

An Chomhairle
Mhúinteoireachta



The Teaching Council

Report on the Montessori Consultation

2017

Introduction

The recently updated Teaching Council Registration Regulations came into effect on 25 July 2016. This means that categories of teachers previously registered under Regulation 3 (Montessori and Other Categories) are now accommodated under Route 4 of the new regulations¹. In light of this redesignation, as outlined in its statement of 4 May 2016, the Council sought to explore ways in which Montessori education can be most appropriately accommodated within the standards framework that has been established for both Initial Teacher Education and Cosán, the National Framework for Teachers' Learning. To this end, the Council embarked on a consultation process with teachers, which included six regional workshops and an online questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

Overview of the Consultation

The questionnaire was launched on 30 September and closed on 9 December 2016. By the closing date 238 questionnaire responses had been received.

103 participants attended the regional workshops – see Fig.1 for a further breakdown of locations, dates and number of attendees. The workshops were facilitated by Teaching Council Associates, and each workshop was attended by a member of the Council's Senior Management Team.

As part of the process the Teaching Council held a bilateral meeting with staff and students (current and past) from St. Nicholas Montessori College (SNMCI). The Director of the College also attended all workshops.

Fig. 1 – Workshop Details

Date	Location	No. of Attendees
26 October 2016	Donegal	5
10 November 2016	Galway	19
15 November 2016	Limerick	7
17 November 2016	Cork	20
22 November 2016	Wexford	6
30 November 2016	Dublin	46
		103

The workshops included a brief presentation by Teaching Council Associates, and then attendees were asked to work collaboratively in answering the three primary questions from the questionnaire (i.e. questions 10, 11 and 12) and offer any additional information they wished to include (reflecting question 13 of the questionnaire). It was felt that combining individual questionnaire responses with those from group discussions would enhance the depth and richness of the gathered data. Furthermore, such discussions offered participants opportunities to directly address queries to Teaching Council staff, and seek clarification where needed. Workshop participants recorded their responses which were then gathered by TC Associates. Council staff also interacted with workshop participants throughout the process, facilitating discussion, and ensuring clarity around the recorded responses. The overall tone of the workshops was positive with many attendees commenting on the openness of Council staff to gathering diverse opinions.

¹ It is noteworthy that the changes in the new regulations do not impact the registration of any teacher currently on the Register of Teachers. Such teachers will continue to remain on the Register once their registration is renewed annually. Furthermore, Route 4 of the new regulations will also accommodate students who are currently studying a level 8 qualification in Montessori education or who commence same on or before 1 October 2018. In order to avail of this option, they must register with the Council on or before the 31 December 2023.

Analysis Process

All workshop data was collected and grouped by question. Questionnaire results were exported from Survey Monkey, and open responses grouped by question, and then cleaned, i.e., empty fields or test fields were deleted. The data for each question (both from workshops and questionnaires) was analysed to identify salient themes (Attride-Stirling 2001²; Braun and Clark 2013³; Vaismoradi et al. 2016⁴). The findings are presented in two parts, the first offering direct quantitative data on the profile of respondents (based on the answers to questions 3 to 9 from the questionnaire), and the second offering the themes as excavated from the workshop and from questionnaire responses to questions 10 to 13 inclusive. In an effort to contextualise the latter they are accompanied by illustrative verbatim examples.

Profile of Survey Respondents

The responses to questions 3 to 9 provided us with a profile of survey respondents. The majority were registered under Route 4 (80.67%) and working in special education, as a resource (or learning support) (27.59%) or special class (52.49%) teacher. Most are employed in special schools (54.02%), and a significant proportion are employed in mainstream primary schools (39.73%). The majority of respondents (39.47%) also had 6 to 15 years of teaching experience and, perhaps as expected, a significant majority held recognised qualifications in Montessori education (86.5%). See Appendix 2 for a complete breakdown of survey respondents.

Findings

The open-ended questions in the survey (questions 10 to 13) asked respondents to comment on:

- the contribution of Montessori education to teaching and learning (Q10 – 131 responses)
- how this contribution might be supported through qualifications attainment (Q11 – 132 responses)
- the contribution of Montessori in the context of Cosán (Q12 – 115 responses)
- the importance of the role of Montessori education, and how it can best be situated within initial teacher education and the continuum of teacher education more broadly (Q13 – 105 responses).

These questions were also answered by workshop attendees in their discussion groups. Analysis of the responses (from both questionnaires and workshops) revealed **four** overarching themes, the narrative for each here offering subthemes, i.e., congruent points of interest, in **bold**.

2 Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.

3 Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26 (2), 120-123.

4 Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6, 100-110.

Theme 1: Value and particular contribution of Montessori education

Respondents highlighted a wide range of contributions. A significant number of participants referenced Montessori as unique in its grounding in a **child-centred philosophy**, where the individual child was prioritised and played an active role in leading learning. This individualisation required practitioners to view the child in a holistic sense, and to look toward fostering independence.

It's a child centred approach to education focusing on the child as an individual. Our training is based on the whole development of the child, the social, emotional, cognitive, intellectual and moral development. We focus too on practical life skills and developing the independence of the child. (R48)⁵

Montessori education offers a child-centred environment that follows the needs of the child. (W4)

(Graduates) bring great ideas on culture, an emphasis on allowing the maximum freedom for the learners in a carefully prepared environment, and an uncompromising respect for the child and his/her potential to change the world. (AC2)

Echoing the aforementioned child-centredness but adding **practical aspects**, several respondents commented on the exploratory nature of Montessori teaching and learning, the **'hands on'** and **'sensory'** approach to same, and the importance of **concrete materials**. They also referenced the **structured environment** typical of Montessori settings and the role of **observation** in the approach.

The Montessori method has a curriculum to educate the senses. It capitalises on the fact that children can learn very well in a prepared environment with a qualified teacher and excellent materials, and from their peers. The materials are inviting and they train the children's thoughts on the powers of observation, decision making and they learn to discriminate fine difference. (R78)

Finally, a very significant proportion of respondents referenced the Montessori approach's important contribution to the field of **special educational needs**. They readily aligned a wealth of strategies that are common between SEN and Montessori provision, e.g., individualisation, differentiation, concrete materials, emphasis on motor skills, sensory learning, and the use of a structured environment. However, within this theme they also emphasised Montessori's past association with SEN and a desire to maintain same. Some respondents also highlighted Montessori education's contribution to early childhood education and indeed applicability to mainstream settings. Finally, some respondents linked the Montessori approach to existing curricula and practices, e.g., Aistear, and the Primary Curriculum.

I have my Montessori degree, a postgrad in SEN and a masters in SEN – all have contributed to my knowledge and experience in special education but none has been more practical and beneficial to the pupils I teach than the Montessori philosophy and methodology. (R5)

The revised curriculum is very Montessori based in parts, as is Aistear, and the new language programme. (R2)

Some aspects of Montessori teaching have been absorbed into the methods used in mainstream – using senses for learning, movement, concrete materials, opportunities for repetition etc. (R62)

5 R here denotes a questionnaire response, e.g., R48 = questionnaire respondent 48; W denotes a workshop response, e.g., W3 = workshop 3; and AC denotes additional commentary sent to the Council via email e.g. AC2= additional commentary 2.

Theme 2: Status of Montessori programmes and teachers

Respondents highlighted a range of positions on Montessori qualifications, with a significant emphasis on their **status in the context of Teaching Council registration requirements**. Some respondents overtly called for the **retention of Route 4 registration** and continued recognition as **SEN specialists**, while in direct contrast, other respondents stated their belief that Montessori qualifications were **on a par with existing (primary) ITE programmes** and therefore deserved 'full' recognition and registration under Route 1 (Primary).

Both AMI and St. Nicholas for many years have been at the back bone of special education in Ireland. We were given status and recognition under Regulation 3, this should still now be honoured and incorporated into the new framework. (R60)

Continue to recognise Montessori teachers as specialists in the area of special education. (W1)

I believe Montessori teachers who have attended full time Montessori training (3+ years) should have the same recognition as educators as teachers who have attended the other full time teacher training courses. (R77)

Young Montessori teachers are achieving a BEd degree and this should be recognised by the Council as a valuable degree on a par with the other colleges for the primary teaching profession. (R79)

Offering another point of contrast with regard to registration, some respondents recognised the potential need to **convert their qualification via additional study**, completion of the SCG/OCG⁶, or through CPD. Such respondents also suggested that Montessori qualifications and colleges could **review their programmes** in line with Teaching Council requirements. The perceived **differences between the Montessori programmes offered by different providers** were also highlighted, with some respondents' expressing concerns around the **'quality'** of programmes from the variety of providers.

Montessori teachers should be given the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications. (R90)

We have the same training as mainstream teachers except in Irish. If the Teaching Council feel there are gaps in our training then CPD courses should be provided for Montessori teachers currently working in the system. (R100)

St. Nicholas need to stand up and work with the Council to agree suitable benchmarks for entry to the course, course content, and recognition of the qualification. (R105)

As with all approaches and theories in education, they are only as good as the teacher training colleges that promote them. The colleges that promote it should be of a high standard. (R5)

⁶ Where an Irish Language Requirement (ILR) condition is applied to an application for registration, the applicant can either complete an Aptitude Test (SCG – An Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge) or an Adaptation Period (OCG – Oiriúnú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge). This confirms the applicant's competence to teach the Irish language as well as a range of primary school curricular subjects through the medium of Irish. Conditional registration is granted to those in the process of completing this requirement.

Theme 3: Montessori and knowledge sharing

Several respondents commented on the potential value of Montessori education as a source of teachers' learning (CPD), via **knowledge sharing** from existing Montessori teachers. They recognised the value in offering teachers diverse approaches and philosophies.

Montessori teachers can facilitate CPD in materials, maths, differentiation etc. (W2)

Montessori teachers are willing to share their teaching expertise and collaborate as professionals to enhance their colleagues' learning. (R89)

Recognise the refresher courses that we do in Montessori as CPD courses. Use our skills as mentors for others to share our scientific based method. (R1)

However, some respondents also insisted that the integrity of the approach needs to be maintained and left undiluted by greater proliferation.

Montessori methodology cannot simply be taught through short courses. It must be taught in colleges over 3-4 years. (R100)

Primary teachers can be exposed to Montessori practice, but they must respect the ethos and values. (W1)

Theme 4: Attitudes toward Montessori education

Many respondents commented on the need for an adjustment of **mindset towards Montessori education**. These responses referenced the perceived misconception that the approach was only applicable to early childhood education, and highlighted Montessori teachers' positioning as '**lesser**', in comparison to mainstream colleagues, or indeed colleagues who received their initial teacher education in 'recognised' HEIs.

I believe that Montessori is sometimes seen as the poor relation to mainstream education. This results in discriminatory work practices and undervalues the contribution of Montessori methods. (R23)

There needs to be a change in the culture of ITE, especially in how traditional models are perceived and how Montessori education is perceived. (W4)

In line with such positioning, respondents (particularly during the workshops) highlighted the **precarious employment prospects** of Montessori teachers, especially in light of moves within SEN provision around resourcing and allocation.

We won't be able to get jobs if not recognised after 2023. And we're always at the bottom of the list due to our positions in resource and now the scrapping of the special panel. (W2)

No one knows what the new SEN model will look like. What will it mean for us? (W6)

Summary

The findings here offer a range of viewpoints on the value of Montessori education overall, while also depicting a somewhat contested landscape. In essence, while consensus on some issues is evident, e.g., the value of Montessori education to teaching and learning in general, with a particular emphasis on its child-centred holistic philosophy (Theme 1); the findings illuminate a number of contrasting positions. For example, respondents clearly referenced the value of the approach and its many practical aspects to SEN, with some calling for recognition as SEN specialists, while others simultaneously highlighted its value to mainstream provision, noting the presence of elements of Montessori education already inherent in same (Theme 1).

This variant positioning is further reflected in respondents' comments around their registration status and the overall status of Montessori programmes (Theme 4), with some calling for a retention of Route 4 (Other) eligibility; others insisting that their qualification was sufficient for registration under Route 1 (Primary); and some respondents recognising a need to 'convert' or 'top up' their existing qualifications, so as to bring these in line with the Council's ITE Criteria and Guidelines (2011). It is worth noting that during the workshops, the Director of SNMCI readily discussed the need for reconceptualisation (in line with the aforementioned criteria) and confirmed the College's commitment to same, i.e., a Bachelor of Education programme that maintained the Montessori philosophy while adhering to the Council's criteria. It was also clear that workshop attendees were generally unfamiliar with the latter and with the extent of the reconceptualisation that existing providers had undertaken. They therefore appeared genuinely interested in exploring any perceived 'gaps' in current Montessori programmes and how these might be addressed while maintaining the integrity of the approach. In tandem, while referencing other ITE programmes, respondents also called for the inclusion of Montessori approaches and the underpinning philosophy, in ITE and beyond in teachers' learning (CPD)(Theme 3).

Throughout the workshops in particular, there was an evident fear on the part of Montessori teachers around employment prospects, as they felt uncertain around their future, particularly in the context of SEN and revised models for provision. In this context many respondents called for a shift in mindset around Montessori education, as the 'poor relation' of ITE and in wider approaches to teaching and learning in schools (Theme 4). Attendees were evidently driven by a desire to reform this status, not only for the integrity of the Montessori approach, but for their own professional status and occupational wellbeing.

Arising from this process, Committee and Council may wish to reflect on our engagement with the Montessori sector into the future, as well as their inclusion in wider consultation processes. This is clearly important in light of the lack of consensus in a number of key areas amongst members of the sector as noted earlier in this report. As the Council seeks to underpin standards for all sectors in the education system, it seems that such an ongoing dialogue will be important in making progress towards a shared vision for Montessori education.

Appendix 1 - Montessori Consultation Questionnaire

The recently updated Teaching Council Registration Regulations came into effect on 25 July 2016. This means that categories of teachers previously registered under Regulation 3 (Montessori and Other Categories) are now accommodated under Route 4 of the new regulations.

The changes in the new regulations do not impact the registration of any teacher currently on the Register of Teachers. Such teachers will continue to remain on the Register once their registration is renewed annually. Furthermore, Route 4 of the new regulations will also accommodate students who are currently studying a level 8 qualification in Montessori education or who commence same on or before 1 October 2018. In order to avail of this option, they must register with the Council on or before the 31 December 2023.

As outlined in its statement of 4 May 2016, the Council wishes to explore ways in which Montessori education can be most appropriately accommodated within the standards framework that has been established for both Initial Teacher Education and Cosán, the National Framework for Teachers' Learning. To this end, the Council is embarking on a consultation process with teachers, which will include regional workshops as well as this survey. The consultation process will afford teachers an opportunity to reflect on the new regulatory framework and provide their views in that context.

We invite you to complete this survey. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete and should be submitted by 5 p.m. on 30 November 2016.

Thank you, in advance, for your time and feedback.

1. Full name of respondent:

2. Teaching Council Registration Number:

3. Please state if you are registered:

- Primary
- Post-primary
- Further education
- Montessori/ Other

Employment Details

4. Are you currently employed as a teacher?

- Yes
- No

Current or recent employment setting

5. In which type of school are you currently employed, or were you most recently employed:

- Special school
- Mainstream primary school
- Mainstream post-primary school
- Further education setting
- Not applicable (I have never been employed as a teacher)

Other (please specify)

6. Please state the number of years' teaching experience you have:

- 5 years or less
- 6-15 years
- 16-25 years
- More than 25 years

7. Please choose an option from the list below that describes your current or most recent role:

- Post-primary subject teacher
- Mainstream primary class teacher
- Special class teacher
- Resource teacher
- Learning support teacher
- Learning support / resource (combined)
- Administrative principal
- Teaching Principal
- Not applicable, I have never been employed as a teacher

Other - Please specify

Teaching Principal

8. If you are a teaching principal, please specify your teaching position

Qualifications in Montessori Education

9. Do you have a recognised qualification in Montessori education?

- No
- Yes (please specify)

Please be as concise as possible in your answers and limit them to a max of 250 words.

10. What are your thoughts on the contribution of Montessori education to teaching and learning?

11. How can this contribution (Montessori) be best supported through qualifications attainment?

12. What contribution can Montessori education make to teachers' learning in the context of Cosán, the National Framework for Teachers' Learning?

13. Do you have any further comments on the importance of the role of Montessori education, and how it can best be situated within initial teacher education and the continuum of teacher education more broadly?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this consultation survey. Please click "Done" below to ensure that the information is submitted.

Appendix 2 - Detailed breakdown of survey respondents

Q3 Please state if you are registered:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Primary	21.85%	52
Post-primary	1.68%	4
Further education	1.68%	4
Montessori/ Other	80.67%	192
Total Respondents	238	

Q4 Are you currently employed as a teacher?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	86.55%	206
No	13.45%	32
Total	238	

Q5 In which type of school are you currently employed, or were you most recently employed:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Special school	54.02%	121
Mainstream primary school	39.73%	89
Mainstream post-primary school	0.45%	1
Further education setting	1.34%	3
Not applicable (I have never been employed as a teacher)	4.46%	10
Total	224	

Q6 Please state the number of years of teaching experience you have:

Answer Choices	Responses	
5 years or less	21.93%	50
6-15 years	39.47%	90
16-25 years	22.81%	52
More than 25 years	15.79%	36
Total	228	

Q7 Please choose an option from the list below that describes your current or most recent role:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Post-primary subject teacher	0.45%	1
Mainstream primary class teacher	8.14%	18
Special class teacher	52.49%	116
Resource teacher	22.62%	50
Learning support teacher	0.45%	1
Learning support / resource (combined)	4.52%	10
Administrative principal	6.33%	14
Teaching Principal	1.36%	3
Not applicable, I have never been employed as a teacher	3.62%	8
Total	221	

Q8 If you are a teaching principal please specify your teaching position (4 responses):

- 4th-6th class
- I own a Private Montessori School but have a contract to deliver the ECCE Scheme with the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.
- Montessori Teacher
- Teaching in a special school currently teaching pupils with ASD with moderate to severe intellectual disability

Q9 Do you have a recognised qualification in Montessori education?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	86.50%	205
No	13.50%	32
Total	237	



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