

Becoming a Teacher Through Flexible Learning

Preservice Teachers' Experiences of a Flexible
Delivery Model of Initial Teacher Education

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Majella McSharry, Irene White & Evan Kirwan
Dublin City University

Context

- Teacher supply crisis (Harford & Fleming, 2023)
- Increasing calls for greater diversity and inclusion in the teaching profession (Keane et al 2023, p.232)
- Implications for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers:
 - recruit more applicants
 - encourage those from diverse backgrounds to enter the teaching profession

Research Aims

1. **To capture if and how flexible modes of delivery encourage diversity in ITE**
2. To gain a deeper understanding of how students on a flexible delivery ITE programme engage with professional placement and the challenges and opportunities therein



1

Data Collection

Surveys and/or Focus Groups
June 2019 and May 2022

2

Participants

246 survey responses
11 focus group interviews

3

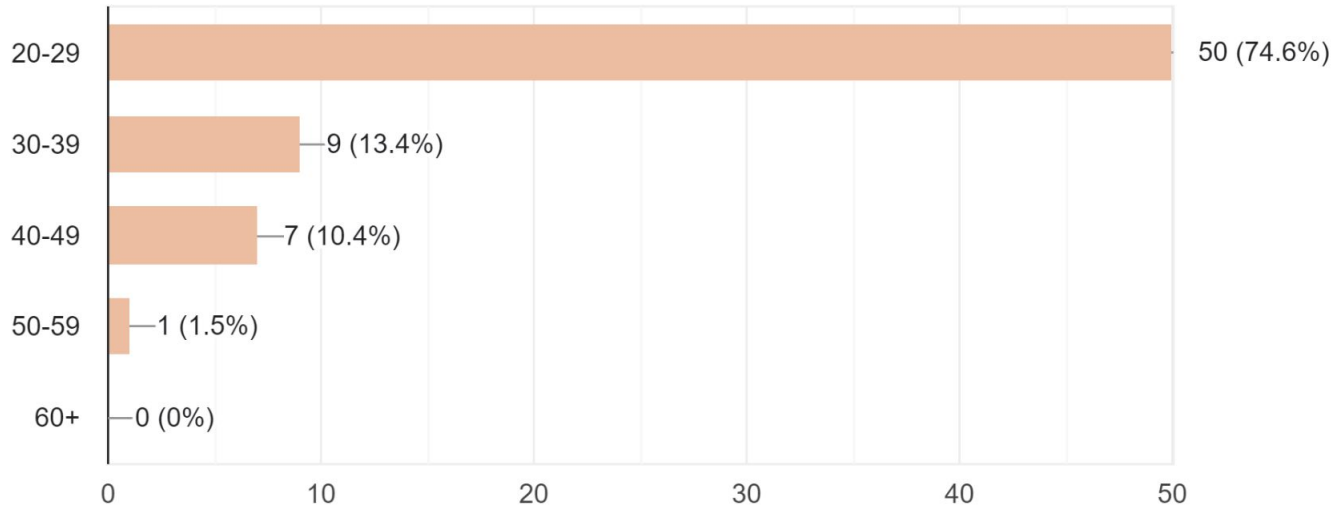
Data analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006)
thematic analysis

2019 PME1 Age Range

1. Age Bracket

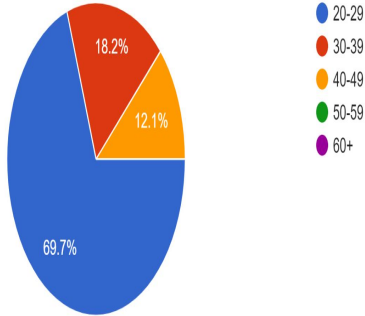
67 responses



2020, 2021, 2022 PME1 Age Range

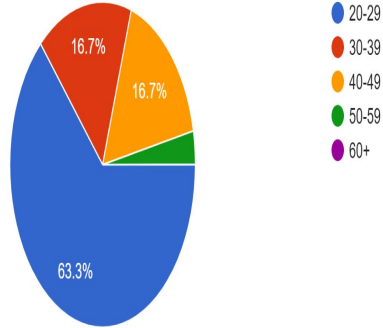
1. Age Bracket

33 responses



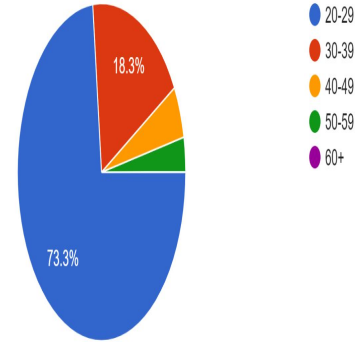
1. Age Bracket

30 responses



1. Age Bracket

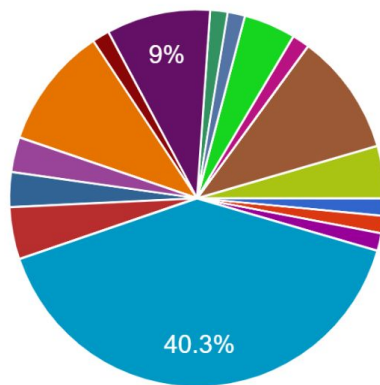
60 responses



2019 PME1 Geographical Spread

19. What county are you undertaking your placement in?

67 responses



- Carlow
- Cavan
- Clare
- Cork
- Donegal
- Dublin
- Galway
- Kerry

▲ 1/4 ▼

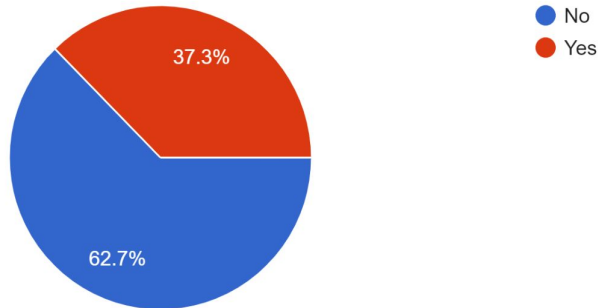
Top 4 Counties:

Dublin 40.3%
Louth 10.4%
Wexford 10.4%
Meath 9%

2019 PME1 and PME2 Previous Career

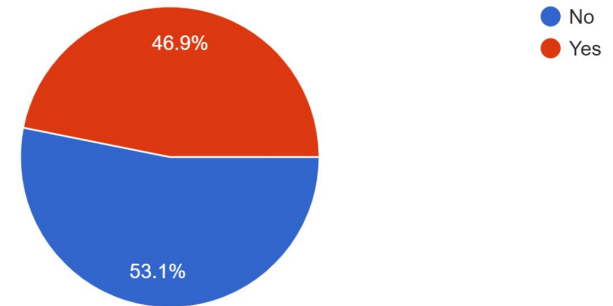
14. (a) Have you pursued a different career prior to applying for the PME?

67 responses



7 (a) Have you pursued a different career prior to applying for the PME?

32 responses



Why Move to Teaching from Other Careers?

I worked for the ESB as an engineer for a couple of years and I guess when I was there, I was in Turlough Hill so there was a lot of tours on for transition year students and stuff so I always ended up doing all of those tours. And you end up doing a presentation with the kids and stuff like that before you bring them on the tour and I was like, actually this is what I really like doing (2020)

I did engineering, I specialised in computer engineering programme for 12 years. I worked in Switzerland and Australia and I did ten years in Ireland and I was heading up a team of 12 or 15 people at stages.... I was doing a lot of training... So I did everything from start to finish and my favourite bit was when I went in, stood in front of the room and taught them how to use the programme that we had written. That was always my favourite bit (2019)

I kind of have been a teacher all my life with my former job as a plasterer so I had young fellows, always training young fellows, apprentices. So I have been dealing with young people all the time (2021)

I always dealt with kids though, even in my initial job I would have been dealing with secondary school children through Irish, I would have been working with the Irish language in secondary schools in a different capacity so it is kind of a natural progressing in lots of ways (2020)

I was also working at a University actually, I was teaching there, business communication and media communication while I was doing my PhD for extra money. And I really enjoyed that and I enjoyed that so much more that I know teaching was something I am really, really interested in (2019)

Flexible Modes of Delivery

- Blended Flexible Model of Delivery
- Evening lectures and tutorials on campus
- Synchronous and asynchronous online inputs
- Year long Placement with a wide geographical spread
- Enables students to immerse themselves in school communities anywhere in Ireland

Professional Placement

The year long placement allows you to become fully immersed in school life... I feel this is a distinct advantage. I get to cover the course content (experience) and get to develop stronger relationships with my students.

The year long placement is extremely beneficial. It allows you to engage and integrate into the school community more effectively. It allows you to build up a relationship with staff and students. It is also closer to the reality of school life when you have graduated and enter the profession.

Year long placement was probably my favorite aspects of the PME. By being in the school the full year I really got the chance to become a member of the school community and build real relationships with staff and students. Experiencing a full year in school including assessment times, report times, parent teacher meetings, staff meeting etc. gave me a true feeling of how a school year will feel when I am in my own job.

You get a real taste of the profession.

Choosing Flexibility

Participants had varied and multiple reasons for seeking to engage with flexible learning.

The blended delivery appealed to me as someone with a dependant it would be hard for me to travel 2 and a half hours up the road daily. This would also impact me financially.

The opportunity to study online and work during the week was the main factor, as I live in Laois and have two young kids.

Year long placement with evening delivery of lectures. This can't be overstated!! Having gone through the PME process I can safely say that I would not have been able to complete it under any other structure.

The flexibility was really important for me. To be able to study and work made it possible to register for the program.

Blended learning reduces student attrition, while enabling professional learning environments (Poon, 2013).

Continuing Responsibilities

- Transitioned from other careers
- Continued to have personal and financial responsibilities that precluded them from daytime study.
- Evening and flexible delivery provided them with the opportunity to embark on teaching as a career yet continue to service outstanding commitments.

Many of the students fit with Borden's notion of 'nontraditional' students in that they already hold undergraduate degrees, are established in professional careers and have families who financially depend on them (Borden et al., 2004)

Around flexibility, I was giving up an extremely well paid job and so to have the opportunity to try and continue to earn money while studying, you know with mortgages and bills and stuff to pay, you can't really ignore unfortunately.

It meant I could bring the kids to school, pick the kids up from school and then college so if I got out quick enough I would still be there for them going to bed and that to me was everything... I didn't want someone else bringing them to school and picking them up from school. So for me it was the only option. If I didn't get in here I probably wouldn't have done it. It really is the most flexible, I found.

It is important that students are given opportunities to pursue programmes of study without disruption of their professional and personal lives (Quinn, Garst, Bowers, & Weston, 2020)

Closing Comments

Homogeneous structures in Higher Education run the risk of turning student heterogeneity into homogeneity (Marczok, 2016).

"A commitment to diversifying the teaching profession needs to be accompanied by a commitment to supporting and ensuring equity for teachers from under-represented groups throughout the teaching career pathway" (Keane et al 2023, p.232).



Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Contact

Majella.McSharry@dcu.ie

Irene.White@dcu.ie

Twitter:

[@MajellaMcSharry](https://twitter.com/MajellaMcSharry)

[@IreneWhite_](https://twitter.com/IreneWhite_)

DCU Institute of Education