

Progress Report for National University of Ireland, Galway: Findings and Analysis

Professional Master of Education and Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas

April 2016

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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 where appropriate accredit, the programmes of teacher education and training provided by institutions of higher education,

(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 that programmes must also undergo. Academic accreditation is based on the suitability of a programme for the award of a degree or diploma. This process must be completed in advance of seeking professional accreditation, which is a judgement as to whether a programme prepares one for entry into that profession as per the Council's *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers*.

1.2 The Initial Review Process

The initial review of the Professional Master of Education and Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas in National University of Ireland, Galway took place between January and September 2013, in accordance with the Council's review strategy. The final report was published on the Teaching Council website in October 2013. With regard to this programme, the report contained commendations, recommendations and stipulations. The accreditation of the programme had a lifespan of two years, with accreditation for a further three years to be approved subject to the Council's satisfaction with the submission of a Progress Report providing evidence of progress in the key areas highlighted in the original report.

2. The Progress Report Process

A Progress Report Panel was appointed by the Director to consider the progress report submissions relating to a number of ITE programmes. This Panel was comprised of two former Review Panel chairpersons and a Teaching Council member. A Rapporteur (a Teaching Council Associate) worked closely with the Panel to support the drafting and finalising of documents for each Higher Education Institute (HEI) during this process.

The Council communicated with National University of Ireland, Galway in December 2015 to set out the purpose of the Progress Report process, and to outline the composition of the Panel, the submission format required, and the relevant timeframe.

Having considered all programmes that required a Progress Report, and in line with Council's strategic priorities, the following were key areas for inclusion in all Progress Report submissions:

- **School Placement and**
- **Resourcing, with particular reference to student-staff ratio.**

HEIs were also required to demonstrate progress made with regard to recommendations (in addition to the two key areas above) outlined in their first cycle of review and accreditation.

A Progress Report submission template was designed and guidelines were developed in order to ensure that information provided by the HEI to the Panel was accessible and of a concise nature (20 pages maximum, including supporting documentation). A School Placement Handbook for Students, with the relevant areas highlighted, was also requested to accompany the submission.

The National University of Ireland, Galway Progress Report submission was received on 28 January 2016, followed by a small number of clarifications sought by the Panel. Documentation was circulated by the Rapporteur to Progress Report Panel members in advance of a full-day meeting convened on 10 March 2016. The purpose of this meeting was to review the documentation and discuss conclusions with regard to further accreditation.

Based on the Progress Report submission and the outcomes of the Panel meeting, this report – including a recommendation for further accreditation – was agreed by the Panel. This report was then presented to Education Committee for final decision regarding further accreditation.

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.

4. Overall Findings

The summary, below, outlines the findings of the Panel in relation to further accreditation and the three key areas that were included in the Progress Report submission from National University of Ireland, Galway for the Professional Master of Education and Máistir Gairmiúil san Oideachas.

4.1 Further Accreditation

Having regard to the documentation that was initially submitted, together with the clarifications sought in response to the Panel's queries, the Panel is satisfied with the progress made in relation to aspects as previously identified in the first cycle of review and accreditation. Accordingly, it recommends to the Education Committee that the programme be granted further accreditation for three years (until autumn 2019).

4.2 School Placement

The Progress Report Panel is satisfied with the progress made in school placement. The details provided align with the Council's Guidelines regarding direct teaching hours, sector and level, and range of settings.

The submission also included a School Placement Handbook, with relevant extracts highlighted, demonstrating progress made regarding HEI-school placement partnership.

4.3 Resourcing

The information submitted to the Progress Report Panel detailed the current student-staff ratio as 18.34:1 (PME) and 19.42:1 (MGO), which is above the Council's recommended ratio of 15:1. The Panel is however cognisant of the University's efforts toward staff recruitment and institutional amalgamation, thereby demonstrating progress in reducing the current ratio. It recommends that the recruitment programme should be expedited so that the ratio can continue to progress towards the 15:1 ratio in advance of the next cycle of review and accreditation.

4.4 Recommendations

As part of the Progress Report submission, National University of Ireland, Galway was also required to address five outstanding recommendations, as identified in the first cycle of review and accreditation:

7.1 Recognition of the strategic importance of the Máistir programme

The Panel recommends that the place of the Máistir programme in the strategic role of NUIG as an ITE provider, be made explicit.

7.2.1 Programme Aims

The Panel recommends that the development of students' competence in Irish be acknowledged appropriately as a key aim of the Máistir programme.

7.2.2 Areas of Study

The Panel notes the extent to which assessment as a professional responsibility of teachers and the related competency demands of the Junior Cycle reforms are provided for by being embedded in a number of modules in both year 1 and 2. The Panel recommends that the School of Education ensures that programme delivery gives additional emphasis and focus to teacher competence in assessment of learning and assessment for learning in the context of current curricular and assessment reforms.

7.2.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies

The Panel recommend that provision be made so that inputs from the Educational Sciences are seen to inform the programmes over the two years. The Panel also recommends that the scale of the Practitioner Based Research Project be increased to about 10,000 words or equivalent, and the majority of marks be allocated for the quality of the research project, with less emphasis on preliminaries.

7.2.7 Engagement of Student Teachers with Staff and with other Student Teachers

The Panel recommends that cross-programme collaboration between the PME and the Máistir programme be a characteristic of the Practitioner Based Research module.

The Panel concluded that the five recommendations above have been addressed. In keeping with recommendations 7.1 and 7.2.1 it also commends the University's ongoing commitment to the provision of education through Irish, as outlined in its Strategic Plan – *Vision 2020*.

5. Informing the next cycle of Review and Accreditation

The Progress Report Panel noted the following issues that it believes merit further attention by all HEIs providing programmes of Initial Teacher Education, and should be afforded particular attention by Council in revising its criteria as part of the next cycle of review and accreditation:

- The School Placement handbooks are a valuable resource for student teachers, HEIs, schools and Co-operating Teachers, as a guide to their roles and responsibilities for the duration of an Initial Teacher Education programme. For that reason, it is advised that in keeping with Teaching Council *Guidelines on School Placement*, the School Placement handbooks should make explicit the role of the Co-operating Teacher in assigning the teaching of areas of the curriculum to the student teacher, while retaining the primary responsibility for the progress of the learners.
- In line with the Teaching Council *Guidelines on School Placement*, it is incumbent on the HEI to ensure that the student teacher is supported and assessed by *two or more HEI placement tutors*, at least one of whom has relevant curricular/subject expertise.
- The extended school placement, consisting of a ten-week block in the second half of the Initial Teacher Education programme should span consecutive weeks and five full schooldays, in line with the school timetable.
- The challenges experienced by HEIs in securing placements for their students have been noted, but these challenges have been lessened in HEIs committed to formally developing a school-HEI partnership model. The development and implementation of a formal Memorandum of Understanding is seen as central to this model.
- While the Panel has noted the student-staff ratio calculated by National University of Ireland, Galway, it is aware that Council intends to develop a standard formula to be used by all HEIs. This is very welcome and it is recommended that the formula be provided to HEIs in advance of the next review cycle.

Appendix 1: Review Panel Membership

Professor Áine Hyland

Professor Áine Hyland is Emeritus Professor of Education and former Vice-President of University College Cork. She was a member of the European Universities Association Institutional Evaluation team from 2007 to 2014 and was involved in reviews of universities in Italy, Turkey, North Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovakia, Portugal and Romania. She is author of *A Review of the Structure of Teacher Education Provision in Ireland*, a background paper published in June 2012, and *Transition from Second to Third Level*, published in September 2011.

Professor Sheelagh Drudy

Professor Drudy is Professor Emeritus of Education at University College Dublin. She is a former teacher, educational researcher and teacher educator. She was a member of the first Teaching Council appointed by the Minister in 2005. She has been an external examiner at a number of Higher Education Institutions and has been involved in quality assurance reviews in various HEIs. She has chaired a variety of panels which reviewed Initial Teacher Education programmes for the Teaching Council. She acts as an expert reviewer for international education journals and for research organisations.

Patsy McVicar

Patrick McVicar was nominated to the Teaching Council by the post-primary school management organisations and served as a member of the Education, Registration and Disciplinary sub-committees and on the Post-primary Applications Panel until his term of office ended in March 2016. He was previously Principal of Pobalscoil Chloich Cheannfhaola, Falcarragh, Co. Dhún na nGall. He is a former member of the Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) Executive Committee, where he chaired the Education sub-committee. He served on a number of NCCA committees including Course Committees for Technical Graphics, Design & Communication Graphics and the Board of Studies for Technological Subjects.