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PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS FOR TEACHING AS A CAREER: A SNAPSHOT AT A TIME OF TRANSITION

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Recent graduates of teacher-education programmes in Ireland are entering their careers at a time characterised by an erosion of teacher autonomy, increased bureaucratic demands, and narrower curriculum specifications. These changes are typical features of what Sahlberg (2011) has termed the global educational reform movement (GERM), which evidence suggests may have a negative impact on teacher morale, and on how teaching as a career is perceived. This, in turn, may adversely affect teacher recruitment and retention. The study presented in this paper examined the career expectations of two cohorts of Irish pre-service teachers (n=494) at the point of transition between college and work. The data gathered were also used to investigate if recent changes to the B.Ed. degree programme are associated with changes in career expectations. It was found that teachers indicated strong expectations on doing a worthwhile job, finding satisfaction in pupil achievement and on personal fulfilment. Expectations with regard to the adequacy of salaries were low, however, diminishing further in the period from 2014 to 2016.

Issues of attrition and turnover within the teaching profession have received a great deal of attention over the years (e.g., Borman & Dowling, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006). Rates vary internationally, but problems with teacher retention have been especially pronounced in the UK, the US, and Australia (Coolahan, 2003). The most recent national estimates from the US suggest that eight percent of public school teachers leave the profession, and a further eight percent transfer to a different establishment, over the course of one year (Goldring, Taie & Riddles, 2014). As career mobility is increasingly common, it should be acknowledged that this pattern is not necessarily unique to teaching (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2007; Watt & Richardson, 2008). However, given the negative impact on schools (Coolahan, 2003), and on individual pupil achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013), attrition and turnover within the teaching profession are issues that undoubtedly warrant attention.

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

Research addressing these questions has revealed a number of factors associated with teacher attrition. These include lack of administrative support, insufficient mentoring, poor pupil discipline, large numbers of low-achieving pupils, excessive bureaucratic demands, lack of autonomy, desire to spend more time with family, dissatisfaction with salary and career prospects, and the perceived low status of the profession (Clandinin et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Guarino et al., 2006; Kersaint et al., 2007; Scherff, 2008; Smethem, 2007; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). These factors are complex and inter-related. For instance, teachers may tolerate low salaries if other working conditions are satisfactory (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Lieu & Meyer, 2005). Similarly, the challenges associated with working in schools serving disadvantaged areas may be alleviated by the presence of effective leadership and supportive administrators (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

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

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

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

One factor that may be especially worthy of consideration when making sense of teachers' decisions to stay or leave is that of their initial expectations about teaching as a career. A longitudinal cohort study by Wilhelm, Dewhurst-Savellis and Parker (2000) revealed that those who reported greater 'imagined pleasure' prior to entering the teaching profession were more likely to remain there over the course of 15 years, suggesting that positive expectations can influence teachers' career trajectories. On the other hand, evidence from the field of organisational psychology suggests that *unrealistically* high career expectations are associated with disappointment and frustration (Buckley, Fedor, Veres, Wiese & Carraher, 1998). As Watt and Richardson (2008) contend, it may be the case that regardless of the objective demands and returns associated with teaching, if these are poorly aligned with teachers' initial expectations, disillusionment and early attrition are more likely.

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

To date, however, research focusing specifically on PSTs' expectations has been relatively rare. Kyriacou et al. (2003) explored the issue with a sample comprised of 121 PSTs from a post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE) course in York, England, and 75 PSTs from a B.Ed. programme in Stavanger, Norway. Each group of PSTs completed a 16-item Likert-style questionnaire exploring their expectations of teaching at the beginning of their respective teacher education programmes. Responses revealed that a majority of PSTs endorsed the social value of teaching, and were confident that they would derive job satisfaction from pupil achievement. Furthermore, many acknowledged that teaching would involve some 'bad times', but nonetheless expected to stay in the profession for more than 10 years. Many had high expectations with regard to career progression, indicating that they anticipated holding management positions within a few years. Some concerns were also evident, most notably in relation to having sufficient time to do a good job. The latter possibly reflects some awareness amongst PSTs of the workload experienced by new entrants, and the increased paperwork and bureaucratic demands associated with education reform and accountability, both of which have been linked with teacher attrition (Clandinin et al., 2015; Ingersoll, Merrill & May, 2016). A qualitative study by Thomson and McIntyre (2013) yielded similar findings to those of Kyriacou et al. (2003), with prospective teachers expressing positive expectations about the intrinsic rewards gained from helping pupils learn, alongside some negative expectations, such as job-related stress and pressure from higher authorities.

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

It has been shown that PSTs' expectations, along with all of the factors mentioned above, may differ across educational and cultural contexts (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Ireland represents an interesting context, as, unlike many other Western countries, it has historically enjoyed relatively favourable levels of teacher retention. Indeed, the findings of a longitudinal

study of B.Ed. graduates in Ireland indicated that just 11.9% left teaching over the first 10 years following graduation (Killeavy, 2001) – many to pursue other caring professions, further qualifications, travel opportunities, or other areas of long-standing interest, while not ruling out a return to teaching in the future. As such, it is unlikely that this attrition reflects adverse teaching experiences. The modest sample size of 151 limits the generalisability of these findings, although Coolahan (2003), in Ireland's background report for the OECD's study of teacher retention, reaffirmed that the issue has not been a cause for official concern in Ireland, due to the over-supply of high-quality and motivated candidates for initial teacher education, and the respected status of the profession in this country.

This situation may not continue, however (Morgan, Kitching, & O'Leary, 2007). In recent years, the Irish education system has entered a phase of rapid change against a backdrop of global educational reform. Although Irish educational policy initially resisted the agenda of accountability and performativity evident in many other countries (Looney, 2006), these now seem to be a more consistent feature of reform. The new approach has been characterised by events such as the decision to publish school inspectors' reports (Sugrue, 2006), and the introduction of regular mandated standardised testing at primary level, as part of the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (DES, 2011), following disappointing outcomes for Irish pupils in PISA 2009 (Cosgrove, Shiel, Archer, & Perkins, 2010). Increased accountability has also been evident in the higher education sector, in the form of European-led compliance-focused accountability in module and programme design (Conway & Murphy, 2013).

It can be argued therefore that today's B.Ed. graduates are entering a distinct era characterised by an erosion of teacher autonomy, increased legislative and bureaucratic demands, and narrower curriculum specifications (Conway & Murphy, 2013). These features represent typical outcomes of the global educational reform movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2011). Regrettably, however, evidence from international contexts suggests that such changes can be associated with undesirable consequences, not least for teacher morale (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011) and consequently, teacher retention (Ingersoll et al., 2016). Against this backdrop of global educational reform, it now seems appropriate to map the expectations of prospective teachers in Ireland. This, we hope, will add considerable value to our understanding of the particular patterns of teacher attrition, turnover, and retention that feature in the Irish context.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As part of a larger study on teachers' lives and careers (see for example, O'Leary & Morgan, 2011), the career expectations scale, developed by Kyriacou et al. (2003) for use in England and Norway, was adapted and incorporated into a questionnaire investigating the views of students in Ireland on their pre-service teacher education and the teaching profession more generally. The adapted scale comprised 11 statements about career expectations and was prefaced with the question "When you are a qualified working teacher how certain do you feel that …?" Respondents were provided with four response options: *not sure at all, somewhat unsure, fairly sure, absolutely certain* (see Table 1 for amendments to original scale). The questionnaire was administered in May at the end of the 2013/14 academic year directly to third year B.Ed. (primary) PSTs at St Patrick's College, Dublin City University during one of their final plenary lectures. This cohort of 471 PSTs was the last one exiting the College following the completion of a three-year B.Ed. degree that had been in place in Ireland since 1974. A total of 295 PSTs completed the questionnaire representing a response rate of 63 percent. The gender breakdown (83% female and 17% male) mirrored the overall gender split for all PSTs exiting that year. Since the change from a three to a four-year B.Ed. degree in 2012 might be expected to impact on career expectations, it was decided to contact the first cohort (n = 384) exiting the College from the four-year B.Ed. degree by email and to invite them to complete the questionnaire survey online. (These PSTs were on school placement during their final semester so it was not possible to administer the instrument directly to them as had been done in 2014). In all, 196 PSTs submitted completed questionnaires – a response rate of 51 percent. As males accounted for 25% of the returns, they were slightly overrepresented in this sample.

The Career Expectations Scale

The psychometric properties of the scale were examined initially using exploratory factor analyses on the pooled 2014 and 2016 data. Results from the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (.83) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .0005$) supported the application of factor analysis to the scale. Principal axis factoring and inspections of scree plots revealed the presence of one large factor with an eigenvalue of 3.4. Most items had strong positive loadings on this first factor – ranging in value from .35 to .76 – with a mean loading of .54.

Two items, "you will be happy with the amount of holidays? " and "you will have a good rapport with your pupils? " had marginally stronger loadings on the second factor (eigenvalue = 1.2). However, these values were not interpreted as evidence that the scale was measuring an additional valid construct beyond career expectations. The proportion of variance explained by the first factor was 31 percent. Separate analyses conducted by year group revealed little difference between the groups: variances explained from the factor analyses were 30 and 33 percent for the 2014 and 2016 cohorts respectively and scale reliabilities, as measured by the Cronbach alpha, were .77 and .78 which can be considered satisfactory (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Comparative psychometric values for the original scale are not provided by Kyriacou et al. (2003) or by Kyriacou and Kunc (2007).

Data from all 494 PSTs who responded to the scale were used to answer two questions: (1) to what extent are pre-service teachers optimistic about teaching as a career? (2) has the introduction of a four-year B.Ed. degree made pre-service student-teachers more or less optimistic about teaching as a career? For the purposes of quantitative analysis, the following numerical values were assigned to the four response options used to rate each of the 11 statements on the expectation scale: 4 = absolutely certain; 3 = fairly sure; 2 = somewhat unsure; 1 = not sure at all.

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

FINDINGS

Mean ratings and associated standard deviations are presented in Table 1. The statements are numbered as in the questionnaire but, for ease of interpretation, are rank ordered from high to low mean ratings (i.e. beginning with statements with mean ratings closer to absolutely certain) for all 494 respondents. Findings for the 2014 and 2016 cohorts are also presented separately.

Focusing on the data for the total set of respondents, an argument can be made that the rank ordered statements can be clustered into three broad categories – responses approaching absolute certainty (a rating of 4), those closer to the fairly sure response option (a rating of 3) and those closer to the not sure at all response option (a rating of 1). The ratings for the first three

Table 1

Pre-service Teachers' Expectations for Teaching as a Career

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

*Statistically significant difference in bold.

Note 1: Scale adapted from Kyriacou et al., 2003; original phrasing in brackets; statement 11 not in original scale.

Note 2: Original response options (unlikely, fairly sure, quite sure, absolutely certain) were changed to: not sure at all, somewhat unsure, fairly sure, absolutely certain.

statements (5, 1, and 4) indicate that the respondents, on average, were close to being absolutely certain about them. In the literature the amount of holidays is considered to be an extrinsic element of job satisfaction for teachers (see for example, Seker, Deniz, & Görgen, 2015) and this variable is top of the list here. Given that the length of the Irish primary school year (181 days) is close to the OECD average of 185 days (OECD, 2014), it is probably not surprising that PSTs have a high degree of certainty that they will be happy with this aspect of their job. However, extrinsic factors, even ones associated with generous holidays, while important to recruitment, are not necessarily key to understanding why teachers remain in or leave the profession (Coolahan, 2003). The next two statements (1 and 4), relating to expectations about important intrinsic factors associated with teacher retention, elicited responses close to the highest rating. These PSTs felt very sure that they would be doing a worthwhile job and would enjoy a good rapport with their pupils.

The second category consists of six statements (7, 10, 6, 11, 3 and 2) with means clustered around a rating of 3 – the fairly sure response option. The first four of these relate to expectations about satisfaction with pupil achievement, career choice and personal and intellectual fulfilment. Studies have shown that a powerful predictor of retention is the degree of optimism among PSTs about gaining pleasure from a career in teaching (e.g., Wilhelm et al., 2000). The next two statements have slightly lower ratings. Still, most respondents felt fairly sure that teaching as a career would be respected by people – an extrinsic factor that features in the literature on why people enter and stay in or leave a career (Kitching, Morgan & O'Leary, 2009). The relatively positive expectation about having enough time to do a good job (overall mean rating of 2.88) could be considered surprising in the context of debates about curriculum overload in Irish primary schools that were occurring while these PSTs were progressing through college (see NCCA, 2010).

Just two statements (9 and 8) make up a third category with means of 2.59 and 2.28 respectively. Respondents indicated that, on average, they were somewhat unsure about the extent to which the B.Ed. degree will have prepared them to teach and the extent to which a teacher's salary would be sufficient for their lifestyle. The 2016 PSTs' response to the B.Ed. question might be considered disappointing given that this was the first cohort to emerge from the new four-year programme shaped to a large extent by pre-service teacher education laid down by the Teaching Council (2011). Perhaps not as surprising were the expectations regarding salary, given the economic environment that

prevailed in Ireland during the period of the study and the fact that public service pay had been cut significantly during the post *Celtic Tiger* years.

Turning now to the disaggregated data, it is clear that the same three broad categorisations discussed above apply across the two cohorts. The rank ordering of statements is almost identical (the exception being that for the 2014 data statements 1 and 5 switch ranks as do statements 7 and 10[1]) and the mean values and standard deviations are more or less consistent. There are four statements (starred) where the mean values are statistically significantly different across the two cohorts. In two of these statements (5 and 4), the 2016 mean is significantly higher ($t(493) = 1.43$, $p<.002$; $t(493) = 2.08$, $p<.001$ respectively) but the effect sizes, as measured by the Hedges' (1981) g statistic are small (.15 and .18 respectively) and render the differences unimportant. For statement 10, the 2016 mean is statistically lower ($t(493) = -2.21$, $p<.01$) but, again, the effect size (.20) is small. However, the differences between the two means for the statement 8 pertaining to expectations about a teacher's salary is worth noting. Not only is the 2016 mean statistically significantly lower than the 2014 mean ($t(493) =5.86$, $p<.001$) , but the effect size of .54 is classified by Hedges and Olkin (1985) as moderately large. This finding could be regarded as surprising as the opposite might have been predicted. One might have expected that the 2016 cohort would be more optimistic about teachers' salaries than their 2014 counterparts since the more recent cohort was leaving college just as the first verifiable trends in data showing signs of an economic recovery were appearing (European Commission, 2016). Time will tell if these data signify a growing dissatisfaction with teachers' remuneration but it is of interest that salary has been identified as an important variable in studies of teachers leaving the profession (Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007).

Taking the data as a whole, the overall means presented at the foot of Table 1 hover close to a value of 3, indicating that the 2014 and 2016 exiting cohorts from St Patrick's College had reasonably high expectations for teaching as a career. This is consistent with the findings of a study conducted by O'Leary and Morgan (2011) which examined how career expectations changed as a cohort of B. Ed. students (primary) progressed through their programme at St

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

Patrick's College from entering in 2006 until exiting in 2009. Those data showed that, while career expectations diminished somewhat through the three years, in general the PSTs remained optimistic about teaching as a career. The data also showed that on entering college, the PSTs in Ireland had higher expectations than similar cohorts from the UK and Norway that took part in the Kyriacou et al. (2003) study.

Gender Differences

The data gathered were also used to examine if gender played a part in determining the extent to which respondents had high or low expectations for their careers. As the data in Table 2 indicate, males had somewhat lower expectations than females on the overall scale, but the differences are relatively small. Even in relation to the salary issue (not shown), gender differences are inconsequential e.g., overall means of 2.32 and 2.18 for females and males respectively. Within cohorts, the gender differences are also small, 3.19 versus 3.10 and 3.16 versus 3.02 for females and males in 2014 and 2016 respectively. Due to the imbalance in the numbers of female and male respondents, statistical tests could not be used validly to assess the degree to which the mean differences are statistically significant.

Table 2
Gender Differences in PSTs' Expectations for Teaching as a Career

		n	%	Mean	St Dev
All Respondents	Female	397	83	3.18	.35
	Male	80	17	3.06	.38
2014 Exiting Cohort	Female	254	88	3.19	.35
	Male	34	12	3.10	.39
2016 Exiting Cohort	Female	143	143	3.16	.36
	Male	46	46	3.02	.42

Note: Data on gender were not available for all respondents.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Two research questions guided the research presented in this paper. The first question focused on the extent to which student-teachers were optimistic about teaching as a career; the second was about whether the introduction of a four-year B.Ed. degree programme was associated with PSTs becoming more

or less optimistic about teaching as a career. The data indicate that the majority of respondents who were completing the B.Ed. programme at St Patrick's College in 2014 and 2016 had high expectations for teaching as a career. The 2016 cohort held expectations that were similar to those of their 2014 counterparts. In relation to teachers' salaries, however, the 2016 cohort revealed expectations that were significantly lower in both a statistical and practical sense. If it is logical to assume that high expectations for a career are good for recruitment and retention, then the hope is that the high expectations of these cohorts of student-teachers will continue into the future. Moreover, if as the literature suggests, entering a profession with positive expectations can have a significant impact on retention, the issue of large percentages of teachers leaving the profession in Ireland is unlikely to materialise as long as future generations of student-teachers are as optimistic as the cohorts that exited the B.Ed. programme in 2014 and 2016. However, such positive expectations cannot be taken for granted, given the many factors currently affecting initial teacher education and the working conditions of teachers. These include lengthening courses of study, new Teaching Council criteria and guidelines, the increasing numbers of teachers attending initial teacher-education programmes in private colleges and in the UK, and the financial restrictions associated with fluctuations in the national and global economy.

A number of additional points are worth noting. First, the data set presented here provides an interesting snapshot of PSTs' expectations of teaching at a time of significant change in education nationally and internationally (Lysaght & O'Leary, 2017). As such, the data set may be important as a baseline for future comparisons of how PSTs' expectations for the B.Ed. degree, and for teaching as a career, change over time in light of the many issues likely to impinge on the teaching profession in the years ahead. In particular, there is a need to follow up longitudinally with a sub-group from this cohort of PSTs – those who began their careers working in disadvantaged schools. This is in view of the fact that in Ireland there has been an issue with teacher turnover in these schools i.e., with teachers leaving the school rather than the profession (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2014). It would be interesting to know what role, if any, career expectations played in teachers deciding to stay in or leave these particular schools. More generally, there is merit also in continuing to gather longitudinal data from future PSTs, beginning with the first cohort to complete the 4-year B.Ed. cycle in its entirety. The promise of such data is timely in light of the recent joint publication by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Teaching Council (2017) reporting the findings and

recommendations of the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Teacher Supply. A number of recommendations in this report are aimed at ensuring that planning for future teacher supply is based on more secure and sustainable foundations than heretofore. Mindful of "the lack of historical data and the difficulties experienced in engaging with data held by sections within the DES, the Teaching Council, schools and ITE providers" (DES/Teaching Council, 2017, p. 36), the TWG's call for ready access to data within and across the educational system to inform future decisions in this area is noteworthy. Trend data on PSTs' expectations of readiness to assume teaching positions and their anticipation of remaining in the profession could be helpful in informing on-going national conversations regarding teacher supply, attrition and retention. In light of the finding of "a modest but steady outflow (in the order of 2%) of permanently-employed teachers leaving prior to reaching retirement age" (DES/Teaching Council, 2017, p.17), such trend data could provide important information regarding potential triggers that prompt exit by teachers within the first few years of assuming the role. In this context, it is important to continue to survey PSTs to determine if reduced expectations correlate with subsequent teacher attrition and, if not, what kinds of retention strategies help to arrest attrition among young teachers whose pre-service expectations suggest uncertainty about teaching as a profession in the long-term.

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

Exploration by Kim and Cho (2014) of the nature and extent of the inter-relationships between PSTs' motivation, sense of teaching efficacy and expectations of reality shock highlights the criticality of helping PSTs to anticipate the inevitable gaps between what they learn in their pre-service teacher-education programme and what they experience in their first year(s) on the job. Complementary research by Tang, Wong and Cheng (2016), into the conceptual and practical aspects of initial teacher education (ITE), serves to underline the distinct but essential contributions of both higher education and schools to professional pedagogical and content knowledge, on the one hand, and expertise in the practical realities of teachers' work in schools, on the other. Cumulatively, this body of research foregrounds the need for future investigations of the nature and extent of PSTs' anticipation and subsequent experience of reality or praxis shock during their first year(s) in teaching and of the concomitant factors contributing to such experiences. Further, it highlights the importance of optimising PSTs' experiences of school-based, pre-service practice in an effort to allay expectations of reality shock and maintain PTSs' expectations of their own competencies to meet such challenges as advocated (Tang, Cheng, & Cheng, 2014). Given the significant extension of pre-service in-school placement from 16 weeks in the 3-year B.Ed. programme to 27 weeks in the first iteration of the 4-year degree, now reduced to 24 weeks, research of this kind is of particular importance in the Irish context. If used in concert with trend data on PSTs' expectations, data of this kind would be particularly valuable to the Teaching Council, the DES and providers of teacher-education programmes in helping to establish the optimal university-school-based partnership in the preparation of future B.Ed. graduates.

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

relationship between PSTs' identity development, their motivation, self-efficacy and career expectations, and the implications these have for retention.

In common with PSTs, as teacher educators, we bring to our interpretation of these data deeply-held views, understandings and beliefs about what it means to be a teacher, how long the teaching career should be and so forth. However, the data reported in this paper serve to remind us that even at pre-service level, the "professional exploration" (Rinke, 2013) gene is likely at play with modulations in student expectations of teaching as a career, reflecting a more fundamental, albeit tacit, anticipation of non-linear careers and life trajectories. This is hardly surprising given the unrelenting discourse about education as an inherently global phenomenon, no longer restricted or fenced in by traditional nation-state geographical borders but enabled by international policy transfer, curriculum modularisation and assessment standardisation – all oriented to the development of the adaptive 21st century skills, prerequisites for survival in the precarious and unpredictable future that lies ahead. By implication, the pre-service teachers of today are tomorrow's educational pioneers; they are expected not only to foster and enable in the next generation an innate ability to anticipate and respond creatively to the unpredictable, but they too have to remain malleable to future oscillations in global educational trends that manifest in changing educational policies and practices. Framed in this way, perhaps modulations in PSTs' expectations of teaching should be welcomed as indicators that B.Ed. graduates are emerging as critical, reflective practitioners, energised and challenged equally by the unpredictability of the postmodern education system.

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