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## **INTERROGATING THE POLICY SHIFT TOWARDS MASTER'S LEVEL TEACHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

### **Abstract:**

Teachers are widely recognised as the most powerful determinants of pupil achievement (Harford, Hudson and Niemi, 2012; Hattie, 2003). However, they face unprecedented challenges in their role in the context of increasingly diverse and demanding teaching and learning environments (European Commission, 2012). In part response to this challenging context, initial teacher education is now at master's level for the majority of upper secondary teachers (Eurydice, 2013). The move to a master's level award reflects the widely accepted view that initial teacher education is considered one of the most important factors in ensuring a well-performing public education system. It also reflects the inherent complexity associated with the role of the teacher, and the need for research-led teacher education. This policy shift contrasts with the 'training paradigm' being promoted across a minority of European states (Beach and Bagley, 2015). The introduction of master's level teacher education has meant the reconceptualization of teacher education programmes, significant additional investment in teacher education, and an expectation that graduates will be better equipped for the increasingly complex and ever-changing environment of classrooms. This paper interrogates the implications of the recent move towards master's level teacher education in the Republic of Ireland. It suggests that while teacher education has moved from representing a national concern towards becoming part of the discourse around Europeanisation (Harford, 2010), the Europeanisation and internationalisation of teacher education is, as Hudson and Zgaga (2008, p. 18) caution 'a much more complex and complicated process than Europeanisation and internationalisation in higher education in general.' Examining 'the contradictions and incoherences that are embedded within policy' (Ball, 2013, p. 17), the paper offers insights from the master's level reform agenda in the Irish context, highlighting key challenges and issues at both a local and wider European level.

### **Keywords:**

European educational policy, Master's level teacher education, Ireland