Enhancing Initial Teacher Education in Kuwait: 'Cooking on a Low Heat'.

by

Trevor Male (UCL Institute of Education)
&
Abdulghani Al-Bazzaz (College of Basic Education, Kuwait)

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Correspondence:

Dr. Trevor Male
London Centre for Leadership in Learning,
UCL Institute of Education,
20 Bedford Way,
London. WC1H 0AL
ENGLAND.

T: +44 (0)207 612 6000
E: t.male@ioe.ac.uk

Second author:

Dr. Abdulghani Al-Bazzaz
College of Basic Education (Jaber),
Al 'Āşimah,
KUWAIT.

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Abstract

This paper reports on a review of initial teacher education (ITE) in Kuwait between 2009 & 2013 sponsored initially by the British Council and latterly by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). Progress on recommended changes has been described within the local Arabic idiom as "*cooking on a low heat"*, which means that progress was being made only slowly. Conclusions as to how to make ITE more effective in the country were agreed at an early stage, but development has limited through a process aligned to the principle of non-decision-making. Although one consequence of inaction has been substantial financial cost, the greater cost is the significant proportion of teachers who are performing at below expected levels. The paper concludes that intervention at the higher levels of government is required in order to overcome the stagnation of this reform initiative.

Introduction

This paper analyses the progress made on the review of initial teacher education (ITE) in Kuwait undertaken between 2009 and 2013 by a partnership consisting of the locally based College of Basic Education (CBE) and the University of Hull (UK). At a press conference held in April 2013 the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs at CBE described the process as "*cooking the project on a low heat",* which is an Arabic idiom meaning that progress was being made, but without rushing. Both sides, he determined, had a clear understanding of the project and were on their way to putting it into practice. The idiom, and the implication it encompassed, perfectly sums up the way in which the review had gone. Discussions, research and conclusions on what needed to happen in order to make ITE more effective in the State of Kuwait, and

especially at CBE, had quickly been agreed between those involved in the review, the two teams from the respective institutions and the sponsoring bodies, but progress had been hindered by a number of factors beyond the control of the project partners. The consequence at the time of writing is that most parties interested in the review of ITE in Kuwait know what needs to be done to make the system of pre-service teacher education more efficient and effective, but seem unable to make the necessary changes.

Methodology

The two teams of academic staff from CBE and the University of Hull were directly engaged in activities that resemble the concept of Action Research as they were working collaboratively to resolve a number of challenges relating to teacher education in Kuwait. The investigators thus saw themselves as research colleagues who were seeking new courses of action to help CBE as well as counterpart institutions, and ultimately all other stakeholders in the state of Kuwait, to improve work practices.

The project team from CBE were led by a senior member of academic staff along with departmental representatives from the English, Science departments and Kindergarten Education. The project team from the University of Hull ultimately amounted to seven members of academic staff by the time the project reached its second stage in 2012. That team was all drawn from the Faculty of Education and were also led by a senior member of academic staff who was joined by academic colleagues from the ITE programmes. The university offered a range of ITE provision including the one year Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) in Secondary and Primary, with a three year undergraduate degree leading to qualified teacher

status, the BA (Hons) with QTS.   Members of the secondary PGCE team had specialisms in Science and Geography while all other colleagues were specialists in Primary Education.

Data collection was an iterative process throughout the partnership in which the project teams were continually identifying issues and proposing responses before seeking to trial and evaluate resolutions. Evidence provided in this paper was mainly interpretive in nature and used a range of methods commonly associated with the paradigm of qualitative research (e.g. interviews, observations and documentary analysis). Use of quantitative data in the partnership project was limited to descriptive statistics. Each meeting of the partnership project teams was documented, with interim reports produced that were agreed as accurate records of activity undertaken andidentified outcomes. These and other reports required by the terms of the project form the evidence base for the findings presented below.

A key issue in this project was the challenge presented by differences in the cultures of participants. Bagshaw *et al.*, (2007), for example, argue that challenges inherent in all research can be compounded in international research teams where cultural differences are an additional dynamic to be considered. One major issue that has manifested itself substantially, for example, is the way in which participants view the use of recorded interviews which has led the teams to find alternative ways of documenting the outcomes of meetings and personal conversations. Consequently, a key feature of data collection has been the use of note taking in meetings and interviews with project teams meeting as soon as possible after such events to agree the outcomes.

The findings within this report, therefore, are reflective and reflexive accounts of lived experiences of the project team members that have been qualified and verified through discourse within and between the partnership project teams.

ITE in Kuwait

ITE in Kuwait is jointly provided through a small number of higher education institutions, but principally by the Faculty of Education at Kuwait University and the College of Basic Education (CBE) which is affiliated to the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAEET). In keeping with the ambitions of most other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, Kuwait seeks to assure that it has sufficient quantities of well qualified teachers to ensure that population growth and the desire (at least) for universal primary education is matched by supply. Recent estimates suggest that in order to achieve that target by 2030 the region will have to create 0.5 million new teaching positions while filling about 2.1 million vacant positions due to attrition (UIS & GMR, 2013: 3). In other words, the need for greater numbers of qualified teachers in the region will continue into the future.

It is here that the dialogue shifts in a subtle manner in that whilst being within the MENA region Kuwait does not appear to have population issues that equate with other local countries in terms of their national citizens. General population growth is much slower within the state than other close neighbours (such as Saudi Arabia, for example) and the number of qualified teachers produced through its education system more than adequate for current and anticipated demand. Geographically Kuwait is not a large country with a population of 4.1 million people, of which 1.2 million are Kuwaitis,

1.1 million Arab expatriates, 1.4 million Asian expatriates, and 77 000 Africans (Gulf News, 2014). The country thus is one that has a relatively small population of nationals and a larger population of expatriates who provide, almost exclusively, the private sector in terms of the economy. Kuwait nationals have high socio-economic status as a consequence of a national economy largely underwritten by the oil industry. In 2012, the per capita income for population was US$ 56 000, making it one of the richest countries in the world (UNdata, 2015).

One consequence of this wealth is that most employment for Kuwait nationals is in the public sector, and it is not uncommon for many citizens to seek employment as a teacher and, in particular, for women to do so. A significant number of teachers do not wish to be teachers, however, but were pressured by parents into teaching as a "suitable" job, particularly for women because they will be able to balance between work and family lives (NIE, 2014: 103). This is the first conundrum of this enquiry, in that some potential members of the future teacher workforce do not actually envisage working in that capacity. Consequently, such participants in ITE programmes are often not intrinsically motivated to become a teacher and may represent not only a drain on resources, but also an encumbrance to reform as we hope to illustrate later in this paper.

Kuwait organises its higher education provision into state provided and state sponsored. There are four institutes of higher education maintained by the state, led by Kuwait University and the College of Basic Education. There are then two specialist institutions, respectively for Theatre Arts and Music, with additional provision being made locally through private universities and, when not possible within the country,

being met elsewhere through scholarships to overseas universities, notably to the US, the UK, Australia and some other Arab countries like Egypt and Jordan. ITE beyond Kuwait University is mainly the responsibility of PAAET which was established in 1982 to fill the need for a vocational and technical training institution. PAAET has two missions: to be responsible for providing and developing the skills of national middle manpower to meet the demands of a developing nation and to provide training for students to have careers beyond the oil industry. Most post-secondary education courses at a PAAET technical college last for two and a half years from which students receive a diploma that allows them to enter the workforce. Similarly, many post-intermediate courses at PAAET Training institutes last for one year where trainees receive a certificate which allows them to get a job or join, in some cases, one of PAAET colleges or institutes. The CBE is, as mentioned before, partially responsible for ITE provision as well and has degree awarding powers for four year courses leading to qualified teacher status.

The Initial Project with CBE: 2009-11

The work with CBE began in November, 2009 as a result of a successful bid by the University of Hull to the British Council for funding under their North East North Africa (NENA) strategy for enhancing Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) in the region. The original request for support from CBE (and approved by PAAET) was extensive and included topics such as eLearning, research and staff/student exchanges. Some of these ambitions were deemed not to be a close fit to the TVET initiative which meant a number of original CBE/PAAET objectives could not be addressed. Consequently, there were a number of subsequent negotiations with the

British Council over the terms of the project with a final agreed version submitted in January, 2010. The revised project aims and objectives were for the University of Hull:

1. To collaborate with PAAET in order to enhance their capability to promote and sustain the pre-service training and continuing professional development of teachers in further and higher education;

2. Specifically, within that collaboration, to form a partnership with CBE in order to revise their ITE with a view to developing the pedagogical capability and, thereby, the employability of their teacher trainees. That partnership to focus on:

   a. the development of ITE provision within CBE, including curriculum review, and;
   b. review and develop CBE capability to support the continuing professional development (CPD)of teacher graduates.

The project was launched, therefore, with the aim of enhancing both ITE and the CPD of teacher graduates in Kuwait, with the provision at CBE to be the testing ground for such revisions. CBE had major programmes of study that prepared teacher trainees for teaching positions in primary, intermediate and secondary schools. In addition, CBE offered a programme, under the umbrella of the Instruction and Curriculum department, solely designed for preparation of Kindergarten teachers.

A Twinning Committee (TC) was established with membership primarily formed by the partnership project teams from CBE and the university, but also with representation from the Director General of PAAET. Four members of CBE TC, all of them teaching staff, visited the university in November, 2009 for workshops and planning meetings with the Primary PGCE team, the project coordinator and the project administrator to further their needs analysis. Work was completed during this visit on the needs for the review of ITE and for curriculum development, although issues relating to CPD were not explored at this stage. Subsequently, two members of university staff travelled to

Kuwait to meet with members of CBE senior leadership group and other members of Twinning Committee to consolidate the partnership in December, 2009.

A university team of primary educators (three academic staff) visited CBE in Kuwait in January, 2010. The programme of activity lasted 4 days and allowed for aspects of needs analysis to be converted into plans for action. The following issues were explored:

a) Student selection procedures for Initial Teacher Education (ITE);
b) Alternative degree routes (not QTS) that CBE could offer;
c) Communication systems between CBE and the Ministry of Education;
d) Content of CBE modules on ITE route;
e) Coherence between such modules;
f) Consistency of standards in assessment processes;
g) Timing and duration of teaching practice element(s) of ITE course;
h) Training for CBE teaching practice supervisors;
i) Development of partnerships with schools to enhance ITE student experience;
j) Establishment of occupational standards for primary teachers in Kuwait;
k) Development of assessment processes and grading criteria for trainee teachers.

As a consequence of that visit, and subsequent visits to each other, by February 2011 the following recommendations were made by the Twinning Committee:

- Selection procedures and criteria for CBE candidates should be revised and tailored for Kuwaiti students – pending discussion and approval from relevant Kuwaiti management parties. This will enable CBE to recruit candidates who are not only academically capable, but also pedagogically suitable;
- CBE were to restructure ITE to include more in-school placements (practicum), as this had been identified as a key area for improvement. In addition to the customary practicum in their final year, students should also have a practicum in the first year;
- Relevant standards for teachers in use in other parts of the world should be adapted and used for Kuwaiti trainee teachers.

The BC funding for the project ceased at that time, however, so the university project coordinator met with the CBE team in Kuwait in April, 2011 to draft and present a bid to PAAET for continuation funding for the project. The final bid was agreed and submitted in May, 2011 and contained the following aims:

1. the consolidation within CBE of proposals emerging from the BC project, including:
   a) amended selection procedures and admissions process for ITE applicants;
   b) the curriculum review for ITE provision within CBE;
   c) more rigorous assessment procedures for trainee teachers;
   d) revised teaching placements and teaching practicum requirements;
   e) the development of partnerships with placement schools;
   f) the finalisation of proposed Professional Standards for Teachers in Kuwait.

2. The review and development of CBE capability to support the continuing professional development of teacher graduates.

The bid was accepted, but due to changes in the senior positions within PAAET the official decree was not issued until early 2012. Subsequently there was more delay whilst a new Director General confirmed the issuing of a contract for the university to provide consultancy, development and research services to CBE to implement the new plan. The consequence was that the new project did not start until November, 2012, meaning that there had been considerable delay in the ITE review process and no further progress on CPD provision since the end of the BC funded project some 18 months earlier.

The Extended Project with CBE: 2011-14

The plan agreed by the Twinning Committee identified four phases to undertake the review of admissions procedures, curriculum revisions, assessment processes and use of placement schools in ITE provision and to establish professional standards for teachers. Phase 1, scheduled to run from November 2012 to March 2013, was designed to comprise briefings and workshops for departments within CBE to examine the implications in terms of admissions and use of placement schools. During this period, it was intended for university staff to visit Kuwait to work with the heads of department and to visit placement schools and for CBE project staff to further their understanding of the way in which ITE was run in England through visits to schools, observations of teaching and support services and through participation in student selection procedures.

The report on Phase 1 presented to PAAET in August, 2013 demonstrated that all aspects of this plan were completed fully in terms of work undertaken in England, but there was virtually no progress on the objectives identified for Kuwait. Project activity during a visit to Kuwait in November 2012 by the university project coordinator was confined to planning meetings with the CBE Project team. In January 2013, four members of CBE academic staff, the same people as came in November 2009, visited the university and schools in England to examine ITE provision in action and, in particular to meet students and supervisors in placement schools. In February 2013 the project coordinator and four members of ITE academic staff team from the university visited CBE with the aim of enacting the first aspect of the Phase 1 plan, to brief various heads of department on the likely implications of the proposed changes to ITE provision (see below). The planned itinerary was changed, however, and

instead of meeting with individual departments there was one collective meeting with not every department represented. In addition, the university team met with CBE admissions officers, Ministry of Education school subject supervisors, planning officers from PAAET and the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Public Education. There were no briefing meetings with heads of department and the university project team was invited to visit just one school, which was designated as a 'Future School', but was one that did not act as a placement school for ITE students. Interestingly, during this visit the university team had the chance to see the new campus that had been built to rehouse CBE in modern, state of art, buildings. This campus was intended, in due course, to become the main site of the new university (Jaber) to be opened in Kuwait with some of the departments of CBE likely to become faculties within the new institution, i.e. Jaber University. The story of this campus and the new university is relevant and will be referred to more fully later in this paper. To sum up, therefore, there had been no opportunity for the university team during Phase 1 to meet with staff in CBE, or in placement schools, who would enact the planned changes to ITE. Instead, many meetings were held with those members of the Kuwait education system who could influence future provision, but from whom decisions to act were required. This led to much discussion, but little action.

The Project Revised

The planned visit of CBE staff to England scheduled for May/June 2013 at the start of Phase 2 did not happen as the necessary decree to provide permission for the visit was not issued. This was due in large part to the appointment of a new Director General in PAAET and, in turn, a new chair for the Twinning Committee. The university project coordinator made two trips to Kuwait in April and May, 2013 to discuss with

PAAET the ways in which the project could continue and it was agreed that work on the proposed changes to ITE could start with the English department at CBE. A meeting took place with the English department during those visits with the proposals for change being generally welcomed and much enthusiasm exhibited by staff. The draft Phase 1 report was also discussed at this time with the Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Office (QA AAO) at PAAET in order to determine preferred mode of presentation. The final Phase 1 report was submitted in August, 2013 with a response being issued by that office almost immediately. The outcomes of those reports were discussed in meetings between the university project coordinator and the office of the Director General of PAAET in February 2014, but without resolution in terms of continuation of the project. That situation still exists at the time of writing, with the project having effectively paused midway and at the end of Phase 1 of the plan.

Proposed Changes to ITE in Kuwait

As had been indicated above no progress has been made on developing CPD provision from CBE for the Kuwait teacher workforce, but the proposals for change in ITE provision had been identified very early in the relationship between the university and CBE. There were three key areas of change proposed following the first visit of the project team to Kuwait in March 2010, which still remained in February 2014 when the project paused:

1. Admission and management of ITE students;
2. College based elements of ITE;
3. Teaching practice element of ITE.

Admission and Management of ITE Students

There are a number of related factors in this aspect of ITE that affect the quality of provision at CBE, namely:

- too few controls on the quantity and quality of students admitted;
- fewer graduates than should be expected, with lengthy periods of study frequently evident;and
- lack of opportunity for students to transfer between degree programmes or have intermediate exit points.

CBE provision for ITE is conducted in parallel institutions for male and female students in keeping with the principle of gender segregated education that is maintained beyond kindergarten age in Kuwait. As indicated above a teaching career is seen as an attractive option for nationals, and particularly for women, with the result that there is high demand for places on ITE programmes. This demand is exacerbated by the fact that all graduate teachers are guaranteed a job and there are good pension benefits offered which are available from a very early age relative to other nations. A further issue is that there are limited degree places available in Kuwait University and yet all school leavers who reach satisfactory levels of attainment are entitled to a place in higher education. This leaves PAAET with a challenge in terms of finding sufficient degree places to satisfy the demand, an outcome that does impact on CBE numbers. This was a common topic of discussion between the project teams, admissions officers and teaching staff at CBE with many concerns expressed about overcrowded classes and timetabling challenges. The consequence in terms of sheer numbers was that approximately the female college had 10 000 students and the male college had 4000 students in 2013. The volume of students was greater than the physical capacity of the buildings which, in turn, induced timetabling and staffing pressures. Although CBE

tried to extend the teaching day to help students are unwilling to stay later as this disrupts family schedules. In addition few CBE female teachers like late classes and most male teachers accept reluctantly. Alternative timetabling has also impacted on placement opportunities for practicum students who were not able to attend schools and kindergartens when they are open as they have been scheduled to attend classes at the same time.

In addition to the weight of numbers a major concern, expressed equally by CBE, PAAET and the Ministry of Education, was that there were too many students on ITE courses who were not suited to a career in teaching and were motivated by factors other than a desire to teach, a finding also recognised in the statement from a government commissioned report into Kuwait education that stated "the selection of candidates into teacher education should be more stringent and selective" (NIE, 2013: 2). Although CBE regulations state that interviews are to be held with applicants, these tended to be perfunctory in most instances. Whilst aptitude tests do exist for Arts, Physical Education & Sport, Music and Interior Design and there are placement tests for English (Ministry of Education, 2008: 49) the findings from the partnership project demonstrate that selection procedures, including interviews, were not rigorous. Normally applicants to ITE are allocated a place on the basis of the GPA scores achieved at High School and, as long as the minimum standard is achieved, CBE is obliged to accept the student (University of Hull, 2013).

There were also issues with progression and completion with a high percentage of students staying in the college for longer than the four years allocated for the BA programme leading to qualified teacher status. Current CBE regulations allow

students to repeat elements of the degree, including repeat years, or transfer to other majors (e.g. transfer from English to Science). This can act as a disincentive to programme completion as such circumstances can suit those who are not keen to be a teacher as it extends their studies, but also does not affect the (generous) bursary they receive as a student. With the general cost of living being low in Kuwait (mainly due to low energy costs and government subsidised basic foods) being a full-time student is economically viable. Graduation rates in 2012 provide evidence of this with just 400 from the female college being awarded a degree and QTS.

Despite the opportunity for switching to another major programme, all ITE provision at CBE leads to a Bachelor's degree and QTS with no scope for directing those deemed unsuitable for teaching towards alternative courses or for an intermediate exit award. The absence of an intermediate exit point has the possibility (and frequently witnessed outcome) of a student reaching the end of a period of study without an award, but more importantly the absence of transfer possibilities does not allow for someone unsuited to teaching to undertake alternative study. This factor is compounded by the fact that the first real exposure to the practice of teaching is not until the final semester of the degree programme, with the unfortunate consequence that some students only discover whether they have the desire, aptitude and capability to be a teacher after a long period of study. This leads to high numbers of ITE graduates not taking up a post as a teacher.

As a consequence of the above features a number of options were explored and the following recommendations made by the project teams to deal with the issues arising from admission and management of students:

- Planning for HE provision within PAAET needs to be more rigorous in terms of managing student numbers for CBE;
- Admissions procedures should identify candidates unsuitable for teaching with such people to be directed towards alternative courses that do not lead to qualified teacher status;
- CBE and its partner colleges within PAAET should develop a dual system of diploma and degree courses with the facility to transfer between the two when appropriate, especially if the student is not suitable for a teacher-training degree course;

College Based Elements of the ITE Courses

There is a generally perceived view in the country, ratified by the government commissioned report on education, that the quality of teachers is not of a sufficiently high standard with "a significant proportion of teachers who are considered to be performing at below expected levels in curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment" (NIE, 2013: 2). That report concludes that ITE programmes are not up to expectations, teachers are reporting to their schools without sufficient expertise and focus too much on examination requirements and rote teaching. This result in the following gaps:

- A lack of understanding of the principles of curriculum design and planning, and a lack of willingness to interpret subject content in innovative ways rather than merely follow what is prescribed in text guides;
- A lack of understanding and competencies in using a repertoire of teaching methods to enhance critical thinking and to develop problem-solving skills;
- A lack of skills to assess students for higher order thinking and problem-solving, and to formulate different batteries of test items for different types of students, such as the slow learners and the gifted ones. (NIE, 2103: 105)

The partnership project teams reached similar conclusions and recommended an overhaul of the ITE curriculum at CBE which was considered to be biased toward

subject knowledge. CBE uses the credit hour system with ITE students needing to accumulate 130 credit hours before they commence their teaching practicum in the final semester of their programme. These credit hours consist of 60 credit hours for their major subject plus 30 credit hours for general education courses and 40 credit hours for vocational courses. A subject, rather than class-based, approach has been the preferred method of school organisation for a long time. In 1988 the class teacher project was initiated, but was cancelled some ten years later as it was considered rather difficult to continue, with the consequence that the subject approach was put into practice again. This has almost certainly led to the dominance of major subjects rather than teacher capability. The emerging recommendation from the project partnership was for there to be realignment of weightings of the programme and, in particular, for more emphasis to be placed on the development of generic and subject-focused pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Consequently it as concluded CBE, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, needs to have a clear understanding of the professional attributes, knowledge, skills and understanding that are required in order to be an effective teacher. At the time of writing Kuwait does not have agreed expectations for teacher performance even though much investment has been made into researching teacher standards in other education systems across the world. On a positive note, there have been some developments in this field with the World Bank having providing technical assistance to develop broad National Education Standards for Kuwait for a number of years, including work undertaken since 2012 by a National Teaching Standards Writing Group (Ingvarson, 2013). Such standards have a clear understanding of what is required in order to be an effective teacher (i.e. the introduction of *teacher standards*).

These, it was concluded by the partnership project teams, should form the basis of the training and assessment of students wanting to pursue a career in teaching and would enable all those involved in the training process to have a shared and consistent view of what a successful teacher should look like.

There were also issues of inadequate quality assurance and enhancement procedures apparent in the ITE programmes where there appeared to be no internal moderation or external examination of assessments. Second marking only occurs, it seems, on the few occasions when a student lodges an appeal. Whilst there was evidence of some good practice in CBE it is not built into the system. Consequently, this raised doubts about the consistency of expectations and standards across the modules. The partnership project teams considered these as issues which needed to be considered alongside the recommended reviews of curriculum and practicum.

As a consequence of these investigations, the partnership project teams made the following recommendations to deal with the issues over which the college could have control in relation to ITE:

- A review of the balance of programme content with the inclusion of more teaching specific knowledge and skills, i.e. more 'core' modules, which all students study and fewer optional 'free choice' modules in order to improve the overall quality of the ITE programmes;
- The adoption of proposed national standards to underpin ITE and subsequent teacher performance;
- Seek to ensure Investigate consistency of assessment across the programmes by applying quality assurance and enhancement procedures commonly seen in systems of higher education (and counterpart institutions in particular) in other countries.

The Teaching Practice Element of ITE

The current system requires students to spend just one semester in school on teaching practice (the 'practicum') and this is during the final year of study. It needs to be noted, however, that students were also allowed to do some courses at the college (around 9 credit hours) while doing their practicum, a practice which usually happened after they finish teaching at school and required them to come back to the campus to attend their classes. This placed an additional burden them as they have to study and respond to all required academic tasks in addition to the training tasks required. The practicum is a 13 week placement which is intended to be jointly supervised by CBE Academic Advisers and school-based teaching staff. A number of concerns were noted about the practicum by the project teams, most notably that because of the late appearance in the programme there were no early opportunities to identify students' suitability for a career in teaching, to identify strengths and weaknesses, to set targets related to teaching skills and to integrate the theoretical and practical aspects of the programmes. There were other concerns, however, including the nature of school placement and the effectiveness of the supervision of teaching practice. The choice of teaching practice schools were often made on the basis of geographical convenience, rather than the appropriateness of the planned learning experience for the students, which was considered by the partnership project teams as an inappropriate method of managing placements. There were also examples of inconsistency in terms of school based practice with some students not being able to engage in the systematic development of whole class teaching. The proposed schedule for teaching placement was for there to be three phases:

> **Observational** (2 weeks) with the student teacher visiting classes and observing the class teacher;

Instructional (about 5-6 weeks) where they teach between 8 and 10 hours a week. No lesson plans are required at this stage and no grading is undertaken, although the student teacher might be expected to make some resources;
Evaluation (final few weeks) where the student teacher is expected to undertake large group work and whole class teaching. Grading is made via agreement between college (45%) and school-based supervisors (45%), and 10% of the total score is left at the hand of the school principal.

A number of other issues were noted, starting with the lack of opportunity for students to visit the school prior to the start of the practicum, thus not allowing for consultation and agreement on their planned role. There was then inconsistency in which placement schools behaved with some not cooperating with students and treating them as teaching assistants, others requiring a greater amount of teaching than was expected in the practicum, imposing unreasonable timetable changes or placing additional duties on the students in the school such as playground duty.

The partnership project teams concluded that role of schools should be more than simply to host students during teaching practice periods. School staff can play a vital role in the development of trainee teachers and so consideration should be given to developing the role of class teachers and mentors so that the training process is seen as a partnership between the college and the schools. As a consequence of this exploration, the following recommendations were made to deal with the issues in relation to the teaching practicum:

- School placement or placements earlier in the programme should be introduced, if only to ensure that students have a realistic understanding of what it means to be a teacher;
- Criteria need to be developed to select (and, if necessary, deselect) placement schools, combined with an effort to recruit more high-quality schools that are not currently involved in teacher training;

- School placements should be determined by development needs and ensure that the student is allowed to engage in a process which allows gradual growth to full capacity;
- The roles of college academic advisers and school-based supervisory staff should be complementary and have a common set of assessment criteria. All involved in the training process (college and school staff) will need to apply the criteria consistently with all students;
- Students need to devote their final term at the college to the practicum without doing any courses at the college.

Discussion

As indicated above, the project teams had quickly agreed the ways in which the current system of ITE could be improved and yet little progress has been made in that direction. The project has indeed been 'cooking on low heat' and has been in a state of suspension since the completion of Phase 1 with the publication of the report in August 2013. In this part of the paper, some of the reasons for slow progress are explored.

The Quality Assurance and Academic Accreditation Office (QA AAO) within PAAET issued its own commentary on the report of the project between CBE and the university saying, in its "professional opinion", the partnership between has been "hamstrung to accomplish its agreed objectives" (QA AAO, 2013: 4) and highlighted in total 11 issues contributing to the shortfall in expectations for the project of which six, as follows, were specific to ITE:

1. Some policy decisions related to vital issues such as streamlining and improving the intake, retention, progression of students and student-teacher ratio were not planned, evaluated or implemented in keeping with the recommendations of the Project Team;
2. The coordination between and among various stakeholders, as strongly recommended by the Project Team, has not been accomplished;

3. The curriculum has not been improved in keeping with the professional needs and according to the recommendations of the Project Team;
4. Lack of proper understanding and appreciation on the part of some administrators and academicians as to what constitutes quality education and how is it achieved;
5. Lack of understanding and appreciation of the requisite professional standards to institute quality in education and to meet the accreditation standards; and
6. Adherence to status-quo as opposed to endeavouring to achieve the emerging trends in higher education.

These statements illustrate a number of the key issues that have accompanied the Partnership Project, with the QA AAO report recommending a need to establish a task force to tackle the problems over which the college has no control. There were still a number of project recommendations, however, over which action could have been taken without recourse to new national policy initiatives. Lack of progress, it is thus suggested, has been caused by a combination of unhelpful regulations and absence of professional will. This latter phenomenon is perhaps best summed up by the government commissioned report which, based on their experience in the Middle East, suggested a pragmatic rather than idealistic approach to systemic change and recommended that "certain institutionalized policies and practices […] are best left untouched" (NIE, 2013: 3). In other words, the status quo of practice is too endemic to initiate substantive change in Kuwait. Even incremental and marginal changes are handled with excessive care, with major change requiring a much great period of development if the initiative is to proceed to practice. To illustrate this point, we offer two examples of proposed change from the experiences of the partnership project teams: the opening of the new CBE campus, and the need to improve completion rates of students on ITE courses.

The development of a new campus was of central importance to CBE as the quality of college accommodation was not suitable for learning in twenty-first century, with the female college in particular having poor facilities. Substantial government funding (c300m Kuwaiti Dinars – approximately US$1bn) was directed towards the building of a new campus in 2010 with excellent facilities for both female and male students and featuring shared buildings for administration and central services, yet this remained vacant on completion for over two years. The partnership project teams were allowed to visit the empty campus in February 2013, and were informed it was not clear how the decision to take up occupation would be made: hence no decision had been made.

In regard to the improved completion rates: even though this was entirely in the remit of the college to introduce stricter rules, there was a general reluctance as such a move would most likely be considered as socially sensitive. All ITE students were in receipt of a bursary which was not affected by completion rate. In other words, the students continued to receive their bursary so long as they remained a student. With so many opportunities to transfer between major courses and to repeat various course components, there was thus little financial incentive to complete their studies.

In both instances it appears that the financial implications of non-action did not influence the decisions (or non-decisions). The concept of non-decision-making is relevant here as it recognizes the way in which power can be exhibited in the absence of plural social settings. Generally, such an approach involves suppressing challenges to the status quo and/or the addition of new issues to an agenda. Issues are excluded from an agenda because they are threatening in some direct way leading to situation that "tends to limit the scope of actual decision-making to 'safe' issues" (Bacharach & Baratz, 1962: 952).   In a later work, Bacharach & Baratz (1970: 44) refer to this phenomenon as a 'mobilisation of bias' whereby a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals and institutional procedures prevent decisions a number of mechanisms. Whilst this can often be seen as deliberate actions on behalf of vested interests, it seems to have been achieved in this instance through "the reinforcement of existing barriers" (McCalla-Chen, 2000: 34). In other words this was not necessarily sets of deliberate

actions to prevent the occupation of the new campus or to resist changes to student progress, but rather both seem to be cases of non-decision-making influenced by an absence of financial concern. The relatively high capital costs, combined with recurring costs of sustaining a non-operational campus, did not induce any increased haste in decision making and is not a situation that can be envisaged as happening in most other countries in the world. Similarly, the cost inefficiency of extended completion of ITE students would be unlikely in other education systems, especially those often reliant on student per capita income.

This is not to say that there was an absence of other uses of power to maintain the status quo and there may well have been examples of individuals and groups using a range of strategies associated with the concept of non-decision-making such as non-attendance of key personnel at meetings with the project team. Too little evidence was accumulated by the project teams to justify such assertions, however, even though it was clear that after four years of work only one department (English) had been identified in CBE as willing to make the recommended changes to their ITE provision. Even then the permissions and funding source for the project was not renewed by PAAET after the submission of the Phase 1 report by the partnership project teams.

Whilst such non-decisions evident in terms of ITE can be understood, this maintenance of the status quo needs to be set against desires for improvement in education outcomes through enhanced teacher capability which have been identified as essential to the success of the education reform required in Kuwait (Ministry of Education, 2008: 35). As identified by the subsequent commissioned report on the

direction of education reform, ITE is "in need of a review to make it more effective as there is currently a significant proportion of teachers who are considered to be performing at below expected levels in curriculum planning, pedagogy and assessment" (NIE, 2013: 2). The authors of that report illustrate that world-class education systems not only require the support of political leadership, but may have to engage the strategy of "leapfrogging" in order to avoid playing catch-up. To achieve excellence in education within a relatively short time, as the Kuwait Ministry of Education policy indicates, the NIE report suggests that all the stakeholders "must collectively possess a 'leapfrog' mindset based on rapid, proactive responses to the realities of change" (NIE 2013: 3). As can be seen from the analysis of the work on ITE provision at CBE by the partnership project, however, the political will required for rapid change in Kuwait has not been evident and, although most development requirements have been identified for several years, the status quo has been maintained. The sad consequence appears to be that the workforce emerging from pre-service teacher education is not at the level of capability to match the curriculum demands embedded in the national policy for education (Oxford Business Group, 2013). Although resolution of this impasse is the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the providers of pre-service teacher education, the major emphasis has to be on political direction from the top if Kuwait is to keep pace with its agenda for improvement of its education system.

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