

Reforming Teacher Education in Portugal:  
A call for innovation and old-fashioned action  
Carlos Ceia | NOVA FCSH - CETAPS

**1 In-service Teacher Training in Portugal: The state of a Diffuse Art**

Portugal has a serious problem to solve immediately: the proven lack of teachers to ensure the constitutional right of access to free education in the public education system. Today, in Portugal, more than 30,000 pupils in primary and secondary education are without teachers in some areas of the curriculum.

Although this is an urgent problem, the first topic to be addressed here is the in-service training of current teachers. The degree of urgency in reforming this type of training is less than the shortage of teachers mentioned above, (which will be addressed later in the paper), but the consequence of maintaining the status quo is no less degrading. Unless pre-service training is carried out in the right place (universities and polytechnics), teacher education programmes exist in a kind of logistical chaos, with no attempt to reorganise the system by governments since the 1990s.

The in-service training of current teachers, provided for in the Foundational Law of the Educational System in 1986, has experienced unsustainable variations and interpretations over the years, and it is my belief that the present situation risks being a case, unique in the world, of training creativity with no quality control. We have a legal regime for continuous teacher training (Decree-Law No. 22/2014), which requires that "[the] teacher, as a trainee, has the right to:

- a) Choose the training actions most appropriate to his or her professional and personal development plan (...)

b) Attend free mandatory training for the purposes of his or her assessment of teaching performance and progression in their career (art. 17)<sup>o</sup>.

However, we have reached a point where this type of training has become so widespread that it is difficult to know what is training and what is entertainment.

Today, there are several entities that are allowed to offer continuing professional development (CPD), even if these entities were not created for that purpose. For example:

1. All training courses can be accredited by the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education (*Conselho Científico-Pedagógico da Formação Contínua*, in Portuguese), an independent Portuguese entity that serves to give a seal of approval related not to quality but to conformity to pre-defined models.
2. School Association Training Centres (*Centros de Formação de Associação de Escolas*, in Portuguese), created in 1992, host multiple CPD courses. The quality control of the training is carried out solely through the results of satisfaction surveys of trainees. They have contributed to the maintenance of a national database of teacher trainers from the state's own network of primary and secondary school teachers. They also conduct the logistics of the external evaluation process of professional performance.
3. Professional associations also offer in-service teacher training courses.
4. The same can be said of scientific societies such as the Portuguese Mathematics Society, which has existed since 1940, and which also offers CPD courses.
5. Professional teacher associations are very focused on CPD, offering many training opportunities and different models of CPD.
6. Teachers' unions, which anywhere in the world serve to fight for better working conditions, in Portugal also offer CPD courses which lack quality control, are replicated everywhere, and seldom relate to research.

7. The Directorate General for Education (DGE) also offers in-service teacher education, even though its mission rightly states it is responsible for the execution of policies only.

To be able to proceed with a general logistical reorganisation would require the courage for a set of disruptive and corrective measures, without acquiescing to national entities, which over the last 20 or so years have taken advantage of the absence of a coherent policy of continuous teacher education. It is my belief that:

1. In-service teacher education should be positioned in the only place possible: higher education (universities and polytechnics), because only here are there highly qualified trainers to guarantee high-quality, timely training (research is non-existent in the unions, in the DGE or in school centres, where the instructors limit their actions to replicating the training they themselves acquired in universities and polytechnics).
2. It should be noted that Higher Education institutions (HEIs) are prepared to accept this challenge of mass training, because they are already responsible for the pre-service education of teachers and for all the research in education that is produced in Portugal. By virtue of the demanding quality control mechanisms of their courses and degrees, these institutions have the ideal conditions for teacher training. The well-known myth about the distance between the concerns of HEIs and the world of non-university education is just that: an idea lacking foundation in most cases.
3. The Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education is a dispensable body, as its level of intervention in the accreditation of all types of university and non-university training has no effective action.
4. The School Association Training Centres should be disbanded, since they do not have the highly qualified personnel necessary to meet the scientific demands of CPD, nor do they have any connection to advanced research in education that is duly externally evaluated, as happens in HEIs.

5. Decree Law No. 22/2014 (and Order No. 779/2019), related to progression within teachers' career, needs to be totally rethought. The career progression of primary and secondary school teachers cannot be at the mercy of isolated training courses, which do not represent advances in knowledge in the different subject areas, where the only criteria considered is the accumulation of training hours, to the detriment of the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.
6. The acquisition of master's and doctoral degrees must be valued in teaching careers as the highest point of achievement. These advanced degrees are evaluated by the *Agência de Avaliação e Acreditação do Ensino Superior* (Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education - A3ES) according to internationally accurate standards, which neither the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education nor the Directorate General for Education nor any *ad hoc* training centre or association can achieve; intermediate (post-graduate) degrees are evaluated by the scientific councils of higher education institutions, with much greater precision than the evaluation of the Scientific and Pedagogic Council for Continual Education, rendering it obsolete.
7. Today, there are countless partnerships and cooperation protocols between HEIs and primary and secondary schools which ensure that the former do not have their backs turned to the latter.
8. There are international networks for continuous teacher training that Portugal should participate in more. For example, the European Teacher Education Network (ETEN), founded in 1988, or the School Education Gateway, from which we can learn a lot.
9. We must take advantage of the distance learning experience that the pandemic forced us all to acquire and invest in training courses created and managed by HEIs that are able to reach the entire community of teachers. If *Universidade Aberta* (the Portuguese Open University) played an important role when, 40 years ago, it was necessary to offer distance

in-service professionalization programs, today all Portuguese HEIs are also capable of offering online and distance learning.

It is true that all these measures together may represent a considerable break with the current system. But either we continue to complain daily that the CPD system is working poorly, or we move forward with courage towards a hard but necessary change to adjust the system to provide coherent training, with quality control and aligned with other internationally referenced training courses. The choice is between having better teachers or the same teachers trapped in a system that does not let them grow professionally or scientifically.

## **2. Pre-service Teacher Education in Portugal: The State of a Prolix Art**

In the last decade, there has been a drop in demand for master's degrees in teacher education (pre-service) if compared to the training models prior to 2007, when teacher education was integrated into an undergraduate degree or in so-called post-graduate courses in the form of educational training "branches" (*ramos de formação educacional*). Numbers have been declining for several years, and several factors have contributed: from the constant criticism of the teaching profession, about which we rarely hear or read anything positive, precarious conditions long, undervalued careers and deficiencies in CPD models, to a lack of financial support for teachers displaced from their area of residence, and, (I say this not in my own cause but in general), a lack of interest from many HEIs which do not recognize teacher education as a strategic area that should articulate the needs of the country with real integrated action programs between Government and training institutions.

There is now a greater awareness of the severity of the lack of teachers in Portugal. As early as 2016, the National Education Council produced a technical report that explained the need to train more teachers over the next 15 years, but it was simply ignored by the government. Presently however, many other politicians have changed their opinion and are now calling for urgent solutions after the public

alarm was sounded. HEIs are also opening their eyes to the problem but are passively waiting for greater certainties.

To solve the problem of the lack of teachers in Portugal requires a combined effort of many measures. Anyone who thinks that they can solve the problem with a single measure is deluding themselves. No country that has experienced this problem - and there is no shortage of countries in Europe that face the same challenge today - has been able to solve it overnight, precisely because it takes as long to solve it as it did to reach the collective awareness that it exists.

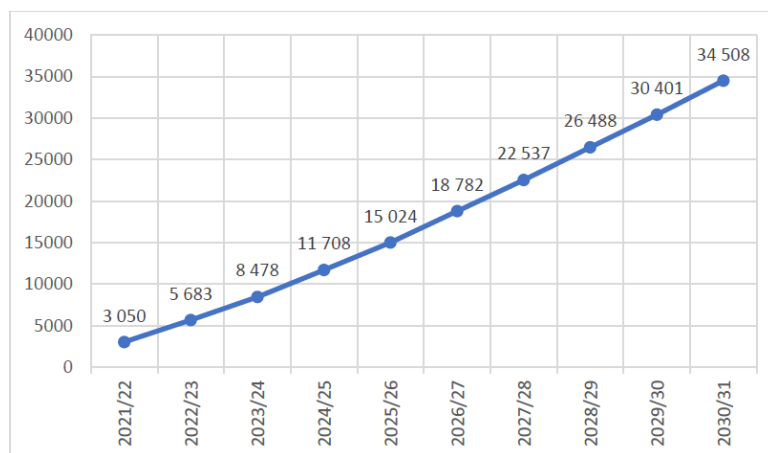
The report "Teaching Career in Europe: Access, Progression and Support",<sup>1</sup> which presents data from the Eurydice network, has already identified the problem not only in Portugal but also in several other European countries. In Portugal, approximately 1,500 graduates choose to take a pre-service master's degree in education annually. Therefore, in a decade, given the current supply, we will have 15,000 new teachers, which is far from the needs already foreseen of about 35,000 new teachers by 2030 (which could reach about 50,000 if we include in the projection the current entry of unqualified, untenured teachers). France today has 50% of untenured teachers, many of whom lack proper qualifications; Spain, in some autonomous regions, has started to recruit teachers without a master's degree in teaching as in Spain, this degree is only 1 year long and few can complete it in such a short time. There are also serious problems in Greece and Italy, etc. It is not exclusively a Portuguese problem, and it is not a 2022 problem! It is not even a European problem. The USA is also experiencing the same dilemma as many teachers have left teaching in the last two years, because it is a poorly paid job if compared to other professions. President Biden has already created the American Families Plan<sup>2</sup>, investing 9 billion dollars just to solve the problem of the lack of teachers in schools. Even before the pandemic, the US already needed more than 100,000 teachers.

---

<sup>1</sup> European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Eurydice, Birch, P., Piedrafita Tremosa, S., Davydovskaia, O., et al., *Teaching careers in Europe: access, progression and support*, Delhaxhe, A.(editor), Publications Office, 2019, <<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/309510>>

<sup>2</sup> See: "FACT SHEET: The American Families Plan", available at: <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/28/fact-sheet-the-american-families-plan>>

Another problem of current pre-service teacher education courses is that they are not even balanced across all cycles of study in pre-university schooling. The most serious is the 2nd Cycle (5th and 6th grades), which has almost disappeared from polytechnics and has been dismissed by universities, which can lead this cycle of schooling to a long period of lack of qualified professionals. This happened in the 1970s and 80s and led to a deregulation in the qualifications of teachers of this cycle of education that continues to this day. In the "Diagnostic Study of Teacher Needs from 2021 to 2030",<sup>3</sup> coordinated by Luís Catela Nunes (from the Knowledge Centre for Economics of Education at NOVA SBE) and in partnership with the Directorate General for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC), it will be in the 3rd Cycle and Secondary Schooling that the need for recruitment will be greatest, since there will be a shortage of 15,663 new teachers by 2030; in the 1st Cycle 6,926 new teachers will be needed; in the 2nd Cycle, 5,655 and 4,419 in pre-school education.



Fonte: Cálculo dos autores com base nas Estatísticas da Educação 2018/19.

**Figure 1** Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers in continental Portugal 2021/22-2030/31

However, the big difference is in the capacity and current interest of the training institutions, and for the 2nd cycle there are almost no teacher education courses available, nor has there been in recent years, contrary to the other cycles. There has

<sup>3</sup> Available in Portuguese at: <<https://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/506/>>.

been a long silence and general inactivity about the training of teachers for the 2nd cycle of basic education, and in the next decade we will pay a heavy price for this gap.

The previously mentioned study includes a projection of new teachers by 2030 by recruitment group (Tables 1 and 2 translated from the Portuguese version, *Estudo de diagnóstico de necessidades docentes de 2021 a 2030*”, available at: <https://www.dgeec.mec.pt/np4/506>).

**Table 1** *Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers from 2021/22 to 2030/31 by recruitment group*

Cycle of education	Code	Recruitment group	2021/22	2025/26	2030/31
Pre-school Education	100	Pre-school education	494	2.412	4.419
1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	110	1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle Basic Education	420	3.502	6.853
	120	English	9	28	74
<b>Subtotal</b>			<b>429</b>	<b>3.530</b>	<b>6.926</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle of Basic Education	200	Portuguese and Social/History studies	12	79	378
	220	Portuguese and English	5	18	60
	230	Mathematics and Natural Sciences	153	429	1.315
	240	Visual and Technical Education	133	429	999
	250	Musical Education	36	129	477
	260	Physical Education	55	180	564
	200, 210, 220	Portuguese [1]	216	631	1.861
<b>Subtotal</b>			<b>611</b>	<b>1.896</b>	<b>5.655</b>

**Table 2** *Accumulative recruitment needs for new teachers from 2021/22 to 2030/31 by recruitment group*

Educational Cycle	Code	Recruitment Group	2021/22	2025/26	2030/31
3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle and Secondary Education	300	Portuguese	206	1.134	2.861
	310	Latin & Greek	0	0	0
	320	French	31	123	405
	330	English	128	564	1.311



	340	German	0	2	2
	350	Spanish	4	12	49
	400	History	131	603	1.253
	410	Philosophy	70	360	765
	420	Geography	77	414	1.007
	430	Economics and Accounting	85	424	758
	500	Mathematics	155	618	1.551
	510	Physics and Chemistry	104	388	1.249
	520	Biology and Geology	103	500	1.231
	550	Computer Studies	35	77	394
	600	Visual Arts	96	446	1.054
	620	Physical Education	85	290	804
	610,997, 530,999	Specialisations	141	593	964
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1.450</b>	<b>6.549</b>	<b>15.663</b>
<b>Special Education, Portuguese Sign Language and Moral and Religious Education</b>	290	Moral and Religious Education	9	79	250
	360	Portuguese Sign Language	0	0	1
	910	Special Education 1	51	514	1.516
	920	Special Education 2	5	32	58
	930	Special Education 3	0	10	19
		<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>1.845</b>
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3.050</b>	<b>15.024</b>	<b>34.508</b>

If we look at another study, "Regime for the Selection and Recruitment of Teaching Staff for Pre-School Education and Primary and Secondary Education"<sup>4</sup> (2019), we can better understand the recent capacity for pre-service teacher training in Higher Education, by master's degree in teaching/recruitment subject group:

<sup>4</sup> Published in Portuguese by the Conselho Nacional de Educação: "Regime de Selecção e Recrutamento do Pessoal Docente da Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensinos Básico e Secundário", available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1495-estudo-estudo-regime-selecao-docentes>>

**Table 3** Number of Master's degree graduates by degree course (source: DGEEC, 2019 & CNE)

Teaching Master's degree course	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Early Years English	21	5	3	6	3
Pre-School Education	367	296	355	93	272
Pre-school and 1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	505	452	532	481	309
1 <sup>st</sup> cycle of Basic Education	30	8	10	5	2
1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle of Basic Education	162	163	196	182	170
Science	23	5	9	1	2
Visual Education & Technology	45	15	3	3	2
Music	59	45	27	43	17
Physical Education	600	475	443	303	305
Portuguese	138	132	146	101	79
English	68	80	42	42	88
History and Geography	62	64	53	50	33
Physics & Chemistry	46	32	21	7	5
Philosophy	34	30	11	13	22
Mathematics	87	50	37	42	17
Biology & Geology	35	41	33	31	11
Computer Studies	37	33	25	11	33
Economics & Accounting	3	13	4	8	10
Visual Arts	143	100	60	22	40
Music	70	101	170	201	277
<b>Total</b>	<b>2549</b>	<b>2156</b>	<b>2195</b>	<b>1688</b>	<b>1718</b>

The 2016/17 total number of 1718 graduates from teaching Master's degree courses have fallen further over the last 5 years, and should now be closer to 1500 graduates per year. In view of these figures, it can be concluded that:

- The need for teachers is unequally distributed across teaching areas, with the most urgent cases being preschool education, basic education (1st Cycle), Music Education, Portuguese, English, History, Geography, Philosophy, Physics and Chemistry, Mathematics, Visual Education/Visual

Arts, Technology and Computer Studies (all cycles), and the area of special education. In the last 10 years, we have not addressed these needs and have trained teachers without regard to the subject areas most in need.

The general situation today forces the Portuguese government to initiate the appropriate policies to solve the problem that could turn the Portuguese educational system into chaos by 2030.

At the end of 2021, The Ministry of Education, presented a draft of the new policies for the future of teacher education in Portugal for the coming years. After parliamentary elections, we are still waiting for clarification from the new Ministry of Education, but we do not expect a major change to the previously announced solutions. It is now argued that the distribution of general scientific training favours curricular units that provide knowledge of learning processes, of the contexts in which they teach and of the curriculum. Simultaneously, the approach to pedagogical knowledge of a more general nature and articulated with transversal dimensions of the curriculum in relation to specific didactics is less frequent. This has never been my personal choice and never will be because I have always believed that training in specific didactics as well as training in the teaching subject areas is more important in pre-service education than in general educational training, which can be acquired and/or consolidated in multiple extracurricular contexts.

The most relevant measure proposed is that the component "Initiation to Professional Practice", including supervised teaching practice, would be increased to 50% of the total number of credits, assisted by a supervised seminar. Separating the *practicum* from the taught courses and placing it in cooperating schools away from any university guidance would be a huge mistake, an unjustified step backwards for a modality whose past results are well-known. Going back to the 1980s, the North America models of pre-service education on the job we imported then failed because professional preparation took place in schools, far away from universities supervision.

We could somehow recover the essence of what was the in-service professionalization model, certainly the best model we have had in teacher

education in the last 40 years. Without a doubt, we must value the practicum in master's teaching degrees. But there is no clarity in the practical implementation of the improvement proposals of such a complex system of teacher education if we do not assume that the performance of a full-time master's student/trainee teacher, with his/her own classes, in a cooperating school, during his/her initiation into professional practice, implies financial reward for the teaching work provided, as existed in the old model of in-service professionalization. And we should recognise the status of the cooperating teacher with a financial reward and reduction of teaching hours. If these two conditions are not respected, we will be facing a legally unsustainable model: as the Ministry of Education would be employing unpaid interns to solve the problem of the teacher shortage and would be forcing professionalized teachers to supervise their work, also for free. I hope that this political assumption will never be applied.

The National Education Council, in an opinion document from March 2021,<sup>5</sup> recommended that the national Recovery and Resilience Plan should include funds for pre-service teacher education. It is all a matter of political choice, and there are funds to sponsor a strategy of real action to train more teachers not only to solve the problem in the present, but in a sustained way in the future. It is true that the 2021-22 school year is the first of three years of implementation of the Learning Recovery Plan "21-23 School+" (<<https://escolamais.dge.mec.pt>>), which represents an investment of more than 900 million euros in public schools to strengthen human resources in schools, training and capacity building for teaching and non-teaching staff, increasing digital resources and equipping schools with equipment and infrastructure, but there are no indicators of what will be invested in training new teachers.

Revising the current Legal Regime of Professional Qualification for Teaching in Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education, in the sense indicated above, will only help to solve part of the shortage of teachers in the Portuguese education system. In the short term, it will always be necessary to articulate this measure with

---

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1643-parecer-sobre-o-plano-recuperacao-e-resiliencia-prr>>.

others that are less complex in technical terms, but that require equal political courage:

1. The creation of incentives for teachers who have moved away from their area of residence, as happens in many other public professions and which governments have ignored. This has driven many professionals away from teaching.
2. Give more autonomy to schools to hire the teaching staff necessary and put an end to incomplete teaching timetables.
3. Eliminate from the curriculum subjects that currently occupy too much space, for example, Citizenship and Development, which is compulsory in all years of Basic Education and optional in Secondary Education. I see no need to go further than offering this transversal subject once in each cycle of Basic Education.
4. It is known that some Nordic countries, for example, have independent agencies for the acquisition of teaching qualifications. The opinion "Regime for the selection and recruitment of teaching staff for Pre-School Education and Basic and Secondary Education" of the Portuguese National Education Council (2020) describes several of these national examples<sup>6</sup>. But there is **one** variable here that makes all the difference: in countries such as Finland, Slovenia, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, teachers apply directly to schools for the specific vacancies that exist. In other words, an open and diversified model for acquiring professional qualifications requires a model of teacher employment that is decentralised from the state, to allow the local employer to decide which profile of teacher it wishes to recruit by looking closely at their training pathway. Without this system, we will have no way of distinguishing graduates with different training profiles in a national recruitment call.

---

<sup>6</sup> "Regime de seleção e recrutamento do pessoal docente da Educação Pré-Escolar e Ensinos Básico e Secundário", available at: <<https://www.cnedu.pt/pt/noticias/cne/1495-estudo-estudo-regime-selecao-docentes>>, p. 83 ff.

5. In recent years qualified teachers have left the profession for many reasons: because they lacked opportunities near their place of residence, because the real life of the school failed to live up to their expectations, or because they gave in to the ever-increasing bureaucratic demands of the profession that prevent most teachers from even having time to think about their lessons. This undefined group will be difficult to attract back to the profession, but it would be worthwhile trying to create recruitment conditions that could lead this contingent of former professional teachers to consider returning to the teaching profession.
6. We could save millions of euros for the Recovery and Resilience Plan applied to education, even considering the great investment in the digital training of teachers; if only part of that budget could be applied in training scholarships, this would allow young graduates to invest in a master's degree in teaching. (The same I would say for the CPD of in-service teachers, where it would also make sense to have training scholarships that would allow each teacher to choose the best offers to reinforce their qualification). Also because of the effect of the pandemic on the lives of many household economies, many potential candidates for entry to a master's degree in teaching simply drop out because they cannot afford the costs of tuition fees, travel and accommodation in places that are often far from their area of residence. This situation, which is getting worse, with many potential young candidates dropping out, could be solved with a training grant for many of them.

Beyond all these technical solutions, I conclude by insisting on the need to bear in mind a teacher training model that includes interaction between scientific research, educational training, and professional practice. This interaction between the different components of teacher training is our best achievement since the paradigm shift in 2006-07. There is not a single known indicator that recommends reversing this logic in which immersion in investigative practices is sacrificed for more general educational training and supervised practice on the job, away from the supervision of higher education institutions. The experience of investigating a subject directly related to professional practice carried out in the classroom, as has

been our option at NOVA FCSH, is a guaranteed learning experience, recognized by the students in training, far beyond the training period, because it also has the enormous advantage of allowing the acquisition of unique skills in action-research, reflective research, intercultural research and philosophical research among other modalities that, as a rule, are not lost in the professional path of the future teacher.