



An Chomhairle Mhúinteoireachta
The Teaching Council

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

Bachelor of Education Programme

May 2013

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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 Froebel 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.

By mid-July Panel members were supplied with the documentation in respect of the Bachelor of Education programme of Froebel 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.

¹Details of the panel membership are included at Appendix 1

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 purposes.²

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

Froebel 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 appropriate information under all headings. The College also provided ten appendices containing supplementary and background information. The Pro Forma submission extended to 117 pages, while the appendices ran to more than 500 pages.

The Pro Forma submission provided information under three main headings (Inputs, Processes, Outcomes). In the view of the Panel, the documentation was comprehensive, 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. However, it would have been helpful if modules had been consistently labelled. The Panel commends the College for its application and endeavour, as well as its willing co-operation in furnishing supplementary information.

5. Overall Finding

Taking account of the documentation which was submitted and considered in detail by the Review Panel, and the supplementary material furnished by the College, 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.

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

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 Panel commends the programme's conceptual framework, which is seen as dynamic rather than static; has been appropriately informed by collaborative discourse and dialogue; and is grounded in a strong theory-practice nexus, consistent with the principles of child learning advocated in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). The programme, which is structured with school placement learning at its core, involves integration of theory and practice across several disciplines. The four tenets which inform the programme (agentic learning, situated learning, the importance of knowledge and skills, reflective practice) support the development of students' professional identity as decision makers, reflective practitioners, and lifelong learners in communities of practice.

6.2 Focus on progression and linkage

The Panel commends efforts to design the four strands of the programme (*Teacher as Learner; Teacher and the Child; Teacher and Society; Teacher as Professional*) in an incremental, coherent and systematic way. The incremental progression and gradual development of students' responsibility to scaffold their learning are evident in a number of areas of study. For example, in the modules *Personal and Professional Skills for Teaching and Learning* in each year of the programme, students are provided with systematic and challenging opportunities to develop their competencies across a broad range of skills and activities that are integral elements of the professional role of the teacher. Similarly, in the modules *Curriculum, (Assessment) and Methodologies*, the development and management of inclusive Froebelian enquiry-based practice receive regular and progressive treatment in a variety of school contexts.

The Panel commends the strong emphasis on linkages between modules in the Pro Forma. There is a clear effort to link elements of the programme, in conjunction with developing students' understanding of integrated and thematic planning processes.

The Panel commends the structure of foundation studies for the way in which (a) interrelationships between content areas (history, sociology, philosophy) are identified; (b) the studies are linked to student placement; and (c) students are encouraged to develop critical responses to the subject matter of the modules.

6.3 Programme elements

The Panel commends the opportunities that are provided for students to develop the skills of reflective practice and to link theory with practice using experiential learning, ‘simulated’ environments, collaborative enquiry, problem-based learning, analysis of lesson scripts and videos, and case studies. The emphasis on the development of reflective practice in schools, in which students are encouraged to draw on feedback from co-operating teachers, is also commended.

The Panel considers that the interplay of elements of the programme with the values of inclusion, equality, intercultural and development education, and social justice merits further commendation. The module *The Social Construction of Identity in the Primary School* (Year 2) offers a critical examination of issues which impact upon the relationship between teachers and their pupils in classrooms.

6.4 Professional skills

The Panel commends attention in the programme to the development of professional skills and efforts to ensure that students’ competency and proficiency in the areas of English, Mathematics, and Gaeilge are accorded appropriate treatment and consideration. That students “will be required to attain a high exit standard in these areas prior to graduating” is a commendable aspiration for the programme.

6.5 School placement

The Panel commends the significant role assigned to school placement learning in the programme. The four key approaches to student learning (reflective practice, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, experiential learning) are appropriately connected to other strands of the programme. Coherence between carefully sequenced school placements and course modules is also evident in the thematic focus set for each year of the programme (*Teacher as Learner; Teacher and the Child; Teacher and Society; Teacher as Professional*).

The appointment of an external examiner with a wide remit, as part of an on-going review and continuous improvement plan, to support the College in enhancing practices pertaining to school placement is commended. The Panel notes that students are given the opportunity to experience a range of outreach settings.

6.6 Partnership with schools

The Panel commends the clarity with which the roles and responsibilities of all involved in school placements are described, reflecting a strong commitment to establishing partnerships that are effective and potentially beneficial to both college and schools.

The Panel commends the extended placements in Years 3 and 4 in schools where students experience a wide variety of school life, both inside and outside the classroom. The extended period of observation without teaching duties in Year 3 should allow students time to analyse and reflect on practices which they observe. It should also provide students with the opportunity to become aware of the many non-classroom based activities that occur in a school.

The Panel commends the College for its plans to provide support to teachers in co-operating schools in the form of continuing professional development opportunities and access to library facilities and college resources.

6.7 Irish language

The Panel commends the College's commitment to ensuring that students will understand the linkages between language theories, methodologies, and practice, including the communicative approach in both literacy teaching and the teaching of Irish in primary schools. The commitment to improving students' oral and written language competencies in Irish is evident in a number of modules, including *Personal and Professional Skills for Teaching and Learning* (Years 1, 2, 3, 4) and *Teanga /Language* (Years 1, 2). The Panel notes the strong emphasis on the use of Irish language literature, story-telling, poetry, folklore, myth and legend to support the teaching of language pedagogies. Opportunities are also provided for students to study and experience immersion education in Irish-medium schools.

6.8 Arts Education and SESE

The Panel commends the integrated approach adopted in the modules *Curriculum, (Assessment) and Methodologies* in which the key teaching skills in Visual Arts; Music; Drama; Physical Education; Social, Environmental and Scientific Education; and Social, Personal and Health Education are addressed. The emphasis on integrated planning, recording and evaluation for a child-centred curriculum, as well as the application of a broad range of assessment principles and practices, are also commended. For senior primary class levels, collaborative and problem-based learning are explored along with ICT applications [*Curriculum, (Assessment) and Methodologies* 3].

The Panel commends the elective *Music Theory in Practice* which involves the creation of teaching resources relating to composing, listening, responding and performing as well as building student capacity to reflect on, and critically evaluate, their own teaching.

6.9 Mathematics and scientific enquiry

The Panel commends the scope of the modules *Mathematical and Scientific Enquiry 1* and 2. The first of these (in Year 1) introduces students to mathematics and science and is focused on junior infants to second class. The module explores emergent numeracy, number acquisition and mathematical and scientific learning, and is appropriately integrated with *Aistear –The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. The module *Mathematical and Scientific Enquiry* (in Year 2), which focuses on third to sixth class, provides for a range of methodologies specific to mathematical and scientific learning and enquiry, including the use of ICT and the creation of an enquiry-based and independent learning environment.

6.10 Challenges in pupil care

The Panel commends the approaches adopted in a number of modules to preparing students to deal with challenges relating to pupil care that they may expect to encounter in their teaching careers (see *The Social Construction of Identity in the Primary School*; *Curriculum Elective 3: SPHE Dealing with Childhood Aggression*; *Challenges in Pupil Care*). The challenges considered relate to a wide spectrum of areas, including special education needs, aggression, bullying, homophobia, racism, child abuse, bereavement, and migrant children.

6.11 Religion

The Panel commends the structured presentation of the modules *Education about Religion and Beliefs 1 and 2* (Years 1 and 2) which explore world philosophical perspectives, concepts of spirituality, and the spiritual formation process. The programme is further enhanced by consideration of the role of morals and ethics in relation to reasoning processes and consequent behaviours. The Panel also commends the exploration of world religions and their underlying tenets as well as consideration of the practices of faith development in children, with particular reference to the Irish context.

6.12 Elective modules

The Panel commends the provision of elective modules related to the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). The modules, which reflect current educational research and thinking, are designed to prepare students for leadership roles in schools during the course of their careers. The Panel also commends the intention to revise electives to reflect educational research findings as they become available.

6.13 Assessment of student performance

The Panel commends the wide range of procedures used in assessing student performance (e.g., written and oral examinations, course work, personal journals, essays, portfolios, project work). In particular, it commends provision in the modules *Cumas na Gaeilge / English and Mathematical Competency Levels 1 and 2* (Years 1 and 2) to use the Common European

Framework of Reference to assess students' competencies in languages and to support them in specifying and meeting learning targets.

6.14 Co-operative learning

The Panel commends the use of group work as a feature of assessment and learning across the programme. In particular, it commends the use of the Jigsaw co-operative learning approach and the experiential learning opportunities provided for students in assuming roles such as chair, scribe/recorder, reader, timekeeper and observer across the programme which are designed to enhance students' understanding of the principles of effective group learning.

6.15 Information and communications technology (ICT)

The Panel commends provision in the programme for information and communications technology (ICT). The use of ICT for teaching and learning is in evidence in *Curriculum, (Assessment) and Methodologies* and in *Placement Learning* modules where students explore how ICT can be embedded as a pedagogical tool. The compulsory professional studies module in Year 4, *ICT across the Curriculum*, has two major objectives: to develop students' digital competence and to explore how ICT can be employed to support teaching and learning. The elective module *Teaching and Learning with ICT* (in Year 3) is also designed to develop students' digital competence to support teaching, learning, planning, and classroom administration.

The Panel commends the provision of opportunities for on-line learning by means of access to the internet, availability of interactive whiteboards in lecture rooms, and the course management and learning environment platform Moodle. The Panel commends the College for its support of the digital media needs of students by supplementing its existing resources and providing technical services. In the library, a range of electronic media provides access to internet-based resources and electronic journals.

6.16 Student/staff support and welfare

The Panel commends the provision of a range of support and welfare services for students and staff. On arrival in the College, each student has the opportunity to undergo an induction programme. Tutors are assigned to provide continuing support to students while there is also provision for student counselling and welfare. The College also provides a variety of opportunities for the professional development of staff, including time and support for research, reflective practice, attendance at conferences, and membership of relevant associations.

6.17 Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes

The Panel commends the College for formalising a range of quality assurance procedures to support its strategic goals and professional and administrative activities. The recently revised Quality Assurance Manual, developed in collaboration with the Academic Council and in

accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, clearly sets out the College's commitment to the enhancement of quality and continuous improvement.

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 offered to assist and support the College's internal review mechanisms.

7.1 Specification of learning outcomes

The Panel recommends that content and learning outcomes in a number of modules should be described in more specific terms. For example, there is need for greater clarity in specifying content in the two curriculum areas covered in the *Mathematics and Science Enquiry* modules.

7.2 Student assessment

The Panel recommends that information be provided on methods of assessment for individual modules (e.g., breakdown of coursework requirements, weighting of marks between assessment components, and assignment due dates).

7.3 Well-being and child protection

The Panel recommends that greater attention be given to developing students' knowledge and understanding of DES circulars such as *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* (2011) and the *Stay Safe Programme*, which is now mandatory in primary schools. The module *Challenges in Pupil Care* (Year 4), which focuses on issues relating to equality, relationships, and discrimination, needs to be updated to incorporate a reference to the 2011 publication, *Child Protection Procedures*. Furthermore, it is the view of the Panel that the module should be introduced at an earlier stage of the programme.

7.4 School Placement

The Panel recommends that the College restructure the extended placement component with a view to ensuring that it is in keeping with the Council's requirement for a block of not less than ten weeks. The Panel recognises the distinct rhythm of the school week and the particular development opportunities which only a continuous placement can offer.

The Panel recommends that the College reconsider the title "junior staff member" for student teachers on placement, given that student teachers are not registered teachers. The Panel

believes that there may be potential for this title to cause confusion, particularly in light of the impending commencement of Section 30 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 on 1 November 2013.

The Panel recommends that opportunities be provided for students to experience teaching in a multigrade class during school placement, a topic identified by newly qualified teachers as one about which they require additional support.

7.5 Inclusive education / Special education

While commending the focus on the uniqueness of each child in *Foundations Module 2*, as well as the provision of two modules on inclusive education, the Panel recommends that the description of modules relating to special education should be expanded to include learning outcomes and specific strategies and approaches in differentiated teaching and learning. Student attention should be drawn to key messages in *Guidelines for Students with General Learning Disabilities* (2003).

7.6 Inclusive education / Multiculturalism

The Panel recommends that best practice elements of the various Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiatives relating to inclusion and multiculturalism be incorporated in literacy and numeracy modules.

7.7 Irish language

In light of the Government's 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language (Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010 – 2030) and the Teaching Council's Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (p. 9), it is recommended that programme documentation should provide a more comprehensive and specific description of how it is proposed to address the teaching of Irish and the use of Irish as a means of communication and medium of instruction. While there is a reference to Content Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL), further elaboration is required on its use in the programme to support language acquisition in Irish. Modules should also specify how students' language competency in Irish will be assessed.

7.8 Gaeltacht placement

The Panel notes the absence of a reference in the documentation to targeted preparatory activities for students in advance of participating in the Gaeltacht placement. To address this issue, it is recommended that an outline be provided of the interactive practical Irish language activities planned to support the development of students' language proficiency levels. Module descriptors should also indicate how students will be supported in using portfolios to document their learning during Gaeltacht placements and how they will be assessed (during and/or) following their Irish language immersion experience.

7.9 Provision for developing student capacity to carry out assessments

While pupil assessment is mentioned in a number of modules [e.g., *Mathematical and Scientific Enquiry 2*; *Teanga3/Language3*; *Curriculum (Assessment) and Methodologies 2*; *Placement Learning 2*] and is specified as a 'key component' of the bilingual module *Literacy, Numeracy and Scientific Enquiry* (Year 3), the Panel recommends that the topic of formal and informal classroom assessment merits a separate module in recognition of its importance in the learning process. The module should address principles and methods of assessment, the definition of learning outcomes that are specific and measurable, reporting procedures, and the use of standardised tests.

7.10 Professional portfolio

While the Panel commends provision for the maintenance of a professional portfolio throughout the programme and, in particular, its use as a connective element for learning across modules, it recommends that students should be provided with greater detail regarding the nature of the portfolio, its role and purpose in the programme, and the supports that will be provided for students to derive maximum benefit from its use.

7.11 Educational research

The Panel recommends that, rather than including research in the modules *Personal and Professional Skills for Teachers 3* and *4*, a module dedicated to the topic should be provided in conjunction with the small-scale research project which students are required to carry out in Year 4. The module should (a) provide an introduction to the design, conduct and interpretation of educational research and (b) prepare students to carry out action research.

7.12 Reading lists

The Panel recommends that items in reading lists be reviewed, reduced in number, and categorised as required or supplementary. In compiling lists, due consideration should be given to demands on students in other modules and to the need to direct students' attention to specific sources.

The Panel recommends that students should be provided with references to reports of national and international studies of the achievements in reading, mathematics, and science of pupils in Irish schools.

7.13 Parents in education

The Panel recommends that greater attention be accorded the role of parents in education, methods of communicating with and reporting to them, and the concept of the school as a community of learners.

7.14 Exit routes

The Panel recommends that the College should continue to explore options for students who do not meet the requirements of the programme to allow them to pursue other programmes with appropriate transfer of accumulated credit.

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 – Froebel College of Education staff who made a presentation during the meeting on 11 April, 2013

Marie McLoughlin	President
Séamie Ó Néill	Head of Education