

**Final Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council  
following a review of the reconceptualised degree  
programme submitted for accreditation by St Patrick's  
College, Drumcondra**

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**Bachelor of Education Programme**

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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 programme (hereinafter referred to as "the programme") provided by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (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](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie)

## **3. Overview of the Review Process**

The Review Panel was appointed in July 2012 with Thomas Kellaghan as Chairperson.<sup>1</sup> 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 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 and a general briefing was provided by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director, and Carmel Kearns, Education Officer of the Teaching

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<sup>1</sup>Members of the Panel are listed in Appendix 1

Council. The Teaching Council's terms of reference and general principles bearing on the 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 St Patrick's 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 in regard to 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 purposes.<sup>2</sup>

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**

St Patrick's 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 several volumes of appendices giving supplementary and background information. The Pro Forma submission extended to 92 pages while the appendices ran to several hundred pages.

The Pro Forma submission provided detailed information under three main headings (Inputs, Processes, Outcomes). In the view of the Panel, the documentation was comprehensive and provided evidence of the College's 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 overall presentation of documentation describing the reconceptualised initial teacher education programme is excellent and easy to navigate. The Panel notes the high degree of clarity and focus in the material, which includes succinct descriptions and visual representations to aid the reader.

Commendable leadership in overseeing the preparation of documents is evident. The rationale for the programme and descriptions of module progression and credit allocation are accessible to the external reader. The cross-disciplinary and cross-curricular

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<sup>2</sup> The names of the representatives are listed in Appendix 2.

collaborative approach taken by the staff in formulating the programme is, with a few exceptions, apparent. This has notably assisted the development of a well-integrated programme. A two-page bilingual brochure provides a helpful overview for prospective students and other interested parties.

## ***5. Overall Finding***

Taking account of the initial and supplementary documentation submitted and of the further evidence provided during the meeting with programme staff on 29 November 2012, 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 conceptual framework of the programme is commended for its precision and comprehensiveness in describing underpinning principles. There is appropriate alignment in the Pro Forma with relevant NCCA curriculum documents, DES strategies, and recent system developments at national level.

The six programme aims are concise and designed to develop the skills and engender the values that graduates will need in a future that is unpredictable. The aims are aligned with the programme's learning outcomes, which in turn are aligned with the Teaching Council's prescribed learning outcomes.

The design of the programme is commended for its sophistication and creativity. It is apparent that vision and clarity have been brought to bear on the planning and construction of the programme. The five pillars signal pathways of progression while the bands link concepts and content from year to year. The overarching developmental frame provides a solid basis for the whole programme. Modules in Years 1 and 2 provide the foundation and studies in the following two years integrate and deepen students' learning and experience. A spiral approach, involving an iterative revisiting of key topics in increasingly deeper and more complex ways, is utilised. A clear rationale underpins each element of the structure.

The alignment matrix, showing modules and their contribution to the realisation of learning outcomes, serves to clarify the College's approach to realising its goals. Tables showing overviews of areas of study and contributing modules, together with an identification of mandatory elements in the programme, attest to the rigour of the self-evaluation and planning processes undertaken in developing the programme. The high degree of coherence, integration, and interconnection in the programme, is commended.

## **6.2 Programme elements**

The Panel commends the interplay in the programme between critical evidence-based enquiry, reflective practice, and the values of inclusion, equality, intercultural education, and social justice.

Students are provided with a range of facilities and approaches to develop their reflective and adaptive skills through, for example, dedicated reflective spaces, portfolio-based self-evaluation, and pre- and post-school placement tutorials.

The development of problem-solving and analytical critical thinking is a feature of the programme design, though it is not always evident in module learning outcomes. The requirement that all students complete an action research project in Year 4 is a further positive feature. The use of case studies to develop analytical thinking is commended.

The Panel commends the way in which modules (e.g., philosophy, science education, assessment) reflect thematic groupings based on broad conceptual bands.

## **6.3 Conceptualisation of knowledge**

Knowledge is conceptualised in the programme as 'constructed' rather than 'received', dynamic and interactive rather than static, and as social and distributed, which is consistent with the principles of child learning in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). The programme is informed by current scholarship in the field of teacher education and adult education pedagogy with an emphasis on critical reflection, learner autonomy and problem-based learning.



#### **6.4 Beginning teaching**

The Panel commends the way in which modules are, by and large, calculated to assist students in assimilating key principles and skills for beginning teaching. For example, in Year 1, *Curriculum Art, Drama, Curriculum Music* and *Physical Education* are well attuned to the work of classrooms with clear connections to school curricula. The module *Teagasc na Gaeilge* provides a suitable introduction to the teaching of Irish at an early stage of the programme. Similarly, the module *Constructions of Childhood* provides source material in philosophy, sociology, and psychology to help students gain insights into aspects of these disciplines at an early stage. The module *Digital Learning* provides valuable experience for students in a variety of digital technologies.

#### **6.5 School placement**

The partnership and consultation processes developed with schools in school placement are commended. The structured developmental approach and carefully sequenced school placement experiences for students are also commended.

Providing graduated placements is logical in terms of student expectations, learning outcomes, and duration. The rationale for sequencing school placements from infants to senior, and then to multi-grade and specialist settings, is persuasive.

The structured use of observation, together with detailed guidance material and documentation for both observation and school placement, are commended, as are the well-developed criteria for placement tutors. A robust system of supplementary support is available for students who experience difficulty in their school placements.

The well-developed and clearly articulated role of partners (for example, the co-operating teacher's input and feedback to student teachers) is commended, as it recognises the complementarity of the roles of co-operating teacher and school placement tutor.

The Panel notes the potential for a well-managed school placement to be mutually enriching for learners, student teachers, co-operating/host teachers, HEI tutors and the wider school community.

#### **6.6 Child protection**

Sufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate that child protection is addressed in modules that prepare students for school placement. There is also prominent and emphatic reference to child protection procedures, including *Stay Safe* and anti-bullying guidelines, to ensure that students are provided with systematic opportunities to develop a thorough understanding of issues associated with this topic.

#### **6.7 Literacy**

The importance accorded to the development of a skills-based incremental approach in supporting students' learning in literacy and the inclusion of a literacy module in every year

of the programme, are commended. Current issues are examined, and best practice in curriculum implementation is addressed comprehensively in relation to the primary school cycle.

## **6.8 Numeracy**

The inclusion of a mathematics module in every year of the programme, and the fact that core courses in this area have been increased from 40 to 96 hours, demonstrates the College's commitment to this curriculum area. Students have the option of choosing to study mathematics as a major or minor specialism in Years 3 and 4. There is strong emphasis on Realistic Mathematics Education research, which is rooted in classroom practice and on real-world contexts. Supplementary evidence was provided to the Panel that appropriate attention is accorded the development of students' mathematical thinking and numeracy in which the focus is on basic skills and their application in everyday life, along with higher-order skills, such as problem-solving.

## **6.9 Irish language**

### **6.9.1 Measures to enhance proficiency in Irish**

In accord with recommendations outlined in the *20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030)*, considerable effort has been made by the College to develop an Irish stream and to promote Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Foghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha) across a number of modules. This will enhance students' opportunities to improve their language proficiency.

The Panel commends the inclusion of activities relating to Irish language provision designed to enhance proficiency. These include arrangements for learning portfolios to monitor progress and to develop reflective skills and learner autonomy, the provision of methodology courses in language teaching for Irish, Gaeltacht placements, and school placement opportunities within an Irish-medium strand.

### **6.9.2 Gaeltacht Placement**

The Panel notes the comprehensive work undertaken on the integration of the Gaeltacht placement and relevant content in the modules *Gaeilge: Labhairt agus Litearthacht* over Years 1 and 2. Students are given valuable opportunity in these modules to undertake a range of interactive and reflective Gaeltacht-based assignments which form part of their language learning portfolio.

### **6.10 Digital media**

Digital learning is integrated explicitly throughout the programme through the use of digital media and as a key part of teaching and learning. Commendable use is made of Moodle as both a repository of resources and a forum for interactive online discussion. The provision of an extensive programme of workshops to integrate digital learning across the programme is commended.

### **6.11 Learning through the arts and movement**

The Panel commends the approach taken in emphasising learning through the arts and movement, where music, drama, visual arts and physical education are developed in a deliberate and integrated manner with a clear focus on the pedagogical skills required for teaching and learning in primary schools.

### **6.12 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education**

The Panel commends the broad range of modules dealing with Social, Environmental and Scientific Education. The distinct focus on the development of enquiry and investigation skills, scientific thinking and understanding, and local studies in History, Geography and Science is especially noteworthy and commendable. The provision of an introduction to a wide range of disciplines (environmental studies, biology, chemistry, and physics) is commended, as is the focus on practical work as a way of exploring and investigating natural phenomena.

### **6.13 Religious Education**

The Panel commends the *Religious Education* and the *Ethics and Education* modules, which examine a wide range of relevant issues, including school patronage, comparative religions, and diversity of beliefs and practices.

### **6.14 Assessment**

Given the importance assigned to self-assessment in contemporary views of classroom assessment, the Panel commends the inclusion of this activity to complement the use of other assessment approaches. The intention of implementing a common assessment framework to promote meaningful integrative practice, as recorded in the documentation submitted, is commended.

The Panel commends the standard use of specific grade descriptors and marking criteria to promote consistency. The Panel also commends the range of sources used in the

assessment of student achievements [examinations, essays, journals, assignments, performance, lesson plans, musical compositions, portfolio content].

A commitment to reducing the number of formal essay-type examinations is noted. Although currently not a requirement of the Teaching Council, the Panel notes the inclusion of a breakdown of coursework requirements and weighting of marks between examination and continuous assessment in individual module descriptors.

### **6.15 Inclusive education / Special education**

The Panel commends the attention given to differentiation and to developing students' understandings of planning for diversity and inclusive pedagogy, particularly in the context of children with special educational needs.

### **6.16 Co-operative learning**

The Panel commends the College's commitment to enabling students gain a thorough knowledge and understanding of the principles and key elements required to implement co-operative learning/structured group-work effectively. This should facilitate students in developing creative approaches to teaching in their challenging professional role as facilitators of learning.

### **6.17 Educational research**

The Panel commends the College's commitment to research in evidence in its staff profiles. At the student level, several modules require reflection on, or critique of, research. In some modules, assessments are based on research assignments, while a number of modules require the completion of a small-scale research project (*Early Childhood Education, Ethics and Education*). All students are required to carry out an action research project in Year 4 (Research Methods and Project).

### **6.18 Professional portfolio**

The Panel commends the College's support for students in the compilation and use of a professional portfolio, which should provide a strong foundation for maintenance of a portfolio throughout their professional careers. The portfolio is maintained over four years, is integrated with school placement, and is intended to assist in actualising one pillar of the programme, as well as meeting a requirement of school placement. The inclusion of both private and public 'faces' in the portfolio, and the provision of scaffolding opportunities to assist students in managing it, lead to the expectation that the portfolio will have value both as a process and as a product.

### **6.19 Specialisms**

The Panel commends the provision that allows students choose some of the modules they will study. Allowing students select subjects that meet their interests should contribute to their personal and professional development, and the subjects, insofar as they are relevant to primary school teaching, should provide a degree of ‘distributed expertise’ in schools. The fact that students continue to study their specialisms through Years 3 and 4 provides a basis for further in-depth study. The addition of new major specialisms, in particular Physical Education, Science Education, Early Childhood Education, and Special and Inclusive Education, provides a good range of options for students.

Further positive aspects of the programme include the opportunity for students to study school leadership and develop their analytical skills in the study of the Humanities or Sciences, in courses which are closely linked to the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) .

### **6.20 Pastoral care and support**

The Panel commends the assignment of students to tutors which, in addition to providing pastoral care, should serve to scaffold and enhance students’ capacities as critical, reflective practitioners.

The Panel commends the cross-curricular linkages in PE, SPHE and mental health to support the emotional health and well-being of students.

### **6.21 Exit routes**

The Panel commends the College system for exit awards in the event of students not meeting the professional requirements of school placement. This entails transfer to the College’s BA in Humanities programme at an appropriate level, with relevant exemptions/credits depending on the specialisms studied. The College is also pursuing discussions with Dublin City University for a transfer mechanism to one of its programmes with similar arrangements.

### **6.22 Involvement of stakeholders**

The Panel commends the opportunities provided to obtain the perspectives of a wide range of stakeholders, including primary school pupils, parents, teachers, inspectors, and policy makers. This is in evidence throughout the programme and occurs in school placement, major and minor specialisms, and in modules such as *Creating Enabling Learning Environments*, *Ethics and Education*, and *Teaching in Disadvantaged Contexts*.

### ***6.23 Commitment to improvement***

The provision for ongoing review, self-evaluation, and planning opportunities in the programme is commended, as is provision for staff development to support implementation of the programme. The Panel is pleased to note that several days have been set aside for whole-staff professional development. Topics will include the use of formative assessment. The scheduled end-of-year planning day is also noted.

## ***7. Recommendations***

Arising from its review of the reconceptualised programme, the Panel has noted two aspects 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 Inclusive education***

Although aspects associated with disadvantage are addressed in several modules throughout the programme, it is the view of the Panel that a module explicitly dealing with issues relating to disadvantage should include an analysis of the nature of disadvantage and its manifestation in the Irish system of education, the action plan for educational inclusion DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), and the continuum of pedagogical interventions to address problems associated with disadvantage and their evaluation.

### ***7.2 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.

## ***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 – St Patrick’s College staff who made a presentation on 29 November, 2012**

<b>Dr Daire Keogh</b>	President
<b>Ms Olivia Bree</b>	Registrar
<b>Mr Denis Twomey</b>	Assistant Registrar
<b>Dr Fionnuala Waldron</b>	Dean of Education