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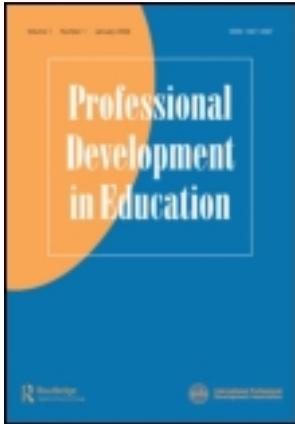
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The quality of teacher educators in the European policy debate: actions and measures to improve the professionalism of teacher educators

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This study examines how the contemporary European policy debate addresses the further development of the quality of teacher educators. A classification framework based on the literature on professionalism was used to compare European and Member State policy actions and measures on the quality of teacher educators through an analysis of seven European policy documents and a questionnaire completed by key policy-makers in 16 European countries. The findings show that European Union policy documents pay limited attention to the quality of teacher educators. However, the professionalism of teacher educators receives more policy attention at the level of individual Member States. Most of these policies are part of general policies for higher education teachers, while the initiative lies with governments and teacher education institutes. The role of the professionals themselves in developing policies to strengthen their professionalism seems very limited.

Keywords: teacher educator; teacher policy; European policy; professionalism

Introduction

It is generally accepted that teachers are the most important in-school factor influencing the quality of pupil learning (Barber and Mourshed 2007, Hattie 2009) and it seems therefore appropriate to assume that teacher educators have an important influence on the quality of the learning of student-teachers. The importance of teacher educators is increasingly recognised in scholarly discussions, as reflected in special issues of the *European Journal of Teacher Education* (vol. 31 [2]) and of *Professional Development in Education* (vol. 36 [1/2]). Nonetheless, the amount of research on teacher educators is limited, and even more so when it comes to policies relating to teacher education:

> Although the international literature has grown in the last five years [. . .], there is still little empirical research which focuses directly on the professional learning of this unique occupational group. And policy documents about teacher education rarely include a strong focus on teacher educators' professional development. (Murray and Harrison 2008, p. 109)

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Recent research on the professional development of teacher educators contributes to our understanding of various aspects of teacher education. One aspect that receives quite some attention is the identity of teacher educators (Murray and Male 2005, Swennen *et al.* 2010). With increasing demands on teacher educators to be more involved in research and publishing, the development of a research identity of teacher educators in particular has been studied (Murray 2010). Practice-based enquiry methods such as self-study by teacher educators (Loughran *et al.* 2004) are promoted to improve the practice of teacher educators and contribute to the knowledge base relating to teacher educators. A second theme that has been addressed is that of the professional development of teacher educators. There is now a growing body of knowledge about the induction of teacher educators in Europe (Van Velzen *et al.* 2010) and in specific countries such as England (Boyd and Harris 2010) and Israel (Shagrir 2010). There is also an emerging body of knowledge on ways to increase the quality of teacher educators that has a focus on the learning of experienced professionals, such as learning in a community. A third group of studies are those that examine the development and use of standards and competences of teacher educators in various countries, such as the Netherlands (Koster and Dengerink 2001) and the United States (Klecka *et al.* 2009).

The majority of studies relating to teacher education have focused on the professional development of individual teacher educators, and hardly addressed issues related to more systemic policy measures that support the professional development of teacher educators as a professional group. Given the recent attention to the quality of teachers and teacher education within formal policy documents of the European Union, we expect increasing attention to the quality of teacher educators within this area of policy-making. Thus the main question of this study is: are teacher educators recognised as a specific professional group as reflected in educational policies of the European Union at large and in individual European countries, and, if so, what are the proposed formal regulations and measures to strengthen the quality of teacher educators as a professional group?

At this point it may be useful to reflect on who the teacher educators are. In a more formal way the definition of teacher educator can be formulated as someone who contributes in a formal way to the learning and development of teachers. This implies that, next to the more traditional group of teacher educators, those who work in teacher education institutes, school-based supervisors and mentors are teacher educators and so are those who work with teachers on their further professional development.

As there is no previous research looking at government policies for teacher educators, this study can be characterised as a small-scale explorative research exercise. The study consists of two parts. Firstly, we analysed relevant European documents about education to gain an insight into how teacher educators are addressed in these policy documents. Secondly, we issued a questionnaire among key policy makers who represent their country in the cluster 'Teachers and Trainers' of the European Commission.

As we focus on the quality of teacher educators as a professional group we use the notion of professionalism. Based on the literature about professionalism, we developed a framework that enabled us to investigate and compare European and national policies on teacher educators and this framework was used to design the instruments for data collection (see next section). In the third section we present the results of the study, and in the final part we draw conclusions, make recommendations for further research and discuss the implications of the results.

Theoretical framework

The study of professions and professionalism has a tradition in sociological research that dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century (Evetts 2006, Crook 2008). Sociologists have tried to identify the specific values that are connected to professions and the criteria that distinguish professions from other types of occupations. Various, shifting perspectives were used in this discourse, each emphasising a different aspect of professionalism (Abbott 1988, Evetts 2006). One way of looking at the professionalism of teachers is to compare the profession of teachers with other professions, such as doctors or lawyers, and to identify similarities and differences. In this 'traits' or 'attributes' approach, four essential qualities of professions are emphasised (Abbott 1988, Hargreaves and Goodson 1996, Evetts 2006): professional autonomy and control of the professionals of their own work; the entry to the profession; the central values and good conduct within the profession through the use of ethical codes and sanctions; and a strong academic knowledge base that underlies professional activities.

A second approach to the concept of professionalism focuses on expectations in today's neo-liberal, competitive knowledge society. In this approach, often referred to as 'new professionalism' as opposed to 'classic professionalism', the expertise of professionals is emphasised (Eraut 1994, Goodson and Hargreaves 1996, Evans 2008). This view often resulted in the explicit formulation of standards for professional performance, public accountability of outcomes of professional performance, lifelong professional development of the members of the profession, collaboration with colleagues and stakeholders, and involvement in innovation of the profession. Practical knowledge, practice-based education and practice-based research are considered valid and valuable additions to more traditional and academic knowledge, education and research.

A third approach focuses on fundamental differences within what has been termed 'logics' (Freidson 2001) in the labour market. Freidson identifies three logics – bureaucracy, the free market and professionalism – and he identifies the different qualities that are needed to operate within each of them. For professionals, the emphasis is on quality control from within the profession itself, through explicit professional values and ethics that are laid down in professional codes of conduct (Atkinson and Claxton 2000, Furlong 2000, Freidson 2001, Evetts 2009). The fundamental ethical and altruistic character of professions is emphasised (Lunt 2008), which is related to the power imbalance between professional and client; or in the case of education, teachers and students.

The three perspectives of professionalism also emphasise different stakeholders. In the first and the third perspectives (the classic profession and professionalism as a third logic, respectively), the profession itself (through professional bodies, associations, etc.) is in the lead; while in the second perspective, government and employers/managers are considered as leading the development of the professions.

The framework

Although several of the above-mentioned perspectives on professionalism have been criticised, together they create a multifaceted view on professionalism. Based on these views, we identified elements of professionalism for our analytical framework, namely: the use of professional standards and ethical codes to regulate the work and professional quality of the members of a profession; entry regulations in terms of required training programmes or qualifications; the lifelong learning of

professionals (which includes induction and programmes for continuing professional development); collaboration within and outside the profession; accountability for professional quality; the use of an extended knowledge base; and engagement in research to develop the knowledge base and to support innovations.

The multifaceted view of professionalism served as the input to develop a framework (see Figure 1) that was used to analyse European policy documents and

1.   General concerns about the professionalism of teacher educators

- Publicly expressed concerns about the professionalism of teacher educators

- Proposals to improve the professionalism of teacher educators

- Committees and advisory boards that give advice about the professionalism of teacher educators

2.   Integration of policy measures in formal regulations for teacher education

- National legislation on the quality of teacher educators

- Inclusion of the quality of teacher educators in accreditation programmes

- Inclusion of the quality of teacher educators in accountability systems

- Selection criteria for entry to the profession

3.   Specific measures that contribute to the professionalism of teacher educators

- Standards for teacher educators

- Ethical code for teacher educators

- Formal education (courses or a complete Master's programme) to become a teacher educator

- Induction programmes for teacher educators

- Resources and requirements for continuous professional development

- Participation in regional, national and international networks

- Development of a practical knowledge base for teacher educators

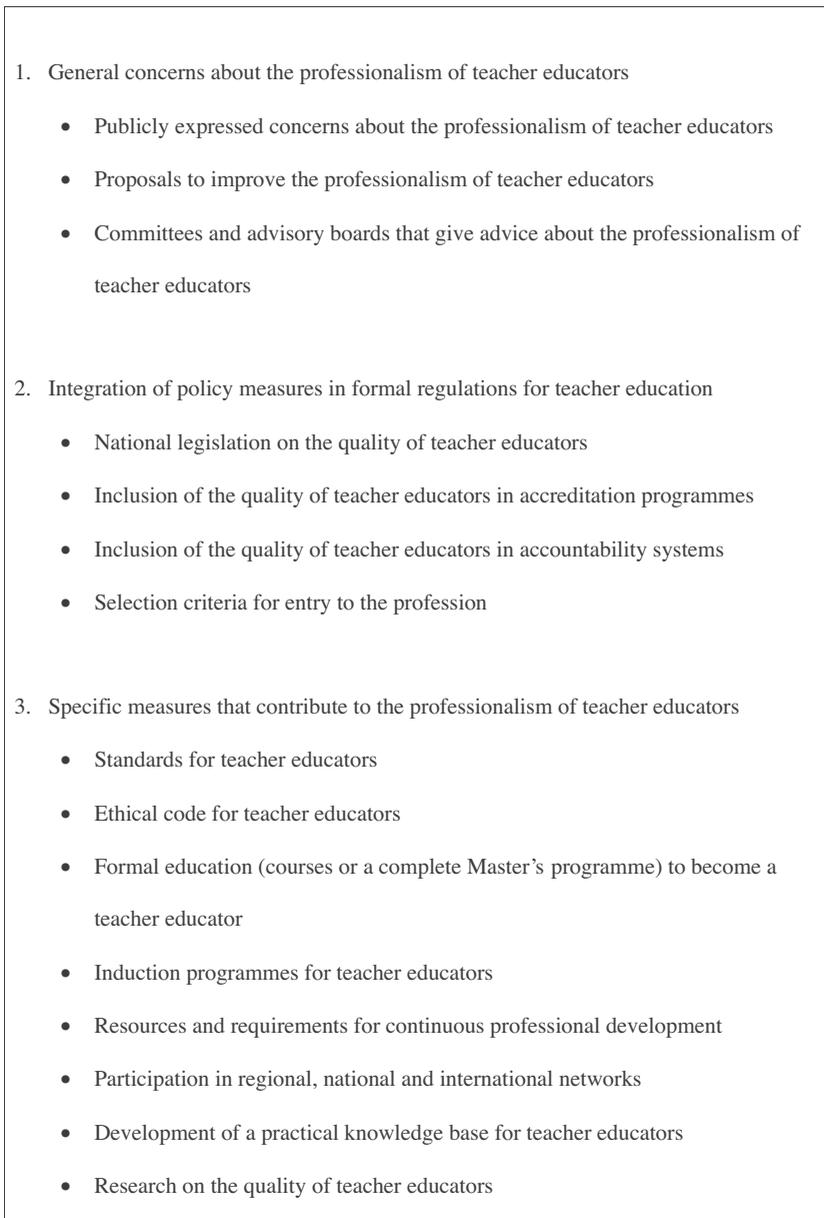- Research on the quality of teacher educators

Figure 1.   Framework of concerns, policy regulations and measures with respect to the professionalism of teacher educators.

national policies on the concerns, regulations and measures with respect to the professionalism of teacher educators.

Two items were added to the framework that are not based on the literature about professionalism. The discussion about the professionalism of teacher educators has only recently started and we therefore assumed that remarks in documents or from cluster members would rather express general concerns about the need to increase the attention for teacher educators as a professional group. In addition, the classification framework acknowledges that specific measures are sometimes embedded in formal regulations and legislation on teacher education or higher education (e.g. in national legislation, accreditation schemes, accountability systems or entry requirements; see section 2 in Figure 1). This resulted in the classification framework that is presented in Figure 1.

Methodology

We conducted an explorative study using the classification framework presented in Figure 1 to identify the concerns, formal regulations and policy measures with regard to teacher educators' professionalism. We used two instruments to answer the research question: a document analysis of relevant European policy documents, and a questionnaire that was used to collect data from national key policy experts in various Member States.

Content analysis of policy documents

Content analysis is a structured approach to analyse any kind of recorded communication, such as protocols of observation, video tapes or written documents (Kohlbacher 2006, Elo and Kyngäs 2007). Seven European policy documents that can be considered influential in the contemporary policy debate were included in the content analysis: *Teachers Matter*[1] (OECD 2005); *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (European Commission 2005); *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (European Commission 2007); Council conclusions on improving the quality of teacher education (European Council 2007), which summarise the main findings of some previous documents and formulate directions and conclusions for the further development of teacher education in Europe; *The Quality of Teachers* (ATEE 2006), in which the Association for Teacher Education in Europe contributes to the debate on teacher standards by making seven recommendations concerning the identification of indicators of teacher quality; *Teacher Education in Europe* (ETUCE 2008), a policy paper on teacher education from the European Trade Union Committee for Education; and Council conclusions on the professional development of teachers and school leaders (European Council 2009).

A deductive approach was applied, using the categories of the classification framework shown in Figure 1. All documents were searched for text fragments that contain information on teacher educators by using search terms such as 'teacher educator', 'teacher trainer', 'educator of teachers' or 'trainer of teachers'. Categories were then assigned to these fragments. To increase the reliability of the coding process, the coding was performed by two researchers: one researcher did the coding, and then discussed the results with the second researcher. Since only fragments that contain manifest content about teacher educators were included, the results of the

coding process did not yield many interpretations or much discussion between the researchers.[2]

Questionnaire for governmental representatives of European Union Member States

The questionnaire items corresponded closely with the concerns, regulations and measures of the classification framework presented in Figure 1. Some items had 'yes' and 'no' as answering categories (e.g. the item: 'In my country, the quality of teacher educators is a topic of research'), while other items invited respondents to tick the stakeholders that were involved in the particular action/measure. For example, the item 'In my country, concern is expressed about the quality of teacher educators by . . .' asked respondents to select one or more of the following stakeholders: government, heads of teacher education institutions, individual teacher educators, teacher unions, teacher agencies, higher education agencies, teacher educator associations. The main disadvantages of questionnaires are that items might not entirely fit with respondents' local contexts or, because of the language used, might be interpreted differently from how the researchers intended. It was therefore decided to invite the respondents to amplify their answers. For this, a free-text box after each item allowed the respondents to provide background information.

The questionnaire was sent to members[3] of the European Commission's Teachers and Trainers cluster. These Member State representatives are policy experts on the topic of teacher policy and teacher education in their respective states. The questionnaires were administered by email prior to a regular cluster meeting, during which the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. A reminder was emailed six weeks later. Completed questionnaires were returned by respondents in 16 countries, namely Austria, Cyprus, England, Estonia, Finland, Flanders, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Turkey. The analysis consisted of counting frequencies per answer category, followed by an examination of the amplifications per question.

Findings

This section presents our findings on an aggregated level, following the division of concerns, regulations and measures presented in Figure 1.

Expressed concerns

Concerns regarding teacher educators' professionalism are expressed quite frequently. Such concerns are clearly expressed in three documents (OECD 2005, ETUCE 2008, European Council 2009), and especially in the ETUCE policy paper, which states that European trade unions feel a strong need to improve the quality of teacher educators across Europe. Furthermore, the Council has invited the European Commission to prepare a study on the existing arrangements in Member States for selecting, recruiting and training teacher educators (European Council 2009).

The questionnaire revealed that all except the Flemish respondent feel that in their own countries the quality of teacher educators is regarded as an issue of concern, and that this has resulted in concrete proposals for improvements. Concerns have been expressed by national agencies responsible for quality evaluations of teacher education (e.g. in England, Hungary, the Netherlands and Sweden) or by

national committees (the Netherlands, Norway and Turkey). In five countries (Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Turkey), committees or advisory boards have been established to give advice about the quality of teacher educators.

The expressed concerns point especially to teacher educators' insufficient academic level. Proposals recommend increasing research capabilities by allocating more financial resources for PhD studies (England, the Netherlands and Norway) and upgrading the entry requirements for newly hired teacher educators. For example, in Sweden there is discussion about raising the required degree for entry-level positions to the PhD level.

Integration in formal regulations

Because of their European scope the documents did not provide any information about the Member States' national legislation. According to the respondents, there is specific legislation on teacher educators in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Romania and Turkey, while in the other Member States it is part of the general legislation for teachers in higher education.

The inclusion of quality criteria for teacher educators in accreditation procedures is becoming quite common. Most respondents (except those from Finland, Ireland, Italy and Turkey) mentioned that this is already common practice in their countries. The respondents indicated that accountability systems for the professional quality of teacher educators exist in Austria, England, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Romania. In the Netherlands there is a voluntary assessment procedure for teacher educators, which leads to formal registration in the national register of teacher educators, while the German respondent referred to formal accountability systems for gaining a PhD. The Norwegian and English respondents indicated that accountability systems are part of the general accreditation or inspection procedures of institutions or programmes. The Flemish respondent stated that the professional quality of teacher educators is the responsibility of individual teacher education institutions.

There is no clear policy regarding the selection criteria for entry to the profession. In some countries, criteria are set by national bodies or governments, as mentioned by the respondents from Estonia, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Sweden and Turkey, who stated that their governments or national higher education agencies require teacher educators to have completed specific courses or master's programmes. In other countries, such requirements are set by individual teacher education institutions and usually dictate the compulsory attendance of certain courses or workshops. There are no entry criteria in Hungary, Norway, Sweden or Turkey.

With regard to the content of the entry criteria, the findings indicate that separate, specific criteria for teacher educators are quite rare. In the majority of the countries, the criteria are similar to those that are applied for new teachers in other higher education sectors. These criteria usually refer to specific academic levels or teaching degrees, while in some countries (e.g. Hungary and Germany) additional criteria regarding practical teaching experience are set.

On the European level, there is attention to entry criteria but this attention is not observed in all policy documents: the ETUCE (2008) policy paper and the conclusions of the European Council (2009) on the professional development of teachers are the only documents that clearly propose actions in this area:

> ETUCE emphasises that all teachers should be educated to Master's level in higher
> education and, of course, teacher educators must have the qualifications required to be
> able to teach at that level. (ETUCE 2008, p. 34)

Although not clearly expressed, the ETUCE (2008) policy paper suggests that if
teachers need a master's degree, then teacher educators need a PhD in order to be
equipped to teach at master's level. This discussion can also be observed in individual Member States, for example in Sweden. The European Council (2009) emphasises that, next to high academic standards, having substantial practical teaching
experience is of paramount importance.

Specific actions and measures

Although the issue of standards for teacher educators receives some attention, large-scale implementation across Europe has not been achieved. Two documents (ATEE
2006, ETUCE 2008) plead for quite similar actions:

> If we want teacher educators to be role models for their student teachers, then teacher
> educators should be explicit about their own professional quality, the indicators of this
> quality and the way they use them to develop professionally in a systematic and self-regulated way. [...] The ATEE, as a professional community of teacher educators in
> Europe, will continue to stimulate communities of teacher educators to develop indicators of teacher educator quality within local or national contexts and to exchange such
> between their communities. (ATEE 2006, p. 8)

Both documents imply that the development of standards is not the responsibility of
Member States, and that teacher educators themselves must undertake the task of
formulating standards.

So far, standards for teacher educators appear to have been implemented in only
a few countries. In England, Flanders, Germany and Ireland, standards have been
developed by the heads of local teacher education institutions. It is unclear from the
respondents' comments whether these standards were developed on their own initiative or were initiated by national bodies. An explicit and formally acknowledged
national standard for teacher educators seems to exist only in the Netherlands,
where this standard was developed by VELON (the professional association for teacher educators).

Ethical codes for teacher educators appear to be non-existent. Respondents from
Finland, Germany, Ireland and Romania indicated that in their countries professional codes for teacher educators exist, but that it is unclear whether these codes
are explicitly focused on teacher educators and differ from ethical codes for teachers
in primary, secondary or further education. The respondent from Estonia referred to
a specific ethical code for teacher educators, but stated that the code is not widely
applied.

None of the respondents reported the existence of specific courses that must be
taken in order to become a teacher educator. To become a teacher educator, one has
to meet the selection criteria reported above.

Teacher educator induction programmes are rare and are not discussed in the
policy documents. There are no national policies in this area: support is entirely
dependent on local initiatives undertaken by universities or teacher education institutions (Austria, England, Estonia, Flanders, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway).

Opportunities for the continuing professional development of teacher educators were mentioned by nine respondents. Examples are participation in research projects and enrolment in PhD studies (Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). Continuing professional development is sometimes supported by the establishment of national expertise centres (England, Hungary, the Netherlands and Norway). The policy documents do not offer much information, with the exception of the ETUCE policy paper, which clearly addresses further professional development:

> In order to meet the demands placed on the profession, all teacher educators – including mentors at schools – should be given the opportunity to undertake proper lifelong learning of their own. Ongoing professional development is a must. Both time and financing should be made available. Agreements should be reached to allow sabbatical years for professional development. This must include provision for qualified replacement staff. (ETUCE 2008, p. 36)

Participation in professional networks seems to be common practice and is seen as a strong impetus for improving professionalism. It is, however, striking that respondents mainly referred to international opportunities such as participation in international Erasmus or Comenius projects, international research projects, international conferences or international professional networks. It seems that participation is primarily perceived as formal participation outside one's own work setting, although the Dutch respondent also mentioned possibilities that are more closely connected to everyday practice, such as participating in local networks of teacher education institutions and schools. The advantages of participation in such networks are clearly outlined in three policy documents (ATEE 2006, European Commission 2007, ETUCE 2008), which is illustrated by an excerpt from the Commission report *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*:

> Links between teacher educators, practising teachers, the world of work and other agencies need to be strengthened. Higher education institutions have an important role to play in developing effective partnerships with schools and other stakeholders to ensure that their teacher education courses are based upon solid evidence and good classroom practice. (European Commission 2007, p. 15)

Again, the main stakeholders in these processes are the local institutions, while in some cases the government or national agencies provide financial support.

The issue of research and knowledge development is not addressed in any of the policy documents we analysed. The questionnaire revealed that in seven Member States (England, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Romania) there are initiatives to develop or further develop a practical knowledge base for teacher educators. The stakeholders that are actually involved in this development vary in each Member State. In Italy the development of the practical knowledge base is solely in the hands of higher education agencies, while in other Member States more than one stakeholder is involved. In England, Hungary and the Netherlands, the notion of a practical knowledge base refers to making information available through a database (England), and through books (Hungary) and journals (the Netherlands) published by associations for teacher educators.

Although at first sight the quality of teacher educators seems to be on the research agenda of seven Member States, the respondents' comments suggest that the quality of teacher educators is usually perceived as just one minor topic that is included in research investigating other issues, such as the evaluation of teacher

education programmes. Research that focuses exclusively on quality aspects of tea-cher educators was mentioned by only a few respondents. For example, the Hungar-ian respondent mentioned research on the characteristics of formal training programmes for teacher educators; in England, research has been conducted on the induction and professional development of teacher educators; in the Netherlands, research has been conducted on teacher educator identity and on the impact of pro-fessional standards and the registration of teacher educators; and in Norway, some research has been carried out regarding teacher education culture.

Discussion of the findings

The European policy documents pay limited attention to teacher educators, their professionalism and its further development. If teacher educators are mentioned at all, it is to express concerns about their quality and to emphasise the need for them to increase their professionalism. With the exception of the ETUCE (2008) docu-ment and the conclusions from the Council on the professional development of teachers (European Council 2009), no concrete suggestions have been made con-cerning measures and actions to improve the quality of teacher educators or to encourage their professional development. This finding is in line with previous stud-ies that pointed at the lack of attention to teacher educators in general (see, for example, Smith 2003, Swennen and van der Klink 2009) and stress the need for further research into the learning and development of teacher educators (Cochran-Smith 2003, Loughran 2006).

On the national level, the questionnaire revealed that in many European coun-tries the quality and professionalism of teacher educators are addressed in several ways. In almost all countries, concern is expressed about the quality of teacher edu-cators and there have been concrete proposals for improvement. Several countries have some kind of national legislation on the criteria for entry to the teacher educa-tor profession. In most cases, these criteria and proposals concern the academic degree that teachers in higher education must hold. More specific criteria are the responsibility of teacher education institutions. These criteria play a role in accredi-tation procedures for institutions or programmes.

National professional standards or an ethical code for teacher educators exist in only a few countries. With respect to formal education requirements for entering the profession, induction and continuing professional development, the findings do not allow univocal conclusions to be drawn. In most countries, this seems to be the responsibility of individual teacher education institutions, while the government plays a role in facilitating initial and further education by funding specific projects or expertise centres. The development of an explicit knowledge base for teacher educators can give direction to the professional development of teacher educators. Initiatives in this respect were mentioned by one-half of the respondents and the findings indicate that this knowledge base is only partly research-based, which is not surprising since there is still very limited research on teacher educators. As far as such research is conducted, it is most often focused on evaluating programmes and not on the profession of teacher educators as such.

As revealed by the questionnaire, the main stakeholders with respect to measures to improve the quality of teacher educators are governments and heads of individual teacher education departments or universities. National higher education agencies do sometimes play a role (e.g. the General Teaching Council in Ireland, the

Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers in the United Kingdom and the National Council for Teacher Education in Norway), but there seems to be virtually no role for teacher unions or teacher educator associations. The professionals themselves seem to be hardly involved in the development of policies that promote their professional quality. Exceptions are countries in which teacher educators are organised in professional associations, which is the case in the Netherlands and Hungary.

Limitations of the study

Although there is an increasing body of research on teacher educators (especially in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Israel), this study can be considered a first investigation of policies on teacher educators in Europe. As such, it had its limitations. Single respondents per country were used, and this may have led to one-sided perspectives on national developments. Although the diversity of countries ensured coverage of various European educational systems and cultures, two large countries – France and Spain – were not involved, and only one German state was represented. Countries whose teacher education programmes are at the master's level (e.g. Finland, the Czech Republic and Portugal) were also not involved. Therefore, the results do not present a complete picture of teacher education policies in Europe, nor has the study answered the question of how variations between Member States can be explained. However, the study has identified areas for further research on national systems and the position of teacher educators in national policies, which can lead to a more complete overview of teacher educator policies and can reveal more details of existing policy measures.

We used a classification framework derived from theories on professions and professionalism to identify policies on the quality of teacher educators. This approach might have led to a limited perception of the quality of teacher educators. However, the analysis of the various European documents and of the respondents' written answers to the questionnaire did not uncover any new, important aspects of European and national policies that did not fit into our initial classification framework.

Conclusion

In most countries, policy measures for teacher educators appear to be no different from measures for teachers in higher education in general, while in only a few countries are teacher educators considered a distinct professional group with its own policy measures. If teacher educators are not considered a distinct professional group and teacher education is understood as the mastering of an academic discipline with some additional courses on teaching strategies, there is little reason to develop distinct policies. Our respondents' answers revealed an increased emphasis on the teacher educator as a member of the academic community, and therefore on the research qualities and academic level of teacher educators. The tendency to emphasise this research identity of teacher educators is reflected in the literature on teacher educators (Murray 2010, Swennen *et al*. 2010). However, this tendency entails the risk that other qualities of teacher educators will fade into the background and become neglected. An excellent teacher educator is more than an excellent researcher.

The most dominant stakeholders in developing actions and measures related to the professional quality of teacher educators are national governments and heads of

local teacher education institutions. Sometimes national higher education agencies also play a role. Teacher educators themselves, however, are much less specified as explicit stakeholders in policies on the quality of teacher educators. This might be because, in most countries, teacher educators are not professionally organised. To be involved as a stakeholder in the development of policies on the professional quality of teacher educators, strong organisational structures are needed. Such organisational structures exist in only a few countries: Hungary and the Netherlands have strong professional associations of teacher educators that play, or at least can play, a role in developing their shared standards and knowledge base through publications and research. In the Netherlands, teacher educators have taken it upon themselves to safeguard the quality of their profession by developing a professional standard and a professional register of teacher educators (Koster and Dengerink 2001). This active self-responsibility has been strongly supported by the government.

Future challenges

Given the invitation of the European Council to the European Commission to prepare a study on the existing arrangements in the Member States for selecting, recruiting and training teacher educators (European Council 2009), and the report of a European Union peer learning activity on the profession of teacher educators (European Commission 2010), the attention of policy-makers in the Member States to the professional quality of teacher educators might increase. If teacher educators are not collectively proactive in setting standards for their professionalism, policy-makers may take the lead.

The quality of teacher educators is not yet an area in which there is active international policy exchange. Although there are interesting policy practices in some countries, these are not shared between countries or between professional associations of teacher educators. In international exchanges between teacher education institutions and individual teacher educators, the focus is often on the content of teacher education curricula and hardly on the professionalism of the teacher educators. Where these exchanges take place – for example, in the ATEE's Research and Development Centre 'Professional Development of Teacher Educators' – the main focus is on individual professionalism and not on policies that support that professionalism. There is a need for a more intensive exchange of policy practices and for mutual peer learning by teacher educators and their professional associations on issues regarding policies that promote the professionalism of teacher educators. This exchange needs to be supported by academic research on the impact and effects of these policy measures on the professionalism of teacher educators. On the issue of teacher educators, academic researchers and policy-makers still seem to live in separate worlds. By bridging the gap between these worlds, both teacher educators and policy-makers can gain a better understanding of effective measures and conditions to strengthen the professionalism of teacher educators.

Notes

1. Although the OECD document *Teachers Matter* is not strictly European, it has strongly influenced the European debates on teachers and teacher education and is therefore included in our analysis of policy documents.

2. See Snoek *et al.* (2009) for an in-depth description of the document analysis.
3. The thematic working group also includes participants from European Union candidate countries like Iceland and Turkey, and Norway.

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