# Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South
## Challenges to Teacher Education and Research North and South
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## Report of Workgroup 2
## Integrating ICT into Teacher Education.

## Workgroup

Roger Austin, University of Ulster (Chair).
Aidan Mulkeen, NUI Maynooth (Rapporteur).
John O Brien, University of Limerick.
Karen Bacon, Primary Curriculum Support Service, RoI.
Chris Reid, Stranmillis University College.
David O Grady, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.
Emer Malone, Leargas.
Byron Evans, ICT and Distance Learning Advisor, Regional Training Unit, NI.

## ICT in schools

The group began by comparing the situation of ICT in Education, North and South. In both areas ICT has been a major focus of investment in education in recent years. In Northern Ireland a managed service (Classroom 2000) has been rolled out to schools, funded through a public/private partnership. This provides a common hardware and software platform and networking in all schools. All schools have access to the internet, and the access is currently being upgraded to broadband, giving faster access but raising difficulties for schools involved in videoconferencing. In-service ICT training for teachers has been provided as part of the classroom 2000 programme.

In the South, there has been a parallel investment in equipment, infrastructure and training, managed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE). The strategy used was not a managed service, but a series of equipment grants to schools, allowing each school to purchase locally and identify their own needs. By 2002 the equipment levels had reached

- 11.8 pupils per computer in primary schools,
- 9.4 students per computer in post-primary schools,
- 4 students per computer in special schools.

The majority of post primary schools have a network (69%), but there are networks in only 30% of primary schools and 19% of special schools. All schools were provided with Internet access, using a mix of ISDN and analogue lines. While very few schools have broadband access, an NCTE study of the feasibility of broadband has recently been completed. In-service ICT training was provided to teachers as part of the ICT development strategy. Although this was provided on an elective basis, the take up was impressive, with over 70% of teachers participating. Following the training the majority of teachers in all sectors were reported to have some ICT skills.

It was noted that ICT also forms a key component of many North-South exchanges between schools and between youth groups. ENCOMPASS, a recently formed North South agency, will provide ICT training for youth workers to facilitate further developments in this area.

There were also some notable difference in approach between North and South. In Northern Ireland ICT skills are assessed at age 11 and 14 as part of the formal examination system. In the South, there is no formal assessment of ICT. At primary level the recommendation is that ICT be used to support learning of other curricular areas, rather than as a skill. At post primary level there is no state assessment, but many schools have opted to use commercial assessment schemes.

In Northern Ireland a virtual learning environment (VLE) for schools called "Learning NI" is under development and should be available in schools from Spring 2004. While electronic content is being developed in the South, there is no firm commitment to a VLE as yet.

## ICT in Teacher Education

ICT is used in teacher education for a number of reasons. At one level, the teacher education institutions wish to ensure that newly qualified teachers have the appropriate ICT skills. This is a requirement as part of the teacher education programme in Northern Ireland and student ICT skills are assessed through a portfolio. While the situation is more varied in the South, most (if not all) teacher education courses include ICT components and many are assessed. It may be that in the long term there will be less need for this ICT skills development, as students will develop better ICT skills before they reach teacher education.

The second dimension to ICT in teacher education is the development of students' capacity to make appropriate use of ICT in their teaching. This is more challenging, as student-teachers sometimes tend to use the most obvious applications of ICT, resulting in over-use of these ideas. In some teacher education institutions, developing ICT capacity in student-teachers is the responsibility of one ICT specialist. This is an effective way to develop skills and the rudiments of educational use of the technology. However it may not be the best way to develop more imaginative uses of ICT within each subject area. To achieve a wider spread of ICT usage within teacher education may involve more staff development activities in some institutions.

A third dimension to ICT in teacher education is the use of virtual learning environment to provide supports to student teachers. Examples of this were reported in a number of the institutions. This is both a useful support to the student-teachers and an opportunity for them to develop some experience of a VLE. Ideally student teachers should gain experience of the same VLE as is intended for school use, but this may present difficulties as the teacher education institutions are funded through different agencies and may have adopted different technology.

## The next steps

The group developed three ideas for possible future work:

### ICT working group.

Given the variety of experience of ICT in teacher education, and the risk of duplication of effort, the group thought that it would be useful to establish a North South ICT working group. This group would begin by sharing practice in ICT in Teacher education, and then look for possible synergies or areas for collaboration.

### ICT in Teacher Education Website

Following the impressive special needs website, the group felt that a similar resource could be developed for ICT in teacher education. The site could provide links to policy documents North and South, examples of ICT in practice in schools, and provide an online database of Irish research on ICT in education.

### Student teacher collaboration

Ideally, student–teachers North and South could use ICT to facilitate a dialogue that would help them to understand the differences in the educational systems. As a starting point, the group felt that institutions could examine student-teacher use of and access to ICT. This research might be used to initiate a collaborative programme, or to examine the potential of schemes aimed at providing portable computers to student-teachers.