

**Final Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council following a review
of the reconceptualised degree programme submitted for accreditation by
Church of Ireland College of Education**

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 its *Initial Teacher Education: Strategy for the Review and Professional Accreditation of Existing Programmes* in September 2011.

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

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

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

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

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

2. Publication of this Report

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

3. Overview of the Review Process

The Review Panel was appointed in July 2012 with Thomas Kellaghan as Chairperson.¹ The Panel was commissioned to review six separate primary ITE programmes. Panel members were in a position to consider the various 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 at which a general briefing was provided by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director, and Carmel Kearns, Education Officer of the Teaching Council. The Teaching Council's terms of reference and general principles bearing on the review and accreditation of the reconceptualised programmes of initial teacher education were outlined.

¹Details of the panel membership are included at Appendix 1

By mid-July Panel members were supplied with the documentation in respect of the Bachelor of Education programme of Church of Ireland College of Education 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 11 April, 2013 to make an oral submission for clarification purposes².

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

4. Documentation

The Church of Ireland College of Education adhered to the *Pro Forma for the Submission of Existing Programmes for Review and Professional Accreditation by the Teaching Council* of June 2011, supplying information under all headings. The College also provided several appendices containing supplementary and background information. The Pro Forma submission extended to 76 pages, while the appendices ran to more than three hundred pages.

The Pro Forma submission provided information under three main headings (Inputs, Processes, Outcomes) although the description of the programme lacked detail in some respects. In the view of the Panel, the documentation was adequate, providing 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 co-operation in furnishing supplementary information.

The Church of Ireland College of Education has 32 places on its B.Ed. programme and these are reserved for those who are members of recognised churches in the reformed tradition including the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, and the Religious Society of Friends.

5. Overall Finding

Taking account of the initial and supplementary documentation submitted, 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.

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

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 the 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 focus on developing the competencies and values required for entry to the teaching profession. Module learning outcomes are organised under four headings or themes: teaching skills, expert educational knowledge, demonstration of inclusive, respectful values and behaviours, and professional reflective development. These themes are linked to learning outcomes in a number of modules, in particular those related to school placement.

6.2 Progression and linkage within the programme

The Panel commends efforts, evident in some areas of study, to specify progression between related modules relating to students' learning and self-development. For example, in the *Mathematics Methods* and the *Mathematics Methods and Numeracy* modules, efforts are made to build incrementally on concepts presented. These modules have a combined focus on both the discrete mathematics lesson and the embedding of mathematics across the curriculum using play-based methodologies as advocated in the national strategy, *Literacy and Numeracy Learning for Life (2011)* and in *Aistear (NCCA, 2009)*.

Progression is also discernible in the *Physical Education/Social, Personal and Health Education* modules which forge imaginative and relevant connections between these curriculum areas.

6.3 Variety of learning opportunities

The Panel commends the variety of learning opportunities provided in the programme. These include seminars, workshops, tutorials, project work, case studies, online discussion fora, and problem-based learning.

6.4 Critical reflection

The Panel commends the consistent attention in the programme to the development of students' reflective skills in modules, professional portfolios, and tutorials that precede and follow school placement.

6.5 Connectivity between college-based activities and school placement

The Panel commends the clear connectivity outlined in the Pro Forma between programme learning outcomes and the taught modules, particularly in the area of school placement. These modules are closely supported by taught modules, such as *School Placement Studies*, which allow students to establish connections between the theoretical and practical elements of the programme. The development of an action research project also supports final year students in making connections between college-based elements of the course and school placement.

The Panel commends the spiral approach of the programme design in which curriculum aspects of the programme are embedded and integrated in the first two years. The Panel also commends the use of workshops to model experiential learning.

6.6 School placement

The Panel commends the provision of opportunities for students to observe and teach in a range of educational settings including multi-grade, infant, single-class settings, special classes and/or special schools, and multi-denominational schools, such as Educate Together. The Panel commends the focused attention in tutorials on planning for integration, inclusion, co-operative learning, and thematic project work. It is also apparent that the *School Placement Studies* modules are progressively challenging from year to year. The importance of developing a shared understanding of expectations for each school placement is evidenced in a number of ways, including the establishment of a School Placement Partnership Forum and the sharing of assessment criteria among all participating parties. The Panel commends the enhanced role planned for co-operating teachers in placement schools in mentoring student teachers.

6.7 Irish: Content and Language Integrated Learning

The Panel commends the College's efforts in the module *English Methods and Irish Methods* to ensure that students will be able to plan for the integration of Irish with another teaching subject. The importance of drama and music in stimulating language development in second language learning is appropriately emphasised.

6.8 Mathematics/numeracy

The Panel commends the attention accorded mathematics/numeracy in modules which demonstrate clear progression. In particular, it commends the module *Addressing Numeracy* in Year 3 which addresses students' understanding of early intervention strategies and relevant research.

The Panel also commends steps that are being taken to develop a test of students' mathematics achievement to be administered in Years 1 and 2 which will provide information on students' strengths and weaknesses, on the basis of which students will reflect on their own learning.

6.9 Arts Education

The Panel commends the structured presentation of an arts education programme in the module *Arts (Visual, Music and Drama)* which has linkages with *Aistear* in Year 3 and a focus on infant education. It also commends the provision of an elective in Year 4 where students are involved in critical discussion, and in analysing aspects of the arts, particularly in music and drama.

6.10 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

The Panel commends the structured lay-out of the three modules of the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education programme based on the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*. In Year 3, in the module *SESE Methods*, there is particular focus on infant education linked with the concepts underpinning *Aistear*. The cross-curricular focus is also noteworthy with an emphasis on enhancing the development of language, literacy and numeracy through the teaching of SESE.

6.11 Religion

The Panel commends the approach outlined in the religious education module *Religious, Values, Moral and Values Education*, which addresses understanding and appreciation of diverse religions and belief systems, strategies for inclusive practice and students' own spiritual, religious and moral development.

Strong emphasis is placed on developing students' awareness and knowledge of the range of school types in Ireland (denominational, integrated schools, Educate Together, etc.,) and the religious and moral education programmes in operation in each of these.

6.12 Student assessment

The Panel commends the variety of sources of assessment in the programme (written examinations, essays, individual and group projects, portfolios) as well as the proposed expansion of the range of assessment tools envisaged for school placements. Consideration is given to self-assessment, peer-assessment, and assessment of teaching.

6.13 Educational research

The Panel commends the module, *Introduction to Research Methods and Completion of Supervised Research Dissertation*, in Year 4, with its emphasis on engagement in action research. The requirement that students complete a 10,000 word dissertation should facilitate the in-depth study of a topic. The Panel also commends the way staff timetables are structured to allow each member devote one day a week to research.

6.14 Professional portfolios

The Panel commends the use of professional portfolios in which students build a record of their developing practice in school placements. Portfolios include a structured reflection journal and a reading and reflection journal, which are designed to develop reflective practice with a multi-faceted approach to accumulating knowledge and awareness of teaching and learning. They should serve as an important link between initial teacher education and later professional development.

6.15 Early childhood education

The Panel commends the focus on early childhood education, the attention given to *Aistear* and the construction of links to the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

6.16 Integration

The Panel commends the integration of literacy and numeracy with visual arts, music, and drama, and the establishment of cross-curriculum links between Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE).

6.17 Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

The Panel commends the modules *Creative Technologies in the Classroom* in Year 3, and *Creative Resource Development* in Year 4. These modules provide opportunities for students to explore the effective use of ICT resources to enhance cross-curricular teaching and learning. The Panel commends the opportunities provided for students to benefit from on-line communication with tutors, students, teachers and the student-teacher tutorial group during school placement using the School Placement E-Integrated System (SPEIS). The development of enhanced facilities for uploading assignments, receiving electronic feedback, using an electronic academic noticeboard, and accessing electronic resources including academic journals, is commended.

6.18 Teacher as reflective practitioner

The Panel commends the provision in both semesters in Year 4 of the module, *Professional Development: Developing the Reflective Practitioner*. Students are afforded the opportunity in small group tutorials to focus on the nature and practice of professional reflection through study of relevant literature and development of their own evidence-based ideas.

6.19 Inclusive education / Disadvantage

The Panel commends the provision of a module on inclusive education in Years 2 and 3 that encompasses a wide range of equality and social justice issues. A core part of the module examines definitions of educational disadvantage and its impact. It also critically explores approaches aimed at tackling and eradicating disadvantage in education.

6.20 Student choice and elective study areas

The Panel commends the provision for student choice in Year 4 of the programme allowing students to select three options from a suite of seven electives, all of which have a direct relevance to primary school teaching (e.g., assessment, teaching in multi-level classes and inclusive education.) The optional module on multi-level teaching allows for the exploration of international research and best practice as part of considering the role of the teacher in a small school.

6.21 Co-operative learning

The Panel commends the opportunities provided for students to participate and engage in school placement tutorials to enhance students' competencies to effectively implement co-operative learning. Appropriate attention is also given to the management and assessment of learning in a variety of co-operative group contexts and suitable reading material is recommended. The development of such transversal competencies will greatly support students in teaching heterogeneous classes and in planning for inclusion.

6.22 Student/staff support and welfare

The Panel commends the College's provision for a range of support services available to students and staff. All students have a tutor who is available formally and informally and who has a supportive role to play in school placement. Student counselling and learning support services in addition to health services are available. There is provision for staff development with notable supports for study visits, attendance at conferences, academic studies, research, and networking with other teacher educators.

6.23 Commitment to improvement

The College has indicated its commitment to improvement in the feedback sought from students, co-operating teachers and College tutors, in the area of school placement. This enables sharing of good practice and provides a means of identifying areas for improvement that are informed by consideration of what is happening in practice. This commitment to improvement is also evidenced in the mechanisms in place to support co-operating teachers.

7. Recommendations

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

7.1 Progression in programme content

Although there is evidence of progression in programme content in some modules, it is the view of the Panel that progression and developmental sequence should be clearly identified in all cognate modules.

7.2 Linkage and integration

While efforts made to link and integrate modules in some curriculum areas are noted, the Panel recommends that this should be more apparent throughout the programme. For example, the sequencing of content in the curriculum areas of Arts Education and SESE should detail more explicitly the discrete subject content and how it develops from one semester to another.

7.3 School placement

The Panel recommends that the description of learning outcomes for school placement should exhibit greater evidence of progression. While learning outcomes in module descriptions for Years 1, 2, and 3 indicate some progression, the Panel also notes that no final year descriptors are provided in the submission document *Differentiated Expectations for the Assessment of Teaching Practice* (Appendix D). The Panel also recommends that all students, as far as practicable, have opportunities for placements in Gaelscoileanna and DEIS schools involving both observation of practice and teaching experience.

7.4 Literacy (English)

The Panel recommends that the modules on language and literacy should provide a more detailed and specific description of content covered in each year of the programme.

7.5 Literacy (Irish)

The module *Irish Language and Literature* is provided to students throughout the programme and has as an overarching aim to improve the language proficiency of students. However, the module descriptors do not demonstrate how the module content is developed throughout the programme.

The Panel recommends that greater emphasis be accorded the progressive and indepth study of Irish, and particularly the teaching of Irish. It is also recommended that all modules related to Irish should be presented in the programme through the medium of Irish. The Panel recommends that the module descriptors should be more specific and provide greater detail in terms of content covered to facilitate the incremental and multi-faceted development of students' competencies in the teaching of the language. Additional guidance should be provided to students on the content and themes assessed.

7.6 Gaeltacht placement

In the absence of a reference to targeted preparatory activities for students in advance of participating in the Gaeltacht placement, the Panel recommends that focused planning should include interactive practical Irish language activities to support the development of students' language proficiency levels. Students should be supported in using portfolios to document their reflections and their learning. It is the view of the Panel that module descriptors should document how students will be assessed during and/or immediately after Gaeltacht placements.

7.7 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE)

While active learning methodologies and inclusive classroom management strategies are promoted, the Panel recommends that SPHE and PE be introduced in Year 1 to reinforce and consolidate students' experience of these methodologies and strategies from an early stage.

While the College has confirmed that child protection issues and the Stay Safe Programme are incorporated in the SPHE/PE modules, the Panel recommends that module descriptors should clearly indicate that students will gain an understanding of child protection procedures as outlined in *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011) from the commencement of the programme.

7.8 Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE)

The Panel notes the lack of meaningful progression in the content of SESE across the programme. The Panel recommends that modules should provide greater focus on relevant knowledge and investigative skills to guide and support students' learning.

7.9 Assessment

The Panel notes that reference is made to assessment in several modules and in descriptions of school placement, and that the module, *Assessing Learning, Assessing Teaching*, is provided as an elective. However, the Panel is of the view that a module dedicated to educational measurement and formal and informal methods of assessment should be provided as part of the core programme.

7.10 Reading lists

The Panel recommends that the number of items in reading lists be reviewed and reduced in number. When lists are being compiled, due consideration should be given to the demands on students in other modules. To introduce students to the findings of national and international studies of the literacy and numeracy achievements of pupils in Irish primary schools, appropriate references should be included in reading lists.

7.11 Exit routes

The Panel recommends that the College should explore options for students who do not meet the requirements of the course so that they may pursue other programmes with appropriate transfer of accumulated credits.

7.12 Monitoring programme implementation

The Panel recommends that relevant quality assurance structures be put in place to monitor the implementation of the reconceptualised B.Ed. programme.

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 Pre-service 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 - Church of Ireland College of Education staff who made a presentation on 11 April, 2013.

Dr. Anne Lodge Principal

Geraldine O'Connor Director of School Placement