

# School Placement Innovation Report

The Teaching Council



August 2021



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# Note on abbreviations, certain terms and selected technical applications

<b>ITE</b>	Initial Teacher Education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institute
<b>SP</b>	School Placement
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>PME</b>	Professional Master of Education
<b>PDST</b>	Professional Development Service for Teachers
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology (or technologies)
<b>IT</b>	Information technology
<b>GDPR</b>	The General Data Protection Regulation is a legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information from individuals who live in the European Union (EU).
<b>Treoraí /Treoraithe</b>	The term Treoraí, the Irish word for guide, replaces the term cooperating teacher and more accurately reflects the nature of the role of a teacher who supports and guides the student teacher during his/her school placement experience.
<b>Netiquette</b>	a combination of the words network and etiquette and is defined as a set of rules for acceptable online behaviour. Similarly, online ethics focuses on the acceptable use of online resources in an online social environment.
<b>TEL</b>	Technology Enhanced Learning
<b>UDL</b>	Universal Design for Learning
<b>Moodle</b>	a learning platform or course management system used for blended learning, distance education, flipped classroom and other e-learning projects in schools, universities and workplaces
<b>MS Teams</b>	Microsoft Teams is a proprietary communication platform
<b>Microsoft OneDrive</b>	a file hosting and synchronisation service
<b>Google Drive</b>	a file storage and synchronisation service
<b>Zoom</b>	a proprietary cloud platform for video and audio conferencing, chat, and webinars

# HEI respondents

- National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG)

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- Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT)

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- Hibernia College

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- St. Angela's College, Sligo

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- University of Limerick (UL)

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- Maynooth University (MU)

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- National College of Art & Design (NCAD)

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- Mary Immaculate College (MIC)

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- Marino Institute of Education (MIE)

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- University College Dublin (UCD)

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- Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT)

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- University College Cork (UCC)

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- Dublin City University (DCU)

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- Trinity College Dublin (TCD)

# Introduction

Future generations will remember the day in March 2020 when the government took a decision to close all primary and post-primary schools in Ireland owing to the health emergency caused by the global pandemic of COVID-19. In a decision without precedent, every recognised school in the country had to close its doors as society entered a prolonged period of obligatory restrictions on social and personal interaction.

Immediately, all the taken for granted procedures and normal movements in and out of schools came to an unexpected and sudden stop. For the 14 Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) engaged in teacher education, intimately involved in the professional preparation of student teachers, this was a major crisis with devastating consequences potentially for thousands of students and their families.

Fortunately, indeed wonderfully, teachers and schools responded to the exceptional challenges presented by the pandemic. In reality, it was school buildings that were closed on the instructions of government. Teachers, staff and school communities managed to maintain a level of education service for children and young people in conjunction with their families amid an extended period of great uncertainty. In the background, the HEIs faced multiple challenges to cater for their student teachers in their programmes of study and in the core aspect of school placement. It is fair to say that ingenuity and resourcefulness, with the remarkable collaboration of partnering schools and teachers, and the wizardry of ICT, allowed the HEIs and schools to complete their year's work without significant impairment or loss.

In advance of the 2020-21 academic year, advisory notes were proffered by the Department of Education and by the Teaching Council to provide some guidance and flexibility for school placement so that HEIs could adapt and adjust arrangements to overcome the limitations imposed by the pandemic. Now that the year has passed, the Teaching Council wishes to acknowledge the adaptability, flexibility and innovation shown by the HEIs in their implementation of school placement during the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the Teaching Council is anxious to take stock of how the HEIs adapted to the circumstances they faced and to consider how innovations availed of in the pandemic might be integrated in future practice.

## This Report

The Teaching Council wished to compile a School Placement Innovation Report in celebration and recognition of the innovative practice that has been developed in school placement in response to COVID-19 measures. The Council did this in co-ordination with the Department of Education and HEIs as one means of drawing a spotlight on the excellent work of HEIs and schools during the pandemic. For this purpose, the Teaching Council requested the HEIs to respond to the following four questions:

- Q1.** What innovative practices for school placement were implemented to adapt to COVID-19?
- Q2.** How did these innovative practices affect relationships with schools?
- Q3.** What were the benefits of these innovative practices for student teacher learning?
- Q4.** Which innovative practices do you recommend should be retained in the system for the future?

## Responses of HEIs

All the HEIs provided responses to the request of the Teaching Council. Each HEI responded in its own way based on its experience and the circumstances applying. Many explained important background details about numbers and distribution of students. Many made reference to ongoing research of their own or monitoring surveys of students and tutors. Many gave references to helpful online material or research items of relevance. Many included illustrations of commentary from students, tutors and host schools about features of the changes implemented to cope with the challenges imposed by school closures and restrictions. The HEIs varied considerably in the levels of detail given in their responses. Some dwelt on nearly all aspects of SP while others focused on particular elements. However, cumulatively, a significant body of material has been gathered and many valuable insights have been provided. It is hoped that certain benefits may accrue to all concerned as these are shared and discussed for the future.

The Teaching Council is especially grateful to the Deans and Heads of Education, and other School Placement (SP) staff in the HEIs for their timely responses to this special end of year request.

In the main, the HEIs furnished their responses under each of the four questions posed in addition to ancillary commentary depending on circumstances. As the HEIs all have school placement as a key element in their courses of study for student teachers regardless of the specific nature of the degree programme, or the year in which students were, this report is focused particularly on the innovative practices that were implemented in response to the pandemic. The intention is to examine as much as possible the innovative practices, how these affected relationships with schools, their benefits for students, and their possible retention for the future.

The report draws on all the responses of the HEIs and seeks to extract from them the most cogent and valuable insights which may influence future practice. It is not necessary to attribute to individual HEIs particular observations though the report includes quotations that are considered germane.

## Structure of Report

This report presents the commentary of the HEIs as written in response to the four questions posed by the Teaching Council. In the interests of readability, the observations of the HEIs have been adapted to a small extent. The report deals with each of the four questions in turn with the fourth question concentrating on what might be retained for the future.<sup>1</sup> There are five sections to the report, the first four of which A, B, C, D, deal with the HEI responses to the four questions. Section E provides some concluding comments.

The most useful way of distilling the large amount of material gathered is to present an array of the points offered by the HEIs selecting a representative sample of the innovative practices implemented to adapt to the pandemic. In the main, the HEIs speak for themselves thus conveying a range of responses from different providers. Unavoidably, there is an element of repetition in some of the points put forward by the HEIs since each faced the same circumstances more or less as a result of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. While the HEIs did similar things, each had to deal with its own circumstances as regards numbers of students, type of degree, host or partner schools, and many other factors unique to itself. However, it is necessary and worthwhile to capture the nuances of a variety of the innovative practices that are outlined by providers.

## Context and Perspective

All colleges had online platforms already in use for communication and sharing. All colleges to some extent were availing of elements of blended learning for particular features of coursework. In some HEIs, students were already using online collaborative tools so they were able to use this knowledge and experience to adapt teaching, learning and assessment strategies in units of learning and lesson plans.

However, all colleges were especially exposed to the reality that school placement was invariably an in-person activity with in-person visits and interactions within schools and in real time. Suddenly, this reality could no longer be guaranteed in the fast moving and unpredictable circumstances of the pandemic. All HEIs acted in accord with government directives and public health measures taking account also of advice from sources such as teacher unions and other bodies. All HEIs evidenced concern and care for their students' and staffs' health and well-being.

HEIs differed in their levels of preparedness for the situation that emerged with the pandemic. For example, one HEI had introduced online tutorials with an innovative blended approach for students to address the needs of off campus learners prior to the pandemic. This had been prompted by recent research which suggested that ITE programmes should provide student teachers with opportunities to experience engaging pedagogies and professional collaboration as well as to improve levels of digital competency.

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<sup>1</sup> This report has been prepared by Dr Pádraig Ó Donnabháin in conjunction with Teaching Council personnel. Dr Ó Donnabháin assisted the Teaching Council on a number of occasions previously including acting as Rapporteur for a number of the panels reviewing reconceptualised degree programmes submitted for accreditation.



Student teachers' experience of the online tutorials was a considerable advantage when the pandemic struck. A few colleges had initiated a transition to electronic files for school placement documentation prior to the pandemic. This proved helpful in moving from paper to digital planning and resource files as required when circumstances changed with the pandemic.

*A major element of preparedness was the strong and established network of relationships that all HEIs had with their host or partnering schools, along with the school principals and co-operating teachers. This proved to be a crucial element in the ability of the HEIs and their student teachers to manage SP in the midst of the pandemic.*

Two comments drawn from the accumulated material give a useful introductory perspective on the overall situation for students and for HEI staff. Commenting on learning to be a teacher in a pandemic, one student remarked:

*'It's been very different' a remark that captures the broad sweep of student experience in the last year and a half. Formulating a plan for 2020-21, the staff of one HEI considered that they had started to find solutions for the crisis but found: 'it soon became a catalyst to reimagine and map out a new terrain for building teacher identity for the twenty-first century'.*

This comment also sums up what emerges from the experience of recent months in initial teacher education in Ireland.





# SECTION A

## Innovative practices implemented to adapt to COVID-19

The first question was: **Q1. What innovative practices for school placement were implemented to adapt to COVID-19?** In reply, each HEI gave a lengthy response to explain how the college managed school placement in the light of its circumstances. This was the largest body of material proffered by the HEIs and the responses are grouped under six headings.

It should be noted that there were wide variations in the HEI experiences of SP depending on timing and on schools' willingness to accept students during periods of severe restrictions owing to public health advice. Some HEIs managed to have students in their host schools in the period from September to December 2020. Most HEIs however, especially those with larger numbers of students, were obliged to plan for school placement with a mix of in-school and remote experience for their students.

Among the key themes that arise are:

*paperless planning, remote supervision of school placement, extensive use of online arrangements for various purposes, and greater recourse to professional dialogue for supporting and engaging with students.*

For assessment of school placement, HEIs adapted their approaches modifying them significantly in line with their circumstances.

### A.1 Paperless planning

Availing of secure file hosting and synchronisation services such as Microsoft OneDrive and Google Drive, HEIs moved all school placement documentation online. Consequently, all planning, preparation, assessment and reflection from all student teachers was readily available to access and view at all times to all SP Tutors. This allowed close monitoring of all student planning, preparation and teaching of lessons during the periods of both online and in-person teaching in partner schools and facilitated ongoing dialogue on professional practice issues between student teachers and their SP Tutors. Among the advantages of these online services were the real time sharing of documentation between students and tutors, and the availability of a platform for on-going engagement rather than being confined to scheduled meeting times. A number of HEIs felt that the move away from paper-based planning files was beneficial on environmental grounds and it was deemed a significant cost-saver for students also.

### A.2 Supervision of School Placement

The guidance from the Department of Education and from the Teaching Council, informed by public health advice, meant that school visits by tutors, for the most part, were feasible only in exceptional circumstances. The HEIs devised unique approaches to supervise SP in line with their own particular circumstances. However, there is much commonality between colleges. To illustrate how HEIs coped with the challenges presented by the pandemic, it is appropriate to give some examples of individual colleges' approaches under selected headings as they are explained in their responses.

### A.2.1 Online CPD, Supervision & Support Materials

In this first example, the HEI arranged for all tutors to receive CPD via Zoom while all support materials for the supervision of placement were accessible online. Question and answer (Q&A) sessions for tutors were provided prior to and throughout placement. The HEI conducted the professional studies lectures preparatory for School Placement synchronously and asynchronously via Zoom and utilised digital technologies such as podcasting and online forums to assist students in their preparation for placement. All supervision of students on placement moved online. Students were allocated to tutors in groups of five. Each group met with their tutor three times as a group (30 minutes sessions each) and twice in one-to-one sessions (15 minutes each). Zoom was used for all of these virtual meetings. Students attended virtual workshops with school principals in advance of School Placement so that they would be fully aware and respectful of the challenges faced by schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Numerous Q&A / information sessions were held virtually for all students both prior to and during School Placement. The minutes / questions from the online sessions were circulated to year groups afterwards. Students were afforded the opportunity to link in with the IT lecturer on a weekly basis during placement to get support on digital technologies in use in their classrooms. To assist reflective practice, the School Placement team built on, and developed the approaches already in place for students to reflect on their learning from placement by means of their e-portfolios. To assist schools by a sharing of resources, a database of online support materials created by various subject specialists in the HEI was shared with partner schools.

In another example, the HEI developed a model of remote supervision in the absence of in-school supervision visits by SP tutors. 'Streamed visits' were not pursued as an option, given the perspective of key stakeholders and the associated complexities these may potentially generate. Instead, the HEI devised an approach to supervision using engagements on MS Teams, both for individual tutor/student engagements, group engagements with the tutor and his/her 3 or 4 assigned students and tutor support group meetings. As the year progressed, tutor support documentation became more comprehensive, as collectively the HEI learned how best to structure (a) pastoral dialogue with students to support students' health and well-being during what were extraordinary times (b) professional dialogue, to assist students in articulating and showcasing their accomplishments, while supporting them to identify the challenges they encountered, either routinely or occasionally. In tandem with this, the HEI devised a format of tutor-school contacts in an effort to replicate the tutor/co-operating teacher dialogue that takes place as part of the usual supervision process. This dialogue was essential in ensuring that the teacher was supported in his/her professional engagements with the students and it ensured that the tutor's understanding of the student's progress was as comprehensive as possible. Tailored documentation was developed for each placement with a specific focus on teacher/student professional dialogue. Engagements between the three key stakeholders, the student, the tutor and the teacher, delineated clearly in the School Placement documentation, were premised on openness.

### A.2.2 Online Community of Practice

Another HEI availed of MS Teams to establish SP tutor / student teacher support tutorial groups and to promote an online community of practice. This platform enabled the sharing of pedagogical practice and support. Student teachers engaged in online peer teaching in the online tutorial groups to refine professional skills and practice in the online space and to receive SP tutor and student teacher peer feedback. Student teachers were offered all feedback on professional practice planning and school visits electronically using the Microsoft Teams platform.

### A.2.3 Professional Dialogues

In another example:

*the HEI provided for remote supervision replacing physical visits by the introduction of online Professional Dialogues between student teachers and tutors. These promoted the development of effective and confident student teachers in an uncertain educational landscape. The process of professional dialogues opened up the existing mentoring practices already in place, and provided a forum for co-planning and an opportunity for student teachers to effectively reflect on their practice. The professional dialogues were twofold whereby the student teacher and the tutor met pre and post lesson and involved a high level of co-planning and critical reflective practice. The HEI noted that students considered the professional dialogues were helpful in shaping their planning and improving their approach.*

### A.3 Online tutorials and Question and Answer sessions online

Many HEIs refer to the use of online tutorials as one of their innovative practices and describe aspects of their usefulness. Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions online, and 'drop in Question and Answer' webinars to keep in touch and to reduce isolation feelings were similarly a feature for a number of the HEIs. In general, the HEIs considered these online features as beneficial in various ways.

Regarding online tutorials, one HEI pointed to positive outcomes including providing support for students off-campus, maintaining a connection to campus and tutors, fostering reflective practice in a collaborative environment and focusing on themes central to 'learning to teach'. The series of tutorials with pre and post engagement requirements over the placement period availed of a flipped classroom approach necessitating students to engage with a pre-planned activity pack. The HEI was satisfied that this approach was effective and supportive for students.

Online CPD for partner schools and co-operating teachers was a feature of HEI school partnership in a special way during the pandemic. One HEI provided a CPD workshop on online and blended teaching and learning pedagogy. A linked development was the provision of ongoing tailored support for partner schools with a dedicated Q&A page on their website to respond to teacher queries and issues on online teaching and learning.

In somewhat similar fashion, another HEI initiated weekly Q&A sessions for both student teachers and tutors. These sessions encouraged the sharing of remote supervision experiences and best practice and developed a space for deeper professional conversations about mentoring and supervision. In essence this provided a consistent virtual connection between the sites of practice. The developing sense of a community of practice over the course of each of the placements lessened the feeling of isolation felt by many. Similarly, another HEI established a 'drop-in Friday' session online where all students had the option to meet on MS Teams as a group for an hour to discuss the week, have their queries addressed and be made aware of evolving developments. This invite was accepted by the majority of students and when surveyed later, was deemed to be of high value.

### A.4 Assessment of School Placement

Owing to the impact of the pandemic in both HEIs and schools, alternative approaches to assessment were required. HEIs endeavoured to develop clear assessment frameworks that reflected learning outcomes and met the needs of students.

#### A.4.1 Grading

Several HEIs chose to adjust their grading of school placement. One HEI opted for Pass/Fail grading and limited on-site supervision as it was considered that to apply normal grading would be assigning grades to students' written work and their ability to describe teaching practices as opposed to actual teaching competence. Similarly, another HEI dispensed with percentage performance grades and based pass / non-pass grades on a comprehensive on-line interview after school placement was completed. In this instance, students reported being more relaxed without on-site tutor visits and relationships between students and tutors were considered more formative and supportive in nature, thus facilitating open dialogue and reflection.

#### A.4.2 Practices-of-teaching

Another HEI divided the assessment of School Placement into three elements framed around the student teacher learning the 'practices-of-teaching'. The assessment of student teachers by tutors occurred remotely. This approach to assessment included cycles of professional dialogues and reflective practice, enhanced opportunities for inquiry-based learning through portfolio development and practice based elements of the online tutorials. Each of the elements of assessment was scaffolded to allow for increased opportunities for critical reflection.

#### A.4.3 Hybrid model of school placement

Another HEI developed a hybrid model of school placement whereby students went into schools, when possible, to gain valuable observation, support and teaching experience. When schools were open and operating 'in-school' rather than 'online', students were required to complete supportive tasks for the co-operating teacher and principal, teach lessons, engage with COVID safety tasks and work with the co-operating teacher to support children negatively impacted by the time away from school. All students were also required to complete recorded lessons, engage with research on online learning and engage in a rigorous planning and review process. The students were assessed via virtual visits, recorded asynchronous lessons and where possible by real-life visits. Virtual visits included a student presentation (with criteria based on grade descriptors), detailed and rigorous questioning and the discussion of specific core and non-core lessons. Students were required to share their screens and show examples of resources, assessment records and planning. At the core of this model was adaptability, flexibility and a student-centred approach.

#### A.4.4 Continuity & Clarity

One HEI commented: 'New processes were developed to provide the assurance to students . . . . that their work would be evaluated appropriately, equitably and that they could be guaranteed that no one would ever question the standard of their degree achieved in the midst of a global pandemic'. The HEI developed a framework of engagements with the aim of establishing continuity and clarity for students. The first engagement, Lesson planning or Curriculum planning Professional Dialogue, was conducted in the first term and did not impinge on schools. The next three engagements were Observation of Teaching, protocols for which enabled students to choose to be observed synchronously (livestream via MS Teams/Google) or asynchronously (a recorded lesson or pre-recorded set of resources). The latter option (to pre-record a voiceover resource) was given to students in cases where they may not have been engaged directly in delivering online lessons.

#### A.4.5 Planning, Assessment & Reflective Practice

Another HEI mapped core areas of practice alongside sources of evidence used to assess performance in each area. The core areas of practice included Lesson & Scheme Planning, Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies, Assessment and Records of Pupils' Performance, Self-critical Reflection and Improvement. The sources of evidence included Online School Placement File, Online Tutorials (pre/post) along with documentation, visual presentations and formal submissions. A tailored form of reflective practice was used to support community of practice cohesion for student teachers and to enrich professional practice through collective reflection and sharing of experiences of working online in schools. Students were enabled by their collective dialogue during school placement to reflect on good practices online, on how to adjust or update unit of learning and lesson content, and formative and summative assessment practices for acknowledging and appreciating individual growth as a consequence of learning online.

#### A.4.6 Professional Dialogic Review

*Another HEI developed a framework and methodology for assessing student performance on School Placement called a Professional Dialogic Review. This involved a three-step implementation process. First, student teachers recorded themselves teaching in the online environment, inviting feedback from both their students and Treoraithe, and reflecting on their experience and practice. Second, the HEI tutor gave formative feedback to the student teachers on their recorded lessons, resources and reflections. Third, the tutors engaged with the Treoraithe to assess the student teachers' overall performance and engagement. In this way, student teachers were encouraged and facilitated to self and peer-assess their performance during School Placement using a detailed assessment rubric as a means to support critical reflection and reflexivity.*

#### A.4.7 Formative discussions, viva voce and microteaching

A particular HEI employed two assessment procedures, one for the September to December 2020 period and another for the period of school closures early in 2021. The HEI, having sought and obtained formal approval, modified its usual assessment practice by augmenting the portion of marks awarded to the professional portfolio and, in lieu of on-site assessment visits, students were assessed by two assessors on two occasions via online viva voce sessions. Ordinarily each PME student, whether in his/her first or second year, would have been visited in a school and observed teaching face-to-face at least three times. In the light of restrictions, students undertook their second block placement teaching face-to-face in schools between September and December 2020 and were assessed formatively online by having two professional discussions, one with each of their school placement tutors. These discussions took place using MS Teams. The discussions were based on lesson plans they had developed for use teaching classes in schools and their subsequent thoughts/reflections on the effectiveness of the teaching they had conducted aligned to the success criteria for the School Placement module learning outcomes. These formative discussions were informal and not summatively assessed.

*The fact that these discussions were formative enhanced the quality of the discussions between students and school placement tutors with school placement tutors taking on more of a facilitative and mentor role than the previous role of assessor and grader.*

Subsequently, each student had a viva voce (oral) examination with both supervisors or tutors in which he/she discussed two instances of teaching of his/her choice during the first semester. This was assessed summatively and aligned to the module learning outcomes. The External Examiner attended a number of viva voce examinations online. The students also uploaded formative weekly reflections between October and mid-December 2020. One final or overall summative reflection, submitted in January 2021, based on these, was then formally assessed. The students completed and uploaded their professional development portfolios which document their school placement in semester one in more or less the usual way.

In January 2021, for those students who could not commence face-to-face SP, the HEI availed of micro teaching for assessment. Each student prepared lesson plans and prompt and response documents prior to teaching twice, in short, focused sessions conducted online, via MS Teams, and attending twice more as others taught their sessions. All students functioned as teachers twice and as members of the 'class' twice. Students uploaded reflections using a Brookfield lenses framework, based on their micro teaching experiences, which were assessed and completed their school placement portfolio and a graded pedagogy assessment.

Also using micro teaching, another HEI provided for digitally facilitated micro teaching for student's first school placement experience. These students were having their first school placement off school sites, and online, due to the extended school closures. The School Placement Team devised online sessions to support and prepare the students for devising their asynchronous lessons and in-school teaching when schools reopened. The micro teaching sessions were designed with less than 35 students in each regional group. In these small regional online micro teaching sessions, student teachers observed their peers and provided feedback in a safe virtual environment allowing the experience of reflective practice.

*An innovation was being able to get students to plan collaboratively via Zoom meetings and then also present collaboratively to their peers.*

### A.5 Exploring alternative sites for learning

One HEI explored alternative sites for learning with a focus on classroom-based assessment. The HEI decided to concentrate particular year groups in alternative sites for learning namely synchronous lessons and asynchronous teaching and learning. A progressive and cumulative approach was devised in designing a Teaching Online Programme with synchronous and asynchronous lessons, incorporating themes such as the teacher as communicator, the teacher as pedagogical innovator, and the teacher as assessor. Among the key skills listed for specific focus were online presence, online creativity and innovation, and assessment and feedback practices centred on Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessment. The team focused on designing a programme that would not only address the issues caused by school closures but also incorporate strategies that would support the student learning experience.

Student teachers were challenged and enabled to become effective communicators in an online teaching environment where they could take risks and learn with, and from, each other in a peer group setting. A focus on experiential pedagogies and transversal skills was adopted to enable a lasting impact on student-teacher professional identity and professional development.

*The HEI considers that its experience in this innovative practice yields significant insights that may reshape how school placement is operationalised.*

## A.6 Live streaming, recordings of lessons and the issue of GDPR

Several HEIs refer to live streaming of lessons and also recordings of lessons in connection with SP. The question of GDPR arises commonly in this context. It is apparent that HEIs differed considerably in their approaches to these matters. Some of the experience reported by the HEIs reveals a variety of views. As already noted above, one HEI stated that: “‘Streamed visits’ were not pursued as an option, given the perspective of key stakeholders and the associated complexities these may potentially generate”. At the other end of the spectrum, another HEI said: ‘virtual observation when permitted by schools gave us an invaluable insight into classroom practice’. This HEI explained: ‘Agreements with placement schools regarding their preference for virtual visits – both Zoom: streaming and recording were used successfully ensuring that tutors could observe student teachers and provide focused feedback despite visitor restrictions. Some students mentioned that they liked the virtual observations as the classroom dynamics were not affected in the same way as during a physical visit’.

In between, there were many comments about this aspect of online observation of SP. One HEI related that live streaming of lessons was tested where face-to-face visits were not possible but then went on to say: ‘However, due to disparity and variability in the interpretation of GDPR legislation at school level, it was not possible to get a consensus on how live streaming could be rolled out as a means of observing and assessing pre-service teachers in the classroom. Ultimately, live streaming of lessons was not considered as a suitable mode of assessing pre-service teachers’. Another HEI commented: ‘schools felt over-burdened dealing with the myriad of changes in responding to the pandemic; there were concerns about GDPR; some cited Union advice not to engage online; and a number of schools noted the use of a different online platform or no adequate access to technology for all students as a difficulty’.

Several HEIs expressed concerns about varying interpretations of the requirements of GDPR by schools so that certain activities were not permitted or facilitated. One HEI sought permission to use Zoom to achieve a virtual presence during SP, and this was not granted, but it goes on to state that a number of GDPR and teaching competence issues were legitimately cited by schools. Another HEI complained: ‘GDPR was interpreted very differently by different people. This area caused the greatest amount of administrative headaches in getting parental permissions and setting up protocols around camera position etc – Not seeing the pupils in the class is a big disadvantage to class observation and an unnecessary restriction’. This HEI concluded that clear protocols are necessary and stated that it would greatly welcome better clarification for schools around GDPR and the use of video technology in classrooms.

One HEI said: ‘We have supported schools with devising and deploying protocols around GDPR when it came to making recordings of lessons and we have received positive feedback from schools about this’ and then continued: ‘Schools are often given conflicting information about what GDPR means for them. This has implications for the ‘data’ gathered for the appraisal of student teachers’ teaching. A considerable level of effort was undertaken by the Programme teams to assist schools in communicating with pupils and their parents when and if a lesson was to be recorded (and even if the lesson was not recorded but livestreamed even though this did not have any GDPR implications – the online nature of the engagement raised red flags for schools)’.

A few HEIs saw a special purpose for live streaming in the case of students experiencing difficulty. For example, one HEI explained: ‘Where students were at risk of failing, schools permitted the use of live streaming. This gave tutors an opportunity to see the student teacher teach and give feedback on the issues they were experiencing’. The HEI considered that live streaming of classes gave tutors the opportunity to add an extra layer of support, particularly for students who were identified as ‘at risk’. Although not widely permitted in schools and acknowledging the potential resource implications, this experience highlights for some HEIs the potential that may exist to explore a blended approach to supervision and mentoring.



# SECTION B

## How innovative practices affected relationships with schools

There was considerable common ground among the HEIs in regard to the question:

### **Q2. How did these innovative practices affect relationships with schools?**

It is relatively easy to summarise a number of points under several headings to reflect the generality of viewpoints on this question.

#### **B.1 Strengthening relationships**

Generally, HEIs experienced a strengthening of relationships with their partnering schools for several reasons. The need for ongoing and regular communication brought HEI personnel and school personnel into closer contact, mainly using online means and allowing a different sort of interaction. The prevailing circumstances necessitated deeper and more extensive engagement between the colleges and schools.

#### **B.2 Greater recognition of students' contribution to schools**

A major feature was that many schools saw student teachers as a significant asset especially in terms of their skills with digital learning. There was a greater recognition of the value and contribution that students make to schools.

For example, one HEI noted the positive effects on relationships with schools explaining that 'the competence of pre-service teachers in the application of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) tools' enabled students to 'reflect regularly that they were able to support their own Treoraithe in the transition to online teaching'. This highlights a common experience for students that they possessed digital skills that were of great importance and benefit for schools many of whose personnel were coming to terms with the need for technology assisted teaching and learning. One HEI said that many students provided informal CPD to teaching staff some of whom were struggling with online teaching.

#### **B.3 Students' rapport with Treoraithe (Co-operating Teachers) and other school personnel**

In similar vein, another HEI explained: 'Student teachers' relationships with Treoraithe and teaching staff were enhanced once teachers saw the potential that student teachers offered by way of their skill-set in relation to online learning. Teachers also quickly came to value our students' ability to team-teach online, to take small groups in break-out rooms or take additional classes at different times during the day. In short, there was a renewed/new respect for the role and relationship of the student teacher in the context of pupil learning and in many cases for teacher (re)learning'. Rapport with senior school staff was an added dimension for some students on SP: 'Students reported being obliged to engage professionally with Principals and Deputy Principals in ways that previous cohorts had not encountered.



Curiously, in negotiating altered timetables and provision of online classes, students built a rapport with senior staff that might otherwise not have been the case'. Another HEI related that student teachers participated in staff meetings, assisted in setting up online platforms and reorientating content for online delivery.

#### **B.4 Greater integration into and collaboration with school community**

Another HEI reported that Principals and teachers were very positive in their feedback and highly appreciative of the students' efforts. Also, school personnel were grateful for the initiative, creativity, child-centredness and digital skills that student teachers brought to remote teaching and the HEI added: 'Student teachers reported that stronger professional, working relationships were developed with co-operating teachers and with the broader school community. Ironically, in COVID-19 times, they felt a greater sense of being integrated into the school community and a deeper sense of connection and belonging emerged. Greater reliance on feedback from the co-operating teacher was also reported'.

#### **B.5 Greater partnership and communication between schools and the HEI School Placement team**

One HEI explained that ordinarily significant variability in student experience is a factor in SP. This year COVID-19 added to levels of uncertainty felt at the beginning. The HEI went on to elaborate: 'schools, who were in crisis mode, adapted to provide worthwhile teaching and learning experiences for all student teachers. In order to secure placements, communication and engagement with schools was extensive and prolonged. There was evidence of enhanced collaboration and professional conversations between students and co-operating teachers and enhanced levels of support included regular observations and feedback. There was greater partnership and communication between schools and the School Placement team to ensure students were supported on placement'. A few HEIs mentioned that a useful benefit for some schools was that student teachers were available to provide cover for supervision and substitution which was significant for some schools who were dealing with staff shortages.

#### **B.6 Positive engagement in CPD and strengthening of school-university partnerships**

The change to online teaching and assessment during COVID-19 required a lot more engagement with the extended PME team was the finding of one HEI. Due to the content being available online both in a synchronous and asynchronous version, engagement in CPD was very high and very positive. This had benefits for placement schools as many of the occasional staff are practising teachers and they brought back new ideas for online teaching, learning and assessment to their schools and shared also good practice emanating from their own schools' response to COVID-19. The strengthening of school-university partnerships and shared learning during COVID-19 were especially notable. A few HEIs remarked that it was easier to provide CPD for partner schools and co-operating teachers via online platforms.

#### **B.7 Every opportunity to maintain the precious link with partner schools and collegial approach of students**

The HEIs all worked hard to compensate for the loss of in-person contact with school principals and co-operating teachers, as one HEI remarked: 'every opportunity ... (was) availed of to maintain the precious link with partner schools'. Another HEI told that many co-operating teachers commented on how well-prepared their students were for emergency remote teaching, as well as the collegial approach of the vast majority of the students who willingly shared resources and ideas. The HEI went on to say: 'our relationships with schools continued to remain strong. We achieved this by keeping the lines of communication open and by being as transparent as possible regarding our adapted practices and the rationale for same. In many cases, the relationships with schools were further strengthened and this was due in no small part to our students' professionalism'.

## B.8 Recording lessons, observing online lessons

One HEI explained how the recording and observation of lessons was dealt with and how there is greater mutual understanding: 'Schools' active engagement with us has illustrated the importance and assured us of the priority they place on supporting student teachers. Initial fears in schools concerning issues such as recording lessons, or tutors observing online lessons for example, were assuaged through very open communication and on-going engagement. ... The relationship we have with partner schools has been enhanced and consolidated and is now characterised by a greater mutual appreciation of the multiple pressures that pervade our work'.

With the school's permission, one HEI was able to record a class and post-tutorial with the SP tutor and send it to the external examiner.

*This was deemed a really innovative approach as it reduced stress for the student teacher in having only one visit instead of two while the external examiner was able to view the class and see the assessment and feedback the SP tutor had actually given.*

The external examiner was also able to join a live class with an SP tutor and see the process live. The HEI admitted: 'there were a lot of administrative issues around this but the potential is great'.

## B.9 Feedback from schools reflected the positive reciprocal relationship with schools

A number of HEIs considered that partnering schools appreciated the efforts made by tutors to contact the individual Treoraí during placements.

*It was noted that teachers and principals were very eager to find a way to share how well students were engaging with placement.*

Feedback from schools reflected the positive reciprocal relationship with schools. The fact that all students were able to secure a placement in the most challenging of years was testimony to the commitment of school personnel, principals and teachers to providing learning opportunities to pre-service teachers.

## Conclusion

The encouraging findings in this section reflect the remarkable resilience and positivity that characterises the relationships between the HEIs and host schools. That strong and mutually beneficial bonds have been fostered over the years is an outstanding resource for school placement and an incalculable benefit for the formation of teachers. As is apparent above, stronger and deeper links were forged in many respects during the pandemic.

# SECTION C

## The benefits of innovative practices for student teacher learning

There was a considerable amount of overlap in the HEIs' responses to the question:

### **Q3. What were the benefits of these innovative practices for student teacher learning?**

The aspects most noted included digital skills, professional dialogues, online tutorials, assessment, and various other benefits of innovative practices. The major points proffered by the HEIs are grouped under several main headings. Apart from some instances, the comments are those of the various HEIs all of whose contributions are in some way represented.

### **C.1 Development of digital skills**

All the HEIs expressed satisfaction with the way in which students embraced a wide array of technologies, platforms and digital methodologies and how students developed a range of technology skills and experimentation with learning platforms and technology-enhanced learning methodologies.

'The sudden immersion into the integration of digital platforms encouraged new thinking and adaptive teaching and communication skills and helped develop a more blended approach to teaching and learning. The online tutorials provided a pedagogically engaging platform and ensured students had opportunities to experiment with digital technology. Many student teachers created engaging and innovative lessons and supporting resources'.

'Student teachers had to develop a new suite of teaching practices and pre-service teachers' reflections showed evidence of increased resilience, adaptability and collegiality (both with their Treoraí and peers) as a result of the rapid transition to online learning over the period in question'.

'Student teachers learned to negotiate expectations at school level regarding supervision and substitution and managed this negotiation through professional conversations with school management. Student teachers became more centrally involved in subject department planning for online teaching due to their familiarity with online apps, platforms and computer software'.

'Students' knowledge and skills in digital learning and ICT increased significantly. Most students became proficient in the use of screencasting, podcasting and video production to create digital resources and facilitate effective e-learning during the periods of school closure'.

'The global pandemic and the subsequent and almost immediate closure of schools on 13th March 2020 presented teacher educators with a challenge but also an immediate opportunity and impetus to harness and develop technology used for webinars and on demand content in an innovative way'.

'It will be worth exploring how technology, so vital in re-creating supervision and support fora, can be used to create triadic (student/teacher/tutor) discussions to underpin relationships and to elaborate on feedback and thereby underline placement as a communal experience'.

## C.2 Professional Dialogues, Reflective practice, online tutorials, Q & A sessions and webinars

All the HEIs made extensive reference to professional dialogues, reflective practice and the benefits of online facilities to enhance student teacher learning. The following remarks of various HEIs convey the overall thrust of viewpoints in this regard.

'The most positive feedback from students has been in relation to the use of online Professional Dialogues as a form of assessment (something which our external examiner also highly commended). Rather than our usual approach to onsite visits, where students are not aware of when they will be visited, the students were notified of when Professional Dialogues would take place. Students commented on how they had more time to reflect on their practices and reported that they felt that the process was less disconcerting than the traditional post-lesson discussion'.

'The pre and post lesson Professional Dialogue sessions provided enhanced mentoring opportunities between student teachers and tutors. The pre lesson dialogue provided enhanced co-planning opportunities for students and tutors and created a space for student teachers to reflect on their planning and preparation, and justify their approach'.

'The pandemic heightened the need for a compassionate and connected space for interactions between academic staff and students. The School Placement Team facilitated regular and informal 'drop in Question and Answer' webinars to address student concerns in advance of their placements'.

'The weekly Q&A sessions, webinars, online tutorials and professional dialogues, enhanced student teachers' placement experience and forged stronger links between the sites of practice. The online tutorials provided a regular touchpoint for student teachers and was an avenue for them to connect with their peers. Feedback from students showed this aspect to be productive and supportive. ... The student voice featured highly in our decision making processes as the pandemic continued to impact'.

'One-to-one tutor/student engagements were complemented by group meetings. These meetings, facilitated by a tutor with his/her group of students (typically four students), created tightknit reciprocal learning communities. These proved highly popular and beneficial for students as they shared best practice and sought and gave advice to each other. Students rated them highly as helpful engagements'.

'Reflective practice: In most instances, the pre and post lesson dialogues were more democratic in nature. This enabled the students to take ownership of their learning to teach journey. This had the effect of encouraging real and meaningful reflection on their practice and students developed the ability to identify the strengths and areas for improvement in their practice'.

### C.3 Remote learning ‘levelled the playing field’

One HEI suggested that remote learning ‘levelled the playing field’ between student teachers and their tutors as neither was teaching in optimal circumstances. Lecturers and student teachers alike were dealing with the struggles and challenges of teaching online. While many students were more comfortable and accomplished with technology, they along with their tutors were experiencing similar issues such as the absence of reactions from children, the inability to gauge / assess engagement with learning, and the consequent decline in both learner and teacher motivation. This resulted in the development of mutual empathy between HEI tutors and student teachers.

### C.4 Assessment

Assessment was an issue of key importance for the HEIs and the following observations convey the main points proffered in this aspect.

**‘The alternative modes of assessment provided not only a guarantee of quality but actually enhanced student teacher learning with additional impact on student reflection, agency and autonomy. The processes devised to ‘cope’ with school closures resulted in enhanced professional conversations between student teachers and their tutors.**

The introduction of a new assignment (Review, Reflection and Professional Dialogue) focused specifically on either lesson planning (PME1) or curriculum planning (PME2), was very well received by students and tutors alike this year, and was favourably commented on and commended by the External Examiner’.

‘While more enforced by equity of assessment concerns than any innovative ideas, **the Pass/Fail model of assessment offered a lot of benefits to students including engaging more openly and honestly in their conversations/reflections with tutors and with each other’.**

‘The multi-media capacity of e-files meant that students were able to showcase their preparation and samples of work or recordings in a manner which was not feasible with hardcopy files. Discussion and documentation became the pillars of assessment on placement and this approach empowered the students to lead the mentoring conversations with the tutor. Students described their practice, and referred to their plans, lesson artefacts and reflective tasks and with the assistance of the tutor, they set benchmarks to monitor their own progress’.

‘SP staff working on the programme introduced modified assessment procedures and additional support sessions for students with a high level of commitment and professionalism in supporting students. The modified assessment approach to school placement was very successful in managing the extraordinary challenges of COVID-19 and facilitating students to achieve the module and programme learning outcomes’.

## C.5 Authentic learning and student agency

One HEI commented on the manner in which many students were able to take responsibility for their learning. The HEI anticipates being able to build on student agency in the future.

‘Ownership of their learning, ownership of identifying achievements and challenges, ownership of setbacks and advances resulted in authentic learning for the students. Meetings with tutors became sharing events during which the tutors helped the students to relate their practice to theory, to identify opportunities for progression, assessment of, and for learning and for differentiated practice. When in-school supervision resumes, it will be important to build on the student agency which remote supervision nurtured’.

The HEI also noted: ‘The absence of in-class tutor visits impacted differently depending on where students were on their placement continuum and in some cases depending on the level of challenge their class context posed for them. This approach was not a universally positive experience for all students however. While many students coped extremely well without in-class tutor visits and embraced the opportunity to monitor, document and assess their own progress, this was not the case for all students for whom placement was challenging despite the consistent support of the class teacher and remote supervision by the tutor. Looking to the future, as in-class tutor visits resume, our task is to do so in a manner that sustains and develops student agency in placement learning and in-depth engagement with the supervision process, which students demonstrated this year’.

## C.6 Engagement by students with a wider variety of stakeholders

It was noted that students liaised with a wider variety of stakeholders than would normally be the case on SP.

*‘Specifically, students had opportunities to liaise more frequently in a professional capacity with parents. ...’*

Students witnessed issues being faced by families first-hand, and this allowed them to develop greater empathy and understanding of children’s lived experiences. Additionally, relationships with the class teacher appeared to be more co-operative and team-like than would normally be the case’.

## C.7 Some pastoral care experience for students during COVID-19

The pastoral care experience of students was commented on by one HEI as follows: ‘Student teachers became acutely aware of the psycho-social and emotional impact of isolation on young pupils during COVID-19. While student teachers are exposed to theoretical content in this regard during the PME programme, they are not often exposed to the reality of the complexity of young people’s lives during ‘normal’ school placement. They also came face-to-face with the inequality of access to education that came into sharp focus during the pandemic with some pupils simply not having the most basic of resources to access online learning. Student teachers were well supported in these situations by schools to observe ‘lean in/lean out’ practices to balance expectations of pupils in terms of attendance and submitting work’.

## C.8 Generation of Artefacts of Learning

One HEI explained: ‘As part of the online assessment of school placement, students were required to create instructional resources and asynchronous lessons using free online digital tools such as Loom. Once the assessments were completed and grades approved, students were approached for permission to share these resources as artefacts of learning. We will use these as a base for also generating features of quality as a form of formative assessment. We will retain this practice as it is a very valuable way of sharing good practice amongst students, the wider PME team and our placement schools’.

A similar benefit was identified by another HEI: ‘Online and onsite demonstrations were often more carefully considered, prepared and delivered; often using a visualiser. Demonstrations were often recorded which created a bank of effective resources and allowed learners to access remotely/ asynchronously’.



### **C.9 Providing online science lessons to primary schools**

A HEI outlined another initiative: ‘Concurrent Maths/Science and Education students provided science lessons via Zoom to primary schools and first year pupils. This was very well received by the participating schools as they got to involve students in learning about science in very interesting, fun and innovative ways. This initiative benefited our student teachers as they were able to glean insights into the primary sector and identify issues of the transition from primary to post-primary. We will expand this initiative across the range of post-primary subjects’.

### **C.10 Research with a focus on classroom based assessment**

One HEI described significant impacts on student learning experiences including the development of competence in teaching online, development of the student teacher as Assessor with a specific emphasis on the new Junior Cycle Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs), building team skills and teamwork, and engaging student teachers as peer reviewers.

### **C.11 Overall benefits of innovative practices**

The main benefits of innovative practices for student teacher learning were summarised by one HEI: Greater peer learning through the group supervision process, greater awareness of the need to be flexible and adaptable in changing circumstances, enhanced comfort in the use of technology-enabled reflections (i.e., e-portfolios, podcasts, video diaries), greater familiarity with and use of the wide range of online materials/resources made available to students on Moodle and also on various publishing companies online platforms, development of students’ professional communication skills, and the opportunities to collaborate and plan with their classroom teacher in multiple different ways.





# SECTION D

## Innovative practices recommended for retention for the future

The final question asked was **Q4. Which innovative practices do you recommend should be retained in the system for the future?**

Mostly, short summary points were offered in relation to practices recommended for retention in the future. Again, there is an element of overlap in some of the points put forward. To capture the nuances of the chief innovative practices put forward, a selection is outlined here grouped under seven main headings with the comments of the various HEIs bulleted.

### **D.1 Innovative practices that are given wide and strong support by the HEIs**

#### *Paperless planning and communication*

There is wide acceptance for paperless planning for students and for SP documentation to be online

There is also a desire for paperless communication with schools while some paperless feedback to students is suggested

#### *Professional dialogue / Use of online tutorials*

- 'Incorporate pre and post lesson dialogue sessions to enhance the student teacher-tutor mentor relationship'
- 'online tutorials as a means of providing support during placement, building links between theory and practice and building a community of learners'

#### *Use of regular Q & A sessions and webinars*

- 'Provide weekly Q & A sessions for both tutors and student teachers'

#### *CPD online and face to face*

- 'It is desirable that there should be a blend of online CPD with face-to-face encounters'

## D.2 Innovative practice – tuition and training for use of technology supported

### *The need for formal lecture input on online teaching and learning*

- ‘Since this will be a feature of school life in the future, students will require more preparation for online teaching and learning so they may be able to incorporate technology into their teaching’
- ‘SP modules to include provision of supports for students to feel competent at incorporating technology into their teaching’
- ‘provide additional tuition and training in technology enhanced learning (TEL) tools’
- ‘The incorporation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into ITE is recommended’
- ‘There are downsides to the training in digital presentation in that students became effective presenters but not necessarily teachers. A combined approach (when the world returns to normal) would be most desirable’

### *The need for tuition in online protocols and ethics for ICT*

- ‘There is need for provision about Netiquette and professionalism in an online environment’
- ‘There is a danger of over utilisation of ‘gimicky’ online resources which can become more about the tool than the learning’

## D.3 Innovative practice – considerations about a hybrid model of remote and in-class supervision

A common viewpoint among HEIs is that all hope and expect to get back to where they were pre-COVID-19. However, many consider that a hybrid version of remote and in-class supervision may be desirable for the future. Nevertheless, some HEIs express strong sentiment in favour of in-person supervision.

- ‘While a return to face-to-face assessment is expected in the next academic year, the HEI will keep at least one planned online assessment as part of the overall assessment due to the benefits found with this approach this year’
- ‘A hybrid model of real-life visits and virtual visits would be a good approach’
- ‘Online supervision has been beneficial and the quality of assessment was not compromised. However, school-based supervision cannot be replaced and the direct experience for the supervisor and the student teacher is fundamental to a holistic assessment of all facets of practice’
- ‘It is crucial that online supervision is used in lieu of some school-based visits and not extra to the prescribed number of visits required’
- ‘For practical subjects, the ‘hands on’ tangible nature of the work is important in the classroom. This is also needed at third level so while IT and the online experience of COVID times pushed boundaries, it also allowed us to appreciate what is good in what we have and what we hope to get back to soon’
- ‘After this year, we are even more convinced of, and steadfastly committed to, the need to maintain in-person assessment of SP by SP Tutors’

#### **D.4 Innovative practice – considerations about Assessment**

- 'Include new assessment approaches – enhance the use of inquiry based learning and portfolio entries to meet the needs of the learning outcomes of the module and effectively connect the sites of practice'
- 'integrate Professional Dialogues into future School Placement assessment practices'
- 'Micro teaching should become a long-term consistent element within the Year 1 PME school placement programme. Positive feedback was also received on other innovations such as the use of a viva voce as a mode of assessment for a school placement visit'
- 'The development of supportive and collaborative aspects of school placement via digital technology, such as the Community of Learners and online micro teaching, should be retained and developed'
- 'Online assessment of school placement was well received ... and took the anxiety of unannounced visits out of the equation. As supervisors and tutors did not have to fit in school visits around timetables, assessment of placement progressed quicker and this meant that struggling students could be identified and supported earlier'
- 'Research is required on Pass/Fail grading to interrogate further the positive experience reported; A review of models of Pass/Fail in the context of school placement merits consideration at local but also at system's level'

#### **D.5 Innovative practice – considerations about live streaming and recording**

One of the more vexed questions that arose among the different HEIs was the question of live streaming and recording of students' teaching and student-tutor interactions even to the extent of including External Examiners in these processes. There are widely different views proffered by the HEIs.

##### *Live streaming classes and Virtual supervision*

- 'Use of live streaming classes has potential as a support mechanism for students at risk or as a form of additional support. It is effective for most subject areas and can be a cost and time efficient method of supporting off campus learners on placement. There is also potential to look at a blended approach to supervision whereby tutors mentor through the medium of physical visits and remote or virtual supervision'
- 'Explore using technology to access classes to support student teacher learning via demonstration classes and / or pre-recorded lessons'
- 'Because Virtual Observation afforded and facilitated second visits, second opinions and subject specialist visits, the HEI recommends its use'
- 'Virtual supervision offers potential to place students geographically more disparately'
- 'Virtual supervision could have continued use with Teaching Council guidelines'
- 'Virtual supervision could offer greater student teacher support, allowing for joint supervision, more real involvement of the co-operating teacher, and more 'real' teaching situation as there is not a stranger in the room. Students were less intimidated by the camera in the room than by a person and there was less stress around school placement visits'
- 'Schools need clearer guidelines on the implications of GDPR as they are interpreting this in radically different ways.'

## D.6 Innovative practice – considerations about Treoraithe and partner or host schools

### *Treoraithe/Co-operating Teachers*

It is apparent that there was widespread appreciation and regard for the work of co-operating teachers. Many HEIs expressed particular gratitude and credit for the enhanced support and mentoring that was provided under the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic. The sentiments shared by many HEIs are reflected in the remarks of one particular HEI.

- ‘Co-operating teachers deserve huge credit and thanks for their ongoing work and support to student teachers especially during what was a very stressful time for schools and school communities and for their ongoing commitment to ensuring that school placements could be undertaken’; ... ‘we are particularly grateful to every school that facilitated school placement in any form and especially to co-operating teachers who went over and above to support student teachers in person. This was an incredibly important role and student teachers reported very positive and affirming experiences in this regard’.

### *Partner schools*

- ‘Share teaching and learning resources with schools’
- ‘Provide CPD online for schools and for SP tutors blended with some face-to-face CPD’

### *Modify SP teaching schedules and develop student agency and ownership*

- ‘Re-assess SP teaching schedules, with less student teaching time and more focused diverse teaching and learning. Continue to build on the clearly discernible impact on students’ agency and ownership of the process’.

### *Artefacts of learning and instructional videos*

- ‘Create instructional resources and asynchronous lessons using online digital tools. Share these resources as artefacts of learning as samples of good practice amongst students, SP tutors and placement schools’
- ‘Make greater use of pre-recorded instructional videos and online training sessions which can be invaluable for tutors and students’
- ‘Improve resources for peer learning, continue to record and build the skill sharing videos resource / library for peer learning’
- One HEI wished to acknowledge the support of the Professional Development Service for Teachers through the free online course on distance learning made available to all teachers and for the many resources and video tutorials made available on its website. This was deemed invaluable and the HEI expects to continue to use this support as part of its Inclusive Pedagogy and Portfolio modules.

## D.7 Innovative practice – research and a recommendation to the Teaching Council

### *Synchronous lessons and asynchronous teaching and learning as part of ITE*

- The research carried out by the HEI academic team this year provides evidence which suggests that the focus on the development of student-teacher identity as teacher as Assessor, incorporating the development of skills for teaching, learning, and assessment in the online context is an essential element of Initial Teacher Education. The HEI recommends that the Teaching Council consider incorporating the new sites of practice and learning, namely synchronous lessons and asynchronous teaching and learning into the 200-hour direct teaching experience to allow practices such as this to flourish and grow and contribute to the development of student-teacher identity and practice.

### *Conclusion*

In concluding this section of the report, it is important to note the gratitude and appreciation for host schools that was signalled by the HEIs.

*All the HEIs paid tribute to the high levels of cooperation and understanding afforded by school principals, school staff members, and co-operating teachers.*

The flexibility and collaboration of partner schools was accorded pride of place by the HEIs in enabling and facilitating school placement to be managed despite serious challenges. The following remarks give an indication of the overall trend of the HEIs' views in this regard.

- One HEI stated that it was 'pleased to report that every student involved in our Initial Teacher Education programmes has had their full complement of school placement visits, be that virtually or in person'.
- Another HEI commented: 'In a year in which those involved in education had to cope with, and overcome unprecedented challenges, the willingness of schools and collective school staffs to extend a welcome to students, and on so many occasions to more than one student, is a measure of their professional commitment, which merits acknowledgement and celebration. The innovative practice reported was made possible by their commitment, generosity and courage. The success of our experience during these challenging times is testimony also to our students who have continued to demonstrate exceptional creativity, initiative, resilience, flexibility and who have made an immeasurable contribution to education in these times'.

# SECTION E

## Concluding comments on School Placement Innovative Practices

### Reimagining Initial Teacher Education for the future

In the wake of the crisis caused by COVID-19, the seemingly paradoxical line in the novel *The Leopard* (Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa) seems apt as the current position in Initial Teacher Education is reviewed: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change”.

All those engaged with Initial Teacher Education will examine and reflect on the manner in which the pandemic triggered radical departures at all levels of education in Ireland. Unavoidably, school placement, the cornerstone in the continuum of teacher education, was hugely affected by the restrictions and closures imposed on schools in response to COVID-19. The pandemic brought profound change to several fundamental dimensions of school placement.

As the restrictions and precautions necessitated by public health advice recede, it is hoped, attention will focus on how certain features of Initial Teacher Education may be redesigned for a new era.

*Because of the centrality of the experience of school placement for the formation of the teachers of the future, it is a priority for HEIs and all the stakeholders to take account of the innovative practice developed in response to the crisis and hopefully, seek to retain beneficial elements for the future.*

It is apparent that the impetus for change has energy and urgency. For good or ill, things cannot be the same as before.

The astounding rate of change and development in ICT in the last twenty years commands attention in a significantly new context as a post-pandemic world may seem in prospect, albeit somewhat tantalisingly. Schools have changed dramatically and profoundly with the pandemic. Principals, teachers and ancillary staff in schools have undergone an immensely transformative period. Teaching and learning have changed, it would appear, for the foreseeable future. Technologies have been summoned to assist in an emergency but it seems inevitable that their benefits must remain for the enhancement of teaching and learning. As schools transform, as teaching and learning is reconceptualised for the future, a paradigm shift may bring unanticipated change. The pandemic may prove to be a tipping point for the adoption of an extensive range of technologies for teaching and learning.

Initial Teacher Education appears ripe for substantial reimagining. It may well be that a technological step change will recast various aspects of teacher education. Most crucially of all for the HEIs, the preparation, management and monitoring of the school placement experience, in close collaboration with host schools, seems set to change significantly. For all stakeholders involved in Initial Teacher Education, there is an immediate challenge to respond to the innovative practice that has emerged, and to devise appropriate measures to consolidate all that is agreed to be beneficial and practicable.

In carrying out this survey of school placement innovative practice, as managed at the height of the pandemic, the Teaching Council has endeavoured to crystallise important findings about how Initial Teacher Education may take a lead from what has been learned in the last year and a half. The experience and insights proffered by the HEIs provide a solid basis for analysis and reflection. It is apparent that in many respects the HEIs, along with host schools and co-operating teachers, ploughed the same furrows in developing solutions for the challenges presented by the pandemic. Hopefully, stakeholders may find much in common in designing and facilitating quality school placement experiences for the future.





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