



Second-Career Teachers: First reflections on non-traditional pathways toward the teaching profession

Second-Career Teachers: Prime riflessioni su percorsi non tradizionali di professionalizzazione degli insegnanti di scuola secondaria

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, many countries in the field of Teacher Education are facing teacher shortages and encountering difficulties in recruiting a sufficient number of qualified teachers. To address this issue, many educational systems have developed alternative pathways to enter the teaching profession, attracting high-quality graduates and professionals from diverse backgrounds, commonly known as second-career teachers (SCT). This paper presents an analysis of European and national documents and reports, sharing the initial state-of-the-art study on the topic of alternative pathways and lateral entry of second-career teachers into the teaching profession. The focus is on England, Germany, and Italy, which are partner countries of the SecWell Project – Second Career Teachers Well-being: toward non-traditional professional development strategies funded by EUniWell – the European University of Well-being Universities Alliance.

Attualmente, nell'ambito della formazione insegnanti, molti paesi si trovano a far fronte a difficoltà nel reclutamento del numero necessario di insegnanti qualificati. Numerosi sono i sistemi di istruzione che hanno sviluppato percorsi alternativi di accesso alla professione insegnante volti ad attrarre laureati e/o professionisti provenienti da esperienze professionali in ambiti estranei all'insegnamento: si tratta di coloro che vengono definiti second career teachers (SCT). Sulla base di un'analisi di documenti e rapporti europei e nazionali, il presente contributo intende presentare uno stato dell'arte sul tema dei percorsi alternativi di ingresso nella professione insegnante, con particolare riferimento a Inghilterra, Germania e Italia. Lo studio si colloca entro il progetto SecWell - Second Career Teachers Well-being: toward non-traditional professional development strategies finanziato da EUniWell - European University of Well-being Universities Alliance.

KEYWORDS

Second-Career Teachers, Initial Teacher Education, Ageing Teacher Population, Teacher Shortages, Lateral Entry Seconda-Carriera, Formazione Iniziale, Formazione in Servizio, Invecchiamento Popolazione Insegnante, Carezza Insegnanti, Ingressi Non-Tradizionali

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1. Teacher-shortage and Second-Career Teachers: an increasing phenomenon

In the 21st century, in the field of Teacher Education, many countries are facing teacher shortages and the problem of recruiting the required number of qualified teachers (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2018). Teacher recruitment shortages together with the ageing teacher population are reported by international literature as a serious problem for many educational systems around the world (McInerney et al., 2015). This phenomenon is cited by more than half of European educational systems. (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al.'s 2018 report on *Teaching Careers in Europe: Access, Progression and Support*). Furthermore, several countries suffer both teacher shortages and oversupply in different curriculum areas (e.g., Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, and Montenegro) (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2018).

Despite educational systems facing these challenges, the path towards tenure-track employment as a fully qualified teacher remains a lengthy and rigid process (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2018; 2021).

To deal with this common scenario, countries are looking at developing alternative pathways alongside defined alternative certification programmes (ACPs) to access the teaching profession (Ruitenburg, & Tigchelaar, 2021). Alternative pathways or lateral entry programmes refer to “education and/or training programmes that have been introduced alongside regular Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes as an alternative entry point to a teaching qualification. Compared to mainstream ITE, these programmes are usually characterised by a high degree of flexibility, a shorter duration and being partly or entirely employment-based” (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2021, p. 72). Across Europe, 18 education systems report the introduction of alternative pathways to teaching qualification to respond to the shortage of teachers, especially in the STEM area (Hazzan et al., 2018; Shwartz & Dori, 2020). The purpose here is to attract high quality graduates and/or professionals from shortage subjects as well as those who have established careers in sectors outside of education and decide to embrace the teaching profession later in their working life (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2021; Ingersoll et al., 2014).

It is established that typically individuals enter the teaching profession after successfully completing a well-established pathway of academic qualification. In this most common pathway people are referred to as first-career teachers. Those who seek an alternative fast-track programs are often so-called second-career teachers (SCT): non-teaching professionals joining the classrooms after spending time in different career backgrounds (Castro & Bauml, 2009) and after working within a prior profession unrelated to education (Hunter-Johnson, 2015). Rising unemployment may encourage individuals with an education degree to re-enter the teaching profession. This may be subsequent to a prior profession unrelated to education or

to complete their educational pathway to enter teaching, even without the possibility of attending any alternative programs to develop their skills. In their study, Paniagua and Sánchez-Martín (2018) highlight the growing importance of second-career teachers and refer to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) which shows that 24 out of 34 OECD countries appear to have teachers with two to ten years of experience outside teaching.

Nevertheless, many countries do not have alternative pathways into the teaching profession despite having a shortage of teachers (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2021) and SCTs are almost always not considered separately, neither during the Initial Teacher Education nor during the induction phase (Ruitenburg & Tigchelaar, 2021). On this point, the literature highlights that beginning teachers, both first- and second-career, need support in their first year(s) of teaching (Kessels, 2010). This support is provided in most countries through induction programs (Zuljan & Pozarnik, 2014).

Despite some research regarding second-career teachers, most international literature addresses first-career teachers. Furthermore, although the literature on teacher education and first-career teachers is particularly developed also in the pedagogical field (Balduzzi et al., 2018), life, working conditions, and motivations for choosing the profession are studied above all in the sociology of education and the economics of education without, however, specific references to teaching as a second career (Argentin, 2018; Cavalli & Argentin, 2010). These studies, where present, are limited to the countries that offer alternative pathways for SCTs (Skilbeck & Connell, 2004) and they propound possible benefits for the educational system from second-career teachers (Chambers, 2002).

There is limited recent research on second-career teachers' induction processes, professional development, perspectives related to their career transition, and the identification of factors for choosing teaching as a second career (Nielsen, 2016). Within this variability around educational systems in Europe and around the world, the relevance of the second-career teachers' phenomenon is not particularly easy to define. These studies, where present, are limited to the countries that offer alternative pathways for second-career teachers. Therefore, the extent of the phenomenon is not clearly defined in countries where lateral entry or fast-track programs are not provided, and further research is needed also to clarify factors of choice of teaching as a second career and the value of support strategies in countries where lateral entry is undertaken.

2. The SecWell project: toward non-traditional professional development strategies

With the aim of exploring the phenomenon of second career teachers, the *SecWell Project - Second Career Teachers Well-being: toward non-traditional professional development strategies* has been proposed by the University of Florence, Birmingham, and Cologne. SecWell intends to define the state of the art on the topic of lateral entry to the teaching profession focus-

ing on frameworks and strategies of alternative pathways or fast-track programs but also pathways that could be defined as “non-traditional” (e.g. adult students that start or complete an Initial Teacher Education program later in their life after previous academic background and/or careers) with a specific focus on the partner countries (England, Germany, and Italy). Furthermore, *SecWell* intends to identify training and support needs of future SCTs. The purpose here is to guide the design of programmes that can be offered by Higher Education institutions in the field of teaching and education focusing on non-traditional learners studying teaching as a second career. This may also inform specific actions and programme design for the induction phase of SCTs. For this reason, *SecWell* will focus on the phenomenon, both at a university level as well as at a school system level, involving in-service SCTs to explore their transition and induction experiences.

As stated, this paper intends to share the first state of the art study of alternative pathways and lateral entry with reference to the partner countries based on the analysis of European and National documents and reports realized in the field.

3. Second-Career Teachers: the state of the art in England

Teacher training for teachers in England is set out in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Criteria and Supporting Advice guidance and The Early Career Framework as a 3-year postgraduate program. It comprises a one year (FTE) initial teacher training program leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), followed by a two-year induction program underpinned by the Early Career Framework (ECF) (Department for Education, 2019). Prior to commencing postgraduate ITT all candidates must hold an undergraduate degree awarded by a higher education provider or a recognised equivalent qualification. Some undergraduate degree courses have the award of QTS integrated into their degree pathway. The aim of this criterion is to ensure the graduate status of teaching, so that candidates demonstrate the level of knowledge, understanding and transferable intellectual skills associated with graduate status. Legislation does not specify that teachers must have a degree in a particular subject or discipline to teach a subject or phase as long as they meet all of the Teachers’ Standards, including those that relate to subject and curriculum knowledge, by the end of their training. Of the 500,800 teachers (headcount) in service in 2020/21 (most recent data publicly available), almost all (96%, 493,100) were qualified to degree, Bachelor of Education, PGCE or higher (Department for Education, 2021a). QTS status is not available from this data set. Candidates must also show a standard equivalent to grade C/4 or above in the GCSE examinations in English and Mathematics for both primary and secondary teacher training. For primary ITT there is an additional requirement of a grade C/4, or above in a GCSE science subject examination. These academic conditions must be met by all candidates training to teach, including career changers. They can be evidenced by academic awards or suitable equivalency testing.

There are several routes into teacher training in England - via Higher Education Institutions such as universities, via School Centred Initial Teacher Training Programs (SCITTs), School Direct or Salaried School Direct routes. From the outset, providers are expected to take account of prior experiences relevant to teaching. For candidates with extensive prior classroom experiences such as those working as unqualified teachers or teaching assistants there is the opportunity to obtain QTS through an Assessment-Only route to QTS whilst employed in school. On this pathway trainees will need to show how they meet the training requirements for ITT already (e.g., have a degree or equivalent and other academic qualifications, meet the Teacher Standards and have gained experience in at least two schools.)

There is a requirement for all teachers in state funded schools to hold QTS. However, academies and independent (fee-paying) schools can employ teaching staff who they believe to be suitably qualified without the automatic requirement for them to have Qualified Teacher Status. This flexibility is intended to enable schools to hire specialists, particularly in shortage subjects, who have not worked in schools before. By its nature, it is very likely to include career-changers. There are no formal requirements for training these individuals on the job, rather it is up to the individual schools and Academy Trusts to ensure their suitability to teach and to provide appropriate support and training which may or may not include a route to QTS. Recognising the specialist nature of the roles, SEN (Special Educational Needs) Coordinators and designated teachers for looked-after children are required to have QTS whatever the setting and all teachers in special academies also need QTS.

Overall, approximately 5% of teachers, as measured by the Full Time Equivalent number of teachers, did not possess QTS in the 2019/20 Census (Department for Education, 2022c). The majority of unqualified teachers were teaching in the secondary sector. Less than 1% (1,700) had a non-UK teaching qualification in 2020-21 (most recent data publicly available).

Career changers are not defined as a separate category in census data for initial teacher training, so it is not possible to identify those students who fit precisely in that category. Mature students are categorized as 25 or over and it is likely that many of these mature students fit our criteria as second career teachers as a subset of the mature student category. Numbers of mature students entering ITT by all routes have been declining slowly from 50 % in 19/20 to 48% of the total in 21/22 (latest publicly available data). The majority of the teacher workforce in England is between 30-49 (Department for Education, 2022c).

As noted in the earlier sections, there are a number of standard entry requirements for candidates entering initial teacher training, including those coming from previous careers. England’s approach to recognizing alternative prior experiences and needs is to offer a range of support, both professional and practical, during ITT and into the induction period rather than different pathways.

3.1 Additional Support to Second-Career Teachers in England

The type of support available varies with an individual's circumstances, previous education and the phase and subject in which they intend to teach. Some of these are particular to career changers but most are generic and available to all trainee teachers regardless of prior experience.

Bursaries related to teacher supply modelling. Training bursaries are a tax-free financial incentive to attract high-quality graduates into the teaching profession. Bursaries are available for a range of shortage subject areas and the bursary amount varies according to the subject which they train to teach rather than the subject of their degree or academic qualification. Whilst bursaries are available to all suitable candidates, having access to a bursary may act as an enabler for individuals changing careers, providing the opportunity to access funded training.

Financial support related to personal circumstances. Individuals who have children, caring responsibilities or disabilities are entitled to a range of grants to support their learning and facilitate their engagement in teacher training. These are non-repayable and in addition to any other bursary entitlement, tuition fee or maintenance loans they may be eligible for (Department for Education, 2023).

ITT Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE). For those individuals who would benefit from developing their subject knowledge prior to starting an ITT course there is the option for providers to recommend, as a condition of starting teacher training, completion of a subject knowledge enhancement course ranging from 8-28 weeks in duration, depending on need. These SKE courses are funded by the Department for Education and provide a bursary to support engagement and accessibility. The availability of the type and range of SKE courses available are reviewed on an annual basis and provision is linked to predictions on supply in shortage subjects and sufficiency. For example, in the academic year 22/23, SKE funding is available in nine secondary subjects: mathematics (including primary mathematics), physics, chemistry, computing, biology, languages, English, design and technology and religious education (Department for Education, 2021b).

Reduced timetable. All trainee teachers are entitled to a minimum reduction in teaching timetable compared to main scale teachers in their school. This is mandatory for salaried/school / HEI programs and set out in the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Criteria and Supporting Advice (Department for Education, 2022a). HEI programs often have a more graduated approach to teaching timetables than school and salaried routes where the trainee is in role as an unqualified teacher.

Targeted professions. To support teacher recruitment there are a small number of targeted initiatives for individuals previously engaged in other careers. These pathways are exclusively focused on recruitment into teacher shortage areas, for example STEM subjects and languages. Some provide a pathway to degree level and then into teacher training whereas others provide supplementary support to those holding degrees in related but not directly applicable subjects e.g., Engineers Teach Physics. Some learned

societies (e.g., Royal Society of Chemistry) support recruitment into Chemistry teaching by offering additional professional development opportunities and an enhanced bursary by providing scholarships for a limited number of high-quality candidates entering Chemistry ITT. Recognizing the transferable skills that come from military service there is a training bursary under the initiative *Troops to Teachers* available to undergraduate veterans who have left full-time employment from the British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. The bursary is available to undergraduate trainees who enrol on an eligible ITT course that leads to QTS in biology, physics, chemistry, computing, secondary mathematics, or languages (including ancient languages). For service personnel who do not already have a degree there are a range of learning opportunities which can support individuals to achieve the degree level requirement needed to embark on ITT (Department for Education, 2022b).

Targeted support for career changers. Since 2017, the Department for Education (along with other benefactors) have funded a charitable organization called *Now Teach* which is directly aimed at supporting career changers into teaching (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2023). The two-year programme complements all initial teacher training routes and supports career changers into their first year as an Early Career Teacher (ECT).

The organisation provides advice in applying for teacher training and then 1-2-1 career change support, events with education experts, and a networked community of career changers. Importantly, this brings together people starting out in teaching as a second career. Participation is fully funded and voluntary (opt in). The cohort represents a small but growing proportion of career changers entering teaching (cohort = 140 in 2020) (Now Teach, 2023).

4. Second-Career Teachers: the state of the art in Germany

German state governments are responding to the lack of qualified teachers by recruiting lateral entrants and substitute teachers. Due to the federal structure of German teacher education and organization, it is hard to find a common description of the different state strategies. The German Teachers Union (GEW) has compiled a comparison of the programmes (Eicker-Wolf, 2020). The following overview is derived from this source.

The state of Hesse relies almost exclusively on substitute teachers. They work immediately in the school service without the corresponding training, usually on a temporary basis and without accompanying measures.

In Berlin, about 1,000 people are employed as "teachers without full teaching qualifications". Examples include travel agents who work as geography teachers, or people who have not completed their teaching degree.

In most states, many teachers are qualified for the teaching profession through *lateral* and *cross-entry programs*. In the case of lateral entry, the preparatory service is completed despite the absence of a teaching degree, and the corresponding teaching qualifica-

tion is then acquired through the state examination. The prerequisite, however, is that the student must have completed a course of study in a subject from which two teaching subjects can be derived. The lateral entry also requires a degree – but in contrast to the lateral entry, these people teach immediately at the school. Educational and subject-related didactic content is completed while working, and in some cases the preparatory service is also completed parallel to teaching.

However, this distinction is not observed in the designation of the federal states for their respective programs. In Berlin, the education administration now refers to teachers without a full teaching qualification as “lateral entrants” (Eicker-Wolf, 2020).

Since 2016, there has been a sizeable increase in the number of lateral entrants; the rate rose from 8.4 to 13.3 percent, according to data from the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs. The differences between the federal states are sizeable. In Bavaria, for example, the proportion of lateral entrants in 2020 was just 0.4 percent, while in Berlin more than one in two new teachers (60 percent) had no undergraduate teacher training in the same period. In 2018, more than 1,000 lateral entrants were hired in each of Berlin, Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia, and nearly 500 in Lower Saxony (Eicker-Wolf, 2020).

As a rule, the prerequisite for lateral entry at general education schools is a university degree (master’s, diploma, magister). During the training phase, there are reduced hours, which means that the full number of compulsory hours do not have to be taught. In addition, it is usually possible to reduce working hours to a certain extent in exchange for a corresponding loss of salary. However, that is where the similarities end - the programs in the four states with the most lateral entrants already vary widely.

In Saxony, teachers from outside the profession begin with a three-month introductory training program. The practical school training lasts twelve months. The situation is different in Berlin: if a subject has to be made up here, a part-time “study program” takes place in the study centre of the Senate Administration StEPS before the traineeship. However, this is not a university course, but an in-service training course.

North Rhine-Westphalia¹ offers two programs: the first is the program in accordance with the regulations for in-service training of lateral entrants and the state examination (OBAS); the second is the pedagogical introduction. The prerequisite for this lateral entry is a non-teaching-related university degree and the educational ability in two subjects that can be derived from this. This must be followed by at least two years of professional activity or at least two years of child-care.

The so-called *Pedagogical Introduction* is intended for all general education schools, including elementary schools. The prerequisite is a university degree or a degree from a university of applied sciences. The qualification to be acquired through the Pedagogical Introduction is the teaching permit for one subject (without acquiring the teaching qualification). It is divided into a two- to three-month orientation phase and a nine-month intensive phase.

In Lower Saxony, the program for teachers who do not have an undergraduate degree is called “direct lateral entry”. Here, too, the prerequisite is a university degree with a master’s degree. The academic training must be assigned to at least one teaching subject as a teaching qualification subject (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2019).

4.1 Training of Second Career Teachers On-the Job in Germany

Training takes place in the two subjects for which the lateral entrant has been hired and which have been specified in the hiring process. The subjects of the training must be listed in the *Teacher Access Ordinance* (Lehramtzugangsverordnung, LZV) for the respective teaching post and must be taught at the hiring school (MSB NRW, 2016).

Teaching in subjects of voluntary work groups that are not subjects in the curricula of the respective type of school does not satisfy the requirements for an in-service preparatory service. For each subject, at least one trained teacher must already be teaching at the school as a training teacher and be prepared to take on the task of training support in the classroom under supervision.

The teaching of additional subjects should be avoided during the training. The principal is responsible for the training at the school and the head of the *Center for Practical Teacher Training* (ZfsL) is responsible for the training at the ZfsL. Together with the teacher-in-training, the *Center for Practical Teacher Training* (ZfsL) develops a standard- and competence-oriented training plan related to the fields of action in the school. For this purpose, a training planning meeting takes place within the first six weeks of the in-service teacher training under the direction of the ZfsL, in which representatives of the school-based training participate. The starting point for the discussion is a lesson planned and carried out by the teacher in training in each subject at the training school. The interview serves to take stock of existing practical and subject-related competencies and to agree on an individual training plan. The result of the interview is documented by the teacher in training. The agreements are continuously updated during the training.

The teacher-in-training is responsible for building up the necessary academic competencies. They receive advisory support from trainers, and they are entitled to at least 20 consultations (visits to the classroom and other areas of activity of the teacher-in-training and consultations following training services received). The consultations explicitly refer to all fields of action of the respective school form. In addition to teaching, these activities include, for example:

1 In the 2020/2021 school year, 178,749 teachers worked at general education schools in North Rhine-Westphalia. The University of Cologne trains around 13,000 students for the teaching profession in this federal state. Nevertheless, it is estimated that only one-third of the demand for teachers in STEM subjects can be met by 2025 (see Klemm, 2014 and own graduate figures). Lateral entry into the teaching profession in North Rhine-Westphalia is clearly regulated by the regulations for the in-service training of lateral entrants and the state examination (MSB NRW, 2009).

break-time supervision; accompanying school trips or school excursions; supporting individual students in conflict situations; and parent meetings and conferences.

Furthermore, in the first stage of training, teachers-in-training take a 40-hour course in educational sciences, taking into account their relation to the subjects of the training. The course concludes with an examination consisting of a colloquium lasting 60 minutes. The examination considers the level of education in school practice, especially in the subjects. The state examination is identical to the examination of trainee teachers at the end of the preparatory service (it currently consists of two written plans for the two practical teaching examinations and two practical teaching examinations, and a colloquium).

The identity of the requirements for state examination is remarkable because, in stark contrast to trainee teachers, the lateral entrants work full-time during their training period. For participating in the training provided by the *Center for Practical Teacher Training*, the teachers-in-training at all of the above-mentioned types of schools receive an average of six credit hours on their teaching obligations during the entire training period, facing an extraordinarily high workload which adds to the fact that many of the seasoned workers struggle with the adaptation to work with adolescents instead of adults.

5. Second-Career Teachers: the state of the art in Italy

In Italy, as underlined by the Eurydice's 2021 report on *Teachers in Europe. Careers, Development and Well-being*, shortages and oversupply seem to co-exist, together with Spain, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Liechtenstein, Montenegro and Serbia. It is due, for instance, to an uneven distribution of teachers across subjects and geographical areas. Italy has also to face with the phenomenon of ageing teachers: the school system is challenged with an ageing teacher population. As early as 2017, Eurostat data showed that in primary and secondary schools more than half of teachers were 50 years old or over (57 %) and 18 % of teachers were over 60 years old. Approximately half of the teachers (48%) in Italy are aged 50 and above (OECD average 34%) (Talis, 2018) and this means that Italy will have to renew about one out of two members of its teaching workforce over the next decade or so (European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2021). The issue of an ageing teacher population could be defined as "historical". In a 2001 OECD Report, Italy was the country with the highest number of older teachers, a "primacy" intertwined with another characteristic of the Italian system, a strong prevalent female presence (OECD, 2001; Siniscalco, 2002).

Ageing and gender, shortage and oversupply represent some aspects characterizing the population of teachers which are potential critical factors, and the reasons for this situation are various and complex. The prevalence of temporary employment is a structural problem of the school sector in Italy and plays a role. The path to achieve permanent employment and

fully qualified status is laborious and time-consuming. This forces younger people to look elsewhere, falling back on other jobs whilst waiting to be employed by schools; this results in an older workforce. According to OECD data, there are more than 200,000 temporary teachers in Italy. Actually, in the *National Recovery and Resilience Plan* there is a specific voice to stabilize and hire temporary teachers. The Plan, therefore, with action 2.1 "teacher recruitment system", aims to establish a new recruitment model, linked to a rethinking of initial training and even "the entire career". The aim is to bring about a significant improvement in the quality of the country's education system, closely linked to an increase in the professionalism of school staff. This will be ensured through teacher training and the simplification of current public competition procedures. For this reform, the EU Commission has set the goal of recruiting, through the new method, 70,000 teachers by 2024. The new recruitment methods have already been defined in decree law 73 of 2021, while as regards initial education of the teachers the national regulations are not yet totally defined.

5.1 A glance at initial training and recruitment methods in Italy

A brief consideration of initial training and recruitment methods is helpful at this point. The initial education of I and II grade secondary school teachers, up to the 1990s, did not require any specific path for teaching and was almost exclusively addressed to the acquisition of specific disciplinary knowledge. This knowledge was verified on admission to the role through a national qualifying competition based on written and oral tests. With Law 341/1990 (Reform of university didactic systems) Specialization Schools (SSIS) were established (art. 4) as well as ones focused on training of secondary school teachers. The law emphasized the centrality of educational disciplines to teaching and the need to link to disciplinary knowledge in teachers. The requirement to professionalize teaching is underlined by the obligatory nature of the didactic internship.

Although the establishment standard dates from 1990, the SSIS came into effect in the academic year 1999-2000 and, with their nine cycles, are, to date, the longest-lasting training experience for secondary school teachers in Italy. The curricular and organizational structure has been drawn from an original model from which subsequent experiences have never been completely detached (Margiotta, 2003; Balduzzi & Vannini, 2008; Anceschi & Scaglioni, 2010). In 2008, the SSIS experience was concluded and was followed by an absence of any path directing training of secondary school teachers. This gap in training lasted two years. In the academic year 2011-2012, the Active Training Internship (TFA) was established in the Ministerial Decree 249/210. The TFA remained operational until 2015-2016.

Legislative Decree 59/2017 defines the current path for initial training and recruitment for secondary school teachers in Italy. At present, the qualification required for future secondary education teachers is both a master's degree and 24 credits in pedagogical disciplines (Balduzzi, Del Gobbo, & Perla, 2018).

These are mandatory requirements for access to the competition that allows completion of the teaching qualification. A reform is now underway to increase this requirement to 60 credits including a period of internship in school. This is the training necessary to acquire the criteria to access a competition to enter the profession permanently. The requirement to gain 24 credits in pedagogical, psychological and anthropological subjects (PF24) also marks a discontinuity in the professional training of teachers which in Italy has always been consecutive, i.e., with specific paths after graduation. In fact, the legislation has made it possible to acquire the 24 credits in conjunction with regular graduate studies. The ongoing reform appears to be promoting this joint approach to academic and professional studies for entry into teaching. So, aspiring teachers may have earned a master's degree and 24 credits for access to teaching, even if not fully "qualified". These well-qualified, aspiring teachers are included in a list exclusively for fixed-term positions. In Italy, candidate lists are used in addition to competitive examinations. After the competition, candidates with the highest scores are appointed to permanent positions. Candidates who succeed in the competition but were not recruited are placed on other candidate lists that are set at provincial level and include prospective teachers who hold a teaching qualification. These candidates are usually employed on contracts of variable duration (within the limit of 50 % of vacant teaching posts annually available or on short-term contracts by schools). All teachers in permanent positions are appointed to their posts by the education authority. Schools can call on suitable candidates from the candidate list only to fill unmet vacancies and only for fixed-term contracts (Eurydice, 2018).

Candidates who succeed in the competition join a school and begin an induction phase. During the year of induction, National regulations require peer support in schools, provided by qualified teachers (tutors) and school heads (Del Gobbo, et al., 2023). Teacher self-evaluation, classroom observation, and an interview with the evaluation committee are mandatory for appraisal at the end of the probationary period, at the end of induction.

A further form of entry to school teaching is completed by reference to another list of teaching candidates, made up of graduates who have no other specific training, but are willing to fill vacant teaching positions. This list is explained by the definition of "making available" and anyone with a master's degree can be included. A private platform for professionals based in the microstate of San Marino but aimed at the Italian public notes that young graduates or graduates between the ages of 24 and 39, who were excluded from updating the graduation and competitions, are the majority; Particularly the case of candidates over 40 (25.5%) and 50 (8.44%), which include freelancers looking for new opportunities (DRIBE, 2023). Given the shortage of teaching staff, many people teach for long periods, without specific training and coming from different careers.

5.2 What about lateral entry to the teaching profession?

The path to becoming a teacher is complex and variable with reference to career development. There are many "non-traditional" paths of transition from another job to that of a teacher or potentially teachers may carry out other jobs in parallel or as alternative careers during years of precariousness in employment in other fields.

Despite this situation, in Italy, at present there is no formal (or explicit) recognition of the phenomenon of lateral entry to the teacher profession. There is no lack of studies on the individual characteristics of those who choose the teaching profession, but research aimed at describing non-traditional forms of entry into the world of school are sparse (Cavalli & Argentin, 2010; Romano, et al., 2021). At the same time, there are no targeted and specific paths to guarantee the quality of training of those who decide, after previous careers, to pursue teaching.

The characteristics of the initial training are the same for both first- and second-career teachers. Even after entering school, there are no differences in access to training opportunities or differentiation of the continuous professional development offered. Continuing education is also the same for all entrants and it must also be considered that in Italy, the in-school offer for continuous professional development depends on the school. It is at the discretion of the institution *if* and *how* to provide professional support, but with no differences or particular provision for lateral entry teachers.

However, various indicators – here described – suggest that also Italy is interested by the phenomenon of lateral entry to the profession. This is expected to grow over the next few years due to an economic crisis in a range of employment sectors and in the face of critical issues in meeting the demand for teachers.

If we consider, for example, the data relating to the participants in the 2020 selection aimed at recruiting teaching staff for upper secondary school, 430,585 applications were submitted for 33,000 places. Clearly the process of entry is competitive and oversubscribed. 64% of the candidates were women, 36% were men. Most are younger candidates (30.4% of applicants up to 30 years of age, equal to 131,040 applications), 24.1% are aged between 41 and 50 (103,804) while 6.2% are over 50 (26,884). Just three out of 10 candidates were over 40 (Ministero dell'istruzione, 2020). One interpretation assumes that many of the candidates already have teaching experience as substitute teachers, but it may also be that many candidates have done other jobs before deciding to attempt entry into teaching.

Teaching was cited as the first-choice career for 65% of teachers in Italy and for 67% in OECD countries. In terms of why they joined the profession, at least 79% of teachers in Italy cite the opportunity to influence children's development or contribute to society as a major motivation (TALIS, 2018), even if for many of them it is a second choice.

In this scenario, the research area of the SecWell project aims to better understand the correlation between professionalization paths and the motivations behind the choice to become teachers.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The SecWell project has a remit to explore the factors that lead people to choose the teaching profession as a second career, the experiences of transitioning into the teaching profession via lateral entry or traditional pathways into teaching, and to determine actions that Higher Education Initial Teacher Education programs could implement to support second career teachers entering the profession. This paper brings together the very different experiences, approaches and support for initial teacher education in the different partner countries (England, Germany, and Italy) and to provide an opportunity for comparison.

In England, the overview shows the different routes available for entering teacher training and the range of support strategies which future teachers can access. Germany demonstrates a wide variability in approaches due to the federal structure of German teacher education, with some states having educational systems based on teaching provided by teachers without specific qualifications and without support measures. There are also federal states where teachers-in-training are expected to work on the development of the required academic competencies whilst dealing with an extreme workload related to stipulated teaching and training hours. Finally, in Italy where lateral entry programmes do not exist, no specific support strategies are in place for second-career teachers who participate in Initial Teacher Education programmes such as “Scienze della Formazione Primaria” or “Corso di specializzazione per il sostegno,” or “Percorso formativo da 24 CFU;” furthermore, there is no distinction between first-career and second-career teachers either during their training programme or the induction phase in schools.

Some hypotheses suggesting reasons that lead to the decision to enter teaching have been put forward. These may be linked to socio-cultural background, the randomness of entry, and the societal value dimension of the profession.

Drawing together the differing strategies from the partner countries has highlighted that there is more than one successful mechanism to support teacher recruitment from individuals who have previously had other careers. Given that teacher shortage is a cross-nation issue, the alternative perspectives summarised here provide a useful starting point in beginning to identify beneficial features to support the recruitment and development of second-career teachers. Further studies will explore the personal experiences, motivation and learning journeys of second-career teachers from the partner countries to better understand what is important to individuals that choose to train as teachers as a second career.

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