

Report of the Review Panel
Approved by the Teaching Council
following the review of the
Professional Diploma in Education (Further Education),
National University of Ireland,
Galway

26 March 2012

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1 Background

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 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 instructions concerned.

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 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 teacher education by The Teaching Council provides an opportunity for colleges and universities 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 which are aligned with the values and professional dispositions and the 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 has drafted its Further Education: General and Programme Requirements for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Qualifications (March 2011). In 2011 the Council invited expressions of interest from colleges and universities wishing to put forward programmes for review in accordance with the Council's review strategy. A number of programmes was subsequently put forward and it was agreed that these would be reviewed in the 2011/12 academic year. This report sets out the findings following one of those reviews, i.e. the review of the Graduate Diploma in Adult and Further Education, hereinafter referred to as 'the programme', in the Open Learning Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway .

2 Statement with regard to the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997 and 2003 (FOI Act) and 2003 (FOI Act)

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

The FOI Act is designed to allow public access to information held by public bodies which is not routinely available through other sources. The Teaching Council complies fully with the terms of the FOI Act and access to this document may be sought in accordance with that Act. It should be noted that access to information under the FOI Act is subject to certain exemptions and one or more of those exemptions may apply in relation to some or all of this report.

3 Overview of the Review Process

The review took place on 16 - 17 February 2012 in accordance with the Council's review strategy. The process was formally initiated when the Review Panel was appointed by the Teaching Council's Director with Stan McHugh as Chair. ¹

From the outset, there was wholehearted engagement by staff of the University and a genuine openness to the review and accreditation process.

The preliminary meeting took place on 16 February 2012 and a list of attendees is included in Appendix II.

¹ Details of the Review Panel membership are included at Appendix I.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Review Panel chair, in the company of fellow panel members, made an oral presentation to management and course staff in which he summarised their findings in broad outline and the subsequent steps in the review process. This report sets out the findings of Review Panel (herein after referred to as 'the Panel') following its review.

4 Documentation

The documentation submitted by the University was comprehensive and adhered to the template provided by the Teaching Council in *Further Education: Pro Forma for the submission of programmes of initial teacher education (further education) for accreditation by the Teaching Council* (August 2011). Key areas of focus were:

- Programme description
- Conceptual framework
- Programme aims
- Programme design and structure
- Programme content
- Teaching, learning and assessment strategies
- Practical teaching programme
- Staffing
- Facilities
- Student support and guidance systems
- Communication and decision-making structures
- Financial resources
- Programme outcomes

The Panel considers that the document articulates the general requirements and programme details with a significant degree of specificity overall. This was of considerable assistance in identifying the focus of attention to the various components of the programme and formed a valuable evidential base for the Panel in assessing the quality of the submission. It is noted that the inputs, processes and outcomes associated with the programme are treated in a systematic manner. Furthermore, a number of amendments are recommended so that the submission will be more fully in keeping with the requirements of the Teaching Council's Programme Requirements for the Further Education sector. At the verbal report stage the university staff members demonstrated a determination to ensure that their submission would reach the levels of comprehensiveness that the Panel suggested, and in no small way this reflects their ready engagement with the review process and their clear commitment to the delivery of a high quality programme.

5 Review Visit

As set out in the overview above, the Panel's visit to the University took place on 16 and 17 February 2012. In broad outline, it consisted of reading, dialogue with the relevant university staff members and observation of the facilities provided, especially in the area of electronic communication. This process afforded the Panel a valuable opportunity to consider the programme in detail and in particular it allowed for the exploration of a number of issues which had emerged during the reading of the documentation.

The detailed logistical preparations made by the Open Learning Centre (OLC) team and colleagues facilitated a systematic and efficient examination of the various components of the programme.

6 Overall Finding

Having regard to the documentation which was submitted and considered in detail by the Panel, and the Panel's subsequent visit to the University, the Panel recommends to the Teaching Council that the programme be granted accreditation for a period of approximately three years. The three-year timeframe will allow for a measured follow-up review of the programme in all its aspects.

The Panel welcomes the express willingness of the OLC to embrace the recommendations outlined at feedback stage. It is important to note that a revised submission received by the Teaching Council on the 7th March has already addressed fully the issues identified below in Section 8.

7 Commendations

Arising from its review of the programme, the Panel notes a number of particular strengths of the programme, as follows:

7.1 Commitment of staff

The Panel is impressed with the high levels of commitment and transparency exhibited by a highly conscientious academic and administrative staff.

7.2 Support of senior management

The support offered by the university senior management as observed by the Panel is seen as key to the sustainability of the programme.

7.3 Suitability of delivery model

The Panel recognises that the delivery model outlined in some detail by the staff builds on the experience and strengths of the OLC, the Adult and Continuing Education Office and the School of Education and thus is admirably suited to addressing the requirements of the Further Education sector.

7.4 The philosophical underpinning

The Panel recognises that the OLC has built up considerable expertise in the vital blended learning approach and also notes the appropriateness of the philosophical underpinning rooted in constructivism's cognitive based learning theory. It is confident that this approach with its alignment to purposeful reflective practice will promote high levels of learning well suited to the learner profile.

8 Recommendations

Arising from its review of the programme, the Panel notes a number of areas of the programme which it recommends for further consideration.

The Panel's recommendations are as follows:

8.1 The conceptual framework

The Panel recommends that the conceptual framework and the programme modules would be enhanced if it were shown how Irish policy sources inform the conceptual framework and programme aims.

8.2 Programme Aims

While the programme sets out its aims with due regard for relevant Teaching Council documents, the Panel believes that a broader elaboration of its mission and programme aims would considerably enhance the submission and the reader's understanding of what is intended.

8.3 Learning outcomes

While the programme submission treats of outcomes in a manner that provides for a broad understanding of what is intended, the Panel recommends a closer alignment with Teaching Council programme outcomes. This need not be detailed in nature but it might usefully focus on the following:

- learner profile
- diagnosis of learner needs, and the use of diagnostic testing tools, in an integration of literacy and/ or numeracy into the programme
- teacher competence in the assessment of learners and of learning

8.4 Overall design of programme

The Panel supports the overall design of the programme. Recognising the clear relationship between Modules 3, 4 and 6, the Panel recommends that the sequence and timing of their presentation together with the possibility of integrating components should be reviewed in order to effect a greater measure of consistency.

Further, it is recommended that a rationale for the different modes of assessment be provided in each module, together with an indication of the basis for apportioning marks in a particular way.

8.5 Teaching Practice

Given that teaching practice is a key area, the Panel recommends that the proposed credit weighting for the practical teaching programme should

reflect its centrality as one of the three key components as outlined in the Council's programme requirements. Also, the submission should provide a greater measure of detail on the administration of teaching practice, observation procedures and frequency of supervisory visits. The roles of respective staff members and their responsibilities should be also be outlined, and there would be a value in exploring how a closer collaboration with the School of Education would enhance the design and delivery of a high quality teacher education programme. In addition, the linking of criteria to the allocation of marks and grades might also be specified and within this scenario the desirability of an initiative to establish a consistency of grading criteria with other providers might be considered. In respect of new tutors, details of their necessary training ought to be provided and planning for the operation might be shown. Further, accurate and precise documentation on the prospective tutors – their qualifications, for example – should be provided. Finally, the Review Panel counsels that the OLC ought to formalise arrangements with VECs, perhaps by means of a memorandum of understanding.

8.6 Staffing and governance

The Panel recommends that the staff organisational structure be clearly identified in order to give the necessary assurance that the intended delivery will materialise. Also, while it is evident that there is a profitable working relationship between the OLC and the School of Education, it is recommended that this relationship should be further strengthened by formally setting out the relevant roles, responsibilities and resources to be shared.

8.7 Funding of programme

The Panel requires a formal articulation of the funding streams available to OLC so that it may be assured of the sustainability of the programme. A formal statement that includes budgetary analysis, together with projections on numbers of students and tutors will suffice. In this regard, the Panel welcomes an assurance from the Finance Secretary of the college that a business plan is required of all college programmes in advance of delivery.

9 National Issues

The Review Panel considers that the Teaching Council might usefully promote a formal process of collaboration between the various HEIs undertaking programmes in Further Education. In practical terms, a forum might be established to allow for a sharing of ideas on issues relating to the development of specialisms in particular centres that would become part of a purposeful sharing of resources.

Appendix I – Review Panel Membership

Stan McHugh, former CEO of FETAC and Independent Review Panel Chair

Evan Buckley, currently Education Officer, City of Dublin VEC

Professor Gary Granville, Head of Education, National College of Art & Design

Edward McArdle, former Registrar of General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland

Cathal de Paor, Director of Continuing Professional Development, Faculty of Education, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Dr Patrick O'Connor, former school principal and Divisional Inspector, DES and rapporteur for the Panel

The Panel was supported in its work by **Ms Ailish Murphy**, Executive Officer, The Teaching Council

Appendix II – Attendees at the Preliminary Meeting, 16 February 2012

Professor Nollaig Mac Congáil, Registrar and Deputy President, NUIG

Mr Michael Kavanagh, Academic Secretary, NUIG

Dr Iain Mac Labhrainn, Director, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching

Nuala McGuinn, Acting Director, Adult and Continuing Education

Dr Mary Fleming, Director, Teacher Education, School of Education

Dr Manuela Heinz, Director of Teaching Practice, School of Education

Dr Anne Walsh, Academic Director, Open Learning Centre

Ms Emer Toner, Manager, Open Learning Centre

Dr Marie Morrissey, Tutor, Open Learning Centre

Dr Manuela Heinz, Director of Teaching Practice, School of Education

Ms Pauline Dillon, Programme Administrator

Ms Edel Molloy, Programme Administrator

Appendix III - Visit Schedule

Day 1 of site visit: Thursday 16 February 2012

Time	Item
9.30am	Panel meeting with Director of programme and senior management
10.00am	Introductory presentation by Open Learning Centre – overview of programme
10.30am	General requirements the programme
10.45-11.30am	Conceptual framework/ programme aims and outcomes
11.45-12.45	Design, structure and content/ teaching, learning and assessment
12.45-1.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm	Panel discussion
2.15pm	Practical teaching
2.45pm	Attitudes, values/ lifelong learning/ reflective practice
3.15pm	Staffing/ governance/ financial resources
4.00pm	Student support
4.30pm	Panel discussion
5.30pm	End of session

Day 2 of site visit: Friday 17 February 2012

9.30am	Student facilities: technological support
10.15	Panel discussion
11.30	Feedback to Director and colleagues