
Report of the Review Panel

Approved by the Teaching Council on 17 September 2012

following the review of the

Higher Diploma in Further Education (HDFE)

National University of Ireland

Maynooth

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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 Higher Diploma in Further Education, hereinafter referred to as 'the programme', in NUIM.

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

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 of both programmes.

This report sets out the findings of Review Panel (herein after referred to as 'the Panel').

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:

- General requirements - embracing programme description, purpose of qualification, accreditation, ECTS, entry requirements
- 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

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- Financial resources
 - Programme outcomes
 - Student handbooks (two volumes: (1) general and (2) teaching practice)

The comprehensive documentation submitted beforehand carefully adhered to the template provided by the Teaching Council. This was of considerable assistance to the Panel in identifying the depth and breadth of focus applied to the various elements of the programme and served as valuable evidential base in assessing the quality of the submission.

5. Review Visit

In broad outline, the review visit consisted of documentation reading and analysis in tandem with a process of systematic dialogue between panel members themselves and between Panel and members of the programme staff. This process afforded the Panel a valuable opportunity to consider the programme in detail and facilitated the exploration of issues that emerged during the reading of the documentation. The ready co-operation of the college staff in clarifying emerging issues and offering sound rationales for their programme orientations demonstrated a praiseworthy commitment and engagement with the review process.

6. Overall Finding

Having regard to the documentation that was considered in detail in the course of the visit to the college, together with the clarifications and rationales presented in the course of discussion, the Panel considers that the programme meets the requirements of the Teaching Council and should be approved for accreditation.

It is noted that the university has taken on board enthusiastically all of the Panel's recommendations and has already acted upon those that allowed for immediate action, while the others will be attended to over the course of the year.

7. Commendations

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

7.1 Commitment of staff

The Panel commends a conscientious and diligent staff who show an impressive level of commitment to the delivery and systematic development of a high quality programme.

7.2 Documentation

The strength of the documentation underpinning the submission is laudable for an impressive coherence and clarity in addressing the information requirements of the Teaching Council as outlined in its *Pro Forma*.

7.3 A tradition of success

The Panel recognises that the programme is rooted in a strong and proud tradition of more than three decades of commitment to adult and community education. It builds on the experience and strengths gained from a focus on the promotion of equality between people and is admirably positioned to make a significant difference in enhancing the life chances of its students and in supporting the FE sector in general.

7.4 The philosophical underpinning

The Panel recognises an impressive coherence and a robust philosophical underpinning permeating the programme. The fundamental values and beliefs are set out with an engaging clarity that highlights a sound grasp of the nature of FE and the challenges attaching to its development in Ireland. Of particular note is the celebration of difference (as ‘opportunity’) inherent in the programme. Staff exhibit a robust determination to effect an appropriate balance between ‘difference’ and ‘deficit’ (implying necessary remediation), and the Panel endorses this position.

7.5 Aims and objectives

The Programme aims and outcomes as set out in the submission are expressed in a clear and concise manner, and the Panel is happy to note that they are in close alignment with Teaching Council requirements.

7.6 Attitudes and values

There is a welcome clarity in the specification of the attitudes, values and professional dispositions that the programme sets out to inculcate. There is a direct linkage with the Teaching Council’s *Code of Professional Conduct* and its core values are set out in close alignment with relevant modules. All this is commendable, and so too is the purposeful emphasis on promoting reflective practice and lifelong learning as significant elements of the learning across the various modules.

7.7 Teaching practice

The teaching practice component of the programme is given due prominence and the planned arrangements for supporting students display a rich potential to contribute significantly to the fostering of FE teachers who will grow in competence as they progress in the profession.

7.8 Integrated nature of programme

The Panel recognises as a fundamental strength the integrated nature of the programme which is characterised by purposeful linkages and cross curricular connections.

8. Recommendations

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

The Panel's recommendations are as follows:

8.1 Entry requirements

The Panel recommends that staff review their recognition of prior learning arrangements on a continuous basis so that they can be assured they continue to be in direct alignment with evolving Teaching Council requirements.

8.2 Design and structure

The Panel recommends the college consider the possibility of transferring the module "Curriculum Development" into Foundation Studies, and of ensuring that it is encountered at an early stage of the programme in whole or in part .

8.3 Alignment of Learning Outcomes to Programme and Module Learning Outcomes (PLOs and MLOs)

The Panel believes that a relatively modest exercise of linking the Programme Learning Outcomes, as identified in Section 3, to the relevant modules would contribute richly to ensuring that all are represented with due prominence in the programme. A matrix with numerical identifiers, for example, would facilitate the exercise. Also, in respect of demonstrating reflective skills and applying legal principles to teaching [programme aims, p.13, (v) and (vi)], the Panel notes that these are currently expressed as outcomes rather than aims, and recommends their amendment.

8.4 Practical teaching

The Panel recommends that the roles and responsibilities of the various players – NUIM staff, mentors, co-operating teachers – be elaborated upon so that there is a greater level of clarity on the nature of their position and what is expected of them both by the college and hosts such as VECs. To that end, it believes that an examination of models of this kind already in operation in other institutions both nationally and abroad would be beneficial, and so too would be a consultation with related entities within the

college. Further, arising from these deliberations a useful memorandum of understanding between the college and a host entity such as a VEC could ultimately emerge.

8.5 Assessment procedures

Assessment constitutes an important feature in the documentation attaching to every module and it is clear to the Panel that the staff is acutely aware of its importance in the promotion of the teaching and learning. In respect of teaching practice, the Panel understands that the staff places a premium on the formative dimension of assessment and, accordingly, considers that the marking templates in the Teaching Practice Handbook could be reviewed and usefully deployed with this consideration to the fore. Furthermore, the Panel drew attention to the need for transparency in respect of the criteria underpinning judgements on final marks, and recommends that these might be more clearly specified in the Handbook.

The Panel views the overall assessment strategy being adopted as very comprehensive. Also, it considers that ongoing monitoring by staff will ensure an appropriate balance is achieved between avoiding unnecessary duplication on the one hand with providing adequate coverage of the full range of learning outcomes on the other. Specifically, the Panel recommends that the assessments identified for Learning Outcomes 3, 4 and 5 in the Learning Methodologies module (p.32) be clarified.

9. National Issues

The Review Panel recommends to the Teaching Council that a document outlining the roles and responsibilities of institutions, mentors and co-operating teachers should be produced so that there can be a confidence that each entity is engaging in a commonality of practice.

Appendix I – Review Panel Membership

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

John Fitzgibbons, former school principal and currently Education Officer, City of Cork VEC

Helen Murphy, Head of Literacy Development Centre, WIT

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

Dr 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

Appendix II – Visit schedule

SCHEDULE

National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Monday 18th June 2012

9.00 a.m. Arrival of Panel at National University of Ireland, Maynooth followed by pre-assessment meeting of Panel until 10.30 a.m	Welcome -Josephine Finn, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan
10.30 a.m. <i>Tea/coffee break</i>	Education Hall
10.45 a.m. Introductory presentation by National University of Ireland, Maynooth – overview of the programme	Staff: Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
11.15 p.m. General requirements of the programme	Staff: Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
11.30 p.m. Conceptual framework / programme aims and outcomes	Staff: Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
12.00 p.m. Design, structure and content / teaching, learning and assessment	Staff: Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
12.15pm Practical Teaching	Staff Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
12.45 Attitudes, Values / Lifelong Learning / Reflective Practice	Staff Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Tony Walsh, Fergal Finnegan
1.15 Lunch	Location: Pugin Hall
2.00.m Panel Discussion	
3.00 p.m. <i>Tea/coffee break</i>	
3.45p.m. End of session	Staff: Josephine Finn, Anne Ryan, Brid Connolly, Michael Kenny, Shauna Busto Gilligan, Luke Murtagh, Fergal Finnegan