which comprise the preliminary pilot phase of this present study. Watling and James (2007: 350) describe analysis as the "researcher's equivalent of alchemy – the elusive process by which you hope you can turn your raw data into nuggets of pure gold." They claim that this is "an iterative and persistent part of the research process" (ibid: 350).

Within the context of interviewing Dr. Rowland as a leader of an organisation one of the 'nuggets of pure gold' which ensued for me was an interest in following on from this more generic conversation on his leadership of an organisation to the pursuit of a more focused study of the HDAPE course as a major component of HC and as an

educational programme of increasing importance in the Irish educational landscape. In a conversation with Dr. Rowland sometime after the initial interview he granted permission for me to investigate the HDAPE course further for my doctoral thesis (Appendix Q).

The following paragraphs are taken from the original study by way of providing a picture of the nature and key functions of the organisation along with an insight into Dr. Rowland's vision for the organisation. As Pring (1998: 15) says, "To describe is to draw a picture of what happened, or of how things are proceeding, or of what a situation or a person or an event is like."

4.2.1 The Establishment of Hibernia College

Certain themes came to the fore from my analysis of the transcript of my initial interview with Dr. Rowland. These themes included, the concept of having a dream, having belief and perseverance, flexibility and working collaboratively, building team and trust, ensuring quality and due diligence, embracing change and innovation. Dr. Rowland considers that the three essential pillars upon which his College is founded are Teaching, Learning and Research. These for him represent the essential ingredients of a learning community.

When Dr. Seán Rowland (henceforth called Seán) and the now Vice-President of HC Sara McDonnell saw the effective distance learning programmes being delivered by MIT in the United States they wondered, "with the growing access to the internet surely we can do this in Ireland." The first step according to Seán was, "if you want to get anything done put smart people around you - so building the team was key." Then they "decided to take a leap and go for this." The key to making it work then according to Seán was being like "a dog with a bone, nobody is taking away my dream and I'm going to implement this, stay up all night every night until it's done" Being flexible is also important here and he believes it is necessary for those with an entrepreneurial slant "you have to be flexible, ... but you know what it will be like and you truly believe it will happen."

With funds raised, the technology identified and a core team of professionals in place the next step in the story of how Hibernia was established according to Seán was "trust and the trust is vital because you have to delegate." In building that core team Seán said that he "relied on Sara ...who is a better judge of people ... and it is good to know where you own strengths are," "I'm training myself to listen to people." This is akin to the self-awareness of effective leaders noted by Goffee and Jones (2005) and the emotional intelligence described by Goleman (2002).

Regarding staff, Seán believes it is important to "show appreciation" for their work, letting them know "how good they are." He cited the awards which the college won as an example of this recognition, stating that the awards had a huge impact on staff and was;

> *hugely positive, some of them cried, it shows their loyalty to the organisation. They were so happy because it means they are in the right job, they are doing it right and they are being told you're great, you're the best in Ireland and in Britain you're in there with BBC, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Lloyds Bank, The British Armed Services who do amazing work with huge budgets and the winner is Hibernia College ... it brings confidence ... and it puts our name out there.* Seán

A clear line management structure has been established, "The organisational chart will show it as a hierarchical structure." He has eight personnel at senior management level "there's the top eight ... all hands on." Then there is the "layer of middle management, heads of departments ... they are the backbone." Each of these middle managers have their own teams working to them. "There's a middle management meeting every week, so the heads of departments are answerable up the line." All staff have an annual review with their line manager and they are "measured against their contract ... it's an open discussion where both people in the discussion look at the measurables and look at the outcomes." Seán believes that good communications are critical and values two way communication, "We are a small enough organisation to take on board what people say and make sure that we listen to people because what they say is usually very relevant and very helpful in fact." If there is a problem, Seán says "Our culture is one of sorting it out now, confronting the issue immediately." But he always aims for a, "win-win ... both sides will work harder to achieve then ... pick you battles ... make sure you are not doing it for your ego ... ask what professional benefit is there to engaging here?"

4.2.2 The Vision for Hibernia College

His vision for HC centres on the concept of equality of access, providing "access to quality education no matter where you are, particularly for the adult." He is convinced that access to quality education free from the limitations of location and time is about "building the technology not the buildings ... the traditional model is broken." Seán concedes that the traditional third level provision is necessary for undergraduates but at fourth level or adult level "we don't need the buildings." This translates into a company mission to be a global leader in the provision of innovative quality on-line education. Seán's stated goals for the company are "to lead this forward to where we have 1,000 employees in Ireland working with other universities paying for quality courses and being a promoter of Irish Education globally." This audacious goal and clarity of vision is a key feature of effective leaders according to Ruth (2006).

His own unique contribution he believes is "the ability to work with people of all types". As Ruth (2006:16) asserts, "our job as leaders is to build relationships of influence." To secure the recognition to train graduates as primary teachers Seán had to, "get through academic accreditation, the DES approval, the union's (INTO) approval and the Catholic Church's approval ... I honestly think that if you are honest, fairly articulate, straight forward and tell them how they may benefit from it then it usually works" But if Seán comes up against opposition as he certainly did with the HDAPE programme he believes the best course of action is "if they have a problem don't fight with them that's not going to get you anywhere, tell them again and tell them again." He sees his role in Hibernia as "leadership with a hint of management."

He strongly believes that in leading an effective organisation, "human resources is everything" Next he says you must have, "the right tools, having a plan knowing where you are going to and then developing the strategies to get there within the resources that you have." He asserts that this is the necessary formula for an effective organisation, "It's very important that you get the right people to do the job, the tools right and the money right ... if you fall down on one everything fails." He also cautions that irrespective of delegation and autonomy, "Make sure that

nobody has permission to overspend ... companies fail when they don't see the direct link between their activities and the financials. We need to know where every penny comes from where every penny goes to." He made the point that only salaries are taken from his company as he is convinced that "You must also plough profits back in, be upgrading all the time, programming that is four/five years old is no good to anybody."

Seán believes that quality assurance is crucial to running an effective organisation, "we have full time staff in our quality assurance office ... the quality assurance spreads across every aspect of our delivery." He considers that this aspect of the business is not optional, "if you get rid of quality assurance ... then in six months you won't know what you have, it could be good we're not quite sure and we are not benchmarking it as we should." For issues such as HR, finance, health and safety and legal issues Seán hires in expert help, "If you ask for advice and you pay for it why not take it." He was very firm on the company being compliant in all areas.

According to Seán what is absolutely fundamental for HC and for education in general revolves around the concept of people and community, "We need small communities of learners with a good teacher and that works and we know it works." When he addresses each intake group he emphasises that point of developing their own learning communities online and onsite. For him quality education is always about three interlinked facets, "it will never change the three core activities of a college are teaching, learning and research - that's what it is all about."

4.2.3 Summary from the Pilot Phase.

The energy and determination of Dr. Rowland to pursue and achieve his dream were palpable and from an organisational point of view it was evident that a committed group of professionals had been engaged and the necessary structures were in place to achieve their goals as a private college. However I wished to investigate further if the HDAPE course encompassed the qualities Seán spoke about of equality of access, the provision of quality education, ensuring due diligence, focussing the core activities around teaching, learning and research. Instead of drilling deeper by

conducting a purely qualitative investigation with a wide range of staff members on their perceptions of HC's inputs and processes, as a private college with contracted staff I decided to conduct further interviews with just three key personnel. These included another interview with the College President Dr. Seán Rowland focussed on the HDAPE course, an interview with the Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Knowledge Management, Dr. Nicholas Breakwell and an interview with Dr. Don Thornhill who is Chairperson of the Board of HC.

4.3 Section B: Presentation of the findings from Interviewing Key Personnel

The analysis of transcriptions … depends upon the generation of a research problem from a particular theoretical orientation, hence the need for having considered carefully and at the outset a clear conceptualisation of the problem under investigation

(Moyles, 2007: 249)

At the outset 10 questions were posed following a generic introductory opening question, (see Appendix E). In summary these questions related to *a proiri* themes such as, the participants' role in the genesis of the college (question A) their vision for the HDAPE course (B), their concept of quality ITE provision (C), the benefits and disadvantages of blended-learning (D), the College's Quality Assurance processes (Questions E-I) and Future Considerations (J).

The intention was to ascertain the views of three of the most senior people in HC on the origins, procedures, processes and future direction of the HDAPE course. These views would be further considered in the light of the available college documentation particularly the external evaluations and reports on the college's processes and procedures. The views of these key stakeholders would also be examined in the light of how their perception of the quality education they provided to the HDAPE students was actually experienced by two particular student year groups. A coding matrix (Appendix R) provides an overview of the three interviewees' opinions on the *a priori* themes and details the summary concepts as subthemes within each theme. The pages of their respective interviews where their statements and opinions may be found are also included.

Two themes to emerge from the interviews mentioned by all three interviewees related to the question of the efficacy of the consecutive model of ITE as opposed to the concurrent model. The second theme to emerge related to the controversy, discord and resistance which arose from the other ITE providers following the establishment of the HDAPE offered by HC (see Appendix S for a similar coding summary of these two emerging themes).

In presenting both the results of the *a priori* themes and the themes which emerged, I intend to accurately portray the views of each of the interviewees within each theme and substantiate my assertion by way of referenced direct quotation. Before commencing this process, I will comment briefly on the pertinent facts to emerge from the introductory general question. The first introductory question related to the experience and qualifications of each of the interviewees prior to their involvement with HC.

Dr. Rowland as the founder and President of the College taught as a primary teacher for five years in Ireland and on completion of a Masters and PH.D. in Boston College set up the Irish Institute there. His expertise was in the area of curriculum instruction and administration and he had experience grading teachers and with teaching practice (S2).

Dr. Breakwell worked in Trinity College Dublin and the Dublin Business School where his area of expertise was e-learning, website construction and working within the HETAC environment (N1).

Dr. Thornhill has acted as Secretary General of the Department of Education in Ireland and executive Chairmen of the Higher Education Authority. He is consultant to the Royal College of Surgeons and Chairman of the National Competitiveness Council (NCC). His area of expertise is in education policy and policy formulation. He also brings his insights from the work of the NCC on education and training to the HC Board.

4.3.1 Interviewees' Role in the genesis of Hibernia College

Dr. Thornill (henceforth called Don) had no role in the genesis or establishment of HC other than to highlight to Dr. Rowland the pent-up demand that existed in the system;

> *a number of people … were urging that something be done, … in relation to providing opportunities, … for professional education and accreditation of very considerable cohorts of … unqualified substitute teachers in primary schools, these were graduates who*

didn't have a teaching qualification and I mentioned this to Seán by way of a comment … Sean immediately seized on this as an idea and the rest is history. (D3)

Dr. Rowland (henceforth called Seán) considered that two main influences came together in terms of the establishment of the College, "one was the chronic shortage of qualified teachers, two was the Irish National Teachers' Organisation … deadline to DES saying they would withdraw ... their qualified members if the Department continued to pay [unqualified] substitutes" (S2). Spotting an opportunity Seán networked, "we actually first talked to one of the teacher colleges to see if they would work with us to help grow the numbers and they were definitely not interested and so we thought you know we can do this" (S2). With his own qualifications and "a lot of my colleagues were either teachers, principals, working in the Department, working in the Union, working in Universities, so we decided we'd build a programme and we submitted that programme to the Department of Education" (S2).

Dr. Breakwell (henceforth called Nicholas) performed a number of functions during the establishment of HC, "I guess in the beginning I was doing a bit of everything obviously because there were so few of us and there was lots of document writing to be done in the beginning both for HETAC and proposals for investment" (N2). He continues, "I was actually producing most of the content to begin with and designing how the course would look and what multimedia elements we would include ... I also was running the technology in the early days and was instrumental in moving us from the system we had in the early days which was blackboard on to an open source platform which we still use today" (N2). After about four years, he says, "we've grown substantially and we have plenty of other people who do that now. And lastly then I've been in a more management role – senior management role with three middle managers who report to me who cover the content development, the technology and the special projects, special development projects" (N2).

4.3.2 Interviewees' vision for Hibernia College

Seán is clear on the status of teacher education, "I think everybody should go to university. I think that the days of a teacher college should be eliminated. I mean

there was a time and a place for them, if there was" (S5). He continues, "I think that the degree you get should lead you then to take on a profession" (S5). He believes that, "we have to make sure that primary education and the education of primary teachers is a respected university level programme," and that, "it can stand up to scrutiny from abroad," (S6). With respect to HC he states, "we want our brand to be the best and they are. I mean there is no question, we've started this trend now where principals head hunt Hibernia teachers." (S6).

Nicholas speaks of a partnership approach in his vision for the college, he envisions, "a much greater role for schools in teacher training," (N3) and believes that this would help, "not only the trainee teacher but also the teachers themselves in terms of continuing professional development." (N3). This is an, "untapped resource in Ireland which is not really used to its maximum extent at all ... there is no formal role for the classroom teacher in grading of the student performance. There is no CPD recognition for the work they do." (N3). He also states that this partnership must include academia, "school can obviously bring the professional expertise to the equation, but you most definitely need the academic rigour alongside that." (N3).

Don's vision related to diversity in that, "the transformational and contributory dimensions of a new form of educational delivery," (D2) made possible through a blended-learning approach might produce greater diversity within the teaching profession. He explains, "A great advantage of the flexible entry which the new course can provide is that it draws in people into teaching who have had other life experience and/or working experience. And I think that any cohort or any group of people benefit as a result of diversity."

4.3.3   Interviewees' opinions of quality ITE provision

Seán believes that quality provision, "breaks into two areas mainly, Theory and Practice. I think they must have a serious understanding of the history of education, psychology, sociology, the 'ologies' as we call them" (S8). He further contends that, "I think they need to have a very strong understanding of social dynamics, sociology, of community dynamics. They are a piece of a community and they need to know

how important their function is" (S8). He believes in the importance of research, "I think as educators they need to have a sound grounding in pedagogy, a sound grounding in research, a sound grounding in history," (S8) but he also cautions that, "in practice they need to be able to have a personality, they need to be articulate, positive and they need to be able to translate the theory into practice every day" (S8). "And they need to be able to initiate change I would say without frightening people" (S8). He concludes, "I suppose what you really need to do is to be able to hold those children in the palm of your hand and know that they will be better people for knowing you" (S8.)

Nicholas concurs with Seán and adds the concept of inclusivity when he states,

> *Well I think they should be certainly able to continue their development as teaching professionals through the practice of critical reflection on their own practice – through the practice of research and the application of research findings again to their own practice in the classroom. I think they should be lifelong learners and open to change and open to the use of technology and new teaching methods in their teaching and to learn from their peers in their own school and also from the wider academic and educational community. I think they should be able to deliver their teaching in an inclusive context which means that every student in their class should be catered for equally.* (N5)

Don echoes the sentiments expressed by both Seán and Nicholas in terms of change and willingness to try new things and lifelong CPD when he says, "I would like to see a formation programme inculcate in teachers … intellectual curiosity, willingness to try new things, willingness to explore new ideas and certainly the other piece is a lifelong commitment to self-development" (D7).

4.3.4 Interviewees' opinions of using a blended-learning approach

Seán believes there are many and diverse benefits to be gained from a blended-learning approach to teacher education, "One it means that the teachers going out are up to date with technology, as up to date as most of the children coming into their

classrooms," (S9) and also, "the other thing is that for Irish education it means you have teachers going into schools where they can help with the whole area of digital learning, of computers in the school, where ... they can help out this class or that teacher, the principal or whatever" (S9). The inherent accessibility is a key feature, where for example the woman living on Valentia Island with a Master's degree and two children can, "become a primary teacher and bring all of that excellence into a primary school. That's what we're doing. That's the benefit, huge benefit" (S10). This accessibility therefore encourages diversity, "So I suppose it allows us draw students from a much broader pool than the other colleges" (S10). Flexibility is another key feature where, "Blended-learning particularly facilitates the student and … it can be scheduled around the student" (S10). Seán summarises the benefits neatly with the all-encompassing statement, "e-learning is not the future, it's the present" (S10).

Nicholas agrees with Seán regarding the use of technology and the ability of students to share practice, "They clearly have to engage with technology and so they are much better placed to be able to use technology and learn what benefits technology can bring to their teaching. They have the opportunity to share practice with people across the country" (N5). He also believes that blended-learning fosters independence, "the fact that the programme is a blended-learning programme, a distance-learning programme means that quite clearly the student has to be more independent than the traditional on campus based learners" (N5).

Don contends that, "the way that the Hibernia programme is structured is that it prevents students from cramming and skipping parts of the course. So the input side is quite rigorous" (D7). He believes that, "The second piece is that the students require … a huge amount of self-management" (D7). As a follow on from this, Don states, "Along with that goes the development of qualities such as accepting responsibility for oneself and out of that comes an acceptance of the notion of self-development" (D7). With respect to technology Don asserts that, "the feedback I am getting from Principals in schools is that the Hibernia graduates … have much more authenticity in the classroom because they are IT savvy. They may not be IT technical but they are savvy" (D8).

4.3.5 Interviewees' opinions of any disadvantages to blended-learning

Seán does not believe there are any disadvantages to using a blended-learning approach to teacher education, "I honestly don't see any. I cannot see any" (S12). Instead of answering this question he continues to extol the virtues of the HDAPE programme and this sits with Don's description of his initial meetings with Seán in the HEA, "Seán Rowland had had a number of conversations with me and he was quite evangelical on this whole issue, of blended-learning" (D2).

Nicholas spoke in terms of overcoming the possible disadvantages of isolation and programme consistency at onsites. He agrees that, "Well criticisms which have been levelled against blended-learning in the past include the isolation factor," (N6) but he contends that, "we work very hard to eliminate that and there are lots of opportunities for students to engage with each other perhaps even more than normal in that they have the constant 24/7 online aspect of the programme so I don't think that is a true criticism of the programme and also I think at last count it was 21 weekends that they actually do meet face-to-face so I guess again that mitigates against that criticism" (N6). He concedes that consistency is a challenge;

> *maintaining consistency across the provision across the country in that there are lots of different faculty delivering the programme around the country and we have to work to make sure that each student gets a more or less consistent product at the end of the day. So that's a challenge but as I say we work very hard to address that.*
> (N7)

Equally Don did not consider there are any disadvantages to a blended-learning approach, "Disadvantages, they are not evident to me" (D8). He wondered about the early attrition rate on the HDAPE as he suggested that research would indicate that at post graduate level people who find a course unsuitable tend to drop out very early, "The normal pattern with post graduate courses is that attrition rates tend to be very concentrated at the very early stages" (D8). At undergraduate level he discussed the socialisation factor as a possible disadvantage but on balance he concluded that, "the socialisation factor which somebody of my age group found as

a great privilege coming up to Dublin from a provincial town may be less of a feature now in peoples' lives" (D10).

4.3.6 How the Interviewees ensure the implementation of quality assurance

From the findings of the pilot study and this interview it is evident that for Seán quality assurance is an essential component of College procedures, he affirms;

> *First of all we have Professor Tom Mitchell who is the lion at the gate when it comes to quality and then you have Nick Breakwell … in charge of academic affairs and then we have Jamie who is in charge of quality assurance and Naomi who is the registrar. And they have regular meetings on every aspect and we get feedback on everybody in every subject. And it's very simple if there is a problem with a person we don't renew their contract (S12).*

He further contends that, "we are more than happy to enforce the most rigid and we do, quality assurance on the people, the curriculum, the content, the technology, the administration, every aspect of our work" (S13). Quality assurance is according to Seán, "driven by the accreditation. It is driven by the TC accreditation and the HETAC accreditation. It is driven by benchmarking against international best practice. It is driven by research" (S13). For Seán feedback is also important in terms of quality assurance;

> *I think most of all it is quite driven by feedback, feedback from students, feedback from teachers, feedback from the interviews of course and feedback from teaching practice. All of these different areas and unless you act on that why would you bother collecting the data. So we do very much act on that, it's very important. (S13)*

Seán believes quality is, "Evidenced based and outcomes based. It's very important to know the journey you're going on so that you can achieve the outcomes you set yourself and that's across ... every module of every programme" (S14). He concludes, "Our goal is not to be the largest e-learning company or college … in the

world. But we really want to be the best. We want to be the ivy league of learning" (S14).

Nicholas explains the quality assurance process by stating that:

> *in brief we do have a full range of quality assurance processes, procedures and policies in place that is encapsulated within the quality assurance manual which was accredited by HETAC and there is annual programmatic review and quinquennial programmatic review and ... there are many more actual reviews which go on, on a more frequent basis.*(N7)

He contends that, "we have had to be better to be equal … so we do take that expert opinion from other professionals very very seriously" (N8). He suggests that, "it is an opportunity to build on the existing success of the programme and to take on board the latest thinking and the latest proposals which are all aimed at improving quality in teacher education" (N8). Nicholas also spoke about the importance of ascertaining and addressing students' needs and explained how their views were represented, "their feedback would be sought on very regular intervals certainly at the end of each module. They have representation on the course committee, they would able to feed into the programme that way" (N8). He also mentioned that, "Each tutor group of 25 students would have a representative … so they could feedback on their tutor group at a tutor group level any concerns or issues they were having with the programme" (N8). Finally he said, "In the programmatic review then graduate and current students would be represented in that process as well" (N8). As a private college Nicholas believes that it is important that the students, "on a programme are happy that they are getting a good experience whilst maintaining academic rigour throughout the duration of the programme. So yes students' feedback is extremely important" (N9).

Don informs us that, "for our next Board meeting and for all future Board meetings we are going to actually formalise the quality issue" (D10). He elucidates further, "Quality issues have come up in terms of discussions about operations in the past but what we are now going to have as a standing item on every Board meeting is education quality" (D10). While Don explains that, "the Board will want to know what are the issues arising, what measures are being taken, how are those measures

being implemented, what is the result of the implementation of these measures" (D10).

4.3.7   The Importance of the external awards the College has won?

Seán believes that the awards, "give a comfort zone for the people who are graduating. To say our post-primary school programme won best in Britain for 2010, I mean that was outstanding," (S14) but he cautions that, "Our accreditations are far more important" (S14). He does admit that the awards are, "great for staff, great for a morale boost" (S15). Nicholas considers that as many of the external awards won were for the teacher training programmes, "that reflects very well on the level of quality from an e-learning perspective at least of those courses because most of those awards are e-learning awards ... for best practice in the use of blended technologies" (N9). He also saw the advertising value of such awards, "We hope it has an effect in the market place and that it would encourage people to come to Hibernia over and above any other provider" (N9). Don agrees, "it probably helps with marketing but the other piece is that I think a lot of people love to be part of a winning team," (D11) and he concludes by emphasising that, "external recognition is hugely important" (D11).

4.3.8   Future Considerations - improvements

Seán suggests, "we would hope we are developing and improving the course every week," and believes that, "it is incredibly important that we have a very organic, growing, evolving programme that is particularly Irish for Irish schools" (S15). On the day of the interview he had just finished a meeting on, "religions of the world," which he believes, "have to be built into our curriculum because we have so many children coming into our teachers … who have come from other countries [beliefs] … our teachers need to be aware of all of this" (S15). He believes in continuous accreditation, "I think constant guard and constant evolution and I think again that's where constant accreditation is important" (S16). He distils quality education provision for pupils back to, "Involved parents, good teachers, more success" (S16).

With respect to the future Nicholas cites the numerous refinements being put in place following their major restructuring of the programme which is currently taking place. He mentions that in the future there will be;

> *An increase in the school experience period, an increase in the programme direction as a whole to two years, a restructuring of the content into what we hope will be more coherent modules. A move to e-portfolio type assessments for the professional practice/school experience aspects of the programme and ... other fairly significant changes.* (N10)

His own concept of greater school involvement is also being developed, "we are experimenting with some partnership schools who we have used … to provide the school through the classroom teachers with some mentor training, to work with the school principals and the teachers within the whole school to better support the student teachers' welfare in school" (N10). In return he hopes that the school will, "guarantee a number of places each year so that the school itself can develop their capacity and their ability to support teacher trainers in the classroom" (N10). After piloting this Nicholas hopes that, "the result will be a better experience both for the student teacher, the classroom teacher and for the pupils in the class as well" (N10).

Nicholas would also like to see a more inclusive religious education programme but placed the present programme within the context of present day exigencies, "One would like to think that a new programme starting today would be a little bit more inclusive as far as the religious component goes and would cover other religions other than Catholicism," (N12) he continues, "but then again the situation with the Board of Management of schools nearly all being run by the Catholic Church makes that still difficult" (N12).

Given the success of the programme Nicholas would also like to see more full time staff being employed, "At the moment we effectively have two fulltime faculty, a Course Director and a Deputy Course Director and everybody else is contracted" (N12), he considers the College needs, "half-a-dozen or ten fulltime academics and that would also give us the opportunity to more easily develop a cohesive profile for the programme and for the college as a whole," (N12) and this is, "something we are

embarking on at the moment but obviously with so few fulltime tenured faculty that's not so easy" (N12).

In terms of the future Don believes that, "what there needs to be are very good feedback processes. In other words what effect are our graduates having on schools, what feedback are we getting from our *alumnae*" (D12). Don has mentioned to Seán and the management that, "they should always get that feedback from *alumnae* about how they're faring and also let the *alumnae* know that Hibernia is always there for them" (D12). Don also sees feedback as encompassing all stakeholders;

> *the feedback loop has to also include school principals, has to include the inspectorate, has to include the accreditation bodies such as HETAC, the Department and the Teaching Council and of course the Department of Education inspectors so all possible sources of information need to be tapped into.* (D12)

4.3.9   Future Considerations – obstacles

Seán is quite concerned about the present austerity measures, "we can't afford deep cuts in teacher education or classroom numbers because it will take so long to claw it back, and especially institutionally" (S16). Speaking about the ITE providers in general Seán is anxious that, "we don't do damage that will take generations to fix, because you can't just put a college back" (S16). Increased austerity he believes will also have an impact on the college, "I am sure people will find it much more difficult all the time to pay for their own courses" (S16). But for Seán this will not deter him from continuing to provide ITE;

> *I wouldn't be pessimistic simply because we reach out to the world. I would go so far as to say if I had to subsidise it with work from abroad I would still do it here because I think our qualification is above and beyond anything we have. So why would we ever want to not provide it. So even if we were putting out a small number of fabulous teachers let's do that.* (S17)

Nicholas sees school placements for students as a possible obstacle in the future, "there may not be enough classes to provide the school experience for all new teachers that are required," (N10/11) but he sees different combinations of, "paired placements" (N11) as a way around this obstacle. He was not unduly worried about the present embargo on jobs as he believes, "if there is any effect it will only be temporary because there are very large numbers of primary school kids coming into the system" (N11).

Don states that, "I think the future is infinitely bright" (D12). He cautions however that, "I think that one of the issues that Hibernia does need of course to pay attention to is the quality of the intake" (D12). He also stresses that the college must, "constantly be up to speed with new developments in pedagogy, new developments in teaching and learning techniques for those to be imparted to students but also those that the college itself will use in its delivery" (D12). When queried if he had worries about the quality of the intake Don replied, "I haven't, oh none at all quite the opposite in fact, the informal word from the Department of Education inspectors is that the quality of the intake is very high" (D12). He maintained that the DES inspectors, "in the early days they would certainly take the view that the Hibernia teachers hit the ground running and are more substantial contributors to schools than fresh graduates out of the teacher training colleges" (D12). Don attributes this to age, experience, maturity and also to the "pent up demand" (D12). Don cautions all colleges however that, "once that pent up demand eases it would be very important and this applies to all entry into teaching that the quality bar is set appropriately high" (D13).

Don also was not unduly perturbed by the recent job embargos, while acknowledging that, "students are very sensitive to what they feel, perceive are fluctuations in demand" he also stated that, "one of the great strengths in Ireland is that teaching is seen as a very high status and a very desired occupation. The other piece too is that other opportunities are quite limited at the moment because of the tight job offers so I don't see any major tsunami hitting the demand for the course" (D13).

4.3.10 Emerging Themes

Two themes emerged from the interviews which were mentioned by all the interviewees. The first theme related to the views the interviewees held on the concurrent versus consecutive model of teacher education. The second theme related to the resistance to the establishment of HC from the existing ITE providers, (see Appendix S for a summary table of these themes and subthemes).

4.3.11 Emerging theme - Concurrent versus Consecutive Model

Seán is adamant that students should attend university, "I think everybody should go to university. I think that the days of a teacher college should be eliminated" (S5). He considers that 17 year old pupils don't have the maturity/life experience to decide their future careers, "the idea that as we move forward that people should make up their minds what they want to do for the rest of the lives, it was questioned in my generation but now it is simply ridiculous because there are no lifetime jobs" (S5). He summarises the concurrent model thus, "This should never happen, go to primary school, go to secondary school, go to teacher college, go back to school, retire, die" (S5) as he asserts, "intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning should make sure that we have different chapters in our lives to bring out the best in us" (S5). Furthermore he contends that the concurrent model of undergraduate teacher education, "narrows the ability of the young teacher to cope with children who are coming from all sorts of homes and all sorts of socio-economic backgrounds, political backgrounds, ethnic, religious, cultural backgrounds," (S5) because these students were, "never out in the world, in the bigger world" (S5).

With the consecutive model Seán maintains he gets, "somebody who is much more committed," (S5) and "We certainly get a much higher male cohort. We are up to a quarter now" (S6). He also questions the concurrent model which admits students purely on the points they've achieved in the Leaving Certificate examination, "taking somebody with 585 points to do primary teaching doesn't mean a thing to me. I would want to sit down and look them in the face and see are they ... a really nice person who you would want to leave your child with" (S13).

Nicholas agrees considering it, "unreasonable for a 17 year old coming out of the Leaving Cert. to decide and know that they want to become a teacher," and he continues, "it is much better that we take post-graduates, people who are transitioning from other careers who have had experience in other walks of life and can bring the benefits of that experience into the classroom and inspire their kids in a variety of ways," and he concludes, "So we are starting from a stronger position I think than a B.Ed. entry point" (N5).

Don was always concerned about the concurrent model, "It always worried me when I was in the Department of Education but there were other jobs to be done at the time and there is a limit to the number of transformations one can make," (D6) because he felt that, "I have some misgivings about the concurrent model … I am not altogether certain that the formation that students get … encourages intellectual curiosity" (D7). He emphasises that this, "is not an informed view, just expressing a concern" (D7). However he considers that, "the power of e-delivery would be more in the area of postgraduate and professional education than it would be in the area of undergraduate education,"(D3) and that the concurrent model provides, "teachers very often [who] have limited work experience," (D5) where the system would, "benefit as a result of diversity" (D5).

4.3.12 Emerging theme - Resistance from other ITE providers.

Seán mentioned how initially he approached an existing provider, "we actually first talked to one of the teacher colleges to see if they would work with us to help grow the numbers and they were definitely not interested," (S2) and remains perplexed at what he perceives is continuing rudeness from other providers, "I find it very amusing to see how we are treated with such bad manners by some of the colleagues here … why are they so rude?" (S10). He suggests that they perceive the college as flooding the market but retorts, "It's not about … flooding the market. We never want to do that. And it is a cheap shot to be saying it is, from people who have never even looked at our programme, don't even know the contents of it." (S17). He states that, "Recently the head of a teacher college said to me, you should be capped, your numbers should be capped, the way ours are capped" (S11). He replied, "Well have

you ever thought about this, none of us should be capped … if the people are willing to train as teachers, take their chances on a job here like all other professions do … maybe there are jobs in England … America, Australia, South Africa" (S11). He concludes, "please let nobody tell us not to offer a qualified person who wants to fund their further education," (S7) "there are people who really need to learn that nobody owns education and nobody owns a particular area in education" (S11).

Nicholas states that, "our philosophy in Hibernia has always been that we have had to be better to be equal to address the challenge which we faced in the education sector here in Ireland" (N8). Don informs us that, "Noel Dempsey who was originally the man who as Minister decided … if Hibernia can run this without any cost to the exchequer why shouldn't they be given a chance … some civil servants … were very diffident about this as a model and also sensitive to the implications that this would have for the teacher training colleges, and of course you'll recall as well as I do the dreadful controversy and rows that developed at the time" (D4). Don speaks of this in terms of, "step change paradigm shift innovation," (D4) which when it occurs there is, "huge resistance from ... the incumbents" (D5).

4.4 Section C: Presentation of the findings from the Students' Questionnaires

The total student population for the two cohorts comprising the October 2009 intake and the February 2010 intake plus those presenting for examination following deferrals was 753 of which 600 (79.7%) were female and 153 (20.3%) were male. In total 246 students responded to the questionnaire. This represented 32.67% of the population of which 199 (80.9%) were female and 47 (19.1%) were male. This gender balance of respondents closely represents the overall gender balance of the intake of the two cohorts. The overall response rate was satisfactory given the mitigating factors that one group were finished their exams and likely to be abroad or have disengaged with the college while the other group had yet to complete their examinations over the summer months.

Questions 1-3 sought basic statistical data from the respondents as follows: the gender of participants; gender breakdown by the two cohorts; and an indicator of the age of the participants. Questions 4-6 asked about the reasons for choosing HC, their previous experience with blended-learning and if they had found it a beneficial method of study. Question 7 queried specific aspects of the HDAPE course in terms of quality and students' perceptions of the level of support they received across different departments. Question 8 sought their overall experience of Teaching Practice and the guidance they received from this component of the course while Question 9 queried if the use of technology had enhanced their learning capacity. The online library facilities were investigated in Question 10 and whether the course prepared the student to work as a primary teacher was queried in Question 11. The use of technology was again queried this time in terms of enhancing the students' capacity as a teacher in Question 12, and following from that Question 13 asked if the course prepared students to become reflective practitioners. An opportunity was given to the students to offer recommendations for improvements to enhance the course in Question 14 and the final question asked if they would undertake another course using blended learning (Question 15). The opportunity was afforded students to add any additional comments they wished to in a final section classified as Question 16 (see Appendix T for the responses to this questionnaire).

Table 4.4.1

Question 1: Gender of Respondents
N=246

■ Male: n=47

■ Female: n=199
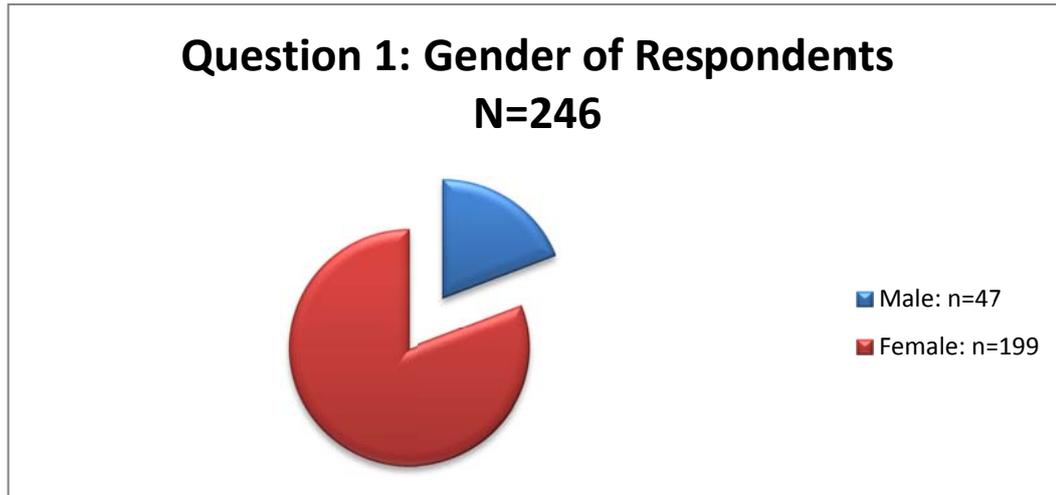
We see from the pie chart that the 47 male respondents represented (19.1%) of the population a figure quite representative of their overall numbers within the college from the two intake periods under investigation

Table 4.4.2

Question 2: Gender Breakdown by Cohorts N=246

■ October O9 Female n=106

■ October O9 Male n=21

■ Februrary 10 Female n= 93

■ February 10 Male n=26
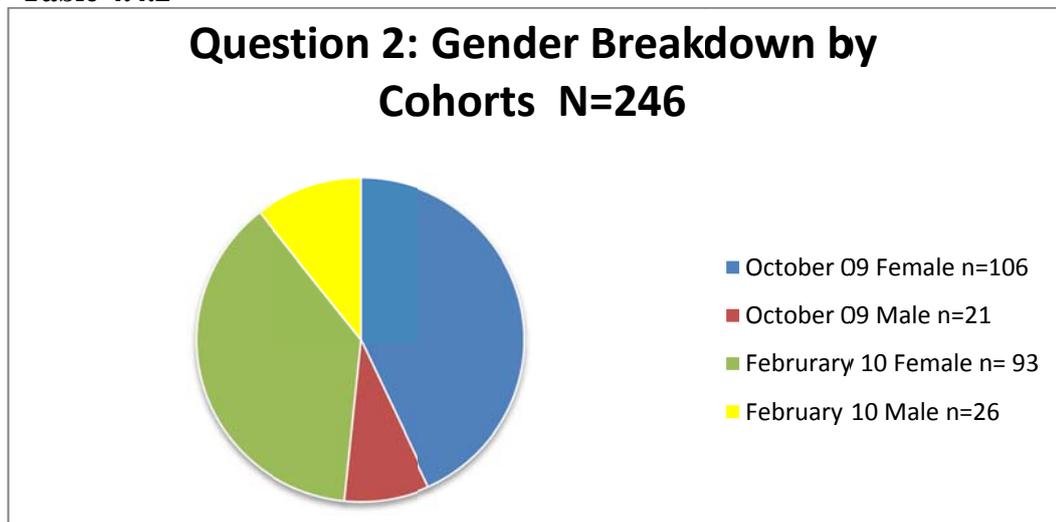
It is interesting to note that roughly the same amount of students replied from the two cohorts and the ratio of male to female respondents in each cohort was also similar. This rather even spread of respondents across both cohorts was fortuitous as it has enabled a balance to prevail in the overall analysis of the replies and presents a good picture of how the course was experienced by the two cohorts coming to their studies at two different points in the academic year.

Table 4.4.3 Age by Cohort by Gender   N = 246
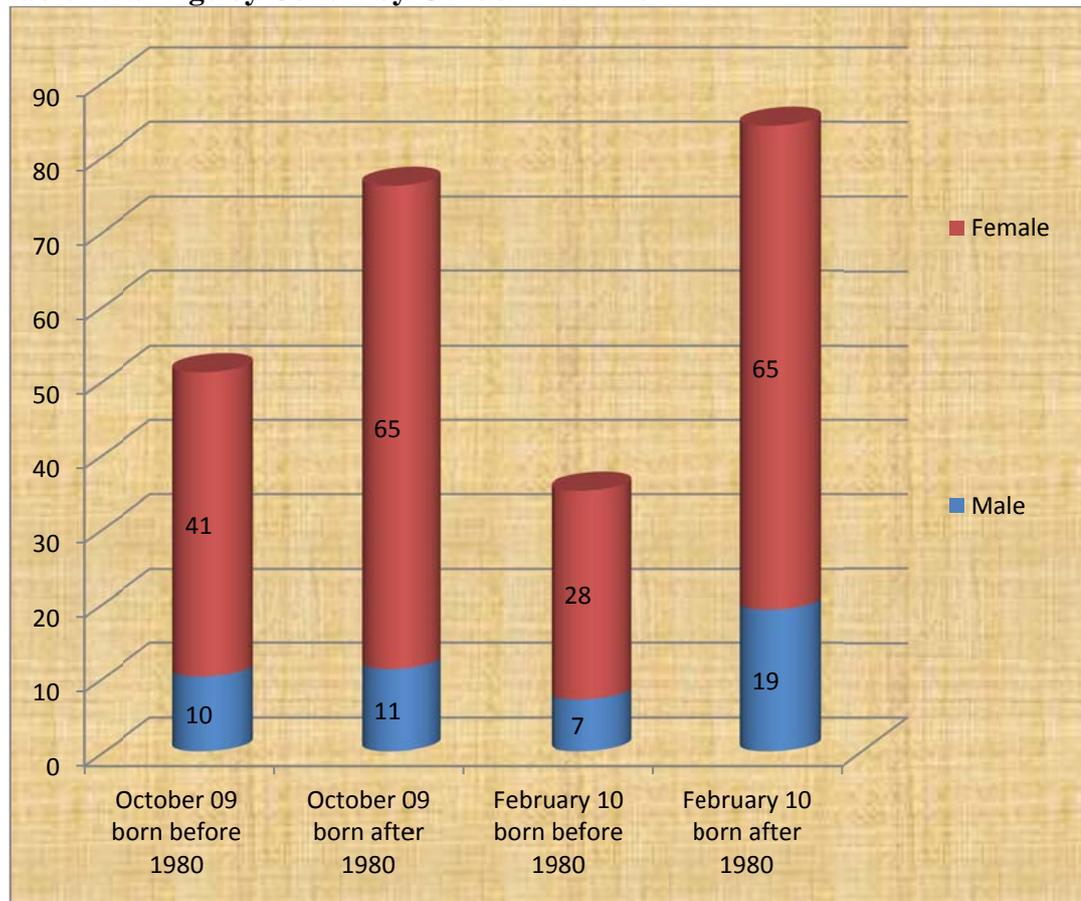
In the October 2009 cohort 41 females (39%) were born before 1980 placing them in the age range of thirty and over, while 65 (61%) were under thirty. There was practically an even split in the male cohort with 10 students over thirty and 11 under that age. In the February 2010 cohort 28 females (30%) were thirty and over, while 65, (70%) were under thirty. The ratio of younger men in February 2010 was far higher however at 19 (73%) as against 7 (27%) who were thirty and over.

Over the two cohorts 86 students (35%) were over thirty years of age when embarking on their course of study, while 160 (65%) were under thirty.

Table 4.4.4

Q.4 Reasons for Studying with Hibernia College N=245

(NOTE:Responses >246 as some students' responses fall into more than one category)
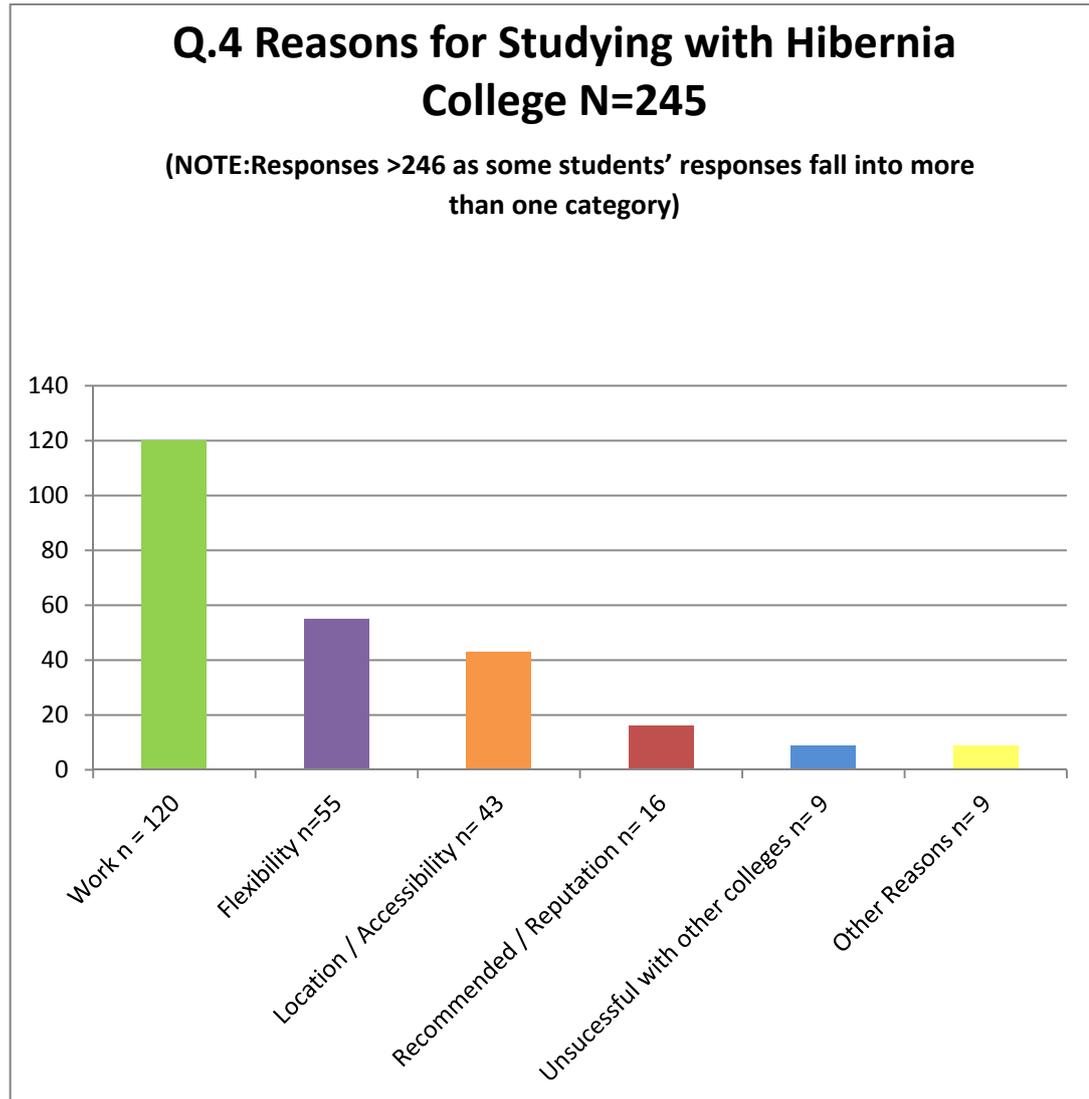
One respondent skipped this question, of those who replied the graph above highlights the main clusters into which their answers fall. Some students gave multiple reasons for choosing Hibernia so their top two reasons were chosen. By far the greatest reason for choosing was the fact that the student could continue working while studying. All students quoted will be referred to as S along with their respondent number e.g. Student 170 (S170) who states "I wanted to continue to work fulltime while I studied. Financially going back to college wasn't an option and as I was already working in a school this suited me better." This quotation summarises many responses for whom financial obligations and the need to keep working was paramount. S45 pragmatically linked work and study in a very practical way "I chose Hibernia College because it gave me the opportunity to put theory into practice as I

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could 'sub' in different class levels and do the different lesson ideas that I was learning at onsites and tutorials."

The flexibility afforded by Hibernia's HDAPE was also important to students. Responses from S189, "no travel required, ease of access to materials," S187 "flexibility, no commute," S124 "Because of its flexibility and I just generally found the model appealing," S109 "I like the idea of flexibility and the possibility of gaining more experience with IT," and finally S77 "because I have children so cannot travel far to study and Hibernia allowed me to schedule my study around my commitments at home" typify the type of responses in this category.

Location and accessibility is also linked to the first two categories. Remarks made by the following students illustrate the respondents thinking, S186 "As it would free me to complete the course from any location and also in an efficient way, time-wise," S138 "I could not afford to move to Dublin to take up a place with any of the other training colleges there" and adding an international dimension S199 "I live in Germany and am married with two small children, aged 5 and 4. The blended-learning option was therefore very appropriate to my situation."

A recommendation from Hibernia students, friends and relatives and the good reputation the course had achieved, acted as a catalyst for others. S127 "I applied to the Hibernia course because I was informed that it was an excellent teacher training course and it was feasible to obtain experience in a school at the same time" and S228 "Teachers I spoke to were most impressed with Hibernia graduates. They seem to have a more modern, realistic and flexible approach to teaching and were more up-skilled in areas such as ICT and educational development" and S150 "It was flexible and suited my personal circumstances. It also has a very good reputation" demonstrate this point.

The online aspect was of particular interest to some, S179 "Liked e-learning and part time rather than full time onsite in other colleges" and S181 "as a mother of 3, the online aspect of the course suited me" and this was linked closely to the flexibility of the course in terms of location and time and the ability to study at one's own pace.

Nine students (3.7%) stated that they chose HC because they failed to get into another college, S213 "Second choice. Did not get into Mary I," S237 "Failed to get into St. Pat's Dip Programme," and S70 "Mary I turned me down, so I went for Hibernia. The interview with Mary I was the worst experience ever, but with Hibernia it was a meeting of minds. So when I got my place I was delighted."

Table 4.4.5

Question 5: Prior study using blended learning N= 246

NO n=239
Yes n=7
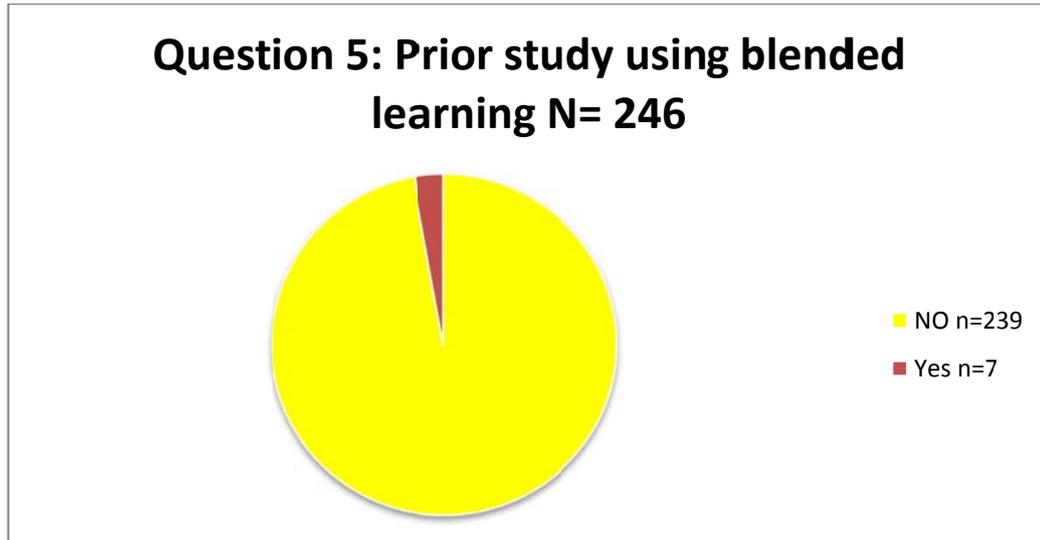
Of the 246 respondents only 7 (3%) had ever been exposed to any form of online learning before taking up their course with HC. Of the seven who answered in the affirmative two attended an open university course, two others attended online courses in their previous jobs, (Diageo, Fosters) and one each attended a degree course, a TEFL course, and a Montessori course via the internet. This data suggests that undertaking a course of study using a blended-learning approach was an entirely new concept for these two cohorts.

Table 4.4.6

Q. 6 Did you find the combination of onsite and online lectures beneficial?
N=246

11 6

229

- Yes
- No
- Mixed
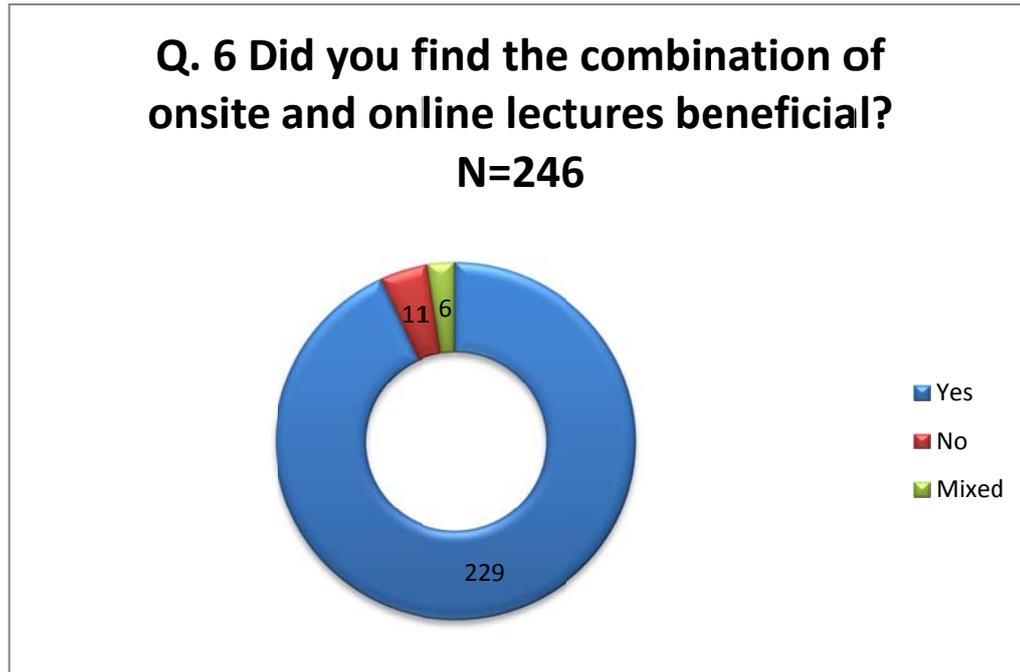
Overwhelming 229 (93%) students found the combination of onsite and online lectures (blended-learning) a beneficial method of study at post-graduate level. Countless examples of the convenience, the ability to go back over information at one's own pace, the flexibility of the model were cited here. S213 asserts, "The delivery of lectures could be arranged to suit the learner and lectures could be reviewed at any later time. The tutors were also continuously available to answer any queries or address any areas of difficulty. The onsite sessions also provided an excellent forum for more in-depth discussion with fellow students and with lecturers, as well as giving students a chance to engage actively with the learning materials." S4 emphasises the social aspect, "Whilst technically all information is accessible online, onsites provide an opportunity for face-to-face interaction and explanation. At the end of the day, we are social creatures." S184 summarizes saying, "It was the best of both worlds. I did not have to travel to tutorials and at the same time met with fellow students at onsites."

One ambivalent student (155) complained, "I have mixed feelings to be honest. I felt there could have been more help and communication between the college and its students, as I felt that students had to do a lot of investigation and research themselves in areas which should have been provided by the college." Those who

gave reasons for a negative response wanted more support in general and as one S150 said, "I did not enjoy the online aspect as I felt awkward in the environment as some lecturers did not come across very well online and it was difficult to get people to participate."

Question 4.4.7 Likert scale questions
Table 4.4.7.1

Q.7.1 Overall structure of the course N=246

| Very Good n= 69 | Good n= 142 | Average n= 30 | Fair n= 5 | Poor n=0 |
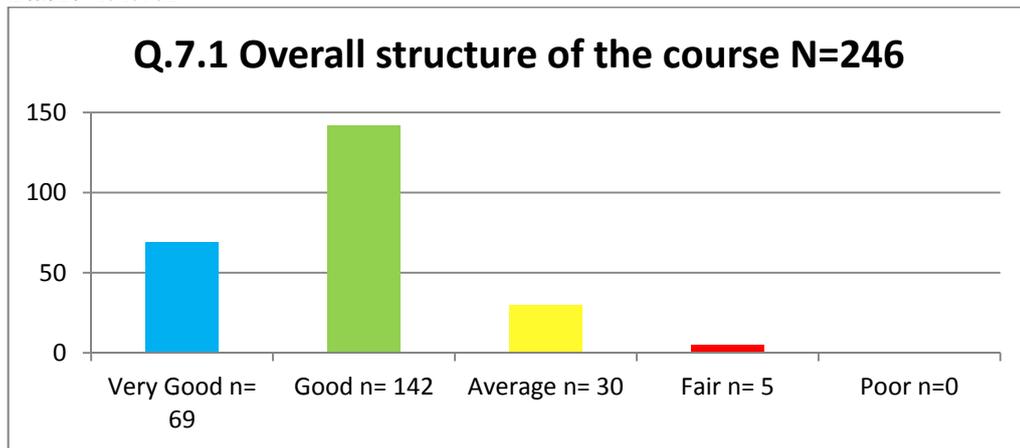
A total of 211 students (86%) found the overall structure of the course good or very good with 35 (14%) considering the overall structure to be average or below.

Table 4.4.7.2

Q.7.2 Quality of the online course materials in general   N=246

| Very Good n= 70 | Good n= 144 | Average n= 27 | Fair n= 4 | Poor n= 1 |
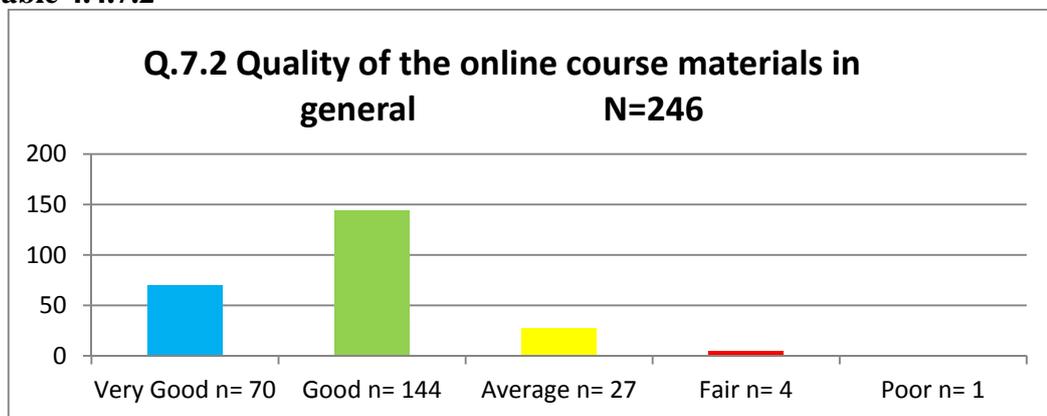
A similar number as above (214) (87%) were happy with the overall quality of the online materials while 32 (13%) rated the content average or below.

Table 4.4.7.3

Q.7.3 Quality of the interactive sessions in general N=246

	Very Good n= 47	Good n= 125	Average n=54	Fair n=15	Poor n= 5
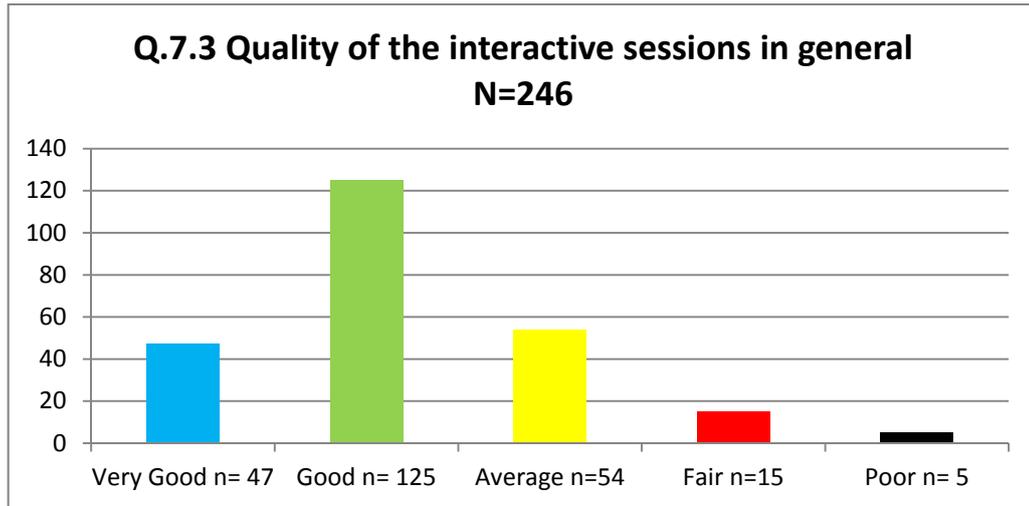
There was a greater distribution regarding the quality of the interactive sessions with 173 (70%) considering that they were good or very good but 74 (30%) considering them to be average or below.

Table 4.4.7.4

Q.7.4 Quality of the onsite lectures N=246

	Very Good n= 78	Good n= 124	Average n= 29	Fair n=10	Poor n= 5
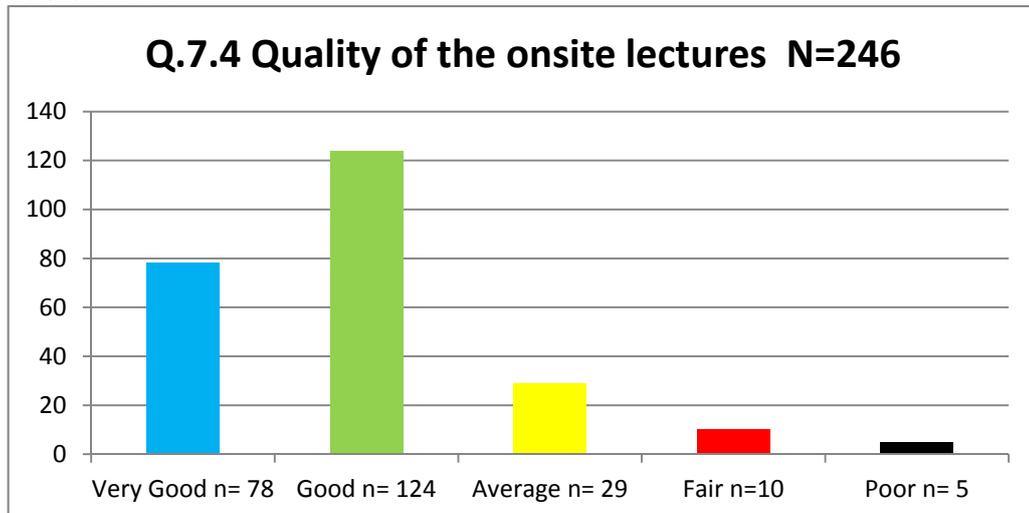
The onsite lectures from a quality perspective were more favourably received with 202 students (82%) considering they were very good or good and only 44 (18%) grading them as average or below.

Table 4.4.7.5

Q.7.5 Level of ICT support given
N=246
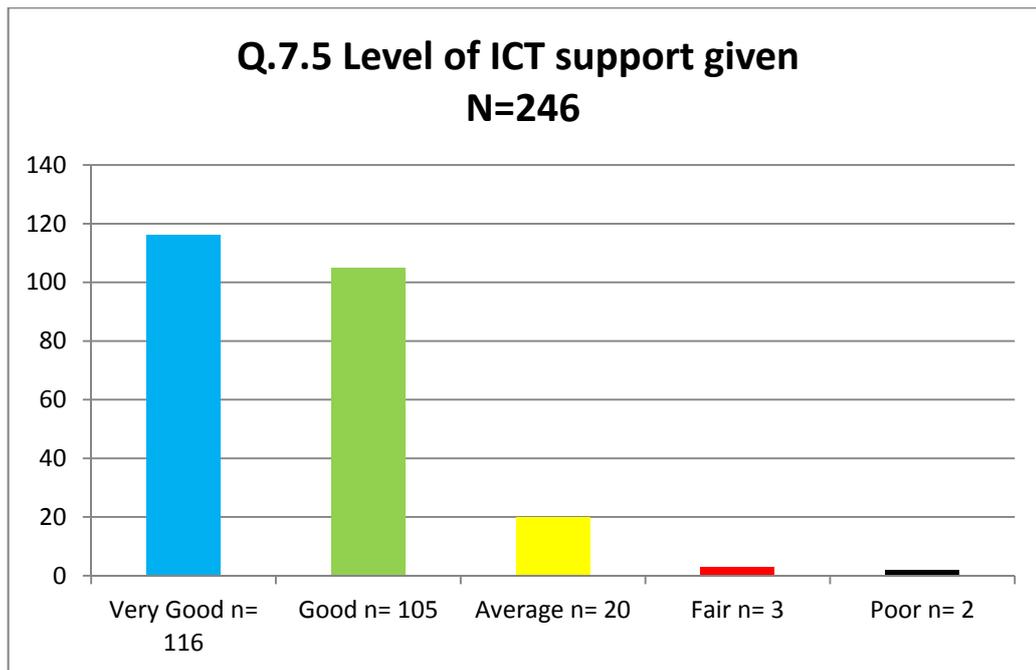
The level of ICT support received from the college was very well received with 221 (90%) considering it to be very good or good while 25 (10%) considered it to be average or below.

Table 4.4.7.6

Q.7.6 Level of support given by administrative staff   N=246
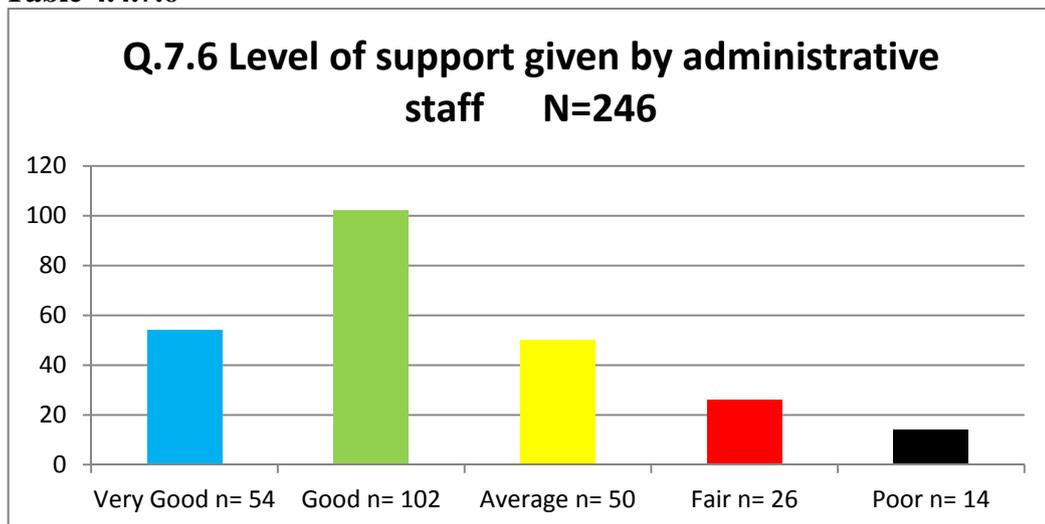
Only 156 students (63%) rated the support given by administrative staff as very good or good while 90 (37%) considered this support to be average or below.

Table 4.4.7.7

Q.7.7 Level of support given by supervisors on Teaching Practice N=246
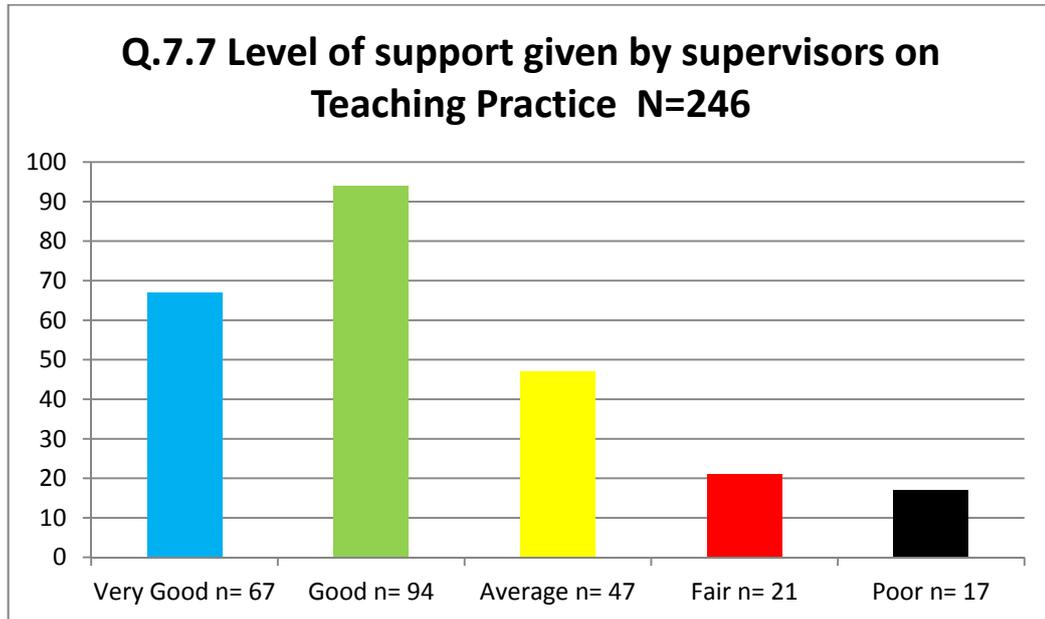
There was a spread of opinion regarding the support given by supervisors on teaching practice with 161 (65%) considering that this support was good or very good but 85 (35%) students rated this support as average or below.

Table 4.4.7.8

Q.7.8 Level of support given by onsite tutors N=246
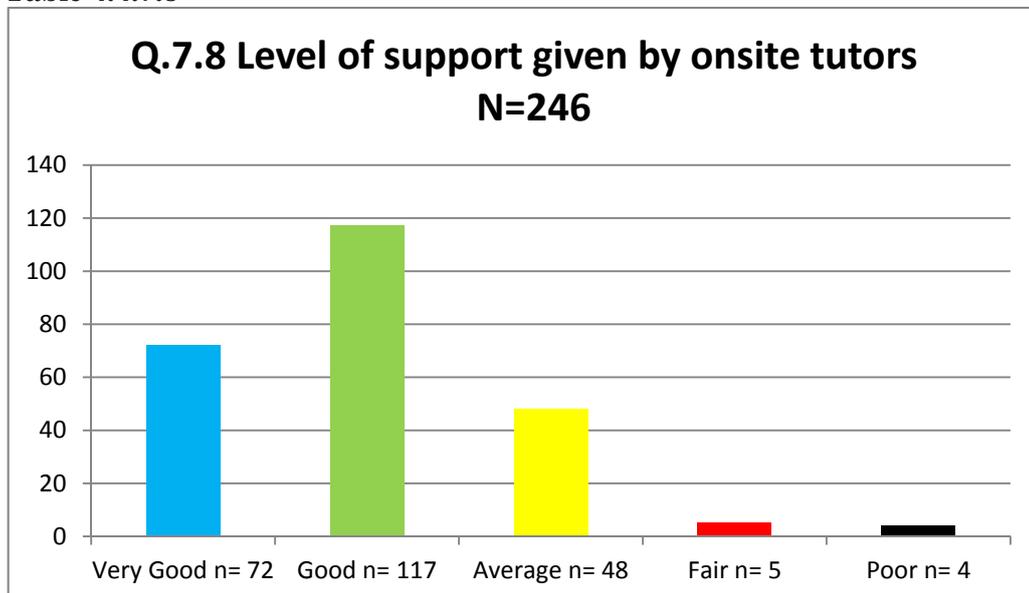
As many as 189 students (77%) rated onsite tutors as providing very good or good support to them. However, 57 (23%) considered this support to be average or below.

Table 4.4.7.9
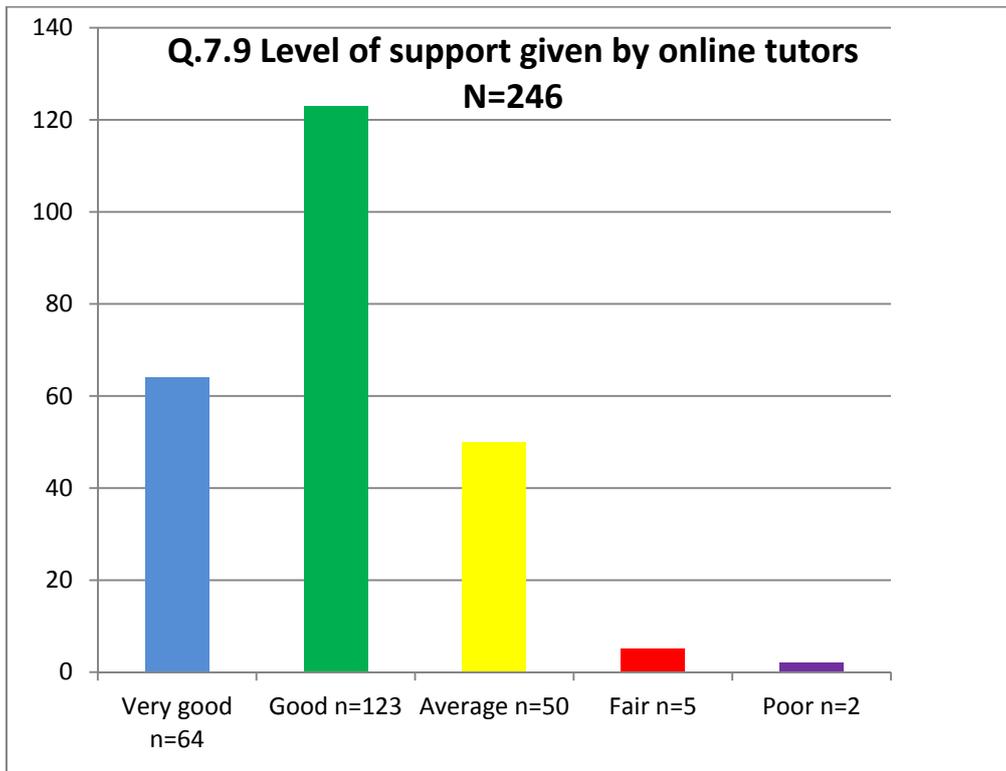
In terms of online tutors 187 (76%) of students rated their support as very good and good, while 57 (24%) rated their support as average or below.

A summary of question 7 would suggest that an overwhelming majority of the students who participated in this survey were very satisfied with the overall structure of the course and with the quality of the online materials. The quality of the onsites and the level of ICT support while receiving a slightly more mixed spread of approval were still considered to be good or very good. Students were also happy with onsite tutors and online tutors.

However students were less satisfied with the support from administration in particular, with the level of support from supervisors and with the quality of the interactive online sessions. See Figure 4.1 below for overview summary.

Figure 4.1 Summary overview of Question 4.4.7

Question7	Very Good/good	Average/below
Course structure	86%	14%
Online Course material	87%	13%
Quality of Interactive Sessions	70%	30%
Onsite lectures	82%	18%
ICT Support	90%	10%
Support from Administration	63%	37%
Support from supervisors	65%	35%
Support from onsite tutors	77%	23%
Support from online tutors	76%	24%

Table 4.4.8

Q.8 Support and Guidance in Teaching Practice N=245

Support/ Positive n= 96, Support/Mixed n= 91, Little Support n= 58, N/A n=1
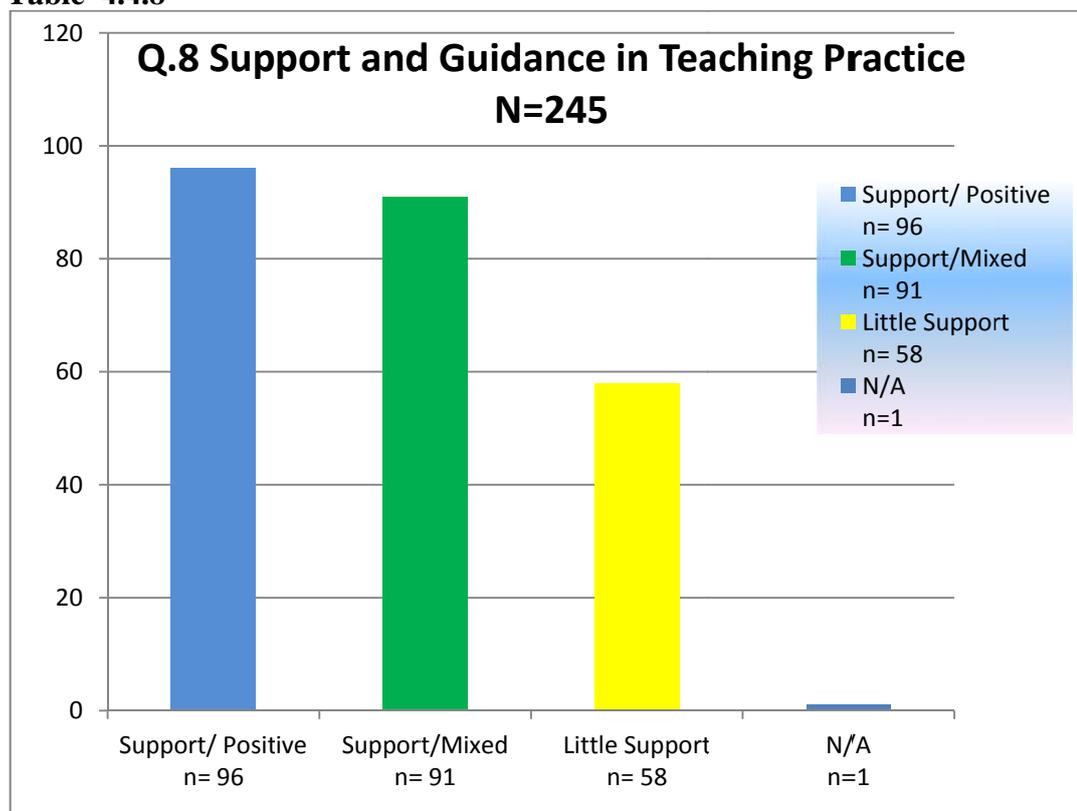
There were 96 respondents (39%) who wrote very positively about the support they received while on teaching practice but a further 91 (37%) had mixed views praising some aspects but criticising others and 59 students (24%) had negative opinions of the support they received. One student wrote 'not applicable' which has been classified as a nil response. Those who were positive were very appreciative of the support received from their supervisors, S12 sums it up well when stating, "All of my TP supervisors gave me clear guidance and clear objectives to guide and improve my teaching. They were encouraging and positive and constructive in their criticism. I always felt that the lines of communication were open, should I need to contact them about anything. My experiences were all positive." This student also states, "On my final TP I had a very difficult class with serious discipline issues and without the support and guidance of my supervisor, I'm not sure if I would have been able to achieve the positive outcome that I achieved." S149 agrees and highlights the counselling service, "I thought that I was well supported and guided during TP. If ever I had a problem and needed some guidance the supervisors were more than

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happy to help. I also remember the college sending us an email before each TP to remind us that there was a counselling service for students during TP as it can be a stressful time."

Those who had mixed opinions were concerned about the different expectations of the supervisors, the huge amount of paperwork required, the lack of support from administration, the difficulty in getting school placements and the feeling that they were not well prepared for the first teaching practice in particular.

S130 suggests, "video footage of how to teach properly would have been helpful, to analyse them on onsite days. More lesson plan samples in all subject areas and at all levels would have benefited the first TP." S65 called for more supervision, "Two visits per TP block is inadequate in my opinion. There is no way a supervisor can assess/guide/assist/support a student teacher carrying out approx 150 hours of teaching practice plus planning and gathering/organising of resources in 1 to 2 hours of observation."

Those who were negative held more extreme versions of the concerns expressed above, S23 said, "I feel very strongly that there was a huge inconsistency in terms of the guidance offered by the various supervisors which resulted in huge variances in grades awarded ... What one supervisor wanted contrasted radically to what was acceptable to another." S187 was quite negative asserting, "Horrific, it was one of the most stressful parts of my life. I felt we were unprepared and the college did not care how we coped." S170 agrees, "Overall I found the teaching practice periods to be quite gruelling and exhausting. I have a primary degree and a masters and have worked in industry for ten years at management level and I found the teaching practice experiences to be by far the most exhausting work experience to date. The main issue was the level of paperwork ... My husband aptly named it 'TP Bootcamp'!." S59 wrote, "I felt that there was not enough workshop time devoted to classroom management well before teaching practice. I personally felt very unprepared for the first teaching practice despite a comprehensive one day workshop as it came too late in the process to adequately facilitate confident and focused preparation."

Students, S79 and S162 called on the college to do more regarding accessing schools, "It was quite difficult finding schools to do your TP in. Other colleges organise schools for their students for most of their teaching practices and I think Hibernia should do this as well."S79 "I feel that if the college got their PR machine in gear and worked with certain schools in building a mutually beneficial relationship it would help students and also help build the reputation of the college."S162

S33 summed up the experience quite pragmatically, "I don't think anything can really prepare you for teaching practice until you enter the classroom as it is there, 'real' teaching, planning and preparation takes place and no matter how many notes you read, they cannot replace 'real' teacher experience.

Table 4.4.9

Q.9 Do you feel the use of technology has enhanced your capacity as a student? N=245

- Yes n= 215
- No n= 27
- Mixed n= 3
- Non-response n= 1
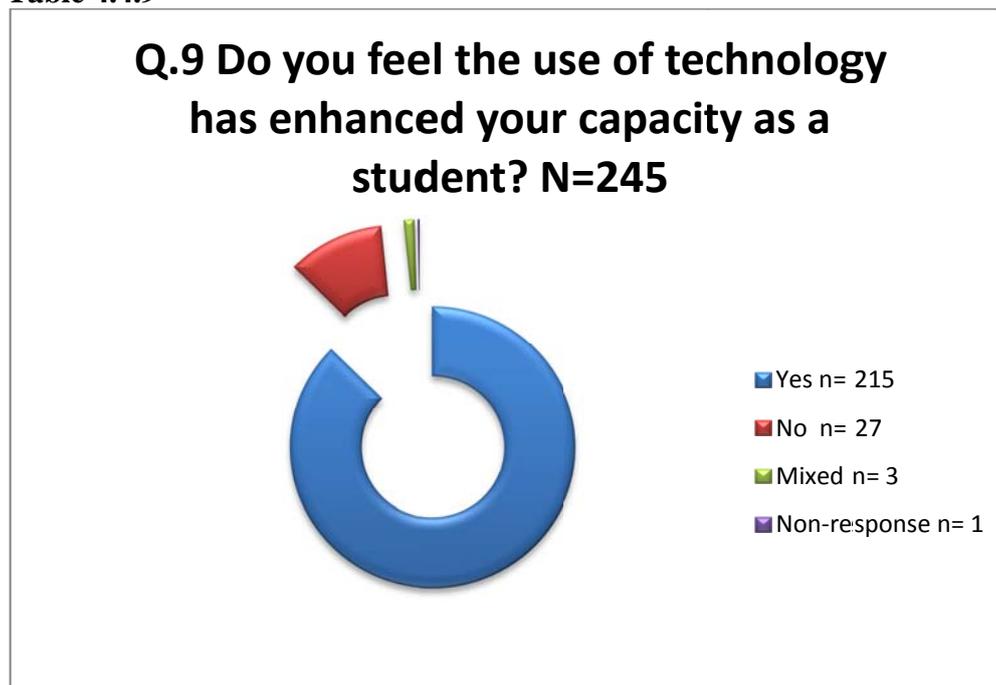
Once again the vast majority of the students, 215(88%), considered that the use of technology necessary in undertaking a blended-learning course enhanced their capacity to learn. S5 said that, "I was already proficient in IT before starting the course, however many lecturers drew our attention to various online resources which were excellent," and S44 was on the opposite end of the spectrum and said, "I had

previously very limited knowledge or experience with ICT so this course has definitely opened a world to me." S242 linked this skill to the classroom, "Now that I am teaching I feel that my technology skills are very valuable."

S228 gave full credit to the college for developing these skills, "Through the Hibernia experience in general I have become more confident in using technology and this ... is a skill that is developed right throughout the course and one that will benefit the ability to be an effective teacher." However S221 did not agree, "I feel that the use of technology was very beneficial, however in my own case I don't feel I enhanced my own capacity in this area." Regarding research and further study S151 states, "I have used so many programmes and packages to participate in the course that I have become much quicker and more efficient at finding things online and researching." While S73 represents those who were negative, "I get better results in a face-to-face setting. Very tiring looking at a screen all the time and extremely frustrating when technology lets you down."

Table 4.4.10

Q. 10 Do you feel that the online library facilities were adequate? N= 246

■ Yes n= 120
■ No n=92
■ Did not use library n= 34
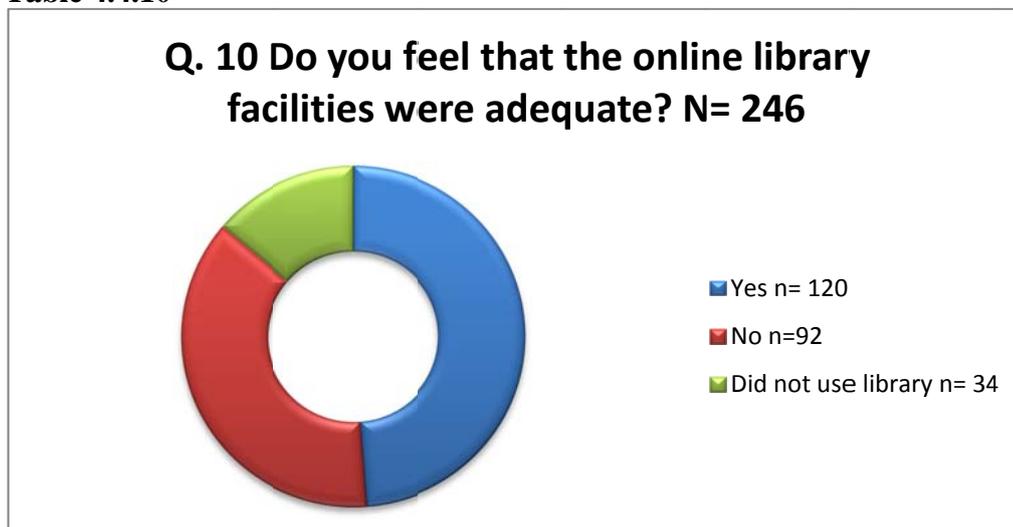
Given its constant availability quite a few students 34 (14%) didn't access the online library. Of those who found it inadequate 92 (37%), their comments centred around navigation issues, as S7 says, "The library facilities were difficult to use with multiple passwords required and they often did not have the required or recommended reading," and S8 agrees stating, "I found it difficult to source

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information using the online library if I didn't have a specific book title to hand, I more often than not relied on google searches to obtain my information for assignments." S212 admits, "Never used it as it was too difficult to find books and not a nice way to read books."

On the other hand of the 120 (49%) who found the library facilities adequate, S214 said, "Library facilities more than adequate, managed to find most of what I was looking for" and S112 asserts that, "they had a huge volume of texts with links to relevant materials and it was very convenient being able to link with the material and not have to wait for it to be available. It was excellent to have your own personal library and also the search function made it easy to navigate." S81 considered, "It was a great way of doing extra reading and getting further information on topics when doing assignments or even just for general questions," while S32 makes the following suggestion, "It might be an idea to make arrangements with the education centres around the country so that students can have access to their facilities."

Table 4.4.11
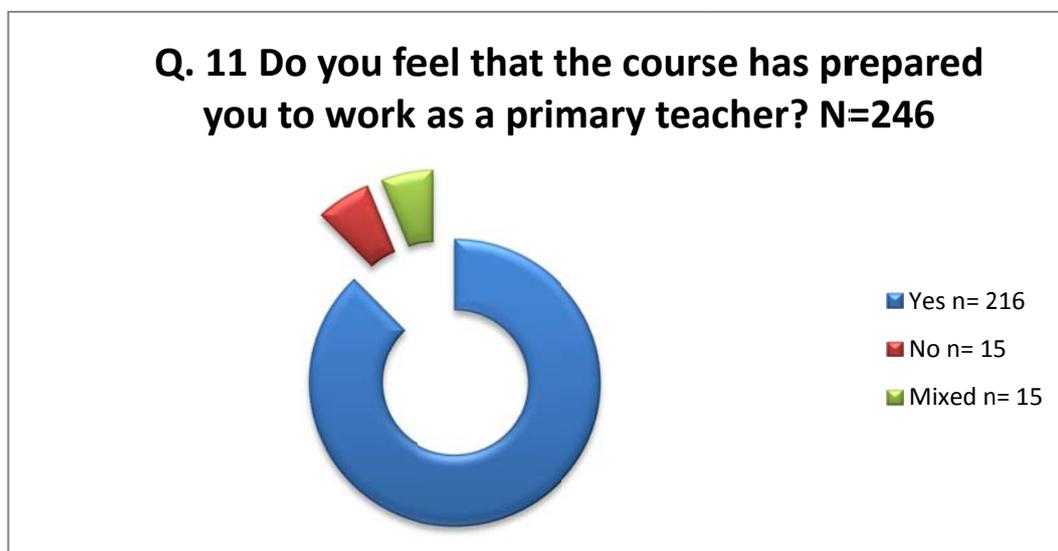
The vast majority of students, 216(88%) felt that they were prepared to work as primary teachers. Of those who didn't 15(6%) and those who were unsure 15(6%) comments related to not feeling that they received adequate training in various subjects. These lacunae included Special Education, Infant Education, Maths,

English, Irish and SESE while they also wanted far more instruction on cúntaisí miosúla (monthly reports), legal issues, child protection, *curriculum vitae*/interviews, and teachers' lives in schools as S61 comments, "I still feel out of my depth and in terms of planning, the cúntas and Dip I will be dependent on others to find out what I need to do," and also S38, "I would not be confident teaching a junior class, as the lowest I taught was 1st class and they are completely different than junior and senior infants" and finally S53 who says, "I feel that TP alone has prepared me. With all the notes we received during the course on different modules, while most were extremely important, I don't feel fully prepared or equipped to deal with behavioural problems, special needs etc."

Of those with mixed views S49 states, "TP bears no reflection on actual classroom work, there is quite simply too much typing to be done" while S83 says, "Yes, as TP is useful to experience different settings. No as written exams totally ridiculous exercise. Good teaching is built on good planning not on learning by rote for a 3 hour exam."

Many of those who felt that they were well prepared gave credit to Teaching Practice and S81sums up the belief echoed by many that Teaching Practice was the best means by which they were prepared,

> *Yes - we have been on three TPs - having taught at all levels - junior, middle and senior level - we have taught all subjects to all levels, dealing with differentiation, teaching methods, strategies, assessment, planning, preparation and implementing. Implementing these strategies and techniques alone in the real classroom setting is excellent preparation to work as a primary teacher.* (S81)

The practical nature of the course impressed S8, "It is a very practical course which provided me with lots of practical tips and common sense approaches. The theory was student friendly and very relevant to all aspects of work as a primary school teacher," while S20 emphasised planning, "The whole course was so beneficial ... I feel I am definitely prepared for teaching as I have learned so much about the importance of planning." S39 typifies those who wanted more post-course support, "The course covered the myriad aspects of teaching and the three teaching practice

sessions, while onerous and demanding, were a phenomenal experience. I would however have liked more information on long term planning and how to prepare for our first year as teachers, the dearth of information for this aspect of our new lives is enormous."

S36 confidently asserts, "I am starting my first teaching job tomorrow and I feel confident in my ability as a teacher due to the advice and training I received studying with Hibernia." S247 says, "The course has been excellent in preparing me ... you do a lot of the work by yourself and use all your previous experiences. Some of the other colleges spoon feed the pupils too much so that they all do the same things in class and have the same teaching styles. With Hibernia you develop your own style as it's up to you at the end of the day to put in the work to achieve the results," as S137 says, "You get out of the course what you put in. Everything is there for you."

Table 4.4.12:

Q. 12 Do you feel the use of technology has enhanced your capacity as a teacher? N= 246

- Yes n= 225
- No n= 18
- Mixed n= 3
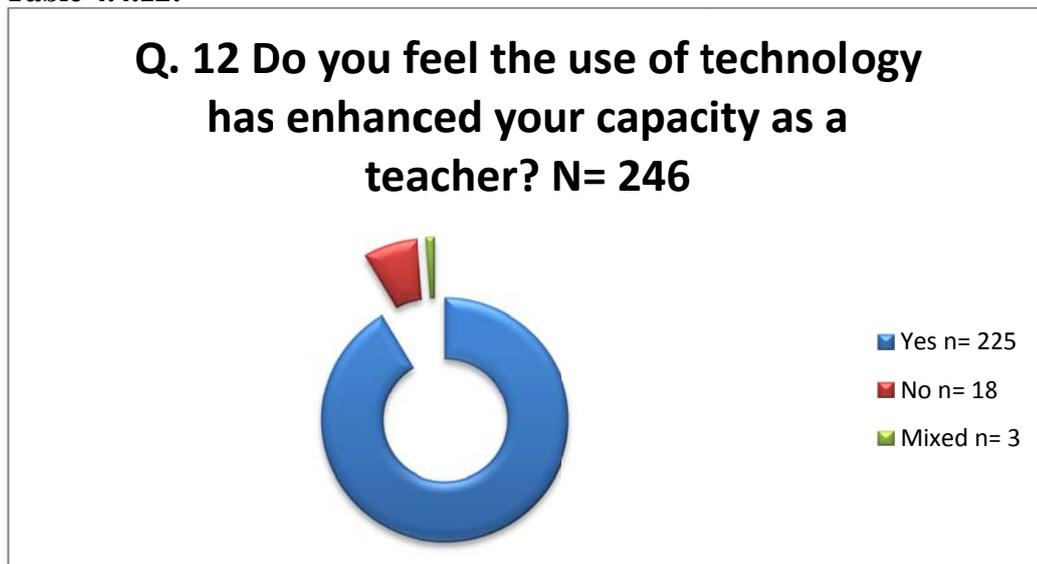
The students were convinced that technology has enhanced their teaching capacity with 225 (91%) agreeing with the question. S228 insists that it has stating, "Definitely, with ICT becoming more and more relevant to the classroom, the Hibernia experience definitely enhanced my capacity as a teacher, through computer knowledge, photostory and its relevance to teaching." S221 agrees saying, "I think the use of technology is extremely important in teaching and learning. While I did

not learn any new technologies on this course, it has given me a further appreciation of how ICT can enhance learning." S171 considers that technology, "is the way forward in education and by using so much during the course it has given me confidence to use it in teaching," S194 concurs believing that "The modernisation of teaching methods is very important and the use of technology in the schools is a vital tool." S150 states that "The emphasis by Hibernia not to rely on textbooks ensured the use of the internet and other technology which has enhanced my capacity as a teacher as up to date materials are always to hand online."

S155 claims that "Technology is a big part of education today. Children need to be taught the skills and encouraged to use and try out new technology. It is therefore important that the teacher can relate to children in this way," and S158 adds, "Lots of technology resources can be used in the classroom - photostory, podcasts, interactive whiteboard etc., allows children different entry points to learning and to display what they have learnt in different ways." S15 says, "We live in a digital age. To effectively engage children, we need to embrace and leverage technology," and S118 affirms that, "We received a very good ICT education and other teachers from other training colleges were impressed with how much we could do. Allied to this comment, S179 states that "In my experience in the classroom I found that many teachers were not using the technology available to them, the students are losing out."

Eighteen (7%) disagreed. S227 considers that, "in reality I didn't pick up any new skills technology-wise ... and received no real training during the course on using IWB and software programmes for use in the classroom apart from maybe photostory, more emphasis should have been placed on these." S226 concurs stating, "We did not have any courses on how to use the interactive whiteboard which I feel would have been far more beneficial than Scratch." S127 also agrees saying "there could have been more of a focus on how to use interactive whiteboards and relevant educational software."

To counteract this S85 says, "Photostory is very versatile and I learned this programme while on the course. Interactive whiteboards were also introduced and we were shown how to use this valuable resource. It is vital in today's world."

Table 4.4.13

Q. 13 Do you feel that the course prepared you to become a reflective practitioner? N= 246

- Yes n= 233
- No n= 11
- Mixed n=2
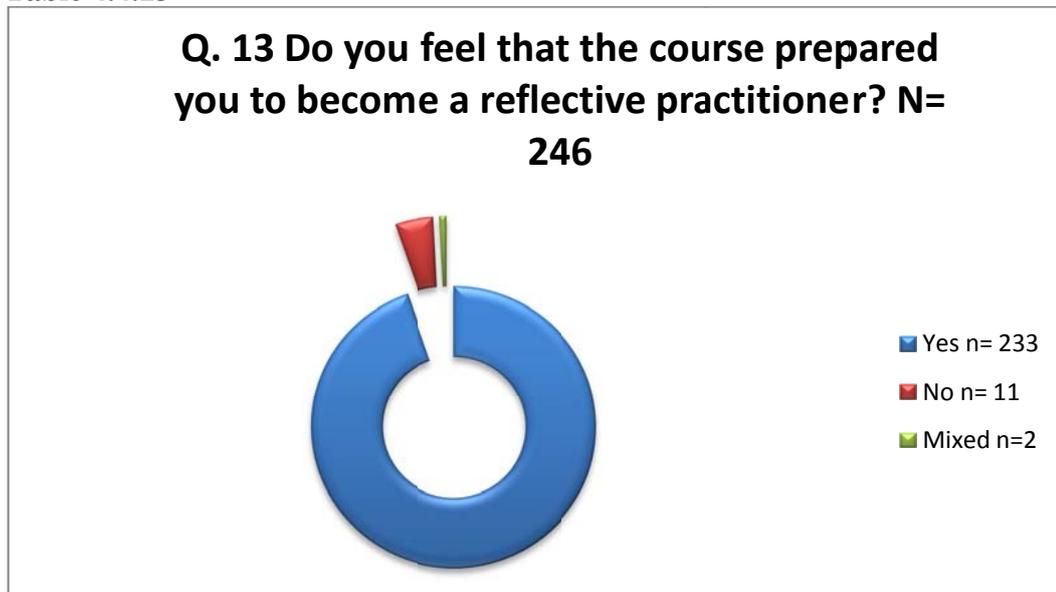
In their own opinion the students believed that HDAPE course prepared them to be reflective practitioners. An overwhelmingly large number 233 (95%) agreed with the question. S111 considers that, "This course really emphasised reflective practice, I found the philosophical aspect most interesting." S124 agrees stating, "I feel reflection was a huge part of the course and I hope to continue this as a reflective practitioner, even though at times I felt during teaching practice this was very time consuming (each night) and took away from planning. However assignments which encouraged reflective thinking were excellent."

S115 declares that, "this aspect of the course was reiterated throughout the course and the college were consistent in promoting its importance, S238 agrees saying that there were, "Lots of emphasis on reflective logs, self-assessment," which S242 considers worthwhile, "I feel self-assessment is a very important part of being a teacher." S123 attributes praise to, "The evaluation sheets that had to be completed during the 3 TP blocks were invaluable in helping you to reflect on your teaching, and student 138 considers, "I am a 'reflexive' reflector! Thanks to the daily evaluations which had to be completed during TP and the foundations (particularly philosophy and sociology) I constantly think how I might do my job better and improve." S155 admits, "The evaluations and reflections on lessons were at times

very hard to do, and if the college had not required them to be done I don't think I would have spent the time reflecting on the lessons and it was a worthwhile practice and I learnt a lot from reviewing the lessons." Of those who disagreed, 11 (4%), S187 said, "We were too stressed to be reflective," while S137 didn't understand the necessity for reflective practice, saying that there was, "A bit too much emphasis on this reflective practitioner nonsense to be honest."

Table 4.4.14

Q.14 Recommendations for improving the course fall into the following categories: N= 245
(NOTE: Responses >245 as some students' responses fall into more than one category)
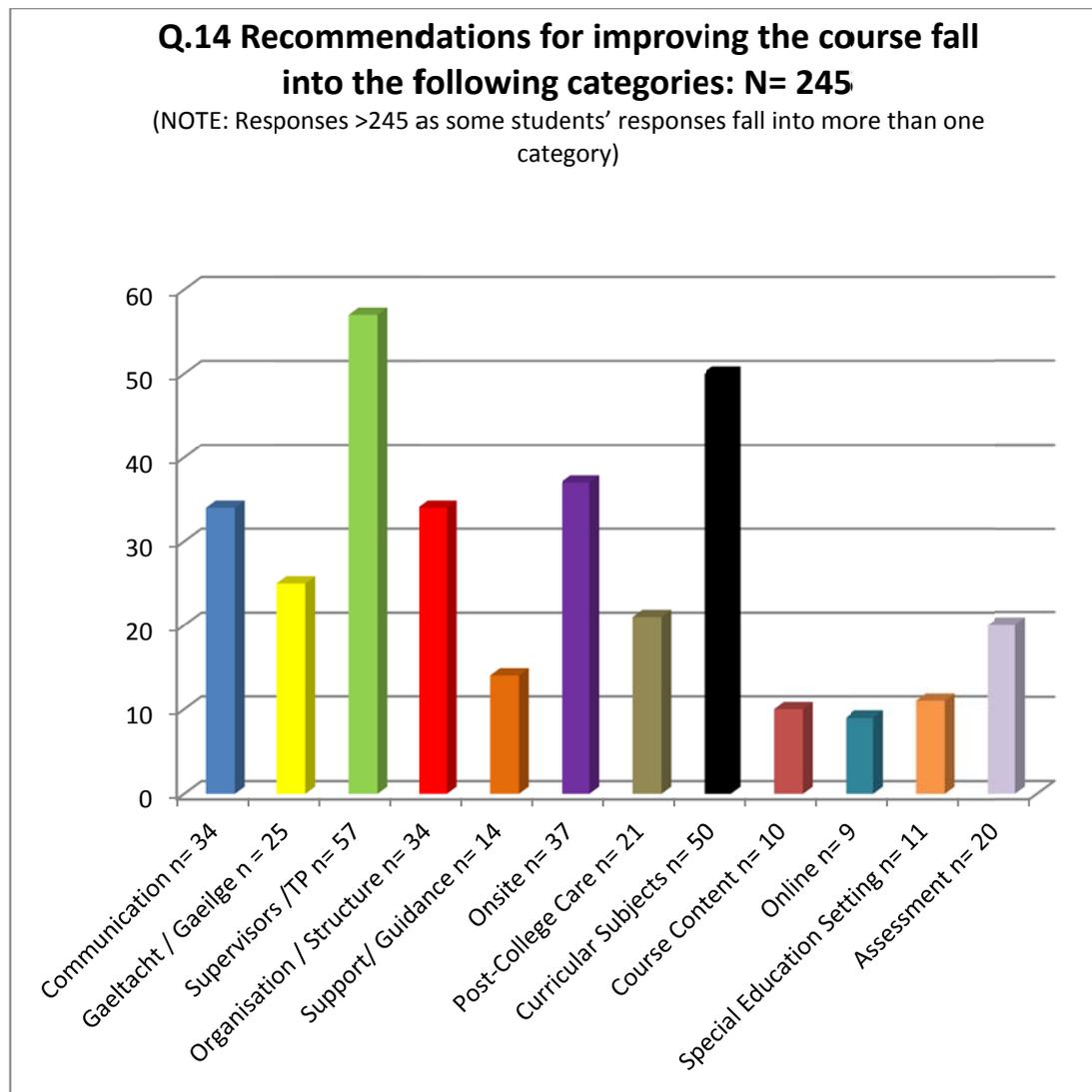
One student did not address this question. From the graph above most of the recommendations for improvement were made about the supervisors and specific curricular subjects with onsite days, and communication and organisation also

featuring highly. The Gaeltacht, post-college care and assessment came next in line for recommendation with allied support and guidance following. Suggestions for improvement to special educational needs, course content and online lectures were also given.

Categorising the recommendations for Supervisors and Teaching Practice there is the obvious call for consistency as S161 states, "I recommend that supervisors need to be singing off the same sheet. Each supervisor I had, requested differing things." S9 wants more supervision, "I think there could be more supervision on the teaching practice placements and there should be more onsite sessions." S22 however wants more preparation before Teaching Practice, "I think more preparation in advance of teaching practice (especially the first one) would go a long way." S110 makes some suggestions, "Maybe an inspection initially when on TP from someone who is there to help and guide rather than grade. TP 3 was a big change as we had to teach for a full day so maybe should include a week or two of full day teaching in TP2. S201 echoes Dr. Breakwell's suggestion about involving the teacher, "Interview class teachers and ask them for feedback on how the student teacher is doing!! They know more after all than 2 visits from a supervisor." S221 recommends a novel approach,

> *Providing the facility (online) for students to plan together and to discuss and evaluate lessons jointly would be very useful. I would also recommend peer review during TP so that students can provide feedback to each other on their performance. This could be facilitated by students filming themselves when teaching and inviting feedback in a structured way from their peers. These films would also provide an excellent resource for the college for the preparation of students for TP.* (S221)

With respect to the second category of curricular subjects, in general there was a call for more onsite days in all subject areas, as S128 summarises, "an extra onsite for all subjects, equally S137 wants, "additional lectures for the core subject areas." A more even distribution of onsite days was also called for, S102 states, "Better division of time among subject lectures, we had 4 PE days and a half day for each SESE subject and SPHE." Timing was another issue of concern and S35 recommends, "I think that all curriculum subjects should be covered, even as an introduction, before the first TP, I know this could be difficult to achieve but it's crazy not to cover some

subjects, for example Maths was covered very late in the course." Certain subjects were criticised for either containing too much or too little content and new subjects were posited as being needed, S125 wants more work on, "special needs, behaviour, practical examples for the classroom for all the subjects, fillers, first aid experience" while S226 suggests that, "some onsite days for preparing for the oral and the exams would benefit greatly."

With respect to onsite days there was a very large call for more onsite days in all subjects as mentioned previously. It was important that these onsite days be as S44 wants, "more effective onsite courses" with as S17 desires, "A more personal touch from onsite tutors." S61 specifies, "There definitely needs to be more onsite classes. There needs to be more preparation in terms of planning, Dip, CVs, interviews etc." and S30 wants, "an onsite or tutorial dealing specifically with differentiation would be helpful."

In the context of communication the students consider that the college administrators need to improve their practice as do some supervisors and tutors. Statements such as S32 makes, "I would ensure that admin and onsite tutors were available and willing to answer queries. I found this quite frustrating when no one replied to queries. Online forums on subjects should be open throughout the course so that every student had access to queries and responses from course tutors" were echoed throughout. S63 agrees with the above suggesting, "I would recommend having more people to answer administrative queries and other problems as it would take days and even weeks to get replies from the college." S133 maintains, "it is a shame that a poor admin team let a great course down. There is a how dare you attitude from the admin in particular the examinations office," while S96 requests, "More accommodating administrative staff, possibly asking too much with so many pupils, but when we're paying such a large sum of money for the course it would be appreciated if we (students) were at least led to believe that we were important and that our questions were answered appropriately."

S117 wants, "more communication, see the students as students and not just a number behind a computer screen. S205 asserts that, "I felt that the college were very slow to respond to any queries. I can think of four different times having

contacted the college office that I received no response." Finally S172 suggests that the college, "Make out and publish the schedule to facilitate students not tutors … Also, publish the dates for exams well in advance. ... It's as if the college got our money and then put us to the bottom of the priorities queue" (S172) who continues, "There was no recognition that (a) we paid you in full for the course over a year ago and (b) people have lives/ jobs/families. Clearly I am still frustrated by this but at times I felt like we were the bottom of the food chain. I enjoyed the course and it was generally well delivered but please put students higher up in the queue. We are the ones paying."

With respect to organisation, S10 believes that, "I think extending the course to two years is a good thing as I felt everything was stuffed into the 18 months course." S38 posits some organizational restructuring, "Students should have 4 teaching practices all at different levels. They should also observe for a full week before actually teaching, as a Monday is much different than a Friday." As a general comment evocative of many, S177 states that what is needed is, "More onsite classes and less online. More guidance during TP, and a simpler breakdown of the course." S39 summarises organisational improvements as follows;

> *Extended observation periods for TP. A less intense schedule for assignments. A period of at least 4 weeks free of assignments and lessons prior to the exams, additional feedback on TP results, more instruction on long-term planning and preparation for life as a teacher* (S39)

Finally S68 highlighted a problem pertinent only to the February intake, "For the Feb 2010 cohort waiting for results etc makes applying for jobs difficult as you are up against registered NQTs with their results."

Many students mentioned improvements to the Gaeltacht and the Irish course in general. S75 considers that, "There should be another week in the Gaeltacht and more onsite *Gaeilge* classes in small tutorial groups. The content of the Gaeltacht classes should be reviewed while S162 says, "The Gaeltacht could be tightened up and include more grammar and structured classes this would definitely be beneficial. S212 declares, "Scrap the Irish course and start again, have more Irish material

relevant to the classroom, rather than reading outdated poetry, prose and short stories even the Leaving is moving on from that outdated rubbish at this stage." and S219 agrees stating, "I strongly feel that the structure of the Irish modules needs to be looked at. I think there was a lot of irrelevant material not applicable to the classroom and how to teach Irish." S214 proffered a suggestion, "I think setting up informal *Ciorcal Cainte* groups amongst classes before even getting stuck into the *Gaeilge* content could be beneficial - these could be done online, through short on-site days, ... just for informal practice in using everyday Irish both amongst ourselves and in the classroom."

An interesting category to emerge was that of post-college care and support. S16 believes, "I feel that it would be worthwhile to have a half-day onsite towards the end of the course whereby some practical information about teaching could be given e.g salaries, pensions, what the Dip entails, where to find information re. panels etc - all of this info I have just picked up incidentally … I also feel that the tone of most communications from the college left a lot to be desired. This combined with the faceless nature of the course resulted in high levels of resentment towards the college, in my opinion." S116 suggests, "A final follow up after exams for newly qualified teachers pending results might be useful, informing NQTs ... in particular [of] the process involved in preparing and applying to the Dip," and S243 agrees saying, "I think there should be a final lecture which covers subject areas such as applying for jobs and interviews. Finally S244 states, "As one of the very lucky few who has been offered a teaching post for the school year I feel slightly unprepared for the planning that will be expected of me for the dip. A set of online/onsite lectures dealing specifically with term/weekly plans would have been really appreciated."

The allied category of support and guidance was also found to be capable of improvement, S20 says, "I would organise more support during Teaching Practice," and S25 agrees stating that, "More practical support with ideas and tips from supervisors about how you can improve your lesson plans" was needed. With regard to exams, S25 says "there should be more of a focus of onsites on exams and how to answer questions." S67 wants, "More support and interest in the welfare of their students." Finally S187 was quite emphatic stating that, "A more caring less cold

college would help. I couldn't believe that no-one even bothered to send us a good luck email. We all felt that we were purely cash-cows for Hibernia. More support especially from an admin side is needed and also during TP."

The students also considered that improvements could be made to college assessment practices. With respect to timing S185 believes that, "The assignments could be more spaced out." S46 queries the form of assessment, "the assessment of many modules by means of a learning log (with severe word count restrictions) is an ineffective means of assessment in my opinion. I would suggest that an essay style question would be a far superior means of assessing student learning." S62 favours continuous assessment, "Less emphasis on final exams and increase the level of marks for continuous assessment," while S91 suggests that, "I think people should receive marks for contributing to online and onsite lectures. Some people never spoke in 18 months of lectures. S100 agrees and questions the overall marking weighting;

> *there should be more emphasis on actual attendance for the onsites where valuable discussion takes place and a greater weight for TP marks which surely is the true measure of a person's ability/suitability and less emphasis on exam marks which only shows someone is a capable learner and not that they are a capable teacher!!!* (S100)

Comments relating to Special Educational needs, related to getting greater access to and experience of, this form of provision, S36 says, "I feel it would have been beneficial to have some classroom experience in a special school and/or resource classroom." S169 endorses this view "Also, we really, really need more Special Ed classes and experience. Suggestions for course content centred on issues such as more onsites and hands-on experience across the subject areas, S1 says, "I'd place more emphasis on SESE subjects for onsites, do more work on special ed. and more on yearly planning." S56 agrees saying, "I think that the course should provide more observation days or videos of typical classroom situations to experience classroom management." while S115 rounds if off in a more generic way by stating, "More detailed instruction of teaching pedagogy."

Comments made concerning the online content include statements such as S15 makes, "Quality of on-line materials needs to be improved - Irish, Science, Religion - write lessons in plain English and make it multidenominational. I found the focus on the Catholic Religion non-inclusive and offensive. More time spent on Infant Education, Special Education and also Science." S220 believes, "In my opinion the podcasts are not organised well. It should be possible to automate the download of these more effectively." Finally S55 raises an issue of concern shared by other students also, "Some sort of reward incentive for online tutorials. It is very disheartening to be making contributions in tutorials where you and another person may be the only ones participating and yet you may receive the same marks as those who never contribute."

This question specifically asked for recommendations and the students responded across the full range of subjects and activities as they experienced them. While some criticisms were related to personal circumstances in general there was agreement across the areas categorised and I would suggest that invaluable learning can take place from an investigation of these comments with a solution focussed attitude.

Table 4.4.15

Q. 15 In the future would you undertake another course using a blended-learning approach? N= 246

- Yes n=234
- No n= 10
- Mixed n= 2
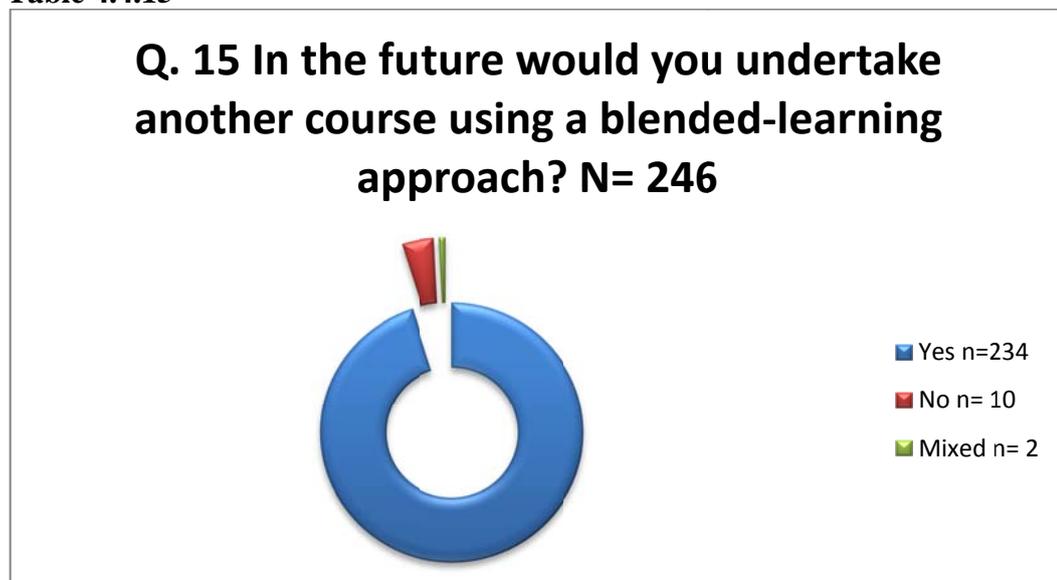
Given that only 7 (3%) students had ever experienced learning through the use of blended-learning before they undertook the HDAPE course the outstandingly

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positive response with 237 (96%) saying that they would undertake study using that method again would suggest an endorsement of this method. Positive statements abound, statements such as S9 makes, "I found it an excellent way to learn and it is a huge leap forward from traditional third level didactic approaches and S21, "The site was ACE!! The calendar was awesome and I loved that I got reminder emails for assignments due. The majority of lectures were sound, over all I enjoyed Hibernia, so yeah I would do another one," as well as S124, " it allows one to be an independent thinker/learner while also linking in with a community of learners." Many students spoke about the convenience, flexibility and timing factors, like S28, "It's a very flexible approach to learning which allows you to combine studying, working and family/social life in a way that suits you" and S15 agrees, "It is an efficient use of my time and I can learn at my own pace."

Referring to choice and control S39 said, "It worked well for me. I enjoyed the flexibility and the variety of teaching methods.   I felt more in control of it because I could choose, to an extent, what material I wanted to cover and when," while S58 would try an online course again, "because I know how it is approached now, what it demands and would feel better organised, able and capable to tackle it." S235 concludes, "I think it is ideal, the subjects that did not require face-to-face contact were taught online, the important modules requiring face-time were held at onsites. It is an ideal learning approach."

A few, 10 (4%) were negative or had mixed feelings, 2 (0.8%). These students either blamed the college like S202 who considered that there was, "Too much pressure and lack of support, compassion and understanding from the college," or as S4 says, "I have been studying for eleven years, this is it now," and S98 agrees, "Am happy to have completed Hibernia successfully but won't be going back to further learning for another few years."

Table 4.4.16

Q. 16 Please insert any additional comments you wish to make N=72

Legend:
- No reply n=174
- Positive n=42
- Mixed n=14
- Negative n= 16
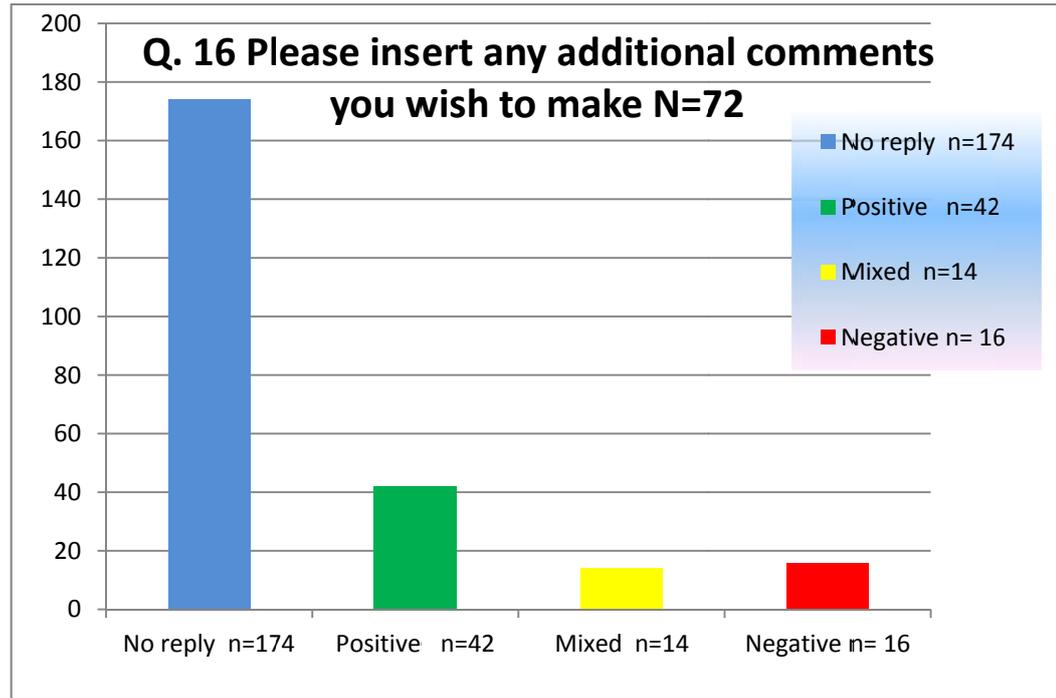
The final question allowed students to provide any further information they wished. Only 72 students (29%) availed of the opportunity. Of those who replied 42 (58%) provided further positive comments, 14 (19%) gave mixed comments while 16 (22%) felt compelled to conclude with some negative statements. The positive comments thanked the college, found it to be a well-structured course and believed that the foundations had been laid for students to become good teachers, S49 exemplifies these sentiments, "I really enjoyed this course and I feel I was given every opportunity to become a successful teacher. Thank you" and S90 agrees, "An excellent course - very comprehensive but very well organised. Thank you."

Those who were negative spoke about a lack of support, poor communication and inadequacies in certain subject areas, S233 summarises, "Hibernia need to support pupils more. Teaching Practice is an area that needs addressing as it is a health and safety issue given the long hours that are needed as a result of much of the unneeded deadlines and admin. Inspectors have their own agendas and are contradictory." S233 continues, "The exam forums occur at a time when students are under pressure studying for orals. They are closed when students actually have questions. These should be available up until a week prior to exams."

Those with mixed responses tended to advise the college on future practice; S192 suggests, "Think more visits during TP would be beneficial in increasing credibility of the course in the eyes of school principals and staff. Had minimum two visits on all blocks and I was in a school with Mary I students for two of these. On both occasions they received at least one and on one block, two more visits than I. Eyebrows were raised at lack of visits from Hibernia supervisors." This was echoed by S218, "Well presented course with excellent on-line notes and on-line lectures. A lack of extra investment in instructors and tutors to meet the growing number of students on the course was very obvious from TP and the on-sites." S247 states that it was a "Good course but could be a great course if some innovations were made and best practice from other countries implemented. Hibernia lecturers /supervisors/tutors need to take more ownership of the Hibernia brand." S113 advises that, "Hibernia should raise awareness that the course is not an 'online' course. It is part online. There are people I speak to that think I do my TP. online too. It is up to Hibernia to ensure an accurate picture of what the HDAPE actually entails is portrayed, both in schools and in the media." Finally S214 represents many students who are concerned about numbers;

> *Overall I enjoyed my time studying with Hibernia. The blended-learning approach is the way to go. However, there are too many NQTs in the market and Hibernia are the main culprits for this. It makes it very difficult for us NQTs to find those elusive jobs that are out there. Just wondering if Hibernia are going to cap the student entry going forward to correlate with the number of jobs that are out there?* (S214)

4.5 Section D: Presentation of the findings from the Principals' Questionnaires

The School Principals were asked 15 questions. The first three sought factual information about the composition of the schools and staff numbers while the remainder sought the principals' opinions of their Hibernia trained staff. One question asked the principals to rate their Hibernia trained teachers across a range of skills and competencies which the students have been rated on by the college, by the DES inspectors and by external assessors while in training. The final question gave the Principals the opportunity to add any further comments they wished (see Appendix U for the results of the Principals' questionnaire).

Table 4.5.1

Q1 What is the composition of your school?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0
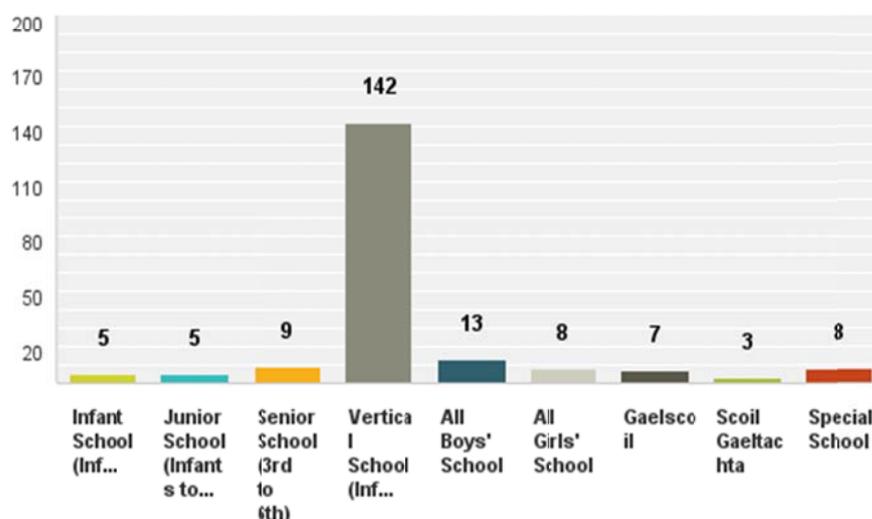
The overwhelming majority of respondents, 142 (77%) worked in vertical schools with pupils ranging from infants to sixth class. All Boys' schools (13) represented (7%) of replies with all other categories were represented to a small degree and a hospital school also replied.

Table 4.5.2

Question 2 How many teachers are on the staff of your school ? N= 185

□ 1 - 5	36
■ 6 - 10	35
□ 11 - 15	42
□ 16 - 20	28
■ 21 - 25	28
■ 26 +	16
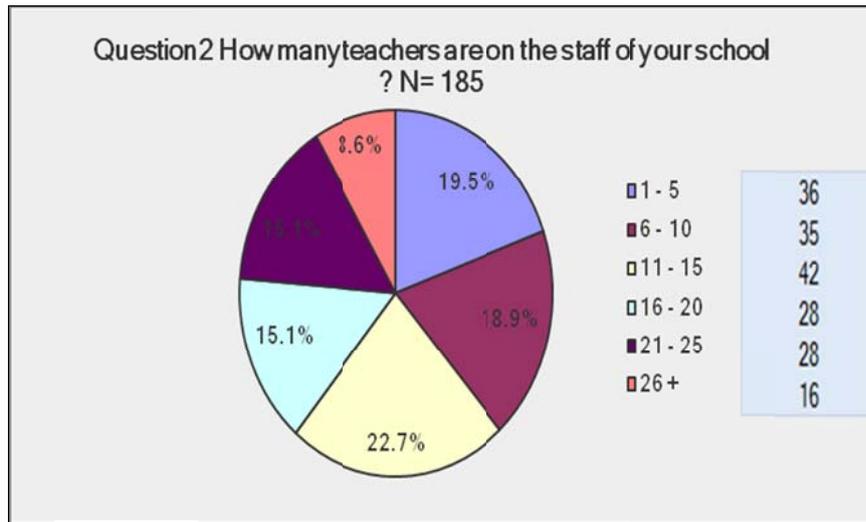
The school sizes were quite evenly represented with the 11-15 teacher school the most numerous (42), while smaller schools 1-5 teacher (36) and 6-10 teacher (35) and larger schools 16-20 teacher (28) and 21-25 teacher (28) at either side were represented evenly. Only16 schools (8.6%) had 26 teachers or over.

Table 4.5.3

Q 3 How many teachers trained by Hibernia College teach in your school? N=185
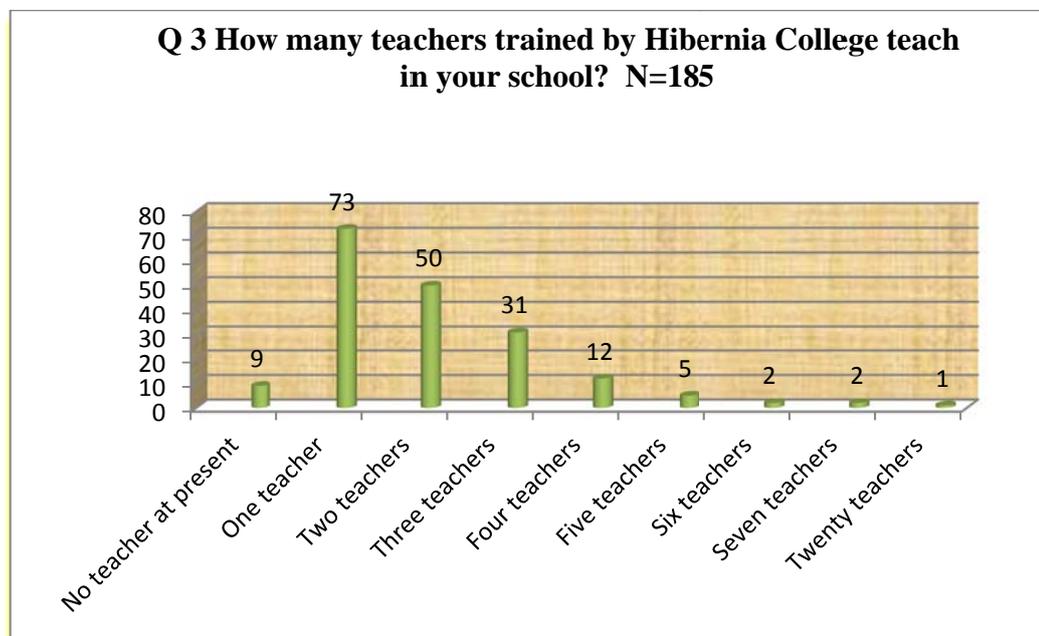
While 9 schools (5%) had no Hibernia teachers when responding but did have them on staff at another time, one school (0.5%) maintains it has 20 Hibernia teachers (this could be a typing error but is represented as given). The vast majority of schools 73

(39%) have one teacher, and 50 schools (27%) have two teachers. Thirty-one schools (17%) have three teachers while 12 schools (5%) have 4 teachers and two sets of two schools each having 6 teachers (3%) and 7 (3%) respectively. In the survey therefore 83% of the comments came from schools with 1-3 Hibernia trained teachers.

Table 4.5.4

Question 4 Did the fact that the teacher was trained using a blended learning approach, involving ICT influence your decision to employ him/her? (Blended learning includes online tutorials as well as onsite lectures)
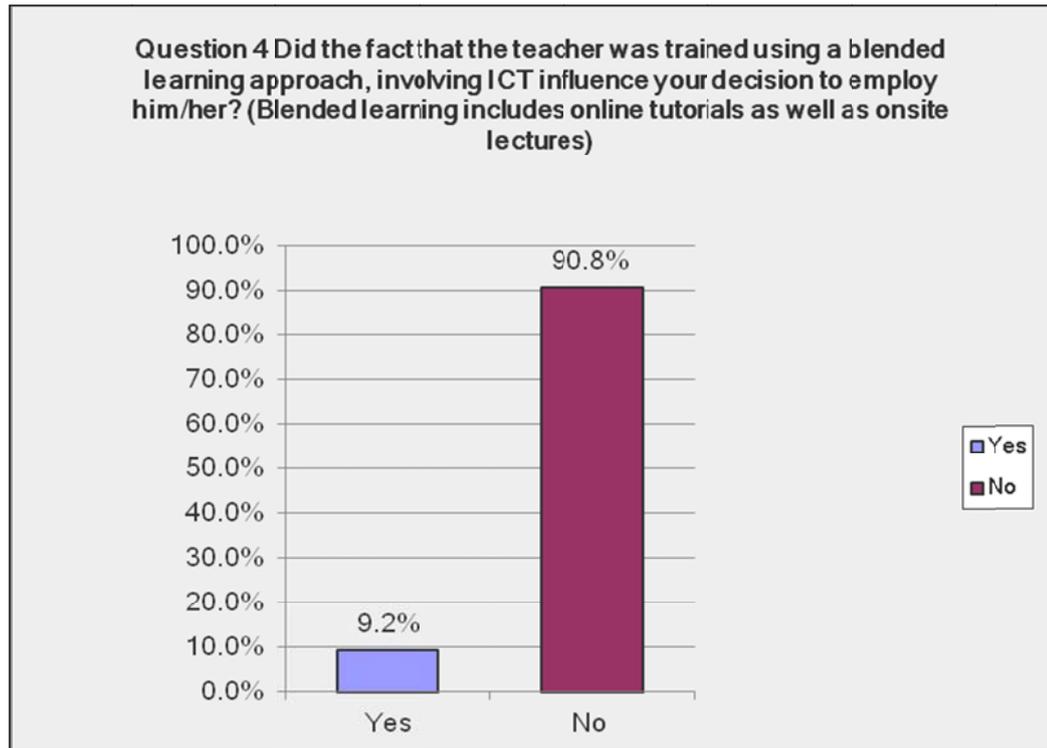
All participating principals quoted will be referred to as **P** along with their respondent number. Of the 168 (90.8%) who responded in the negative, Pl41 summed up the general feeling, "It didn't influence my decision to choose these teachers as I based this on interview performance, experience, referees and references." P28 states, "These teachers had done 'sub' work in our school while completing Hibernia," while P10 said, "the teacher performed extremely well at interview and had excellent references, that's why we employed her. Having trained with Hibernia was not an advantage, in fact it was a disadvantage as far as our interview board was concerned."

The 17 (7%) who said that where the teachers trained did matter, were either positive about Hibernia stating as P21 does, "More rounded and also in touch with

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ICT and possibilities of technology-enhanced learning," were neutral, as P23 says, "employed from the panel" or were negative as P6 says, "I don't like this blended-learning approach and therefore I am very slow to employ a student from Hibernia."

Table 4.5.5
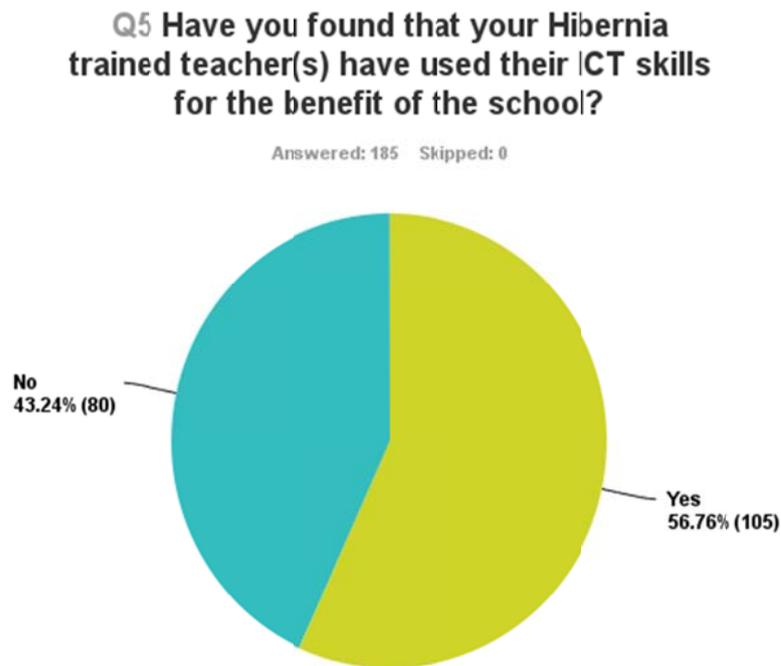
While more Principals (57%) found that Hibernia trained teachers did use their ICT for the benefit of the school, 43% of principals found that they did not. Positive comments such as P53 states, "One of the Hibernia trained teachers has given tutorials on how to use whiteboards to the staff, "and P18 confirms, "Three of our five Hibernia trained teachers have become leaders in IT in the school" are offset by comments such as P23 makes, "Not particularly, I in fact wouldn't have been aware that they had more IT skills than other teachers," and P38 believes, "not any more than teachers trained in any other setting. I think personal interest in IT rather than Hibernia Training is more a factor." In general P54 considers, "Hibernia students tend to have the same limited ICT skills as any other teacher coming from any other college. The ability to transfer ICT skills (which is a given now) to pedagogy, is the skill lacking in all teachers."

Table 4.5.6

Q6 Have you found that your Hibernia trained teacher(s) have brought any other specific skills and used them for the benefit of the school?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

Yes
44.86% (83)

No
55.14% (102)
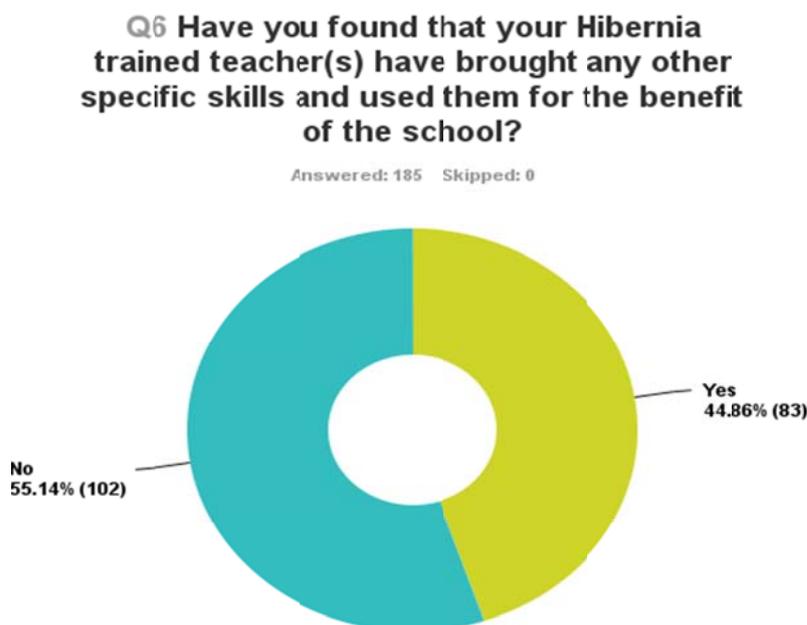
Only 83 principals (45%) considered that Hibernia trained teachers used other specific skills for the benefit of the school, 102 principals (55%) considered that they did not. An analysis of the answers to this question highlights however that principals see the life experience and previous qualifications that the Hibernia trained teachers bring as a positive but they are answering no the question on the basis that this has nothing to do with Hibernia. Here it could be said that they are favouring a consecutive model over a concurrent one. As P78 says, "I have a qualified accountant on staff who is most helpful," and P42 agrees, "The skills they had in their previous working lives - I have a fully trained nurse on the staff." P1 considers that they bring, "Not necessarily better teaching skills but they do bring a wider life experience than some recently trained teachers, and P2 now has on staff an, "Engineer, two Horticulturalists and IT specialist." P9 however says, "I don't see Hibernia teachers stand out over other candidates in what they might bring to a job," and P47 agrees, "I have not seen any skills demonstrated that were over and above those brought by other graduates." Finally P71 suggests, "Their previous qualifications can sometimes be good. However, in recent years I have found more and more of them have come straight from degree courses and are not bringing the same real world experiences that they

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used to do. I would think anyone doing Hibernia should have had to face the real world for some time before taking on the course.

Table 4.5.7

Q7 In terms of the following categories, how would you rate your Hibernia teacher(s) overall?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0
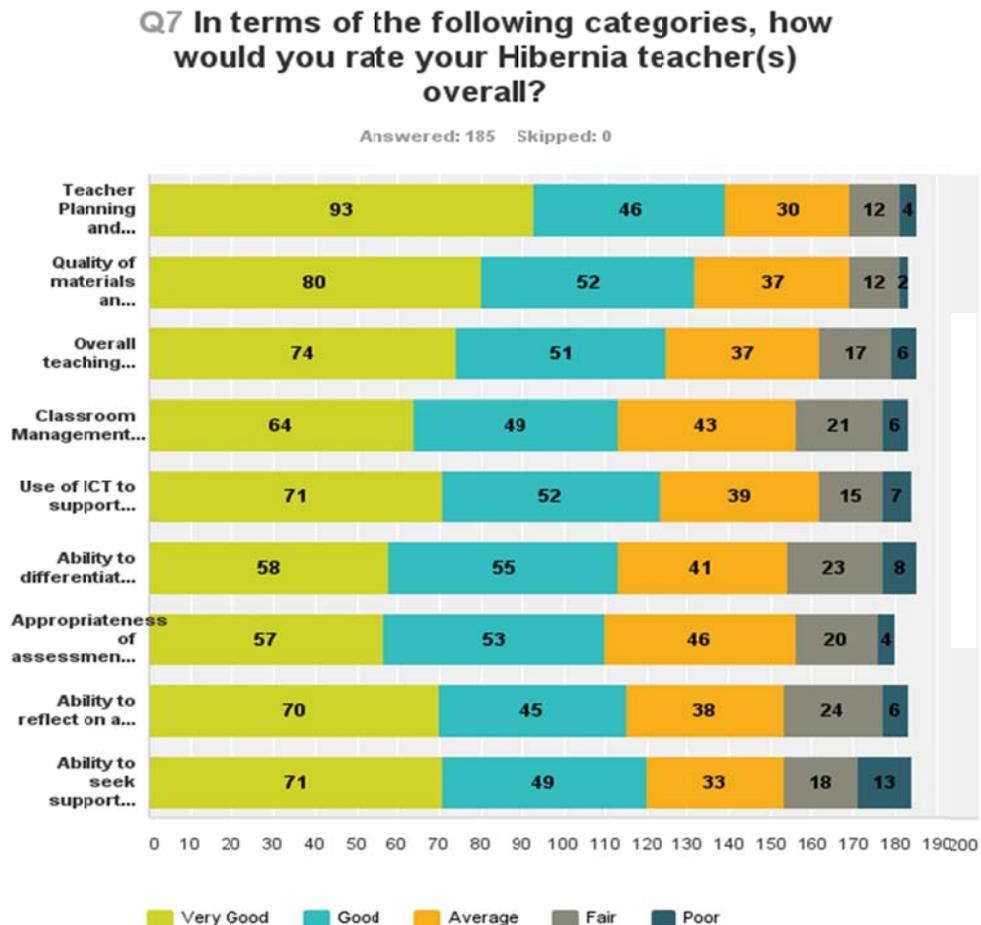
Question 7 posed a series of questions seeking principals' opinions about the quality of Hibernia trained teachers across a set of competencies using a Likert scale. All these areas of competence were used to assess these teachers when they were students in HC with the exception of the final question which queried their ability to seek support and advice which should feature as a component of reflective teachers' repertoires once they had secured a teaching position. 'Survey Monkey' presents the data in nominal and percentage terms ranging from very good to poor across the full spread of opinion for each of the questions posed (see Appendix V, Table 4.5.7.1) However we can collapse Table 4.5.7.1 further into those who considered the teachers to be very good and good at a particular competence and those who considered them to be average and below, as shown in Table 4.5.7.2.

Table 4.5.7.2 Principals' Perceptions of Teachers Abilities

	Very Good and Good	Average and Below	Total N
Teacher Planning and Preparation	74.86% (139)	24.87% (46)	185
Quality of materials and resources used in class	72.41% (132)	27.87% (52)	183
Overall teaching ability	67.57% (125)	32.43% (60)	185
Classroom Management Skills	61.75% (113)	38.26% (70)	183
Use of ICT to support teaching and learning	66.85% (123)	33.15% (61)	184
Ability to differentiate and cater to diverse pupil needs	61.08% (113)	38.91% (72)	185
Appropriateness of assessment strategies used in class	61.11% (110)	38.89% (70)	180
Ability to reflect on and adapt their teaching to effect improvements	62.84% (115)	37.16% (68)	183
Ability to seek support and take advice	65.22% (120)	34.78% (64)	184

Here we can see that the first two competencies, planning and preparation and quality of materials and resources used in class emerge as the highest rated competencies

while principals rated the teachers' abilities to differentiate and to cater to diverse pupil needs along with the appropriateness of assessment strategies used in class as the weakest areas. For the top two competencies the principals rated practically three quarters of the teachers as very good and good but for all other competencies only two thirds of the teachers were rated as very good and good as is shown above.

Table 4.5.8

Q8 Did you find your Hibernia trained teacher(s) to be well trained at the outset to undertake the duties of a primary school teacher?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

No
32.43% (60)

Yes
67.57% (125)
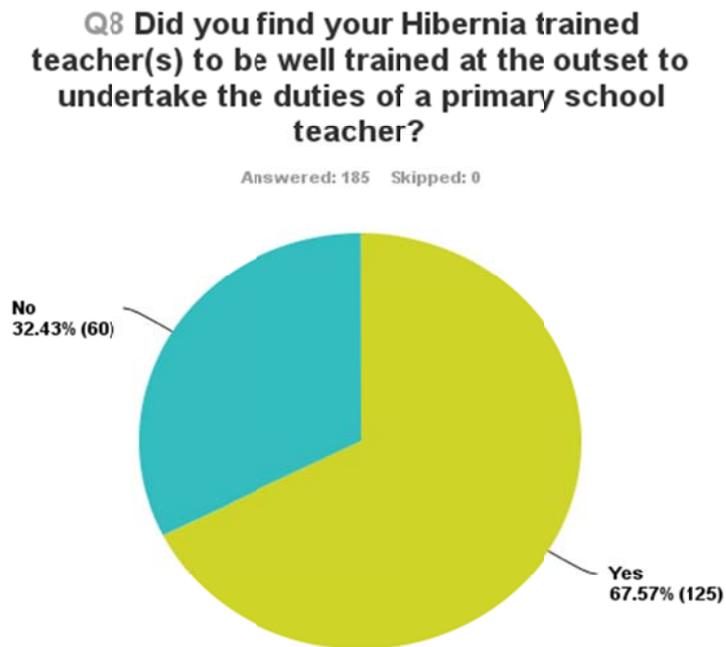
Just as in question 7 we see a two third/one third division in the affirmative. Positive comments tended to relate to the students' maturity and other life experiences as P30 exemplifies, "Mature and open to advice. Very conscientious, with regard to planning and preparation of resources. Independent and just gets on with it," and P71 who says, "In fact more so than some of the younger teachers coming straight from LC and then teacher training colleges who seem very inexperienced. I think this is more to do with their age and the different degrees/ masters they have undertaken before Hibernia." P2 agrees, "I find Hibernia teachers are more motivated, and have usually arrived at teaching through a diverse route which enhances their skills and experience."

Negative comments suggest a lack of training in classroom management and other subjects and a need for greater mentoring *in-situ* as P19 explains, "I felt that the

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Hibernia trained teacher was less well prepared at the outset, (though thorough and hard-working), than teachers trained in face-to-face colleges," P9 concurs, "Teachers lacked ability in teaching methodologies and tended to revert to chalk and talk." P6 mentions that, "They needed a lot of support and mentoring."

P26 differentiates between mature and younger graduates, "I found the more mature students to be better prepared, the younger teachers who had completed the Hibernia course directly after an undergraduate degree did not display the same level of readiness."

P18 compares these teachers to graduates from other colleges, By comparison to other colleges, I found that there were numerous gaps and considerably more 'hand holding', mentoring and direction were needed ... Those trained in other colleges were generally considerably better prepared." While P39 compares those trained in earlier years in Hibernia to those trained recently, "That is those trained pre 2011 since then the standard is a disaster on all School Placements and we have not employed any Hibernia teachers."

Finally P46 admits, "Well enough trained. Having four different teachers from Hibernia, they are not a homogenous group. Three are really good at preparation, one less so. Difficult to rate as a group, slightly more difficult to steer, than a new teacher from a conventional training college."

Table 4.5.9

Q9 Did your Hibernia trained teacher(s)
accomplish their probationary period with
the Department of Education and Skills
Inspectorate satisfactorily?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

No
10.27% (19)

Yes
89.73% (166)
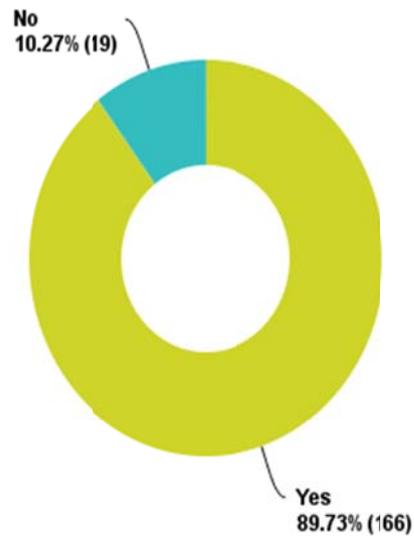
The comments made regarding the 90% who passed their probationary period satisfactorily ranged from statements such as P1, "Inspector was very impressed by the teacher," to P19, "Two of the three long term teachers had difficulties during their external inspections but were eventually probated. This was not the case for other teachers." However P35 disagrees, "One a number of years ago did not. However I have had a similar experience with a College of Ed. graduate. Both of them very challenging." An interesting comment made by P5 relates to the school inspector, "Inspector commented that teachers were good 'in spite of ' Hibernia."

Table 4.5.10

Q10 Do you find your Hibernia trained teacher(s) to be self starters able to initiate and complete their duties without the need for direction?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

No
32.43% (60)

Yes
67.57% (125)
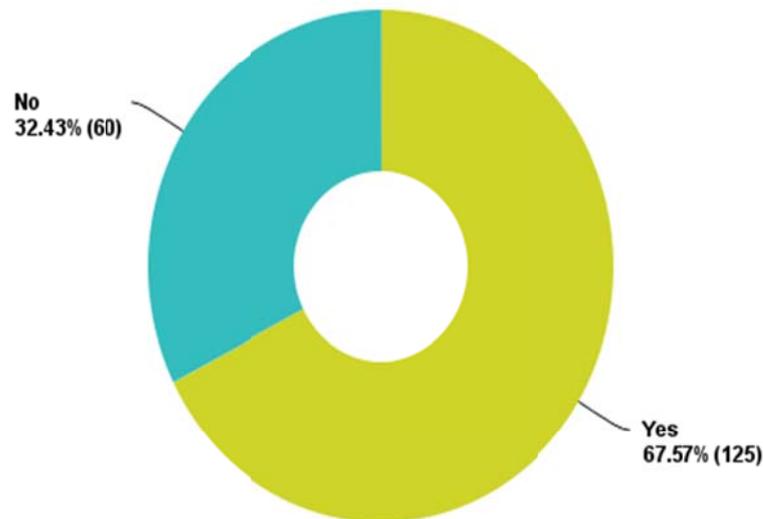
More than two thirds of the principals considered that Hibernia trained teachers were self-starters. These principals considered that this ability to complete their duties without the need for direction was more a factor of age and experience than the college from which they were trained. P14 says, "This would not be unusual to Hibernia trained teachers, that's the type of teacher we seek to employ" and P35 states, "I feel this again is to do with maturity and not the course." Those who did not believe Hibernia teachers were self-starters considered that they need a lot of support initially and that they were as P37 says, "not as confident in large group discussion around curriculum or educational initiatives." P10 agrees stating, "No different to other staff members. They work as a team. They certainly needed direction when they started in the same way as all young teachers do." Some principals differentiated among their teachers as P18 asserts, "Two have management posts and I wish I could clone them, however, with one I wish I could rewind the clock and I would never have offered a contract."

Table 4.5.11

Q11 Do you find your Hibernia trained
teacher(s) to be innovative?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

No
34.05% (63)

Yes
65.95% (122)
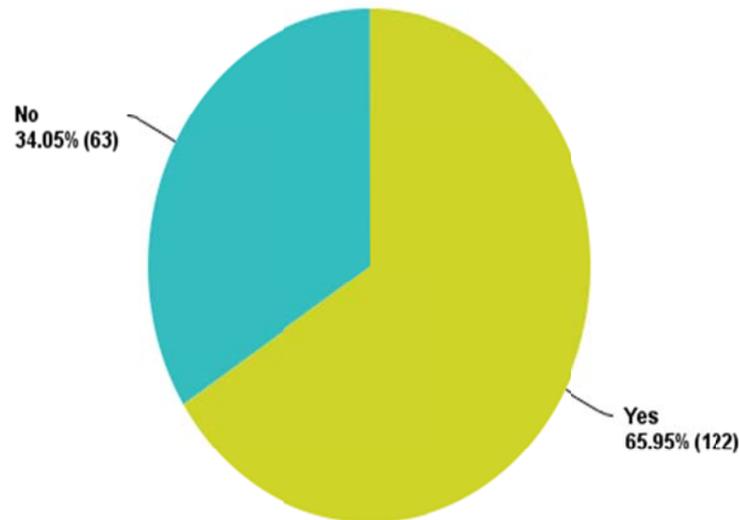
Similar results pertain to the question on innovation as to self-initiation. Two thirds of principals consider Hibernia teachers to be innovative. P29 elaborates, "One particular teacher introduced Building Bridges to Understanding to his colleagues - his dedication inspired the other teachers. Another teacher introduced a load of teaching strategies using the interactive whiteboard." However principals generally attribute this innovative ability to factors other than the college as P29 insists, "I think it's more to do with the personality of the teachers or the makeup of the person. The girl I have is naturally organised and imaginative she would be like that no matter where she trained really." Those who were negative considered Hibernia teachers' innovative skills to be, "Not any more so than other teachers" (P5) or as P33 says, "Not more innovative than a graduate from any other college".

Table 4.5.12

Q12 Do you find that your Hibernia trained teacher(s) work collaboratively with other teachers on your staff?

Answered: 185 Skipped: 0

No
12.97% (24)

Yes
87.03% (161)
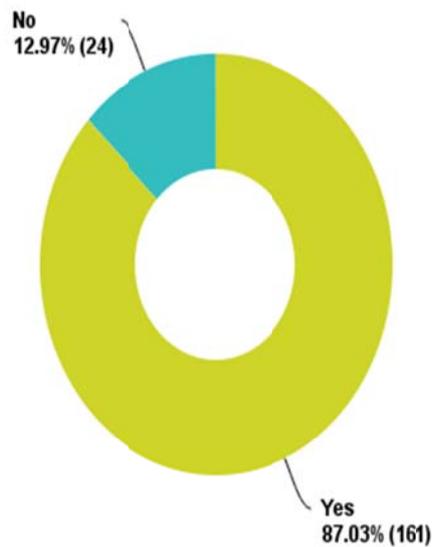
A high percentage of principals considered Hibernia teachers to be collaborative professionals. P4 summarises, "Again, the experience that the teachers have from other walks of life and working in other sectors has been invaluable here," while P2 specifies, "Yes ... but we are all part of a team. The ability to work collaboratively isn't imparted by a college." However P9 considers they are, "More independent and self-starters than team players," and P13 insists, "I have found them to be reluctant to seek advice and also to offer support to others." Two simple one word comments from two principals sum up the collaborative spectrum, P14 states, "excellent" while P17 states, "eventually," and as P19 says, "The ability to work collaboratively is often driven by personality type."

Table 4.5.13

Q13 Do you find your Hibernia trained teacher(s) to be interested in Continuing Professional Development (CPD)?

Answered: 185   Skipped: 0

No
20.54% (38)

Yes
79.46% (147)
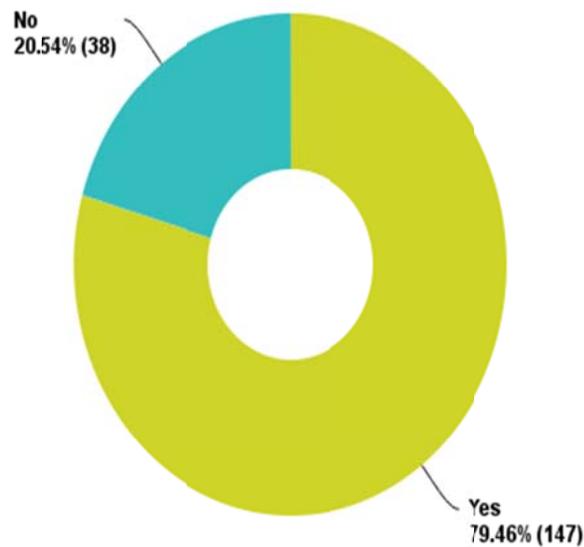
Once again a large percentage of principals (79%) rated Hibernia teachers' interest in CPD as positive. P20 states, "they are aware there are gaps in some of their learning so do attend courses in the Ed. Centre," and P16 agrees, "Engages in many CPD courses through the Ed. Centre network and online" and P22, "two are doing their Masters." Of those who said no (20%), sentiments such as P2 makes are typical, "Not any more than other teachers, "or as P17 who says no, "Other than assigned Croke Park hours for CPD."

Table 4.5.14

Q. 14 Having employed Hibernia trained teachers what advice would you give Hibernia College   N=185

(NOTE: Responses >185 as some responses fall into more than one category)
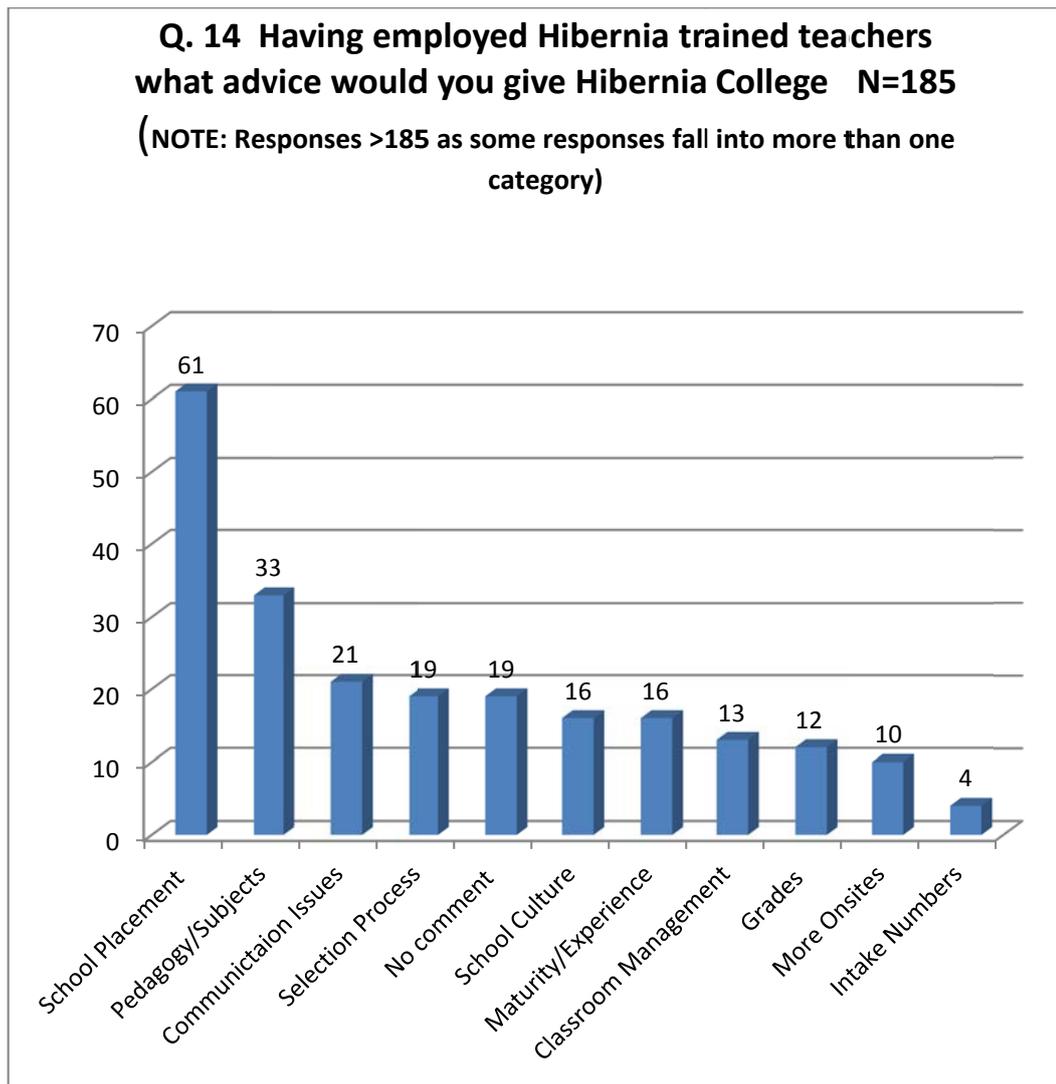
All principals responded though 19 (10%) offered no opinion. The majority of comments (33%) related to school placement. Most were framed as neutral advice across the range given above though a few were critical of the college itself. Many complained of the timing and the duration of teaching practice as well as the lack of preparedness of the students and the necessary copious notes required at the expense of actual teaching. P23 summarizes many issues when stating,

> *Provide much more practical teaching over a number of weeks where students take responsibility for the class, not a selection of lessons. Also, inspectors need to arrive unannounced. Link teaching with objectives - some Hibernia students 'pass time' standing at the top of a class with a textbook. Teach them to focus on the objectives and expected outcomes. Teach them how to vary methodologies and*

how to actually teach. No one can learn to be a teacher without practising! (P23)

P85 says, "Take into account the views of the school principal and class teacher when assessing a student especially where an unfavourable result is about to be given. Assessing a student, particularly one who is on her/his first TP and giving an unsatisfactory result after 30/40 minutes observation seems unfair," while P156 makes comparisons saying, "We have had many Hibernia students complete teaching practice with us, and we have found that student teachers from other training colleges are better prepared for the classroom." Supervisors were criticised for not being consistent and for their leniency in grading and for the announced visits, as P67 states, "Train the Teaching Practice supervisors properly! Few use common criteria for assessment. Many have outdated ideas," and P80, "Be more stringent during periods of teaching practice, I have personal experience of a very poor teacher being passed ... after a disastrous placement. Led to a feeling of 'pay your money get your degree' no matter what" and P19, "Standardisation of grades is needed. Many get honours with what seems to be at the drop of a hat"

Principals (18%) gave advice regarding various subjects, as P22 says, "give a very good grounding in all aspects of primary teaching, and teaching to all age groups," and P170, "Irish standard needs increasing," and P113 agrees, *"Níos mó béime agus ama a chur ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge."* P130, advises "More focus on Special Schools and schools with DEIS status. Lectures in core subjects need to be delivered before Teaching Practices," P64 wants more emphasis on "Infant Education, Classroom Management, Differentiation." P40 seeks, "loads of practical classes at evening and week-ends eg Music, PE, Gaeilge, Science ... (*Gaeilge, leitheoireacht, comhra*), teaching reading, English Literature in the Primary school, Science for primary pupils."

Allied to this principals (7%) gave advice regarding classroom management, P1 simply said, "more modules on class management strategies," and P54 agrees, "Strong classroom management skills and further input/experience of Special Education as the variety of Special Ed. pupils we have is growing." P163 neatly summarises, "I would advise providing a lot of practical day-today advice in the

form of classroom management, recognition of special needs, clarity about behaviours that are outside the norm in children and training in management of transitions."

Principals commented on issues relating to communication, P22 states that there are "too many phone calls, emails and calling to the school looking for placement, and P51 says, "Provide materials to schools in hard copy - asking schools to print out information for students' school placement at the school's own expense is not appropriate." P63 simply wants, "Much more human interaction" and P60 agrees stating,

> *There needs to be a much greater sense of collegiality imbued in the training process. The basic technicalities seem to be well understood, (the craft of teaching) but the softer but more important people skills are not developed, (the art of teaching). This is an opinion borne of watching a number of Hibernia trained teachers over the years. Personal development needs to be addressed ... social skills and friendships need to be developed* (P60)

Principals (10%) gave advice regarding student selection, P4 warns, "The college needs to select candidates carefully. Just because a person can pay a fee does not guarantee a quality teacher," P29 expands, "Ensure that applicants REALLY want to be teachers, and are not just applying because they cannot get a job in their first choice of profession" and P37 agrees, "To be more vigilant about the intake. There has been an explosion of teachers trained through Hibernia in recent years, some have been good, others have certainly not been. My concern is that there are a lot of 'Qualified' teachers now, who do not have the same level of training, expertise or skill."

The allied issue of grades (6%) and student intake (2%) was also mentioned by principals. P46 echoes the feeling of many when saying, "Giving out firsts in teaching practice should not be done unless the teacher is exceptional. When interviewing prospective teachers now, I find I am very sceptical of teaching practice scores given to Hibernia students and find that this scepticism is reflected in the opinions of many more principals." Likewise regarding intake, P77 sums up principals' concerns in a positive way, "Keep up the good work. Be aware that the

increased numbers of teachers produced by an uncapped college is a point of dissatisfaction with other teachers from other colleges. It is no longer the quality of the Hibernia trained teachers which is at issue, but the perceived numbers."

School culture (8%) and the issue of onsite lectures (5%) were mentioned and P28 incorporates both, "Move more of the course away from online, towards face-to-face contact sessions. More emphasis on the culture of primary schools, what's expected - how we behave, dress, prepare, interact." P44 is specific, "I feel that based on my experience of three different Hibernia teachers, all have been lacking an understanding of co-operating with ethos, struggle to be consistent in basic paper work ... and lack a vision of whole school development planning." P49 queries, "I wonder perhaps is the online aspect actually resulting in genuine engagement with the nitty-gritty of what it is to be a teacher," and P152 contends, "I know the teachers are committed and hardworking and want to be a teacher. I would feel the teachers trained in the other Colleges of Education offer a school a more rounded teacher. The programme needs more face-to-face teaching."

Finally (8%) spoke in positive terms about HC teachers and their abilities and maturity, P70 said, "I have found that those I have had experience of, both as staff in school and on teaching practice are more mature and sure of themselves than younger students, but this probably comes from life experience," and P134, "In the past few years we would have facilitated a number of student teachers ... [they] were very dedicated and worked very hard. Their computer and ICT skills were excellent."

Table 4.5.15
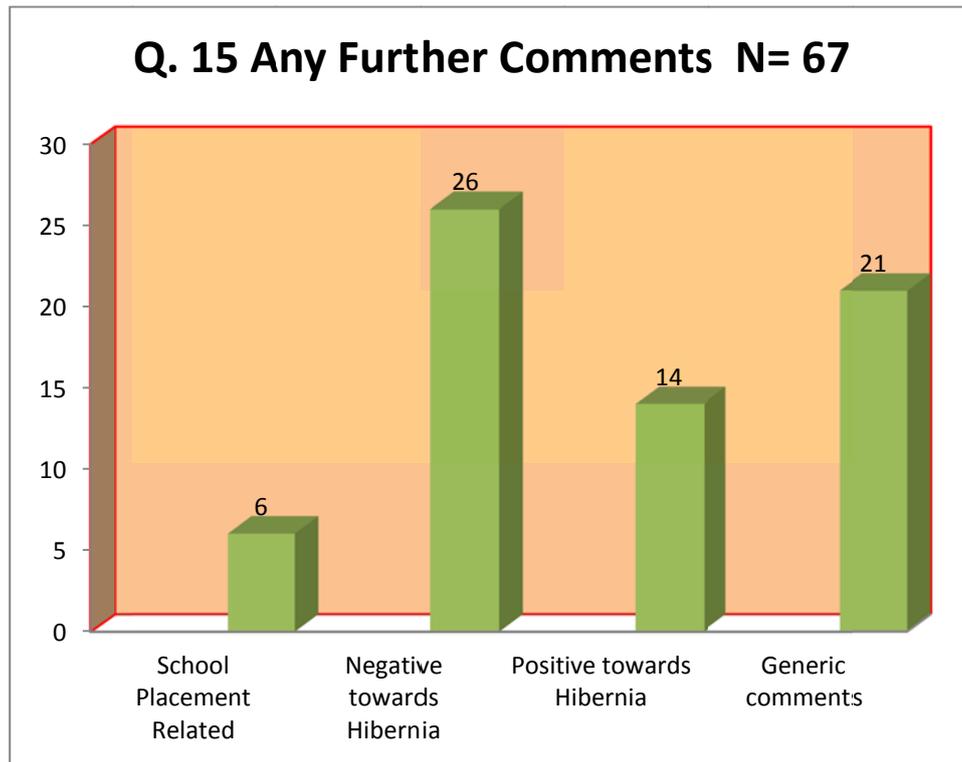
A total of 67 principals added further comments, of which 26 (39%) made negative comments, such as P4, "Hibernia College is a totally for-profit outfit. Money is their aim, not education," or P9, "I have had a big number of Hibernia students with me over the years and their standard of Irish has been atrocious. They also give too many A's to their students and some are clearly not at that level. Improve the standard of student that you take in and be more selective. Colleagues have sometimes remarked that Hibernia will take anyone as they will get money for it."

Too many students with A grades was a cause of concern as P60 illustrates, "The grades awarded to graduates of Hibernia seem to be surprisingly high for all graduates of the course. I can't believe that every student graduating is an A student. For this reason I'm very very sceptical of the grades awarded," P5I agrees viewing, "HC Teaching Practice grades with a certain level of scepticism due to my experience of students and the grades they subsequently received, the elevated level of grades in comparison to other teacher training institutions." The number of students worried many, P16's comment typifies this, "Overall, like other colleges, there should be a definite cap on the number of teachers trained by any one college,"

P43 concurs, "I have always held the view that the entry of the Hibernia training to the system has been welcome. The numbers being trained needs to be regulated however to reflect the demographic changes and Government commitments to improvements of the pupil-teacher ratio," and P35 also agrees, "Very high quality of teachers from Hibernia but way too many graduating. There needs to be a cap on the numbers."

The next highest category 21 (31%) represented once off generic comments as P13 says, "The capabilities of the teachers on our staff who were trained in Hibernia College are not just reflective of the college they attended but of the personalities involved, and P49 agrees, "I don't think it was the teacher's Hibernia training that makes her a fine, capable, confident teacher; Hibernia suited her because she needed to retain professional employment … if she had a different training she might have had more opportunity to develop her more creative side."

Comments positive towards Hibernia 14 (21%) state in general that it is about the person and not what college trained them but are also complimentary about Hibernia as P17 exemplifies, "At the end of the day, it boils down to the person really no matter which college they attend. I have had excellent and very poor teachers from the other colleges. It depends on a person's work ethic and level of interest. I've just been very lucky with the students I've got from Hibernia, hardworking and conscientious," P7 agrees, "Overall I have found Hibernia trained teachers to be professional, well trained and competent teachers. Finally P32 states "My impression of Hibernia is of a college that is very thorough and has high standards and P34 concludes, "Thank you for the great graduates that you have trained."

Comments relating to School Placement 6 (9%) referred to poor standards in Irish, inconsistent supervisors and too little time given to pedagogy in face-to-face contexts, P1 states, "With longer periods of Teaching Practice, Hibernia trained teachers should be equally if not more ready to enter the world of teaching, " but P20 advises, "Hibernia College needs to recognize that the students are in schools where the approach and plans of the school must be respected rather than superseded by the demands of the College."

4.6 Section E – Pertinent findings from College Documents

In investigating if the HDAPE course encompassed the qualities Seán spoke about of equality of access and quality educational provision the internal documents consulted (see Appendix I), demonstrate a strong emphasis on quality assurance and implementation across every level of HC's practices. Internal document 1:22 (**I**1:22) states, "Quality is at the heart of all activities ... This is reflected in the College mission statement which states;

> *Hibernia College aims to bring to higher education the full benefits of advances in information technology and to help meet the needs of the knowledge age by extending access to high quality, flexible and affordable adult and professional education and training* (**I**1:22)

The underpinning principles of these procedures are "equity, fairness and standards" (**I**1:22). The widespread nature of the onsite tutorials across the country give testifies to the realisation of equity of access. With respect to the College's blended-learning approach the mission is to "provide a pedagogically sound content delivery mechanism which serves students and faculty needs, while conforming to best international standards" (ibid: 84). The numerous awards that HC has won is evidence of best e-learning international practice. HC states it is a private for-profit higher education institution and as such bases its strategic plan on five key strategic outcomes namely, high-quality provision, successful students, a strong reputation, programmes development and financial sustainability. Fundamental to this strategy is the success of the students, "They are ambassadors who, more than any other activity, develop and enhance the College reputation and brand. Without [them] the outcome of growing enrolments becomes unattainable" (**I**10:6).

The HDAPE programme was first validated by HETAC in 2003 and again in 2008. The next review and validation was not due until 2013 but HC sought an earlier review in 2011, "in order to comply with the recommendations arising from the Institutional Review (March 2008), implement Assessment and Standards (more completely) and satisfy the requirements of the Teaching Council Registration Regulations 2009" (**I**2:4) The aim of the review was for the course team to "report

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on the overall welfare of the programme in relation to structure, content, currency and quality as well as the learning environment which contributes to its delivery" (**I**2:4). Programmatic review as an, "*ex-post* validation, provides confirmation that what was promised has been delivered" (**I**7: 21). The pre-requisite critical self-evaluation included in a programmatic review focuses on "qualitative analysis, with quantitative analysis/statistical evidence underpinning conclusions reached" (**I**7: 23).

Essentially the internal review found that the main weakness of the programme lay in its non-compliance with the new 2009 HETAC and Teaching Council regulations. In undertaking the review HC addressed many of the weaknesses highlighted by students and key personnel. From September 2011 onwards the programme was fully modularised thereby supporting "access, transfer and progression," (**I**2: 46) more appropriately. Student were evaluated by means of continuous assessment for all subjects except *Gaeilge* over a 90 credit, seven module, more cohesive programme with an emphasis on learning outcomes. A greater link was made between the theoretical modules and teaching practice especially in *Gaeilge* and Mathematics and "students would be facilitated to assess their own competencies in Maths and *Gaeilge* by taking online competence tests … to enable them to address their weaknesses in these areas" (**I**2: 52).

The external examiners' brief was to focus "the evaluation of quality and the flexibility of the programme's responses to changing needs and relevant awards standards," (**E**1:4) and they recommended that the new HDAPE "as submitted by Hibernia College be accredited unconditionally for a five year period" (**E**1:11). The external panel was "particularly impressed by the integrative approach adopted" (**E**1:7) and stated "There is an emphasis on quality throughout and there are built-in mechanisms for ongoing QA/QI" (**E**1:7).The panel noted however, "the absence of benchmarking by Hibernia of its own performance against other online educational providers" (**E**1:6/7).

They caution that eliminating exams (except for *Gaeilge*) and basing the course assessment entirely on continuous assessment needs careful monitoring for plagiarism, "This is particularly important in a programme which is largely delivered online and off campus" (**E**1:7). They recommend the partnership pilot with 'Hub'

schools recently initiated whereby HC commits "to provide additional continuing professional development opportunities and support for the mentoring teachers and to the schools as a whole," (**E**1:8) for taking HC students on school placement. The "large number of contracted faculty creates a special challenge to ensure that there is consistency in delivery and assessment," (**E**1:10) and "contracted faculty, some of whom might not be as research-active or research-aware as their full-time higher education colleagues," (**E**1:9) were both areas of concern to the independent panel. They also recommended a more inclusive religious education programme, ensuring students were equipped to teach literacy and numeracy and in administering and interpreting appropriate standardised literacy and numeracy tests" (**E**1:8).

In assessing programme outcomes I have confined this study to an examination of the internal and external documents that pertain to those relating to the two student cohorts involved in this research (those graduating in 2011). With respect to the examination process of Teaching Pedagogy for these cohorts the external examiner states, "I believe that the Teaching Pedagogy papers prepared for the examinations this year have been well developed … [achieving] its aim of combining an exploration of the implementation of a range of methodologies, the student's knowledge of curricular areas and the implementation of appropriate assessment methodologies" (**E**3:4).

The external assessor for Teaching Foundations said, "I would like to commend all those who took part in this set of examinations. It was clear that the students were well prepared and well informed … the commitment, dedication and scholarship of the academic staff … ensured that students were provided with a 'fair means' of assessment" (**E**4:2).

The external assessor for *Gaeilge* however stated "I would add that there was a low standard and a poor standard of Irish in many B grades and below" (**E**5:1).

The assessor for Special Education, Infant Education, Language Learning, Development Education and Educational Technology commented, "I feel the course work presented indicates that students are thoroughly taught; there is clear evidence that the whole assessment process is of a high standard" (**E**6:6).

Finally the assessors for Teaching Practice jointly commend the College for the user friendly templates, the high-quality revision notes and the "emphasis the college places on enquiry, self-evaluation and reflection by GSTs."[graduate student teachers] (**E**2:10). Recommendations mentioned include, "developing GSTs' understanding and application of the principle of differentiation, including practical ways that it can be applied to questioning, classroom tasks, learning styles, learning needs and social needs," (**E**2:9) and for supervisors "It is recommended that during the training of supervisors they examine the importance of giving clear messages, clearly stating key strategies and giving practical examples when writing assessments, and the implementation of the principles of differentiation and integration" (**E**211).

In this study Infant Education (among others) was an area in which the students required more input with some students stating that they felt inadequately prepared to teach infants. This was also echoed by some school principals. Given the positive remarks of the external examiner above regarding Infant Education "students were thoroughly taught … assessment process of a high standard" (**E**6: 6), I conducted an analysis of the October 2009 students' internal evaluation of Infant Education on completion of the module which was completed midway through their HDAPE course.

It was found that the quality in terms of module structure, pace, and relevance particularly but also academic content, tutors, administration, overall enjoyment and quality of online material were rated highly with online interactivity and tutor support less well rated as shown in Figure 4.6.1.

Figure 4.6.1 Infant Education Module October 2009 Cohort

Response rate 35%   (**I**16:1-2)

	Good to Excellent
Module Structure	92%
Administration	87%
Academic Content	83%
Quality of Online Material	84%
Interactivity of Online material	74%
Academic content of tutorials	88%
Support from module tutor	76%
Pitch Level	82%
Pace of module	90%
Facilities of onsite venue	80%
Overall rating of the module	84%
Tutor rating	88%
Overall enjoyment	86%
Relevance of module	95%

However the qualitative data reveals that while comments like the "onsite day for this module was excellent, tutor was fantastic and offered lots of tips and advice for working with infants,"(**I**16:2) abound, the students found in general there was too much information to take in at both the online and onsite sessions, that timing was bad as the course commenced online while students were on school placement, two groups were together for the onsite which was too large (60) and that, "There should be two onsite days for this module. Content is too important to allocate only 1 day for this module" (**I**16:9).

This suggests that while external examiners reviewing the content and assessment strategies may find the quality to be excellent the issues of timing, pace, amount of content presented and the ways in which it was presented have a major bearing on the quality of the module experience. Equally as some students may have been out in infant classrooms on school placement as the online sessions for this module commenced negative perceptions of their abilities and preparedness could have been

conveyed in the schools. This highlights the same difficulty with all course content and subject areas which is encountered by HC students throughout the HDAPE programme. Course content is presented once and while this can be revisited online many times a linear progression continues subject after subject (see Appendix W for course outline). Yet students must go out on their first School Placement and teach all subjects whether they have been exposed to the respective methodologies for that subject or not. This increases their sense of helplessness as was evident above. Suggestions are made in another chapter on how to alleviate this problem.

4.7. Internal Comparative Analysis

The DES inspectorate has traditionally inspected a convenience sample of 10% of students from all the ITE providers while students were on their final teaching practice and about to enter the employment market. They have discontinued this evaluation process in recent years. The statistics below (**E**14) however compare the HC students graduating in 2006 with those graduating in 2009 across the range of areas in which the inspectorate assess students on final teaching practice namely; Planning and Preparation, Quality of Teaching, Quality of Pupil Learning and Classroom Assessment. Both groups represent one of the first and one of the last groups respectively to graduate under the 18-months HDAPE programme.

Planning:

Level 4: Very Good	Level 3: Good	Level 2: Scope For Development.	Level 1: Significant Difficulty.
'06: 24%	'06: 38%	'06: 25%	'06: 13%
'09: 14%	'09: 60%	'09: 24%	'09: 2%

With respect to planning, while 74% of the HC students on final teaching practice in 2009 were placed in the top two grades as compared to 64 % in 2006 it is noticeable

that there are far more rated as very good in 2006 and also more are rated as having significant difficulty in 2006.

Teaching:

Level 4: Very Good	Level 3: Good	Level 2: Scope for Develop.	Level 1: Significant Difficulty
'06: 22%	'06: 29%	'06: 37%	'06: 12%
'09: 30%	'09: 46%	'09: 18%	'09: 6%

With respect to teaching ability 76% of the HC students on final teaching practice in 2009 are in the top two grades as compared to 51% in 2006. This time 2009 had a higher percentage rated by the DES inspectorate as very good.

Pupil Learning:

Level 4: Very Good.	Level 3: Good.	Level 2: Scope for Development.	Level 1: Significant Difficulty.
'06: 30%	'06: 26%	'06: 37%	'06: 7%
'09: 28%	'09: 52%	'09: 14%	'09: 6%

While 80% of the HC students on final teaching practice are in the top two grades in 2009 as compared to 56% in 2006, once again the 2006 cohort had slightly more students rated as very good and rated as having significant difficulty.

Assessment:

Level 4: Very Good.	Level 3: Good.		Level 2: Scope for Develop.	Level 1: Significant Difficulty.
'06: 4%	'06: 30%		'06: 48%	'06: 18%
'09: 26%	'09: 52%		'09: 16%	'09: 6%

With respect to assessment 78% of the HC students on final teaching practice are in the top two grades in 2009 as compared to 34% in 2006. Three times as many students in 2006 were rated as having significant difficulty with assessment as in 2009. Pupil assessment was not given the same emphasis in the earlier years as it was since 2008 with the publication of the NCCA's, "Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum, Guidelines for Schools (2008).

These statistics call into question the often quoted remarks that the earlier HC students were far better by virtue of being substitutes in schools, having wide work experience and being the product of the 'pent up demand' spoken about earlier. A mitigating factor which should be mentioned here however is that 2006 students had only ever been exposed to announced visits by HC supervisors prior to these unannounced visits by the DES inspectorate which may have placed them at a disadvantage and did cause the College to amend its policy of announced supervisory visits on all occasions.

The statistics demonstrate improved figures from 2006 to 2009 across all areas. This suggests that as the HDAPE programme progressed and was refined and improved a higher percentage of students were able to demonstrate greater competence in the areas assessed.

4.8. External Comparative Analysis

 In 2005 the inspectorate of the DES produced a report (Beginning to Teach, 2005) on the quality of ITE provision based on the perceptions of newly qualified teachers in the 2003/04 academic year and the inspectors' evaluations of this cohort's teaching ability. This report evaluated all ITE providers except HC as its first cohort of students was not due to complete the HDAPE programme until the summer of 2005. It is interesting to compare the statistics as the final year students in HC had to teach for the full day and were therefore in a teaching situation which was quite similar to a beginning teacher though admittedly without the full responsibility which comes with being a paid professional.

The inspectors found that 70% of the newly qualified teachers (NQTs) displayed competent practice in planning. The figures of 64% (2006) and 74% (2009) were given for HC's final year students by the same professional body.

The inspectors found that 65% of the NQTs displayed competent practice in teaching. The inspectors rated 51% of the 2006 HC cohort and 76% of the 2009 HC cohort as very good/good at teaching.

The inspectors found that 78% of the NQTs displayed competent practice in pupil learning in 2003/4. The figure of 56% in 2006 and 80% in 2009 was found by the inspectorate for HC's final year students.

It is interesting to note that the results for HC final year students in 2009 were superior to the other ITE providers' teachers in 2003/4 in all areas even though the NQTs would have had the benefit of varying amounts of experience in the classroom as employed teachers before they were inspected for probation purposes. It is also noteworthy that for the 2006 HC cohorts the ratings were inferior in all areas. It could again suggest that the HDAPE programme adapted over the years to result in improved learning outcomes for HC students.

It is also interesting to compare the inspectors' evaluations of the 2003/4 NQTs across the same three areas with the principals' 2014 perceptions of their HC

teachers. To draw up this comparison using the data from the principals'
questionnaire I have compared the statistics from the category, 'Ability to
differentiate and cater to diverse pupil needs' as a comparison with the inspectors'
category 'Pupil Learning.'

**Comparison of Inspectors' Evaluations of NQTs (2003/4) and Principals'
Perceptions of HC teachers (2014)**

	VeryGood /Good at Planning	VeryGood/Good at Teaching	Very Good/ Good at Pupil Learning
Inspectors' Evaluations of NQTs 2003/4	70%	65%	78%
Principals Opinions of HC Teachers 2014	75%	68%	61%

Here we see HC teachers comparing favourably in two out of the three areas under
consideration. The final diagram compares the evaluations of the DES inspectors of
the HC final year students in 2009 with the principals' perceptions of HC teachers in
2014.

**Comparison of DES Inspectors' Evaluations of HC students (2009) and
Principals' Perceptions of HC teachers (2014)**

	VeryGood /Good at Planning	VeryGood/Good at Teaching	Very Good/ Good at Pupil Learning
DES Inspectors' Evaluations of HC student teachers (2009)	74%	76%	80%
Principals' Opinions of HC Teachers 2014	75%	68%	61%

While the DES inspectors rated the student teachers higher in both teaching ability and pupil learning their rating for planning ability was remarkably similar to the principals' ratings in 2014. The DES ratings would be gathered from a morning's inspection of the student whereas the principals' opinions would be the result of protracted engagement with the HC teacher/s as staff.

Both the internal comparisons and the external comparisons shown above (albeit from different years) illustrate that on course completion HC students demonstrate competencies comparable to students from other ITE providers and that the HDAPE course has improved the learning outcomes for its students over the years.

4.9 Chapter Summary

As necessary in all research, the function of this chapter was to present the findings from all aspects of the study for others to inspect. The findings from the five sections of data collection were presented in a factual manner and descriptive style. In so doing all subsidiary questions posed in Chapter 1 were addressed within the context of the overall research question.

The following chapter will analyse and discuss these findings within the context of this research question and subsidiary questions and the concluding chapter will proffer suggestions and recommendations to inform future practice based on these findings and subsequent discussions

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

5.1   Introduction

As stated at the outset the purpose of undertaking this research was to examine the blended-learning HDAPE course offered by HC in Ireland with a view to ascertaining as the key research question queries, what can be learned from this unique course which might inform future practice? Each phase of the study was aligned sequentially and built on what was learned in previous phases. The sum of the evidence from all phases was presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter I intend to discuss the salient features of these findings in order to present an overall interpretation of this study. This process represents the convergent phase of the multi-phase design outlined in Chapter 3 and it is situated within the context of the key research question above and subsidiary questions which include:

- What was the genesis for and the values underpinning the establishment of Hibernia's HDAPE programme?
- How does Hibernia College ensure that its primary teacher education course achieves quality standards?
- What are DES inspectors' and other external evaluators' opinions of this HDAPE programme?
- What are students' perceptions of this blended-learning ITE course they have completed?
- What are primary school principals' opinions of Hibernia graduates as primary teachers in their schools?

This chapter concludes with an overview summary.

5.2   Exploratory Phase 1 Level 1

In the pilot phase of this study we are introduced to an entrepreneur with an educational background who had the technological means to address the chronic shortage of qualified teachers in Ireland in 2003 and who negotiated the approval of HETAC, the DES, the INTO and the Catholic Church in order to establish the first

ever private College accredited to train students as Irish primary teachers using a blended-learning approach.

Taking advantage of the "pent-up demand" highlighted by Don a paradigm shift of substantial consequence took place in Irish education with the establishment of HC. Seán insists, "the traditional model is broken." This new form of e-delivery with a face-to-face component founded as he asserts on "teaching, learning and research" allows for equity of access to education free from the limitations of location and time because it builds, "the technology not the buildings" and yet still facilitates, "small communities of learners with a good teacher" and that combination he believes works.

This answers the subsidiary question of the genesis of HC whereby the high level of untrained personnel working in primary schools provided a client base for an e-learning college espousing and providing for equity of access. This is reminiscent of the potential Kaye (1992:1), spoke about in his phrase, "learning together apart" and also elucidates the vision Seán has for the college. It does not address the pragmatic issue however that unless a paradigm shift takes place in online tutor teaching and facilitation skills, e-delivery, "does not educate, nor does it actively support learning. Mostly, it provides information."(Laurillard, 2012: 29), echoing Alexander and Boud, (2001).

In the case of HC cognisance must also be taken of Hallissy's work cited in this study whereby he found that for HC tutors on the MATL course, "the evidence of [such] transformational practice is limited."(Hallissy, 2014: 133) Therefore for a blended-learning approach to have a transformational effect on HC students (as envisioned by Don and as stated in the COACT Framework) where both students and tutors co-construct knowledge through focussed conversations and discussions Hallissy asserts that, "teachers and students will need guidance and support to enable these to take place" (ibid: 133). An outcome therefore from this exploratory phase would be that training for HC faculty is required to leverage the potential of the available technology used in this blended-learning approach and as Garrison and Kanuka (2004: 104) insist "In addition to assessing the learning outcomes, the learning process should also be assessed."

5.3 Exploratory Phase 2 Level 2

In further exploring HC through the three interviews conducted with Seán, Nicholas and Don certain themes resonated across the whole spectrum of the study. These themes included, vision, student intake, quality, staffing and models of ITE and they will be explored in the context of all the findings to which they relate. A further two themes emerged namely: the concurrent versus consecutive model of teacher education and the resistance to the establishment of HC from the existing ITE providers.

This phase answers the subsidiary questions of how HC ensures that its primary teacher education course achieves quality standards and what the DES inspectors' and other external evaluators' opinions are of the HDAPE programme

5.3.1 Vision - diversity, partnership, excellence

According to Don blended-learning can bring "transformational and contributory dimensions" in terms of diversity and this diversity has certainly been realised in the HDAPE. Many school principals in this study spoke about the various expertise and experience HC trained teachers bring with them given their diverse pathways into teaching. This resonates with the sentiments of Conway et al (2009: xvii) who consider that the "development of flexible pathways into teaching is part of an effort to ensure that the teaching force reflects the diversity of a population."

Nicholas envisions, "a much greater role for schools in teacher training," and this was also called for by many students who considered that class teachers should be consulted. Equally school principals want the views of the school principal and class teacher to be taken account of when assessing a student. These views concur with recent TC policy, "New and innovative school placement models should be developed using a partnership approach, whereby HEIs and schools actively collaborate in the organisation of the school placement" (Teaching Council, 2011: 16).

Principals also mentioned the allied point that school processes should be respected as P20 insists, "the approach and plans of the school must be respected rather than superseded by the demands of the College." It must be noted that HC has initiated a pilot with 'Hub' schools to address these issues and this has been commended in a recent external review which praises HC's commitment, "to provide additional continuing professional development opportunities and support for the mentoring teachers and to the schools as a whole" (**E**1: 8). Conway et al (2009: xviii) state that, "Internationally it is common for formal partnership arrangements to be developed between higher education institutions and schools to provide structured support and a gradual increase in classroom responsibility for student teachers."

Seán has a laudable vision and asserts, "we want our brand to be the best … we've started this trend now where principals head hunt Hibernia teachers." To be the best is achievable but it is only sustainable I suggest if the recommendations of recent external evaluations and the recommendations of this study are considered and implemented.

The assertion that HC teachers are being head hunted may well have been true in the early years but this study suggests a certain disquiet with the standards of recent student intakes, P39 compares those trained in earlier years in Hibernia to those trained recently and compliments, "those trained pre 2011," but states, "since then the standard is a disaster … we have not employed any Hibernia teachers." While P39 does not represent the views of all principals cognisance needs to be taken of the perception s/he holds as these sentiments have resonated with some other principals in the study.

5.3.2   Student Intake

Don's caution to all ITE providers is of note here, "once that pent up demand eases it would be very important and this applies to all entry into teaching that the quality bar is set appropriately high." Increasingly a higher percentage of the intake into HC will be from graduates straight from university with little further experience than

undergraduates and the benefits HC enjoyed in the early years with experienced entrants will decrease. Indeed this trend has already started, in the 2009/10 cohorts participating in this study (35%) were over thirty years of age when embarking on their course of study, while (65%) were under thirty. Ten per cent of principals in this study also advised on entry intake, warning that candidates need to be selected carefully and are not "just applying because they cannot get a job in their first choice of profession" (P29). This resonates with the research on teacher selection where Barber and Mourshed (2007:13) found that the high performing school systems chose, "the right people to become teachers." Equally to uphold standards Sahlberg et al, (2012: 20) recommend that, "all providers, including Hibernia College, be required to submit data to the DES with regard to the standards of their entrants"

5.3.3 Quality

The issue of quality provision was well demonstrated by all three interviewees and the quality assurance procedures as evidenced from the internal college documents and as evaluated by the external evaluations of the college give testimony to the HDAPE as providing quality ITE as highlighted here "There is an emphasis on quality throughout and there are built-in mechanisms for ongoing QA/QI."(**E**1:7). This answers the second subsidiary question regarding how HC ensures that its primary teacher education course achieves quality standards through the regular mandatory approval processes and the ongoing internal qualitative reviews. Carmichael et al, (2001: 451) state that, "there is a strong case for student learning to be placed at the very heart of quality systems in all sectors of education and in that context Harvey's (1997:138) contention that in essence, "quality is about transformation" holds true for HC where students, principals and DES inspectors alike consider that the HDAPE developed students as reflective practitioners.

For quality to be sustainable into the future however, I would proffer that notice should be taken of Don's advice when he stresses that the college must, "constantly be up to speed with new developments in pedagogy, new developments in teaching and learning techniques for those to be imparted to students but also those that the college itself will use in its delivery." The awards the college has won for its e-

learning programmes suggest that it is at the cutting edge of technology and the COACT framework gives a solid basis for transformative education. For sustainability however, of equal if not more importance I contend, is the number and quality of fulltime staff, an issue also of importance to the Teaching Council (2011).

5.3.4 Staffing

This was mentioned by Nicholas, "At the moment we effectively have two fulltime faculty, a Course Director and a Deputy Course Director and everybody else is contracted." He considers the college needs, "half-a-dozen or ten fulltime academics … to more easily develop a cohesive profile for the programme and for the college as a whole." The students were also concerned about staffing as S218 states, "A lack of extra investment in instructors and tutors to meet the growing number of students on the course was very obvious from TP and the on-sites." Furthermore the external examiners equally were concerned that the "large number of contracted faculty creates a special challenge to ensure that there is consistency in delivery and assessment," (**E**1:10). The concept of consistency was also mentioned by Nicholas. The independent panel also had concerns that, "contracted faculty ... might not be as research-active or research-aware as their full-time higher education colleagues," (**E**1:9). I suggest that this is an area which should be addressed *post haste* not only for sustaining quality and developing research capability but also because the TC intends to place staff/student ratio requirements on all ITE providers, "The ratio of students to academic staff should be a maximum of 15:1. This allows for small group work, for the modelling of effective teaching methodologies and for teaching the skills necessary for meaningful reflective practice."(Teaching Council, 2011: 20).

5.3.5   Models of ITE – Emergent theme concurrent *versus* the consecutive model

A theme that emerged during this study was the debate concerning the concurrent *versus* the consecutive model of teacher education. All three interviewees were quite

convinced that the consecutive model brought a greater diversity of personnel who had more life and work experience into the profession which as Don states, "any group of people benefit as a result of diversity." Conway et al (2009: xvii) would concur citing "the lack of student teachers from minority groups and low socio-economic status (SES) groups in Irish society … [and] … the under-representation of males in teaching." as issues of concern. In this study the principals were also complimentary of the benefits such experience can bring as P4 summarises, "the experience that the teachers have from other walks of life and working in other sectors has been invaluable here," though some comments were negative such as P13 who insists, "I have found them to be reluctant to seek advice and also to offer support to others." The unrestricted growth in HC's student numbers undertaking a consecutive model has had an impact however on the Irish educational landscape the implications of which will be discussed later in the context of the Government's 1995 decision on retaining the concurrent model.

5.3.6   Models of ITE – Emergent theme resistance to the establishment of HC from the existing ITE providers.

The resistance to HC from the existing ITE providers was evident and public from the outset yet nobody with the exception of the INTO appeared concerned that approximately 1,000 untrained personnel taught in primary schools on a daily basis back in 2003. The resistance to the college may have its roots in territoriality, anti-competitiveness and a monopoly culture, a genuine fear that a private college might lower standards, a suspicion regarding blended-learning or as Don explains HC represented, "step change paradigm shift innovation," which when it occurs there is, "huge resistance from ... the incumbents." Seán suggests that the existing ITE providers, "perceive the college as flooding the market." This market surplus has transpired but Seán considers that, "if the people are willing to train as teachers, take their chances on a job here like all other professions do" then "none of us [ITE providers] should be capped" He concludes, nobody owns a particular area in education." As recently as 2012 however Sahlberg et al, (2012: 20) insist that, "a more effective modelling of the supply and demand for new teachers should be developed as a matter of urgency" in Ireland.

5.4 Explanatory Phase 3 Level 3 – Students

In continuing the exploration of HC through the perspective of the students, different themes resonated across the whole spectrum of the study. These themes included, blended-learning, sharing expertise, quality provision, reflective practice, supervisors and communication and these will be explored in the context of all the findings to which they relate. This phase answered the subsidiary question of what students' perceptions are of this blended-learning course.

5.4.1 Blended-Learning

This study found that in general the HDAPE provided a good quality ITE for the students. An overwhelming 93% of students considered that blended-learning was a beneficial method of study at post-graduate level. Countless examples of the convenience, the ability to go back over information at one's own pace, the flexibility of the model were cited, S124 summaries saying, "it allows one to be an independent thinker/learner while also linking in with a community of learners."

This positivity is all the more significant as only 3% had ever been exposed to any form of online learning before commencing the HDAPE. A very large number (96%) said that they would undertake another course using blended-learning thus subscribing to Seán's assertion that "e-learning is not the future, it's the present." The significant rise in online and virtual universities in recent years confirms Seán's contention and Allen and Seaman, (2013) state that. 6.1 million students took at least one online class during autumn 2010 in the USA.

In terms of educational impact 88% of students considered that the use of technology necessary in undertaking a blended-learning course enhanced their capacity to learn as S9 states, "I found it an excellent way to learn and it is a huge leap forward from traditional third level didactic approaches and 91% were convinced that technology has enhanced their teaching as S118 insists, "We received a very good ICT education and other teachers from other training colleges were impressed with how much we could do."

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5.4.2 Sharing expertise

Allied to this comment S179 informs us that "In my experience in the classroom I found that many teachers were not using the technology available to them, the students are losing out." This confirms Seán's assertion that the blended-learning approach will develop teachers who can use ICT skills in the classroom and share their skills with school staff. However, only 57% of the principals in this study considered that HC teachers shared their ICT skills with their colleagues.

5.4.3 Quality Provision

In terms of quality ITE, students endorsed the quality of the following as being good to very good: ICT provision (90%), the quality of the online materials (87%), the quality of the overall course structure (86%) the quality of the onsite tutors (82%) and finally the quality of interactive online sessions (70%). This is in line with Nicholas's belief that it is important that the students, "on a programme are happy that they are getting a good experience whilst maintaining academic rigour throughout the duration of the programme."

In terms of support however students were less complimentary, with the following being rated as good to very good: support from onsite tutors (77%), support from online tutors (76%), support from supervisors (65%) and support from administration (63%).

Students wanted more inputs on various subjects and felt poorly prepared to face teaching certain subjects and/or certain classes or address various issues like classroom management or special educational needs. However 88% felt that they were prepared to work as primary teachers. When working as teachers in schools however principals in this study considered that 67% were well trained at the outset.

Feelings of insecurity in some aspects are to be expected, as ITE providers are not expected to turn out fully formed teachers able to address every contingency. Indeed Kellaghan (2002:149) acknowledges this fact and states that the reality of full-time

teaching can, "come as a shock to many teachers who find themselves having to address a range of issues and concerns that may have been less pressing when they were completing shorter periods of teaching under rather artificial conditions in their pre-service programme."

What quality ITE provision needs to do is help students to become lifelong learners and reflective practitioners. As McAteer et al. (2010:7) state, (speaking about teacher training at Master's degree level), teachers who complete them should be equipped "with higher-order skills, improved practice and attributes of, and desire for, lifelong learning." As Schleicher (2012:35) asserts, "the past was about delivered wisdom, the challenge now is to foster user-generated wisdom among teachers and school leaders".

5.4.4 Reflective Practice

With regard to reflective practice which is one of the building blocks of transformative education this study found that the students rated the college highly with 95% believing that the HDAPE course prepared them to be reflective practitioners, S111 considers that, "This course really emphasised reflective practice, I found the philosophical aspect most interesting," and S124 agrees stating, "I feel reflection was a huge part of the course and I hope to continue this as a reflective practitioner." This is in line with current TC requirements whereby it is considered that ITE providers "should allow for the development of a more reflective, enquiry-oriented approach to the school placement and facilitate the development of the teacher as a reflective practitioner" (Teaching Council, 2011: 16)

5.4.5 Supervisors

In terms of recommendations to the college for improvement most of the recommendations the students made were made about the supervisors and specific curricular subjects with onsite days, and communication and organisation also featuring highly. Two of those areas were also highlighted by principals namely

supervisors and communication. With respect to supervisors there is an obvious need for consistency as S161 states, "I recommend that supervisors need to be singing off the same sheet." Principals also echoed this call, as P67 states, "Train the Teaching Practice supervisors properly! Few use common criteria for assessment. Many have outdated ideas." This advice resonates with current TC requirements for all HEI Placement Tutors, full-time and occasional,

> *to participate on an ongoing basis in programmes of staff development where practice and written guidelines are moderated so that a clear understanding is shared by all. This is necessary in the interests of facilitating the development of the student teacher, maintaining high standards of teaching and exercising an informed, fair and equitable approach to the awarding of grades.*
> (Teaching Council, 2011: 18)

5.4.6 Communication

With respect to communication students considered that the college administrators need to improve their practice, S63 suggests, "I would recommend having more people to answer administrative queries and other problems and S133 maintains, "it is a shame that a poor admin team let a great course down. There is a how dare you attitude from the admin in particular the examinations office," while S96 requests, "More accommodating administrative staff, possibly asking too much with so many pupils." The TC recommends that ITE providers, "should have adequate administrative staffing levels to support the efficient organisation and delivery of the programme" (Teaching Council, 2011: 20).

Principals equally mentioned the need to improve communications, P22 states that there are "too many phone calls, emails and calling to the school looking for placement", and P51 says, "Provide materials to schools in hard copy - asking schools to print out information for students' school placement at the school's own expense is not appropriate." P63 simply wants, "Much more human interaction."

It is also interesting to note in respect to written communications that the most recent external evaluation of HC's new Master's programme conducted by the TC (2014:4) stated, "The documentation submitted in January 2014 by Hibernia College in hard

copy format was extensive. Presented in ten volumes some of which were subdivided into booklets and handbooks of various kinds, there were in all some 1,500 pages of typescript. The Pro Forma extended to 251 pages … The documentation provided a significant challenge for the panel to comprehend and analyse." Here there is a suggestion of overstatement while students and principals alike complain of a paucity of communication and documentation on the other hand.

While these comments from students and principals relate to college processes which can be easily addressed another more important finding emerged from this study which I believe warrants attention by the college at a more systemic and/or corporate level which will be developed below.

5.5 Explanatory Phase 3 Level 3 - Principals

This final explanatory stage of the study brings together the outcomes of the quality ITE which HC considers it provides for its students and the outcome of that provision in terms of well qualified teachers as perceived by the school principals who have employed them and to whom they are accountable. In completing this exploration of HC through the perspective of the school principals another set of themes emerged including, teacher quality, grade inflation, the standard of Irish, student numbers and the perception of the college and these will be explored in the context of all the findings to which they relate. This phase answers the subsidiary question of what primary school principals' opinions of HC graduates are as primary teachers in their schools.

5.5.1 Teacher Quality

Happily the range of school types was quite well represented in this study and 83% of the comments came from schools with 1-3 Hibernia trained teachers. Overall 90% of the principals stated that their HC trained teachers were successfully probated and 67% considered them well trained at the outset. While 87% considered that they were collaborative workers only 45% considered that they shared their

skills with other teachers, though this rose to 57% when referring to sharing ICT skills.

In general principals considered that HC teachers were self-starters (68%), innovative (66%) and engaged in CPD (79%) which resonates I suggest with the high ratings given by students to their exposure to reflective practice during the HDAPE programme. Indeed Conway et al (2009: 126) note that, "there is increasingly a consensus that learning to teach effectively cannot happen in ITE alone. The teacher education reform agenda now requires teachers to be lifelong learners from pre-service to induction through CPD, (Coolahan, 2003; Kelley, 2004; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; OECD, 2005.)

The grade for teaching ability given by principals of 67% represents a midway rating between the grade given by DES supervisors to final year HC students in 2006 of 51% and in 2009 of 76% and probably represents a fair assessment of the overall standard of HC trained teachers across the years from 2005 to the participating cohort in 2011. Interestingly this study has shown that some principals are of the view that the standard has deteriorated since 2011, though no rationale was given for this opinion.

5.5.2 Grade Inflation

Principals raised the allied issue of grade inflation. Too many students with A grades was a cause of concern as P60 illustrates, "The grades awarded to graduates of Hibernia seem to be surprisingly high for all graduates of the course … I'm very very sceptical of the grades awarded," P5I agrees viewing, "HC Teaching Practice Grades with a certain level of scepticism due to my experience of students and the grades they subsequently received, the elevated level of grades in comparison to other teacher training institutions." P19 states, "Standardisation of grades is needed. Many get honours with what seems to be at the drop of a hat." This perception has implications for the college which will be discussed later.

5.5.3 The Standard of Irish

Some principals mentioned the poor standard of Irish which HC teachers have, as P170 states, "Irish standard needs increasing," and P113 agrees, *"Níos mó béime agus ama a chur ar mhúineadh na Gaeilge."* Supervisors at meetings have also mentioned this as a weakness and the external examiner for Irish commented, "I would add that there was a low standard and a poor standard of Irish in many B grades and below." Equally the students while not commenting on their own standard of Irish were critical of the college provision in Irish as S162 asserts, "The Gaeltacht could be tightened up and include more grammar and structured classes, this would definitely be beneficial". S212 declares, "Scrap the Irish course and start again, have more Irish material relevant to the classroom, rather than reading outdated poetry, prose and short stories" and S219 agrees stating, "I strongly feel that the structure of the Irish modules needs to be looked at. I think there was a lot of irrelevant material not applicable to the classroom and how to teach Irish." The Teaching Council is aware of the problem of low standards in Irish across the ITE provider network in general and is recommending that the minimum entry requirement be set at a B1 Level in the Honours Leaving Certificate examination in future years and that, "applicants for primary teaching … will be required to demonstrate competence in Gaeilge by means of an Irish language Admissions Test" (Teaching Council, 2011: 19)

5.5.4 Student Numbers

The arrival of a private college with the ability to accept a large number of students has unnerved many stakeholders in Irish education. Seán spoke about the head of another ITE institution saying, "your numbers should be capped, the way ours are capped." Likewise HC students expressed concern regarding the large intake though they would have benefitted from this policy at the time of their own entry. S214 states, "there are too many NQTs in the market and Hibernia are the main culprits for this. It makes it very difficult for us NQTs to find those elusive jobs that are out there. Just wondering if Hibernia are going to cap the student entry going forward to correlate with the number of jobs that are out there?" While P77 sums up principals'

concerns in a positive way, "Keep up the good work. Be aware that the increased numbers of teachers produced by an uncapped college is a point of dissatisfaction with other teachers from other colleges. It is no longer the quality of the Hibernia trained teachers which is at issue, but the perceived numbers" echoing once again Barber and Mourshed (2007:18), "Failing to control entry into teacher training almost invariably leads to an oversupply of candidates which, in turn, has a significant negative effect on teacher quality."

5.5.5   Perception of the College

I said earlier that I would return to another aspect of communication which warrants attention by the college at a more systemic and/or corporate level. This element of communication relates to perception and how the college might be perceived by others.

Nicholas said, "we have had to be better to be equal." I suggest that his statement could be phrased in the present tense. The college needs to continually be better to be seen to be equal to the existing ITE providers and wider stakeholders in Education. I base that conclusion on remarks made by both students and principals which when taken together could be seen as quite serious for the college and would suggest that time and attention be given by the college to building alliances, working collaboratively on research projects and investing in far better public relations. Some of the following statements speak for themselves. They may indeed represent bias and even a form of prejudice and may be unjust and unfair and only held by a minority of the relevant stakeholders but they represent perceptions held by some elements of Irish educational society, which are in circulation and were presented in this study. The perceptions are illustrated in the following statements emanating from this study.

1. **Interview Panel**

   P10 - "the teacher performed extremely well at interview and had excellent references, that's why we employed her. Having trained with Hibernia was not

an advantage, in fact it was a disadvantage as far as our interview board was concerned."

2. Inspectorate

P5 relating to the school inspector, - "Inspector commented that teachers were good 'in spite of ' Hibernia."

3. Grade Inflation

P46 - "Giving out firsts in teaching practice should not be done unless the teacher is exceptional. When interviewing prospective teachers now, I find I am very sceptical of teaching practice scores given to Hibernia students and find that this scepticism is reflected in the opinions of many more principals."

4. Online learning

P49 - "I wonder perhaps is the online aspect actually resulting in genuine engagement with the nitty-gritty of what it is to be a teacher,"

5. Other Providers

P152 - "I would feel the teachers trained in the other Colleges of Education offer a school a more rounded teacher. The programme needs more face-to-face teaching."

6. Lived Experience

P44 - "I feel that based on my experience of three different Hibernia teachers - all have been lacking an understanding of co-operating with ethos, struggle to be consistent in basic paper work ... and lack a vision of whole school development planning."

7. Public Relations

S113 - "Hibernia should raise awareness that the course is not an 'online' course. It is part online. There are people I speak to that think I do my TP online too. It is up to Hibernia to ensure an accurate picture of what the HDAPE actually entails is portrayed, both in schools and in the media."

8. School Placement

P80 - "Be more stringent during periods of teaching practice, I have personal experience of a very poor teacher being passed ... after a disastrous placement. Led to a feeling of 'pay your money get your degree' no matter what."

9. Perception of the College

P4 - "Hibernia College is a totally for-profit outfit. Money is their aim, not education" and P9 - Colleagues have sometimes remarked that Hibernia will take anyone as they will get money for it."

These statements above are highlighted to assist the college in a realisation that there is no room for complacency. While situations can always be seen from both sides after all the Interview Panel did appoint the HC teacher, the teachers were not only probated by the inspector but given a back handed compliment and a small piece of research could demonstrate whether or not HC's school placement grades are inflated relative to other colleges etc. Equally principals could be critical of other ITE providers (and were) but for the purposes of this study they were only asked to comment on HC trained teachers. The issue remains however that to combat any deserved or undeserved criticism HC must continually strive for excellence in all aspects of the ITE programme and I suggest might communicate better with the wider educational community.

5.6   Chapter Summary

The key research question asked what could be learned about the HDAPE programme offered by HC that might inform future practice. In addressing the question this study has unearthed data which has implications at both policy level and at college level and in so doing this study has also answered the subsidiary questions posed at the outset of this endeavour in Chapter 1.

We have learned that the HDAPE programme offered by HC had its genesis in a time of primary teacher shortage in Ireland and uniquely as a private college was approved as an ITE provider by the State. HC's capacity to train teachers, at no cost

to the State was limited only by its own resources. Hence in a few short years it has become the largest ITE provider of trained primary teachers in Ireland and this has resulted now in a situation where there is a surplus of trained teachers available to schools. The benefits and challenges of such a situation can be debated but this study has found that other ITE providers, HC students themselves and school principals are very concerned about the development, maintenance and possible growth of this supply surplus. This has implications at both policy and college level.

We have learned that in general HC students believe that they are well prepared for teaching and that school principals and DES supervisors have rated between two-thirds and three-quarters of them as being good to very good teachers.

The results of this study have prompted certain questions at policy level such as, are entry requirements set at a high enough level by the TC given the huge demand for primary teaching? Given the growth of HC the consecutive model of ITE provision at primary level is likely to become the dominant model, and if so, is there a continuing role for the concurrent model? Given HC's ability to train teachers using the consecutive model at no cost to the State should State resources be made available solely for the concurrent model? There are also a host of implications arising from this study at college level. In this chapter the implications of the findings from this study have been highlighted through the seminal themes which emerged at the different stages of this multi-phase research. Suggested recommendations arising from these implications, at both policy and college level will be posited in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, overall conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made for future practice at both policy level and at college level. These conclusions and recommendations are based on the evidence presented from both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study and the analysis and discussion of the common themes which emerged across each of these methods. The chapter also includes some concluding remarks on possible future research enquiries and the study concludes with the final chapter summary.

6.2 Conclusions

The central objective of this study as stated was to gain a greater understanding of the HC blended-learning HDAPE course with a view to informing future practice. Certainly the Irish educational landscape has changed irrevocably with the emergence and growth of HC. In terms of equity of access and diversity HC has facilitated the entry of greater numbers of more diverse learners into primary teaching. This diversity has brought graduates of experience (nursing, accountancy, management expertise, ICT skills) into teaching who might never have been in a position to make the transition. Equally HC has facilitated second chance entry for those who did not achieve the entry requirements at undergraduate level but as a postgraduate with work experience in other fields could now return and meet the criteria for entry at graduate level. Furthermore as the evidence suggests, equity of access was greatly increased with students studying at home in counties all over Ireland and even abroad. The social and economic benefits of this flexibility for the students themselves, for the schools they serve and for the exchequer in terms of a cost neutral qualification of use to the DES has been well demonstrated in this study. The HDAPE programme has been evaluated by external experts many times since it was first approved and it has met the standards of the different accrediting agencies each time. The internal quality assurances procedures and processes in HC are

robust and different iterations of the programme have taken on board many of the recommendations of the various stakeholders from external experts to the student body. Some pertinent recommendations still require attention as will be detailed below.

The HDAPE can be considered fit for purpose from the extent of the successful external evaluations undertaken to date and the fact that 88% of the student body who participated in this study considered that they were prepared to work as primary teachers. School principals considered that 67% of HC teachers were well trained at the outset and the DES inspectors in their best rating considered that 76% of the final year students were very good/good at teaching.

This study suggests therefore that HC can be considered to offer a good quality education through its HDAPE programme to graduates. In general this results in the provision of good teachers at no cost to the state. The blended-learning approach was found to be extremely popular with the students in this study which is a resounding endorsement of this method of study given that only 3% had previous exposure to online learning.

The exponential trajectory of HC's output of trained teachers since its first group in 2005 has seen the situation change in Ireland from a problem of over 1,000 untrained teachers working in the education system to an oversupply of trained primary teachers in 2011. This reversal in six years has obvious benefits for the Irish educational system at national level not least of which is the constant supply of trained teachers available for permanent, temporary and substitute work in schools. Furthermore this now highly competitive market should result in school authorities being able to pick the very best and brightest for permanent positions.

On the other hand an oversupply of teachers, Barber and Mourshed, (2007:18) suggest, "has a significant negative effect on teacher quality" and similar concerns have been expressed in this study by students and principals alike. HC continues to admit large numbers and this year (2014) have admitted over 400 to the final HDAPE programme and 300 into the new Masters programme this September. The

following recommendations are made based on the evidence presented in this study and are posited in the spirit of informing and improving future practice.

6.3   Recommendations at Policy Level

Four recommendations are made at policy level which in the opinion of this author would if implemented, improve the quality of ITE provision generally, in time would alleviate the issue of oversupply, would enhance the professionalism of the general teaching body and would ensure the continued provision of the concurrent model of ITE.

6.3.1   Higher Entry Standards and Changed Entry Requirements

The presence of HC as an independent uncapped provider has proved that the entry criteria set by the TC is attainable by large numbers of the graduate population. On the principle of equity of access I concur with Dr. Rowland's assertion that as long as students meet the entry requirements and are prepared to finance their education and take their chances with job opportunities they have a right to gain access to ITE. Now that the 'pent-up' demand spoken about by Dr. Thornhill has been truly satiated and an ever increasing oversupply situation pertains I suggest that it is timely for the TC to reconsider its entry criteria and set the bar considerably higher in order to attract candidates of the highest calibre.

I recommend that in conjunction with the recent proposal to raise the academic entry requirements further (particularly in grades achieved in the Leaving Certificate Irish, English and Mathematics examinations) it behoves the TC to consider other methods of assessing suitability. From the opinions of school principals in this study of the different *lacunae* evident in HC teachers the use of personality inventories, tests in sixth class primary mathematics and assessments in basic Irish and English grammar as well as personal statements and/or oral presentations giving evidence of an interest in or capability in The Arts, P.E., Science or Music, and other forms of entry assessments could also be considered as part of a selection/de-selection process.

As stated the TC has proposed raising the minimum entry standard in Irish and Maths in 2016/17 there is now an opportunity (emulating Finland) to be more innovative in terms of entry regulations and set entry requirements across a wide spectrum of competencies.

6.3.2 Reconceptualise School Placement

In line with the inevitable curtailment of numbers achieved through raising entry standards, I would also recommend that the TC reconceptualise the form of school placement required of student teachers. While the duration of school placement has been raised considerably by the TC in recent years, stipulations as to the form and nature of these school placements could enhance practice.

In this study concern was expressed by college authorities, students and principals that the present school placement situation was becoming unsustainable given the large numbers seeking placements. The situation is also further exacerbated by block placements. In addition school principals in this study suggested that HC students were lacking in an understanding of the overall school processes e.g. school planning, school culture.

Consideration could be given to a form of apprenticeship model whereby a student teacher would work in a variety of ways with a specific school for a sustained period e.g. one day per week or four days per month over the course of an academic year to suit both parties. This would assist the student teacher embed theory in practice, become familiar with the processes and practices of school life, understand the meaning of working as part of a team and assist with action research possibilities given that future postgraduate students will complete a Master's thesis as part of the new programme from September 2014. This would also give schools an input into the student's final school placement grade which is something sought by students, principals and by Dr. Breakwell in this study and is present TC policy.

6.3.3 Provide Mentor Training for Teachers as part of CPD

 An allied recommendation I suggest to the TC which was posited by Dr. Breakwell earlier in this study would be to give CPD credit to teachers in schools who would be willing to act as mentors for student teachers on school placement. This would fulfil two functions. Firstly it would ensure that student teachers witnessed best practice from trained mentors while on school placement, (anecdotally some students complain about encountering didactic teaching in relatively silent passive classes and on the difficulties of having to negotiate a compromise with what the college requires and what the class teacher requires). Secondly as the TC is in discussions with the relevant stakeholders at present regarding the possible forms of compulsory CPD which will be required of teachers for their professional portfolios in the future, a teacher mentoring course on assisting student teachers similar to that available through National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in general and NQTs in the *Droichead* (pilot in-school teacher probation process) scheme in particular would act as a worthwhile CPD component to teachers' professional portfolios.

6.3.4 Reallocate State Funding

In line with the Government's own policy in 1995 on retaining the concurrent ITE model and in view of the fact that a continuing supply of teachers from the consecutive model can be produced by HC, I would recommend that all available state funds should be channelled to the provision of teachers educated through the concurrent model thereby keeping some balance in the provision of teachers from the two models.

I suggest that these measures taken at policy level would result in a higher calibre student intake (albeit a smaller number of eligible candidates), a more rounded student experience at school placement level, a greater professionalism among existing teachers as they support and grade student teachers within the context of a professional mentor programme and in conjunction with ITE providers and an

enhancement of the profession in general through the increased dialogue on teaching and learning as schools become hubs of excellence for ITE provision. The final recommendation would also allow for a continuing diversity of ITE models to co-exist in a more proportionate and balanced manner.

6.4 Recommendations at Hibernia College Level

Thirteen specific recommendations are made of consequence to HC which I suggest if implemented would improve the course experience for future students, would enhance the reputation of the college and would increase the sustainability of its endeavours in the long term.

Some of the recommendations the students reported in this study in 2011 have subsequently been taken on board since then by HC and have been discussed in Chapter 5. This section will be confined to the salient student and external assessors' recommendations which have not yet been addressed and most significantly the collated recommendations of school principals in June of this year, 2014, as these represent the most up-to-date information available to HC from an outsider's perspective, which if implemented could enhance the college's ITE provision and sustainability into the future.

In this study Dr Rowland stated, "Our goal is not to be the largest e-learning company or college" but, "we really want to be the best. We want to be the ivy league of learning." This study has demonstrated that HC's ITE provision is of high quality within the context of the Irish accrediting and regulatory bodies to which the college must adhere for validation and approval. While the college is certainly fit for purpose the recommendations posited below are given in the spirit of college improvement as it journeys towards its stated goals above.

6.4.1 Staffing

As mentioned in this study by Dr. Breakwell, and the students, the college needs to increase its number of fulltime staff. Furthermore the part-time nature of the education faculty was a concern to the external assessors. There is a very large number of experienced and well qualified contracted staff which gives great flexibility to the college to re-engage and disengage personnel. This ensures that the college does not continue to employ underperforming personnel, a point Dr. Rowland highlighted as a positive.

However a college with a yearly intake of between 600 and 700 HDAPE students requires more than two academics with the relevant professional expertise working on a full-time basis. The support given by the myriad of part-time module leaders, lead tutors and subject tutors, school placement supervisors as well as full-time course administrators allows the College to sustain and maintain its programme on an ongoing basis but I would concur with the external assessors concerns that part-time staff may not be as involved with ongoing research as those full-time staff in other colleges are required to be contractually. Therefore HC is at risk of losing out on innovative practice and stagnating from an educational research perspective. Full-time staff are also in a position to take "ownership of the brand" as one student requested and to be more committed by virtue of their own employment status to promote the long term aims of the college than part-time short contract personnel might be.

6.4.2 Blended-Learning

Dr. Rowland's belief in the blended-learning approach was endorsed by the students in this study who found the approach in some cases 'the best of both worlds' as one student claimed. However I contend that cognisance should be given to the students' request that credits or some form of recognition be given to students' engagement with the synchronous tutorials and the forums postings if the college is to remain true to its own espoused COACT framework for teaching and learning. Students judge the value of various components of a course by how it is assessed and the

weightings attached to that assessment. Therefore if a constructivist approach to learning is espoused the means by which the students can co-construct meaning by interacting with themselves and with their tutors should be encouraged and credited as well as summative assignments at the end of a module or summative examinations at the end of a course.

6.4.3 Staff Training

This leads to an allied recommendation that part-time faculty staff be properly trained in the pedagogical use of the synchronous tutorials. HC identified this area as needing improvement in their self-evaluation document and an unpublished doctoral thesis cited in this study clearly demonstrated the need for greater training of HC tutors in this area. It is not sufficient to train faculty in how to upload content and allow access to student voices; a full programme of training is required as this online component represents a paradigm shift in teaching and learning for most tutors. As Laurillard (2012:40) states "it takes more than telling to teach. Language alone is not enough." Furthermore ongoing CPD is required for online tutors if the synchronous and asynchronous online elements of this blended-learning course are to contribute in a meaningful way to an educative and transformative ITE programme for students.

6.4.4 School Principals' Opinions – Listen to feedback

In this study similar findings arose between the *lacunae* students found in the HDAPE course and the *lacunae* school principals found in HC trained teachers in their schools. Many of these *lacunae* related to extra tuition needs in specific subjects and others related to broader issues around school processes and practices, collaboration and teamwork. I recommend that the college act on the findings from the principal' questionnaire in this study as it represents the most up-to-date information from a large number of principals. To that end I have undertaken to represent these findings to college personnel once my thesis is complete. The perceptions of school principals who already have trained Hibernia teachers on their

staffs such as this study proffers is of immense importance to HC I contend as their endorsement of Hibernia trained teachers would have credence with their fellow colleagues and equally their concerns or negativity could do untold damage to the reputation of the college and potential employment prospects of present and future students.

6.4.5 Ensure Students' Anonymity

I concur with the external assessors advice that processes should be put in place to ensure that student feedback is anonymous as opposed to just being confidential and I would posit that some of the more extreme views presented by students in the findings from this anonymous study may not have been offered by those same students when they critiqued the various modules for the college as their identity was known.

6.4.6 School Placement Supervisors

In this study both students and school principals had concerns regarding school placement supervisors. Students' complaints related to mixed messages, varying expectations, inconsistent grading and different levels of support given, along with the fact that some students considered two visits from the same supervisor (one of which was an announced visit) was insufficient for grading purposes. Some school principals spoke about grade inflation and asserted that they no longer had confidence in the grades awarded by HC. I recommend that school placement tutors receive continual training, require peer evaluation and should work in teams. This should address most of the students' concerns and could also address the possible issue of grade inflation if a group decision was arrived at for each student.

6.4.7 School Placement Visits

While the concept of an announced visit allowing the students to represent themselves at their best is in line with a caring constructivist approach to learning I still contend that as other providers do not engage in this practice and as this causes embarrassment to students teaching in a school with students from other colleges that changes could be made. To honour the ethos of care and add further rigour to the assessment of school placement I recommend the following adaptation to the present HC policy; that one announced but ungraded visit be allocated to all students in a supportive capacity and that all other visits be unannounced and graded.

6.4.8 School Placement Experience

Some students felt unprepared to teach Infant Classes never having been exposed to pupils in classes lower than First Class. As the primary school curriculum is organised as a spiral curriculum and divided into four main sections consideration could be given to four sets of school placement one at each level Junior/Senior Infants, First/Second, Third Fourth and Fifth/Sixth thereby exposing all students to a teaching experience at all levels.

Equally consideration should be given as requested by both students and principals alike to more exposure to special needs classes/units/schools while on school placement and to assisting students with a greater awareness of strategies to differentiate instruction for special needs pupils in mainstream classrooms.

Finally as many students spoke about feeling unprepared to undertake their first teaching placement, consideration should be given to the spiral nature of the primary curriculum when designing course content. It could be possible to facilitate student exposure to pedagogical elements of most subjects before school placement and revisiting these subjects again in greater depth rather than adopting a linear approach to course content construction

6.4.9 Comparative Analysis

HC should as a matter of urgency conduct a comparative analysis on their percentage grade allocations *vis-à-vis* other ITE providers for school placement. As the largest college it would be logical that HC should have more grade As, Bs etc but in general the distribution curve should be similar to other colleges and if not, consideration should be given to why it is not similar. If it is similar and the college can stand over the authenticity of grade A students and debunk rumours of grade inflation then this should be communicated to schools.

6.4.10 Assessment

In this study some students queried the value of summative exams and in the 2011 programmatic review the college proposed moving to a modularised programme with continuous assessment for all course content except *Gaeilge*. I concur with the external assessors' concern that the college needs to be even more vigilant around issues of plagiarism given the online and offsite nature of a blended-learning course. As the college also allows for a *viva voce* in certain circumstances and already conducts exit orals in Irish, I recommend a more widespread use of the *viva voce* to ensure that over the course of the various modules a certain proportion of students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge in person.

6.4.11 Communications

Some students in this study were critical of the support received from the college administrators and of the tardiness of replies and requested better and speedier internal communications. Equally some principals in this study commented negatively on aspects of external communication from the college i.e. using emails and requiring principals to print off documents. I recommend that the college track response times to emails and requests from students in order to provide information to students in advance, of expected response times, as often negative perceptions can be triggered in stressful situations such as school placement periods and exam times

with students' desire to receive an immediate response to what appears is an urgent problem.

While an online college uses all forms of electronic communication systems as a normal part of daily business due regard must be given to the cost in terms of time and resources as well as the inconvenience to primary school principals (many of whom are teaching principals) in having to print off documentation. I recommend 'snail' mail and well-presented brochures be used in making initial contact with schools confirming school placements and if possible a courtesy follow-up visit from a college representative be made to each school to thank the school for the opportunity afforded HC students.

Given the misinformation evidenced in a minority of principals' responses (all of whom had trained HC teachers on staff) I concur with Dr. Thornhill's advice that the college should maintain and foster relationships with its *alumnae*. Feedback to and from these graduates could be very beneficial to the college in terms of improving future practice. They are also an important resource as future possible mentors to HC students and could be incentivised to act in this capacity by the college through the provision of free mentorship courses for their CPD and their future CPD portfolios.

6.4.12 Public Perception of the College

In this study some negative comments made about HC were borne out of ignorance and misinformation. This was all the more concerning as they emanated from principals who have employed HC teachers. As a newcomer to the Irish educational landscape it behoves HC to devote time and attention to building alliances, working collaboratively on research projects with other ITE providers, with stakeholders and with schools. The college could also invest in far better public relations and could consider ways to 'give something back' to the wider educational community through sponsorship programmes and/or piloting educational research initiatives with certain schools and publishing the results widely.

6.4.13 Proactive Approach to Policy Recommendations

Finally I would encourage HC to adopt a proactive approach to the recommendations made at policy level in this study. For instance HC could set its own criteria even higher than those specified by the TC at present and could add further layers to their entry regulations as mentioned above on top of the present interviews in English and Irish. School placements could be undertaken in four periods as highlighted above and the concept of an apprenticeship model could be explored. Finally there is nothing preventing HC designing and offering a free mentorship course for teachers who wish to develop their skills in adult mentoring and are open to receiving HC students into their classrooms. Obviously any adaptations would have to meet the approval of the College's accrediting bodies but I believe that proactively going above and beyond the present TC requirements and instigating even more rigorous selection processes would benefit the college in the long run. I proffer these recommendations based on the evidence provided in this study which if implemented could enhance the quality of the college's ITE provision.

6.5 Future Research Possibilities

In this study it was found that the pilot on school partnership being proposed by HC in its 2011 programmatic review was commended by the HETAC assessors and its implementation offer possibilities for further research of consequence at policy level in the future.

The comparative analysis on teaching grades mentioned above should be undertaken and could yield important data for the college. Equally the veracity of the assertion that post 2011 students are not as good as pre 2011 made by some principals in this study could be explored further.

The college *alumnae* could be encouraged and supported to conduct research, particularly action-research and the college could be proactive in publishing their

findings and assisting them in disseminating their research through the establishment of annual conferences and/or an e-magazine which could be sent to all the educational stakeholders including school principals and submitted also to peer review journals. The same opportunities could also be offered to staff and time given to both part-time and fulltime staff to engage in such activities.

6.6   Concluding Remarks

The recommendations proffered above are given in the light of the findings of this study and in the spirit of assisting HC on its journey towards excellence. The data has been presented in a truthful manner and to the best of this author's ability given the limitations of a small scale personal study. It is always good to be aware of and listen to the critical observations of external agencies as a means of driving improvements and innovations. It is also good for the soul to hear that one is doing a good job.   Therefore I will leave the last comments to three principals who have complimented HC and represent the views of those principals who are happy to have HC teachers on staff. P7 states, "Overall I have found Hibernia trained teachers to be professional, well trained and competent teachers. Finally P32 states "My impression of Hibernia is of a college that is very thorough and has high standards and P34 concludes, "Thank you for the great graduates that you have trained."

6.7   Chapter Summary

In Chapter I the rationale for undertaking this study was explained, a brief historical outline of HC was presented to provide context and the uniqueness of the college in terms of its blended-learning approach was highlighted. The main research question was posed, subsidiary questions were listed and the research tools to be employed were described. The limitations of the study were outlined, within the context of an ever-changing educational landscape.

Chapter 2 focused on an examination of initial teacher education, explored the concept of quality in an educational context and considered the nature of online

learning, and the value and limitations of blended learning as a form of adult learning.

In Chapter 3 a review of the relevant literature pertaining to qualitative and quantitative research was carried out and a defence was made for a mixed methods approach as the most effective and efficient approach for use in this study. The management of the research was clearly delineated and a framework was outlined giving the research strategy and phases employed. The research ethics which would underpin the study were stated clearly.

In Chapter 4 all aspects of the pertinent findings from this study were presented. Chapter 5 analysed and discussed the findings previously presented in the context of the research question and subsidiary questions and provided an overall interpretation of the study. Finally in this chapter overall conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made for future practice at both policy level and at college level and some possible future research enquiries were posited for consideration by the college.

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