



An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

**Final Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council
following a review of the reconceptualised degree
programme submitted for accreditation by Mary
Immaculate College.**

Bachelor of Education Programme

January 2013

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1. Background

The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 as the professional standards body for teaching. It works within the framework of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, Section 38 of which sets out the Council's statutory role in reviewing and accrediting programmes of initial teacher education.

The Teaching Council's role in relation to the review and accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education is distinct from the academic accreditation, which programmes already undergo. Academic accreditation is based on the suitability of a programme for the award of a degree/diploma, whereas professional accreditation is a judgement as to whether a programme prepares one for entry into a profession.

The review and accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education by the Teaching Council provide an opportunity for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate that they offer quality programmes of teacher education. It is expected that the graduates of such programmes achieve programme aims and learning outcomes that are aligned with the values, professional dispositions and standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence which are central to the practice of teaching.

In order to guide its review of programmes, the Teaching Council published *Initial Teacher Education: Strategy for the Review and Professional Accreditation of Existing Programmes* in September 2011.

In carrying out reviews, the Council is mindful of its *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* published in 2011. The policy highlights the evolving and dynamic context for teaching and the increasingly complex role of teachers in Ireland today. The policy states that "...the time is now right for a thorough and fresh look at teacher education to ensure that tomorrow's teachers are competent to meet the challenges that they face and are life-long learners, continually adapting over the course of their careers to enable them to support their students' learning." It further states that innovation, integration and improvement should underpin all stages of the continuum.

In parallel with the development by the Council of its *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education*, the Minister for Education and Skills initiated a national consultation process on the theme of improving literacy and numeracy. This culminated in 2011 with the publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* as the national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system. The strategy emphasised teachers' professional development and proposed that the duration of initial teacher education (ITE) programmes should be extended and that programme content should be reconceptualised.

The Teaching Council, having established an Advisory Group on Initial Teacher Education, developed criteria and guidelines to be used by providers in reconceptualising programmes of initial teacher education at primary and post-primary levels. These were approved by the Council and published in June 2011 as *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*. These set out learning outcomes for all graduates of ITE programmes as well as the criteria and guidelines which providers of programmes of ITE are required to observe. As such, they form the bridge between the Council's policy and the development and implementation of reconceptualised programmes. While recognising the inter-related nature of all aspects of programmes of teacher education, the criteria and guidelines are categorised under Inputs, Processes and Outcomes. All three dimensions have an important bearing on the quality of teacher education. The required Inputs and Outcomes are clearly elaborated in the document, while the Processes are less prescriptive to allow HEIs the freedom to develop the processes which best suit their individual situations.

A Pro Forma for the Submission of Existing Programmes for Review and Accreditation by the Teaching Council was designed to obtain the necessary documentation to enable an independent Review Panel to read and evaluate reconceptualised programmes.

This report relates to the review of the Bachelor of Education (hereinafter referred to as "the programme") provided by Mary Immaculate College (hereinafter referred to as "the College").

2. Publication of this Report

The Teaching Council routinely makes information available to the public in relation to its functions and activities and, in line with that practice, this report will be available on the Council's website, www.teachingcouncil.ie

3. Overview of the Review Process

The Review Panel was appointed in July 2012 with Thomas Kellaghan as Chairperson.¹ The Panel was commissioned to review six separate primary ITE programmes. Panel members considered the programmes in the overall context of the reconceptualisation of teacher education at primary-school level.

To assist and support the work of the Panel, Pádraig Ó Donnabháin was appointed as Rapporteur. His functions included liaison with HEIs, maintaining records of meetings, and drafting and finalising the Panel's report in conjunction with the Review Panel Chairperson and Panel members.

The initial meeting of the Panel was convened on 3 July 2012 at which a general briefing was provided by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director, and Carmel Kearns, Education Officer of the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council's terms of reference and general principles bearing on the

¹Details of the panel membership are included at Appendix 1

review and accreditation of the reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education were outlined.

By mid-July Panel members were supplied with the documentation in respect of the Bachelor of Education programme of Mary Immaculate College in electronic and hard copy formats. In the course of a series of meetings, the documents were studied taking into consideration the Council's requirements, most notably *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*. Additional information and clarity were sought regarding a number of issues, to which the College responded in a further written submission. An opportunity was provided by the Panel for representatives of the College to attend a meeting on 29 November, 2012 to make an oral submission for clarification purposes².

Panel members made extensive use of electronic mail to exchange views and comments prior to forming a collective view of the programme. The Panel prepared its report having considered the College's initial submission and its further clarifications.

4. Documentation

Mary Immaculate College adhered to the *Pro Forma for the Submission of Existing Programmes for Review and Professional Accreditation by the Teaching Council of June 2011*, supplying detailed information under all headings. The College also provided two volumes of appendices containing supplementary and background information. The Pro Forma submission extended to 175 pages, while the appendices ran to several hundred pages. It would have been helpful for the Panel, in the original documentation submitted, if all documents had been paginated, if the listing of modules had followed the same order in the Pro Forma and Appendix C, and if comparable information had been provided for all modules.

The Pro Forma submission provided detailed information under three main headings (Inputs, Processes, Outcomes). In the view of the Panel, the documentation was comprehensive, providing evidence of the College's high level of commitment to the process of reconceptualising initial teacher education in accordance with the Teaching Council's criteria and guidelines.

The Panel commends the College for its application and endeavour, as well as its willing co-operation in furnishing supplementary information.

The Panel also considered the report of the review by the Teaching Council of the College's three-year B.Ed. programme which was carried out in 2010. On the basis of the evidence in the documentation submitted for the current review and the information provided at the

² The names of the representatives are listed in Appendix 2.

meeting with programme staff on 29 November, 2012, the Panel is satisfied that the recommendations in the earlier review had been addressed by the College in its reconceptualisation of the B.Ed. programme.

5. Overall Finding

Taking account of the documentation which was submitted and considered in detail by the Review Panel, and of the supplementary material and additional clarifications and evidence furnished by the College, the Panel recommends to the Teaching Council that the programme be granted accreditation. The Panel proposes that such accreditation would have a lifespan of five years.

The commendations in Section 6 relate to areas of particular strength identified by the Panel.

Recommendations in Section 7 relate to areas which the Panel considers to be of strategic importance to the programme. It, therefore, proposes that the Council should require the College to set out and submit, within twelve months of receiving the final review report, its proposals for their implementation. It further proposes that the Council prioritise those areas for attention when the programme falls due for re-accreditation.

In the case of the national issue raised in Section 8, the Panel recommends that the Council engage in discussion with relevant parties at national level.

6. Commendations

Arising from its review of the programme, the Review Panel has noted the following strengths of the ITE programme.

6.1 Aims, programme design and learning outcomes

The Panel commends the design of the programme which is coherent and comprehensive, underpinned by a carefully structured and well-developed rationale and conceptual framework. The programme was developed following consultation with staff and students, including a survey of the student body, and some engagement with schools.

The documentation outlining the programme is well presented in general. The conceptual framework, aims, and learning outcomes are articulated clearly. Key principles are addressed in a balanced and cogent manner. Considered attention is given to elements including child-centred education, knowledge and skills as the foundation for teacher education, the development of critical reflection and reflective practice, the needs of a diverse society as well as special educational needs, the contribution of educational research, and leadership in education. It is apparent that high expectations are set for

students and that a challenging and dynamic programme is envisioned to develop their pedagogical and leadership skills.

The programme aims and learning outcomes are set out concisely, having regard to core values relating to the professionalism of teachers and the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers*.

The programme is based on the principles of constructivist learning, which is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). The Panel commends the College's commitment to the application of the principles of constructivism and to empowering students to become 'active and participative agents' in their learning.

The Panel commends the focus in the programme on assisting students to develop their professional identities as teachers.

6.2 Focus on progression and linkage

The Panel commends efforts, evident in some areas of study, to specify progression between related modules relating to students' learning and self-development. For example, *STeM 2 Introduction to Mathematics and its Teaching 2* in Semester 2 is designed to build on concepts presented in the Semester 1 module and to provide the proficiency required to participate in the Semester 3 module. Progression is also discernible in the *Language and Literacy* (English and Irish) and Science modules which show incremental development and challenge from one module to another. The incremental and sequential development of content knowledge is also evident in Physical Education, Drama and Visual Arts.

While the sequencing of content from one semester to another could be more explicit in some modules, for example, in the *Schools and Society* modules, the Panel commends other efforts to link modules. For example, the two modules *Social, Personal, Health and Physical Education 1 and 2* in Semesters 3 and 4, link SPHE and PE, forging imaginative and relevant connections between these curriculum areas.

6.3 Student choice and elective study areas

The Panel commends the provision of a range of modules in Education and the Liberal Arts from which students can choose eight to complete their programme of study. The Education electives are appropriate to primary school teaching and have the potential to provide (a) opportunities for students to adapt the programme to their interests and abilities and (b) a degree of 'distributed expertise' in primary schools. Providing students with the opportunity to develop their knowledge in primary school curriculum and specialist areas, such as early childhood education, special education, and information and communications technology/digital learning, is especially commended. Students also have the possibility of studying abroad for one semester and, subject to careful planning and integration into the programme, this has the potential to be very beneficial for the students' personal and professional development.

6.4 Critical reflection

The Panel commends the range of opportunities, in evidence in many activities, which are provided to support students in developing their skills as analytical thinkers and reflective practitioners.

6.5 Connectivity between college-based activities and school placement

The Panel commends efforts apparent in the programme design to co-ordinate and integrate college-based and school-based activities in a meaningful way. Aspects of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) are addressed in the first two years of the course, so that, by the end of Year 2, students will have been introduced to all curriculum areas and should be in a position, with support from co-operating teachers and tutors, to begin teaching the full range of the school curriculum in Placement 4. Anticipation of, and preparation for, school placement are the focus of the module *Supporting the Child as Learner* in Semester 1. The inclusion of the modules *Language and Literacy 1* and *Becoming a Student Teacher* in advance of School Placement 1, and of modules on *Early Primary Education and Advanced Educational Methods* and *Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) 2* in preparation for School Placement 5, provides further evidence of careful sequencing of course work and the maintenance of appropriate links between college-based input and students' school placements.

6.6 School placement

The Panel commends the positioning of school placement as a central component of the programme with notable partnership features and a suitable focus on a range of teaching and non-teaching activities. School placements are carefully planned and structured, and detailed attention is given to related procedures, processes, and protocols. Importance and value are assigned to the preparation for, the observation of, and overall engagement with, work in schools.

The deployment of consultant tutors, who have an important support role, and an equally important role for moderating assessment and ensuring consistency, is a distinctive and commendable feature of provision.

Careful thought and reflection have been invested in the preparation of staff and part-time tutors for school placements, particularly in relation to curriculum input, professional development opportunities, and grading procedures.

6.7 Partnership with schools

The Panel commends the College's growing partnership with a large number of schools distributed over a relatively wide area. Opportunities to develop the partnership further are in evidence, for example, in the development of in-career possibilities linked to school placement for principals and teachers. A further valuable feature of the programme is recognition of the changing role of co-operating teachers in the commencement of an online course for their professional development (*The Co-operating Teacher and the Student on School Placement*).

6.8 Literacy and Numeracy

The Panel commends the College's response to the national strategy *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (2011) in the provision of fourteen core modules designed to support the development of students' pedagogical skills and strategies in oral language, reading, writing, and mathematics. The College's intention to provide additional opportunities for students to specialise in the teaching of literacy in English and Irish and of mathematics, is also commended. Mathematics modules address the issue of students' own content knowledge, which is prudent given the strategic importance of mathematics as a core curriculum area in the primary school curriculum.

6.9 Irish language

6.9.1 Commitment to Irish

The Panel commends the College's strong commitment to the Irish language as reflected in its mission statement and in the provision of an Irish Language Officer, who provides support for the College community in organising social events in collaboration with the Cumann Gaelach to promote Irish language activities. Furthermore, the programme provides interactive practical workshops to facilitate the active participation of students. Appropriate emphasis is given to professional Irish and students are required to undertake some research on the informal use of Irish arising from their school placement experiences. Careful attention is given to the teaching of contemporary issues of relevance to the teaching of Irish to enhance students' language proficiency levels. The practical Irish language activities undertaken in preparation for Gaeltacht placement also aim to enhance students' communicative competence.

6.9.2 Gaeltacht placement

The Panel commends the important connections between the two Gaeltacht placements of two weeks duration and particular facets of college-based activities. These include the use of a *fillteán foghlama* to document learning in the Gaeltacht and other aspects of reflection and competence; a workshop in the College prior to the Gaeltacht placement; collaboration with course providers in the Gaeltacht in developing appropriate learning outcomes for a course suitable for third level; and an Irish oral examination on return to College.

6.10 Social, Personal and Health Education

The Panel commends the College's strong belief in, and commitment to, ensuring that students' well-being and sense of identity are addressed throughout the programme. This is evidenced in the modules on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and in the module *Becoming a Student Teacher*, which addresses relevant issues such as self-identity, transitions and relationships, effective communication and decision-making.

6.11 Creative arts

The Panel commends provision for the meaningful engagement of students with the processes of making, performing, and responding to the art forms of music, drama, and visual arts. In addition to including methodologies and techniques specific to the teaching of the creative arts, the programme supports the promotion of social and collaborative learning experiences and pedagogical practices.

6.12 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education

The Panel commends provision for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, particularly in the modules *Social Studies 2: Teaching History and Geography in Primary Schools* and *STeM 3 Introduction to Science*. These modules are commended for their clarity and focus on relevant knowledge and investigative skills to guide and support students' learning.

6.13 Religious education

The Panel commends the inclusive approach adopted in the modules *Ethics, Religions and Beliefs* and *Religious Education in Multi-denominational Schools 1 and 2* which prepare students for the teaching of religious education in a diverse range of primary schools in Ireland.

6.14 Assessment

The Panel commends the College's commitment to varied assessment approaches including student presentations, performances, essays, reports, journals, learning logs, and terminal examinations.

6.15 Inclusive education / Special education

The Panel commends provision for inclusive education for children with special educational needs, which is based on a holistic view of the child, adopts a whole-school/community and collaborative approach to inclusion and recognises the need to provide a differentiated curriculum. The programme is underpinned by the philosophy that every child has a right to a needs-based and outcomes-based appropriate education in accordance with current legislation and policy. Students' attitudes, values and beliefs about diversity and equality in education are in sharp focus, while strategies for assessment, differentiation, individualised planning, research and collaboration, are clearly emphasised.

6.16 Co-operative learning

The Panel commends the emphasis placed on group projects, assignments and reflection in recognition of the social dimension of learning. It notes that the modules provide opportunities for students to engage in peer and group learning across a range of curriculum areas, for example, dance projects, PE assignments, music education, drama, and paired reflection in micro-teaching. The Panel highlights the need to support students in acquiring a thorough knowledge and understanding of the principles and key elements of co-operative learning (e.g., interdependence, accountability) to facilitate its effective implementation in schools.

6.17 Online learning opportunities

The Panel commends the range of online facilities that are provided to support staff and students.

6.18 Educational research

The Panel commends the emphasis on research in evidence in the profiles of staff who have been successful in obtaining external funds to support their work.

Research is considered central to students' experience. In the reconceptualisation of the B.Ed. programme, teacher-as-researcher is an overall operational theme. The programme features a research methods module which is mandatory for all students, while students also have the option of undertaking a dissertation incorporating a significant research dimension.

6.19 Professional portfolio

The Panel commends the clear structure and guidance provided for students in the development of a professional portfolio which will be an important connective element between the initial teacher education programme and their professional role in schools. Appropriate support is provided for students through tutorial work organised on a weekly basis.

6.20 Student/staff support and welfare

The Panel commends the strong commitment to the well-being of the College community in evidence in submitted documentation. Appropriate supports, welfare structures, and mechanisms are provided for students and staff.

A broad range of pastoral care and welfare services, including counselling and activities to promote mental health awareness, is available. The range of training opportunities provided by the counselling service to staff, specific health promotion initiatives, and the provision of a student/parent co-ordination service, are evidence of the College's commitment to the

welfare of all. Assistance and support are also available to students in such matters as essay writing, study skills, and time management.

6.21 Exit routes

The Panel commends the formal systems in place for exit awards for students not meeting the professional requirements of school placement. These include degree, certificate, and diploma awards that accord recognition and accreditation for accumulated credits.

6.22 Community involvement

The Panel commends the involvement of College staff and students in a wide range of relevant activities in civic society and local communities.

6.23 Commitment to improvement

The Panel commends the College's commitment to improvement which can be discerned in many aspects of its submission as, for example, in the statement of programme aims and learning outcomes. Its strategic plan emphasises excellence in teaching and learning, as well as in scholarship and research, reflecting values and ideals that derive from a rich tradition.

The College values students' views, and facilitates feedback through its Centre for Teaching and Learning, which, among other things, provides for student evaluation of teaching. Staff can engage in critical self-reflection and development as teacher educators in light of a student feedback report based on analysis of questionnaire data.

The College's engagement in various forms of internal and external review processes underlines its commitment to developing and improving its practices.

7. Recommendations

Arising from its review of the reconceptualised programme, the Panel has noted a number of areas of the programme which it recommends for further development/improvement. These recommendations are included to assist and support the College's internal review mechanisms.

7.1 Irish language

In light of the Government's *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030)* and the reference to it in the Teaching Council's *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (p. 9), it is recommended that programme documentation should provide a more comprehensive description than is available of how it is proposed to address the teaching of Irish and the use of Irish as a means of communication and medium of instruction. The description should provide evidence of how it is intended to use Content

and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to support Irish language acquisition in Irish in targeted curriculum areas.

7.2 Social, Personal and Health Education

While child protection is addressed in the placement tutorials during the first semester and in the *Developmental Psychology* module, the Panel recommends that the module learning outcomes for SPHE should include a greater emphasis on anti-bullying, and the Stay Safe Programme, which is now mandatory in primary schools.

7.3 Inclusive education / Multiculturalism

The Panel notes the College's commitment to multicultural and development education. The Panel recommends, however, that the module *Ethics, Beliefs and Religions* and the development education module *Social Studies 1: The Global Teacher* should accord greater prominence to the multicultural education aspect of primary schools in Ireland.

7.4 Elective modules

The Panel recommends that the large number of electives that are available to B.Ed. students should be reviewed on the basis of their relevance to primary-school teaching (e.g., *French Language and Civilisation; History: Power, Belief and Culture: Europe 1500-1750; Basic Questions in Contemporary Philosophy; History: Contemporary United States 1945 to present; Political Philosophy*). The review should take account of the importance of providing a clear rationale for all elective modules and how it is envisaged a particular module or combination of modules will serve the specific needs of students.

While the programme provides for a dissertation as an optional elective and all students are required to complete a number of extended essays throughout the programme, it is the view of the Panel that all students should be required to undertake an extended essay/dissertation in which a topic would be studied in some depth.

7.5 Required/suggested reading

The Panel recommends that items in 'essential' reading lists in module descriptors be reviewed and reduced in number and grouped as core text(s), supplementary texts, and key periodicals in the field. When lists are being compiled, due consideration should be given to the need to direct students' learning and to the demands on students in other modules.

7.6 Information regarding assessment

Although currently not a requirement of the Teaching Council, it is the view of the Panel that information on methods of assessment for individual modules (e.g. breakdown of coursework requirements, weighting of marks between examination and continuous assessment, and assignment due dates) would be beneficial for students.

8. National issue for the attention of the Teaching Council

The Panel identified the following issue in its review of initial teacher education programmes which has implications for all HEIs and which, therefore, should be considered at policy level by the Council.

8.1 Diversity of practice in school placement

The panel notes that the Teaching Council's new conceptualisation of the school placement in ITE programmes allows for the inclusion of some non-school based activities, such as micro-teaching, preparatory workshops and collective reflection sessions. It further notes the Council's expectation that the greater part of the placement should be school-based, but that it has not determined the minimum proportion of the overall placement component which should be school-based.

In view of the diversity of practice across HEIs in the amount of time spent by students (a) in schools and (b) in actual teaching, it is recommended that the Teaching Council should carry out research with a view to determining the appropriate balance of these activities.

Appendix 1 – Review Panel Membership

Independent Review Panel Chairperson: Dr Thomas Kellaghan is a former Director of the Educational Research Centre. He is a member of *Academia Europaea* and a fellow of the International Academy of Education. He chaired the Working Group on Primary Preservice Teacher Education. The report of the Group, *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century* (2002), recommended extension of the B.Ed. programme to four years.

Claire Connolly is the School Experience Co-ordinator at St Mary's University College, Belfast. She has experience in evaluating and reviewing modules, procedures, and documentation to maintain the quality of teacher education programmes in SMUC. She has extensive knowledge of the Teaching Council's review and accreditation role, having previously served on two review panels for the Council.

Dympna Mulkerrins is a primary-school teacher with many years' experience. She is deputy principal in a DEIS 1 school. As a member of the Council since its inception, and a member of the Education Committee for a number of years, she has extensive knowledge of the Council's review and accreditation role and its policy on the continuum. She has a M.Ed. degree and a post-graduate diploma in special education.

Dr Treasa Kirk is Divisional/Senior Inspector in the Department of Education and Skills, assigned to the Department's Teacher Education Section. She chairs the steering committee of the National Induction Programme for Teachers and represents the DES on a European Commission working group and on the European Network on Teacher Education Policies. A former deputy principal and curriculum support service facilitator, she has extensive knowledge of the Council's review and accreditation role, having previously served on a review panel for the Council.

Rapporteur: Dr Pádraig Ó Donnabháin taught at primary-school level before working as an inspector of schools with the DES. He has extensive experience of schools and educational issues and, together with Professor John Coolahan, wrote *A History of Ireland's School Inspectorate 1831-2008*. He has in-depth knowledge of the Council's education functions, having previously acted as an adviser to the Education Committee.

Appendix 2 – Mary Immaculate College staff who made a presentation on 29 November 2012

Professor Eugene Wall

Vice President, Academic Affairs.

Professor Teresa O'Doherty

Dean of Education.