



EFFeCT – Level 4 National/International CASE STUDY

The Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)

An international example of Collaboration in Learning

Using our 'EFFeCT Criteria' for the analysis of evidence to support and challenge practice and outcomes

In most countries in Europe and beyond, education is increasingly seen by respective governments, as vehicle through which to raise, the standing of their country, politically, economically and culturally in an ever-more competitive world. (OECD Pisa 2007 to 2015: OECD 2015). Improving teacher quality is perceived to be central to the capacity of a nation to improve its position in the global economy, ensure the quality of its workforce, and meet the rising social expectations in relation to diversity and equality (Cochran-Smith, 2012).

The OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), based on tests taken by more than 500,000 secondary school pupils focus on more affluent industrialized countries while the 2015 test claims to be '... the first time we have a truly global scale of the quality of education' (OECD 2015). Based on test scores in 76 countries on mathematics and science the OECD asserts that the comparisons show the link between education and economic growth.

'Poor education policies and practices leave many countries in what amounts to a permanent state of economic recession' (Andreas Schleicher, education director OECD <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/uk-below-poland-and-vietnam-biggest-ever-international-education>). Asian countries lead the league table while Ireland is ranked 15th, ahead of its near neighbours in the British Isles.

The scramble to be in the top percentiles of the tables of world growth, in a neo-liberal market-led reality, has become a major factor in planning and executing 'Educational Policy' and influencing policy change in an attempt to improve. A series of reports *Education Policy Outlook 2015: Making Reforms Happen* from the OECD give a comprehensive overview and more detailed publications on each country are available for at least some of the sectors. Darling-Hammond's comprehensive review of the connection between 'Teacher Quality and Student achievement' at the start of the millennium provides some challenging conundrums for the present day. In her analysis she triangulates data from surveys of state policies, case study analyses of state policymaking, and quantitative examination of the distribution of state achievement scores and resources, taking student characteristics into account. Some conclusions appear to contradict the efficacy of the strategies being planned or

adopted by policy makers in pursuit of 'market' economic desirables.

The argument that the economy and educational attainment of a nation's youth is directly associated with the quality of teachers and their teaching skills has taken root in international literature and policy developments (Thompson & Cooke, 2014). Taken at face-value this in itself raises a number of challenges; not least the thorny issue of 'Good Practice'. Adopted as a near panacea by policy makers in governments, the questions of what is 'good practice', 'how can we recognize it, spread it, support and maintain it' have seldom been thought through. Or indeed from whose standpoint the criteria for 'good practice' are gained.

Many countries concentrate on their own specific context, perhaps 'borrowing' ideas from research/experience in other jurisdictions (e.g. Australia; Netherlands). However despite the European initiative in many areas of education to promote commonality and closer co-operation, (compatibility of Qualifications: DG ECA: Lisbon Treaty, TUNING Project), concrete examples of jurisdictions actually working together to enhance teaching and teacher education policies and to create a strong researched-base of alternative possibilities are not common. The example Mary Immaculate College has chosen to illustrate the fourth strand of 'EFFeCT' *The European Methodological Framework for Facilitating Collaborative Learning for Teachers*, is one of the rare examples of cross-border cooperation and collaborative learning.

This present project EFFeCT is designed to throw some light on these processes at four levels in each of the contexts taking part:-

- School/college
- local
- regional
- national/international

The level explored here is that of the national/international context. By considering the activities and outcomes we will seek to ascertain whether a body such as SCoTENS can be identified as a vehicle of 'good practice' on an international scale.

Origins of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)

Following the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement in 1998, the agreed model of governance in Northern Ireland which brought to a close decades of violence and conflict, educationists north and south gathered at a conference convened by Professor John Coolahan (NUI Maynooth) and Professor Harry McMahon (University of Ulster, Coleraine). The purpose of the conference convened in 2000 was to highlight the role of education, and particularly teacher education, in promoting and cementing the peace process. The intention was to encourage discourse among and collaboration between teacher education professionals across the island of Ireland. It was hoped that the initiative would facilitate the identification of areas of common concern and open avenues for ongoing co-operation, research and development. Out of this conference came the formation of the Standing Conference on Teacher Education in 2002, which was made possible through the support and financial commitment of the Department of

Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland and the Departments of Education and Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

While the island of Ireland shared a common education system until 1922, thereafter both jurisdictions evolved separate educational policies, scholarship, and practice, guided or governed by their relative Departments responsible for education. In the South, following the establishment of independence in 1922 and influenced by the dominant ideology of cultural nationalism, the promotion of the Irish language at all levels of the education system was central to education policy. Education was deemed a pivotal agent in the drive to revive the national language and culture; the centrality of the Irish language dominated the development of education and teacher education in particular over the next four decades.

In the North, educational policy was dictated by political decisions made in Westminster and the education system reflected that established in Britain. Despite the close proximity of Dublin and Belfast, which are located less than 100 miles apart, there was no cross-border collaboration or communication for almost eighty years. This distance in time and ideology, and an awareness of the potential of educationists to promote and endorse the peace process, became the animating factors in the establishment of SCoTENS. Established as a bottom-up collaborative venture, this professional network of teacher educators, has grown and flourished over the last fourteen years. SCoTENS is the only network of its kind in the world, operating across a contested border.

Benchmarking SCoTENS

In a retrospective Professor John Coolahan, Professor Emeritus NUI Maynooth and Ireland's leading educationist, described his involvement in the establishment of the SCoTENS as one of the most significant achievements of his career (<http://www.independent.ie/life/family/learning/in-my-opinion-crossborder-initiative-is-crucial-to-teacher-support-26575323.html> accessed 30.4.16)

Anxious to benchmark the work of SCoTENS, the Steering Committee in 2011 issued an international invitation to tender for the evaluation of the network. Following a competitive process, this tender was awarded to a team of three academics from Oxford University, namely Professor John Furlong, Dr Anna Pendry and Dr Patricie Mertova. Despite precarious funding and significant dependence on goodwill, the evaluation was 'overwhelming positive' and acknowledged that SCoTENS is highly valued and 'generated genuine professional and personal development' (Furlong et al 2011, p.2). Described as 'one of the outstanding examples of North-South cooperation in the post-Agreement period' (Pollak, <http://crossborder.ie/an-incredible-achievement-for-teacher-education/> accessed 30.4.2016), SCoTENS was also commended by the former Joint Secretary of the North South Ministerial Council, Tim O'Connor, who labelled it as a 'superb example' of what professional associations can achieve if they set their minds to working on a North-South basis.

Examples of measures set up to foster the growth of collaborative learning, shared management, and spread and maintain the 'good practice' arising within SCoTENS are multi-faceted. This report will give short overview of objectives, values and activities taking place in SCoTENS, followed by a more in depth look at the strategies, people and learning involved.

Let us begin by introducing the present committee, a representative selection of the types of establishment, involvement, cultural and geographical make-up of SCoTENS as a whole.

Meet the representatives:



Committee Members 2015-16

Backrow, from Left:

Dr Conor Galvin, School of Education, University College Dublin,
Dr Noel Purdy, Stranmillis University College, Belfast;
Mr Tomás Ó Ruairc, General Teaching Council, Maynooth (Joint Chair)
Ms Ruth Taillon, Centre for Cross Border Studies.
Dr Anne O’Gara, Marino Institute of Education.

Front row:

Eugene Toolin, St Angela’s College.
Dr Carmel Gallagher, General Teaching Council N. Ireland,
Prof Linda Clarke, University of Ulster, Coleraine (Joint Chair)
Dr Deirbhile Nic Craith, Irish National Teachers’ Organisation
Prof Teresa O’Doherty, Mary Immaculate
Prof Kathy Hall, University College Cork
Dr Geraldine Magennis, St Mary’s University College, Belfast,

Missing from this photo is Mr David Duffy, who represents the Teachers’ Union

of Ireland.

Committee Members meet approx. six times a year, with meetings generally held in Marino Institute of Education, Dublin, a location which is reasonably accessible to all participants. In light of emerging issues and/or policy concerns, as perceived by the Committee, each year brings a fresh set of education foci, covering all aspects of teaching and learning, the curriculum, methods and both delivery and policy areas. Dialogue, challenge and discussion are seen as ways in which to explore the what, where, how and why of education in the increasingly complex landscape of teacher education, both North and South.

Although established to bring together those involved in initial teacher education, SCoTENS has broadened its membership base to include a wider range of organisations and now attracts membership from associations that represent all those involved in teacher preparation and support in the two jurisdictions:

Meet the members:

Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI)
Belfast Metropolitan College
Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, Dublin
Donegal Education Centre
Drumcondra Education Centre
Dublin City University
Froebel College of Education, Galway Education Centre
General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (MyTCGNI)
Irish Federation of University Teachers
Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Kildare Education Centre
Kilkenny Education Centre
Laois Education Centre
Marino Institute of Education Dublin
Mary Immaculate College Limerick
Mater Dei Institute of Education
Middletown Centre for Autism
Monaghan Education Centre
National College of Art and Design
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

National University of Ireland Galway
Maynooth University
Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CEA)
National Association of Principals and Deputy-Principals (NAPD)
Queen's University Belfast
Regional Training Unit Belfast
Sligo Education Centre
St Angela's College Sligo
St Patrick's College, Dublin
St Mary's University College Belfast
Stranmillis University College Belfast
Tarbert Education Centre
Teachers' Union of Ireland
The Open University
The Teaching Council (Ireland)
Trinity College Dublin
University College Cork (UCC)
University College Dublin (UCD)
University of Limerick
University of Ulster
Waterford Institute of Technology
Wexford Education Centre

A brief overview of SCoTENS:

SCoTENS is a network of now 43 organisations, including colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils, curriculum councils, teacher representative/trade unions and education centres on the island of Ireland with a responsibility for and interest in teacher education.

While the underling mission of SCOTENS was and is to support the peace process, as a non-political and non-sectarian organization, this mission is not explicitly stated in its objectives. Rather the organisation's stated objectives are to:

- Provide a supportive framework for collaborative research and professional activities on teacher education, north and south
- Hold invitation conference on themes of mutual interest to teacher educators, north and south
- Provide seed funding for North-South research projects on teacher education issues
- Promote position papers on issues of mutual concern to teacher educators, North and South
- Use its good offices to assist in obtaining funding for approved research activities;
- Support exchange arrangements between teacher educators for approved purposes, as part of its concern to strengthen existing inter-professional and inter-institutional linkages;
- Establish and maintain a website which will incorporate several forms of computer-mediated communication in relation to educational developments in research, North and South;
- Act as an agency for advice or consultation by policy makers in the Departments of Education of both jurisdictions.

Each objective is committed to actively enabling cross border and system wide learning. One of the founding members of SCoTENS recognised the duality of the purpose of this cross border initiative, stating 'developing mutual understanding and reducing barriers' might take several generations to achieve. In the interim he asserted 'the best approach is to keep academic business academic' (Furlong, 2011,p. 8). Equally important is the awareness that peace building is a vulnerable process and that 'with the trouble threatening again in N Ireland, SCoTENS role will be required even more to educate against unacceptable prejudices' (Furlong, 2011, p.8).

Building on a deep commitment to quality teaching and learning for all, and a shared tradition where teaching is a valued profession, teacher education has become the vehicle for one of the most successful North South projects. The growth in the peace process paralleled a growing interest in teacher education policy renewal and development. While teacher education policy had experienced extended periods of policy drift and inertia in the South (O'Doherty, 2014, p. 38), the first decade of the 21st century witnessed a renewed interest by national and international agencies in teaching and teachers (OECD 2005, *Teachers Matter*). Consequently the platform provided by SCoTENS for shared policy discussion and the professional development of teacher educators became increasingly important and valuable as the years progressed. The work of SCoTENS has gathered momentum since its establishment, mirroring the enhanced level of engagement by policy makers in the area of teacher education, not only for pre-service teachers, but for all teachers across the continuum.

SCoTENS contributes to the development of professional practice among teacher educators through multiple programmes of work; these include supporting a wide range of research, holding national conferences, organizing exchange projects and developing resources. In brief its main activities are as follows:

1. The **SCoTENS annual conference** is a key fixture in the education calendar on the island of Ireland. The annual SCoTENS conference provides a forum where teacher educators across the island of Ireland can engage in open, critical and constructive analysis of current issues in education with a view to promoting a collaborative response to these issues.

2. The **SCoTENS Seed Funding Programme** promotes and funds a range of research-based initiatives with a view to establishing sustainable North-South partnerships and projects designed to further the development of teachers, schools and education.

3. The **North/South Student Teacher Exchange project**, enables student teachers to undertake one of the school placements/ teaching practicum in the other jurisdiction; this means that students from Dublin can complete one of the core teaching placements in Belfast schools, and Belfast student teachers can do likewise in Dublin. This project is open to all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

4. **Resources:** their website (scotens.org) also offers teachers and teacher educators throughout the island of Ireland a range of resources with a particular focus on Special Educational Needs, Citizenship and Digital/Video resources.

The SCoTENS Secretariat is provided by the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) in Armagh. The CCBS is part-financed by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund through the EU-INTERREG IVA Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. The CCBS was established in 1999 and has a wide remit in boosting social and economic growth in border regions and thereby creating better living and working conditions for citizens in those regions. It has developed a reputation for thorough and high quality research, information provision and collaboration. During its relatively short history the CCBS has been part of the embedding of the peace process, worked to support North-South co-operation and developed a European dimension to cross-border working. Under the stewardship of its Directors (Andy Pollak until 2013, and Ruth Taillon thereafter), it continues to provide administrative support to SCoTENS.

An in-depth scrutiny:

Within this section we will use the criteria / markers to evaluate the level and nature of collaborative learning facilitated through SCoTENS. In order to do this we will draw on individual examples across the range of activities undertaken over the last number of years, and utilize the activities and materials produced, including the voices of individuals and groups.

It would be helpful at this point to introduce the EFFECT criteria against which we make our judgments. This will be referred to in our assessment of each strand in turn on the analysis sheets derived from the EFFECT Criteria Table (1) shown below.

evaluation criteria	
<i>process:</i>	
participative professionalism	reflects a participatory or democratic model of professionalism involving co-leadership by teachers and other stakeholders, mobilisation of their knowledge and expertise, and interpretation of policy
deep level collaboration	...displays characteristics such as a cohesive culture, high team identity, etc. and features that may include supporting one and another emotionally or working creatively to provide new holistic ways to support learning, children and families etc.
<i>impact (on students, teachers, school, beyond school):</i>	
equity	... advances developmental, participative, cultural and distributive justice
deep learning	...promotes aspects of a broad conception of learning that includes the ‘qualification’, ‘socialisation’ and ‘subjectification’ functions ¹ . (Not every case would be expected to include all aspects.)
additional factors for study	
facilitating factors	personal, structural, group, organisational and process characteristics, and other support; plus how these were developed
barriers	personal, structural, group, organisational and process characteristics, and other problems; plus, where applicable, how these were overcome
context	institutional history, culture, policy context, etc.

Table 1: Evaluation criteria and other factors for study of good practice

1. SCoTENS Annual Conference

The annual conference takes place each year in October, and normally rotates North and South of the border. Generally it is hosted in a location which has easy access from both jurisdictions, although in 2015 it moved away from the border and was hosted in Limerick. The theme, location, and invitations to guest speakers are decided democratically within the committee, following consultation with all members from whom suggestions are invited. Each year has a specific theme chosen by the committee with an eye to the current needs or challenges being experienced by the members. However, emerging policy issues are also viewed as influential in deciding the topic for these conferences. While SCoTENS is rarely formally consulted by the ministries of education in Belfast or Dublin, it has an informal role in establishing channels of communication between the teacher education community, government, and practitioners (Furlong, 2011. P. 11). To this end it has used its conferences as a platform to tease out and debate issues and actions of interest of the teacher education community and the education reform priorities of government departments, north and south. These conferences provide one of the few venues open to teacher educators and policy makers, both civil servants and politicians alike, to meet and to discuss issues of importance.

The annual conference is not just an opportunity to validate policy, but to analyse it from national and international perspectives. It is important that such debate is informed not only by international leaders in the field, but also by evidence of good practice within the workshops and panel discussions. The conference provides an opportunity for participants to interrogate the most pressing contemporary issues and contribute to the development of policy. The continuing relevance of SCoTENS to the policy makers is evident through the continued resources made available to part-fund the organization, despite the significant reductions in public expenditure experiences by all other aspects of educational spending. Secondly, the continued presence of the ministers for education, North and South, as well as senior members of the inspectorate and the civil service, indicate the value and status attributed to SCoTENS within both jurisdictions.

Recent themes reflect the pressures being increasingly placed on education over the last decade, including:-

- 2015 - Teacher Education for Social Justice
- 2014 - Always learning, always teaching: Making the journey
- 2013 - Learning Teaching: Reimagining the Profession
- 2012 - Creative Teachers for Creative Learners: Implications for Teacher Education.
- 2011 - Promoting Literacy and Numeracy through Teacher Education
- 2010 - Teacher Education for Inclusion
- 2009 - Reflective Practice: Challenges for Teacher Education
- 2008 - School Leadership, Policy and Practice, North and South
- 2007 - Teaching in the Knowledge Society
- 2006 - Teacher Education and Schools: Together towards Improvement'.
- 2005 - Teacher Education for Citizenship in Diverse Societies
- 2004 - The changing contexts of teacher education, North and South
- 2003 - Challenges to Teacher Education and Research, North and South

Key Speakers are carefully chosen for both their expertise in the area and their ability to introduce ideas from differing contexts both supportive and challenging. Workshops on diverse subjects related to the theme are an important feature designed to include cross border/subject/phase spread and often arising from completed or on-going practitioner research projects funded through the 'Seed Funding Scheme' (see below).

An overview the 2015 conference gives an indication of the diversity and strength of options on offer.

Conference Theme: Teacher Education for Social Justice
15-16 October 2015

Welcome by co-Chair of SCoTENS, Mr Tomás Ó Ruairc

Official opening by the **Northern Ireland Minister of Education**, Minister John O'Dowd, MLA

Keynote address:

There is no view from Nowhere: Ideology, Social Justice and Teacher Education
Professor Kathleen Lynch, Professor of Equality Studies, School of Social Justice, UCD

Launch of 2014 SCoTENS Annual Report by Professor Emeritus John Coolahan,
National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Launch of Research Report: Creative Classrooms: Imaginative and Innovative Teaching in
Ireland, launched by Professor Emeritus Harry McMahon, University of Ulster

16 October

SCoTENS Seed Funding Workshop: Led by Dr Geraldine Magennis, Senior Lecturer, St Mary's
University College, Professor Kathy Hall, Head of School of Education, University College Cork
and Dr Conor Galvin, Lecturer & Researcher, University College Dublin (optional workshop
open to SCoTENS members interested in seed funding)

'Teachers need to be able to do more than talk about social justice'
Panel Discussion chaired by Professor Kathy Hall

Panel members:

- Dr Brian Cummins, Head of Widening Participation, Stranmillis University College
- Dr Una O'Connor Bones, Lecturer, Ulster University
- Dr Kevin Cahill, Lecturer, University College Cork
- Ms Rena O'Shea, Principal, Thomond Primary School, Limerick

Workshop 1 – The Write to Right

Mr Séan Love, Executive Director, Fighting Words, Dublin

Ms Geraldine Wilkins, Development Officer, Fighting Words, Belfast

Fighting Words host daily free creative writing workshops for primary and secondary schoolchildren. These workshops demonstrated both models, in which the participants created together the beginnings of a couple of stories. The workshop models have been adopted in similar creative writing centres in eight other EU countries and in several other countries around the world. The workshops are creative, productive, educational and good fun – for all ages.

Workshop 2 – Rural Schools in Multi-cultural Settings

Dr Maria Campbell, Lecturer, St. Angela's College, Sligo

Mr Kenneth Denny, Principal Scoil Iosa, Ballyhaunis

Mr Kevin Devlin, Principal, St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon

Mr David Thompson, Principal, Dungannon Primary School

This workshop was presented by primary/national school principals. Both schools contain a high percentage of newcomer pupils which presents many challenging as well as enriching and celebratory dimensions to educational provision within each context.

The speakers outlined their individual situations in terms of location, staff numbers, pupil enrolment and school environment as a means of providing the audience with a contextual backdrop. They then discussed the strategies and shared good practice that they and their staff have put in place to support newcomer children and their families in educational, social and emotional terms. They also addressed the various difficulties they have experienced over the years in meeting the needs of such changing populations. Finally, with a look to the future, the principals offered their thoughts on what is maybe next in the continued development of this aspect of educational life in modern day Ireland.

Workshop 3 – Teaching English as an Additional Language, perspectives from North and South

Dr Barbara Skinner, Senior Lecturer, Ulster University

Dr Barbara O'Toole, Senior Lecturer, Marino Institute of Education

This workshop presented the current linguistic landscape in Ireland, North and South, and examined some of the challenges and opportunities involved in teaching English to students from minority languages. Theoretical perspectives such as social interaction theory were explored. The importance of a sociocultural / socio-political perspective on minority languages and cultures was emphasised. Within these theoretical frameworks, specific teaching approaches were presented, and the potential of these approaches in classroom settings discussed.

Workshop 4 – Collaborating for social justice in the primary school: lessons from a literacy initiative

Ms Suzanne McCanney, Learning Support Manager, Middletown Centre for Autism

Dr Áine Cregan, Senior Lecturer, Mary Immaculate College

Dr Carmel O’Doherty, Senior Inspector, Department of Education and Science

Ms Tracie Tobin, Principal, St Michael’s Infant School, Limerick

Mr Tiernan O’Neill, Principal, Corpus Christi Primary School, Moyross

The workshop presentation focused on the Limerick DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) primary schools’ literacy initiative: its origins, implementation, and impact in schools. The workshop focused on contemporary research on models of teacher education. Vignettes of practice from an Infant School highlighted the learning from and importance of implementing a balanced literacy framework. Lessons from a vertical co-educational school emphasised the importance of teacher networks, collaboration and reflective practice.

Keynote address: How Teacher Education can Contribute to Social Transformation and Greater Justice

Professor Ken Zeichner, Professor of Teacher Education, University of Washington, Seattle.

Official Closing by the Republic of Ireland Minister for Education and Skills Minister, Jan O’Sullivan T.D.

Closing remarks by co-Chair of SCoTENS, Professor Linda Clarke