

**Draft Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council following  
a review of the Initial Teacher Education programme at Mary  
Immaculate College, Thurles**

**BA in Education, Mathematics and Gaeilge**

**March 2020**

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## **1. Background**

### **1.1 The Teaching Council's Review and Accreditation Function**

The Teaching Council is the statutory body charged with setting the standards for entry to the teaching profession and ensuring that these standards are upheld.

In accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, the Council shall:

- (a) review and accredit the programmes of teacher education and training provided by institutions of higher education and training in the State,
- (b) review the standards of education and training appropriate to a person entering a programme of teacher education and training, and
- (c) review the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required for the practice of teaching,

and shall advise the Minister and, as it considers appropriate, the institutions concerned.

The Teaching Council's role in relation to the review and accreditation of programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is distinct from the academic accreditation which programmes also undergo. Academic accreditation is based on the suitability of a programme for the award of a degree/diploma, whereas professional accreditation for any profession is a judgement as to whether a programme prepares one for entry into that profession.

The review and accreditation of programmes of ITE by the Teaching Council provides 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 will achieve programme aims and learning outcomes which are aligned with the values, professional dispositions, and the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence that are central to the practice of teaching.

### **1.2 Review and Accreditation Strategy**

In order to guide its review of programmes, the Teaching Council has published *Initial Teacher Education: Strategy for the Review and Accreditation of Programmes* (hereinafter referred to as the Council's review strategy). That document sets out the process by which programmes are reviewed.

### **1.3 National Policy Framework**

In carrying out reviews, the Council is mindful of its *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* which sets out its vision for teacher education at all stages of the continuum – ITE, Induction, and Continuing Professional Development. 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 & 2017 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.

#### **1.4 Accreditation Criteria**

The Teaching Council, having established an Advisory Group on Initial Teacher Education, developed criteria to be observed and guidelines to be followed by providers in reconceptualising programmes of initial teacher education at primary and post-primary levels. They were approved by the Council and published in June 2011 as *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (hereinafter referred to as the Council's criteria). These relate to a range of areas, including programme design, areas of study, the duration of programmes, the numbers and qualifications of staff, facilities and resources. As such, they form the bridge between the Council's policy and the development and implementation of reconceptualised programmes. Significantly, the criteria:

- prescribe those areas of study which will be mandatory in programmes, including numeracy and literacy, behaviour management, parents in education, ICT and inclusive education
- set out for the first time the expected learning outcomes for graduates of all ITE programmes
- propose raising the minimum requirements for persons entering programmes of ITE at primary level and a literacy and numeracy admissions test for mature entrants
- require a 15:1 student-staff ratio
- call for the development of new and innovative school placement models, involving active collaboration between HEIs and schools, and an enhanced role for the teaching profession in the provision of structured support for student teachers
- require that student teachers should spend at least 25% of the programme on school placement, and that such placements should be in a minimum of two schools
- require increased emphasis on research, portfolio work and other strategic priorities.

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.

Providers of existing programmes have been asked to reconceptualise their programmes in line with the revised criteria and to submit them for accreditation.

### **1.5 Particular requirements for post-primary programmes**

In November 2011, the Council published *Teaching Council Requirements for Entry onto a Programme of Initial Teacher Education*, which set out the Council's revised subject criteria. They also guide providers of post-primary consecutive programmes in determining suitability of entrants and which curricular subjects entrants can ultimately be registered to teach. They will also guide PME providers in matching students appropriately to methodology modules.

### **1.6 Programme overview**

This report relates to the review of the following programme provided by **Mary Immaculate College, Thurles, (MIC Thurles) - BA in Education, Mathematics and Gaelige** - hereinafter referred to as 'the programme'

## **2. *The Review Process***

The review of the BA in Education, Mathematics and Gaeilge took place between 31 May and 9 March 2020 in accordance with the Council's review strategy. The process was formally initiated when the Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the Panel') was appointed by the Teaching Council's Director, with Professor Sheelagh Drudy as Chairperson.<sup>1</sup> The Panel was supported in its deliberations by external subject experts and by the Director and staff of the Teaching Council.

The application was submitted to the Teaching Council by MIC Thurles, on 31 May 2019. A meeting of the panel was held on 17 September 2019 and a letter requesting additional documentation was sent to MIC Thurles on 12 November 2019. Following receipt of all required documents, the Panel met on 27 January 2020 to consider the application and all documents submitted. A conference call facilitated by Teaching Council staff was held between the Head of Education at MIC Thurles and the Chair on 3 February 2020 for final clarifications. An updated Pro Forma was submitted on 6 February 2020. The Panel had a further conference call on 10 February 2020 to discuss the updated Pro Forma.

## **3. *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).

## **4. *Documentation***

The documentation submitted on 31 May 2019 by MIC Thurles was in accordance with the template provided by the Teaching Council in the Pro Forma and Guidelines which accompany the Council's review strategy.

The Pro Forma submission provided detailed information under three main headings Inputs, Processes, and Outcomes. Further submissions were made by MIC Thurles on 11 December 2019 and 6 February 2020.

## **5. *Overall Findings***

The Panel noted that this programme commenced in September 2019, prior to the granting of accreditation by the Teaching Council. In light of this, the Panel required that MIC Thurles advise all current and prospective students that this programme had not yet achieved accreditation from the Teaching Council and required that MIC Thurles publish an advisory note on their website to that effect.

The commendations in Section 6 below relate to areas of particular strength which the Panel has identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the Review Panel membership are included in Appendix I

With regard to the recommendations in Section 7, the Panel submits that the Teaching Council should require the college to set out, within twelve months of receiving the final review report, its detailed proposals for implementing the recommendations. It further recommends that the Teaching Council should prioritise those areas to be accorded particular attention when the programme falls due for re-accreditation.

The Panel proposes that accreditation of the programmes would have a lifespan of five years.

## **6. Commendations**

The Panel has noted a number of particular strengths of the programme having regard to the following:

1. the Pro Forma documentation which was submitted
2. the supplementary material which was submitted
3. advice received from the curricular subject specialists who supported the review process

These strengths are:

### **6.1 Engagement with the review process**

MIC Thurles co-operated fully with the process. The module descriptions provided are informative and the programme protocols are well described. The Panel commends the honest and proactive engagement of MIC Thurles with this process.

### **6.2 Inputs**

#### **6.2.1 Conceptual Framework and Programme Aims**

The Panel commends the emphasis on excellence in teaching and learning set out in the conceptual framework of the programme. The framework also places commendable emphasis on the values of social justice; personal development and well-being; contributions to the community; personal and institutional identity and research activity. In addition there is a welcome prominence on the areas of critical reflection and research informed practice.

The Panel commends the value of the programme noting that it addresses a serious national need for well qualified teachers in the disciplines of Gaeilge and Mathematics.

The Panel also commends the importance placed on social justice, inclusion and diversity in the approach to teaching.

#### **6.2.2 Programme Design, Areas of Study, Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

### ***Strategies and School Placement***

The Panel praised the designers of this new programme in respect of the modules devoted to Gaeilge, for the impressive historical breadth of the literary content of the modules. It was noted that students taking these courses will be exposed to a wide range of Irish language literacy and cultural primary sources and will therefore be equipped to teach all aspects of the post-primary curriculum. The integrated approach of embedding language learning in the literature modules is noted.

In respect of Mathematics, the Panel noted that the programme provides for a well-rounded education in the subject and should produce competent teachers of Mathematics in the future. They noted specifically its attention to the key areas of analysis and algebra and that it provides sufficient exposure to the topics of geometry and probability/statistics.

The Panel commends the Education components of the programme noting that they are well designed and well address the various dimensions of initial teacher education as presented in *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*.

The Panel commends the various exit strategies proposed by MIC Thurles for students who may at various points in the BA in Education, Mathematics and Gaeilge programme decide not to pursue a teaching career.

#### ***6.2.3 The Duration and Nature of the Programme***

This is a four-year programme in which the equivalent of two years of study of Education, one year of Gaeilge and one year of Mathematics will be undertaken over the course of the four years. As such, it fulfils the criteria set down by the Teaching Council.

#### ***6.2.4 Student Intake***

The Panel commends the structure indicated to ensure diversity in student intake to the programme through the mechanisms of quotas for mature students and HEAR and DARE applicants.

#### ***6.2.5 Student Support and Guidance Systems***

The Panel commends the approach to student support and guidance by means of additional mathematics support and the dedicated appointment made available to students under the HEI Academic Learning Support Provision. In addition, access to a full time Counsellor and career guidance is made available.

#### ***6.2.6 Communication and Decision-Making Structures***

The Panel commends the communication and decision making structures involving all staff and also students in decision making.

#### ***6.2.7 Areas of Study – Gaeilge***



The Panel recommends that MIC Thurles should continue to develop relationships with the NAPD, Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholaístí.

### **6.3 Processes**

#### **6.3.1 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Approaches, Engagement of Student Teachers**

The teaching, learning and assessment processes embedded in the programme are commendable. The Panel were impressed with the engagement of students in the HEI's community and access programmes.

## **7. Recommendations**

Having regard to:

1. the Pro Forma documentation which was submitted
2. the supplementary material which was submitted
3. advice received from the curricular subject specialists who supported the review process

The panel has noted a number of areas of the programme which it believes should be developed. They are as follows:

### **7.1 Inputs**

#### **7.1.1 Staffing**

The Panel notes that the majority of lecturing staff have qualifications at doctoral level. The Panel recommends that MIC Thurles should support the small number of part-time Tutors who have Level 8 qualifications to achieve at least a Masters level qualification.

### **7.2 Outcomes**

#### **7.2.1 Knowledge-Breadth/Knowledge-Kind**

MIC Thurles should make explicit the assessment process that ensures graduates of this programme will have achieved level B2.2 on the CEFR framework for Gaeilge, which is a requirement for registration with the Teaching Council.

## **8. *National Issues***

Having regard to:

1. the Pro Forma documentation which was submitted
2. the supplementary material which was submitted
3. advice received from the curricular subject specialists who supported the review process and

the panel has noted the following issues which it believes merit further attention by the Teaching Council and/or other national stakeholders.

### **8.1. *Staff Resourcing***

MIC Thurles should be mindful that in order to continue to adhere to the staff student ratio additional academic staff may be required.

## ***Appendix 1 - Review Panel Membership***

### **Independent Review Panel Chair**

Professor Sheelagh Drudy is Professor Emeritus of Education at University College Dublin and former Head of the UCD School of Education. She is a former teacher, educational researcher and teacher educator. She was a member of the first Teaching Council 2005 - 2009. She has researched and published numerous books and peer-reviewed papers on education including the sociology of education, gender, class, teacher education and inclusion. She was a member of the Education subject area grouping which was part of the project Tuning (Higher) Educational Structures in Europe. She was a member of Council of the NCSE 2013-2018 and chaired its Research Committee.

### **Teacher Education Expert**

Dr Mary Fleming Adjunct Senior Lecturer in NUI Galway. She was Head of the School of Education, NUI Galway from 2013-2016 and member of the Teaching Council 2016-2018. As Director Teacher Education within the School of Education from 2012, she had primary responsibility for the development and accreditation of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programmes and was academic Director of the Professional Master of Education. Mary lectured and taught modules in the areas of Leadership and Policy development, Curriculum Studies and Professional Practice. Her research interest areas are concerned with the dynamics of teaching and learning within classrooms, leading learning and policy developments within the system and leadership practices within educational contexts.

### **Teacher**

Ms Máirín Ní Chéileachair is Director of Dublin West Education Centre. She is currently on secondment to DWEC from the position of Principal in Gaelscoil Uí Fhiaich, Maigh Nuad, a position she held for almost 20 years before going on secondment. She was National Co-ordinator of the National Induction Programme for Teachers from 2015-2018. She has lectured and taught modules on Gaelscolaíocht, SPHE and Leadership in both Colleges of Education and across the Education Centre Network. She is a former President of Gaelscoileanna Teo. (now Gaeloideachas) and a member of several advisory groups in the area of education.

### **Teacher**

Mr Patrick McVicar is a former post-primary school Principal and former member of the ACCS Executive and of the Teaching Council. Mr Mc Vicar has also served on a number of NCCA committees including Course Committees for Technical Graphics, Design & Communication Graphics and the Board of Studies for Technological Subjects.

## **Appendix 2 - Teaching Council Registration: Curricular Subject Requirements(Post-primary) Effective for registration on or after 1 January 2017**

### **Gaeilge/Irish**

*In order to meet the registration requirements, set down in the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations in respect of the curricular subject of Irish, an applicant must meet **all** of the following criteria:*

1. (a) Applicants must hold a degree-level qualification, with Irish studied up to and including third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

(b) The qualifying degree must be equivalent to at least Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and with a minimum pass<sup>1</sup> result in all examinations pertinent to the subject of Irish.

(c) The qualifying degree must carry at least 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits (or equivalent) with the specific study of Irish comprising at least 60 ECTS credits (or equivalent) and with not less than 10 ECTS credits (or equivalent) studied at third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

2. The study of Irish during the degree must show that the holder has acquired sufficient knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the Irish syllabus([www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie)). To meet this requirement, the degree must include the study of: <sup>2</sup> to the highest level in post-primary education (see

(a) Irish Language Studies

**and**

(b) Irish Literature

The degree must incorporate the study of Literature through the medium of Irish comprising of at least 20 ECTS credits and should incorporate at least two of the following areas:

- i. Poetry
- ii. Prose
- iii. Media/Film Studies
- iv. Drama.

3. Applicants must have verifiable residential experience of at least two months in an area designated as a Gaeltacht area.

4. Applicants must provide evidence of linguistic competence in the language. This can be demonstrated by:

(a) Applicants for whom the language is their mother tongue

**Or**

(b) Providing evidence of achieving a minimum level of B2.2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (or equivalent) from the higher education institution where the qualification was completed. Alternatively, applicants can provide certification of successful completion of an independent language competency test.

5. Applicants must also have completed a programme of post-primary initial teacher education (age range 12-18 years) carrying a minimum of 120 ECTS credits (or equivalent)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> which includes pass by compensation.

<sup>2</sup> as approved by the Minister for Education & Skills, and published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

<sup>3</sup> Applicants who have commenced a programme of initial teacher education prior to 01/09/2014 carrying less than 120 ECTS credits may be exempted from this requirement at the Council's discretion.

## Mathematics

*In order to meet the registration requirements, set down in the Teaching Council [Registration] Regulations in respect of the curricular subject of Mathematics, an applicant must meet **all** of the following criteria:*

1. (a) Applicants must hold a degree-level qualification, with Mathematics studied up to and including third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

(b) The qualifying degree must be equivalent to at least Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and with a minimum pass<sup>1</sup> result in all examinations pertinent to the subject of Mathematics.

<sup>1</sup> (c) The qualifying degree must carry at least 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits (or equivalent) with the specific study of Mathematics comprising at least 60 ECTS credits (or equivalent) and with not less than 10 ECTS credits (or equivalent) studied at third-year level or higher (or modular equivalent).

2. The study of Mathematics during the degree must show that the holder has acquired sufficient knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the Mathematics syllabus ([www.curriculumonline.ie](http://www.curriculumonline.ie)). To meet this requirement, the degree must include the study of all of the following essential areas to a minimum of 40 ECTS credits (or equivalent): <sup>2</sup> to the highest level in post-primary education (see

### Essential areas of study

(a) Analysis<sup>3</sup> - minimum of 10 ECTS credits

(b) Algebra<sup>4</sup> - minimum of 10 ECTS credits

(c) Geometry<sup>5</sup> - minimum of 5 ECTS credits

(d) Probability and Statistics<sup>6</sup> - minimum of 5 ECTS credits

The remaining 20 ECTS credits (or equivalent) may be in any of the above essential areas, or be drawn from the following optional areas:

### Optional areas of study

(e) Dynamical Systems and Chaos

(f) Calculus of Variations

(g) Numerical Analysis or Computational Mathematics

(h) Mathematical Modelling

(i) Discrete Mathematics

(j) History or Philosophy of Mathematics

(k) Mathematical Logic

(l) Set Theory and Cardinality

3. Applicants must also have completed a programme of post-primary initial teacher education (age range 12-18 years) carrying a minimum of 120 ECTS credits (or equivalent)<sup>7</sup>. The programme should include a module(s) on the teaching of Mathematics carrying a minimum of 5 ECTS credits (or equivalent)<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> which includes pass by compensation.

<sup>2</sup> as approved by the Minister for Education & Skills, and published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

<sup>3</sup> This must include modules in Differential and Integral Calculus in one and several variables, and may include modules in Differential Equations, Complex Analysis, Abstract Analysis, Measure and Integral, or Topology.

<sup>4</sup> This must include modules in Linear Algebra, and may include modules on Abstract Algebra (Groups, Rings, and Fields), Cryptology, Coding Theory, or Number Theory.

<sup>5</sup> This must include a module or modules in Euclidean and Non-Euclidean Geometry and may include modules in Differential Geometry, Algebraic Geometry, or Topology.

<sup>6</sup> This must include modules in Probability and Statistical Inference and may include modules in Combinatorics or Stochastic Processes.

<sup>7</sup> Applicants who have commenced a programme of initial teacher education prior to 01/09/2014 carrying less than 120 ECTS credits may be exempted from this requirement at the Council's discretion.

<sup>8</sup> Applicants who have completed a specialist concurrent degree in Mathematics must meet all of the requirements as detailed above. This course should be equivalent to a minimum of 240 ECTS credits.